

FROM THE SOFA TO THE STREETS:

Strategies to Ignite Social Action through
Documentary Media

October 2017



The Norman Lear
CENTER
Entertainment @ USCAnnenberg

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Producers of *America Divided* conducted an innovative engagement campaign to spur action against social injustice, and invited the **Media Impact Project** to determine if their documentary series inspired real social change. The resulting Impact Evaluation provides insights for anyone interested [in social change through documentary media](#).

America Divided aired on EPIX in Fall 2016 and is available on Amazon Prime and HULU. Ten strategies to position the series as a catalyst for social action were developed. At the core was a plan to **energize activist organizations**.

The prestige of the series' **celebrity correspondents** and producers was harnessed to meet with potential partners, activists at community centers, political caucuses, religious organizations, parent, teacher and school groups, and universities. The goal was to springboard screenings into solutions-based activities across groups of organizations.

Partner organizations invited their members to screenings, and were encouraged to join forces with other organizations for these

events, powering up the numbers. *America Divided* supplied the content, discussion guides, publicity materials and someone from the film team to attend the screenings.

The five-part series was re-edited into eight shorter and issue specific modular units, enabling partners to engage their members in discussions they care about most. Producers also re-purposed and shot additional footage for screenings to philanthropic audiences, edited a series' highlights episode, and created shorter segments suitable for social media. This nimble approach to re-purposing the material enabled facets of *America Divided* to be viewed by hundreds of niche audiences nationwide and millions of people online.

Another key strategy that proved effective involved matching a specific topic (gerrymandering), with a specific celebrity host (Zach Galifianakis), who was connected to a specific region (North Carolina), and conducting an intensive screening tour there with the celebrity at the helm. **This tactic helped draw audiences to screenings as well as providing a "face" for the issue.**



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America Divided aired on EPIX in Fall 2016 and is available on Amazon Prime and HULU.

HOW DID MIP MEASURE THE IMPACT OF AMERICA DIVIDED?

MIP method for measuring impact involves:

- analyzing media metrics on viewership and reach
- conducting content analysis on audience reactions in social media and surveys
- interviewing partners from diverse groups who screened episodes and hosted panel discussions on the issues
- surveying audience members and partners

Together the findings provide a lens into who is watching, how viewers access the content, their reactions to the series and any actions they plan to take or have already taken because they watched.

DID AMERICA DIVIDED ACHIEVE ITS IMPACT GOALS?

Success for *America Divided* engagement campaign was defined by producers: (1) **raising awareness** of the issues represented; (2) **educating** and **elevating discourse**; and (3) **sparking action**. Findings reveal that *America Divided* met all three goals.

1. RAISING AWARENESS

- *America Divided* was seen by a national and international audience, viewed on cable through EPIX and streamed through HULU and Amazon.
- Some 25,000 individuals viewed the series in 428 screenings hosted by 132 partners.
- Generated substantive discussion about the issues online: it holds 61,000 Facebook fans, a reach of over 47 million users through social media posts, with some 163 million impressions
- YouTube videos viewed over 250,000 times.
- Facebook, Twitter and Instagram videos viewed more than 1.4 million times.
- Series [website](#) more than 88,000 users in 115,423 sessions (as of June 30, 2017)

Partner screenings drew strong representation from decision makers with diverse missions; educational organizations ranging from middle schools to universities; arts, cultural and civic groups; and organizations involved in policy making at local and national levels.

Screening hosts emphasized how audiences moved from feelings of surprise and compassion to discussion of efforts to address the issues (action). Hosts commented on the series' ability to bring a new perspective to the audience. One university educator said: "Some of the students were overwhelmed. They knew what the issues were and had read about them, but they hadn't been up close and personal in their face before they saw the films."

 **TIP: Forge Partnerships With Influencers Who Can Screen Your Work.**

More than 42% of all screenings requests came from North Carolina, where a tour of "Democracy for Sale," which focused on voting rights and money in politics, was mounted.

 **TIP: Focus Touring Campaigns Around One Rallying Issue**

North Carolina viewers provided the highest proportion of website sessions and audience attendance, confirming the efficacy of a focused statewide campaign around a relevant issue with a celebrity who identified with the viewers and the issue (Zach Galifianakis).

 **TIP: Be Open To New Edits That Allow For Issue Or Region Specific Coalitions**

Screening hosts discussed using celebrity names and appearances to promote their events as being a helpful tool and helped provide a face to the story beyond the content.


 **TIP: Align With a Celebrity Who Can Personally Identify With Your Issue**

2. EDUCATING AND RAISING DISCOURSE

- 87% of hosts "Strongly" or "Somewhat Agreed" the screenings provided an opportunity to engage in solutions-based conversations with their communities.

- 96% of the screening hosts strongly or somewhat agreed that the series will lead to more constructive conversations about the issues in the series.
- 99% of respondents agree that individual episodes are useful as a tool for educating and creating awareness around issues of inequality in education, housing, healthcare, labor, criminal justice, and politics.

Viewer testimonials of 7,384 audience members report the hope felt after screenings, often due to the simple act of gathering together to discuss meaningful issues.

 **TIP: Use Screenings To Create Forums for People To Assemble and Discuss**

Educators from middle school through medical school were interested in the content for their students. The majority of educators surveyed praised the series as a teaching tool and either used or planned to use the series in their classes. An administrator at Dartmouth University's Geisel School of Medicine plans to incorporate series' issues into curriculum, and Arizona State University has committed to offering credit to students attending series screenings. A minority of viewers were concerned that the point of view appeared too one-sided for a public school classroom. Some K-12 Schools expressed a need for further factual resources in addition to the personal stories to support lessons about the types of evidence used to craft persuasive arguments.

 **TIP: Support Learning with Fact-Based Resources for Deeper Study**

3. IGNITING ACTION

Respondents report they have already changed or plan to change certain behaviors after viewing the series, including:

- becoming more active in voting registration
- getting involved with local politics
- starting social media pages
- signing petitions
- canvassing
- organizing events

Other respondents revealed that they were already active in social justice issues, and the screenings reinforced or re-energized their efforts: “It reiterated to me that there is still much work to be done around inequality in America.” Many responded they would like to hold additional screenings and panel discussions.

