The State of SIE
Mapping the landscape of social impact entertainment
Welcome

Teri Schwartz
Dean, UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television

We stand at a critical intersection in our human history where there is a need for new, diverse voices to be heard — for powerful new stories to be told.

Story has the ability to build bridges of understanding, tolerance, empathy, and respect, helping us to make sense of our lives and the world around us. The time has come to use the infinite power of story, as expressed through entertainment and performing arts, to inspire social impact.

We are the Storytelling School. We believe that story can both delight and entertain but to inspire social impact — not just in terms of moving and changing people from all walks of life by creating deeper meaning and connections for all of us, but also by a new-found belief in the double bottom line: that you can do well and do good in life.

In my own contribution to this report, I expand on my work in this field and explore strategies and opportunities for educators working in this space.

I hope you find this report very useful and engaging. I am so optimistic about the future of SIE. Its promise and possibilities are limitless. Please consider this an open invitation to join us on this amazing journey — we look forward to welcoming you on board.

SIE is an idea whose time has come. At our world has become more complex and challenging, artists, scholars, educators, and industry leaders are realizing the true value of social impact entertainment — not just in terms of moving and changing people from all walks of life by creating deeper meaning and connections for all of us, but also by a new-found belief in the double bottom line: that you can do well and do good in life.

In 2003 when I first became a university dean, I began working on an idea that would put my life philosophy to the test — a major university research center focused on the power of entertainment and performing arts to inspire social impact. The structure of this new center would be built upon three pillars: research, education and special initiatives, and public engagement, programming and exhibition.

At the time, there wasn’t a university model fully focused on this topic that I could draw upon for information as the field was in its infancy. That would change in 2007 when I met visionary philanthropist Jeff Skoll. Jeff in the early days of building Participant Media — a company whose vision to use the power of story to not only entertain but to inspire social impact aligned with mine at the educational level. Jeff has played a crucial role in shaping the ideological foundations of this emerging field. Through Participant Media, he has produced and supported some of the most iconic, award-winning SIE films to date, including Oscar® winners Spotlight, Citizenfour, and An Inconvenient Truth, amongst many other brilliant films. Without question, I was very inspired by what Jeff and his team were endeavoring to accomplish. I forged ahead with the confidence that we were doing something meaningful that would have lasting impact at both the industry and university levels.

In 2009 when I became the Dean of UCLA TFT, I brought the idea for the center with me as part of an overarching vision and set of goals for the School. We were fortunate that it was a vision shared by Jeff who made a transformational leadership gift of $10 million to name and endow the new Skoll Center for Social Impact Entertainment at UCLA TFT (Skoll Center SIE) in 2010. We are deeply honored and grateful to have this remarkable center bear Jeff’s name and reflect his profound core values and mission to make the world a better place.

The State of SIE is the Skoll Center SIE’s first major publication: a report that aims to map and explore the emerging field of social impact entertainment. We’ve gathered opinions and key insights from some of the most compelling voices across this landscape, exploring many of the major themes that have defined the Skoll Center SIE’s work to date: the most effective strategies for driving impact through storytelling; the question of when, within the creative process, impact should first be considered; the key role of research to explore, contextualize and help define the field; and the importance of partnering with the right allies across the entertainment and performing arts industries for new ideas, special projects and initiatives.

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To explore the digital version of the report, complete with interactive elements, find out more about our work and learn about upcoming events, head to www.thestateofsie.com.
When I was 35, I found myself in an unexpected and humbling position working as a lowly, unpaid intern for the Central Tibetan Administration in the foothills of the Himalayas. I was looking for a way to make a difference in the world, and I believed that my skills as a filmmaker could be used to engage audiences on social issues. I realized that all of the reasons I had originally, so passionately, pursued a career in film were united in the amazing work of social entrepreneurs who know it best.

The purpose of this report

The State of Social Impact Entertainment is our first attempt to capture this field as it exists today. We’ve explored the key components of SIE, what works to engage audiences on social issues; why SIE’s financial potential is growing considerably; which metrics most accurately reflect its impact; what the established theories of change are and, perhaps most importantly, how all of this relates to mainstream Hollywood.

You want to make sure that your audience walks away with a clear understanding of the steps they can take in their own lives to be part of the change you are seeking to create.

— Luske D’Souza (p. 15)

We want it to be used as a guidebook and toolkit that creative storytellers looking to engage audiences in solving real-world challenges, which are often too big or complex for any single person to take on.

For creative storytellers looking to engage audiences in solving real-world challenges, the State of Social Impact Entertainment is your first stop.

Peter Bisanz

Executive Director, Skoll Center for Social Impact Entertainment, UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television

The State of SIE

This report explores the landscape of social impact entertainment through the insights of the experts who know it best. Peter Bisanz introduces this exciting space and its transformative effect upon the world.

The State of Social Impact Entertainment (or SIE) really didn’t exist at that time — so I left it all behind for graduate school in England to study social entrepreneurship. Two years and a master’s degree later, and still trying to find my way, I realized that all of the reasons I had originally, so passionately, pursued a career in film were united in the amazing work of social entrepreneurs who know it best.

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This report pulls together all of their amazing work in one place, for the first time, and is intended to serve as an accelerator as well as a resource for people looking to work in the field of SIE.

Overview of key findings

Given the state of our world today, there is an underlying assumption that entertainment, mass media and the performing arts can drive social change because they shift attitudes, shape our culture and generate empathy. However, the dynamics for each media intervention can differ wildly. As a result, among theorists there is a broad consensus that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to the creation of SIE, the social impact campaigns that accompany it or for the measurement of its impact.

There is a unanimous call to consider the unique context of each piece of SIE, as well as the context of the issues it seeks to address, from the outset. Theories also agree that defining and planning for your impact at the start of the creative process will likely maximize the positive effects of your given piece of content. However, maintaining a degree of flexibility is key — you have to be ready and able to adapt your plan as your project takes shape and is released into the world.

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The State of SIE

There is also some urgency for greater collaboration by all the stakeholders involved in SIE. Though there are clear leaders in certain fields, like Doc Society with their Impact Field Guide & Toolkit, or the WhoJust series of reports produced by Liz Makeup, Unbound Philanthropy, and the Nathan Cummings Foundation, there is still work to be done to bring the entire ecosystem closer together. It’s our hope that, by covering the various different media forms and disciplines within SIE — as well as its often overlooked business case — we can inspire a greater knowledge exchange within the existing community and bring new people into the fold as well.

In summary, SIE is an emerging space. It’s essential to recognize that it is shaped not just by the content creators, but also the funders, nonprofits, and academics that help to support them.

What is social impact entertainment?

Learning from the development of other fields — where theorists have spent considerable time and effort trying, and failing, to agree on a single definition — it is our hope to show you what SIE is, how it works and how to create it, rather than attempt to simply define it.

To do this, we’ve referred to existing theories of change, impact frameworks, and the experience of leading practitioners, many of whom have shared their stories and learnings in this report.

Several common themes emerged during this process. While different models may have a different number of steps, or use different terminology, most of them ultimately describe the following process:

1. Focus on the story — Tell the best story you can or you will never reach your audience. This mantra has been repeated by all of our contributors, from filmmaker Tom McCarthy (p. 30) and Fisher Stevens (p. 56), to Participant Media’s David Linde (p. 32) and Elke Pearse (p. 66).

2. Know your issue — Fully understand the real world of your story and then determine your intended impact at the start. This importance of this consideration is evidenced by contributors like Joshua Oppenheimer (p. 54) and Neal Baer (p. 88).

3. Find the best partners — Identify and partner with leading organizations and people already working on the issues you’re attempting to address. Building your social impact campaigns in conjunction with these experts can maximize your potential impact, as highlighted by Wendy Cohen (p. 152) and Bonnie Abaunza (p. 138).

4. Think about distribution differently — Create a distribution plan that surrounds your work and activates all relevant stakeholders, communities and constituencies of action. Dustin Lance Black and Ciarán Torma explain how they did this for their respective projects (p. 110) and Racing Extinction (p. 154).

5. Evaluate, learn and share — Assess what you have done and pass on key learnings. Doc Society’s Impact Field Guide & Toolkit and the Center for Media & Social Impact’s Impact Field Guide are just two best-in-class examples of how to do this effectively.

We don’t presume to have all the answers, however, in creating this report we have collated practical theories and personal creative insights in one place, so that we might help inform how to navigate this ever-changing landscapes.

Examples and case studies

The work of our contributors has also highlighted where SIE has been deployed to particular effect. Similar to the theories of change, each of the processes discussed is unique to the work they support, but key themes did surface. Namely, the importance of identifying issues, objectives and tactics as early as possible — and then sharing this information with all stakeholders throughout the project — in order to build an integrated approach that influences outcomes.

Given the magnitude of today’s challenges — climate change, economic inequality, forced migrations and many more — it’s easy for people to get discouraged about their capacity to make a difference in the world. But as the case studies in this report reveal, SIE can play a critical role in catalyzing significant change.

For example, the film Blood Diamond was released with a coordinated campaign to enlist audiences as citizen activists and successfully sparked global consumer demand for conflict-free diamonds.

Similarly, Oscar®-winning documentary An Inconvenient Truth helped shift global opinions on climate change, one of the most contentious issues of our time, and mobilized a new generation of pioneering environmental activists.

The documentary, Food, Inc. got hundreds of thousands of people thinking about how they could improve their diet and help protect the planet. And finally, SoulPancake’s Kid President videos sparked a new generation in the increasingly critical issue of citizenship. These projects are just a few among a growing number of powerful SIE catalysts.
The business case for social impact entertainment

Study after study has shown that audiences are affected by what they watch. So, if you’re a content creator wanting to get your message across, there’s no better way to do it than through entertainment. Moreover, the exponential changes in technology mean entertainment no longer a siloed endeavor. Its influence is everywhere, including business, and therefore what’s good for entertainment can be good for business as well.

Contrary to old misconceptions that associating your content with a cause somehow limits your profitability, the changes sweeping across society today – particularly in terms of demographics, distribution models and consumer appetites – actually show the opposite is true. Context that engages content that engages with social issues.

What’s more, the increasing number of mobile devices and the rise of over-the-top (OTT) are driving more and more content through the Internet. Attention spans are shorter than ever, and audiences don’t just have more choices – they have greater expectations.

Millennials and Gen Zers are quickly cutting their cords and interacting with content on their cell phones in ways that are radically different than the generations before them. At the same time, these younger audiences are seeking to align their spending with their values. In a 2017 report, Cone Communications found that 99% of Gen Zers believe companies should address social and environmental issues. A further 89% said they would rather buy from a company supporting social and environmental issues over one that does not. Like never before, consumers are demanding companies align their spending with their values.

The corresponding scramble to meet these new demands has thrown the industry into an entirely new era of competition, often blurring or expanding the boundaries that once separated entertainment and technology. Because of its flexibility and the fact that it spares increased audience engagement – both on and offline – SIE is a perfect fit for this new paradigm.

But, despite the critical acclaim of “cause films” during awards season – arguably at least 5 of the last 10 Oscar® winners for Best Picture were works of SIE – much of Hollywood has been slow to recognize these shifting tides and the risk of this “conscious consumer.” As a result, the industry has lost out on many SIE opportunities.

All of this goes to show that Hollywood no longer needs to be wary of issues-driven content. Today, when properly executed, SIE can provide greater access to highly activated and hard-to-reach audiences. And, when we begin to factor in the other massive demographic shift of our time – that populations are, by year, increasingly diverse – another key aspect of SIE comes into focus: its ability to connect to previously underserved and underrepresented audiences.

According to the most recent UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, in 2016, diverse audiences bought 21% of the tickets for films in the U.S. In fact, it is more profitable for Hollywood to make films with diverse casts than to make films with solely white casts.

Diversity sells, and ignoring such stories and audiences is no longer a viable option. Hollywood is leasing money on the table by not delivering content to these demographics – just look at the success of series like Empire, Atlanta, Black-ish, and Fresh Off The Boat, or theatrical juggernauts like Hamilton.

Despite how progressive the entertainment industry may feel as a whole, in some ways it has fallen behind. Changes in consumption models and shifting demographics mean that it’s more important than ever for content to cut through the clutter in order to connect with audiences. Just as social media can give you a competitive advantage. On the other side of the equation, it can be a real liability if your consumers don’t feel you are doing enough – or worse, that you are doing it wrong.

Building a core competency

Many content creators hope to match this term “causewashing” – the deceptive marketing some companies undertake to suggest they are environmentally responsible, without actually doing the hard work to make their businesses and our planet more sustainable.

By contrast, other companies are embracing transparency and tasking the challenges of sustainability head-on, earning the business and loyalty of environmentally conscious customers. One could make a similar argument for what we might term “causewashing” in our space – the superficial appearance of an ethical commitment to the greater good, without really integrating the ethics of SIE into your content or organization. Ultimately, such entertainment just leaves audiences skeptical and hungry for better content, ripe for the picking by more genuine SIE practitioners.

Entertainment leaders who truly invest in developing SIE as a core competency will continue to build more competitive brands that capture audiences’ loyalty and, as such, their dollars. This will create more enduring, less transactional consumer relationships that turn in turn generate positive change in the world.

Building SIE as a core competency, though not solely a real commitment, but also a new understanding of this space. For generations, Hollywood has been slow to recognize these shifting tides and the risk of this “conscious consumer.” As a result, the industry has lost out on many SIE opportunities. As a result, the industry has lost out on many SIE opportunities.

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Despite these efforts – and in line with a greater understanding of our world today – our industry has struggled to match ideals with actions, as the #MeToo, #OscarsSoWhite and Time’s UP movements have revealed. This has become a critical conversation in Hollywood helping to support the industry’s push toward greater diversity and inclusion as well.

Exactly how these changes will be implemented and take shape and hopefully blossom is yet to be seen. However, there are those whose work now offers practical steps the industry can take in order to build systemic change. We’ve spoken to key practitioners in this space, including Dr. Anesha Christine Ramon and Dr. Danielle Hurt – co-authors of the soon-to-be-released Hollywood Diversity Report – and Cathy Schuman, President and CEO of Wella Entertainment, about the ways in which our industry can and should tackle these issues.

Closing the gap between rhetoric and reality will take time, money, creativity and most of all determined leadership. Consistently generating effective SIE on a global scale will be very challenging, yet no less vital to our industry’s future as it is to that of our world.
The State of SIE

When you can make audiences empathize with something they initially felt wasn’t relatable, that’s the first step toward change.

— Eve Dawkins (p. 49)

Effective SIE requires building strong partnerships. It’s imperative to collaborate with key people and organizations working on your issue. These partners are often present long before you arrive and will remain long after you leave. They can therefore offer critical knowledge around which to build your work, plus access to other engaged shareholders and stakeholders working in the same space. By leveraging partnerships — and truly evolving networks — you can achieve a multichannel approach to development and distribution, which is vital to creating impact.

Outcomes matter. If we want the field of SIE to grow, we have to learn from our mistakes as well as our achievements. Identifying the right measures of success is essential if you want to understand your impact, replicate it, and increase it in the future. As most businesses discover sooner or later, it’s hard to improve what you don’t measure.

Embracing downing on and off screen is key. In this highly fractured, ever-changing entertainment landscape, it is no longer just the big three networks clamoring to provide content to the lowest common denominator. It’s now more important than ever to be able to downscale or upstage. Most audiences today are working on your issue, working with the key people and organizations associated with your work. These partners can therefore offer critical knowledge around which to build your work, plus access to other engaged shareholders and stakeholders working in the same space. By leveraging partnerships — and truly evolving networks — you can achieve a multichannel approach to development and distribution, which is vital to creating impact.

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Outcomes matter. If we want the field of SIE to grow, we have to learn from our mistakes as well as our achievements. Identifying the right measures of success is essential if you want to understand your impact, replicate it, and increase it in the future. As most businesses discover sooner or later, it’s hard to improve what you don’t measure. SIE is not a fad — it’s the future. Research reveals that young audiences increasingly prefer companies, products, services and brands that make a positive impact in the world. The idea of a triple bottom line — evaluating your company’s performance from a social, environmental and financial perspective — matters in the entertainment industry too, especially at a time when delivery platforms and loyalities are in flux like never before. For companies to sustain their influence among consumers and talent allies, they must take a holistic view of what they create and what they can offer.

Looking ahead

I was seven years old when the movie Star Wars came out, and I made my parents take me so many times — 16, in total — that they just started dropping me off at my older brother off at the theater and having us work home. Week after week, I just couldn’t get enough of Luke, “the hero’s journey,” and how he managed to save the galaxy.

I became so captivated by movies in general. I felt they offered me the most meaningful opportunity to make a difference in the world. Even if I never had the chance to save an entire galaxy, at least I could help tell stories that made the world a better place. And at its simplest, this remains the central opportunity of SIE.

In an era of unprecedented global challenges, our industry has an urgent responsibility to make a significant, more catalytic impact on the real world. Together, we must all rise to the challenge. May your best work, and our greatest impact, lie ahead.

**Sherry Netherland**

Chairman of the Board, CAA

The hero’s journey — the archetypal story pattern described by mythologist Joseph Campbell.

Refusal of the call

The road back

Reward, raising the sword

Ordal, death and rebirth

Call to adventure

Crossing the threshold

Mentor

Tests, trials, enemies

Special World

Ordinary World

Return with elixir

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The State of SIE

Welcome Note
Teri Schwartz

What is SIE?

The State of SIE
Peter Bisanz

Narrative Film

Out and About
Dustin Lance Black
Gus Van Sant

The Reality of Fiction
Tom McCarthy

The Power Within
Terry George
Don Cheadle

Case Study:
The Day After Tomorrow
Anthony Leiserowitz

Finding Our Purpose
David Linde

Shooting for the Moon
Liba Wenig Rubenstein

Stories Worth Fighting For
Gina Prince-Bythewood

From Myth to Reality
Reginald Hudlin

Documentary Film

A Wave of Change
Fisher Stevens
Leonardo DiCaprio

Shock of the Familiar
Joshua Oppenheimer

A Driving Force
Jess Search

Case Study: Chasing Ice, Chasing Coral
Case Study: Will & Grace
Edward Schiappa

Television

The Revolution Will Be Televised
Pat Mitchell

Taking the Nation’s Temperature
Neal Baer

Divining the Future
Miura Kite

Case Study: Food, Inc.
Johanna Blakley

Narrative Film

Case Study:
V for Victory
Eve Ensler

Case Study:
All the World’s a Stage
Oskar Eustis

Shooting for the Moon
James Redford

Case Study:
Survival Stories
Tabitha Jackson

Theater

V for Victory
Eve Ensler

All the World’s a Stage
Oskar Eustis

Television

The Revolution Will Be Televised
Pat Mitchell

Taking the Nation’s Temperature
Neal Baer

Divining the Future
Miura Kite

Case Study: Food, Inc.
Johanna Blakley

Emerging Forms

Creating Soulful Content
Shabnam Mogharabi
Rainn Wilson

Less is More
Carole Tomko

Stepping Inside the Issue
Nonny de la Peña

SIE Agenda

The Story of Change
Holly Gordon

Fortune Favors the Prepared
Bonnie Abaunza

Picturing Progress
Dr. Darnell Hunt
Dr. Ana-Christina Ramón

Dismantling Gender Bias
Cathy Schulman

Reading Between the Lines
Shirley Jo Finney

In Media We Trust
Shamil Idriss

The Bigger Picture

Seeding a New Generation
Teri Schwartz
Ellen Scott
Sean Metzger

Closing the Gap
Caty Borum Chattoo

Agency for Change
Michelle Kydd Lee
Natalie Tran

Community Spirit
Beadie Finzi

The Ecosystem of Change
Richard Ray Perez

Funding the Future
Sandy Herz

Amplifying Impact
Wendy Cohen

Convenings Calendar

Contents
Narrative Film
in our opening chapters, we explore what we perceive to be the primary form of social impact entertainment: performance and screen-based entertainment formats that are both long-established and well-defined, though often still evolving.

Narrative film — which we define as feature-length works of fictional or fictionalized cinema — is the natural starting point for this exploration. As a vehicle for storytellers, artists and visionaries for over a century, narrative film has rapidly become one of the most influential mediums of the modern age.
Dustin
Lance Black

Academy Award®-winning filmmaker, writer, and social activist

Notable works:
Milk, When We Rise

I’m not a morning person. To get out of bed, I need a great deal of coffee and the knowledge that what I’m doing is making a difference in the world.

It’s fairly obvious where this drive comes from. I was raised by a paralyzed single mother and grew up in a Mormon home in Texas, knowing from the age of six that I was gay. People treated my mother poorly because she was different, and I knew that if anybody found out I was gay I’d be treated badly too. I come to realize that this prejudice often stemmed from misconceptions and a lack of understanding about people of diversity. Being a Southern boy in a religious home was a gift though, because I grew up surrounded by some of the greatest storytellers on the planet: drunk Southerners and devout Christians. This enabled me, from a very young age, to understand the power of story to change people’s hearts and minds.

Today, whenever I write, I do so in an effort to dispel those misconceptions. I try to give people a window into things they never knew about, through stories that move and entertain them. This is the cause that propels my work, because our differences are what make each of us special. If there’s one thing my experience has shown me, it’s that every single person on this planet is a minority in one way or another. There’s a whole world of stories waiting to be told.

You might be greeted with enthusiasm when pitching SIE stories, but sadly not when you need the greenlight.

However, most social impact stories don’t have enough capes, superpowers or fangs, so they aren’t obvious moneymakers. You might have enough capes, superpowers or fangs, but they aren’t obvious money savers. However, most social impact stories don’t have enough capes, superpowers or fangs, so they aren’t obvious moneymakers. You might have enough capes, superpowers or fangs, but they aren’t obvious money savers. However, most social impact stories don’t have enough capes, superpowers or fangs, so they aren’t obvious moneymakers. You might have enough capes, superpowers or fangs, but they aren’t obvious money savers. However, most social impact stories don’t have enough capes, superpowers or fangs, so they aren’t obvious money savers. However, most social impact stories don’t have enough capes, superpowers or fangs, but they aren’t obvious money savers.

Gus
Van Sant

Director, screenwriter, painter, photographer, musician, and author

Notable works:
Milk, My Own Private Idaho, Good Will Hunting

When I look back at the films I’ve made, one clear commonality is that I am always in the process of learning something new about my characters. Whenever I discover something important about them, I try to represent that somehow on the screen. I want the things that I am learning to be at the center of the drama, as I find new details that seem important, that becomes what the movie is.

In the case of Milk, we were dealing with someone whose life was a watershed moment in lesbian and gay history. Within Harvey Milk’s story there exist so many of our own LGBTQ stories. There are echoes of us in all those members of San Francisco’s LGBTQ population who took charge of their lives and insisted on equality — people who were a major source of inspiration for me. Harvey asked that gay people living out of the closet run for office themselves, rather than simply waiting for representation by straight politicians. When he did that, he started something that began small and grew bigger and increasingly significant over time. I think that when you’re starting out in this space, it’s vital to not overlook your own viewpoint. Catalyzing social change is a broad and intense arena, and it is also an end result, not just a general objective. If there’s one part of society that you feel you need to change, then you may have a great job to do — but I would advise that you look deep within yourself and really think about what you want to say. It can be elusive, and you may find that it lies in an unexpected place.

Milk grossed $55 million worldwide and won two Academy Awards®, Dustin Lance Black and Gus Van Sant discuss the importance of telling such an inspiring story.
As a result, you have to build a package that is attractive to studio executives in order to "show them the money," — but in this case, the money is usually your cast list. The good news is that actors feel the money" — but in this case, the money is attractive to studio executives in order to "show for it and defend why it should exist as much of the "no's." If a story lives deep inside of them, there's a much better chance they will think about how the audience will feel. If a story lives deep inside of them, there's a much better chance they will think about how the audience will feel.

I'd wanted to tell the story of Harvey Milk since I first heard it as a teenager, because it depicts a successful strategy for how LGBT people can win in politics.

That's how I attracted the team I worked with on Milk. The whole project is a tale of frustration reaching a boiling point, one where as a creative I had to act, even though every single person in the business was saying, "Don't you dare!"

I'd wanted to tell the story of Harvey Milk since I first heard it as a teenager, because it depicts a successful strategy for how LGBT people can win in politics. Warner Bros. had the option on a book about him but had failed to make a movie for decades. I tried to get the job making their version of that book, but they told me they wanted a writer with an Academy Award®

So I went ahead and decided to do it myself, and went to war with Warner Bros. using a Capital One credit card to finance the feature. Warner Bros. leaked in American Beauty, and went to war with Warner Bros. using Amazonafter the story of my battle with and was nominated for eight Academy Awards®, winning two. The process of making this project illustrates how you've got to have a thick skin in this business to survive people actively trying to talk you out of what you so strongly believe you should be doing.

I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end.

I asked my screenwriting students, "Why you? Why are you telling this story? Why are you the only person who should be telling this story?" They have to be able to answer these questions because it's not just about having a personal understanding of the story. They have to be so confident in their idea that they can survive all the "no's."

This is why I think it’s important for any writer to try to become a writer-producer. No one will love your story as much as you do, no one will feel it in their bones the way you feel it, and no one will be able to fight for it and defend why it should exist as much of the "no's."

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The things that make you different are the things that make you special, and as a writer, that makes you marketable. Audiences want to see and learn something new and something different — and that lives inside each and every one of us.

According to the MPAA's 2019 "Lights, Camera, Action! State of the LGBT Moviegoer" report shows that 20% of Americans aged 18–34 yr olds identify as LGBTQ. According to the MPAA’s most recent THOMS report, in the US and Canada, people aged 18–39 made up 26% of the "frequent moviegoers" audience in 2017 — meaning they went to the cinema once a month or more.

LGBT moviegoers are more likely to watch their favourite movies again and again.

According to the 2017 "Theme Report," 2017 GLAAD's Accelerating Acceptance report shows that 27% of Americans aged 18–34 yr olds identify as LGBTQ. According to the MPAA’s most recent THOMS report, in the US and Canada, people aged 18–39 made up 26% of the "frequent moviegoers" audience in 2017 — meaning they went to the cinema once a month or more.

2019 GLAAD Studio Responsibility Index

GLAAD’s esteemed Acceptance report shows that 27% of Americans aged 18–34 yr olds identify as LGBTQ. If Hollywood wants to remain relevant, they must create stories that are reflective of the world’s LGBTQ people know.

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Narrative filmmaking offers a powerful way to depict real events. **Tom McCarthy** explains the opportunities and responsibilities of telling true stories.

As a filmmaker, first and foremost, my job is storytelling. For a film to have an impact, it has to play well as a movie. It has to grab people’s interest. Whenever I take on a new topic, my first job is to find a story that will engage people. If they’re not engaged, then the film ceases to do its work as a tool for social impact.

With *Spotlight* — a film that explores sexual abuse, institutional abuse, and journalistic practices — we knew we had a powerful subject with many layers to it. We were also dealing with a story that a lot of people thought they knew, but few did. Even The Boston Globe reporters who led the investigation had no idea of the scale of events or how many children had suffered at the hands of priests. I realized that, as an Irish Catholic who had lived in Boston, so much of the story was new even to me. So the challenge was to create a film that authentically transported the audience to that time before they were aware of the scope and severity of these crimes, in order to take them on a voyage of discovery. One of the ways to do this was to ensure that the film was as accurate as possible, so we interviewed The Globe reporters about every little detail of the investigation. Sometimes we put it in their words, sometimes our words, but we would always go back to them to make sure we were staying true to the spirit of the story. Those reporters and editors read every draft of the script we gave them. We knew we would be held up to a lot of scrutiny because of the subject matter, so we had to get the facts right.

*Spotlight* reaches the Vatican

In early 2016, the Los Angeles Times reported on a Vatican commission meeting on clerical sexual abuse, established by Pope Francis in 2014. Members of the commission attended a private screening of *Spotlight*.

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*Spotlight’s campaign website includes contact information for the National Sexual Assault Hotline, Survivors Network for Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), and the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline, as well as links to free guides and toolkits from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center for survivors, parents of survivors, and the communities and congregations affected by sexual abuse.

*Spotlight* wins BAFTA award for Best Live Action Film

Tom McCarthy

Academy Award®-winning writer, director, actor, and producer

Notable works: *Spotlight*, *The Visitor*, *The Station Agent*


It is a story about a lonely middle-aged man whose life changes after an encounter with a young immigrant couple in New York. This came about after a few trips I took to the Middle East. I was very affected by the people and way of life there, and it struck me that we were going to war in that part of the world, yet most Americans didn’t understand the cultures of the region.

The Visitor was used in a social action campaign by Amnesty International, inspiring audiences to learn about the US immigration detention system. Schools, healthcare providers, attorneys, legislators, social workers, and referred immigrants were all encouraged to use the film as a tool to raise awareness around the issues.

When I got back to New York, I spent a lot of time in the Arab community, and the film’s characters started to take shape. At the time, people weren’t really talking about immigration, but that was when I started hearing about detention centers. I got an opportunity to visit one and I knew immediately I had to take on this story.

These detention centers were warehouses of human beings lost in a legal and cultural purgatory. The Visitor was able to shine a light on this and force viewers to confront how they felt about it. I tried to humanize the subject and make the story personal. In conjunction with the release of the film, the American Civil Liberties Union and Participant developed a social impact campaign that focused on the film’s themes of illegal detention, treatment of immigrants, and the legal challenges that immigrants face. They also created a website to promote the use of the film for educational purposes and within community programs. In addition, over one thousand lawyers were recruited and trained using the film and other materials on issues surrounding deportation.

While the experiences of making each of these films were different, the takeaways were similar. It’s about connection. It’s about empathy. It’s about understanding. Unless you can hook people, you’re not going to have the impact that we all so often seek. Ultimately, it’s about the story; if the story is good, it raises questions and starts a conversation that live on past the film itself. If we can do that, we’ve done our job.

