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An Inconvenient Response to An Inconvenient Sequel

Patricia Goldstone · Wednesday, January 25th, 2017

Like most people, I like reinforcement for my own beliefs. I desperately wanted to buy AN INCONVENIENT SEQUEL, former Vice President Al Gore's and Participant Media's long-awaited follow-up to their climate change jeremiad AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH, but couldn't, quite, despite the considerable appeal of what might be described as liberal comfort-food in a comfortless environment.

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Directors Bonnie Cohen and Jon Shenk have done a highly effective job of showcasing Vice President Gore's advocacy stardom. Courteous, charming, professorial, with an impressive mastery of his subject and an equally impressive rumble of Southern-inflected Old Testament rage when he really gets into it, Gore makes one yearn for the vanishing breed of American political aristocrats with a family background of public service he represents. It is moving to see him, aging and tired, pulling on his cowboy boots for yet another fray. When he unaffectedly comforts a young man who breaks down describing the most destructive typhoon ever to hit the Philippines, we are treated to perhaps one of the world's last glimpses of America the Beautiful for some time to come.

With the light touch of self-deprecating humor that evokes one of the many laughs in the film, Gore describes himself as a "recovering politician," juxtaposed against truly catastrophic footage of "moulin" (lit. windmills) of ice-melt boring their way into the foundations of the Greenland glaciers. Whether he is truly recovered is an open question. As he himself remarks, "When you are going to spend time fixing the climate, you have to spend time fixing the democracy crisis." Climate change is perceived by some political analysts as the one Big Tent issue big enough to unite greens, labor activists, and human rights activists of every stripe against the Republican machine. When the film shows Gore twisting the arm of an American CEO to give India exclusive technology in exchange for giving up its opposition to the Paris climate change accord of 2016, he could be LBJ at his best.

Gore undeniably deserves both his Oscar and the Nobel Peace Prize he won for the decades of work on climate change that culminated in AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH (though climate-change denier and no doubt envious Donald Trump has, with breathtaking meanness, called for Gore's Nobel to be rescinded). But climate change, as AN INCONVENIENT SEQUEL points out, is accelerating much faster than scientists anticipated. The film's high point, the Paris climate accord agreed by 200 world leaders including Putin, who delivers a lengthy peroration protesting Russia's

good faith, was not a legally binding agreement in the sense that it didn't impose civil penalties on violators and outsourced enforcement to private environmental groups which are now being eviscerated by the incoming Trump administration.

At a conversation of film-makers following the film's premiere at Sundance, Gore called upon the culturally transformative power of storytelling to move the public, presumably in numbers large enough to capture the attention of politicians. But movie-making can be a slow process, compared to the amount of legislation introduced by Republican lawmakers in recent weeks to criminalize nonviolent protest: one particularly repellant bill in North Dakota, where pipeline protests have cost the state an estimated \$22 million, would allow motorists to run over and kill any protester obstructing a highway as long as the driver did it "accidentally." The Trump administration, as producer Laurie David pointed out, has been empowered by the "dirty, dying fossil fuel industry," but nowhere in the film or the conversation that followed could I find even a hint of a climate change money network to influence legislation like the "dark money" network detailed by artist Mark Lombardi, journalist Jane Mayer, and others. Surely it's in the interest of the Silicon Valley industries who stand most to benefit from renewable energy to build one. C'mon, fellas. Pony up.

Image: Al Gore appears in An Inconvenient Sequel by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk, an official selection of the Documentary Premieres program at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Courtesy of Sundance Institute.

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