 **TIP: Build Momentum By Providing Content For Additional Events**

A look at demographics reveals that audience members were primarily white (70%) and female (76%). The majority of viewers reported they were inspired to action following screenings, but fewer indicated they had changed their minds about a topic. One respondent said: “As a Democrat, the film underscored my core beliefs.” This finding indicates that the series acts as an “echo chamber,” bringing its powerful messages to audiences who are open to hearing them and who may already hold similar perspectives. This report recommends reaching out to groups who disagree with the predominantly liberal perspectives of the series for screenings and civil debate, providing a meaningful second prong of engagement.

 **TIP: Beware the Echo Chamber: Reach Out to Different-Minded Audiences**

Providing screening partners with a robust website where in they could search the series’ topics and collateral materials allowed teachers and organizations to easily decide if the project was relevant to their needs.

 **TIP: Make the Information in Your Documentary Searchable**

Partners need easy online access to the episodes, especially busy teachers juggling student schedules; several teachers complained the download process was cumbersome and only allowed for a single screening, but this problem was eliminated once the episodes were available for general streaming online.

 **TIP: Allow Partners Easy Online Access with Multiple Viewings**

Developing additional resources through online research links, where viewers can keep up to date on the issues would be helpful to educators and organizers. Also, additional curricula and study guides available online would be welcomed, educators responded.

 **TIP: Keep Your Website Up-to-Date and Relevant**



Actor Zach Galifianakis featured in episode 4: ***Democracy For Sale: Money in Politics & Voting Rights.***

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

America Divided is a multi-episode docu-series featuring celebrity correspondents as they explore narratives around inequality in education, immigration, housing, health care, labor, criminal justice, environment and the political system. The series was conceived by Divided Films and Executive Producers Common, Norman Lear and Shonda Rhimes to engage the public in efforts to address these issues, and to reframe the national discourse on inequality in America. It was produced by a team including Divided Films and RadicalMedia, and premiered as a five-part series on EPIX in September 2016, followed by distribution through Hulu and Amazon Video. The five episodes wove together eight separate stories explored by celebrity correspondents whose life experiences connect them to the subject matter.

America Divided stories and correspondents are:



The System: Policing and Mass Incarceration — Oscar®-winning hip-hop artist Common returns to his hometown of Chicago to explore disparities in the criminal justice system.



Something in the Water: The Flint Water Crisis — Actress Rosario Dawson travels to Flint, Michigan, to investigate the man-made disaster behind the city's water crisis.



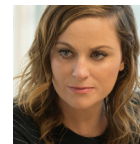
Out of Reach: The Lives of Undocumented Immigrants — Emmy®- and Golden Globe®-winning actress America Ferrera, whose family migrated from Honduras, travels to Texas where US-born children of immigrants have been denied birth certificates.



Democracy For Sale: Money in Politics & Voting Rights — Actor and comedian Zach Galifianakis investigates the political landscape in North Carolina and the country's deepening political divide during the 2016 campaign.



A House Divided - The Struggle for Housing in New York City — Peabody® and multi-E Emmy®-winning, legendary TV producer Norman Lear goes in front of the camera to investigate gentrification, displacement and homelessness.



Home Economics: Domestic Workers — Golden Globe®-winning actress and producer Amy Poehler reports on challenges faced by domestic workers who maintain intimate relationships with families that employ them while also struggling for better conditions.



The Epidemic: Addiction and Deindustrialization — Actor and activist Peter Sarsgaard explores the heroin and prescription pill crisis devastating a heartland beset by unemployment and the shutting of America's factories.



Class Divide: The Battle to Fix Inequality in Education — Grey's Anatomy star and former teacher Jesse Williams studies the battle to fix inequality in education and learns of a daunting school-to-prison pipeline in Pinellas County, Florida.

Engagement Campaign

The campaign coordinated by Picture Motion and evaluated by MIP includes ten key strategies to position *America Divided* as a catalyst for awareness, discussion and action:

1: Partnerships for Action

Upon securing distribution of the five-part series, the *America Divided* team fanned out to meetings across the country with influencers, national social justice and grassroots group leaders to introduce the series and its themes. The series was pitched as a conversation starter and catalyst for gathering and organization. Some partner organizations include:

- ACLU
- Appalachian Way
- Brennan Center for Justice
- Ford Foundation
- Incarcerated Nation Collective
- La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)
- NAACP
- National Domestic Workers Alliance
- National Alliance for Fair Housing
- Open Society Foundations
- Univision/Track Record

2: Power in Numbers

Partners who agreed to host a screening event were encouraged to team up with other organizations, widening the audience base and bringing the force of their numbers to any actions organized subsequent to the event.

3: Re-edits for Niche Audiences

Partner organizations indicated interest in hosting screenings of stories connected to their own missions, but were uncertain about screening all five episodes of the series. Thus, the *America Divided* team applied for and received funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to re-edit the material, pulling apart the stories into eight separate tales in a post-production process that lasted several weeks. As the engagement campaign required the stories to be shown on their own before live audiences, these new iterations required further legal review of such issues as licensing of archival footage as well as new archival licensing fees.

4: Engage Viewers in Panel Discussions

Panel discussions following screenings provided the centerpiece of the campaign and allowed viewers to discuss their

feelings on what they saw as well as discuss solutions and plan actions. Highlighting the themes in the series, the panels consisted of artists, activists, philanthropists and authorities on the subject. As often as possible, *America Divided* filmmakers traveled to these events and participated as members of the panel.

5: Develop Viewer Guides and Curricula

A discussion guide spurring deeper reflection around each story was made available for download. Overviews of each story, questions for discussion, key terms and resources were provided. Producers' intention was to "turn viewers into participants." Questions include those about the series as a whole, such as: "Which moment or subject stood out the most?" And episodes: "Jesse Williams talks about society's view of education as a personal problem versus a collective one. What do you think he means?" A curriculum for educators was also developed.

6: Partner with Local Film Engagement/PR Groups for a Regional Tour

America Divided partnered with the North Carolina documentary engagement group Working Films and the state's chapter of the NAACP to host more than 50 screenings throughout the state. Many of the state's grassroots groups were instrumental in the organization of these events, inviting their memberships.