The Visitor is a story about Walter Vale, a lonely college professor, travels to New York City to attend a conference and finds a young immigrant couple whose life changes after an encounter with a school teacher. The Visitor encounter with the couple forces him to grapple with issues of identity, immigration, and cross-cultural communication.

The Visitor was produced with the support of Participant Media and Active Voice.

Films Like The Visitor

- Spotlight
- The Social Network
- The Cove
- The Hunger Games
- The Green Mile
- Good Night and Good Luck
- The Help
- The Intouchables
- The Pursuit of Happyness
- The Departed
- The Matrix
- The Godfather
- The Shawshank Redemption

These films, like The Visitor, were all chosen for their unique ability to inspire action and create social impact.
The Power Within

Terry George and Don Cheadle discuss chronicling the stories of our real-life superheroes — ordinary people who transform society with acts of courage and bravery.

Don Cheadle
Academy Award®-nominated actor, film producer, director, and writer

Hotel Rwanda marked the beginning of the intersection of my filmmaking and social impact work.

After the success of the film, I was invited to join a congressional delegation to Sudan along with John Prendergast of the Enough Project and Paul Rusesabagina himself. I was quickly pulled into the current of work happening around trying to prevent the atrocities being committed in Darfur. These experiences led to the founding of Not On Our Watch — a humanitarian organization dedicated to raising awareness around international crises.

After Hotel Rwanda I was offered a lot of socially conscious roles and was asked to be a spokesperson for different causes. I felt privileged to help “turn the camera” toward issues and the amazing people dedicated to tackling them.

I then applied to making these kinds of stories.

My superheroes are ordinary people who transform society in ways that we can all believe in and identify with — people, sometimes very flawed or damaged, who end up doing something extraordinary.

These people are doing the tough work on the ground, and movies can contextualize the problems they’re attempting to solve. They can help audiences understand what an issue is, what it looks like, and in some instances move them to take action.

With Hotel Rwanda we always knew we didn’t want to make a “genocide movie.” We wanted to make a movie about people. We wanted to humanize the issue, because when you can make audiences empathize with something that they initially felt isn’t relatable, that’s the first step toward change. After that, you have to follow up with something actionable — something they can do to make a difference — otherwise it’s a missed opportunity.

There’s a lot of emphasis right now on big-budget tentpole superhero movies. They’re a lot of fun. I’m even in some of them (those are especially fun). But smaller films — like Get Out, Sorry to Bother You, even The Florida Project — are demonstrating the increasing value of exploring the intersection between entertainment and social impact. This value is reflected tentfold when large studio films have those same considerations; just look at the success of Black Panther. I think studios need to recognize that there’s a big market out there for these kinds of stories. It’s my hope that they will start to put some real muscle behind them, not only because the issues need that kind of exposure, but also because the audiences are out there, ready and waiting!

As an artist and cultural instigator, I have always preferred nonfiction or fiction set in real-world events. Those were the films that most appealed to me. Feature films allow you to explore in a different way the inner thoughts of the main characters and the impact of political and humanitarian events upon them. You can distill, crystallize, and present the emotions and actions of the characters in a way intimate way that documentary often does not allow.

Terry George
Writer and director

Notable works:
Hotel Rwanda, In the Name of the Father, The Promise

My background, along with my spell as a freelance journalist in New York, gave me a set of tools that distill, crystallize, and present the emotions and humanitarian events upon them. You can distill, crystallize, and present the emotions and actions of the characters in a way intimate way that documentary often does not allow.
Many times we talked about the film — obviously the process of developing a film like this takes a long time, and with every passing month, I’ll say to him, ‘Are you sure you still want to do this? Because we could just donate the money to charity — that’s what you’ve always done.’ And he said, ‘No. We can make the movie and donate to charity. We want to do both.’

— Eric Esrailian on Kirk Kerkorian

That intimacy is vital and one of the most important ways of conveying a story or issue. For example, there’s no question that the Holocaust is viewed by many people through the experience of watching Schindler’s List. The same goes for the Cambodian genocide and The Killing Fields. Being able to stimulate the emotions of an audience is such a powerful gift. A feature film takes people beyond an event and allows them to relate to ordinary people who face extraordinary circumstances and become heroes — whether it’s Oskar Schindler or Paul Rusesabagina in Hotel Rwanda.

To engage an audience like that is social activism in itself. We didn’t expect Hotel Rwanda to play at more than a few festivals, given the film’s bleak subject matter. Yet it caught the zeitgeist, earning almost $37 million worldwide and picking up three Academy Award® nominations. It became a motivating factor for the campaign against genocide in Darfur — including the creation of the Not On Our Watch, founded by Don Cheadle, George Clooney, and several other stars — and even played a key role in influencing policy at the White House, where it was watched twice by President Bush. Even though the film was set in a small country in the middle of Africa that most people knew nothing about, because it was a universal story, it helped educate a great many people on the genocide.

To me, this was not only proof that the medium had the power to affect change, but that the universality of a story is what draws people in. Always look for “nobility” and what I call working-class heroes: the ordinary people with all their flaws who overcome their fears to find humanity and strength. This is the overall theme that triggers me. The next is, how do you make something entertaining, how do you make people pay their hard-earned dollars to sit through a film for a couple of hours and come out with all their emotions stimulated, feeling empathy, anger, inspiration, sorrow, joy?

I meet people around the world who tell me that Hotel Rwanda was the first real education they had about Africa.

The Promise — a love story with fictional characters set during the real events of the Armenian genocide — was written in the blueprint of David Lean films, weaving a great triangular love story against the huge political events of the time. This film was a totally unique situation where every dollar of the proceeds — not profits — was donated to human rights and humanitarian nonprofit groups. This was a condition of the film’s funding by businessman Kirk Kerkorian and producer Eric Esrailian, an incredible one that I would like to see replicated again and again.

Unfortunately, the marketplace has now overtaken the philosophy of filmmaking and studios are more devoted to box office numbers than ever before. I wish there were a lot more philanthropy and heart in our business. Social impact entertainment is so important — just look at the extraordinary impact and capability to educate of the films I’ve mentioned:

I meet people around the world who tell me that Hotel Rwanda was the first real education they had about Africa. The Irish films we made have had a big impact on people’s perception of what was taking place in Northern Ireland at the time. The Armenian diaspora around the world can point to The Promise and say, “This is what happened to our people.” To have it there as a record is a wonderful thing. So, maybe you’re not going to live up to the bravery of Paul Rusesabagina, or Gym Conlon in In the Name of the Father, but I present stories where that is a possibility. And just maybe, these stories will inspire people to try.
Case Study

The Day After Tomorrow

Roland Emmerich’s blockbuster put climate change on the map, but did it change the beliefs and behaviors of moviegoers? Yes, and at scale, says Anthony Leiserowitz.

Anthony Leiserowitz
Director of the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and a Senior Research Scientist at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies

The study
In 2004, soon after completing one of the first studies of American views on climate change, I started to see trailers for The Day After Tomorrow (TDAT). Immediately, I could see that it was going to be a Hollywood blockbuster that millions of Americans would watch, and it was going to describe climate change in a completely new way for the public.

At the time, a large part of the US population thought of climate change as a slow, incremental, linear process that might be a danger in the distant future. Recent climate science suggested this might not be the case; the climate system is highly sensitive and can reorganize abruptly, with consequences as potentially disastrous as the shutdown of the Gulf Stream. Interestingly, this premise was going to be envisioned in TDAT, so I immediately thought that this could be an amazing natural field experiment.

I received support to conduct three national surveys: one, a week before the film’s release, another three weeks after, and a third four months later to see if there were long-term effects. We wanted to see if the film would have an impact on people’s beliefs, attitudes, policy preferences, and behaviors, and whether it would alter their perceptions of the risks of climate change.

We found that the people who saw TDAT were affected by it. Our results found that the film had a significant impact on the climate change beliefs, risk perceptions, policy priorities, behavioral intentions, and — by seemingly casting the bush administration in a negative light — even the voting intentions of moviegoers.

The results
Our study made one thing clear: not only can narrative film have social impact, it can have social impact at scale. Period.

Even after controlling for demographic and political factors, people who saw the film became more convinced that climate change was real, became more worried about it, changed their conceptual model of how climate change actually works, became more supportive of climate policy, and became more willing to say that they at least intended to change their behaviors.

To cite a few results: 83% of moviegoers said they were concerned about global warming compared to 72% of non-watchers; more than 80% of moviegoers responded that global warming is likely to produce more intense weather events over the next 50 years, versus 72% of non-watchers; and perhaps most telling, moviegoers were more likely than non-watchers to believe that global warming could lead to a shutdown of the Gulf Stream current or a new ice age — two underlying premises of TDAT.

The power of story
Let me underscore this, because I can’t say it strongly enough: stories are one of the most powerful forms of communication that humans have invented. TDAT is, first and foremost, a story. Stories provide us with an interpretation of reality and they are an incredibly powerful means to communicate ideas in an emotional way. Empathy and narrative transport helps people identify with characters, see through their eyes and share their experiences — and this is what makes stories such an effective tool for helping people to understand issues like climate change.

Humans have always used narrative in this way, passing on essential, substantive news stories are carefully curated and written to aid with their very survival.

The results from TDAT included international studies addressing the science underlying the movie, focused on the public. More surveys were conducted from April to June (TDAT Box Office Mojo www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=dayaftertomorrow.htm).

The Day After Tomorrow box office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date: May 28th 2004</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worldwide gross: $54.4M+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic total gross: $386,740,799</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign total gross: $157,653,065</td>
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<tr>
<td>Widest release: 3,444 theaters</td>
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<tr>
<td>In release: 161 days/23 weeks</td>
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<td>Opening weekend: $68,743,584</td>
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The power of story
Let me underscore this, because I can’t say it strongly enough: stories are one of the most powerful forms of communication that humans have invented. TDAT is, first and foremost, a story. Stories provide us with an interpretation of reality and they are an incredibly powerful means to communicate ideas in an emotional way. Empathy and narrative transport helps people identify with characters, see through their eyes and share their experiences — and this is what makes stories such an effective tool for helping people to understand issues like climate change.

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It's this deep, psychological understanding of the brain that helps to explain why a film like TDAE, with its incredibly rich and provocative images, can be such a powerful communication tool.

The teachable moment

Naturally, TDAE spurned a lot of viewers to seek out further information. Many organizations tried to leverage the film to advance the cause of tackling climate change, setting up websites and social media platforms that featured climate videos and related content.

In a later study on what we called “the teachable moment,” we showed that an event planned for a specific release date, like a movie release, can have a significant impact on public opinion.

We showed that the film could have had even greater impact if change organizations had launched their websites in advance of the film, making the most of this teachable moment. By extending, this study emphasizes the importance of taking the right approach with social impact campaigns, tailoring your conversation to specific goals where possible, and engaging audiences at the most opportune moments before, during, and after release.

When a piece of entertainment speaks to the cultural and social dimensions of an issue it’s possible to change social and cultural norms. (like a movie release) will generate increased information-seeking behavior before the event itself arrives. There is a specific period in the weeks prior to a film’s release where this ramp-up of public attention is at its peak, and this teachable moment is a critical time for people or organizations to strike while the iron is hot, before attention is diverted elsewhere. Naturally, it follows that film-makers and organizations seeking to create maximum impact should have their outreach strategy in place well before the film’s release. For TDAE in particular, we found that the teachable moment spanned from 10 days before the release date to 19 days after.

TDAE was among the first films of its kind. While one film alone may not be enough to change the opinion of the entire public, it can certainly drive change at scale and help initiate or accelerate a culture shift, one where the momentum is continued by other projects. The audiences for TDAE accounted for 9% of the US population, and as we’ve seen, it had a quantifiable impact on people’s perceptions of climate change. However, it’s arguable that the film couldn’t have had even greater impact if change organizations had launched their websites in advance of the film, making the most of this teachable moment. By extending, this study emphasizes the importance of taking the right approach with social impact campaigns, tailoring your conversation to specific goals where possible, and engaging audiences at the most opportune moments before, during, and after release.

When a piece of entertainment speaks to the cultural and social dimensions of an issue it’s possible to change social and cultural norms — the unruly rules of how people are supposed to behave — and thus affect big shifts in politics, policy, and society at large. That’s one of the real powers of popular culture and media: it can engage people in social issues in a way that is often more powerful than all the data, statistics, and scientific reports combined.

Five models of the climate system

Out of five different, highly simplified models of the climate system (shown below), moviegoers were more likely than non-watchers to choose model A — the most accurate depiction.

When a piece of entertainment speaks to the cultural and social dimensions of an issue it’s possible to change social and cultural norms.
Many environmental leaders and organizations described the release of *The Day After Tomorrow* (TDAT) as a “teachable moment” — an opportunity to use its themes and ideas as a springboard to educate the public about global warming, and perhaps even change policy.

According to Hart and Leiserowitz, “In preparation for the ‘teachable moment,’ many environmental organizations created these websites based on the premise that TDAT and related media coverage would increase public information-seeking behavior.”

The team collected web-traffic data from six global-warming related websites from April 1st to June 30th 2004. The six were selected to represent a “variety of sources that provide information and/or advocate for specific policies to address climate change.” They included: a Johns Hopkins University website (EcoHealth); a website operated by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS); another operated by the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF); a website operated by the Global Exchange, Rainforest Action Network, and the Ruckus Society (RAN); a website operated by National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC); and one operated by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI).

Media coverage data of TDAT was gathered via a LexisNexis search between April 1st and June 30th 2004. The search was “limited to coverage from news sources, and included television, radio, prestige newspapers and major metropolitan newspapers.”

Of the websites studied, three (UCS, EDF, and RAN) were active throughout the duration of the study. The other three (EcoHealth, WHOI and NSIDC) launched on, or nearer to, the actual release date of TDAT (May 28th 2004).

For the first three sites, there was a clear spike in web traffic between May 12th and June 11th (Figure 1), clearly supporting the team’s hypothesis that “web traffic on global warming related websites increased during the release period of *The Day After Tomorrow*.”

The latter group comprising the three sites that launched closer to the release date of TDAT (EcoHealth, WHOI, NSIDC), showed similar results to the first group (Figure 2). However, the data also suggested that “by waiting until the movie release date to launch their respective *The Day After Tomorrow* websites, WHOI and NSIDC, in particular, missed the first week of heightened global warming related web activity that occurred during the ‘teachable moment.’”

Hart and Leiserowitz’s study and findings show that, despite being a fictional representation of the dangers of climate change, TDAT created a teachable moment of heightened public concern and increased information-seeking behavior. More specifically, as Leiserowitz and Hart write, “a ‘teachable moment’ of elevated information-seeking activity was found to extend from 10 days before the release date of *The Day After Tomorrow* to 19 days after the movie release date.”

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Finding Our Purpose

Through purposeful storytelling, Participant Media wants to change the world. David Linde explains how to extend your impact beyond theaters, and why SIE is aligned with society’s needs.

So, when I became CEO of Participant, a company that was founded by Jeff Skoll with the belief in the purpose and power of its content to make the world a better place, it couldn’t have been a more natural fit.

Since 2000, Participant Media has been producing social impact entertainment that inspires and entertains audiences while highlighting some of the most pressing issues of our time, and most importantly, giving those same audiences the means to take action. Our belief in the capacity of storytelling to spark and contribute to social change — instilled by Jeff — is baked into our DNA. It’s what we do and it’s what makes us unique, and what draws people to Participant, from our incredible partners already working on the relevant causes, to the changemakers, the NGOs, and our other impact partners already working on the relevant causes.

To try and ensure this happens, we’ve adopted a three-part process, steeped in understanding the tremendous value in partnerships, for making social impact entertainment effective.

For us, it always starts with the story. To even think about engaging audiences around an issue, we need to tell them a story that moves them. That’s why we focus on partnering with great artists who want to act, and our social impact team empowers them to do so by providing tools and connecting them to the social impact campaigns, the changemakers, the NGOs, and our other impact partners already working on the relevant causes.

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effect created by the film and its impact campaign would lead to the desclassification of U.S. State Department files related to the mass killings — a historic achievement and the primary goal of Participant's social impact campaign for the film. Meanwhile, with Wonder, released in 2017, the main message of the film — compassion — was considerably more nuanced. Based on The New York Times bestseller, Wonder tells the story of how August Pullman, a boy born with facial deformities, becomes his school’s unlikely hero. We believe a film like this can still help create positive impact because compassion has a universal relevance. If we don’t have compassion for each other, how can we even attempt to address important global issues like those in The Look of Silence? If it stongly engages us and has the potential to create change, we’ll consider it even if it doesn’t fit perfectly into a specific category or cause.

Wonder made more than $27 million in its first weekend. For us, the financial success of our films, as well as the accolades they garner, is proof that there’s a real hunger for social impact entertainment. The notion that stories can entertain, enthrall, and contribute to social change in a meaningful way is quickly gaining traction in Hollywood and beyond.

The Look of Silence

This leads to the third and most essential part of our process: to catalyze the collaboration between audiences and impact partners on an issue. This is all of us working together as an accelerator for raising awareness and a connective tissue to their work. The wide range of nonprofits, NGOs, and foundations we work with on our social impact campaigns all value our ability to connect them to a broad network of concerned people all over the world.

That said, the potential impact of a film isn’t always obvious — or immediate. Take, for example, Joshua Oppenheimer’s 2014 film The Look of Silence, which documents the 1965–1966 Indonesian genocide. Three years after its release, a ripple

The notion that stories can entertain, enthrall, and contribute to social change in a meaningful way is quickly gaining traction in Hollywood and beyond.

The second part is all about distribution. No film can contribute to social change if it goes unseen. Thanks to the breadth of our content, and audiences’ engagement with it through relationships built over many years, we’ve been able to cultivate global, ongoing, and preferred distribution partnerships with the major studios, the leading independent distributors, all the major pay television services, and now the streaming services as well. Though connections like these, we can consistently reach the widest possible audience all over the world.

The world is seeing stories and waking up to the incredible work done by impact partners. This means that together we have a real opportunity. And this really means that together we have a real opportunity. The world is seeing stories and waking up to the incredible work done by impact partners. This means that together we have a real opportunity. And this really means that together we have a real opportunity.

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At 21st Century Fox (21CF), social impact grew out of some pretty forward-thinking sustainability promises that we made back in 2007. Deciding to become carbon neutral was a revolutionary moment for us. It allowed what was then a decentralized collection of businesses to begin to organize around shared values. Eventually, the company’s focus on sustainability evolved into a more comprehensive social impact practice, which now includes, but aspires to transcend, a traditional corporate social responsibility (CSR) mode. We understand that our focus in this area can be more than a core competency — it can be a competitive advantage. As a result, we’ve developed our social impact work in a much more holistic fashion across the entire organization and now — whether you work for Star in Mumbai or National Geographic in Washington, D.C. — all 21st Century Fox companies know they are part of a bigger picture.

Girls Build LA
FOX and the LA Promise Fund partnered to provide a screening of Hidden Figures to 10,000 middle and high school girls from all over Los Angeles County. The female students were invited to the screening as part of the LA Promise Fund’s Girls Build LA initiative.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein
Senior Vice President of Social Impact at 21st Century Fox

I’ve been working in this space for a dozen years, long enough to have both helped drive and respond to the staggering growth of consumer and workforce demand for companies to demonstrate values and purpose. Having some kind of cause is swiftly becoming the lowest common denominator for all brands; the real value lies in standing out through the substance and impact of your work. As well as handling more traditional elements of CSR and sustainability, my team acts as an internal cause marketing and impact campaign consultancy. That means we partner with companies across 21CF when they produce films, TV shows, and other programming that

We understand that our focus in this area can be more than a core competency — it can be a competitive advantage.

It’s not enough for companies to just explain their values, writes Liba Wenig Rubenstein, they need to demonstrate them in the real world too. A successful future is dependent on practicing what we preach.
The Search for Hidden Figures was an opportunity to leverage inspired storytelling into concrete positive outcomes like this is one of the reasons we love what we do.

By combining a tight social impact campaign with the right partners and an opportunistic streak, we were able to reach our target audience and beyond.

The Search for Hidden Figures

In partnership with 21st Century Fox, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media conducted a survey to determine the potential of $2,000 viewers who have made a concerted effort to set up or sponsor a preview event and panel discussion. We then facilitated a screening at the White House, where Michelle Obama invited students from Los Angeles at an event organized by the LA Promise Fund as part of its Girls Build LA Initiative. Both events helped raise excitement for girls to get involved with STEM. These kinds of ancillary campaigns amplify the film's impact as well as word of mouth to driver viewership.

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The Search for Hidden Figures was an opportunity to leverage inspired storytelling into concrete positive outcomes like this is one of the reasons we love what we do.
Director Gina Prince-Bythewood opens up about the personal importance of Love & Basketball, its lasting impact and how she has managed to push past the “no’s” that all too often greet female filmmakers.

**My journey as a filmmaker has been one of fighting to tell the stories I want to tell. Those fights sharpen, harden and embolden you. They give you the confidence and courage to go after what you want, despite the track record of who, historically, gets to tell the stories.**

I love action and superhero films, for instance, and I’ve fought to be able to tell those stories despite the fact that women — especially women of color — rarely have the opportunity to do so. I’m excited to be making *The Old Guard*, a film based on a graphic novel series by Greg Rucka and Leandro Fernández about two incredibly badass women and their group of mercenary soldiers. It’s great to be able to put these characters out into the world.

Up until this point in my career I’ve tended to direct screenplays I’ve written, so the story is always my starting point when I’m considering a film’s impact. When you have a platform as big as TV or film, it shouldn’t be wasted on just entertaining; you can absolutely entertain and have something to say at the same time. The show *Shots Fired*, which my husband and I created, is a great example of that. It looks at the range of perspectives resulting from racialized shootings in a small town, but it’s also a really compelling mystery.

Love & Basketball is another example of balancing entertainment with social impact. I wanted to make a love story as iconic as *When Harry Met Sally*, but with a black cast. I wanted people to look at Love & Basketball and see a universal love story, but at the same time it was important for...
me to make a film with black characters at the center. Back in 2000 that was dangerously rare in Hollywood and in many respects it still is.

It was also important for me to get this film made because so much of it was my personal story. I wanted to see myself represented on screen because for most of my life I felt ignored by the mainstream media. I am still humbled by the fact that the impact of the film. I hope that many consider the character Monica, an athlete, their romantic ideal. I also love that women and girls can look at her and be proud of their athleticism.

That impact might not have been possible without the help of the Sundance Institute, which was instrumental in getting Love & Basketball made. When I first went the idea out, every studio passed. Two days after I got the final pass, Sundance called and said they wanted to meet me. I was invited to bring the script to their lab. It was an incredible experience. I got to work with amazing mentors like Scott Frank and Paul Attanasio, writers for whom I have the utmost respect. The Institute also put on a live reading of the script which resulted in Spike Lee’s company coming aboard as producers, and the finished film screened at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival.

1

Institutions like Sundance are vital because they actively look for disparate, yet equally important voices in our industry. This work is essential because the diversity stats in film are horrifying.

Out of a total of 109 film directors who were associated with the top 100 movies of 2017, 101 were male while only eight were female. None of the female directors had previously appeared previously in the top 100 films across the 11-year time frame investigated.

7.3%

12.6%

145 days/20 weeks*

1065x326


© New Line Cinema and other respective production studios and distributors.


Hollywood Diversity Report 2018: Five Years of Progress and Missed Opportunities

Hunt, Darnell et al.


The Institute also put on a live reading of the script which resulted in Spike Lee’s company coming aboard as producers, and the finished film screened at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival.
Movies have the power to make both dangerous narratives and empowering histories into reality. Reginald Hudlin considers the role and responsibility of filmmakers and how, if you want your film to have an impact, balance is key.
I’ve always believed the best way to override the myth that diverse films can’t generate box office success would be to play to genre, because the genre appeal will override any racial pushback. The success of Black Panther confirms that. The film also adopted a rendition of the character that black comic book writers had created — one that made the Black Panther as powerful as, if not more powerful than, his white counterparts. So that made the Black Panther as powerful as, if not more powerful than, his white counterparts. The BFI also adopted a rendition of the character.

The filmmaker said, “I’m a fantasy film about the struggles of a poverty-stricken orphan, to connect with that audience. In the end, it was not through a single film but through his body of work that De Sica managed to reach different people on different wavelengths on issues and topics they cared about.

We can also learn how to strike that balance by acknowledging the political content in popular films like Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark and The Empire Strikes Back.

How do you strike that balance between the storytelling and the message, between entertainment and social impact?

Night of the Living Dead. It can even be instructive to compare films that tackle the same subject, like Fail Safe and Dr. Strangelove. Both are about nuclear war, but which was better at changing people’s views?

Looking ahead, I’m cautiously optimistic for the future, but I’m also worried. Both are about nuclear war, but which was better at changing people’s views?

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Documentary Film
Documentary film is arguably the leading form of SIE. From journalistic endeavors to more poetic meditations, documentaries have long been a platform for activists and artists alike. With the emergence of new technologies, innovative distribution models and over-the-top media services, the question of what constitutes a documentary — and indeed who can make them — is constantly shifting. What is clear, however, is the form’s ability to raise awareness and change minds.

As an art form, documentary film has a near unrivaled capacity to inspire, educate and change people’s understanding of their lives and societies.

— Jess Search, p60
The release of Before the Flood reached a record 60 million people around the world. Leonardo DiCaprio and Fisher Stevens reflect on the innovative release strategy that made it happen.

Fisher Stevens
Actor, director, and Academy Award®-winning producer

Notable works:
Before the Flood, The Cove

A lot of people say that when you’re making social impact entertainment, you have to start with the issue you’re trying to change. This is only part of the equation. I believe that first and foremost, in order for your film to have the most impact, it must be a film that people will want to watch. This means making the best film possible and not necessarily beating the audience over the head with the points you are trying to make. Let the characters reveal the change you’re trying to drive through their personal discoveries. Let the story unfold and dictate how you will strategize your impact.

One example of this is The Cove, which was actually my first social impact documentary. I’ve always been a big scuba diver, and in 2004 I went on a dive with Nausetra founder Jim Clark. We visited a spot he’d been to over 10 years ago and it had completely changed: all of the coral had died or been bleached and all of the fish were moving. We visited a local fisherman and learnt that they were killing dolphins. This was the beginning of Before the Flood that says, “Try to think about the future of your own children.”

Leonardo DiCaprio
Academy Award®-winning actor, producer, and activist

Notable works:
Blood Diamond, Before the Flood, The Revenant

I believe in the power of film to inspire people everywhere to be part of a global solution to climate change. I always wanted Before the Flood to be solutions-oriented. When Fisher and I set out on our visual storytelling journey, we didn’t just want to show the effects of climate change on our polar ice caps and low-lying regions, or shine a light on the destructive forces of mining and logging in the rainforests; we also wanted to highlight what individuals, communities, and grassroots movements are doing to protect their lands and way of life for future generations.

The idea was to promote widespread individual action. We wanted to show that when we understand we share a common planet, and when we set aside our differences to work together, there is hope. That’s part of the reason why working on Before the Flood was an extremely positive experience for Fisher and me. I think it’s important for documentary filmmakers, especially those just starting out, to keep an open mind so that you are capturing as broad a perspective as possible when it comes to the solutions available to your audience. This is especially true for driving positive social action. You want to make sure that your audience walks away with a clear understanding of the steps they can take in their own lives to be part of the change you are seeking to create.
I believe that you have to make films like this about an important issue because that’s what really makes it personal. I tried to draw that aspect out of Leo in Before the Flood, and I also believe that you have to make films like this more compelling. It also made it feel less like the issue was the driving force of the story to tell, no more important issue facing our planet than that of climate change.

Having Leo as our main character meant that he was able to take the audience through the narrative as it unfolded, allowing the audience to learn about the issue as it happened. Having Leo as our main character meant that he and the audience were able to connect with him and the film because it became our tour guide for the issue, and he was able to take the audience through the narrative in a palatable way for kids who didn’t necessarily know a lot about climate change — because it’s our hope that their generation will be able to solve it.

Having Leo as our main character meant that he was able to take the audience through the narrative as it unfolded, allowing the audience to learn about the issue as it happened. It revealed so much about who he is as a person and the audience was able to connect with him and the film because it became our tour guide for the issue, and he was able to take the audience through the narrative in a palatable way for kids who didn’t necessarily know a lot about climate change — because it’s our hope that their generation will be able to solve it.

Once you have the film the way you want it, the next step in creating social impact entertainment is to get it in front of the right audience. But Before the Flood, we were in a desperate state because the 2016 election was rapidly approaching. This became a core part of our deal with National Geographic: we said we would basically give them the movie for nothing if they got it in front of as many people as possible before the vote. That was really new to us — the movie had to hit a lot of eyeballs at the right moment in time.

To accomplish this, Courtney Monroe at National Geographic had the idea to give it away free for the first 10 days, hosting the film on YouTube, iTunes, Facebook, and many other social networks. The board agreed with her plan and the success of the release exceeded our expectations. Before the Flood was available in 45 languages across 171 countries, eventually reaching an audience of more than 60 million people worldwide. It’s gone on to surpass 1 billion minutes of viewing time across multiple platforms, making it one of the most-watched documentaries in history and the most-watched Nat Geo film ever. The film was also used to launch Nat Geo’s “Earth Week” and to connect viewers to our social impact campaign. The campaign prompted viewers to take action through the use of tools like Snapchat geofilters for film screenings, hashtags and tracked Facebook mentions. For every use of the social assets, National Geographic and 21st Century Fox donated one dollar to Stealth Sea and the Wildlife Conservation Society, up to a total of $50,000 for each organization.

While making Before the Flood, we realized we had to do something about our carbon footprint. We joined up with Daniel Nadler who designed the CarboTax app, which helps you contribute to reforestation campaigns to offset your carbon footprint through a voluntary carbon tax. That had a really positive effect — it gave us a practical step we could take and was also an action we could communicate to viewers. In the end, this raised over 31 million to help retreat places that were featured in the movie.

