



The Yes Men are Revolting Discussion Guide

Directors: The Yes Men and Laura Nix
Year: 2014
Time: 91 min

You might know these directors from:

The Yes Men from:
The Yes Men Fix the World (2009)
The Yes Men (2003)

Laura Nix from:
The Light in Her Eyes (2011)

FILM SUMMARY

Mike Bonanno and Andy Bichlbaum had a good thing going as the Yes Men. With their quirky brand of comic activism they were stirring things up and feeding the fight against systemic corruption and inequality. But in their newest film, *THE YES MEN ARE REVOLTING*, Andy and Mike—along with Laura Nix, their co-director and long-time friend—decided to show not only their successes, but also their moments of doubt and despair. The planet's in peril, yet the Yes Men are no longer facing only global corruption and greed, but the nooks and crannies of their own psyches.

From drought-stricken Uganda to the failed climate talks in Denmark and the desolate Oil Sands of Alberta, the purpose and stakes of the Yes Men's activism are clear. But so are its tolls: and as jobs and relationships end, and babies are born, the two men's personal lives necessarily take precedence over activism. Finally, as a giant, climate-change-related storm rips through New York, the two men's doubts reach their peak. What good is fighting? What difference does their activism make anyhow?

The answer comes during Occupy Wall Street: a few dozen young people launch a global movement that gets everyone in the U.S. talking about inequality and corruption. And as Mike and Andy participate in that movement with their own funny twist, several young people let them know they'd gotten interested in activism after seeing one of their previous films. Without quite knowing it, Andy and Mike were always part of this movement, which itself is part of an even larger movement. As Mike's young daughter celebrates the Yes Men's work against the forces of corruption and greed—"You're making movies to stop them!"—we remember that all large movements succeed eventually, and that activism is worth it.

FILM THEMES

On their comedy-fueled fight for a better world, the ups and downs of life catch up with the Yes Men; they come to doubt whether their activism is even working. By the end of the film, however, their confidence is reborn.

A LITTLE CELL IN A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

The Yes Men feel that much of what we call “civilization”—reasonable work hours, no child labor, civil rights, women’s rights, gay rights, etc.—has come about thanks to activism and social movements. They believe that action works. But it’s important to link up with others; it’s only as part of a movement that anyone can really change things. Rather than remaining a small entity up against the fortified forces in charge, the Yes Men understood that strength is in numbers, and by becoming a part of something greater and linking into the widespread global movement of activists, they could tap into an energy fuelled by many.

COMEDY AS ACTIVISM

The Yes Men’s distinct breed of activism involves aiming laughter at the darkness of corporate greed. Through carefully designed hoaxes in which they impersonate business and governmental leaders, the Yes Men help to spread the message about what’s wrong with the system, and help mobilize others to change it.

THE POTENCY OF PARTNERSHIP

When he first meets Mike, Andy thinks: “You’re my other half, somebody as mischievous as I am!” Throughout their years of working together, Andy and Mike have carried off “actions” (as they call what they do) that they never would have even thought of doing alone. Their partnership has sometimes been all-absorbing, and has even on occasion sidelined their life partners. Today, they’ve learned to balance work and life, and the sum of their power continues to be greater than the parts—just like with movements themselves.

CLIMATE CHANGE

For the Yes Men, all issues are interconnected: the forces preventing us from taking action on climate change are the same ones preventing us from achieving universal health care, a living wage, free higher education, and other benefits we should expect in the U.S. (and that most other developed countries enjoy). Still, the dangers of climate change are especially dramatic: because of unchecked corporate greed, our very existence is threatened. But there’s hope: “In our lifetime we could replace all fossil fuels with renewable energy,” the Yes Men (and many others) believe. And as the last action in the film proves, almost everyone will be happy if we do so.

“Mischief with a purpose is much more fun than mischief alone.”

Mike Bonanno, Interview, *Leading Edge*

“To keep going, we’ve got to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. That’s the only way we’re going to win this fight.”

Mike Bonanno

“This question of hoaxes distracts from the fact that the world’s future is in peril.”

Andy Bichlbaum

FILM FACTS:

- THE YES MEN ARE REVOLTING premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2014. The film is the third in the Yes Men series, following “The Yes Men” (2003) and “The Yes Men Fix the World” (2009).
- The Yes Men have adopted many alternative names throughout their careers, including Mike and Andy for the Yes Men. Andy’s real name is Jacques Servin, while Mike was born Igor Vamos.
- Co-director Laura Nix and Yes Man Igor Vamos both attended Reed College in Oregon, where Nix graduated with a BA in History and Vamos with a BA in Studio Art. They also studied for their graduate degrees at the University of California, San Diego, where they both received MFAs in Visual Arts. Nix was a producer on The Yes Men Fix the World.
- Yes Man Jacques Servin studied Mathematics and Creative Writing, and published two books of short stories. After receiving his MFA, he became a computer programmer. His first action was accidental—he inserted kissing men into a macho video game (SimCopter) just before it shipped to store shelves, and the media went wild.
- The first time the Yes Men impersonated someone powerful was an accident: a law conference in Austria thought their fake World Trade Organization was real, and tried to invite the WTO’s director (the Yes Men accepted).
- Climate debt is an idea that can be divided into two categories: adaptation debt and emissions debt. Adaptation debt means that rich nations owe poor ones for the damage they’ve caused to the climate. Emissions debt means that rich countries owe poor ones for the emissions that are no longer allowed because of conventions on climate change—which, again, are due to rich countries’ past emissions.
- Superstorm Sandy—commonly referred to as Hurricane Sandy—struck in October 2012. The storm caused \$65 billion in damages in 24 U.S. states; New Jersey and New York were hit the worst.
- The Arctic is estimated to hold 30% of the planet’s undiscovered natural gas and 13% of its oil—400 billion barrels’ worth.
- The Occupy Movement was inspired by other international protests, such as the Arab Spring and the Indignado movement in Spain. Occupy in turn affected movements abroad, in Spain, Turkey, Greece, and elsewhere. The Occupy Movement began on September 17, 2011, when a few dozen protesters camped out in Zuccotti Park in New York City’s financial district; within weeks, the movement had spread to over 500 cities worldwide.
- The world’s largest reserves of tar sands are located in Canada, Russia, and Kazakhstan.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Watch the other two Yes Men films to gain an even more in-depth perspective on their work and methods.
2. Mike and Andy launched the Incubator an 8-week online workshop that helps activists pull off great media actions, and also the Action Switchboard, an online platform to help activists get help with ideas, and find collaborators. Anyone can propose an action idea. Get involved!
3. The Yes Men have made a “cookbook” with “recipes” for carrying out various kinds of actions, at <http://actionswitchboard.net/cookbook>. Check it out.
4. Get inspired! The Yes Men helped put together the actipedia.org, with thousands of examples of creative actions to help inspire your ideas, and beautifultrouble.org, which describes some of the principles that activists use in dreaming up actions.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.