7: Elevate Celebrity Power

The campaign utilized the star power of their entertainment industry hosts to draw audiences to screenings and to personify issues personal to each celebrity. For example, host Common was born and raised in Chicago and provided a first-hand knowledge of the issues explored.

8: Cultivate Audiences around Arts, Activism and Philanthropy

To coalesce an audience around the themes of inequality, and to demonstrate the connection between arts, activism and philanthropy, a sneak peek of the series was held at the new National Museum of African American History and Culture.

9: Spotlight Role of Music and Art in Activism

Music in the series was used as a draw to audiences and to illustrate connections between music, artistic expression and social movements from Civil Rights to the present. Together with other hip hop luminaries, hip hop producer and musician J.Period

created an EP, RISE UP!: MUSIC INSPIRED BY AMERICA DIVIDED. The EP highlights arts and activism, and the role of music as a catalyst for change.

10: Maintain a Relevant and Active Digital Presence

The official series website is the main source of information for screening hosts, while Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and other social media sites are regularly updated and individual posts, both supportive of the series and critical, are responded to by campaign administrators. Separate Twitter campaigns are executed to engage viewers further.

WHAT MIP STUDIED

The overall goal of MIP's evaluation was to assess how and to what extent the series reached, informed, and engaged diverse audiences on the featured issues, and to provide insights regarding ways to further its goals as the campaign moves into its second year.

To effectively evaluate the impact of the *America Divided* engagement campaign, MIP utilized multiple methods to analyze viewers engagement:

Media Analytics on viewership and engagement were analyzed to address the question of who *America Divided* reached and how audiences interact with the content. Digital statistics, screen captures and information from the following data sources were collected and analyzed:

1. Google analytics on project website
2. Social media analytics (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), including attention to the role of high-profile correspondents and supporters
3. Keyword frequency analysis of Tweets and Instagram posts to drill down into digital campaign and ascertain which episodes and themes were being discussed by users.

Surveys were developed to collect data at three different points:

1. *Online Request Form*: An online form used by organizations to request screenings gathered information on the types and geographical locations of partners such as nonprofits, advocacy organizations and educational institutions interested in hosting an event. Material was collected using Google Forms; summary analysis was conducted on quantitative data to determine demographics and other data of host organizations, and a content analysis of responses to open-ended survey question was conducted.

2. *Screening Host Survey*: Administered after screening events, these surveys were designed to add to the breadth of nonprofit partners, advocates and educators perspectives captured in the evaluation. Material was collected using Google Forms; paper surveys were mailed and entered into a database. A summary analysis was conducted on quantitative data and a content analysis was conducted on open-ended survey question responses.
3. *Audience Survey*: As screenings were held across the US, survey data was collected to assess awareness and impacts. The surveys contain both open-ended and multiple choice questions. Material was collected using Google Forms; summary analysis was conducted on quantitative data and a content analysis was conducted on open-ended survey question responses.

Content Analysis of America Divided Facebook posts and user-generated comments was conducted to build a deeper understanding. This data was collected and analyzed using an open coding approach to synthesize meaning that emerged from the responses. We used this approach to address research questions including "Does the series successfully raise awareness of issues of inequality?" and "Do people feel empowered by the content? Did they take any specific actions?" Content analysis of open-ended survey questions also provided insights into opinions of both screening hosts and audience members.

Interviews with 11 screening event hosts were conducted by MIP researchers. The hosts were diverse in terms of geographical location, organizational type, episode screened, and size of the event. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy, then coded and clustered into thematic response areas.

WHAT MIP LEARNED

WHO WATCHED AMERICA DIVIDED?

Through the series premiere on EPIX in September 2016 and its subsequent streaming on EPIX, Amazon and Hulu, *America Divided* is accessible to millions of viewers internationally. Some 25,000 individuals viewed the series in 428 screenings hosted by 132 partners. The MIP study analyzes the reactions of 7,384 audience members who were surveyed following partner screenings, as well as examining data from social media sites.

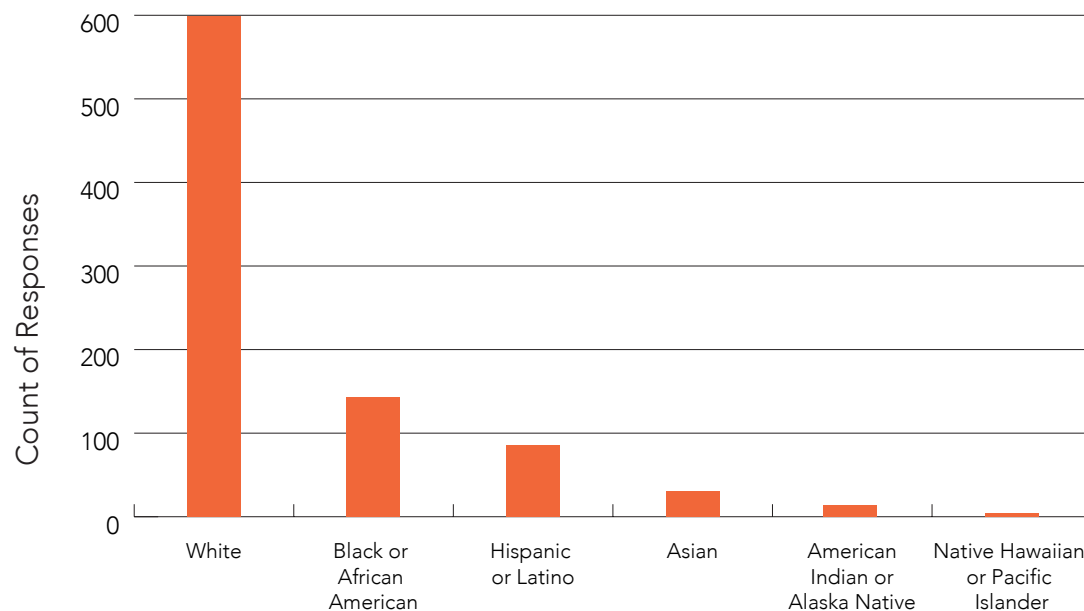
Partner events took place in a variety of venues and formats, and frequently featured a panel discussion or question and answer session. A look at demographics reveals that the **audience members were primarily white (70%) and female (76%)**, although website visitors were more evenly split by gender and also tended to be younger than 35. The *America Divided* online audience appears to be spread throughout the United States. (Figure 1).