The impact work does not stop once you’ve released the film — in fact, you could say that’s when it really begins. Never in our wildest dreams could we have imagined that the Trump administration would have rolled back all of the progress made by President Obama. All of our deepest fears have come true. So this movie is now more important than ever. You always need someone to pick up the cause and be dedicated to its impact, and the social impact campaigns you’ve started, long after you’re gone. I’ve found it helpful to have partners involved at every stage possible so I can get back to making the best films I can. Because for me, that’s where impact has to start: with a great movie.

Ultimately, there are a million causes and a million movies — so nothing’s easy. But this is a great time to be making documentaries. There’s so much to fight for and so much to fight against. You’re going to see a lot of amazing creativity come out of this time from documentary filmmakers.

Let the characters reveal the change you’re trying to drive.

Before the Flood distribution

Convincing Hollywood to produce a documentary on such a sensitive issue was no easy task, so we needed a commercial-off-the-shelf platform and streaming platforms.

171 countries 45 languages

16M viewers on the Nat Geo Channel

>7.1M views on YouTube

National Geographic Channel commissions Unprecedented outreach in 171 countries, 45 languages, the film was released commercially across multiple digital and streaming platforms.

1,500 prints screening events for colleges, religious institutions, and other organizations.

Before the Flood Before the Flood presents the dramatic changes occurring around the world due to climate change, as well as the actions individuals are taking to prevent it. The film presents the disruption of life on our planet.

Before the Flood presents the dramatic changes occurring around the world due to climate change, as well as the actions individuals are taking to prevent it. The film presents the disruption of life on our planet.
By finding humanity in even the darkest moments, Joshua Oppenheimer challenges viewers to look beyond the superficial.

Joshua Oppenheimer
Academy Award-nominated director

Notable works:
The Act of Killing, The Look of Silence

For a film to generate positive social impact, it needs to hold up a mirror to the audience. That’s because the shock in great art and great storytelling is always the shock of the familiar, when you encounter something about yourself in a work.

Often, journalism and news media only provide a snapshot of an issue, but documentary film lends itself to telling deeper stories about people, stories that can touch the core of our being. With The Act of Killing and The Look of Silence, I wanted to tell a deeper story about the Indonesian genocide by exploring the impunity of the perpetrators.

When working on a film, I always start with what troubles me or what I can’t look away from. This requires looking within, beyond the superficial. In the case of The Act of Killing and The Look of Silence, it was the boastfulness of the perpetrators that captivated and disturbed me. I felt there was something performative in the way they were showing off about the worst of their crimes.

My crew and I devised ways to explore this impunity by setting up new situations that made this performance visible. In The Act of Killing we asked the perpetrators to dramatize their memories of murder and how they felt about participating in a genocide. In this way, we created a new reality by helping our protagonist Adi confront his brother’s killers.

When working on a film, I always start with what troubles me or what I can’t look away from.

This kind of work is never easy, so you need to cultivate the right environment on the shoot in order to evoke these new realities. It’s about establishing a safe space and being transparent, since your crew and participants will be pushed beyond their comfort zone. You are creating an intervention. This is the task of the artist: to create new pieces of the world that force us as viewers to reflect on and recognize things that were unable to speak about previously.

While I knew this work was disruptive, I didn’t think that The Act of Killing would have an immediate inflammatory impact and explode in the way that it did. It became a touchstone of discussion, leading to a swift transformation in how the Indonesian media was talking about the past. Just three weeks after the first press screenings, the media shifted from talking about the “heroic extermination of the communists” — or more vaguely “the troubles of the 1960s” — to describing the atrocities as a genocide carried out by people who still remained in power.

There was a real hunger for The Look of Silence too. It was screened 950 times in 116 cities in 32 of Indonesia’s 34 provinces. Numerous public screenings were held in Medan, which is the city where both films were made. Not every organization that screened the film could report on how many people attended, but we know that at least 53,000 people went to screenings held by universities, film clubs, NGOs, religious organizations, and community groups. We made the film available for free online and it has now been streamed or downloaded tens of millions of times in Indonesia alone.

As a result, young people started demanding the truth. Survivors of the genocide organized an international people’s tribunal, and Indonesian teachers’ unions created an alternative history curriculum so that they wouldn’t have to continue to teach the false, official version. Initiatives in visual history, theater, art, and human rights sprang up across the country, many of which are still active today.

Historians demanded that the Indonesian and American governments open up their archives to shed light on the role the US played in the genocide, and we supported them by hosting screenings at the White House. Then, on December 10th 2014, Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) — who screened The Act of Killing to Congress earlier that year — introduced a Senate resolution demanding that the US declassify all documents pertaining to America’s role in the genocide, and that it apologize for America’s part in the slaughter.
On October 16th 2017, the US government released official documents on the mass killings in Indonesia in 1965–1966. The released documents revealed that US diplomats and their State Department counterparts in Washington, D.C. had full knowledge of the events. They detailed tens of thousands of killings of suspected Communist Party members and ethnic Chinese, as well as trade unionists, teachers, activists, and artists. These killings were committed by the Indonesian military, paramilitary groups, and Muslim militias.

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If you want your film to have a real impact, I think it has to force people to see that the world cannot continue in its present form. Many documentaries simply present us with violence committed will never happen again.

The Indonesian media investigates after watching The Act of Killing. Indonesia’s premier news magazine, Tempo, decided it would follow the filmmakers around the country looking to find fresh evidence, sending a team of researchers photo researchers translators journalists. As of February 2013, there were more than 600 new Indonesian press articles re-examining the genocide.

The Indonesian National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) held screenings of the film in 32 provinces. The organizations and individuals who received DVDs often held screenings of the film. There were 45 publicly announced screenings on August 17th, 2013 (the anniversary of Indonesian Independence Day). The film was also shown in 29/34 Indonesian cities, and in various cities in Indonesia.

The most comfortable explanation for the stories told in The Act of Killing is that these men are monsters, because it is predicated on the assumption that “I, the viewer, am not a monster.” Instead, I tried to present the audience with human beings who were writhing with guilt: I started to see myself in them, and the film asks viewers to do the same. That’s a profoundly uncomfortable position and one that a significant number of people will reject. But those that are prepared to look in the mirror will ask themselves the important questions: why do we do these things and how can we live with them?

That’s why the end of the film is possibly the darkest and most hopeful in documentary history. You realize that even a man like Anwar, one of the leaders of the death squads back in the 60s, is fundamentally a human being. If that’s the case, then we ought to be able to find ways of living together that ensure the unthinkable violence committed will never happen again.

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The tempo investigation team:

– journalists
– project managers
– translators
– photo researchers
– researchers

The result:

75 pages of testimony

600+ new press articles

If we are to transform Indonesia into the democracy it claims to be, citizens must recognize the terror and repression on which our contemporary history has been built. No film, or any other work of art for that matter, has done this more effectively than The Act of Killing.

– The National Human Rights Commission of Indonesia
Doc Society is a nonprofit organization that enables the creation of great documentary films. We award grants, host convenings and celebrate achievements in the space, providing filmmakers with the support to reach new audiences and make a greater impact with their work. From day one in 2005 we have worked to empower artists to make the best version of their films possible, in order to unleash the power and potential of documentary.

One of the ways we try to do this is by consolidating expertise and knowledge and sharing it with the entire field. One of our most groundbreaking resources is The Impact Field Guide & Toolkit, a detailed online publication that amalgamates the wisdom and experience of countless amazing filmmakers, all in one place. It is the largest and most significant publication of its kind.

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Doc Academy is now used in over 25% of secondary schools in Britain, and we're piloting the program in the US and Kenya. Our approach is to engage hard-to-reach pupils with real-life content and provide teachers with materials on hard-to-discuss topics that kids are anxious about, all without adding to the teachers' workloads. We've found that it's particularly effective in reaching marginalized students. The films are often about difficult subjects, and these kids make real, meaningful connections with the work because it reflects their own outsider experiences.

These initiatives aside, the process of making a documentary remains a difficult one. There's certainly no right or wrong way to go about it, and no great film is ever made without a huge amount of self-doubt. But for teams that also want to create social impact, having a plan, a committed team and an impact producer embedded in the whole process as early as possible can definitely help. It's important to have clarity on what you're trying to do, but that's different than having a single, set goal; you still need to be flexible. Just as Doc Society is iterative in its methodology, the filmmakers who achieve the most are often and able to adapt quickly too — especially when their films are released into the world and people, communities, and institutions start reacting to them.

We think evaluation of that reaction is incredibly important. You need to understand your film's impact so you can learn how to deepen and replicate it. If you can't tell the story of your film's effect, you'll struggle to learn from it, you'll struggle to build upon it, and you'll struggle to attract the resources and partners that you need for your future projects and for others that come after you. This is why evaluation is a responsibility, not just a nice thing to have.

It's exciting and a privilege to be contributing to a field that's developing so rapidly. Documentary is a broad church — events, podcasts and even live performances can all be part of this space. It's a flexible medium, and we're only just beginning to see how creative it can be.

Documentary has the power to get inside a person and do something amazing. We all know films that have really changed us, changed who we are and who we want to be. That's the magic of it. Doc Society works to harness that magic.
Case Study

Chasing Ice
Chasing Coral

From changing minds in Ohio to capturing the attention of world leaders at the UN — Samantha Wright walks us through the evolution of impact across Chasing Ice and Chasing Coral.

Exposing the issue
The challenge with telling stories around big, complex subjects like climate change is getting beyond the reports, numbers and graphs. You need to make it visually coherent so people can connect the dots and understand the issue. My role at Exposure Labs is to empower people to do that: to be visual, to experiment, and ultimately, to help expose those difficult, entrenched issues. To do this we use an iterative approach, allowing ourselves to make mistakes, to learn, to grow, and to change.

At Exposure Labs we have a simple but ambitious mission: to solve problems through film. We think one of the biggest issues in the US right now is a lack of political will to act on climate change of the speed we need. In response, we make films that highlight specific aspects of the much larger problem — from the melting of the northern ice caps in Chasing Ice to the destruction of coral reefs worldwide in Chasing Coral. Then, through strategic, local partnerships, we arm audiences with images that help them break down these complex issues. This allows the films to instigate change at a local level. If you try to address a global audience about this type of issue, a lot of the message can be lost. By focusing on a region, a state, or even just an individual lawmaker, you can get real-world results that can then be scaled up to make a big difference.

Chasing Ice viewers
Chasing Ice has been screened in more than 150 countries and an estimated 35 million viewers tuned into the broadcast of the film via National Geographic, CNN, and other networks. The film has been acquired by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and HBO Climate Series for Children.

Chasing Ice, driving change
We learned a lot from Chasing Ice. The 2012 documentary initially sought to simply show viewers what was happening in the Arctic Circle, but we were overwhelmed with the response and it became the centerpiece for a much more dynamic campaign.

This was when we began to focus on the hyperlocal. We had been hearing that there were elected officials across the US who believed in man-made climate changes, but lacked the political cover to go public with their views. Representative Bob Inglis (R-SC) was untapped in 2009 for just this reason. We knew that if we were going to shift skeptical policymakers we would have to convince their voters. So, we decided to micro-target one district and one congressman (Pat Tiberi), a climate change denier in Ohio. We had this idea that 50 screenings in one place, as well as the largest glacier calving ever filmed – “Largest glacier calving filmed.”

The event held the Guinness World Record for the longest doc impact award. To date, Chasing Ice: The Doc Society “Doc Impact Award 2016 – Chasing Ice.”

Exposing the issue
Chasing Coral

Coral reefs around the world are vanishing at an unprecedented rate. A team of divers, photographers, and scientists set out on a thrilling ocean adventure to discover why and to reveal the underwater mystery to the world.

Exposing the issue
Chasing Ice

Multi-year record of the world’s changing glaciers. Camera designed for one purpose: to capture a Balog across the Arctic as he deploys time-lapse photography James Balog, Sean M. McMullen.

SYNOPSIS

Nov 16th 2012

PG

Jerry Aronson, Jeff Orlowski, Paula DuPré Pesmen

DIRECTED BY

Jeff Orlowski

RUNNING TIME

01:15

PG-13

Samantha Wright

Managing Director of Impact at Exposure Labs

SYNOPSIS

July 14th 2017

PG

Jeff Orlowski

RUNNING TIME

01:33

Richard Vevers, Zackery Rago, Dr. John “Charlie” Veron

Produced by Jeff Orlowski, Larissa Rhodes

PRODUCED BY

Richard Neves, Zaeleny Rago, Dr. John “Charlie” Veron

SYNOPSIS

Chasing the digital presence
As of 2016, an estimated 180 million people had engaged with the film’s website.

60K+

Facebook likes

7,500+

Twitter followers

18K+

mailing list subscribers

55M+

video views

The event holds the Guinness World Record for the longest glacier calving ever filmed.

63%

64.7%

43.9%

45.9%

63%

75%

13.3%

33.5%

7.83%

43.9%

27.6%

63%

75%

13.3%

33.5%

7.83%

43.9%

27.6%

63%

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13.3%

33.5%

7.83%

43.9%

27.6%
in one community, could go so much further than 50 around the world — and this proved to be right. After six weeks, Congressman Tiber in Ohio ultimately shifted his position acknowledging that climate change is a man-made problem, and eventually joined the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus, working with other representatives to address the risk of climate change.

Chasing Coral, building on success

The approach to engagement for Chasing Coral was based on our learnings from Chasing Ice. After evaluating the successes of the campaign, and where things could have been done differently, we decided to change it up a little. With Chasing Ice our effort was centered around the one experiment we ran in that district in Ohio, so for Chasing Coral we focused on a water area in the Southeast. Again, we were driven by a desire to iterate, to try new things and see what worked. But whereas before we had just one experiment, now the plan was to run a whole series of them across the region, varying our approach from screening to screening.

For our 2018 work for Chasing Coral, we ran three local campaigns, each targeting different levers of systems-level change: mobilizing voters, inspiring young people, and shifting policymakers. Atlanta, Georgia, saw mobilized voters in time for the 2018 midterms, using screenings across the city to get to hard-to-reach audiences. In South Carolina, we partnered with the Charleston County School District, using the film as a launchpad for an entire semester of learning that inspired young people to take ownership of our impact on the environment. A separate campaign toured South Carolina across nine state house districts, using screenings in time for the 2018 midterms, using screenings across the state to inspire local political representatives to back you up, there’s nothing that can’t be accomplished. Making a real difference — and with the power of local champions, we’ve been humbled to show Chasing Ice at the White House, while Chasing Coral has been screened on Capitol Hill and at the UN Ocean Summit, among many other places. When your films are playing at venues like these, you know you have a chance of making a real difference — and with the power of local champions to back you up, there’s nothing that can’t be accomplished.

Chasing Ice audience attitude shifts

At the end of the Chasing Ice film campaign tour, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report was released. Organizing for Action, a nonprofit, had volunteered to go to the office of every US Congressperson who denied climate change and had at least one more visit scheduled to speak on how climate change impacts their district. We asked them to reach out to their offices to invite their reps to view the film. As of the end of 2018, the film’s famous video of the calving glacier had reached over 55 million views. In 2016 the film even won the prestigious Doc Society Doc Impact Award in recognition of its impact on audiences. Fortunately, Chasing Coral is headed in the same direction, with impact donations from 39 countries and 30 awards from 72 festivals. Lasting success — both films are having an extremely long shelf life. Much of this is down to the homeowner activism that’s built around the screenings as a result of that hyperlocal approach we’ve been taking. With Chasing Ice, we wanted to make sure it was fully accessible to all communities wherever it was showing, so the campaign contributed $100,000 toward ticket giveaways, which were made possible through a private grant. For Chasing Coral, we now have many partners who’ve helped us set up over 5,000 community screenings in more than 100 countries around the world.

The impact of our local strategy has been incredible, and it’s been matched with impact at a global level, too. Chasing Ice was screened in over 172 countries and earned over $1.3 million at the box office. More than 15 million viewers have tuned into broadcasts on various networks, as of the end of 2018, the film’s famous video of the calving glacier had reached over 55 million views. In 2016 the film even won the prestigious Doc Society Doc Impact Award in recognition of its impact on audiences. Fortunately, Chasing Coral is headed in the same direction, with impact donations from 39 countries and 30 awards from 72 festivals. We’ve been humbled to share Chasing Ice at the White House, while Chasing Coral has been screened on Capitol Hill and at the UN Ocean Summit, among many other places. When your films are playing at venues like these, you know you have a chance of making a real difference — and with the power of local champions to back you up, there’s nothing that can’t be accomplished.

Chasing Coral came out in 2017 and we aren’t nearly finished with it yet. We’ve held over 1,500 screenings and the demand hasn’t dropped at all, and this is partly because we’ve been selling to change the formulas as we go. This sounds like a lot of work, but the ultimate goal of this approach is to create a set of refined learnings that will help others generate impact of their own. In support of this, Exposure Labs has launched “Unstoppable,” a new project that draws from these lessons learned to build an open-source toolkit that will help other campaigners and filmmakers supercharge their impact work.

As we supported Chasing Ice in communities around the world, our screenings became no less than just basic OKAs. We curbed different aspects of the experience — from sending out the invitations, to mediating the discussions, to designing the environments. In key test audiences, we also conducted exit surveys to measure the shifts in mindsets during our events, basing our method on the “Six Americas” framework from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. On average, climate change skeptics accounted for 37.5% of our audiences; following screenings, these self-identified skeptics left feeling either “skeptical” or “concerned” about climate change. One woman even came to a screening with the specific aim of heckling us, and 90 minutes later she was a convert!

A global problem requires a global solution. An effective solution requires that all countries agree to participate together. I would like to see us address climate change in a balanced manner, on as broad a front as possible.

Chasing Coral in 2019

Lasting success — both films are having an extremely long shelf life. Much of this is down to the homeowner activism that’s built around the screenings as a result of that hyperlocal approach we’ve been taking. With Chasing Ice, we wanted to make sure it was fully accessible to all communities wherever it was showing, so the campaign contributed $100,000 toward ticket giveaways, which were made possible through a private grant. For Chasing Coral, we now have many partners who’ve helped us set up over 5,000 community screenings in more than 100 countries around the world.

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Chasing Coral came out in 2017 and we aren’t nearly finished with it yet. We’ve held over 1,500 screenings and the demand hasn’t dropped at all, and this is partly because we’ve been selling to change the formulas as we go. This sounds like a lot of work, but the ultimate goal of this approach is to create a set of refined learnings that will help others generate impact of their own. In support of this, Exposure Labs has launched “Unstoppable,” a new project that draws from these lessons learned to build an open-source toolkit that will help other campaigners and filmmakers supercharge their impact work.

Chasing Coral in 2019

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Spotlight on: The Chasing Ice Ohio Tour

The Chasing Ice Ohio Tour saw the team at Exposure Labs concentrate their change efforts in one district: Ohio’s 12th. The aim was to galvanize the public — through events, screenings, and by striking up local partnerships — and push Congressman Pat Tiberi away from his stance as a listed climate change denier, and toward accepting the reality of the issue.

According to the team orchestrating the campaign, the strategy was to flood the district with “Chasing Ice screening events, press and climate education for the public” with the goal being to “support the Congressman through his constituents and provide him with everything he needed to understand and embrace climate change science.”

At the screenings in particular, local residents were afforded a platform to discuss the issues and, if they so wished, reach out to Congressman Tiberi to ask him to reconsider his stance on climate change. The campaign team asked attendees to write any statements, messages or questions to the Congressman to be shared on the web (and eventually on a dedicated website: www.DearCongressmanTiberi.com).

The team spent close to three months planning and developing the tour, which included “writing proposals, researching Congressmen and congressional districts, developing educational language, creating a new constituent call to action, building a new website, and designing marketing and media materials.”

The concerted effort and hyperlocal focus paid off: on April 24th 2014, Congressman Tiberi released a statement acknowledging that climate change was an issue that needed to be tackled.


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<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Screening presentations hosted by the Chasing Ice team.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9,440</td>
<td>Ohio residents reached through screening and marketing events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300+</td>
<td>Messages from Ohio residents to Congressman Tiberi.</td>
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<tr>
<td>35+</td>
<td>Press articles or event announcements were released about the Ohio Tour between April-May 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>Partnerships with local venues/organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>662</td>
<td>Ohio residents signed up to stay involved with the Chasing Ice Ohio Tour.</td>
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Telling a Good Story

Elise Pearlstein elaborates on the importance of using stories to connect with audiences on an emotional level to take them someplace where they wouldn’t otherwise go.

Jeff Skoll founded Participant Media on his belief that a good story, well told, can make a difference and drive people to do good in the world.

Our approach to documentaries echoes this view and aligns with the organization’s overall reason for being: to create entertainment that inspires and compels social change.

There is a misconception that in social impact entertainment the issue must always come first, but when it comes to making documentary films, we always put the story first. Why? Because we look to stories to connect with audiences on an emotional level and take them someplace where they couldn’t or wouldn’t otherwise go.

Audiences do not need or want to be hit over the head with a message. But rather to discover the issues at play through authentic storytelling. So, we look for representatives who will be the best people to tell the story. In Food, Inc, Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan, a pair of investigative journalists, took the lead in steering the audience through the narrative, but every issue we explored within the food industry was also represented by someone who was grappling with that issue themselves.

Impartial and engaging documentaries often provide a personal entry point that connects with audiences. Audiences do not need or want to be hit over the head with a message, but rather to discover the issues at play through authentic storytelling. So, we look for representatives who will be the best people to tell the story. In Food, Inc, Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan, a pair of investigative journalists, took the lead in steering the audience through the narrative, but every issue we explored within the food industry was also represented by someone who was grappling with that issue themselves.

For breaking news or stories that are going to feel outdated in six months. We’re looking for projects that are ideally going to hit a zeitgeist 18 months from when they are first pitched to us.

Typically, the pitches Participant receives are from people with clear visions, strong points of view, and an idea of the impact they want to have. We’re benefitting from the opportunity to tell an in-depth story over time. We’re not looking to have. We’re benefitting from the opportunity to tell the story over time. We’re not looking for breaking news or stories that are going to feel outdated in six months. We’re looking for projects that are ideally going to hit a Zeitgeist 18 months from when they are first pitched to us.

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Carol Morrisson was a chicken farmer so disillusioned with the way she was forced to treat her animals, she risked her livelihood to expose the truth. Mike Perez was a seed cleaner whose principles brought him into a devastating legal battle with Monsanto: the agrichemical giant sued him for encouraging soybean farmers to save their seed, a traditional practice that contravened Monsanto’s patent. By allowing your audience to be with these characters at this crucial time in their journey, the storytelling is much more compelling. There’s a sense of immediacy as people connect with the issues you’re exploring, and this ultimately means that your documentary can have a greater impact.

A lot of our films feature people who are proactively doing something to combat a very challenging problem, which can prevent the storytelling from becoming demoralizing. Even if it’s a David-and-Goliath mismatch where you doubt that the protagonist can actually change anything, the fact that they’re trying at all is inspiring. Our most impactful documentaries effectively engage with audiences who will hopefully be inspired to do something about an important issue themselves, and won’t be left feeling defeated or wanting to put their heads in the sand.
The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and former US Vice President Al Gore for their efforts to obtain and disseminate information about the climate challenge. Having lost the presidential election in 2000, Gore used his influence to increase public awareness in the US and other countries of the seriousness of the environmental situation. This goal he will later achieved by means of his documentary film.

\[\text{An Inconvenient Truth (2006).} \]

\[\text{www.imdb.com/title/tt0497116/} \]

Impact is clearly important to us from day one, but once we greenlight a project, we believe in letting filmmakers work as they see fit. They must be equally well-executed and they must also two halves of the same whole. These elements are great stories and pure hard work, social impact entertainment demands a delicate balancing act. Your film and your social impact campaign act. Your film and your social impact campaign

At a base level, we hope they will raise awareness: Citizenfour reached over 3 million people worldwide in theaters and won an Academy Award. The audience couldn’t directly do much about the issue of widespread covert surveillance programs and illegal wiretapping, but our impact goal was to start a conversation on a timely, and incredibly important topic. At other times, where possible, we provide our audiences with simple but effective actions they can undertake. An Inconvenient Truth ends with a list of impactful things that viewers can do to help address climate change. These ideas range from simple, specific steps like driving less and recycling, all the way up to more involved suggestions such as planting trees, or even running for Congress. Raising awareness was still a primary goal of An Inconvenient Truth, and in this regard it was incredibly successful. A 2008 study from the Pew Research Center suggests that in the months following its release, there was a 9% increase in the number of Americans who believed that human activity was causing climate change. There’s also evidence that An Inconvenient Truth changed people’s behaviors as well as their opinions. Dr. Grant Jakobsen of the University of California, Santa Barbara, found that in the two months after release, zip codes within a 10-mile radius of the film’s screenings experienced a 50% relative increase in the purchase of voluntary carbon offsets.

Not everyone is going to change their life or quit their job to fight for an issue, but many will want to engage at some level, especially if it’s accessible and easy for them to understand how they can help. Even if the film simply makes them think differently, we believe that opinion change is a form of action in itself. Besides, sometimes just spreading the word about a film is enough: if an issue is at a tipping point, our work in harmony with each other if you want not to have not a successful film, but also an impactful one.

Beyond unique ideas, great stories and pure hard work, social impact entertainment demands a delicate balancing act. Your film and your social impact campaign

The State of SIE

Alongside the filmmakers and our colleagues in social impact, we try to ensure that our films offer a range of ways for audiences to engage with the topics they explore.

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Imagination is key when it comes to social change. We have to be able to imagine what a different and better world could look like in order for it to be realized. If you can spark people’s imaginations with great work, you can guide them in the direction of behavior change. That’s why our vision at the Sundance Institute is to advance independent artists to become a global, cultural force.

When he founded Sundance in 1981, Robert Redford was looking for an alternative channel for the independent voice in film. He was trying to enhance freedom of creative expression and get work made that wasn’t seen as commercially viable by the studios at that time.

Today, we work to discover, support, protect, and amplify independent artists working in film, theater, and emerging technologies. I see our role as providing nutrition for the soil where these filmmakers can sprout and develop to become strong on their own. Since 2002, our Documentary Film Program has supported nonfiction filmmakers across the world. Whether it’s our residential labs, festivals or year-round artist support, everything we do is about trying to create a catalytic space for imaginative possibility. As of December 2018, we awarded $1.4 million in targeted Documentary Fund grants to support nonfiction storytellers. 70% of our supported projects were helmed by women, 36% originated outside the US, and 23% were from first-time feature filmmakers.

Tabitha Jackson
Director of the Documentary Film Program at the Sundance Institute

Imagination is key when it comes to social change.

I believe impact is almost synonymous with audience and distribution.

Over the course of Sundance’s three-and-a-half decades, culture has shifted. I don’t attribute that entirely to us of course, but the Institute has

Tabitha Jackson argues that in order to create a different future, we must first be able to see it.
The role and responsibility of the artist is to be truthful, independent, and to let their individual voice come through. Raoul Peck’s I Am Not Your Negro, one of the documentaries supported by our program, exemplifies the power of a story told with authenticity. The film envisions novelist James Baldwin’s unfinished manuscript, Remember This House. The book was intended to be a personal account of the lives and assassinations of Baldwin’s friends, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The film is something very different but still richly poetic and political.

Peck’s film confounded the industry box office predictions which, given the work’s African American subject matter and historical, biographical nature, were pessimistic. I Am Not Your Negro blew everyone’s expectations out of the water because it provides a fierce, unapologetic commentary about the way we live now. The film asked questions and that’s what a documentary should do. Rather than provide all the answers, Peck reminds us that film is a journey into black America, using Baldwin’s original words and flood of rich archival material.

I Am Not Your Negro is a journey into black history that connects the past of the civil rights movement to the present of #BlackLivesMatter. The book was intended to be a personal mouthpiece, we’ve helped spark discussion about social impact films is the fact that creating imagery, for example.

This means filmmaking can be a positive force for a visual culture and as such, images wield power. Those artists need to be responsible too; we live in a visual culture and as such, images wield power. The use of art and metaphor can express deep truths about the human condition, as while one film might not necessarily be able to change the world, it can certainly help make sense of it. That’s why at Sundance, we want to sustain artists who describe the world accurately and honestly, in all its complexity. We look to support artists whose work holds power to account and, particularly at this moment in time, helps build a shared discourse.

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The Sundance Institute’s artist programs provide support at every step of the creative journey for individuals with distinct voices in film, theater, film composing, episodic storytelling, creative distribution, short filmmaking, documentary film editing, and more.

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I believe there are transformative films and transactional films. With the latter, you go to the cinema to see something that confirms what you already know. You pay your money, reinforce your liberal sensibilities and go on your way without being troubled by any doubt or question as to where your opinions come from.

Transformative films move us emotionally and make us question ourselves. Joshua Oppenheimer’s The Act of Killing, which exposes the mass executions of accused communists in Indonesia, forced me to find my own moral compass because it didn’t give me any answers. Now I see the world slightly differently because I was forced to do that imaginative work.

Ultimately, I want to be changed after emerging from seeing a work. That’s why I love being questioned. For me, the questions and the possibilities that allow for imaginative intervention will always be more interesting than someone just telling me the answers.
My interest in social impact filmmaking had a uniquely personal start. After surviving two liver transplants in the early 90s, I re-emerged with a stark awareness that there were many myths and misconceptions surrounding organ donation that were impeding broader acceptance of life-saving procedures. As a result, I founded the James Redford Institute for Transplant Awareness to educate, engage, and inspire a wider acceptance of organ donation. It was this mission that inspired me to make The Kindness of Strangers, my first HBO documentary, and led to the start of my work on social impact campaigns.

The Kindness of Strangers was made on a budget of just $600,000. We told the story without narration, just following the experiences of people on either side of the process — donors, recipients and their families. Looking back, the project was at the leading edge of a shift in public acceptance of organ donation. The most rewarding aspect of our impact campaign was the family that saw the film shortly before a tragic accident left their son with a fatal brain injury. After seeing The Kindness of Strangers, they donated his organs and, as a result, saved seven lives.

