

Entertainment Weekly for El Paso • Juarez • Las Cruces

what's up

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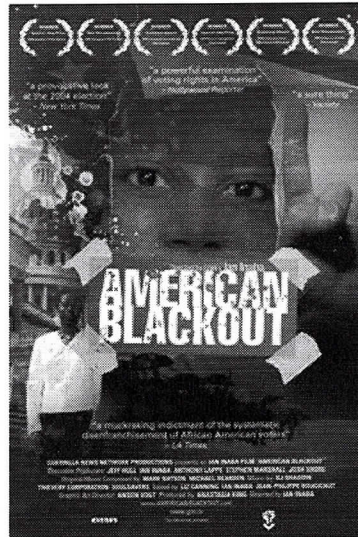
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9 documentaries to watch this election year
View, read, discuss, vote

By Cheri Pearson



The next presidential inauguration isn't until Jan. 20, 2009, but election excitement is already at full throttle. Hotels and convention halls in the nation's capital are booked up and selling out in what's being called a historic and pivotal election year.

As the primaries whittle down the contenders, you owe it to yourself to get educated on some of the hottest issues this voting season.

So, regardless of your political persuasions, gather some friends and watch these illuminating documentaries. You can find them at your local video store, Amazon, Netflix or online at freedocumentaries.org. While documentaries do present facts, they may be representing a point of view, so before you vote, make sure to read further and discuss.

WAR
No End in Sight (2007)

Riveting and impossible to ignore, this documentary is a must-see for anyone who wants to understand the handling, or mishandling, of the war in Iraq. Several now-defected, high-level officials from the Bush administration testify that arrogance, recklessness, mismanagement and poor military strategy helped create the deadly insurgency in the fractured country. Nominated for an Academy Award and a winner at Sundance, this film is gaining traction both as a historical analysis and as required viewing for anyone hoping to understand the consequences of the Iraq war's bungling.
Further viewing: "Iraq for Sale: The War Profiteers"

The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert McNamara (2003)

"I think the human race needs to think about killing. How much evil must we do in order to do good?" This quote comes from Robert McNamara, one of the central figures in the Vietnam War. As secretary of defense, McNamara was in charge of bombing and military strategy. Through a series of starkly shot, contemplative interviews, he reflects on his life and mistakes, sometimes exposing uncertainty and inner conflict. This Academy Award-winning doc, which the New York Times says "ought to be studied by military and civilian leaders around the world," is a firsthand insight into the necessities and moral costs of waging war.
Further viewing: "Why We Fight"

IMMIGRATION
Border War: The Battle over Illegal Immigration (2006) and Immigration episode from "30 Days: Season 1" (2006)

In order to understand this heated issue, it helps to look at both sides. "Border War" is a conservative-leaning documentary that explores immigration through a selective pool of interviews with those on the frontlines, from Border Patrol agents to high-profile members of Congress. To counterbalance that viewpoint, a look at the "30 Days" DVD might lend cultural understanding and insight. Each episode of "30 Days," a reality series on the FX Network, follows an ordinary person who agrees to live outside their comfort zone for a full month. In the immigration episode, Minuteman Frank George spends 30 days with an illegal immigrant family in Los Angeles.
Further viewing: "El Inmigrante"

ENVIRONMENT An Inconvenient Truth (2006)

This documentary casts narrator Al Gore in a new light as impassioned and well educated on the issue of global warming. Most scientists agree that humans' actions

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are having a gradual and debilitating effect on the environment. The fate of our planet is a nonpartisan concern, and this documentary calls for political and private responsibility. This Oscar-winning film contributed to a Nobel Peace Prize for Al Gore and the United Nations for its success in creating greater worldwide understanding and awareness of the severity of the climate crisis.

Further viewing: "Who Killed the Electric Car" or "Out of Balance (Exxon Mobil)"

HEALTH CARE Sicko (2007)

Why are we 37th in the world in health care? Filmmaker Michael Moore spotlights America's health care system. With a definite slant towards socialized medicine, Moore takes an investigative look at the system, down to how much politicians are getting paid by lobbyists representing the pharmaceutical companies. According to Moore, services like police, firefighting, education and libraries are "socialized" in the U.S., so why not health care? Moore's request is simple - that Americans take care of one another - and his argument is persuasive when you see how many lives are destroyed by lack of care.

Further Viewing: "Frontline PBS: The High Price of Health" and "We Become Silent"

ABORTION Lake of Fire (2006)

Of "Lake of Fire," New York Times magazine writes, "This sprawling, scary, nearly unbearable film is more important than ever." And yet many who were initially reticent to view the film, balanced so evenly between pro-life and pro-choice sources in the abortion debate, were glad they did. January was the 35th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, and the controversy continues to intensify. Protests have become so disruptive that abortion clinics have sought injunctions to keep their patients safe. This grueling, unflinching film is shot in black and white, a small protection from the sometimes graphic scenes but also a perfect analogy for the clearly divisive nature of this heated argument.

Further Viewing: "Abortion: Desperate Choices"

American Politics Bill's Run: A Political Journey in Rural Kansas (2004) and American Blackout (2006)

This list would not be complete without a look at the election process itself. "Bill's Run," a PBS doc, is a fairly docile look at a mild-mannered rancher lawyer who runs for the Kansas House of Representatives. The film follows Bill's seven-week campaign trail through the primary as he takes on a Republican incumbent and fights to preserve small-town americana. On the other hand, "American Blackout" examines the voting irregularities in the 2000 presidential elections in Florida and the 2004 elections in Ohio, while chronicling recurring patterns of voter disenfranchisement, especially amongst blacks. Considered a powerful and important political documentary, this Sundance winner raises important questions.

Further viewing: "Unprecedented: The 2000 Presidential Election" or "A Perfect Candidate"

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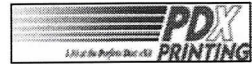


Jowauna Stegall



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