Actor Amy Poehler featured in episode 6: *Home Economics: Domestic Workers*.

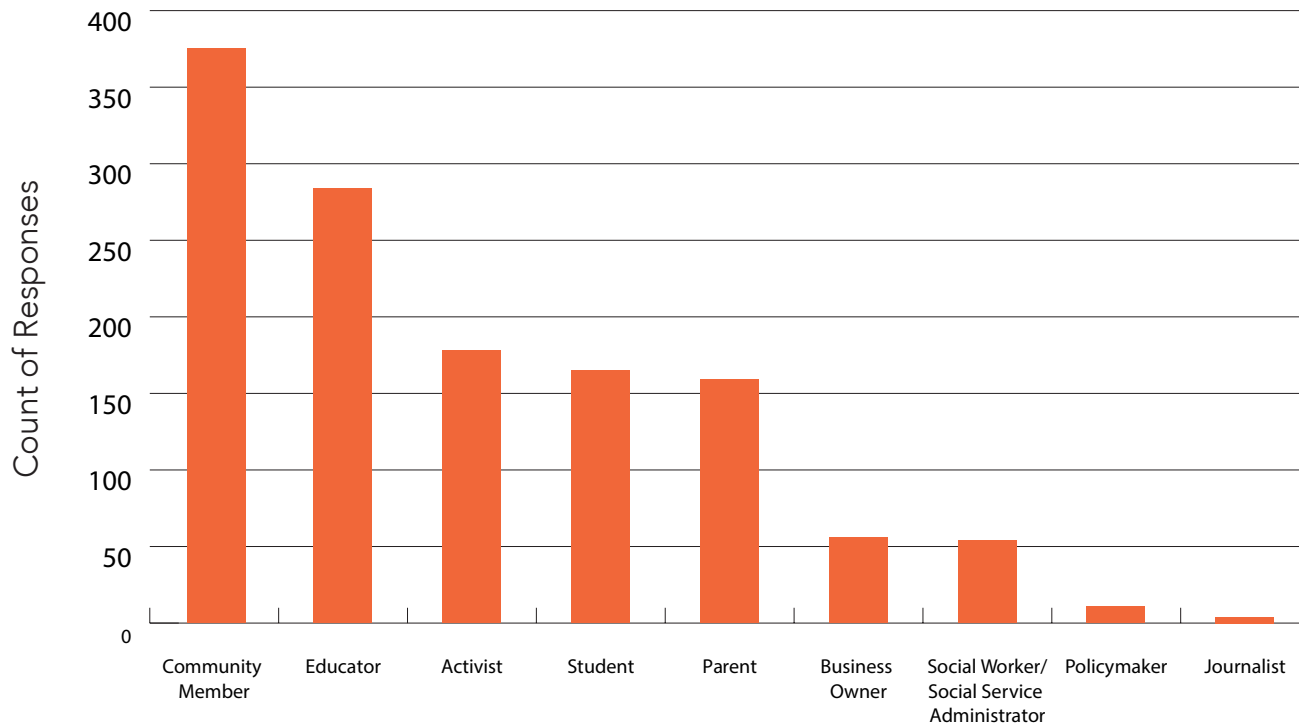
FIGURE 1

What best describes you? Check all that apply.



Requested partner events included strong representation from decision makers at nonprofits with diverse missions; educational organizations ranging from middle school to universities; groups involved in policy making at local and national levels, including organizations such as the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.

FIGURE 2
What best describes your role in the community? Check all that apply.



The North Carolina campaign, which focused on voting rights and money in politics, proved most effective in drawing viewers, as the state provided the highest proportion of website sessions and audience attendance. More than 42% of all screenings requests came from North Carolina, where a tour of “Democracy for Sale” was mounted.

The celebrity hosts provided a powerful draw for audiences both online and during bricks and mortar screenings. Celebrity attendance provided a boost for drawing in audiences, and many online comments mentioned celebrity correspondents. Screening hosts discussed using celebrity names and appearances to promote their events as being a helpful tool and because each celebrity correspondent was personally connected to the issue, they helped provide a face to the story beyond the content.

HOW DID VIEWERS ENGAGE WITH THE CONTENT?

With more than 88,000 users in 115,423 sessions (as of June 30, 2017), the *America Divided* website was described by screening hosts as an effective tool for researching information about the series. Almost one-quarter of all traffic came from social media, and 84% of the social traffic comes from the Facebook page, indicating Facebook is the most effective source of social traffic to the website.

- Social media posts reached over 47 million users, with some 163 million impressions
- Videos were viewed over 250,000 times on YouTube
- videos were viewed 1.4 million times through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram



Facebook is the most effective source of social traffic to the website.

The *America Divided* online presence was not just successful in terms of eyeballs reached, but also in generating substantive discussion about issues presented in the series. Posts about every episode featured both supportive and oppositional comments on social media. A look at posts for the most screened segment, “Democracy for Sale,” where North Carolinian Zach Galifianakis looks at the role of political spending in state politics reflects positive feelings about the episode:

- The episode had the second highest percentage of “likes” with 89%.
- “Love” was the most used reaction button on posts about this episode with 5%.
- Over 48% of comments were supportive.
- Only 7% of comments were oppositional - they primarily interpreted the issues presented in the episode into partisan issues.