That experience encapsulates the mission I’ve adopted: I want to transform information into inspiration, using my love of film to drive positive change. I spent 20 years writing screenplays for feature films and, thanks to that experience, I also know that to make this change you need to find relatable and inspiring subjects. This is the strategy we embrace at The Redford Center, a nonprofit co-founded by my father and I in 2005 that supports impact-driven documentaries. We are focused on solutions-based storytelling in the environmental space.

The last decade has seen the proliferation of important and powerful documentaries that bring attention to environmental challenges — particularly the challenges of climate change. However, the plethora of doomsday narratives has had an unintended effect: denial and disengagement. For us, documentary films are a core component of a much larger vision to produce effective social impact campaigns.

Frankly, if the overarching message is one of hopelessness and despair, denial seems a reasonable response. So, while the films we make and support deal with environmental problems, we try to offer solutions as well. For example, in Happening: A Clean Energy Revolution, I take a very personal journey into the clean energy revolution. In Happening: A Clean Energy Revolution, I take a very personal journey into the clean energy revolution.
space to see how it’s creating jobs, turning profits and affecting communities across the US.

This solutions-based strategy is also echoed in the work of KPJR Films, a production company that I co-founded with producer Karen Pritzker. KPJR’s take on this approach is to take challenging social issues and to break them down in a way that people can understand. As with The Redford Center, we see documentary film as a tool for positive change. For us, documentary films are a core component of a much larger vision to produce effective social impact campaigns for use by those working at the frontline of social action. We enjoy supporting those who have boats on the ground, working hard to better our lives.

When developing our projects, both The Redford Center and KPJR Films seek guidance and input from the communities whose outreach efforts could benefit from high-quality media tools. While we often partner with HBO, we also focus on community screenings that trigger dialogue and open doors to action at the local and occasionally national level.

For example, KPJR’s campaigns for Paper Tigers and Resilience — films conceived to address the health risks of adverse childhood experiences — have become textbook examples of the power of stories to drive community engagement. We consulted the global pediatric and public health communities early and often as we planned the films. We wanted to make sure we produced films that met the needs of those already working so hard in the space who could use them to drive better practices and policy. It’s important to invest in long-term relationships with a sincere, open heart. Too many NGOs get used for access to stories and characters and are then promptly forgotten, which can not only burn bridges but also prevent progress.

Three years after the start of our social impact campaigns for both films, we are a part of a great community that supports and helps each other. The results speak for themselves: there have been 40,000 screenings of Resilience and Paper Tigers worldwide, resulting in changes in policy in a number of US states as well as Scotland. All of this without a traditional broadcast deal, and all of it big word of mouth and grassroots marketing.

For some documentary filmmakers, not being central to the entertainment industry might feel problematic, but if your goal is to truly make a difference, this shouldn’t be an issue. With the advent of new and flexible platforms for distribution, I see impact docs as an emergent genre that will expand over the next decade. Some films will have crossover entertainment value, but most will become the third leg on the stool of socio-environmental impact and education. In this increasingly audio-visual world we live in, social impact entertainment will continue to spread and grow. There is the demand, there is the market — and that’s good for those of us that believe that the right story can move mountains.

For example, KPJR’s campaigns for Paper Tigers and Resilience — films conceived to address the health risks of adverse childhood experiences — have become textbook examples of the power of stories to drive community engagement.
Social impact entertainment can be an incredible force for change. However, for that change to be quantified and proven, it’s essential we understand how to measure impact, explains Johanna Blakley.

The genesis of the study
Since its inception in 2000, the Norman Lear Center at USC has provided students and scholars with the means to study and research the social implications of entertainment and media. One of our inaugural initiatives, Hollywood, Health and Society (HH&S), embodies the type of work we do — connecting television showrunners with medical experts and resources to help inform health-related storylines. HH&S ensures that while being entertained, audiences also learn and are provided with accurate and potentially useful medical information.

The Lear Center developed an innovative survey instrument that would assess the impact of Food, Inc on its viewers while considering these issues of self-selection bias. We used a method called propensity score matching (PSM) to help determine whether the different results that we see between viewers and non-viewers were associated with watching Food, Inc., rather than pre-existing differences between these two groups. Simply put: PSM allowed us to say, with a much greater degree of confidence, whether the differences between viewers and non-viewers in knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes were attributable to the film.

Sure enough, the differences we uncovered between viewers and non-viewers (or the exposed group and the control group) were already signed up to Participant’s email newsletter, or had engaged with Participant on social channels. Respondents to the survey answered our call because they were already more likely to say that Food, Inc had changed their lives, so finding a control group was essential. There was already a real belief that this film had an impact on those who saw it, but it was our job to prove it.

Food, Inc. was the perfect candidate for many reasons. It prompted viewers to make simple behavior changes in their everyday lives and it encouraged them to effect broader social change by engaging local school administrators and policymakers. It had an extensive social impact campaign, the Hungry for Change outreach effort organized by Participant’s digital arm, and it had a director, Robert Kenner, who had been traveling with the film and engaging communities of action across the US.

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Controlling for self-selection bias
Media effect studies have long suffered from not having control groups. I really think that they should be instituted as a best practice in all media impact evaluations, and our study of Food, Inc. is a clear example of their value and importance.

When setting out to study the film’s impact, we knew that we would likely be working with a highly self-selected sample. Respondents to the survey answered our call because they were already signed up to Participant’s email newsletter, or had engaged with Participant on social channels. Naturally, this population would be more likely to say that a film like Food, Inc. had changed their lives, so finding a control group was essential.

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The importance of "scaffolding"
Documentaries are clearly a powerful tool for motivating social change, but it may not be enough on its own. You also need a supportive infrastructure outside of your media intervention—a social impact campaign, for example. This "scaffolding" will offer ways to carry on the conversation after watching the film, channel audience energy and bring people together to take action, both online and off. Without this, you’ll be left with a motivated but disappointed population—eager to act, but unsure of what to do. This scaffolding should already be in place before audiences see the film.

As part of the Hungry for Change campaign, Participant’s digital team built a robust website where people could find out more about the huge environmental impact of the food industry, from pesticide usage to factory farming. There were links to petitions they could sign to combat these issues, and detailed information about the steps they could take to reduce their own foodprint and support a sustainable food system. There was also information about how to arrange local screenings of the film and downloadable discussion guides to help stimulate conversation in the community. These two resources in particular helped to build a strong grassroots activist component around the film.

Theorizing change, measuring impact
Measuring impact is never going to be easy, but I think there are three categories of data that, if collected, could allow us to make very convincing arguments about what a piece of media can lead people to do.

The first is content analysis. Starting off with a clear understanding of the content in a media intervention is key. Whether it’s a single documentary film or 32 episodes of scripted TV, we carefully analyze the content, including the language used, factual information shared, calls to action, as well as the tone and narrative framing.

The second is exposure and engagement data. If the media is available on a digital platform, we can gather data about who was exposed to the content and how they interacted with it. Did they watch the whole thing? Did they share it? We always encourage content creators to provide opportunities for people to take further action on the same platform, such as donating or joining a mailing list, so that we can draw a clear connection between exposure and taking action.

The third is survey data. If we want to know whether media content produced changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and offline behavior then we need to gather survey data. Ideally, these surveys can be administered on the same digital platform where people consumed the media content. Then we have a very clear picture of what content people consumed, how they engaged with it and what potential impact it had.

It’s clear that much of the data we need to measure impact is out there, and we have the chance to do this work better than ever before. But there’s a growing (and completely warranted) concern around the misuse and abuse of data that could stymie our progress on this front. I think it will be difficult for academics, institutions, and organizations to win back people’s trust in this regard, but we have to—especially because we’re finally waking up to how crucial an impact media is having on our society.
Spotlight on:

Propensity Score Matching

By and large, the majority of people choose the films they see based on personal taste and interests. As such, researchers looking to study the impact of a given title will almost always have to deal with a certain bias. The research done at USC’s Lear Center was no different. To try and overcome this bias, however, they developed a unique survey instrument: propensity score matching (PSM).

"In this study, propensity score matching (PSM) techniques were used to control for self-selection bias among survey respondents. PSM helped identify factors that predict the likelihood of a person seeing Food, Inc. The Lear Center’s research team performed a statistical analysis of survey responses from all the respondents who watched Food, Inc., and determined what personal characteristics increased their likelihood — or propensity — to see the film.

We used these characteristics to generate a propensity score for survey respondents who had seen the film, and those who had not. People with all 17 of these characteristics received the highest score and those with the fewest received the lowest. However, just because someone has a high score does not mean that they have seen the film — it just makes it more likely that they have seen it. Therefore, a person with a very high score may not have seen the film yet, and a person with a very low score may have seen it despite themselves (for instance, a teacher may have screened the film in a class where students with low scores saw it).”

Once scores were assigned, we created two groups: people who had watched Food, Inc. and those who had not. Next we compared the range of scores in each group and then performed ‘one-to-one matching,’ which allowed us to use an automated method to remove subjects from each group until both groups were composed of the same number of respondents with the same range of propensity scores (e.g., each person who saw the film was paired with a person who did not see the film, but was equally likely to see the film based on their propensity scores). The salient difference between the two groups was whether or not they had viewed Food, Inc.

This method allowed us to create something similar to an experimental study design where subjects are randomly assigned to a control group and a treatment group. Here, the “treatment” group is comprised of those who had seen Food, Inc., and the “control” group is comprised of those who had not seen the film but were equally likely to. By making these groups completely parallel, we were able to examine whether differences in knowledge and behavior are attributable to exposure to the film.”

Viewers with a high propensity to watch Food, Inc. shared 17 characteristics:

Demographics:
1. No child
2. Not working in the media industry
3. Slightly more likely to work in education

Media exposure:
Recalls seeing information about food safety on:
4. TV
5. News websites
6. Radio
7. Visited the Hungry for Change website

Ideology and taste:
8. Democratic affiliation
9. Believes that sustainable agriculture is important
10. Supports organized efforts to improve food safety/sustainable agriculture
11. Frequently watches social issue feature films
12. Frequently watches social issue documentaries
13. Individual attitudes
14. Individual behavior
15. Media coverage
16. Watched An Inconvenient Truth
17. Watched Fast Food Nation

Since its creation in the mid-20th century, television has become one of the most versatile and widely consumed forms of entertainment media. For social impact storytellers, TV offers a means to bring powerful ideas directly into people's homes. In the digital age, the rise of over-the-top content providers has had a dramatic, transformative effect on how TV shows are made, distributed, and watched. Yet this upheaval also presents unique opportunities for makers of SIE.
The Revolution Will Be Televised

Pat Mitchell

Pat Mitchell discusses the vital importance of public broadcasting in highlighting inequality, and its role in communicating the need for change.

Notable works:
- Woman to Woman, Yes, We Can!

When I started out in television in the early 1970s, the country had just emerged from a turbulent time of social change.

The civil rights movement had, in part, led to the creation of an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EOOC), which required media companies to start to hire women and people of color. Yes, these were quotas, and they had an impact on what was seen on television and the programming that was produced.

So, I trace my interests in social impact programming to my own hiring as part of a social movement’s impact. I believed that if we applied a social justice lens to our work, women and underrepresented populations could make a difference in media. I put that belief into practice immediately after getting my first job in television, first as a producer, then as a news reporter and anchor, and later a talk show host. Whether running my own production company or creating and hosting my own programming, I always approached everything from the perspective of what difference the report, show, documentary or special would have beyond the broadcast.

As one of the first women in network television on the frontlines of the women’s movement, I faced the challenges of being the “first” or the “only.” I was encouraged to stay away from women’s issues to avoid being stereotyped. But I saw the tremendous opportunity to optimize the power of television as a mass media communications tool to raise awareness about women’s lives; to elevate women’s stories; to point out the challenges of inequality; and to push for programming with social change and impact agendas.

In one early, groundbreaking example, my female colleagues at WBZ-TV — the Boston NBC affiliate at the time — and I convinced management to devote 24 hours to programming for women, produced by women. The impact was beyond expectations, with huge ratings and thousands of women showing up to participate in an event we called Yes, We Can! The New York Times described the event as “history-making,” and it was — we proved the impact that women’s programming could have on a community. This was a one-time-only event, but it convinced me of the power of the television medium to be transformative, and I became committed to using every media platform I could access to tell stories with impact.

During my early years in Boston, Washington, and Los Angeles I sustained my commitment to impact programming, focusing — when possible — on women’s stories. Frustrated with the limitations of network programs at the time, I left a good job to set up my own company and produce a daily series for national syndication. The Woman to Woman series featured conversations among carefully curated groups of women who shared stories, challenges, and ideas. The series won the Emmy® for Best Daytime Talk Programming in its first year, and our success proved to me that programming intended to have impact could be more popular than the diet of soap operas and game shows that were being offered to women audiences at that time.

I believed that if we applied a social justice lens to our work, women and underrepresented populations could make a difference in media.

I also witnessed the growing impact of documentary films, and by partnering with former UCLA professor and author, Dr. Diana Gabaldon-Maishan, launched a nonprofit division of a very successful Hollywood production company, Ubu Productions. Our mission was to produce films with social impact campaigns attached. The films exposed child labor abuses, infant and maternal mortality, and explored the challenges for women in politics and on the frontline of global conflicts. In each instance, the documentaries had a specific and actionable impact agenda.

That time was financially tough, as no one believed impact or mission-based films could be popular or make money, and there were fewer media companies buying them. “You never have to make money, all you have to do is have impact.” That was the way Ted Turner described the job opportunity when he offered
me the position of leading his documentary unit as part of the cable media empire he was building in the early nineteen-eighties (which included TBS, TNT, and CNN). His vision for media was that it could help create a better world. He actually named our unit “The Better World Society,” and often reminded us that creating a better world began with more informed media consumers.

Patricia Mitchell

In 1982, Ted Turner, in his approach to Ted Turner about producing a Century of Women, I had the unique opportunity to document the history of women in America. Turner convinced Mitchell to join Turner Broadcasting as President of Turner Original Productions and later CNN Productions. It was there that Mitchell executive-produced hundreds of hours of documentaries and specials, which earned 25 Emmy® Awards and 5 Peabody® Awards.

This kind of content has never been more needed to strengthen and sustain a democracy.

We produced 100 hours of documentaries, most of which had social change agendas attached from the beginning — partnering with National Geographic for conservation awareness, or telling the untold story of women’s contributions to the 20th century, or exposing the threat of nuclear annihilation. Ted never hesitated to tackle controversy or to advocate for a more sustainable, peaceful world, and he used the power of his media companies to promote this agenda. Many years later when Jeff Skoll set up Participant Media, he acknowledged that it was Ted Turner’s documentary work during this period that had, in part, inspired him.

After the Time Warner/AOL media merger, there was no longer support for social impact work at Turner Broadcasting. Ted was fired and I decided to leave, too. I stepped into my next big opportunity, for impact by becoming president of PBS. PBS’s mission is to serve, not sell, and it’s the only major media company with national reach and impact — it’s connected to local communities through 395 independent public television stations. PBS doesn’t have the profit motive of other media companies, and even though the funds have to be raised every year, they are from the public, who value their PBS station. PBS’s programming is mission-driven and less accountable to sponsors or shareholders. It’s not a perfect model for impact because there are built-in limitations to what PBS can do, given its mission to serve the local stations. Also, what they see as positive impact varies greatly, and there is always the threat of government disapproval of an impact agenda — even though government support is less than 20% for more public television. However, I feel good about the impact programming PBS was able to commission and distribute, and I remain a big proponent for a better-funded public media enterprise in a democracy.

For me, the next position was to lead the Policy Center for Media, and use that platform of an organization that served all media and technology companies. I had an opportunity to approach social impact from the perspective of what was changing in the entire media ecosystem — changing at cyberspace — and the increasing globalization of media as a powerful force connecting the world, as well as exposing the dangers of media consolidation of ownership. Soon all broadcast networks and cable companies would be owned by less than seven companies, and local stations are being bought up by media conglomerates, further narrowing the focus of programming and diminishing the commitment to provide accurate information and news and entertainment that uplifted or informed as well as entertained.

Media is one of the single biggest forces in our world today.

Today, most local media outlets are staggering under a burden of unrealistic financial pressures. In terms of impact, local media serves as a countervailing force against the present determination of both the quantity and the quality of news coverage, and the production of compelling content intended to compel social change. This kind of content has never been more needed to strengthen and sustain a democracy.

I’ve been fortunate to work with media visionaries who believed in optimizing media’s power for good — Ted Turner, Robert Redford and now Jeff Skoll, as I sit on the Participant Media board. We need more visionaries willing to put their money where their values are, and we are seeing more entrepreneurs with means moving into media content and distribution. Hopefully, they too will harness media’s power for good and follow the path of these three men — and the many others who have invested in stories well told to combat social change.

Overall, what I have learned through my various positions in media — as a journalist, documentary producer, network executive, media board director, and as an engaged supporter and board member of many social impact organizations — is this simple but profound truth: media is one of the single biggest forces in our world today. It’s capable of influencing elections, shifting policies, starting revolutions, ending wars, and transforming lives and communities. That power can be optimized for good: for exposing wrongdoing and exploring solutions; for shaping opinions and attitudes; for reinforcing values and shifting perceptions; for changing the world for the better; and for envisioning a more equitable and sustainable future for all. Can there be a better reason to tell a good story, make a great film, write or produce a series, or create new realities through technological advances? It all begins with a good story, well told, and the best have outcomes of positive social change.

— Paula Kerger, PBS President

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) received $445 million for 2020. Funding is set two years in advance, with Trump proposing to eliminate nearly all of it. The bulk of CPB money is distributed through grants to PBS and NPR member stations, who use it primarily to cover operational costs. In rural areas, local public television stations are among the only programming options – CPB funding can account for more than 50% of a station’s budget.


Holloway, Daniel. “1984: Dr. Patricia Mitchell: ‘We need more visionaries willing to put their money where their values are’,” Variety, 30 July 2017, variety.com/2017/tv/news/pbs-federal-funding-1202510494/.

PBS itself will not go away, but a number of our stations will.
To fully portray an issue requires understanding the people who actually live it. Neal Baer discusses television’s ability to affect the lives of its viewers through its depiction of characters.

Television as a medium has the potential to dramatically influence people’s understanding of health issues. During my first season at ER, the New England Journal of Medicine published an article that lambasted representations of CPR on television. This was an important milestone for me: it made me realize that people got their healthcare information from TV, and that as a consequence, we had a duty to be as accurate as possible. We put so much effort into making our shows look real because we wanted people to believe these were real doctors doing their jobs, so the issues we were presenting had to be equally authentic.

Unlike with film, TV can explore themes repeatedly over years or even decades. We did that on ER with Gloria Reuben’s character, who was diagnosed with HIV early on in the series. In year 14, she was brought back to the show so viewers could see that she was doing well and living a healthy life, to give closure to this character and to say something important about how people can live and thrive with HIV.

This kind of storytelling has a measurable impact on audiences. A 2003 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation revealed that 53% of ER’s regular viewers learned about important health issues from the show, and 51% revealed they also...
spoken with family and friends about the health issues addressed on the show.

People trust what they see on TV, but you can’t just preach about complicated social issues, and that’s where the art of storytelling comes in. In 2000 we aired an episode of Law & Order: SVU that was inspired by a woman who spoke at a fundraiser for the Joyful Heart Foundation, which was started by SVU star Mariska Hargitay in 2000. The Foundation—which sheds light on issues that affect sexual assault survivors, like the backlog of rape kits—has served more than 15,500 survivors and healing professionals, effected policy changes, and connected more than 3.9 million people to help and resources.

At the fundraiser, we learned that the woman never even knew of her boyfriend’s rape kit. Our episode of SVU starred Jennifer Love Hewitt as a sexual assault survivor who had to leave her house, and it became an emotional springboard for existing and new social impact campaigns to get the backlog of untested kits. Thousands of rape kits have now been processed, leading to investigations, convictions, and the identification of serial rapists via the CODIS and NDIS DNA databases.

I’m really proud of the impact that our show has had on certain issues, but I’ve also learned that it can often take a long time for change to happen. Sometimes an issue is too fresh or the audience isn’t ready. I’m happy that it is streaming on Hulu, and that SVU is in perpetual repeats, so that these shows are seen over and over. They’re great boosters of social issues, and serve to keep the message in people’s minds.

There’s a lot of talk about this being the golden age of television, but I’m not sure. There may be more violence and nudity, but networks and cable companies are very conservative as they try to retain viewers in a world with endless options for entertainment. There are shows now that are beautiful and are spending huge amounts of money, but in terms of social issues I think there’s so much competition that there’s a fear of offending audiences.

Times have changed, and so has the television landscape.

There’s reliance to tackle subjects that are loaded, even taboo — topics like abortion, HIV, and gun control. HIV is still a real problem in the US, particularly amongst people of color. At the end of 2015 there were 1 million people in the US who were living with HIV, but we haven’t seen that reflected on screen. It’s the same problem with abortion, which we tackled in season six of ER with “Match Made in Heaven.” The episode received a lot of attention, but now the issue is rarely mentioned on TV.

On the other hand, I couldn’t get much press interest for the 2008 ER episode we did about rape in the military, but now it’s a much more widely discussed topic. Likewise, on SVU we did the first show about a transgender youth taking hormone blockers around 2008, and today there’s a much more open discourse around gender and identity. Either way, times have changed, and so has the television landscape. Our episodes may have paved the way for a dialogue around certain issues, but they’re one part of a larger cultural shift in entertainment.

I do believe that networks are willing to let you show them the data behind the issue police want to explore. You have to start the conversation and — through multifaceted characters struggling to cope with complex social issues on the ground, even if it’s not the right moment for that particular topic. Television is an extremely powerful tool for influencing people’s understanding of public health, and there are so many great writers out there who are passionate about these issues. If given the opportunity, they can tell stories that will really make a difference.
Miura Kite discusses why television is the best medium when it comes to inspiring social awareness and behavior change around key issues.

Television has an incredible power to inspire social awareness, understanding, and behavior change around key issues. The best thing for any project is when it joins the public zeitgeist. If press coverage of a show moves past the entertainment section into op-ed and other arenas, it’s a sign that it’s made it into the larger cultural discussion which is helpful not only for the economics, but also in getting the messaging out. However, this is not something that’s easy to engineer. You could try to develop a social impact project based on the big headlines in today’s news, but by the time it makes it to air, you’ll often find the world has moved on. This means you have to try to look into the future to identify the themes that will dominate public discourse a few years from now. As SVP of Television at Participant, I’m responsible for trying to address these considerations when building Participant’s narrative television slate.

Central Park Five

Ava DuVernay is working with Participant Media, Harpo Films, and Tribeca Productions to bring the notorious story of the Central Park jogger case to Netflix, for premiere in 2019. Based on a true story that gripped the nation, Central Park Five will chronicle the case of five teenagers of color who were convicted of a rape they did not commit. The four-episode limited series will focus on the five teenagers from Harlem — Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, Raymond Santana, and Korey Wise. The series will span from the spring of 1989, when each were first questioned about the incident, to 2014 — when the City of New York settled a case resulting in a settlement being reached with the City of New York.

As an example, Central Park Five was originally meant to be a two-hour film, but swiftly became a limited TV series when filmmaker Ava DuVernay realized she had more than two hours’ worth of material. This kind of flexibility is a wonderful thing. It means that the content can determine the format and ultimately, its impact, rather than vice versa.

Central Park Five really showcases some of the strengths of scripted television as a format. The true story behind the series — the scandal of five young men of color wrongly convicted of rape — had already been the subject of an incredible documentary by Ken and Sarah Burns, which used some amazing archival footage. However, a scripted television version is able to dramatize real events that may not have been captured on film at the time the event actually happened.

Television also allows you to follow more characters and explore more plotlines than a feature film might, making it a perfect fit for a story like this with five lead characters. The dramatic structure of TV also helps, because every TV episode has five acts to its narrative, unlike a feature, which has just three. The ending of a film usually has a resolution, but the final act of a TV episode introduces new questions that make the viewer want to watch more.

Now, networks can aim to hit one audience with a given show, and to hit it really well.

We usually begin assessing the potential social impact of a project as soon as it comes to us. Our social impact team helps us identify the partner organizations whose work can be highlighted during a resulting social impact campaign. Broadly speaking, an impact campaign for a television show could have a longer lifespan than one for a feature film, which has a single launch window.

Central Park Five (unfortunately and astutely) is a perfect case study for social impact because systemic issues within the police system, the legal system, the penal system, and the post-incarceration system contributed to a marginalization of the boys at every step along the way. When you pair this limited series with Ava DuVernay’s documentary 13th, you get a pretty good sense of some deep-rooted problems that need to be assessed.

It’s clear that the right type of social impact project can resonate powerfully with audiences. However, we have yet to see how the evolution of today’s various streaming platforms might inform this relationship between viewer and content. What is clear is the impact the rise of over-the-top (OTT) entertainment is having on viewing habits. A recent study showed that 2.6 million US consumers cut their cable TV subscriptions in the first nine months of 2017, which is a steep increase from the overall figure for the previous year, when 1.7 million consumers did the same. Meanwhile, the audience base for Netflix rose from 130 million to 137 million subscribers worldwide in the third quarter of 2018.

The world needs TV shows that are created for these underserved demographics.

Streaming platforms like Netflix have clear advantages for content creators and consumers alike. Audiences can consume shows whenever they want, and at a full film pace if they wish. Meanwhile, the show’s creators are no longer tied to a five-act structure that must accommodate ad breaks. The only minor downside is that this flexibility has sacrificed something of the communal nature of television watching. When all of the episodes of a season of TV are released at the same time, people will watch at their own pace rather than on a set schedule, so there may still be value in staggering the release of episodes. This is more likely to create those “water cooler moments” that an audience will watch and discuss simultaneously, and which can ignite broader discussions of themes and key issues.

The changes the industry is experiencing make it an exciting time to be working in development. Television is embracing voices that are new, distinct and authentic. Networks are realizing that previously underserved audiences have real financial power and are galvanizing themselves to use it. Once, the leading strategy was to try to create content that appealed to all four quadrants — female, male, over 25, under 25. Now, networks can aim to hit one audience with a given show, and to hit it really well. This revised approach to finding audiences has resulted in an increasingly diverse array of content.

While our commitment to social impact entertainment has remained constant, its place within and importance to society and culture has been growing and changing. The world needs TV shows that are created for these underserved demographics, that engage with the biggest issues of our time, and that inspire people to take action. We have never been more committed to making them.
**Case Study**

**Will & Grace**

Will & Grace was a seminal television moment. Edward Schiappa explores the impact one show can have on the attitudes and actions of viewers.

Edward Schiappa
Professor and Head of Comparative Media Studies/Writing, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, John L. Burton Chair of Humanities

The study: can one TV show make a difference?

The prejudice people feel toward minority groups is so often fueled by ignorance. That’s why the relationship a viewer has with characters on television, whether fictional or not, can be a tool for increasing understanding of different groups, even if it’s one-sided. In 2002, as a professor at the University of Minnesota, my team set out to prove that through the power of this kind of indirect contact known as “parasocial interaction,” a TV show like Will & Grace could transform people’s attitudes toward gay men.

Our research is an evolution of an existing psychological theory known as the contact hypothesis. Proven through hundreds of studies, the theory states that one way to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members is for there to be sustained interpersonal contact between them. However, there are certain conditions that must be met for this contact to be productive, such as ensuring that the participants feel of equal status or that they share a common goal.

We set out to prove that in the case of Will & Grace, despite the characters being fictional, the show provided an opportunity for people who had little or no contact with openly gay men to gain a greater understanding of people in the gay community. When actual contact under the conditions mentioned above is not possible, parasocial contact is often the next best way of getting people to feel an affinity with a different group and confront their own prejudices.

Will & Grace was one of the first TV shows to portray openly gay characters in major roles; in fact, only 0.6% of all characters appearing on television in 1995 were gay or lesbian. Today, the percentage of LGBTQ series regulars on broadcast prime-time scripted programming is up to an all-time high of 8.8%, according to the 2018 GLAAD report.

Were there some early suggestions that Will & Grace actually reinforced heteronormativity? However, these claims were based on a conceptual idea of what the show was rather than an actual interaction with the content and its real impact on viewers. Once researchers tallied to audience members and gathered data on how the viewing experience actually influenced people, they found the opposite to be true.

Working with Peter Gregg and Dean Hewes, I launched an empirical investigation while the show was still on air to see whether it (and other shows like it) could reduce prejudice.
Good intentions are not enough by themselves; from an artistic standpoint, a comedy needs to be funny and a drama needs to be dramatic. In my opinion, the key to attitude or belief shift is to provide a learning experience for viewers that is relatable and also entertaining. People will keep watching a show if it is of sufficient quality and they get their comedic or dramatic payoffs. This is why the quality of representation is as important as the quantity. Judging by the show’s impressive ratings—an average of 3.7 million weekly viewers during the spring of 2000—as well as its subsequent syndication, it’s safe to say Will & Grace had enough quality to keep viewers coming back for more.

To cite a few findings: 60% of viewers agreed that watching Will & Grace made them feel positive about the characters. As we noted in our experimental design, the subsequent research provided findings in a paper entitled “Hypothesis. The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis.”

Herek and Capitanio (1996) found that three individuals are associated with more favorable attitudes toward gay men: those who have few, if any, gay friends or acquaintances, the contact participants have with multiple gay characters through parasocial contact and increased sexual prejudice was observed. Viewing frequently sacramentalized gay men to whom viewers were exposed, the more they watched it and the more they felt the need to perceive the characters. As we noted in our case study, “increased viewing frequency and parasocial interaction were found to correlate with lower levels of social prejudice—a relationship that was most pronounced for those with the lowest amount of social contact with lesbians and gay men.”

Also, having two very different gay characters represented by Will and his friend Jack allowed viewers to learn at least something about the diversity of gay men in general, and the more viewers learn, the less likely they are to perpetuate negative stereotypes based on ignorance.

