

## Activities and Other Interesting Things to Do

### Activities and Outtakes Menu

CONSIDERING DEMOCRACY, 8 THINGS TO ASK A REPRESENTATIVE\*  
Documentary, 58 Minutes, DVD Extras 41 Minutes

This is a fun one - well, depending on what you like. These are funny or odd moments or things you may have missed when first viewing the film. There are also activities and other interesting things that people said off-tape during the production of Considering Democracy.

### Appetizers & Observations

#### Media Section

Is Michael Powell checking out Kathleen Abernathy? Watch his body language and his eyes.

#### Foreign Aid Section

Something that might have been missed in an earlier viewing is the voice giving the commands to the Nepali military - in English. When I first heard it, I was stunned because I didn't notice it while I was recording it. As the Nepali military men are going out into the crowd, listen for "Go, go, go." Is it an American giving the command?

#### The Reaction from Abroad

While I was conducting interviews during the production of the film, I told people that I wanted to get their point of view on the United States. In response, quite a few people from both the developed and developing world, asked me if I was from the CIA. I assured them that I am/was not. Yet as citizens of the U.S., our tax dollars (combined with private funding) do go toward the CIA, yet we're not really sure of their activities. Is this a danger to representative democracy? While there are oversight committees, what happens if a member of the committee speaks out against certain actions? Could it impact his or her reelection financing from the private sector? How does this impact checks and balances under the U.S. Constitution?

#### Lobbying and Legislation

If you slow down the GE section in the Lobbying and Legislation chapter, you will see that the credit agency featured on NBC is also within the GE Empire. So in actuality, featured news on MSNBC, may actually be - advertising? Does that strike you as being somewhat monopolistic? What might Roosevelt think?

#### DVD Extras

There's a lot of information in DVD Extras. If you slow down the section on the Iran-Contra Scandal, it highlights some of the Media Manipulation that took place within the Whitehouse during the Reagan administration. You might see interesting similarities between the Reagan and Bush administrations. The section was edited quickly, but if you slow it down, you will be able to see how people within the administration can manipulate information by first creating it, then by choosing *how* it's presented and *who* will present it on a channel like C-SPAN. (See if you can give it to people like Newt Gingrich.) This is why I blogged about the Dr. Jekyll /Mr. Hyde phenomena in our government. People behind the scenes have the ability to create information, and then give it to others to present it to the public on various media formats.)

Do you find it odd that CSPAN is something that American citizens have to pay for in order to get information about our representatives? Private companies get access to the public airwaves, and then in order to get information, the public needs to pay the private company to find out what may be happening with our lawmakers.

### Learn About other Systems for Solutions!

Go to the Considering Democracy website, then to the Solutions-Links page for links to other country websites. Look at other healthcare, taxation, and educational policy in other systems. Learn directly from other countries and sources. Meet with people and discuss your findings.  
[http://consideringdemocracy.com/solutions\\_links](http://consideringdemocracy.com/solutions_links)

### Radio Fun and Support Group

Think of creative and rational ways of talking to others who may have different points of view. Listen to say, an AM radio station and call in if you disagree with what is being said. It's important to keep your mental sanity when doing this. Read all of this first before doing it. I wanted to learn more about what was being said on AM conservative radio so I set my morning alarm to wake up to AM radio. I found that after about two weeks of this, I was somewhat angry throughout the day. Here's a way to do this without adverse emotional damage. Figure out when they take calls, then call in. Set it up so that you can listen for 5 to 15 minutes and call in. Form a radio action support group so you can share stories and give each other support. If there's four people, each person can take a day of the week. Meet once a month and share with others what happened. AM radio does do a really good job of manipulating emotions, but not a good job of reporting objective news. Should we allow it to continue? If not, call in. Think about your approach. Be calm. Don't yell. Be nice. Start out by agreeing with them, then point out where you disagree. Be rational. Be kind. Make good sense and then hang up.

### Engage! - Interview a Policy Maker - Video & Other Stuff

We live in a visual culture and currently have ways to help get information out to people. Make an appointment with your representative! Ask them questions and post the footage online. This can take place within your own state, or you can plan a trip to Washington D.C. (Washington D.C. is a lovely city. It's easy to get around on their metro system. You can take the train from the airport and never need to rent a car.) Another reason to see your representative is to get access to the Capitol. This needs to be prearranged through your representative. While you're there, see if you can get 10 minutes with the Congress person to ask their questions about his or her stance on different policy. Create a youtube or blip.tv, or any other online channel upload the interview and get the information out to others. Be nice when asking questions. No one likes a grump!