The most contentious posts discussed the episode “Out of Reach,” which explores the lives of immigrants and refugees in Texas, and hosted by America Ferrera. Facebook posts about this episode reflected heated discussions among users:

- This episode was featured in 10% of *America Divided* Facebook posts.
- The most common engagement reaction on posts about “Out of Reach” episodes was “Love,” which, at 11%, was the highest “Love” reaction for any individual episode.
- It had the highest percentage of oppositional comments (37%), but 52% of comments were supportive. Immigration was one of the most contentious issues in the Facebook comments and while some of the opposition was defamatory and pejorative (19 comments referred to immigrants as “illegal”), most of the opposition was composed of users





Actor and activist Peter Sarsgaard featured in episode 7: ***The Epidemic: Addiction and Deindustrialization.***

discussing their views in a respectful manner. For example:


 **Renee** I have no problem with legal immigrants because they show respect for the US laws from the get-go. It's the ones who came here by sneaking in and believing they did not have to abide by the law of the country they chose to come to. Yes, it's hard and sounds heartless but millions have come here the legal route-why should they be so special as to exempt them from adherence to the US laws?
Like · Reply · February 28 at 4:30am


The comments provided an opportunity for *America Divided* to provide additional information directly to commenters:


 **Melissa** Hell no!! They owe to much!!!!
Like · Reply · 1 · February 27 at 1:10pm

 **Mae** Owe???

Like · Reply · February 27 at 4:36pm

 **Melissa** For however long they were here illegally not paying taxes !like all Americans.
Like · Reply · February 27 at 4:43pm


 **America Divided** There are actually some statistics that show undocumented workers contribute billions of dollars in taxes. <https://www.theatlantic.com/.../undocumented.../499604/>

 **The Truth About Undocumented Immigrants and Taxes**
They're contributing billions of dollars a year to Social Security, but may never reap any retirement benefits from it.
THEATLANTIC.COM

Like · Reply · 5 · February 28 at 10:27am

Twitter & Instagram Influencers

Many influential supporters, including high profile correspondents who were featured in the series, dedicated posts to *America Divided*, which helped raise the profile and expand the reach of the series. Here are a few highlights:

 **Jalen Rose** ✓
@JalenRose Follow


I salute @common for wanting to be a part of the solution. I'm focused on education issues. What will you do? #AmericaDivided #partner

6:02 PM - 30 Sep 2016




 **mattmcgorry** Follow

mattmcgorry Check out #AmericaDivided the new docu-series on @EPIX about inequalities in America featuring Common, Rosario Dawson, Norman Lear, and many incredible grassroots organizations (whom I'll be making donations to and would encourage you to check out and consider doing the same!). You don't want to miss this! #ad

 **Van Jones** ✓
@VanJones68 Following


We are an #AmericaDivided. See artists & activists explore inequality when the series hits @EpixHD on 9/30

 America Divided



 **COMMON** ✓
@common Follow

Chicago, represent! My criminal justice episode of #AmericaDivided is being screened on 10/26, RSVP here:

 **Rosario Dawson** ✓
@rosariodawson Follow

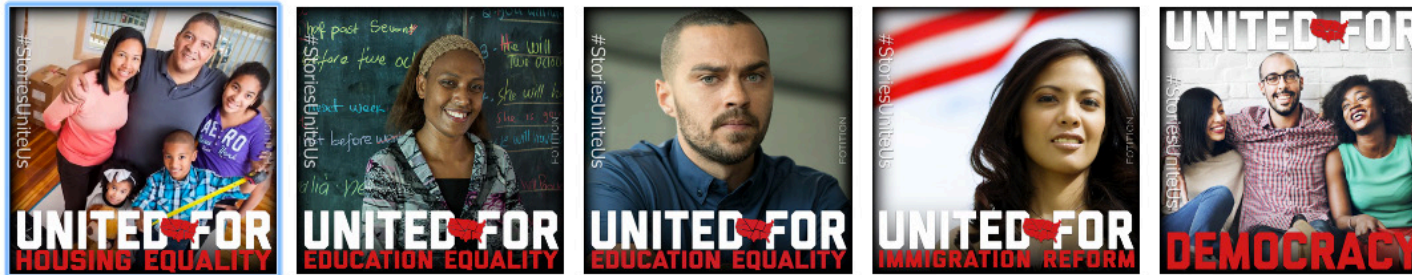
Glad the people of #Flint may see #justice. Hopefully soon they'll also get relief funds- they still don't have clean water!! #AmericaDivided

 **ijessewilliams** Follow

ijessewilliams Los Angeles Premiere of #AmericaDivided !! Five part series begins Sept 30, only on Epix Channel. #NormanLear

Fotition

235 users changed their profile pictures to feature the themes of *America Divided* with Fotition:



Facebook Content Analysis

America Divided has more than 61,000 fans, and posts have a reach of over six million users, and with over 68,000 engagements and over 2,600 comments. This high level of engagement made the Facebook page a prime candidate for a content analysis to gain understanding of how viewers received the series.

The number of shares, comments, and engagements were recorded for 332 *America Divided* Facebook posts (as of June 30, 2017), and the posts' content and engagements were manually coded by one coder. Engagements are defined as the number of "likes" and other reaction buttons: "love" (which includes the special "thankful" reaction for Mother's Day and the "Pride" reaction for LGBTQ Pride Month in June 2017), "wow," "haha," "sad," and "angry."

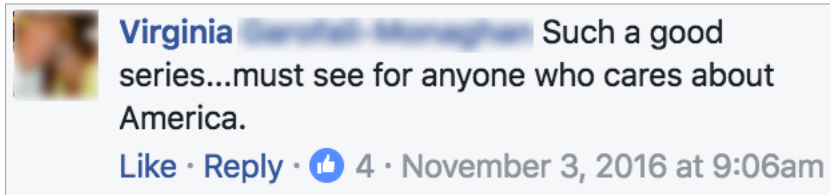
The text of comments was coded as either supportive of the content in the original post or opposed to the content in the *America Divided* Facebook post that initiated the thread. This code was only used when the intent of the commenter was obvious, so only 59% of comments were coded as either supportive or opposed.

America Divided Posts

- Jesse Williams, Rosario Dawson and Common were the most mentioned series influencers in posts, and key terms from each of their episodes were also among the most used
- 43% of all Facebook posts featured general *America Divided* content, meaning they focused on overall ideas about inequality and the promotion of the series. This includes the #BridgeTheDivide campaign and specific screenings, as well as posts about intersectional inequality, inspirational quotes and general content about the series.
- These posts produced about 19,000 engagements (28% of all engagements) and over 700 comments (28% of all comments).
- 10% of all comments on general *America Divided* posts were about access to the series, with commenters either asking where to view the series or complaining about not being able to access the series. The word "Epix" was used

464 times across all posts and comments, primarily in phrases like “I don’t have Epix” or “How do you get Epix?” General *America Divided* posts were shared about 15,000 times, which represents 47% of all shares.