Heterosexual relationships are the only ‘normal’ kind of relationship.

The apparent influence of contact with Will & Grace was similar to the influence of direct interpersonal contact with gay men. For those who reported they had few to no gay friends or acquaintances, the contact participants have with multiple gay characters through parasocial contact and decreased sexual prejudice was observed.

The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis

Viewing frequently sacramentalized gay men to whom viewers were exposed, the more they watched it and the more they felt the sense of affinity with the characters (or “parasocial interaction”)

The importance of engaging stories

Ellen—a groundbreaking situation comedy because it features gay men in major roles.” The sitcom has come out as a lesbian, was also a significant step along the way, but was arguably not as popular. Looking around comes out as a lesbian, was also a significant step along the way, but was arguably not as popular. Looking around.

The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis

Also, two very different gay characters represented by Will and his friend Jack allowed viewers to learn at least something about the diversity of gay men in general, and the more viewers learn, the less likely they are to perpetuate negative stereotypes based on ignorance.

Reaching the tipping point

Through expert storytelling on complex social issues, entertainment can play an important role in broadening people’s minds, but it’s hard to say if it can drive social change by itself. Shows like Will & Grace are always part of a more complicated social evolution of America on airplay toward embracing same-sex marriage.

These results were so strong that we did a series of other studies that were increasingly more sophisticated in their experimental design. The subsequent research provided additional evidence that the more a viewer learns about a particular group of people as depicted in a positive way, the more the observer reduces in prejudice. We published these findings in a paper entitled The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis.

The importance of engaging stories

In order to influence people, positive representation of minority groups needs to be ensconced within a great story.
The paper described and tested the PCH in three studies: two involving parasocial contact with characters in series depicting gay men—analyzing *Six Feet Under* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*—and one involving parasocial contact with self-identified transgender comedian Eddie Izzard.

As Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes note: "In all three studies, parasocial contact was associated with lower levels of prejudice. Moreover, tests of the underlying mechanisms of PCH were generally supported, suggesting that parasocial contact facilitates positive parasocial responses and changes in beliefs about the attributes of minority group categories."

As formulated by Gordon W. Allport in 1954, the contact hypothesis states that interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between people, specifically “minority” and “majority” group members. Two years after Allport’s book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, was published, Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl argued for studying what they dubbed parasocial interaction.

They claimed that “one of the most striking characteristics of the new mass media — radio, television and the movies — is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the consumer.” In Edward Schiappa, Peter B. Gregg and Dean E. Hewes’ follow-up to the *Will & Grace* study (entitled *The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis*) the team described a “mass communication equivalent to Allport’s Contact Hypothesis” that they termed the “Parasocial Contact Hypothesis (PCH).”

It was the trio’s feeling that “if people process mass-mediated communication in a manner similar to interpersonal interaction” as Horton and Wohl suggested, “then the socially beneficial functions of intergroup contact may result from parasocial contact.”
Theater
Theater is always political. Newspapers tell us the facts; plays tell us the emotional truth.

— Paula Vogel

With a heritage that dates back to ancient Greece in the sixth century BC, theater is undoubtedly the oldest form of social impact entertainment. With its emphasis on live spectacle and a shared physical space between the performer and their audience, theater is notably distinct from the major screen-based forms of SIE.

Social discourse has been an integral element of theater since its inception. Modern dramatists continue to honor this tradition, using performance to explore complex human concerns — from sexual identity to racial and political discrimination.
I have always thought of theater as a radical church — a holy space in which we come together to think and feel deeply about the things that really matter to us.

All my working life, artists and audiences have been educating me about the power of this space. I was thrilled when the Skoll Center told me that my play *The Vagina Monologues* is regarded by them as a model of how art can lead to social change — and it made me think back over what I have learned in the 20 years the play has been occupying that holy space across the world, in spaces from Paris to Pakistan, from Manhattan to Mumbai.

As a playwright I’m biased, but my hunch is that theater is the most transformative of all art forms — for three reasons.

As an audience member you get to respond to a film; but with a piece of theater, you get to create it.

Theater is one of the only forms that’s happening in the present tense. It is literally alive, in front of you, at that moment. Where other art forms like film or novels have been frozen ahead of time, theater will always be unpredictable and unexpected because it depends on the people in that particular room on that particular day. This is true of the actors, of course — but it’s also true of the audience. One audience can be silent at the precise moment when another audience fell into raucous laughter — and that response transforms the performance, which in turn transforms the response of the audience, and so on. Every work of theater is a co-creation with the audience. As an audience member you get to respond to a film; but with a piece of theater, you get to create it, in that room, with those people, in that moment, which will never be repeated in the same way again.

That produces danger and surprise. You don’t know what will happen. Maybe the set will fail to open, and the actors will find themselves stuck in front of gorgeous scenery the...
You need to crawl into the bodies and minds of people you don’t agree with so you can allow that point of view to be fairly and clearly communicated. As a writer, you fear that what you believe won’t come through if you channel yourself into your characters. I learned that you will be heard through the paradoxa of art that wants to produce social change is that the less you try to persuade people to change, the more successful you will be — you have to tell a deeper emotional truth and be funny, and you will find that those connections produce the change you want.

In dark times, art can move us beyond the binaries of good and evil, left and right.

I started to feel like the keeper of these extraordinary secret stories — of joy, of grief, of rage — and I felt like it was unethical to keep them stowed away, inferring only so. So I gathered together in 1997 some extraordinary women and asked them: how do I use this play, which is connecting with so many people, to end violence against women and girls, and to set us free? Soon, we had established a group named V-Day. Each Feb. 14th of February, women all over the world began to perform The Vagina Monologues in their communities, with the proceeds going to feminist causes. What has been the result? I see it playing out every day, and I think it has three layers. The first is: we have raised $100 million, for everything from domestic violence shelters in Arizona to a sanctuary and revolutionary center in the Dominican Republic. The second is: thousands of women have performed these monologues, and I meet women of all the time who tell me that it led them to choose a life of activism — whether as social workers, or campaigners, or politicians. The third is: all those extraordinary secret stories can never go back into that silence. They have listened to a conversation — blunt, funny, raw — about vaginas. They have been awakened to the issues facing women.

I wish that The Vagina Monologues had been rendered politically redundant, and the world could now enjoy it as purely a piece of art. You don’t need me to tell you that we aren’t there — and we are in fact facing horrific forces of misogyny rising once again (alongside a horrific resurgence of many other evil, left and right).

In dark times, art can move us beyond the binaries of good and evil, left and right. It can offer us new energy and activate our imaginations. It can inspire empathy and a much-needed compassion. It can bond us in our common search for heroic resistance.

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All the World’s a Stage

From Angels in America to Shakespeare in the Park, Oskar Eustis works on the front line of exploring social dynamics through theater. He highlights how empowering the right voice can make a difference.

Oskar Eustis
Artistic Director of The Public Theater and a Tony Award®-winning producer

Notable works:
Fun Home, Hamilton, Sweat

In your 2018 TED Talk you called theater the "essential art form of democracy." Could you please elaborate on this? What role do you see theater playing in society at large?

There are a couple of aspects to this. One is that the art form itself is a training in democratic citizenship. By that, I mean that it assumes, as a form, that the truth is dialectical: truth is not monolithic or singular but can only emerge in the conflict between different points of view. I think that's true about the world, but I think it's also terribly essential for a democracy: people have to believe that the debate between different points of view will produce a better result than a monolithic imposition of one person's will or one party's will.

The other thing that I think is key to theater is that it requires an imaginative leap of empathy. In order to enjoy a piece of theater, you have to put yourself in the shoes of the characters on stage — and by the way, you put yourself into more than one pair of shoes. To understand that people can see things differently and come from different points of view — again, I think that's crucial to democratic citizenship.

Finally, there's the experience of being in an audience. When people laugh together, it's not simply their personal reactions — it's a collective response. We don't have many places in culture where we can feel that sense of sharing a communal experience with people who are not pre-selected to share our ideological beliefs. We applied for a commissioning grant for Angels in America and got it, and the play ended up going beyond our wildest dreams. It was the first high-level American artistic artifact in which gay people were not only openly gay, completely gay, totally secure in their gay identity, but were also struggling with what it meant in the world. These characters were staking their claim to speak for America itself. They were saying that their experiences were not in any way marginalized or reduced because they were gay. Prior Walter is an American everyman, and being gay is central to that identity but in no way limits the size of his identity. I think that is something that the theater does particularly well — to take the experience of people who have previously been marginalized and say, no, this is actually central to the story of America.

In order to enjoy a piece of theater, you have to put yourself in the shoes of the characters on stage.

While working at the Eureka Theater Company you commissioned a groundbreaking work of American theater: Tony Kushner’s Angels in America. What was it you saw in Tony Kushner that made you want to fight in his corner?

In 1985, when Tony was still a student at NYU, I saw a staged reading of one of his very first plays, A Bright Room Called Day. By the intermission, I knew that my life was about to change. Part of it was reaching that moment in your professional life where you think, this is it, this is the reason I do this: to find a writer who is this bright, this young, at the beginning of their career.

Tony was a great writer, and that was obvious just from the writing, but he also cared about the same things that I did. Up until that point I had been despairing over whether I'd ever be able to have a life in the American theater where I would be surrounded by people who embraced the kinds of social, political, and historical issues that I cared so passionately about. I was a red diaper baby and was raised by Communist parents — and most red diaper babies didn't go into the theater. So I had felt very lonely.

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Hamilton: An American Musical is a rap and pop, soul, traditional-style musical with hip-hop, R&B, and other historical figures. Hamilton is a musical about the life of American Founding Father Alexander Hamilton. Created by Lin-Manuel Miranda, the play incorporates hip-hop, R&B, jazz, soul, traditional-style show tunes, and conscious rhyming of non-white actors as the Founding Fathers and other historical figures.
There is not a single play or program I’ve done that has had a real impact that didn’t feel impossible when I started thinking about it.

It’s been so powerful and astounding because it’s a completely simple idea. We put on fantastic productions by the world’s greatest writers, you get to see them without paying — and the idea is contained in the title!

We almost never have an empty seat at Shakespeare in the Park — we have 2,000 people come out all summer to see these shows. The quality of the productions is very high and people are passionate about them, so you can feel the sense of connectivity in the audience.

The Mobile Unit, which takes Shakespeare to community centers, prisons, and homeless shelters is the only program we have where the demographics of the audience precisely matches the demographics of New York City. There’s no difference between the populations that see our mobile Shakespeare and those that make up the city, and that’s thrilling for us. There was a lesson from this that we incorporated into our recent mobile, national tour of Lynn Nottage’s Sweat: if you want to make sure you reach people that you wouldn’t normally, go to them. Don’t make them come to you, go to where they are.

What advice or key learnings would you pass on to people who are just starting out in the world of theater — particularly those who would like to create social impact through their work?

First, there is not a single play or program I’ve done that has had real impact that didn’t feel impossible when I started thinking about it.

It is almost the definition of something beginning to break new ground. Perhaps it’s because it’s never been done before that it seems like it’s not possible, and you have to actually school yourself to suppress your own doubts. You must continue to ask questions, to try to solve the problem you think is most worth solving, even if you think it can’t possibly work. Of course, sometimes it doesn’t work, sometimes you can’t do it. But what I’ve found is if you don’t give up, it’s astonishing how much of what seems impossible becomes possible. It just means you have to have your values pretty clear, and you have to be willing to pursue them pretty ferociously.

The second thing is that 95% of the success of my work has been because I have identified people of great ability, talent, and vision, and then did everything I could to empower them. In this way you support the artists and visionaries that need that support, but also those who need to see that there are not one person trying to push it through, there are at least two: me and the person I am supporting, and Tony and me, and Lin-Manuel.

The geometric progression of an idea — whether that’s a play, a new program, or a new way of reaching audiences — never happens because you just start and you have figured out how to do it. It happens because you are gathering around you the people with the abilities, the talents, the drive, and the ideals to help make it real.
Dustin Lance Black discusses his use of theater as a means of generating an instant impact and emotional engagement in making the case for marriage equality in the United States.

Throughout my career, most of the work I’ve created has been for the screen. Making a movie or TV show takes time — sometimes a really long time. But in 2011 when I wrote 8, a play about the courtroom battle for same-sex marriage equality in the United States, time was exactly the luxury that we didn’t have.

When the judge decided not to allow cameras to enter the courtroom, so that they could feel that this was not a trial, but a battle. We knew that the eventual decision at the Supreme Court would determine the legal status of gay marriage across the country. I decided to use theater to try to make a significant impact on the issue as quickly as possible, because we couldn’t wait around for something to get approved, shot, and distributed. We needed to get it out there almost as soon as I’d hit “save” on the final draft, and only theater would let us move at that speed and scale.

I needed to be able to say: “This is what opposition being able to dismiss my version of the truth, and nothing but the truth. What happened in the courtroom was incredibly emotional and dramatic; it was hard to sit there and not feel like banning same-sex marriage was inherently wrong.” I wanted to use theater to transport people into that courtroom, so that they could feel that way too. The challenge was to do this without the opposition being able to dismiss my version of events. I needed to be able to say: “This is what the California trial that led to the overturning of Proposition 8 — I knew I had to find a way to make what happened in the courtroom visible to a wider audience as soon as possible. The judge ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, making gay marriage legal in the state once more, but soon after, an appeal was launched. This was just the start of the battle. We knew that the eventual decision at the Supreme Court would determine the legal status of gay marriage across the country.

Throughout 2012 I launched 8-play-youtube_n_1319379.html. Because the final draft, and only theater would let us move at that speed and scale.

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The Supreme Court’s final ruling was going to affect every state in America, so I wanted it to be performed in as many of them as possible. We knew that the judges didn’t live in bubbles. They read newspapers, watched television shows, and were aware of public opinions, so if there was anything we could do to make this decision simpler for them, it was worth a try.

My friend Richard Socarides—who was, Charles Socarides, was the psychiatrist who came up with the entire notion that being LGBT was a mental illness—encouraged me to write it for free for Broadway Impact, an organization that has been using the theater to raise money for HIV/AIDS since 2009. Not only would all the money it made go to LGBT causes, but with their network of contacts there was a chance we could get it to play across the entire country, it seemed like a fantasy, but it was worth a shot.

Broadway Impact turned out to be the best producers I’ve ever worked with, because everything they promised came true. The New York reading of it raised over $1 million and with their assistance we were ultimately able to bring the show to all 50 states. On March 3rd 2012, we arranged a special one-off reading at LA’s Wilshire Ebell Theatre, directed by Bob O’her and with an all-star cast that included George Clooney, Brad Pitt, and Jamie Lee Curtis. To maximize our reach, the performance was also streamed live on YouTube and later released as an audiobook.

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Between the show itself and donations from online viewers, the Wilshire Ebell performance raised a further $2 million for our cause.

The show ended up traveling far beyond the US; the last time I checked, the play had also been performed in eight other countries—notably in Australia, where it was recently used in support of another national battle for gay marriage equality. In the end, the most triumphant impact of it was in the US where we eventually won our battle. The US Supreme Court legalised same-sex marriage in June 2015, making gay marriage a reality across the entire nation.

No matter which medium I work in, I strive to write stories that will correct the misconceptions we have about people of diversity. It’s my firm belief that if we can clear out all that still divides people today, we can start to see what we have in common instead. This is yet another reason why detail is so crucial for a good story—because in detail, lives authenticity, authenticity cultivates curiosity, and curiosity can help you build the audience that these works deserve.

No marriage equality timeline

The timeline juxtaposes the percentage of Americans who believe gay marriage should be legal, with significant events of gay rights history, and the release of notable film, TV, and theater projects depicting gay characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Percentage of Americans who believe gay marriage should be legal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>First National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” signed by Bill Clinton</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Defense of Marriage Act signed by Bill Clinton</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Massachusetts first state to legalize gay marriage</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Supreme Court ruling legalizing gay marriage</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Art and activism can go hand-in-hand. Shirley Jo Finney talks about her most impactful projects and explains why now, more than ever, we must learn to trust in art.

People have always learned about themselves through storytelling. What an artist does is study human behavior — our wants, needs, and desires. Since the beginning, humanity has had to understand how to navigate our everyday existence by seeing nature and ourselves within it. I became involved in the Black Arts Movement in the late 60s, while still in college. The nation was in crisis and the civil rights movement was exploding, pulling the scab off the historical wound of systemic racism in this country. The artists of the time were fearlessly telling our narratives with a sense of urgency. Black theater companies emerged throughout the country. It was a time of reclamation, of breaking from Western storytelling. They reintroduced ritual improvisational storytelling, embracing the diaspora and ancestral spirituality that is unique to the African American experience.

In response to the George Zimmerman verdict, The New Black Fest commissioned the following six plays about Trayvon Martin, race and privilege:

- Colored by Winter Miller
- Night Vision by Dominique Morisseau
- Dwelling by Mona Mansour and Tala Manassah
- No More Monsters Here by Monica Ali
- Some Other Kid by A. Rey Pamatmat
- The Ballad of George Zimmerman by Dan O’Brien and Quetzal Flores

Notable works:
- Facing Our Truth, Citizen: An American Lyric
- In the Red and Brown Water, 2010

When directing social impact theater, it is important to create a safe space.
The State of SIE

116 The State of SIE

them to have a place, through story, in which to tangible reaction in the rehearsal hall. The wound age as many of those murdered. There was a The students were 18 to 22 years old — the same shootings had happened in the intervening period. University of Southern California. Several more Facing Our Truth Two years later, I directed another production for the Center Theater Group at in different venues. I directed the Los Angeles plays became part of the national conversation and many others of the black male body. The captured their reaction to Martin’s assassination and rage and frustration of people following the George Zimmerman verdict. Facing Our Truth — a series of six, 10-minute plays — that pulls moments into reality. This show, like In the Red and Brown Water, 2010

I leave the intellectual meaning to the writers; my express that in the room. That means feeling safe want them to identify what they’re feeling and then to create a safe space. Most of the time the work that is being performed is immediate and living — it’s personal. I never want my actors to act. I want them to identify what they’re feeling and then express that in the moment. That means I have to dig into my own experience — that’s the challenge. My way of working is totally organic. I leave the intellectual meaning to the writers; my work takes place in the space between the lines. This organic process was particularly important when Stephen Sachs invited me to direct an adaptation of Claudia Rankine’s Citizen: An American Lyric. The publication is an award-winning collection of vignettes — expressed through prose, poetry, and imagery — that detail the experience of race and racism.

The audience needed an opportunity to give voice to their emotions. Claudia wrote Citizen for white, middle and upper-class privileged people to examine everyday microaggressions towards black people. Citizen is told through a variety of perspectives, and by narrators seeing themselves in the shared experience of systemic racism. It can make privileged audiences uncomfortable, but it’s important that those audiences see how they interfere with our lives. For the audience member of color, they find it cathartic to have the moments they have kept to themselves in the open. It is language that pulls moments into reality. This show, like Facing Our Truth, demanded an audience talkback. The audience needed an opportunity to give voice to their emotions. They needed to have a conversation about what they had just experienced.

Even now, I’m still learning to trust my art. I recalled my passion and how I felt so many years ago, and how that drove me to actively participate in a movement. When directing social impact theater, it is important to create a safe space. Most of the time the work that is being performed is immediate and living — it’s personal. I never want my actors to act. I want them to identify what they’re feeling and then express that in the moment. That means I have to dig into my own experience — that’s the challenge. My way of working is totally organic. I leave the intellectual meaning to the writers; my work takes place in the space between the lines.

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At one point, the show traveled to Charleston, South Carolina. The theater was just around the corner from the church where Dylann Roof murdered nine black parishioners. I was walking in newly dug up soil; the community and the actors had suffered that experience just a year and two months ago. It was as emotionally raw as working with the USC students. In the post-show talkbacks, the first question I asked was not “What did you think?” but “How did you feel?”

We need our tools of empathy and imagination more now than any other time. — T. Michelle Murphy

T. Michelle Murphy, “Broadway Shows Are Taking on Activist Issues.” Metro US, 4 May 2017, www.metro.us/things-do/ew-broadway-shows-are-taking-activist-issues. In every era, theater has had a social and emotional impact on people. Artists have a responsibility as storytellers to research the culture, politics, and music around their stories because they can affect the energy and temperament of the people. You also need to trust your work. Trust yourself, your impulses, trust your feelings, then trust those working around you. Even now, I’m still learning to trust my art.
Emerging Forms
Over the past two decades, technological progress—and the arrival of the Internet in particular—has given rise to a wide array of new entertainment forms. These have been seized upon by social impact artists, over keen to find new ways to tell stories that drive essential change.

While there are many of these emerging forms of SIE, our inaugural report focuses on two of the most exciting examples: virtual reality (VR) and digital short form.

Digital short form doesn’t need to fit into a traditional slot or platform, and that’s one of its greatest strengths.

— Notice from VICE
Emerging Forms

The State of SIE

Creating Soulful Content

Shabnam Mogharabi
General Manager of SoulPancake

We are bombarded with a dizzying amount of information every single day. The average American spends 35–45 minutes per day on Facebook; 500 million tweets are sent every 24 hours, and 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute. At the same time, our attention spans are shrinking — a study by Microsoft found that our average attention spans had dropped from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds in 2015. That’s one second less than a goldfish. So it makes sense that our consumption habits have evolved to favor short-form and social content. Social platforms cater to our shrinking attention spans, and short-form content allows us to maximize the time we are spending on entertainment. Short-form content takes advantage of the five, 10 or 20-minute “micropockets” of time that we now program our days with.

For Shabnam Mogharabi and Rainn Wilson, the future of all content is in digital short form. The question is, how do we give that content purpose, meaning and soul?

Shabnam Mogharabi: “It’s a sense of meaning and soul. We give that content purpose, form. The question is, how do we create meaning and soul?”

Rainn Wilson: “I check my phone at least every 30 minutes.”

But does this type of content work to communicate a social impact message? I believe it does, and I have a theory why. If you’re familiar with Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs,” from your psychology class, humans must progress through five stages of needs, each being fulfilled in order. In 2008, when my friends and I began talking about the idea that would eventually become SoulPancake, there was very little positive content on the web. There was, to put it bluntly, a lot of crap out there: porn, Kardashians, crass humor, and materialism. We wanted to create a positive destination where thinkers, innovators, misfits, and activists could congregate to explore their universal human experience — a place to examine ideas, chew on life’s big questions, and dig into thought-provoking content.

And it was there that we found our first big hit and really homed in on our voice. The future of all content must include short-form video. It’s the most consumed content on social platforms, and the most easily available (and streamable) by phone, which is the device more and more consumers use to watch entertainment. When students are between classes or have time to fill, they don’t turn to movies or TV shows, they use their phones to find some entertainment. This content is often immediately shareable, unlike traditional television and film, so it can reach huge audiences in a short amount of time — something that was unthinkable 10 years ago.

In 2008, when my friends and I began talking about the idea that would eventually become SoulPancake, there was very little positive content on the web. There was, to put it bluntly, a lot of crap out there: porn, Kardashians, crass humor, and materialism. We wanted to create a positive destination where thinkers, innovators, misfits, artists, and activists could congregate to explore their universal human experience — a place to examine ideas, chew on life’s big questions, and dig into thought-provoking content.

Once up and running, we quickly realized that the video content we were producing for the website was our strongest and most engaging content, so we pivoted to becoming a content studio focused on video storytelling. Our first big initiative was to create inspirational short-form episodic series via a premium YouTube channel.

Consumers are looking to use the Internet to find a sense of meaning, purpose, and identity.

And content creators? We have the biggest responsibility here. As the world becomes more fractured and perilous, it’s up to content creators to tell the stories that move us forward as a species on our sacred planet. I hope that SoulPancake can continue to serve the world by making content that ignites a fire toward positive change.

Rainn Wilson
Actor, writer, co-founder of SoulPancake and Haiti-based educational initiative Goldie

Notable works:
The Office, Kid President

Microsoft Attention Span Study

Addictive technology behaviors are evident, particularly for younger Canadians. A 2013 survey asked participants from different age demographics whether they agreed with the following statements:

- I check my phone at least every 30 minutes.
- The last thing I do before I go to bed is check my phone.
- When nothing is occupying my attention, the first thing I do is reach for my phone.
- I check my phone at least once every 10 minutes.

18–24 65+

77%

10%

52%

18%

6%

10%

“18–24”

“65+”

“The last thing I do before I go to bed is check my phone.”


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77%

10%

52%

18%

6%

10%
before the next can be reached, in order to reach the ultimate goal of self-actualization. I believe the Internet, and particularly our online lives, are progressing through Maslow’s hierarchy. Our “physiological” needs online were met in the early days of the online boom with transactional websites like eBay and Amazon. The birth of online banking and secure email like AOL. Online and Microsoft gave us the ability to send our “belonging” needs were met with social sites like Facebook and MySpace. We’ve now moved to the “esteem” stage where sites like Twitter and Instagram fulfill our needs to be seen, heard, and appreciated. I believe we are finally on the verge of entering the final phase of “self-actualization,” online where consumers are looking to use the Internet to find a sense of meaning, purpose, and identity.

This is where I see SoulPancake and our parent company, Participant Media, fitting in. As storytellers, it’s our job to help people find a common sense of purpose and meaning. This doesn’t always mean direct social action; it might be as simple as helping a child find a common sense of purpose and meaning. Most of the time, it’s actually about forming an identity and connecting with other humans. In the social sphere, this understanding is especially important. You don’t want to ask your audience for something every time they interact with you because it can cause fatigue. Broadly speaking, the vast majority of our content is entertainment that asks the viewer to think and feel, but only a small percentage has a direct call to action.

One of my favorite sayings is, “Strive to be a virus, not viral.” In practical terms, this means creating a steady drumbeat of content online that can infect an audience, not focusing on getting a viral hit. That way, if and when you do have an organic breakthrough hit, you can capitalize on the momentum of that one video by having a library of content for viewers to engage with that helps sustain views and engagement during the inevitable post-viral drop.

Strive to be a virus; not viral.

Take our hit series Kid President. It wasn’t an overnight success. We’d been releasing Kid President episodes for a long time—a new video, once a week, for six months—before the “Pep Talk” video went viral, hitting nearly 30 million views in less than one week. Kid President certainly had a viral moment, but because of the deep vault of content already in place, it wasn’t a one-off sensation.

SoulPancake’s target audience epitomize what I like to call the optimistic millennial and the altruistic Gen Zer.

After its viral success, we continued to focus most of Kid President’s weekly videos on being entertaining, inspiring, and meaningful. Only two or three times a year would we ask viewers to engage at a more significant level. For example, the annual Socktober campaign—which aimed to prove that even the smallest acts of kindness, like donating a pair of socks, can make a difference in the lives of the homeless—was a prime example of using these small actions, big, but great effect. Over time, something fascinating happened: our viewers started asking Kid President for more ideas on how else they could make a difference. These viewers—SoulPancake’s target audience—epitomize what I like to call the optimistic millennial and the altruistic Gen Zer. These generations believe that humans are generally good, there is hope for the future, and they have the power to make a difference. A big part of that is by using their dollars as consumers to show what they stand for. Given the choice between brands, millennials and Gen Zers will often opt for the brand that stands for something. In fact, a recent study by Cone Communications suggested that 89% of Gen Zers would rather buy from a company that’s addressing social or environmental issues over one that is not.

In early 2018, Larry Fink, chairman of BlackRock, the world’s largest asset manager, sent a letter to the CEOs of the company’s holdings. In it, he explained that it was essential for businesses to have a social purpose, or else risk losing consumers and the support of BlackRock. This was a clear sign that even Wall Street is starting to pay attention to the demand for social responsibility and consequential impact, and if that is happening, then it’s a trend everyone needs to start embracing.

The next generation, powered by social networks, mobile technology, and the drive to find meaning, will change the way the world works, for the better. Ignoring that will be an obstacle to progress and success. The change is already happening; it’s just up to us to engage with this new culture.

Kid President

Kid President began when 11-year old Robby Novak and his brother-in-law Brad Montague started posting their videos online. Their first video, “Kid President,” is a call to action for all kids to change the world. The video cover a range of topics but all center around the simple premise that the world can be more awesome, and that all kids deserve to be heard. Since its inception, Kid President videos have included notable guests—such as President Obama and Beyoncé—and garnered more than 100 million views.

As of the end of 2018:

- Views on YouTube for “Pep Talk.”
- 4.3 million
- 850K+ followers on Twitter
- 380K+ followers on Instagram
- 280K+ videos on Instagram

Kid President

Kid President: Facebook: KidPresident; Twitter: KidPresident; Instagram: Iamkidpresident; YouTube: KidPresident; SoulPancake: Facebook: SoulPancake; Twitter: SoulPancake; Instagram: SoulPancake; YouTube: SoulPancake

SoulPancake.

SoulPancake: “Strive To Be a Virus, Not Viral.”

SoulPancake.

SoulPancake. “A Pep Talk from Kid President to You.”

Cone Communications.

Cone Communications. blog/2017-genz-csr-study.

Cone Communications. "Strive To Be a Virus, Not Viral.”

Kid President campaign.

Kid President’s success.

SoulPancake took several requests into consideration. They drafted an infectious video to invite advice, tips, and ideas to the SoulPancake campaign, which provided socks for homeless children.


SoulPancake had been releasing the Kid President videos once a week for six months prior to the “Pep Talk” video that has now garnered over 200 million views. The video was an infectious, “viral” thanks to the viral potential of content that had preceded it. Marketers Kid President video saw a lift in viewership after the “Pep Talk” release.

SoulPancake. "Kid President: A Hit".
Less is More

Carole Tomko explains how digital short form has become this generation’s go-to format, and why, when tackling the big issues, the shorter the better.

