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An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power

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Abstract

This is a film review of *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power* (2017), directed by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk.

Keywords

Al Gore, Inconvenient Truth, Climate Change, Global Warming, Trump

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Routledge, 2009) and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.



An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power (2017), dir. Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk

Ten years after *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), we see the continued denial of the scientific evidence for climate change by those who benefit from such denial, and the political success of those who have embraced that denial. It was especially poignant and a bit eerie to be viewing this film at the Sundance Film Festival at the very moment when Donald Trump was being sworn in as President of the United States. In the days prior to this, we have seen the confirmation hearings for Trump cabinet appointees, many of them friends of the fossil fuel industry who make a habit of questioning the evidence for climate change. To the extent that they acknowledge its reality, they question its extent, or whether human influence on it is significant.

In such a world, one might think Al Gore would have given up his quest to convince the world of the seriousness of climate change or the idea that we can still do something about it.

Instead, we has continued his prophetic mission, newly galvanized by both the increasing threat and the promise of change. This film chronicles his current journey with empathy and hope.

One of the great values of the film is the presentation of the evidence, and how it has become increasingly hard to avoid. Gore visits Greenland, to witness the melting and collapse of glaciers during warming periods; footage shows floods around the world that have increased in frequency just in the last few years, from the Philippines to India, and from Miami to Houston right here in the United States. When *An Inconvenient Truth* suggested the possibility that the site of the 911 memorial in New York City could be flooded, skeptics raged. But since then, this has actually happened, as so many other dire predictions have come true. The Zika virus spreads northward; streets literally melt shoes in India, as the temperature reaches 120 degrees. Watching the devastation caused by floods is the most heartbreaking, as the poorest populations suffer the most death and destruction of their homes. But Gore insists that we must hope, for “despair is paralyzing.” One cannot do nothing. He has trained thousands of leaders to educate others on climate change, and they have in turn spread the word in hundreds of thousands of presentations worldwide. He also points out repeatedly that wind and solar power are growing exponentially in use, and have been proven to be economical as well as environmentally desirable. One of the most hopeful scenes is a trip to Georgetown, Texas, where Gore meets with the Republican mayor who has helped to make the town powered solely by wind and solar energy. The film also shows Gore’s role in brokering India’s acceptance of the 2015 Paris climate change agreement, premised on securing advantageous interest rates for the loans to develop solar power there.

The opposition is well-funded, of course, and Gore says that democracy has been “hacked” by powerful interests that make it difficult for sustainable energy to succeed. He is hardly alone in making this observation these days, but again, this does not cause him to despair. Renewable

resources and sustainable energy are the future; this is “foreordained.” At the same time, this does not mean we should sit on our hands and do nothing. We have a duty to work towards this future. In this balance of hope and duty, he echoes (and quotes) Martin Luther King, Jr., that the “universe bends towards justice” precisely because we act to move it in that direction. King rejected the narrow Calvinist predestinarian view that we have no free will; as a Baptist minister, he believed in the free power of human action, but he also had the faith that God was directing everything to the proper end. Gore’s Christian faith has also been crucial to his own persistence, as he makes clear. And he does sound a bit like King when he begins to thunderously proclaim truth to power. He urges us to consider the challenge of Deuteronomy 30:15, “today I set before your life, and death” that we might choose life. And when he came out on stage after the film showing, he challenged every audience member to act, to share this message. He believes that humans can and will act decisively and correctly in response to climate change. This film is a battle cry that could bring that hope to fruition.