- Since these posts primarily focus on overall inequality and the promotion of the series, only 6% of the comments were oppositional. Overtly supportive comments made up 29% of comments. For example:



Hashtag Campaigns

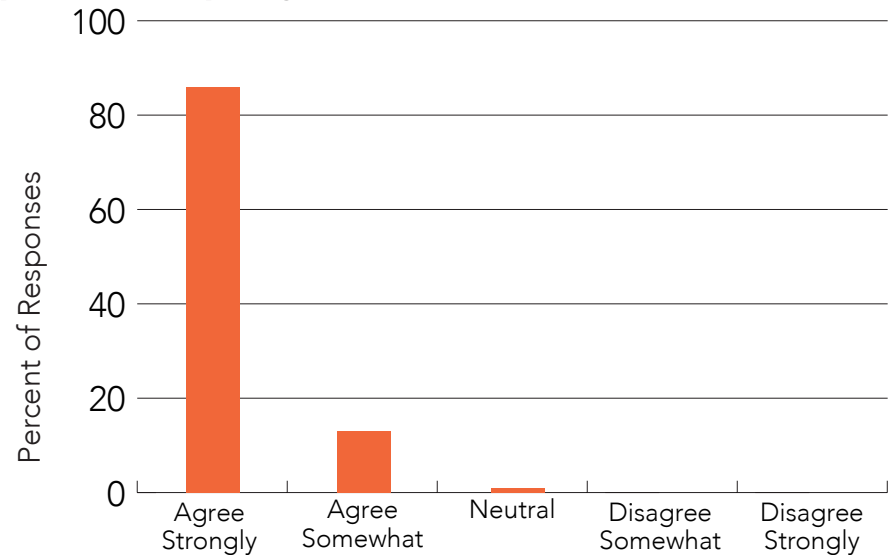
The hashtags #AmericaDivided and #StoriesUniteUs were used to engage the audience in social conversations about the series. Overall the two hashtags reached close to 50 million people with almost 160 million impressions and over 14,000 posts. Much of the success of the hashtags was due to tweets from influencers like Shonda Rhimes, Jesse Williams and Rosario Dawson. While visitors to the *America Divided* website skewed male, 72% of users who used these hashtags are women.



HOW WAS AMERICA DIVIDED PERCEIVED BY AUDIENCES?

Survey results from audience members show an overwhelmingly positive response to the use of the series as an educational tool and touchstone for conversation.

FIGURE 3
I think AMERICA DIVIDED is an effective tool for educating people about inequality.



Almost all (99%) of respondents Agreed Strongly or Somewhat that the series is an effective tool for educating people about inequality, and 95% Agreed Strongly or Somewhat that the series was helpful in educating people about issues relevant to their organization (Figure 3). Screening hosts echoed these sentiments:

“Most of the people who attended the screening [...] discuss undocumented immigration and other social justice issues often. Many, though, were still shocked by many of the narratives. It was an eye-opener for our youth and other attendees.”

— Hosted “Out of Reach” in New York

“I kept tearing up, as this subject matter was very personal for me. And, I know we have a lot to work on in our communities, schools, and government if we wish to make positive change.”

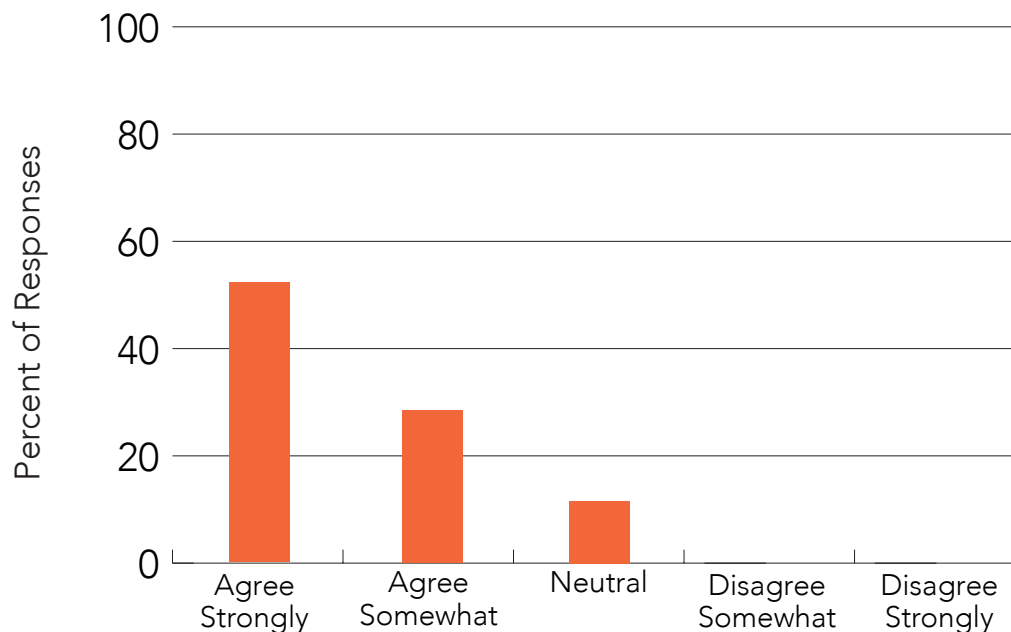
— Hosted “The Epidemic” in Arizona

“I thought the film was very informative and engaging. It kept the audience’s attention and really made them think about specific changes they want to see to our electoral process.”

— Hosted “Democracy for Sale” in North Carolina

One of the key goals for the engagement campaign was to raise the level of discourse surrounding inequality issues. Survey responses indicated that 87% of hosts “Strongly” or “Somewhat Agreed” the series provided an opportunity to engage in solutions-based conversations with their communities. A further 96% of the screening hosts strongly or somewhat agreed that the series will lead to more constructive conversations about the issues in the series.