Storytelling can drive public awareness of big issues in a way that conventional philanthropy can’t match. The emotional bond generated from compelling content, partnered with information that empowers people to do something about it, is the key to real, positive change. Our mission at Vulcan Productions is centered around five pillars — technology, data, policy change, philanthropy, and storytelling — and how these tools help us to create content that builds awareness and drives engagement. The work we do ranges from production to campaigns and outreach, but all of it aims to generate impact through information-rich storytelling.

Two of our most successful digital short-form projects are The State of SIE and We The Economy. Both aimed to demystify big, thorny issues a lot of people remain uninformed about throughout their lives. We The Economy arose from shocking insights gathered on how the average American struggles to understand the fundamentals of the country’s economy. We commissioned 23 digital short films with a totally uncommercial agenda, allowing 20 directors to produce content that explained an economic topic they felt needed unraveling — such as how the global trade system works, or why healthcare is so expensive. The creative freedom we gave them meant that the films took all shapes and forms: documentary, narrative, and even one that is told through dance! We partnered with more than 70 distributors online and with Landmark Theatres across the country — all of which resulted in 18 million views across various platforms.

With We The Economy, the impetus was instead the imminent 2016 US presidential election. We were discovering, as with the economy, a lot of Americans were trying to make sense of the political system and voting process. Again, we commissioned 20 films — about topics like student debt, lobbying, and immigration — to break down the issues and inform diverse audiences. We wanted to reach younger voters and those harder-to-reach, traditionally disengaged groups.

Storytelling can drive public awareness of big issues in a way that conventional philanthropy can’t match. The emotional bond generated from compelling content, partnered with information that empowers people to do something about it, is the key to real, positive change. Our mission at Vulcan Productions is centered around five pillars — technology, data, policy change, philanthropy, and storytelling — and how these tools help us to create content that builds awareness and drives engagement. The work we do ranges from production to campaigns and outreach, but all of it aims to generate impact through information-rich storytelling. Two of our most successful digital short-form projects are We The Economy and its follow-up, We The Voters. Both aimed to demystify big, thorny issues a lot of people remain uninformed about throughout their lives. We The Economy arose from shocking insights gathered on how the average American struggles to understand the fundamentals of the country’s economy. We commissioned 23 digital short films with a totally uncommercial agenda, allowing 20 directors to produce content that explained an economic topic they felt needed unraveling — such as how the global trade system works, or why healthcare is so expensive. The creative freedom we gave them meant that the films took all shapes and forms: documentary, narrative, and even one that is told through dance! We partnered with more than 70 distributors online and with Landmark Theatres across the country — all of which resulted in 18 million views across various platforms.

With We The Voters, the impetus was instead the imminent 2016 US presidential election. We were discovering, as with the economy, a lot of Americans were trying to make sense of the political system and voting process. Again, we commissioned 20 films — about topics like student debt, lobbying, and immigration — to break down the issues and inform diverse audiences. We wanted to reach younger voters and those harder-to-reach, traditionally disengaged groups, so we choose our platforms based on these targeted demographics. We also partnered with PBS Learning and 10 national educational organizations where our content was used by 2 million teachers, with 15,000 downloads of our 20 films, and 135 million views across various platforms.
The responsiveness and ease of production you get with digital short form allows you to really extend a project’s life.

A more sustained example of what Vulcan Productions does is the short-form content that was commissioned in concert with the release of the documentary Racing Extinction, which Discovery Channel premiered worldwide within a 24-hour window. The feature premiered in December 2015, but Vulcan’s social impact work continued long after with a campaign featuring additional short films to help grow the community of activists. We also created a website that is regularly refreshed with content, and we launched a public challenge and campaigned for policy change. We partnered with more than 75 NGOs to drive viewership, petitions, and support for bans. We even partnered with the Vatican and the Vatican and shared. That’s still a challenge to be tackled and shares. That’s still a challenge to be tackled and shares. That’s still a challenge to be tackled and shares. That’s still a challenge to be tackled and shares. That’s still a challenge to be tackled and shares. 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Imagine that you are walking down the street when you see somebody hit by a car. You could go home and describe your experience, or you might even be able to show photographs or a video of the aftermath — but nothing would do justice to the visceral experience of having been there on the scene. Virtual reality (VR) is the closest we can get to communicating an exact sense of being physically present at an event. This is why as a research fellow at USC in 2010 I wanted to apply the VR medium to social impact stories. I've always been driven by a desire to connect people to these topics: I've worked as a Newsweek correspondent and created documentaries such as the HBO investigation Death on the Job. But a two-dimensional screen can be distancing. Concerns like poverty or war can fail to resonate or feel relevant when we see them as flat images on the news, as if these things are somehow separated from our day-to-day lives.

For people to feel empathy about a specific story, they need a sense of “being there.” They need to understand what a situation feels like to connect with the issue. VR is the perfect tool to create this sensation and, by extension, to create social impact. That’s why I decided to use VR to change public perception around the issue of food insecurity, wherein poverty deprives people of adequate access to food. Hunger in Los Angeles recreates an actual scene using real audio in which a man collapses into a diabetic coma while waiting in line at a food bank in California. The viewer is placed in the

Stepping Inside the Issue

Nonny de la Peña discusses the promising present and bright future of virtual reality, and why it’s the perfect medium for creating social impact.
street when the diabetic man falls to the floor and "starts having seizures, while others in the scene react by running away and retreating to the van," which enabled a live feed of the stock market to be explored in both a virtual environment and in augmented reality. Despite this, it’s an ongoing struggle to secure investment. As a woman, I’d say it’s the biggest challenge I face. For example, in 2017, $8.9 billion was invested by venture capitalists. All-female teams received just $1.9 billion of that money, 2.2% of the total pool. Meanwhile, all-male teams received roughly 79% or $66.9 billion.

Soon you’ll be able to experience VR on your personal device wherever you are.

Funding challenges have forced me to work on shoveling budgets — I’ve even had to finance some of my own projects myself. VR is not a cheap medium to be working with! The setup costs are huge, particularly as you have to create dedicated, fairground-like environments in order for people to view your work. This also limits how widely your content can be distributed and how many people can be impacted by the stories you’re telling.

Another challenge is that right now, 2D video is the only way to promote your work. Needless to say, this hardly represents what the experience is like when you’re there and how it engages the whole body. You lose the essence of making the space so effective, which is beyond frustrating!

Thankfully, I think many of these challenges will dissipate once our phones and headsets are merged. We’re getting closer to this happening due to advancements in technologies like edge computing and 5G mobile Internet, soon these will enable us to create more seamless experiences for less and allow for much wider distribution. At that point there’ll be no need for the "fairground" spaces — you’ll be able to experience VR on your personal device wherever you are. We’re also making great progress towards making volumetric experiences accessible through web browsing in a platform like Facebook Reality Labs, and we’ve been making simple tools to not only eliminate our reliance on 2D video for promotion, but to open the space for everyone.

VR is becoming ever more mainstream. The number of consumers using VR increased from 1.6 million to 14 million worldwide between 2015 and 2018, while startups raised $13 billion in investments in 2017 across 28 AR and VR categories, breaking previous records. In short, it’s inevitable that our digital world is going to “go spatial.” There’s no reason for Center Parcs or Disneyland to think twice when real world surroundings are dimensional. It’s a no-brainer that this change will happen, and as it does the opportunities for engaging social impact content will increase dramatically."
Content creation is an integral part of SIE. But in order to fully understand this space, it’s vital that we also look to broader points of discussion.

In this section we explore three notable trends in the entertainment industry: the effective use of SIE by international change organizations; the increasing value and importance of social impact campaigns; and Hollywood’s ongoing efforts to improve diversity and inclusion.

Gestures toward diversity just won’t cut it. We need diverse creatives who have the sensitivity and perspective to produce the type of content that audiences are increasingly demanding.

— Dr. Darnell Hunt & Dr. Ana-Christina Ramón, p144

A total of 4,583 speaking characters were analyzed for gender across the 500 top fictional films of 2016. A full 68.6% were male and 31.4% were female, which means viewers will see 2.18 males for every 1 female character on screen. The prevalence of female-speaking characters has not changed meaningfully across the 9 years evaluated. The difference between 2007 and 2016 is only 1.5%!


Read online at thestateofsie.com
As Chief Impact Officer at Participant Media, I lead the team that develops the social impact campaigns that are launched alongside our film projects.

In simple terms, my job is to use our content to make a difference—to help it become a catalyst tool for leaders working to address key social issues around the world. The overarching vision for our work is set by Participant’s founder, Jeff Skoll: we strive to create a more sustainable world of peace and prosperity.

Social impact producing, the work of driving impact through content, is experiencing a moment of growth and transformation. As the world shifts to new structures of power, accelerated by the digital revolution we are experiencing across society, content and storytelling has a new potency as a tool for change. I am passionate about the opportunity that exists today to harness that storytelling to make a difference in the world. There has been a lot written about how an increasingly connected world is impacting society, and one book I love is New Power, written by Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms. Whereas old power is hierarchical, structured, and formalized, like a traditional company, new power is open, flexible, and informal in its distribution. While old power delivers a product from the top down, new power asks for enrollment and participation in engaging with a product or an idea, building support from the bottom up.

Content is an incredible new power tool. At Participant, we build our social impact campaigns from this fundamental perspective—we are creating frameworks for open, networked collaboration amongst people who share a vision or values that are in alignment with the stories we tell. We endeavor to build “armies” of support for ideas whose time has come, and to use art to galvanize activism around the opportunities and pathways for those citizen-leaders to step into the arena and experience the transformational power of personal “agency.” The more people our films reach, the greater the opportunity for impact.

It is worth noting that a consistent theme across Participant’s films is that of leadership. All of our films tell stories of everyday citizens who stand up to speak truth to power. These heroes and heroines provide visible role models for audiences of what it looks like to lead change. Every great advancement in society begins with a leader, a story, and an engaged audience. This is a belief that is at the center of Participant’s core theory of change.

At Participant, we apply a social impact lens to every project we consider. Before a film is given the green light, we ask ourselves a set of questions which include the scale of an issue the opportunities and pathways for those citizen-leaders to step into the arena and experience the transformational power of personal “agency.” The more people our films reach, the greater the opportunity for impact.

1. Become a hub for the existing social action community and super-fans.
2. Provide incentive for action.
3. Give people tools to act locally.
4. Create content around the content.
5. Let the message take on a life of its own.

The basics: equity, justice, sustainability, health, and peace. We strive to inspire, empower, and connect audiences to take action and to lead change, in their homes, communities, or countries.

When Jeff Skoll founded Participant, he did so with the fundamental belief that every person has the power to create change. Following his lead, we believe the role of storytelling is to spark that inner activist, to seed change by increasing understanding, deepening compassion, and ultimately inspiring action. As social impact producers, our role is to create the opportunities and pathways for those citizen-leaders to step into the arena and experience the transformational power of personal “agency.” The more people our films reach, the greater the opportunity for impact.

At Participant, we apply a social impact lens to every project we consider. Before a film is given the green light, we ask ourselves a set of questions which include the scale of an issue.
Old power works like a currency. It is held by few. Once gained, it is jealously guarded, and the powerful have a substantial store of it to spend. It is closed, inaccessible, and leader-driven. It downloads, and it captures.

New power operates differently, like a current. It is made by many. It is open, participatory, and peer-driven. It uploads, and it distributes. Like water or electricity, it’s most forceful when it surges. The goal with new power is not to hoard it but to channel it.


Informal, opt-in decision making; self-organization; networked governance

Open-source collaboration, crowd wisdom, sharing

Radical transparency

Do-it-ourselves, “maker culture”

Short-term, conditional affiliation; more overall participation

Once the film is greenlit, we assign a social impact team to the project. Each campaign starts with what we call a listening tour during which we reach out to leaders and organizations who are working to solve the challenges our film is addressing. During this period of learning, we seek to understand the issue context and history, and to identify opportunities for change. Our goal, in every case, is to be of service to the leaders and organizations who have dedicated their life’s work to making progress. In contrast to these life-long advocates, our timeline is usually short and so it is important that we recognize, and plan for, our finite, but potentially powerful, contribution to accelerating change. As a result of this consultative process, and in partnership with issue leaders, we compose a framework that describes the impact opportunity and describes a theory of change for that particular film.

I am often asked whether there is a specific audience for impact work, and the answer is yes. At Participant, we focus on reaching a particular subset of a film’s general audience, a group I call “super-fans.” These are most often activists or leaders who are already engaged in the change that the film speaks to, and for whom professionally created content, that supports their vision for change, is an invaluable tool. Our job is to help these super-fans find innovative and powerful ways to use our content to engage with their own audiences, at a local, regional, or national level.

As a social impact entertainment producer, you’re most likely not a “resident” of the space affected by the issue you’re exploring. For this reason, it’s essential to approach every partnership from a place of humility, curiosity, and learning. You’re trying to build trust with folks who have been in this space before you — and who are going to be there a long time after your campaign is done. In short, you are an invited guest to someone else’s revolution, so it’s important to listen carefully and see what you can provide to help capture hearts and minds for social good.
Collaboration is vital right from the beginning. First, you have to define the issue that you want to highlight to the public and then create specific initiatives that will help individuals take action. It’s critically important in any social impact campaigns to define those initiatives, metrics and goals in partnership with the people doing the work on the ground, on the policy side, and in agencies and governments who have the power to affect change.

It’s important to give social impact campaigns a long runway.

Working with organizations helps you to analyze your issue from all perspectives, and this is crucial. With the right NGO on your side, you’ll have credible experts who understand the complexity of the issues and who are prepared to stand up and say that your case is absolutely accurate. This is vital because if you want to have a successful social impact campaign, you have to be able to answer people’s questions.

You also need to address the naysayers or the people who are on the fence in order to bring them over to your side. To do so, you have to take into account the fact that some people are going to question you or point to competing arguments. You need to be prepared for this, and with the right partners, you will be.

Building a strong coalition behind a movie takes time, partly because securing NGO support requires many levels of approval before sign-off to support a film. This is one reason why it’s important to give social impact campaigns a long runway. If you truly want to make an impact, a minimum of four months lead-time before the movie is released is what I would recommend — but eight months to a year is preferable so that conversations can start even during the production of the film. This allows the impact producer to see the film far enough in advance to start coordinating effectively, and for NGOs to harness their networks of influencers, press contacts and begin to mobilize their members. Plus it gives you time to define your impact goals and come up with a plan of action for how to achieve them.

Some distributors are often reluctant to allow that much time for social impact campaigns because they are concerned about “politicizing” a film that is not necessarily political in nature. They need to understand that the public is engaged and interested in the issues raised in the movie, and that it’s not unfair or feasible to only allow a short window of, say, four weeks to raise awareness of the film and then mobilize people before a film’s theatrical release. If you’re able to work with ample lead-time, you’ll be able to make the most of your partnerships.

For example, during my tenure at Amnesty International as Director of the Artists for Amnesty Program, I worked on Terry George’s 2004 drama Hotel Rwanda. One of the most strategic decisions that the studio MGM/UA made was to engage Amnesty International eight months before the theatrical release of the film. As a result, we were able to build a campaign for a film about the Rwandan genocide that was, somewhat counter intuitively, released during the Christmas holiday.

Social impact campaigns can create value long past the film’s theatrical life.

With time on our side, we were able to work closely with the MGM/UA marketing team on a joint campaign that targeted people within and beyond the activist and human rights networks. We promoted the story as one of a heroic man trying to save his family and community, as well as a film about the Rwandan genocide. With the engagement of Amnesty staff, including the organization’s directors of Advocacy, Human Rights Education, Membership Mobilization, Social Media and Communications, we were able to come up with a really effective, multi-tiered marketing campaign that appealed to a wider demographic.

In terms of budget, a social impact campaign for a studio feature film can cost between $300,000 and $500,000 (depending on number of initiatives, events and whether the impact campaign has a domestic and/or international focus). Documentaries and indies will cost less, perhaps between $75,000, and $150,000. When the filmmakers are negotiating these deals with potential distributors, they should consider the fact that these campaigns can bring many additional benefits to a film’s release. When you have a strong social impact campaign in place, you can — in addition to affecting the issue — activate new audiences, new press opportunities, and create social media buzz for the film. These campaigns can also create value long past the film’s theatrical life. They can continue to increase DVD sales, drive viewers onto streaming platforms and raise viewership on cable.
The State of SIE

22,000 people signed the campaign's of sexual abuse, reported that After Lady Gaga appeared nominated song "Til It Happens to You" which was created by President It's on Us One of the film's social impact campaign campuses into the national spotlight. The issue of sexual assaults on college Ziering's documentary The Hunting of society. Take Kirby Dick and Amy allow them to become part of the fabric The long lifespan of these films can to effectively mobilize the public.

One of the film’s social impact campaigns partners was the It’s on Us Campaign, which was created by President Barack Obama’s administration to raise awareness about sexual assault on college campuses. Diane Warren and Lady Gaga wrote the Oscar®- nominated song “Til It Happens to You” and performed it at the 2016 Academy Awards®. After Lady Gaga appeared on stage alongside dozens of survivors of sexual abuse, It’s on Us reported that 22,000 people signed the campaign’s pledge. There was a 100% increase in Google searches for the campaign, Snapchat reached millions by releasing an "It’s On Us" filter during the telecast, and there were 48,719 Twitter tweets with a reach of 250 million. The campaign website had 115,204 page views in just 24 hours. The number for a sexual assault support hotline was also broadcast at the end of the "Til It Happens to You" music video, and saw a 34% increase in calls after the video was released. By the end of 2016, the music video had over 15 million views.

The enduring power of a social impact campaign is perhaps no better illustrated than with our work for Edward Zwick’s 2006 movie Blood Diamond. Set in Sierra Leone in the 90s, the movie shed light on how diamonds are mined in war zones to finance conflicts. For our campaign, Warner Bros. and director Edward Zwick worked closely with Global Witness and Amnesty International to come up with ways to engage audiences around this incredibly complex issue of conflict diamonds, having Amnesty International and Global Witness on our board — both experts on the issues of conflict diamonds and the human rights situation in Sierra Leone long before the film was produced — proved essential.

For example, when the World Diamond Council found out the film was being made, they sent a three-page letter to Ed Zwick pointing out the strides the diamond industry had already made to remove conflict diamonds from the market. In our eyes, they were throwing down the gauntlet, and we picked it up. There was tremendous press interest in the film and the two organizations had the facts, the reports, and the witnesses — and most importantly, we had a very powerful film. With our experts, we were able to effectively engage in a very public battle that ensued over the film.

Because of the film and its impact campaign, people asked jewelers whether the diamonds being sold were “conflict-free.” Jewelers put up signs in their shops to reassure conscious consumers. To this day, people continue to ask jewelers whether the diamonds they are buying are certified clean. This illustrates how the movie and campaign led to a new populist vernacular to describe the industry around blood diamonds — one that now extends to blood chocolate, blood minerals, blood gold and more.

Beyond educating consumers, we also needed to challenge the romantic imagery perpetuated by the phrase “diamonds are forever.” So we decided to fight symbolism with symbolism. At the time, everyone was wearing Livestrong band. We created a downloadable, easy-to- read consumer guide explaining the supply chain of blood diamonds and providing questions people could ask when shopping for diamonds. We also created a school curriculum containing activities and lessons designed to spark classroom discussions about the conflict in Sierra Leone and how conflict diamonds played a role. We knew that students would tell their parents and other adults about the issues — and the adults were the ones buying the diamonds.

When the movie was nominated for five Academy Awards®, we decided to drive our message home on the red carpet. We created a special pin for people to wear on Oscar® night and gave them to the Blood Diamond cast as well as other celebrity activists. It received huge press attention and helped combat the established narrative.

Looking back, we were ready to go to battle with this campaign because we had such confidence in the cause, in our film, and in our partners. Our grassroots campaign became a juggernaut against goliaths with millions of dollars at their disposal. We fought a good fight, and I like to think we won.
Picturing Progress

A degree of positive change is evident in the fact that there are now more people of color working in front of the camera and in television. This is partly because the number of original scripted shows has exploded with so many different platforms creating original content. While previously there were only so many jobs available, the increased demand for content has forced executives to consider new talent.

Recall that we established the Hollywood Diversity Report in 2016, to document the degree to which women and people of color are present in front of and behind the camera. It discusses patterns between these findings and box office receipts and audience ratings.

A lot of our work has involved shattering old myths and "industry truths." A lot of our work has involved shattering old myths and "industry truths" ingrained since the early days of Hollywood, such as the idea that to be successful, films must be about a White male lead as the lead, rather than a person of color. While 50 years ago, it might have made business sense to cater primarily to a largely white population, that logic no longer holds. Demographics have shifted so much since then.

The industry is losing out on profit opportunities by failing to produce content that aligns with what people want. The title of our most recent report sums up where we are now: Five Years of Progress and Missed Opportunities. Despite the minor improvements, the industry is losing out on profit opportunities by failing to produce content that aligns with what people want. Audiences are becoming more diverse every year. In the US, people of color bought the majority of the tickets for half of the top 10 highest-grossing films in 2016.

Of course, the business argument isn’t the only reason why Hollywood should diversify. There’s a considerable amount of research showing the impact images have on people’s identities and sense of self—images that are no longer predominantly White. Outside of Hollywood, such as the idea that to be successful, films must be about a White male lead as the lead, rather than a person of color. While 50 years ago, it might have made business sense to cater primarily to a largely white population, that logic no longer holds. Demographics have shifted so much since then.

Despite the clear business case for diversity, we’ve only seen incremental progress since we started our research. The same white male creatives can’t make everything. In this respect, these new platforms have opened up opportunities for diverse and unique voices.

However, Hollywood’s problem with inauthenticity may stem from its use of stereotypes to portray certain groups. According to a 2018 YouGov survey:

41% of Americans say black characters are often stereotyped.

53% of Black Americans say black characters are often stereotyped.

Statistics from the UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report 2018: People of color remained underrepresented on every front in 2015–2016:

Despite the fact that the majority of films released blatantly fail to represent this demographic accounts for about 39% of the US population. This happens despite the fact that the majority of films released. Hollywood wants to sustain itself and maintain its profitability, it has to be aware of its appeal to this audience.

Its profitability, it has to be aware of its appeal to this audience. Its profitability, it has to be aware of its appeal to this audience.

Concluding nearly 10% of the US population, minorities will become the majority within a few decades. The white male creatives can’t make everything. In this respect, these new platforms have opened up opportunities for diverse and unique voices.

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are widely perceived. Native Americans have been so greatly underrepresented since the days of one-dimensional characters in old Western movies that in a recent study — a 2018 report by the Reclaiming Native Truth project — 46% of respondents believed that they no longer existed.

If people experience an underrepresented group in film and TV but the group’s characters are all stereotypes, then they are likely to believe that it is a true reflection of that group. If you live in a small, segregated town and never interact with Latinos, then you might believe that the stereotypical repeated in images are true.

While we believe the moral argument for diversity is the most important, it’s not the one that’s moving the industry. We made the strategic choice to focus on how diversity benefits the bottom line because all of our discussions with industry stakeholders told us that this would be the most compelling and persuasive argument.

But the industry is not going to change in a foundational way until it changes the way it does business. Real progress requires institutional commitments to doing business differently so that change trickles down the entire culture. Institutional change requires institutional commitments to doing business differently so that change trickles down the entire culture. Real progress requires institutional commitments to doing business differently so that change trickles down the entire culture. Real progress requires institutional commitments to doing business differently so that change trickles down the entire culture.
Dismantling Gender Bias

Gender parity in the screen industries requires cultural transformation. Cathy Schulman discusses the systemic change needed to make it happen.

When #MeToo and the TIME’S UP movements gathered steam as a response to the Harvey Weinstein allegations, they sent shockwaves around the globe and raised awareness about the intersection point between workplace discrimination and the prevalence of sexual harassment. From my perspective as President Emerita of Women In Film—a leading advocacy organization for women in media—the screen industries are now becoming conscious, woke, and are slowly making progress towards dismantlable change. But there is confusion between the culture of sexual harassment post-Weinstein and the need for gender parity in the business. They are often treated as the same thing, but sexual harassment is a symptom of the wider issue of discrimination. At the top of the issue sits the fact that, across seven of the biggest media companies, just 15% of C-suite positions are held by women.

In most systemic change projects you end up with a triangulation of problems, and ours was no different. The ReFrame model identified three core needs for systemic change:

1. Pipeline/Inclusion and Innovation Culture
   The ReFrame theory of change identifies these core needs for systemic change.

   - **The ReFrame Triangle**

   - **Build the barrier down.**
   - **Inclusion and innovation culture**
   - **Supports pipeline**

2. **We need to prove that content by and for women is profitable.**

3. **We need to prove that content by and for women is profitable.**

To tackle the pipeline, we created the ReFrame Blue cross company, executive sponsorship program for mid-career female directors, creating opportunities for them to access tangible support and maintain sustainable careers. My first job was actually on Kathryn Bigelow’s second movie, Blue Steel. Seeing her working in the director’s chair was an incredibly important experience for me. It made my own ambition of being a producer more realistic. However, the reality of the situation quickly set in, and it was another 17 years before I was able to work with a female director again. This isn’t unusual. Female directors can often go six or seven years between projects, and that’s a trend reflected in all areas.

In our first year, we presented three different tactical plans to actualize each systemic change goal.

- **3. Sponsor/Protégé Program**
  - **Emphasizing pipelines to protégé talent.**
  - **Building the barrier down.**
  - **Pipeline/Inclusion and Innovation Culture**

   - **ReFrame Partners have committed to participate in the following three programs.**

   1. **1. ReFrame Culture Change (acquisition, ReFrame Production Roadmap): partners conduct one or more internal training initiatives (workshops, ReFrame Production Personnel Data) to achieve gender equality milestones): partners provide guidance and sponsor/protégé program to encourage and support projects receiving the stamp.**

   2. **2. ReFrame Stamp (recognizing projects that achieve gender equality, this partnership provides production personnel data to ReFrame for stamp qualification—partners provide guidance and sponsor/protégé program to encourage and support projects receiving the stamp.**

   3. **3. Sponsor/Protégé Program (emphasizing pipelines to protégé talent.**

- **Empire (season 4)**
  - **How to Get Away with Murder (season 4)**
  - **Jessica Jones (season 2)**

- **Grey’s Anatomy (season 15)**
  - **The Originals (season 7)**

- **Source one data.**

Cathy Schulman

Academy Award–winning film producer, President and CEO of Welle Entertainment

When #MeToo and the TIME’S UP movements got underway, a huge culture shockwave hit the industry. The cultural environment was toxic.## Schulman transformation.## industrie...## Gender Bias

Dismantling...
to dismantle gender bias at every decision-making inflection point within the trajectory of making and financing content. For me, the key here is that gatekeeping executives, producers, directors, and department heads interview as many women as men and practice blind hiring, which means they review resumes before seeing the name of a candidate.

The trickiest part of the triangle is the business case. The biggest target group for studios for the last 25 years has been men and boys between the ages of 14 and 24. Unlike other demographic groups, we’re just not seeing that and 24. Unlike other demographic groups, we’re just not seeing that.
In Media We Trust

Shamil Idriss of Search for Common Ground argues the case for building sustainable peace through media, using content to provoke discussion and overcome differences.

One way we build peace is through media. Our content is designed to provoke discussions within communities in conflict and model new ways to overcome differences. Depending on the issues at hand, we might create community theater, television dramas, reality TV shows, radio programs, or call-in shows, all complemented by extensive community outreach and engagement.

There are three ways that the change we help bring about becomes sustainable. The first is institutionalization: when a government ministry, police department, media syndicate, or other important institution adopts new policies or procedures reflecting principles of peace. The second is commercialization: when a local market emerges to resource a peacebuilding approach so that its continuation need not rely on philanthropic support. The third is popularization: when a social impact entertainment program affects social norms, or how a large portion of a population deals with differences; this is where social impact entertainment is particularly powerful.

Our content is designed to provoke discussions within communities in conflict and model new ways to overcome differences. To achieve such change, our teams and partners must all be local, drawn from across the very dividing lines they seek to bridge in their communities.
One of the reasons social impact entertainment is so effective is that it harnesses our emotions. What happens in a community is useful when working in situations that are often fluid or turbulent.

Illustrating the potential of spaced learning, our weekly series The President inspired young Palestinians to believe they can play an active role in the political process. This reality TV show tasked 100 young citizens with tackling difficult political challenges. With many Palestinians disengaged or mistrustful of politics, the show was designed to inspire a new generation of leaders to create positive change through democratic means. Around 3.8 million people watched each episode, and 88% of viewers polled said they believed young people could make a difference after watching the series. Six of the show’s contestants eventually ran for real positions in local politics, while the first season’s winner was hired by the office of the President of Palestine, serving as an advisor on youth affairs.

One of the shows I’m most excited about is our first cop drama, Nabliksa. Set in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it tells the story of a former combatant who continues to serve his country by becoming a senior police officer. Like some actual police officers there, he hasn’t been paid for months; for some, it means crops in his unit, and much of the population fears or distrusts him — or both. We co-produce this show with the police force in Congo. They love it because they are effectively the stars, but we use the show to foster dialogue between police and locals to improve their relations and conduct.

One of the reasons social impact entertainment is so effective is that it harnesses our emotions. Attitudes, behaviors, and even world views are developed from people’s emotional experiences, not their rational thinking. This is clear in how extremist groups inflame passions to recruit and mobilize young people. The emotional experiences of being ignored, humiliated, and disparaged — or on the flip side, respected, included, and heard — have a powerful determinative affect on how people see the world and how they behave in it.

To leverage this emotional power, you need to craft character-driven social impact entertainment from the inside out, making sure the characters and the content resonate with what people are seeing and living in their daily lives. By collaborating with people who are living with the conflict, we’re able to create those stories and lay the groundwork for sustainable, enduring change.

**The Common Ground Approach**

A methodology to transform how we respond to conflict, away from confrontation and force and toward collaboration. When working in situations that are often fluid or turbulent, we use the show to foster dialogue between police and locals to improve their relations and conduct.