Write a letter to your representative. Write to a local or national newspaper. You could also call your representative. While it may seem dismaying that some interns don't seem to know about certain legislation, be nice and perhaps explain it to them. Don't vent, get to the point. When I call I ask for someone who can explain the senator's current position to me. (One time after calling in 3 different times in attempt to talk to someone who knew about the pending legislation, someone did call me back and we spoke for about 40 minutes.) You could comment on a blog. Why not comment on a conservative blog?

### Newspaper Fun

Look at your daily newspaper and see what there's more of: ads or articles. Use two copies of the same daily newspaper so that you can analyze each page. Put the articles on one side, and ads on the other. You might want to try this on more than one day to see if there are patterns that may impact information that your community receives. I did this in different cities during the screening tour and posted them online at Considering Democracy's website.

### See (and Think About) What's Around

On your commute, look around you and see how many ads you find. Are they persuasive in getting you to buy a product? What emotions does it use? What does it do to your emotions? Do they use similar emotions in political ads? Which emotions do they usually tap into? What three emotions are predominant on political ads? What three emotions are usually used in AM radio?

## *Engage! - Interact with Others in the Public Sphere, Nicely*

Write to or talk to others that might have a different point of view. You can do this through internet forums like blogs, letters to the editor in newspapers, host meetings, or simply talk to others in various random situations when people are around you, for example, when waiting in line. When you do this, do so calmly, nicely and rationally. We currently do not have good role models in the media. (Compare the technique of Edward R. Murrow to say, Bill O'Reilly. Some news 'anchors' tend to attack the 'guest' and try to make them - and you, feel bad. Not so good.) With these types of role models, the person that you're talking to may start yelling rather irrational things at you. Don't be surprised at this behavior, but don't engage in that style. It's silly and little communication takes place. Be rational. Be kind. If it's not working, wish them well and go on your way.

## *Interesting Things that People Said, Off-Camera*

Often, after the interview was done and the camera was put away, the most interesting conversational pieces came up. A few people mentioned that Americans are very corporately trained. This was the observation: when Americans order a drink at a restaurant, they ask for a Coke or Pepsi, but not a cola. Interestingly, they often don't care if the other brand is the only one that the restaurant serves, they usually end up ordering it regardless. Do most people ask for a Kleenex or do they ask for a tissue? Do you use Chapstick or lip balm? Are Americans trained to ask for a brand, instead of the product? See if you find this happening in society around you. How does this relate to the concept of freedom?

## *Taxes*

One Australian couple that I was talking to was surprised when they learned that about 35% of my paycheck was taken out in various taxes and deductions before I received it. I was a public school teacher, making around \$30,000. They thought that it was high for what we get, or don't get. They said in their society, if a person makes under a certain amount, like \$30,000, the taxes taken out would not rise above a certain amount, like 25%. While we assume that we as Americans pay less in taxes, it's not always true. The middle class often pays a similar amount in taxes when compared to many other industrialized democracies. It is true that the Scandinavian countries pay more in taxes, and they do so because of their social systems and what they offer to their respective populations.

## *The World Marketplace of Defense Manufacturing*

A Dutch man asked me if I knew that the Dutch made the landing gear for fighter planes. It was his point of view that it was the only reason that they were part of the 'coalition of the willing'.

## *The Revolving Door within the State Department and Foreign Diplomacy*

Other people pointed out that U.S. industry lobbyists become State Department officials and attempt successfully and unsuccessfully try to take apart other countries' healthcare and social systems, by either pushing the purchase of large defense sales (which creates a situation where the other country needs to pull funding from other social funding areas) or by privatizing sectors of the economy in order for private multinational corporate profit. One man refused to say anything on tape, but was quite angry and asked that Americans get some sort of control over the political system in the States.

Relax. Take a break!

Then take a look at Discussion at Discussion Menu #3 that looks at recent analysis and possible solutions!

[www.consideringdemocracy.com](http://www.consideringdemocracy.com)

## *Activity and Outtakes Menu*

# CONSIDERING DEMOCRACY

A documentary to *Refresh* and *Recharge* your Dialog!

*Do Good Things! Act Creatively!*

[www.consideringdemocracy.com](http://www.consideringdemocracy.com)