FIGURE 4
This series provided the opportunity for my organization to engage in solutions-based conversations with our community.



Hosts responded:

“This was a fantastic tool to help start a difficult conversation with our students and community members. We are scheduled to show two more of the stories from the America Divided Series, and we are very excited.”

— Hosted “Out of Reach” in Wisconsin

“I really think that showing this in small, intimate environments can foster great dialogue. I’ve seen it in a big setting and also in our home. We talked for a solid hour after the small showing in our house and it was very substantive, informed, actionable discussion.”

— Hosted “Democracy for Sale” in North Carolina

Several hosts mentioned the power of having hosts and panelists with a connection to their specific area:

“The audience was really happy that the panel featured local community leaders from the film. It was a great opportunity to feature the folks doing the real work on the ground.”

— Hosted “Democracy for Sale” in North Carolina

“My friends and I were able to have an open discussion about the series. We’re striving to find solutions.”

— Hosted “A House Divided” in New York

“Using our local people enlightened and engaged our crowd on the particulars of our situation, our responsibility and action needed on our part.”

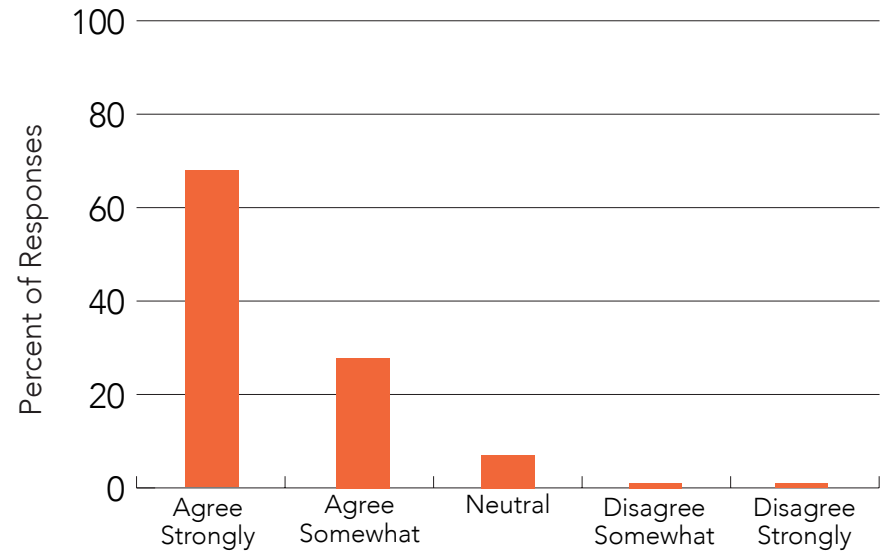
— Hosted “Democracy for Sale” in North Carolina



Although many viewers discussed powerful feelings after viewing the episodes, such as frustration and hopelessness, most praised the series for its ability to spur meaningful discussions around the issues.

FIGURE 5

This screening made me reflect on inequality in my own community.



Almost all (99%) of respondents agreed that individual episodes were useful as a tool for educating and creating awareness around issues of inequality. These patterns were consistent across gender, racial and ethnic demographics, and episode viewed. A deeper dive into Tweets highlights references to central concepts of the series, including “prison,” “education,” “school,” “justice,” “police,” “inequality,” and “system,” indicating audience members were engaging with the substance of the program. Although many viewers discussed powerful feelings after viewing the episodes, such as frustration and hopelessness, most praised the series for its ability to spur meaningful discussions around the issues.

“There’s an entire generation of children living in fear and growing up in this era of mass deportation and mass incarceration of brown people. The Kent County Sheriff’s Department could decide not to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by not holding people until ICE can get there to start deportation proceedings.”

— Hosted “Anthology: Voting Rights, Criminal Justice, Education” in Michigan

“It allows the viewer to apply their own perspective on what was viewed and discuss possible solutions.”

— Hosted “Home Economics” in Virginia



[A] screening event can be a touchstone for gathering concerned citizens and planning local actions, such as contacting representatives and organizing attendance at future marches and rallies.

According to hosts, a screening event can be a touchstone for gathering concerned citizens and planning local actions, such as contacting representatives and organizing attendance at future marches and rallies. Hosts reported post-screening discussions often emphasized systemic effects of inequality across topic areas.

“...I went away from this event thinking that we have so much work to do in our communities and sitting on the sideline complaining is not an option...”

— Host collected response to “Anthology: Voting Rights, Criminal Justice, Education” in Maryland

“...[W]e need to ‘transform schools collectively, not just escape individually.’”

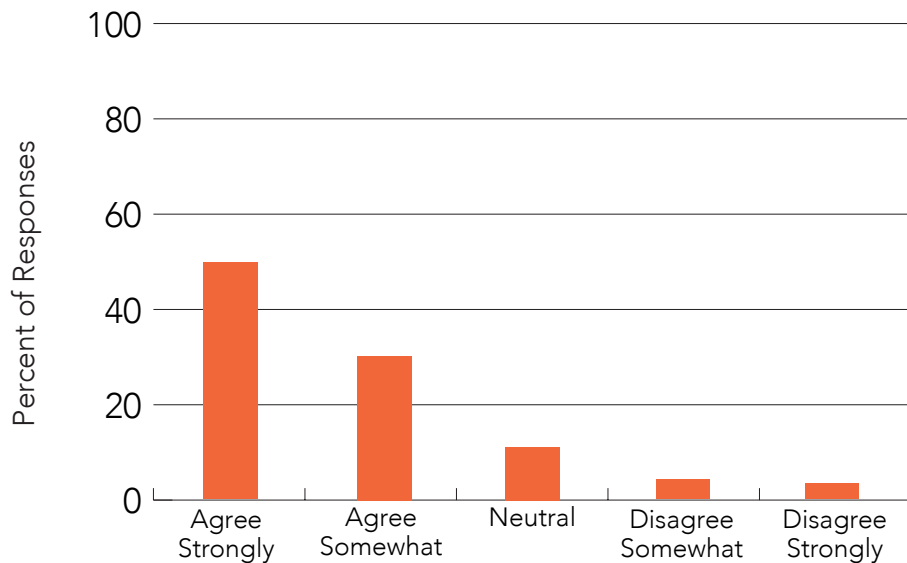
— Hosted “The Class Divide” in North Carolina

“Bring this to the Neighborhood Commission - advertise in school and newspapers to attract diverse ages for this discussion. Involve mayor, police, and school officials.”