1. **SIE Agenda**
   - **Institutionalization**: when a government-facing, police department, media, or other institution adopts new policies or practices reflecting principles of peace.
   - **Commercialization**: when a local market emerges to resource a program’s continued viability, or the institution adopts new policies or procedures reflecting principles of peace.
   - **Popularization**: when a change in social norms, or how a group perceives a situation, occurs with diffusion of a program or organization across a community and social groups. Once change takes one of these forms, it can maintain its viability without reliance on third-party support.
In this section we shift our focus from the makers of social impact entertainment to the businesses and organizations that operate around — or work in support of — SIE creation. From educators to conveners, funders to talent agencies, the efforts of these professionals are an essential part of the SIE landscape. Their insight has much to reveal about the challenges and opportunities that are inherent in this space.

For our projects to bring about lasting change in the world, we need to join forces with unlikely allies, develop trust, share control, and build toward opportunities for mutual benefit.

— Sandy Herz, p180

In a survey of 50 (nonprofit) organizations, 61% of those surveyed used pop culture in the last two years as part of a communication strategy, but only 52% used it all the time (compared to NPF who said “not that often”). Of those surveyed, 75% said they would use pop culture again — so there is a significant opportunity to grow this discipline.


75% would use pop culture again

Read online at thestateofsie.com
Seeding a New Generation

Educators can guide and nurture the next wave of SIE creators and scholars. Teri Schwartz sets out the unique vision behind the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, and it’s work to champion the power of humanistic and social impact stories.

I had a wonderful 30-year career as an award-winning feature film producer in Hollywood. In 2003, I was appointed the inaugural dean of the LMU School of Film and Television. In 2009, I became the first woman dean of the historic UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television (UCLA TFT). I like to call it the Storytelling School. As Dean of UCLA TFT, I have the great privilege of leading an extraordinary creative and scholarly community. I have been able to put my life philosophy to the test—a belief that humanistic story can be used for good and for transformational change. I have the honor to help nurture and develop a new generation of diverse artists and scholars who embrace our UCLA TFT vision around the power of story to not only delight and entertain, but to enlighten, engage, and inspire change for a better world. It’s exciting to educate a new generation who have this consciousness—students who are inspired to use their stories, their creative works, their leadership and their research to make a difference.

At UCLA TFT, we are home to remarkable faculty—diverse thought leaders, scholars and artists who have long focused their work around themes of social responsibility. Each faculty member has a rich, individual interpretation of what social impact entertainment is, and each brings their own work to life in powerful and unique ways. There are far too many great UCLA TFT faculty to mention here, so I invite you to visit our website www.tft.ucla.edu to learn more about our School, our renowned alumni and our faculty’s remarkable teaching, research and creative work in our Film/TV/Digital Media Department and our Theater Department.

For this section of the report, I am very proud to highlight two immensely remarkable faculty professors who have been honored with two of our highest awards: the President’s Professor and the MacArthur Fellowship. Scott Metzger and Jeff Skoll represent an outstanding new generation of educators, scholars and creative practitioners who are forging groundbreaking research, ideas, insights, connections and new directions across the social impact entertainment landscape. The focus of Scott’s and Metzger’s teaching and research is breathing in its depth and originality.

Our vision is for TFT to serve as a premier interdisciplinary global professional school that develops outstanding humanistic storytellers, Industry leaders and scholars whose diverse, innovative voices enlighten, engage, and inspire change for a better world.

Teri Schwartz
Dean, UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television
Ellen Scott
Associate Professor, Vice Chair, TV/Digital Media Department, UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television

My work centers on the political meanings of media, focusing on race — and African American identity specifically.

I am currently engaged in two major research projects. The first explores the history of slavery on the American Screen, with audiences to film production and reception. Built upon my ongoing research into the production politics behind depicting slavery from the silent era — when many viewers still had personal memory of the institution — to the present, my book, Cinema’s Pathological Mimicry: A Comprehensive History of American Slavery on Screen, is the project. The book is accompanied by a digital, archivally centered traditional theater history class to emphasize women.

The film, TV and theater.

Example #1 — Enlightened individuals: I have traveled tirelessly around the world over the past 10 years for our UCLA TFT telling our story and sharing our vision and mission. I have had the privilege of cultivating really interesting and inspiring relationships with enlightened individuals for the benefit of our diverse students, faculty, staff, as well as our research and creative projects. One example has been garnering generous support from amazing individuals around the idea of empowering women to tell their stories. I have received seven-figure leadership gifts from a wide array of enlightened donors from around the world for full-ride scholarships for our Master of Fine Arts (MFA) graduate degree in directing that “gives voice to the unique perspective of Arab women”; for full-ride scholarships for our MFA graduate degree in directing, screenwriting and producing that “gives voice to the unique perspective of Indian women”; and for full-ride scholarships for our MFA graduate degree in directing that “gives voice to the unique perspective of African American and Hispanic women.” These individual gifts have been transformational for the scholarship recipients, for our faculty and for the campus. This unique model

Pillar #1: Public Programming and Engagement. UCLA TFT encompasses a broad variety of campus-wide, public programs, such as film retrospectives, festivals, conferences, symposium and special screenings, the latter often in conjunction with Partisan Media. Our annual Spark Change Summit is particularly important to us, bringing together all authorities in the SIE space, along with rising talent, industry leaders, faculty, students and the public in a single convening that welcomes both the local and global scholarly and professional communities at large.

The State of SIE

As we build out the work of the center, we are drawing upon the ideas and experiences of a wide circle of UCLA TFT, campus and external experts. In addition, I am contributing several findings that have emerged from my own experiences over the past several years while advancing our vision and strategic goals. In my work as dean, I have found three distinct categories of alliances and partnerships that I believe help to define, move forward and fund our goals for social impact entertainment. They are: 1) Enlightened individuals; 2) Foundations and select organizations; 3) Like-minded companies across the creative industries. All three groups already share our ideals and world view. I believe these relationships are essential for anyone looking to make headway in this space. When you strike up a great dialogue with all three groups, you share your mission and values, it inevitably benefits both parties — and often the wider communities that surround you.

Critics from Classical Hollywood to Blasphemation, explores the film writings of over forty black American women, from the Classical Hollywood era through to the year when the first black woman made her feature film. The project departs from existing, largely theoretical scholarship on black women’s spectatoriality by bringing greater historical specificity and by drawing attention to the intersections of black women’s film writing with broader struggles to define freedom. The book includes a substantial edited section collecting reviews written by black women film critics from the 1920s through to the 1970s. It wasn’t until HBO that a black woman had an opportunity to direct a feature film. But before there were black women directors like Julie Dash, Cheri Dunez and Ava DuVernay, there was a generation of black women who did not have access to the director’s chair and whose powerful ideas about the screen were expressed through critical writing.

Both projects investigates the ways that media converges with social practice, influencing larger social institutions through representation but also through surrounding acts of censorship, protest, and criticism. TFT makes a good home for this work because of its long history of engagement, through scholars like Tasheema Gabriel, with the work of theorizing media as a site of political engagement and political imagination.

The Bigger Picture

I think it’s going to be sharing our stories across borders and cultures, and women’s voices in particular, that is going to help save our world.

Without question, we have a compelling vision and story to tell. As such, more individuals are understanding the great value of investing in educational programs and scholarships that inspire social impact and diversity.

I often tell students I want them to imagine differently. In other words, I am not primarily interested in reproducing what people already know (a canon of playwrights, for example). I see my research addressing social issues like racial and socio-economic disparities, but also hope it enables us to reframe pressing problems. As one instance, because I am interested in different gender formations across time and cultures as well as the position of women and sexual minorities in American society today, I have structured my undergraduate theater history class to emphasize women. Indeed, all the plays and performances we study are authored by women, in part to help us to narrate a more centered and more complete filmic and theatrical tradition.

Enlightened individuals for visionary philanthropy has had a ripple effect around the world, too, by inspiring other enlightened individuals from many countries, including the US, to participate in this kind of mission-driven giving at our School supporting a wide array of SIE focused programs and initiatives.

I work on performance and visual culture — art, fashion, film, and theater. More specifically, I study the articulation of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality across media and film in transnational contexts. I wrote two books on this topic — Chinese Looks: Fashion, Performance, Asia (The City University, 2008) and Seascapes and the Theatricality of Globalization: A cultural history — and I’ve co-edited several anthologies, including Awkward Stages: Plays about Growing Up Gray.

Frankly, I think it’s going to be sharing our stories across borders and cultures, and women’s voices in particular, that is going to help save our world. This is the power of what enlightened individuals can do with visionary giving focused on advancing social impact entertainment.

Example #2 — Foundations: The William Randolph Hearst Foundation (WRHF), one of the most important and forward-thinking foundations in the US, also

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We are drawing upon the ideas and experiences of a wide circle of UCLA TFT, campus and external experts. In addition, I am contributing several findings that have emerged from my own experiences over the past several years while advancing our vision and strategic goals. In my work as dean, I have found three distinct categories of alliances and partnerships that I believe help to define, move forward and fund our goals for social impact entertainment. They are: 1) Enlightened individuals; 2) Foundations and select organizations; 3) Like-minded companies across the creative industries. All three groups already share our ideals and world view. I believe these relationships are essential for anyone looking to make headway in this space. When you strike up a great dialogue with all three groups, you share your mission and values, it inevitably benefits both parties — and often the wider communities that surround you.

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The Storytelling Institute’s stated mission is that the screenplays must be ones that have stories that matter. Following the success of the first year, we are now going into our second year of the Institute with UCLA TFT and French graduate screenwriting students who have as much promise and talent.

We set up an equally rewarding partnership with Sony Television who also share our vision and mission. They have made a multi-year commitment to support a writing for social impact storytelling initiative and engaged our students, now alumni, have now gone on to work on other feature films — their professional careers having been launched as a result of Swarovski’s investment in nurturing and developing the new storytellers who have an eye for creating social impact entertainment. Filming is a big part in the overarching strategic goals for this project, Swarovski has funded and launched a major global social action campaign to accompany the release of the film. Serving as the critical follow-up elements to raise awareness and drive change, the campaign includes a customized website, social media platform, special student screenings in the US and worldwide, panels, online global newsletter, and an expanded water curriculum.

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The Storytelling Institute focused on the intersection of entertainment and performing arts.

Example #2 — Creative industries: We have created unique industry partnerships with those who share our vision and ideals — like-minded partners who understand the value of investing in, and creating a pipeline for, the development of outstanding diverse new talent whose stories not only have commercial value, but are ones that have the great potential to make a difference.

One example is our new Storytelling Institute — a groundbreaking model for a six-week in-residence graduate screenwriting program that we launched in 2018 for eight outstanding graduate-level screenwriting students from UCLA TFT and France in partnership with the CEO of Vivendi/Canal+, the President of the Cannes Film Festival, the Mayor of City of Cannes, and the President of the University of Côte d’Azur. The Institute is fully funded by a multi-year commitment from Vivendi/Canal+ and supported by the partners all of whom share common values and a belief in the power of story to make a difference. During the residency, the students write a feature film screenplay and have a "first-lock" deal with Vivendi/Canal+. Underscoring our ideals and strategic goals.

This academic year 2018/19, through a major multi-year grant awarded to us from the WRHF, we have launched the WRHF Playwriting Lab Initiative at UCLA TFT that supports humanistic storytelling in theater and other forms of immersive performance. Not only does the grant fund our year-long student playwriting program, but it also provides faculty grants for the development of new plays with humanistic themes, and major funding for the inaugural WRHF Playwriting Lab Initiative—Distinguished Faculty grants for the development of live theater and other forms of immersive performance. TFT that supports humanistic storytelling from the WRHF, we have launched the major multi-year grant awarded to us this academic year 2018/19, through a partnership with those who share common values and a belief in the power of story to make a difference. During the residency, the students write a feature film screenplay and have a "first-lock" deal with Vivendi/Canal+. Underscoring the Storytelling Institute's stated mission is that the screenplays must be ones that have stories that matter. Following the success of the first year, we are now going into our second year of the Institute with UCLA TFT and French graduate screenwriting students who have as much promise and talent.

We set up an equally rewarding partnership with Sony Television who also share our vision and mission. They have made a multi-year commitment to support a writing for social impact storytelling initiative and engaged our students, now alumni, have now gone on to work on other feature films — their professional careers having been launched as a result of Swarovski’s investment in nurturing and developing the new storytellers who have an eye for creating social impact entertainment. Filming is a big part in the overarching strategic goals for this project, Swarovski has funded and launched a major global social action campaign to accompany the release of the film. Serving as the critical follow-up elements to raise awareness and drive change, the campaign includes a customized website, social media platform, special student screenings in the US and worldwide, panels, online global newsletter, and an expanded water curriculum.

It is immensely gratifying to have launched these SIE programs and initiatives.

Throughout 2018, we had special screenings and panels at the Sundance, Venice, Cannes, Toronto and the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the Cannes Film Festival, the Toronto Film Festival and the United Nations. Several of the greatest students, now alumni, have now gone on to work on other feature films — their professional careers having been launched as a result of Swarovski’s investment in nurturing and developing the new storytellers who have an eye for creating social impact entertainment. Filming is a big part in the overarching strategic goals for this project, Swarovski has funded and launched a major global social action campaign to accompany the release of the film. Serving as the critical follow-up elements to raise awareness and drive change, the campaign includes a customized website, social media platform, special student screenings in the US and worldwide, panels, online global newsletter, and an expanded water curriculum.

The Bigger Picture

Our field is a beautiful one and it’s exciting to see flowers blooming everywhere.
Every nonfiction film project is unique in terms of how it may seek to have societal influence. Across all our projects, our research is designed to help inform the common objective of how to learn more and understand the process of telling a good story is not as prevalent in peer-reviewed research. Researchers could benefit from understanding the creative process and the art of storytelling. This understanding helps inform what questions they should ask, and the way in which they should ask them.

One of our key publications, Assessing the Impact of Issues-Focused Documentaries, illustrates the bespoke approach we take to research. I published the study showcasing that every nonfiction film project is unique in terms of how it may seek to have societal influence. For example, there are many projects that put social issues on the map for the first time. In these cases, having a “breakthrough” goal might be tricky.

The State of SIE

There’s so much to be gained by bringing SIE’s creative and academic communities closer together, says Caty Borum Chattoo.

Closing the Gap

At the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) we believe that all forms of entertainment have the potential to shape culture. As Director of the Center I spearheaded the research, theory, and practice of various types of storytelling, to developing practical guides for filmmakers, at every nonfiction film project is unique in terms of how it may seek to have societal influence. The creative work is always the centerpiece. The first step is to understand the process of storytelling, because if a mediated story about a social issue is didactic, overtly explanatory, or confrontational, it will turn audiences off. People come to care about the issues profiled in a work of mediated entertainment because they connect with the characters and artistry of the story.

This means that increased collaboration between the creative and research processes is of the utmost importance. Understanding what moves us in storytelling, seeing what’s worked before, and moving forward is the only way to continue to build the kind of research existence that requires changing attitudes? Those few examples show that one method can be used to evaluate the impact of all stories. As researchers, we need to understand the context of a social issue. Our projects need to think about an issue and the ways of understanding it, not just moving it. Is there potential for a structural shift, like policy change? Is it an issue that requires changing attitudes? Those questions should guide the research methodology, but they also show why any kind of research about storytelling is itself a creative process.

I also don’t use the word “measurement” to describe research that examines the social-good influence of mediated narrative. For me, a more accurate description is quantitative research, which isn’t always appropriate. Similarly, I don’t often use the word “evaluation” in this particular work because it can imply there are “good” and “bad” elements that need to be weighed.

Whatever our approach, the creative work is always the centerpiece. The first step is to understand the process of storytelling, because if a mediated story about a social issue is didactic, overtly explanatory, or confrontational, it will turn audiences off. People come to care about the issues profiled in a work of mediated entertainment because they connect with the characters and artistry of the story. Through collaboration between the creative and research processes, we can continue to develop the idea of entertainment storytelling and social good.
Agency for Change

The first talent agency to develop a social impact department, CAA has a long-standing influence as creative changemakers.

Michelle Kydd Lee and Natalie Tran explain how big ideas create big impact.

We are veterans in this space. We were the first talent agency to establish a department that would solely focus on developing evolving ideas to make a positive impact on the world. Created to put a nonprofit sensibility at the heart of the entertainment business, throughout the last 20 years CAA has led the way in some of the most transformative social action in our industry.

We live in a world of big, bold ideas. We sit at the epicenter of popular culture with each individual who comes through our doors — from world-renowned artists, content creators, and athletes to presidential candidates, activists, and innovators who are setting out to change the world. This gives us a very particular insight into the zeitgeist. We can see “the wave” coming months, if not years in advance, and this has enabled us to become a hub for social impact work — not only in Hollywood, but around the world. As our colleagues say, people around the planet may never visit our country, but they will see our movies, listen to our music, and watch our television shows. That is a great gift and an awesome responsibility.

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Michelle Kydd Lee
Chief Innovation Officer and member of the Management Committee, Creative Artists Agency

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Natalie Tran
Co-Director of the CAA Foundation

CAAs long history of bringing together individuals and organizations that might not have initially seen the mutual benefits of collaborating.

CAA Foundation has a long history of bringing together individuals and organizations that might not have initially seen the mutual benefits of collaborating.

Some 18 months later, we found ourselves deeply involved in another movie about climate change, An Inconvenient Truth. On the heels of hosting Vice President Gore in our screening room for his now famous “slide show,” we convened producers and director Davis Guggenheim into our conference room to put the wheels in motion for a documentary film that would lead the same at scale. The film, which was produced by Participant Media, went on to gross $49.8 million worldwide (making it the 11th highest-grossing documentary film of all time) and earned Al Gore a Nobel Prize. One of the reasons the film was so successful is that it was able to capitalize on the existing relationship the CAA Foundation has helped nurture between the environmentalists and the entertainment industry. We had helped develop a trust that simply hadn’t existed before. This relationship embodies what social impact entertainment is all about: the collaboration between content creators and those actually working on the issues in the field.

Another core strength of the CAA Foundation is our ability to connect clients and partners to a single, common cause. For example, in the lead-up to the 2018 midterm elections, we saw an opportunity to rally the entertainment community to help shift the way we think about voting, and ultimately increase voter turnout.

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The CAA Foundation led the formation of a coalition of entertainment, studio, distribution, and retail companies to launch “I am a voter,” a campaign movement dedicated to increasing voter turnout in the 2018 midterm elections and beyond. The combined efforts of the nonprofit organizations with our connectivity to influential companies and individuals enabled us to supercharge the message around voter registration and participation.

Our work resulted in $5 million of donated ad space and a multifaceted social media campaign featuring high-profile personalities, athletes, and everyday citizens, generating 13 billion impressions. We activated in retail and used brands to help carry the message across the country through unique.

The CAA Foundation

Since launching in 1995, the CAA Foundation has become a leader in the entertainment community on education, the environment, and health and social issues.

The CAA Foundation harnesses the power and reach of the entertainment industry to create positive social change by forging strategic partnerships, encouraging volunteerism, making financial contributions, stimulating public awareness, and providing in-kind donations.

An Inconvenient Truth, 2006

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The CAA Foundation has a long history of bringing together individuals and organizations that might not have initially seen the mutual benefits of collaborating.

With access to CAA’s global network of resources and relationships, CAA Foundation has a long history of bringing together individuals and organizations that might not have initially seen the mutual benefits of collaborating. We do this in several ways — by connecting research to entertainment, clients to causes, and the broader industry with social issues.

With the 2004 climate change blockbuster feature film, The Day After Tomorrow, for example, CAA used our convening power to bring environmental scientists into the fold. The goal was to help them see the teachable moment this “popcorn” film would create in the public discourse. We sent them the script in advance of the film’s release and noted that this film could help put climate change on the public agenda in a meaningful way. We persuaded them to use this fiction to tell the true science of climate change. While the movie would go on to receive plenty of press in the arts and leisure sections of newspapers and magazines, the environmentalists could work with the science writers to connect the two stories in the same editions. For the first time, environmentalists realized the power and potential of popular culture in supporting their work.

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products. We built a state-of-the-art text platform, which was used by tens of thousands of individuals across the country and provided information on local elections, polling place locations, and ballot information.

Our proximity to contemporary culture also enables us to connect the industry as a whole to current issues. For example, the first meeting for TIME’S UP was organized and held in CAA’s office. In October of 2017, after a slew of allegations of sexual misconduct within the entertainment industry and beyond, we went to work to not let this crisis pass without significant and fundamental change. At the very first meeting, we made sure we assembled the people we convened were women of color, and we assumed there was also the desire for positive change, then to lead by ego and instead lead by service, just as we have since day one. That is not only limited to our clients: every five business days, we offer our employees the opportunity to participate in some act of community service, just as we have since day one. Our philosophy is: to lead is to serve.

The CAA Foundation

The Foundation provides additional monetary and in-kind support for the schools and nonprofit organizations with which they work. In 2017:

- 12,557 students were served directly through the Foundation’s programs at partner schools.
- 120 volunteers traveled to Haiti, New Orleans, the Rockaways, and Tuscaloosa to help provide resources and guide a community recovering from natural disasters.
- 183 days were volunteering in the community.

We went to work to not let this crisis pass without significant and fundamental change.

While the work of the CAA Foundation has been going on for decades, its central mission has not changed. Today, our goal is still to make it as easy as possible for people to do the right thing. That is not only limited to our clients: every five business days, we offer our employees the opportunity to participate in some act of community service, just as we have since day one. Our philosophy is: to lead is to serve.

What has changed is that the entertainment industry, businesses, and high-profile individuals have become more purposeful about the ways in which they participate in social justice. This has become so visible and so prevalent; we feel that people now equate the idea of a successful life with having the ability to serve others.

Looking at the younger generations who have grown up in this new culture is also inspiring. They are tuned-in to the social issues of our time. By regularly protesting and marching with their peers, they self-identify as activists. We are incredibly proud to be playing our part in cultivating and nourishing that atmosphere — and if this generation is any indication of what lies ahead for this field and for this work, we expect great things.

The Bigger Picture

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Community Spirit

Many hands make light work. Beadie Finzi discusses why it is essential to convene independent documentary filmmakers with good partners to help their work have the greatest possible impact.

“How can we respond to the changing needs of independent filmmakers?”

Bringing together the documentary community with civil society and forging new partnerships to support funding, distribution, and impact campaigns is an essential part of this strategy. For this reason, organizing convening is a huge focus for us. In particular, our convening primarily focus on four groups: independent filmmakers who want to understand how their films can have impact beyond a traditional distribution cycle, the burgeoning community of global impact producers who are forging a new professional class, foundations and philanthropists who are disc-curious, and leasing NGOs and organizations who recognize how powerful media can be and wonder how to partner. Sometimes we bring them all together and sometimes we convene them as individual communities, and these gatherings range from informal to theatrical.

As one of the Doc Society Foundation Directors, my prime area of focus is Good Pitch. Since 2009, this annual program has been bringing together documentary filmmakers with foundations, NGOs, filmmakers and social and media activists, and media around social and environmental issues. Our aim is to forge coalitions and campaigns that are good for the films and good for those partners.

We decided to redirect our resources in the US toward convening at the city and state level.

Each annual cycle includes Impact Labs for the participating filmmakers to devise an impact strategy for their feature docs. Then comes six months of deep outreach to potential allies, before the whole cycle culminates in a live event, featuring several hundred changemakers from across civil society. The event is a day of connections and radical collaboration, which forges new alliances and raises financing for documentary productions and their impact campaigns — over $30 million at the last count.

This model is now well-proven to work across continents and cultures. In addition to annual hub programs in Europe and in the United States, we have now successfully shared the model with local coalitions in South Africa, Canada, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Tanzania, Argentina, Australia and Kenya, with new programs in development in Brazil, and in the MENA and Pacific regions.

The Doc Impact Award

The Doc Impact Award is first and foremost a way to celebrate the power of documentary filmmaking to drive action. It is an award for documentary filmmakers to capture and articulate evidence of impact. Impact-Aware filmmakers have created significant and measurable social or environmental impact. Past winners include The Act of Killing, Ai Weiwei, Blackfish, Burundi: Viva l’Egalité, Chasing Ice, Chocolate, Food Chain, and Shuga.

This year, Impact Award will be awarded to a documentary film as a result of Good Pitch’s convening work. We can work with filmmakers anywhere in the world to help them create the conditions that are good for the partner and partners they need to flourish, to connect with the organizations who are forging a new professional class of impact producers, and to partner. Sometimes we bring them as individual communities, and these gatherings range from informal to theatrical.

While we have seen great success with national and continental editions of Good Pitch, the dramatic global political events of the last three years demanded soul searching amongst media makers and support organizations like ourselves. Following the 2016 US Presidential election, we decided to redirect our resources in the US toward convening at the city and state level, helping lift up stories missing from the news cycle — and so Good Pitch Local was born.

Good Pitch Local is a day-long networking event showcasing short-form nonfiction media projects that are deeply relevant to that community. This is where artists and storytellers connect with local allies — from lawyers, to musicians, local journalists, or community foundations — to find the resources they need to get their work made and seen. A more rough and ready convening, Good Pitch Local costs less and can happen faster, and so Good Pitch Local was born.

“Hell yes!” The documentary community is proudly tangential and highly entrepreneurial. We have had to be. But we live in complex and challenging times, and so anything, we need to do more of it — creating purposeful gatherings that bring us together, to offer solidarity and a chance to learn. We must keep asking the question — is what we are doing most useful? — and, if not, what can we do to make it more effective? — and then let’s do that.”

Beadie Finzi

Director, Doc Society

At its core, Doc Society is an organization that’s committed to supporting independent documentary filmmakers and the extraordinary films they create. We want to help them realize their vision, to connect them with the audiences and partners they need to flourish, and to help their work have the biggest impact possible.

How do we do this? With direct funding for documentary films and mentorship of individual filmmakers but also through a series of programmatic interventions designed to help build capacity and grow resources for the whole field. From the Doc Impact Award to Doc Academy, Safe + Secure to Good Pitch, some of these projects are wholly experimental, some more mature. The trick is to be in constant learning mode, a state of permanent inquiry, asking ourselves, “Is what we’re doing most useful?” and, if not, what can we do to make it more effective? — and then let’s do that.”

Let’s be clear — we are not alone. Doc Society exists in a rich soup of collaborations and peers delivering really good work. The US in particular has such a rich ecology. True/False, Firelight Media and Chicago Media Project provide the community with deep professional development. We have sophisticated and strategic funders like Fledgling and Perspectiver Fund. We are spoiled for choice with world-class festivals from Sundance to True/False.

When people ask me does convening work, my answer is “hell yes!” The documentary community is proudly tangential and highly entrepreneurial. We have had to be. But we live in complex and challenging times, and so anything, we need to do more of it — creating purposeful gatherings that bring us together, to offer solidarity and a chance to learn. We must keep asking the question — is what we are doing most useful?”
Filmmakers alone would struggle to achieve this impact, even with the best intentions of its world. It is up to us, as a program, to help coordinate the respective talents of the filmmaker and the social entrepreneur. The idea is that a collaborative model that leverages the respective talents of the filmmaker and the social entrepreneur can reach wider audiences and find pathways to a better world. The first convened takes place at the Sundance Film Festival. Here, we work to support the creation of compelling film and digital projects by bringing independent filmmakers into direct dialogue and in partnership with Skoll-Awarded Social Entrepreneurs. The goal is to build a network of storytellers and entrepreneurs, to enhance story skills, and to promote the exchange of knowledge within our community. The Sundance Filmmaker Labs, in part because the filmmakers often take film and digital projects to the Sundance Film Festival. Here, we work to support the creation of compelling film and digital projects by bringing independent filmmakers into direct dialogue and in partnership with Skoll-Awarded Social Entrepreneurs. The goal is to build a network of storytellers and entrepreneurs, to enhance story skills, and to promote the exchange of knowledge within our community. The Legends of the Vagabond King of Lagos In this script and feature film, a Nigerian community activist answers a vast sum of corruption money and sets out to use the dirty cash to upgrade his community. However, he inadvertently invites many more problems than he solves. The Bigger Picture The Sundance Filmmaker Labs, in part because the filmmakers often bring their films and digital projects to the Sundance Film Festival. Here, we work to support the creation of compelling film and digital projects by bringing independent filmmakers into direct dialogue and in partnership with Skoll-Awarded Social Entrepreneurs. The goal is to build a network of storytellers and entrepreneurs, to enhance story skills, and to promote the exchange of knowledge within our community. The Sundance Filmmaker Labs, in part because the filmmakers often bring their films and digital projects to the Sundance Film Festival. Here, we work to support the creation of compelling film and digital projects by bringing independent filmmakers into direct dialogue and in partnership with Skoll-Awarded Social Entrepreneurs. The goal is to build a network of storytellers and entrepreneurs, to enhance story skills, and to promote the exchange of knowledge within our community. The Legends of the Vagabond King of Lagos In this script and feature film, a Nigerian community activist answers a vast sum of corruption money and sets out to use the dirty cash to upgrade his community. However, he inadvertently invites many more problems than he solves. The Bigger Picture The Sundance Filmmaker Labs, in part because the filmmakers often bring their films and digital projects to the Sundance Film Festival. Here, we work to support the creation of compelling film and digital projects by bringing independent filmmakers into direct dialogue and in partnership with Skoll-Awarded Social Entrepreneurs. The goal is to build a network of storytellers and entrepreneurs, to enhance story skills, and to promote the exchange of knowledge within our community. The Sundance Filmmaker Labs, in part because the filmmakers often bring their films and digital projects to the Sundance Film Festival. Here, we work to support the creation of compelling film and digital projects by bringing independent filmmakers into direct dialogue and in partnership with Skoll-Awarded Social Entrepreneurs. The goal is to build a network of storytellers and entrepreneurs, to enhance story skills, and to promote the exchange of knowledge within our community. The Legends of the Vagabond King of Lagos In this script and feature film, a Nigerian community activist answers a vast sum of corruption money and sets out to use the dirty cash to upgrade his community. However, he inadvertently invites many more problems than he solves. The Bigger Picture
Know it won’t be easy, but at least you’ll never be bored!

