

teach *Game Change*, for example, I would ask the students to compare scenes from the film to archived news footage of the same events on YouTube.

The ultimate lesson to teach our students about a docudrama such as *Game Change* is that journalists covering the 2008 election used preexisting narratives—of the “new star,” the “boxing match,” and the “fallen star”—to tell the candidates’ stories. *Game Change* also shows how the news cycle became a narrative in and of itself—one that did make for a captivating drama when re-created by Harrelson, Moore, and Harris.

In the end I would urge the use of well-made docudramas in the classroom. We are not (nor should we be) at the crossroads that Griffith imagined, where everything in our classrooms is a moving picture. But teaching our students how to analyze the moving pictures that saturate our environment, how to understand how narratives such as *Game Change* reconstruct what happened, and how news is often shaped according to predetermined narratives will make our students better historians and better citizens.

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*41*. Dir. and prod. by Jeffrey Roth. HBO Documentary Films, 2012. 100 mins. (<http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/41>)

Any film that calls itself *41* will probably excite the arithmomania in even the most casual of viewers who may suddenly find themselves counting many items in this HBO documentary about George H. W. Bush, the forty-first president of the United States. Shots of cute dogs: twenty-seven. Shots of the American flag in the film’s first ten minutes: nine. References to Michael Dukakis or Dan Quayle: zero (though sharp-eyed viewers will spot Dukakis on an election-night television screen, and Quayle—albeit unidentified—in a still with President Bush). Shots of the surf off of Kennebunkport, Maine: do not even try to count. There are so many scenic views of the water, including in

the film’s opening and closing scenes, that *41* might be mistaken for a video promoting the beauty of Maine’s coast.

Kennebunkport is also a summer home for the Hollywood producer Jerry Weintraub (perhaps best known for producing *The Karate Kid* series [1984–1989] and *Ocean’s Eleven* [2001], *Ocean’s Twelve* [2004], and *Ocean’s Thirteen* [2007]). The Bush family has owned property in Kennebunkport since 1902—far longer than the Weintraub family—but as the story goes, the Bushes welcomed the Weintraubs when they first arrived in Kennebunkport nearly fifty years ago; George and Jerry have been close friends ever since. Weintraub served as the executive producer for *41*, which was first televised on June 14, 2012, two days after Bush’s eighty-eighth birthday.

A nicer birthday gift would be hard to find. Bush himself is frequently photographed from a flattering low angle as he either pilots his speedboat or drives his golf cart, which is clearly labeled—presumably in jest, but we do not know for sure—“Property of #41. Hands off!” More importantly, Bush does all of the talking in the film, based on exclusive access and a series of interviews he granted the filmmakers. As a result, there are no other talking heads (not even his wife or his equally famous son) to comment on the successes or failures of his life in public service—as a two-term congressman from Texas (1967–1971), envoy to the United Nations (1971–1973), the chair of the Republican National Committee (1973–1974), U.S. ambassador to China (1974–1975), the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1976–1977)—before becoming vice president under Ronald Reagan and, finally, president. To be sure, it is a distinguished résumé—but also one that deserves tougher scrutiny than this film cares to offer. For instance, one of the soft questions we hear from off-camera is “why did you leave your extremely successful business to run for public office?” In response, Bush declares that he wanted “a challenge. Life is full of challenges.”

Unfortunately, this film offers very few challenges—letting Bush have his say even when his recollections cry out for follow-up questions. When asked “What consequences

did Watergate have for our country?" Bush replies,

Not particularly profound, when you look at it in terms of the history. Other countries have had big problems, ethical problems. But Watergate, itself, none that I think of. And I think most people would agree with that assessment. Because life goes on. You can't stay mired in the past.

Whether the filmmakers responded by pointing out the ways the Watergate scandal fundamentally altered the bonds of trust between political leaders and the American electorate is unrecorded. Instead, the film immediately cuts to the more soothing image of a seagull resting on a buoy in the waters off Kennebunkport.

As a result, there is relatively little in this film that will be of much interest to historians. Much of what Bush has to say for the camera is boring and predictable: he loves his family and his dogs—but not his cats; and he loves Kennebunkport, where (cue the footage) “the sea is enchanting.” Only occasionally does Bush reveal something about his personality, especially from the years before he entered politics. As a teenager, for instance, he had admired a young woman who “wore a rubber bathing suit to die for.” As an undergraduate at Yale University, he would sneak up to the roof of his apartment building to peep at his seventy-five-year-old landlady when she was standing naked in the shower. And, in a particularly poignant sequence, he admits that he profoundly mourned the loss of his daughter Robin, who died of leukemia shortly before her fourth birthday in 1953.

However, when it comes to his career in politics, only a few sparks emerge. For instance, Bush recalls how his job as the chair of the Republican National Committee was likened by Robert Strauss, his Democratic counterpart, to “screwing a gorilla. You can't stop till the gorilla wants to.” Viewers get a rare glimpse of Bush's frostiness when he coldly answers a question about Ross Perot and the 1992 election: “Can't talk about him. Cost me the election, and I don't like him. Other than that, I have nothing to say.”

Viewers with an interest in history might wish that Bush did have something more to say about the 1992 election, or even his 1988

campaign's use of advertisements featuring Willie Horton. Those same viewers might also wish that he would reflect on the two-term presidency of his son, George W. Bush (the forty-third president), especially his waging of war in Afghanistan and Iraq (following up on his father's campaign against Iraq in 1991). Perhaps HBO could create a new documentary and call it *43*. Numerologists will point out that Kennebunkport lies on the 43rd parallel north, so if this new documentary were to be produced, there might be some justification for so many scenic shots of the Maine seacoast.

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*Paul Goodman Changed My Life*. Dir. by Jonathan Lee. Prod. by Jonathan Lee, Kimberly Reed, Robert Hawk, and Israel Ehrisman. Zeitgeist Films, 2011. 89 mins. (<http://www.paulgoodmanfilm.com>)

“The most influential man you've never heard of” is the tagline promoting this documentary. Its invitation to identify a presumably important yet forgotten figure such as the social critic, poet, and philosopher Paul Goodman (1911–1972) is also bound to tease intellectual historians, who often face the problem of determining which circumstances account for the impact of ideas and why some authors sink from prominence into obscurity. Goodman indeed exemplifies the caprices of fame. Even so, not one frame of this rather exasperating film attempts to specify Goodman's political and moral influence, how it was achieved, against what odds, and with the benefit of which predecessors or allies; nor does *Paul Goodman Changed My Life* expend much effort to account for his posthumous oblivion. Eight years after his death, a surprisingly hostile monograph by Kingsley Widmer (*Paul Goodman*, 1980) appeared; no revisionist scholarship resulted. Even three decades afterward, no full-scale scholarly biography has appeared, and so for the moment the resurrection of Goodman's reputation must depend—rather shakily—on Jonathan Lee's film.

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