Social impact filmmakers face a myriad of challenges as they endeavor to give voice to stories that deserve to be heard — stories that identify problems that need to be solved. Over the past few years, we have seen an increase in the number of festivals that showcase cause-oriented films — festivals like TrueTales, Human Rights Watch Film Festival, and the big staples like Sundance. Filmmakers can now also apply for growing numbers of funding circles for support — like those offered by Doc Society or Impact Partners — and seek alternative forms of online distribution, making it easier than ever before to get the stories to audiences.

To those who wish to venture into the world of social impact entertainment, we advise that before you start, figure out the impact you want to create. Clarity counts. Check out organizations that could benefit from your film and explore all the possible outlets that may be interested in what you produce. Then, reach out to others who have traveled the same road and learn from their mistakes. Know it won’t be easy, but at least you’ll never be bored!

As you venture forth, we suggest that you tape these words by Winston Churchill onto your refrigerator and read them every day: “Never give in, never, never, never.” Your audience awaits.

Creative Visions
Creative Visions is an organization made up of “creative activists,” whose mission it is to spark awareness of critical issues and ignite change through impact, media, art, and technology.

Creative-activist Program Grants
The Creative-activist Program (CAP) has incubated over 360 projects and productions, from documentaries and feature films distributed on major networks, to photography exhibitions and theater projects that fuel a national conversation about pressing issues.

CAP projects have created significant impact and policy changes in topics of human rights, women and girls’ empowerment, the environment, and youth education.

Creative Visions
Creative Visions is a non-profit organization that offers fiscal sponsorship, mentoring, funding assistance, and development to emerging, high-potential filmmakers, and nurtures social impact films that have raised awareness due to a surge in the number of social impact entertainment activists. Since the outset of our goal was to make films

About “Creative Visions” — www.creativevisions.org

To find out about our fiscal sponsorship program — visions-fiscal-sponsorship-program.

To connect with our creative-activist network — creativevisions.org/creative-activist-network-malibu-ca.

Lamellia Harmonic
Lamellia Harmonic follows the Regal Organization of Cutters, a Panamanian musical group that plays instruments made entirely out of garbage. When their story was told, the orchestra’sintonations were released in the world, and the international crowd became aware of the natural disaster strikes their country, music director Favio made it using the orchestra intact and provide a source of hope for their future.

Living on One Dollar
Living on One Dollar is a tool and a test to help empower the extreme poor to take control of their lives. The film follows the story of four young friends who set out to see if just one dollar a day for eight weeks in rural Guatemala. They battle hunger, parasites and the realization that there are no easy answers. Yet, the generosity and strength of Rosa, 20-year-old woman, and Chino, a 12-year-old boy gives them resilient hope that there is a way to survive. The resulting natural disaster strikes their country, music director Favio makes it using the orchestra intact and provide a source of hope for their future.

The Truth Shall Set Us Free
Creative Visions incubates and nurtures social impact stories. Kathy Eldon and Amy Eldon Turteltaub helm the organization that empowers filmmakers to tell stories that matter.

Kathy Eldon
Journalist, author, producer / founder, Creative Visions Foundation

Amy Eldon Turteltaub
Creative film producer, author and co-founder of Creative Visions Foundation

Since we launched our nonprofit organization, Creative Visions, we have supported more than 350 projects and productions in 35 countries, impacting more than 100 million people.

We focus on supporting “creative activists” who use media and the arts to raise awareness of critical issues and ignite positive change.

The foundation for our organization was set in 1990 when we founded Creative Visions Productions in London. From the outset our goal was to make films about issues we felt were important. We wanted our movies to spark a desire in audiences to get involved.

In 1993 Dan Eldon, our 22-year-old son and brother, was killed while working as a Reuters photographer in Somalia. Determined to raise awareness of the challenges faced by frontline journalists, we moved to Los Angeles to make a film on the subject. Together, as a mother-daughter team, we pitched an idea we had developed about Dan and his friends to TBS. In 1997 our documentary, Dying to Tell the Story, premiered at the United Nations. Accompanied by an innovative website and a high school curriculum, the film was distributed to 90 countries and triggered major public awareness of the true cost of this type of work, and of the huge risks facing freelance journalists.

After producing four more films complete with websites, curriculums, and social impact campaigns for major networks, we decided to use our nonprofit to aid other aspiring filmmakers. We wanted to help develop and distribute their films and manage social impact campaigns that would change lives around them.

Today, Creative Visions is globally recognized for its accelerator and incubator programs that offer fiscal sponsorship, mentoring, funding assistance, and development and production resources.

Over the past few years we have prioritized supporting social impact stories focused on refugees and immigration, women and girls’ empowerment, and the environment. This year we are launching a Media Impact Fund that will offer funding to emerging, high-potential filmmakers, and provide emergency funding to enable storytellers to produce critical and timely stories.

Although it’s notoriously difficult to measure the impact of social impact entertainment, over the past two decades we have seen a major shift in public awareness around pressing social, environmental, and humanitarian issues. We believe this is due to a surge in the number of social impact films that have raised awareness around important issues, triggered a desire in people to get involved, and influenced policy and public opinion. Creative Visions incubated many of these high-impact SE film projects.

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The idea of having impact on social justice topics through popular culture has taken on a new moment, as some foundations strive to harness the power of the entertainment industry as a part of a larger set of integrated approaches. In particular, strategies involving commercial film and television hold great promise, but foundations must also stay focused on where the need is greatest and the intervention most strategic. Ford Foundation is at the forefront of this exploration and many new initiatives are being supported by JustFilms, Ford’s signature moving image strategy.

Ford Foundation has long had a commitment to independent cinematic documentary as the genre traditionally seen as the most capable of providing transformative narratives that reflect lived reality. Launched in 2001, JustFilms is the latest and most ambitious iteration of this commitment. JustFilms’ mandate is to support nonfiction filmmakers around the world who center the voices and experiences of those most affected by inequality. This requires a strong ecosystem, and in 2017, I used Ford’s multi-year funding approach called BUILD to launch JustFilms Film Network. Working with staff in Ford’s regional offices, ultimately this network will support 15 social justice documentary organizations around the world with a $2 million, five-year commitment. The cohort is exploring with JustFilms how such networks, if networked, can strengthen creative nonfiction cinema at a time when creative and free expression is being challenged widely.

JustFilms in 2018, the day before the start of the Sundance Film Festival, the Ford Foundation announced a five-year, $50M initiative to help JustFilms support its new generation of visionary women leaders across the world.

The JustFilms initiative was planned to invest $50M over the five years to go to support and expand the programming of ‘visionary women leaders’ and in creating documentaries with vision and purpose, but also to help fund initiatives to make their visions or reach audiences.

Incorporating JustFilms into the Ford Foundation’s larger $3B innovation strategy, enabling the organization to challenge the ways foundations think, work and fund. This includes infusing social justice and equity thinking into our everyday work, not just our programs. This will help ensure that all the innovations that come from the foundation’s portfolio are rooted in the recognition that social justice is not just another social issue, it is the organizing principle of our work.

Ford Foundation’s signature moving image strategy, JustFilms, is often an early funder in transformative narratives that reflect lived reality. As an example, JustFilms’ support of Gimlet Media’s Citizenfour — about Edward Snowden and the leaking of NSA surveillance activities, passed the USA Freedom Act in 2015 to reframe the conversation about online privacy, compared to one year earlier. 300% more online searches for “NSA surveillance” were compared to one year earlier. 64% of users were more concerned about online privacy than they were about privacy in their phones. Of those, 39% had taken steps to protect their online privacy after the film was released, and 60% had heard of Edward Snowden. Of those, 39% had taken steps to protect their online privacy after the film was released.

JustFilms impact	After Citizenfour’s release, Google search results for “NSA Surveillance” increased 200% and “NSA surveillance” increased 300%.

“NSA Surveillance”

Edward Snowden

In 2011, the day before the start of the Sundance Film Festival, the Ford Foundation launched the JustFilms initiative to help fund and support a new generation of visionary women leaders across the world.

Supporting these groundbreaking initiatives since their inception is part of an effort to build capacity, expertise, and impact by aligning social justice leadership, philanthropy, entertainment, and justice-oriented moving image creators who are helping to build the momentum needed to guide a just transition to more sustainable and equitable societies.

We live in deep challenging times which call for radical reimagining and powerful approaches, and in designing strategies, I keep in mind that social change processes are always human processes. They are not linear or predictable and, in many cases, they are not fully foreseeable. Examples of social impact through documentary and other forms of entertainment show how clear and effective it does exist, but they are not the rule. Rather, the essential and transformative is storytelling that allows us to see the unknown, to understand and empower those who are being marginalized and ignored, and to propose new forms and perspectives that can fundamentally change our understanding of the complex issues of our time.

174 The State of SIE

175

176

ABBY Alliance

JustFilms launched the ABBY Alliance to establish a creative home for artists, activists, and audiences to come together to create and experience stories that advance social change. The ABBY Alliance is also an incubator for set of underrepresented communities by bringing together filmmakers and people of color with the resources they need to ensure that diverse perspectives have a platform.

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Pivotal Funding

Impact Partners was born of funding models that didn’t work. Geralyn Dreyfous explains how looking to venture capitalists gave them inspiration for their unique model of equity investing for social impact films.

I got into filmmaking in 2000 with The Day My God Died. This was a time when films were starting to be used as tools for social change, and documentaries, such as Lee Hirsch’s Amandla, had taken $3.5 million at the box office. HBO film that was eventually sold to in 2004. This was an wrong with the system after releasing thing, then came aboard. We were need that the money leaving the system is a unique model of equity investing for social impact film. As a first-time filmmaker, we didn’t have the proper contracts in place, the money to complete this film but we didn’t have the proper contracts in place, it kept costing more, and we had to repeatedly go to the investors to bail it out. We learned that we shouldn’t release large amounts of money until the whole budget is raised and that we must have systems in place that can help filmmakers to account.

The next film I was involved in, Living in Emergency, was an abysmal failure, but it taught me a lot. We were working with a first-time filmmaker, we didn’t have the proper contracts in place, it kept costing more, and we had to repeatedly go to the investors to bail it out. We learned that we shouldn’t release large amounts of money until the whole budget is raised and that we must have systems in place that can help filmmakers to account.

However, if the market doesn’t bear and they only return 20 cents on the dollar, that’s still fine because it’s better than zero. As for when things go wrong — we’re not afraid when that happens, nor do we want our filmmakers to be. It can be a great example of this. It began as a film about doping in cycling and turned into one about the largest doping scandal in sports, with its legal character, a whistleblower, becoming a target for assassination by the Russian government. Some people may have pulled out when the stakes got too high, but we capitalized. We got legal counsel, Homeland Security involved, and we did our best legal counsel. Again, it was our ability to pivot that allowed us to capitalize on an opportunity that many others would have run from.

Equity investing was seen as controversial at first; we were accused of profiting off the back of suffering artists. But as one of our founding members, the venture capitalist Jim Swartz, has argued, filmmakers are essentially entrepreneurs — they spend things before other people. We can help them by making films faster and by introducing the fiscal discipline into the process. By amortizing the risks, we can accelerate the flow of capital to these cultural entrepreneurs. That said, we tell our investors that if your primary motivation is pure profit, you’re likely in the wrong place. But if you’re looking to make a real difference in the world, then come aboard. We want to leverage all of the resources our investors can provide: distribution, access to influential networks, even setting up screenings that can change policy. Their time and talents are ultimately worth more to us than their checks alone.

The fact is these kinds of social impact documentaries provide a huge public service. You have to remember that you typically spend three years and a million dollars making a film that you can see at a community screening for free, or on Netflix, or at a theater for 10 dollars. That’s a lot of social innovation — it’s practically a miracle! But how do we get audiences to hear about these films? The distribution and the targeting of audiences are the next frontier, and we still haven’t figured that out yet.

We got the Justice Department and we got the Justice Department and the targeting of audiences are the next frontier, and we still haven’t figured that out yet.

No one person can make and distribute a film, so we’re building communities that learn from each other. We tell potential investors that documentary film has the unique ability to align with, and amplify, something that they already care about — provided they work with people that understand good storytelling. For them, it boils down to a choice. They can create the same back office in their foundations to search for saleable films, staffing this for around $300,000 a year, or they can pay us $25,000 a year to cover our overhead. That way, they drive our expertise and avoid reinventing the wheel. They can test the waters and make sure any mistakes they make are not million-dollar mistakes but, say, $25,000 mistakes.

Documentary film, and by extension the field of social impact entertainment, is one of those areas where it makes sense to pool your resources and your risk. The new model can be a story that changes the world and cuts through the noise and clutter like nothing else.

Icarus, for example, won multiple Sundance awards, was nominated for an Academy Award® for Best Documentary Feature, and was a huge box office hit. In 2017, Impact spent $5M+ on various films, including our flagship film and record-breaking deal at Sundance — Netflix bought the U.S. and Canadian theatrical rights for $4M. Since then, Netflix has purchased five documentary films. In 2018, we made the now record-breaking deal at Sundance — Netflix bought the U.S. and Canadian theatrical rights for $4M. The deal made a huge impact on the film industry, and our documentary partners made a huge impact on the film industry.


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A compelling story is at the core of social impact entertainment, but as Diana Barrett explains, to increase its impact a film’s production value has to be equal to its subject in terms of quality.

Financing a film is always difficult, especially in the social impact entertainment space. While it has become easier to make a documentary film, both short form and long form, many films with the potential to really make a difference around an important issue never do so. Our organization exists to increase the chances that a well-made and compelling film has significant outreach potential; that it comes to making an impact. As our application process can take a while, we offer another route for filmmakers who need to get their work out faster.

The Fledgling Fund has awarded grants to over 160 films and raised over $4 million into communities that needed their work out faster. We offer another route for filmmakers to get their work out faster.

The Stop the Violence community tour took Sin by Silence directly into communities that needed to hear their message.

Diana Barrett
Founder and President, Fledgling Fund

**The Sentence**

First-time filmmaker Busy Walde's film, The Sentence tells the story of Linda Cindy Shank, a mother of three who received a 15-year mandatory prison sentence for conspiring crimes related to her deceased ex-boyfriend’s crimes. The documentary offers a look at the consequences of mandatory minimum sentencing and received critical acclaim when it premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival.

**The Sentence**

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<th>36,546 petitions</th>
<th>1,027 granted</th>
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**Sin by Silence**

From behind prison walls, Sin by Silence reveals the story of rehabilitation efforts in the California prison system through first-hand accounts from inmates, prison staff, and others. The film premiered at the Cleveland International Film Festival in March 2009.

Sin by Silence was broadcast on Democracy Channel and reached 2.2 million viewers. We helped provide funding for social impact campaigns in the 13 states considering legislation. In addition to 140 tour events, 427 host-screenings were ordered and there were 258 events hosted on university campuses. In the end, bills that would empower abuse survivors in court were passed in several states. In California, two of the bills named the “Sin by Silence Bills.”

Raising the public’s awareness of an issue can have a profound effect. With the documentary, The Sentence we wanted to highlight the issue of mandatory minimum sentencing, which most Americans don’t have a clue about. This documentary tells the story of Cynthia Shank, a woman charged with conspiring crimes after she had failed to report that her then-boyfriend was dealing drugs.

Mandatory minimum sentencing laws dictate that judges sentence offenders to a minimum, specified amount of time in jail for a specific crime. This meant that Shank—who had since married and had three children—was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2008. President Obama received 38,000 requests for clemency during his tenure. Before leaving office, he granted almost 2,000 of these requests, many of which were related to mandatory minimum sentencing.

Shank was one of them, and she was released on March 22nd, 2017.

Timing is an important factor when it comes to making an impact. As our application process can take a while, we offer another route for filmmakers who need to get their work out faster.

The Rapid Deployment Fund was created in response to our turbulent political climate, so that issues can be addressed more quickly than the normal funding process would allow.

The initiative provides grants of $2,500 to $10,000 to support short nonfiction films or other visual stories that can be completed and distributed quickly. Sometimes we’re able to supply the money overnight, though it tends to take longer when we’re trying to push a project to advance that organization’s agenda.

We also look for applicants that have proven engagement with outside partners; they need to talk to us before they’ve spoken to and how their film would help to advance that organization’s agenda. We also like to know how much money the filmmakers think they need to spend, if a project already has financial backing or not, and where else that backing might be coming from. We are funding work before it has begun, so we usually only work with experienced filmmakers.

Through our funding, our research, and the partnerships we offer online, we aim to provide the right support at the right time for issues that are poised for action. We believe film is a language, and if you can speak it in front of the right people, it has the power to educate, engage, and mobilize. By narrating this language and those that speak it, we hope to see more work have a profound social effect.

Clemency statistics

38,000 applications were received during the Obama years (2009–2017) and 1,027 were granted.

Sin by Silence

[Clemency: Barack Obama](https://www.justice.gov/pardon/clemency-statistics#obama)

“Case Study: Sin by Silence.”

“Rapid Story Deployment Fund – Highlights and Lessons.”

“The Bigger Picture

“Fledgling Provides Over $400,000 in Outreach and Engagement Funding in 2017.”

“Fledgling Fund’s Rapid Story Deployment Fund.”

Rapid Story Deployment Fund has awarded $400,000 in grants, across 40 projects from its inception in 2016, through December 2018.

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Fledgling Fund has supported more than $650,000 in Outreach and Engagement grant funding, spread across 20 documentary film projects.

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The Power of Partnerships

For Sandy Herz it’s clear that the most successful SE projects bring together multiple stakeholders. What’s more, creating lasting change can often mean joining forces with unlikely allies. 

Sandy Herz
Director of Global Partnerships
Skoll Foundation

At its heart, the field of social impact entertainment is a collaborative space.

For our projects to bring about lasting change in the world, we need to join forces with unlikely allies, develop trust, share control, and build toward opportunities for mutual benefit. This is precisely why the most successful SE projects tend to have multiple funders and stakeholders. Everyone brings something different to the table—from funding, networks and expertise to impact and platforms that reach new audiences—all of which are necessary for success.

As Director of Global Partnerships at the Skoll Foundation, I work to ensure we engage the right partners to drive large-scale social change by investing in, connecting, and catalyzing social entrepreneurs solving the world’s most pressing problems. We focus on social entrepreneurs because we believe they offer society a new way of operating, and a chance to fundamentally shift the systems that create and maintain global challenges like climate change and poverty. Our efforts range from funding and convening, to collaborating and storytelling. Partnerships are essential for outsized impact, especially in the social impact entertainment space.

According to research from the London School of Economics,

"As the immediate crisis recedes, the long-term impact depends on the ability of social sector organizations and partners to rebuild and rejuvenate, and to address the root causes of the crisis. This requires the commitment of governments, international agencies, and the private sector.

At the Skoll World Forum..."
Amplifying impact

Partnerships are imperative to creating change.
Wendy Cohen explains the importance of impact campaigns to making a difference.

Independent film is anything but independent. If your goal in making your film is to drive meaningful and memorable change, you’re going to need a lot of help and strong partnerships. You have to find productive and rewarding ways to get the film in front of the community you want to impact. And that’s where we come in.

Picture Motion, and companies like us, are known as impact consultants—or producers—just like I think of us as bridge-builders. If you imagine a Venn diagram of the film world and the nonprofit, community-organizing world, we sit right in the middle. We make sure a film has the largest possible audience and makes the greatest possible impact.

We start every project by asking all of the stakeholders—the filmmakers, the distributors, the partners, the producers—what their impact goals are. Usually, a filmmaker has a sense of the change they want to see happen, whether it’s legislation change, behavior change, or sometimes even opening hearts and minds. At this stage it’s also essential to be honest about the campaign’s budget and the time we have together, so we can be realistic about what we can do. Money isn’t always the key to making an impact, but you have to be realistic about the team it takes to bring your ideas to life. Perhaps most important is creating a film, a story, that is high-quality, engaging, and well-told. If the community you’re hoping to engage loves your movie, you will likely have a successful campaign.

Once we have clear goals from the team, we dive in and learn about the issue at hand at this moment in time. We think of ourselves as the experts at finding the experts. We’ll make phone calls to the nonprofits, activists, professors—and we do a lot of listening. Who is already working on this issue? Where can the film make the most impact? Who are the people who might think differently if they experience this film? Those phone calls and meetings are the most important part of our job.

This is where we become the bridge-builders, because now we understand the goals and intentions of both sides. We never just ask a partner to promote a film and sell tickets for us, we make sure that we are helping them meet their goals as well. How can the film support their strategy? Can they be involved in the press around the movie? Can they be speakers at events? Can their strategy be amplified in the press around the movie? Can they be involved in the campaign’s budget and the time we have together, so we can be realistic about what we can do. Money isn’t always the key to making an impact, but you have to be realistic about the team it takes to bring your ideas to life. Perhaps most important is creating a film, a story, that is high-quality, engaging, and well-told. If the community you’re hoping to engage loves your movie, you will likely have a successful campaign.

Middle of Nowhere

When the audience is eight years in prison, really drop out of medical school in order to focus on her husband’s well-being while he’s incarcerated—leading her on a journey of self-discovery in the process.

We focus on leaving the audience with a memorable change, you’re goal in making your film successfully.

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You have to find productive and rewarding ways to get the film in front of the community you want to impact. And that’s where we come in.

Picture Motion, and companies like us, are known as impact consultants—or producers—just like I think of us as bridge-builders. If you imagine a Venn diagram of the film world and the nonprofit, community-organizing world, we sit right in the middle. We make sure a film has the largest possible audience and makes the greatest possible impact.

We start every project by asking all of the stakeholders—the filmmakers, the distributors, the partners, the producers—what their impact goals are. Usually, a filmmaker has a sense of the change they want to see happen, whether it’s legislation change, behavior change, or sometimes even opening hearts and minds. At this stage it’s also essential to be honest about the campaign’s budget and the time we have together, so we can be realistic about what we can do. Money isn’t always the key to making an impact, but you have to be realistic about the team it takes to bring your ideas to life. Perhaps most important is creating a film, a story, that is high-quality, engaging, and well-told. If the community you’re hoping to engage loves your movie, you will likely have a successful campaign.

Middle of Nowhere

When the audience is eight years in prison, really drop out of medical school in order to focus on her husband’s well-being while he’s incarcerated—leading her on a journey of self-discovery in the process.

We focus on leaving the audience with a memorable change, you’re goal in making your film successfully.

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Convenings Calendar

The SIE landscape is vast and ever changing. As we built this report, we began the process of putting together a list of convenings within the social impact entertainment space. The following calendar is only a preliminary snapshot of events and meant to be a jumping off point for anyone looking to connect with others within the entertainment industry for whom social change is the primary concern. To help us build this further or correct anything we may have missed, visit www.thestateofsie.com

### March 2019

- March 7–9, 2019
  **Story Movements**
  American University Center for Media & Social Impact, Washington, D.C.
  creahimpact.org/event/story-movements/2019-

- March 8–11, 2019
  **Spark Change Summit**
  The Skoll Center for Social Impact Entertainment, Creative Visions and Participant Media, Los Angeles, CA
  sparkchange.com

- March 8–13, 2019
  **SXSW Social and Global Impact Track**
  SXSW, Austin, TX
  www.sxsw.com/conference/social-and-global-impact

- March 9–12, 2019
  **Good Pitch Local**
  Doc Society, Karnataka, India
  goodpitch.org/events/gplka18

- March 15–25, 2019
  **Socially Relevant Film Festival**
  Socially Relevant Film Festival, New York, NY
  sociallyrelevant.org

- March 20–21, 2019
  **CPh: DOX**
  Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, Copenhagen, Denmark
  cphdox.dk/en/

- April 2019

  - April 1–4, 2019
    **It’s All True International Documentary Film Festival**
    Government of the State of São Paulo and Brazil Ministry of Culture, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
    etiadoc.com.br/itacite/brasil

  - April 9–12, 2019
    **Skoll World Forum**
    The Skoll Foundation, Oxford, England
    skoll.org/skoll-world-forum

  - April 15–19, 2019
    **TED Conference**
    TED, Vancouver, Canada
    ted.com/talks/jean-claude-van-vincent

  - April 25–May 4, 2019
    **Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival**
    Hot Docs, Toronto, Canada
    hotdocs.ca

  - April 26–May 2, 2019
    **Milken Institute Global Conference**
    Milken Institute, Los Angeles, CA
    milkeninstitute.org/events/conferences/global-conference/2019

- May 2019

  - May, 2019
    **Webby Awards**
    International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences, New York, NY
    webbyawards.com

  - May 4–7, 2019
    **GLAAD Media Awards**
    GLAAD, New York, NY
    glaad.org/mediaawards

  - May 20–25, 2019
    **Cannes Film Festival**
    Festival de Cannes, France
    festival-cannes.com/en

  - May 20–21, 2019
    **Environmental Media Association Impact Summit**
    Environmental Media Association, Los Angeles, CA
    ema.org/impactsummit2019

- June 2019

  - May, 2019
    **Best of Pitch**
    Mashable, New York, NY
    mashable.com/sgs/

  - September, 2019
    **Mashable Social Good Summit**
    Mashable, New York, NY
    mashable.com/sgs/

  - September, 2019
    **Media for Social Impact Summit**
    PVBLIC, New York, NY
    public.org/mediasocialimpact

  - September 5, 2019
    **Good Pitch Indonesia**
    Doc Society, Jakarta, Indonesia
    goodpitch.org/events/gplka18

  - September 21–27, 2019
    **Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival & Conservation Summit**
    Jackson Hole, Wyoming
    jacksonholewildlifefilmfestival.org

- October 2019

  - June 25–27, 2019
    **Encounters Film Festival**
    Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa
    encounters.co.za

  - June 27–29, 2019
    **Games for Change Festival**
    Games for Change, New York, NY
    gamesforchange.org

  - June 27–29, 2019
    **Awards**
    American Film Institute, Washington, D.C.
    afi.com/videos/default.aspx

  - July 20–21, 2019
    ** Aspen Ideas Festival**
    Aspen Institute & The Atlantic, Aspen, CO
    aspenideas.org

  - September, 2019
    **Reelworld Film Festival**
    Reelworld, Toronto, Canada
    reelworld.ca

  - November, 2019
    **IDFA International Documentary Film Festival**
    Amsterdam, Netherlands
    ida.org

  - November, 2019
    **IDFA International Documentary Film Festival**
    Amsterdam, Netherlands
    ida.org

- December 2019

  - December, 2019
    **IDB Documentary Awards**
    International Documentary Association, Los Angeles, CA
    documentary.org/awards

- October 2019

  - October, 2019
    **Fast Company Innovation Festival**
    Fast Company, New York, NY
    events.fastcompany.com/fastcompany

- October, 2019

  - October, 2019
    **IDB Documentary Awards**
    International Documentary Association, Los Angeles, CA
    documentary.org/awards

- October, 2019

  - October, 2019
    **Defina American Film Festival**
    Defina American, TBD
    definaamerican.com/festival

- October, 2019

  - October, 2019
    **Ft.Bbl Live Events**
    Forbes, Various Cities Worldwide
    forbes.com/fortunebusiness/conference

- October, 2019

  - October, 2019
    ** humanity Watch Film Festival**
    Humans Rights Watch, Various Cities Worldwide
    humanrights.org

- November, 2019

  - November, 2019
    **AFI Fest**
    American Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA
    afi.com/afi-fest/index.aspx

- November, 2019

  - November, 2019
    **Variety Inclusion Summit**
    Variety, Los Angeles, CA
    events.variety.com

- November, 2019

  - November, 2019
    **IDFA International Documentary Film Festival**
    Amsterdam (IDFA), Amsterdam, Netherlands
    ida.org

- November, 2019

  - November, 2019
    **Tedxwomen**
    TED, TBD
    ted.com.conference/tedxwomen/ special-events/women

### Other notable events

- Agents of Change Summit
  Agents of Change, San Diego, CA
  agentsofchange.org

- Defina American Film Festival
  Defina American, TBD
  definaamerican.com/festival

- The Aspen Institute & Event
  The Aspen Institute & Event

- American Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA
  afi.com/afidocs/default.aspx

- American Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA
  afi.com/afidocs/default.aspx

- American Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA
  afi.com/afidocs/default.aspx

- American Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA
  afi.com/afidocs/default.aspx
The State of SIE

Methodology

Credits & Thanks

Report team

Produced by The Skoll Center for Social Impact Entertainment at UCLA TFT
Peter Briscoe, Report & Project Director
Laura Herb, Project Manager
Shelby Kivont, Project Coordinator

Consultant
Emily Wahlen Strom

Data consultants
Andy Morris, Director of Strategy & Research, GOOD Media Group
Manisha Sundaram, Project Manager, GOOD Media Group
Naive/Pravin Guillaume, Ph.D.
Melody Mubab, Ph.D.
Holly Seely, M.A. ’19
Natalie R. George, M.A.

Research students
Jane Lee
Rahi Guria
Antonia Thornton
Amanda Hayes
Adriana Santorelli

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Jeff Gallow
David Linde
Lindsay Spindle
Holly Gordon
Bronie Abasun
Lynne Hinchfield
Andrew Stewart
Amanda Chen
Eric Emelison, M.D., M.P.H.
Alan Ladd, Jr.
Bill and Judith Meyers
Patrick J. Floyd
Jennifer Sargent-Clark
Jane and Vincent Firth
Ken Sunshine and the Sunshine Sachs team
Marian Koltai-Levine and PMK•BNC
Human After All
UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television

Production

Designed and produced by
Human After All
www.humanafterall.co.uk

Writers
Adrian Pennington
Ann Brady
Ferdinand Simon
Grace Ryan Stewart
Ian Wylie
Jacobs Denno
James Liddij
John Dunning
John Pollock
Jonathan Crocker
Jordan Steele
Joseph Wobish
Kate Hallowood
Laura Kressly
Liz Bennett
Nea Arou
Neon Kelly
Tom Wiggins

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