— Host collected responses to “Episode 1” in Virginia

A majority (81%) of the audience surveyed reported that *America Divided* accurately displayed diverse points of view (Figure 6). **Individual survey respondents did not report changing their minds about issues, however, indicating that they may have come to the screenings already committed to the issues presented** (Figure 7).

FIGURE 6
I think AMERICA DIVIDED accurately displayed a range of diverse points of view.

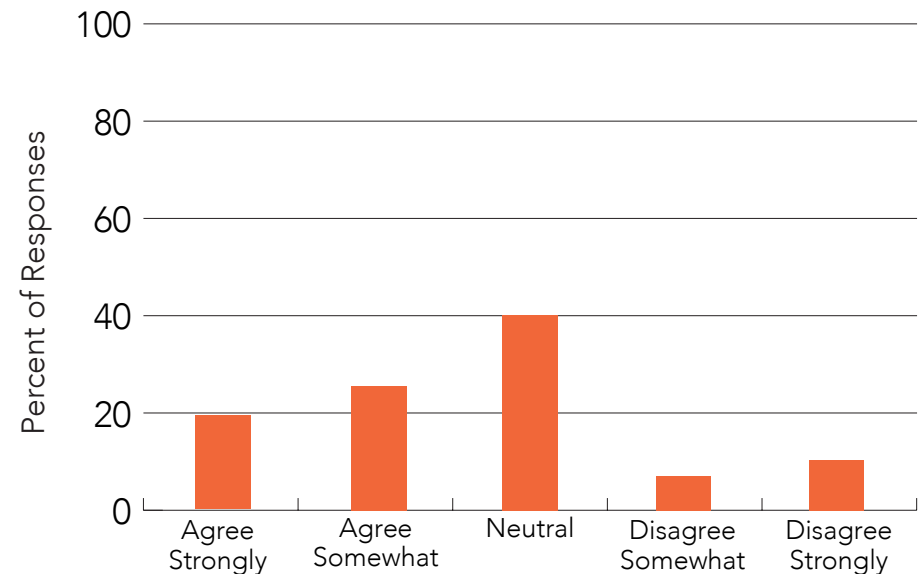


“As a starting point for discussion and research, I think the films are great. The stories alone, however, aren’t enough evidence to truly persuade. When America says, for example, ‘I’ve seen some studies that suggest . . .’ my critical thinking meter goes off immediately. It’s a challenge to balance audience attention and digestibility with more in-depth evidence. I thought the episode I watched was persuasive in its storytelling but less convincing in its presentation of facts.”
— Viewed “Out of Reach”

“My struggle is trying to figure out how audiences not open to this message would actually see the docu-series...”
— Hosted “Episode 1” in Louisiana

“I think if we had a broader audience represented, it would have opened more dialogue. We had plenty of dialogue afterwards with a panel, but we had mostly like-minded people in our audience.”
— Hosted “Episode 1” in North Carolina

FIGURE 7
This screening changed my mind about the topic presented.

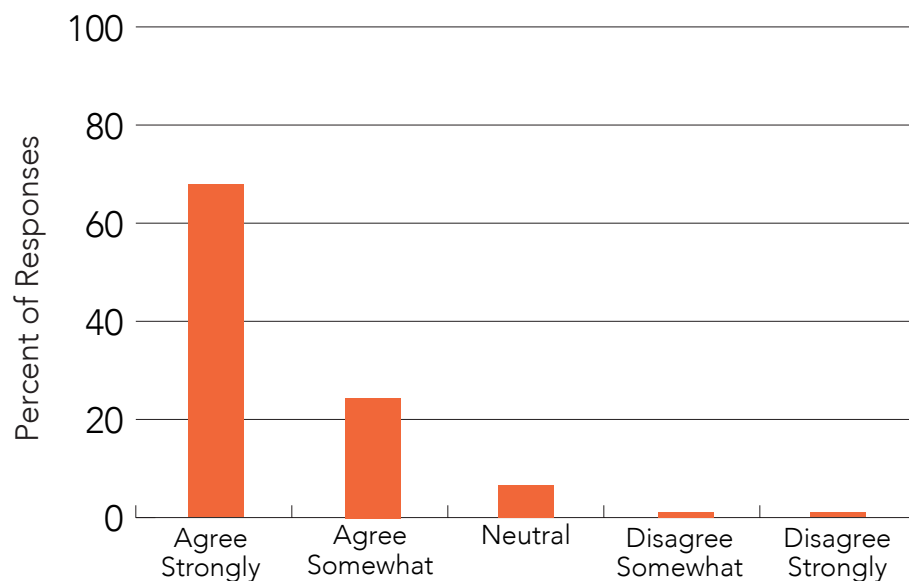


Educators from middle school through medical school were interested in the content for their students. The majority of educators surveyed praised the series as a teaching tool and either used or planned to use the series in their classes. Survey respondents asked for expanded guides and an expanded website linking to additional educational resources. K-12 Schools also expressed a need for further factual resources, in addition to the personal stories, to support lessons about the types of evidence used to craft persuasive arguments. **A minority of viewers online, in survey responses and in interviews were concerned that the point of view appeared too one-sided for a public school classroom.**

“Our library seeks to provide our community with good information from multiple sources. This screening provides one important perspective.”

— Hosted “Democracy for Sale” in North Carolina

FIGURE 8
I am more likely to consider inequality when reading or learning about current news events.



Many screening audience members claimed the series informed and inspired them to consider issues surrounding inequality when they read the news, but **fewer individuals indicated they had changed their minds about a topic following the viewing.** This indicates that the series is in a sense “preaching to the choir,” bringing its powerful messages to audiences who are open to hearing them and who may already hold similar perspectives as those presented onscreen.

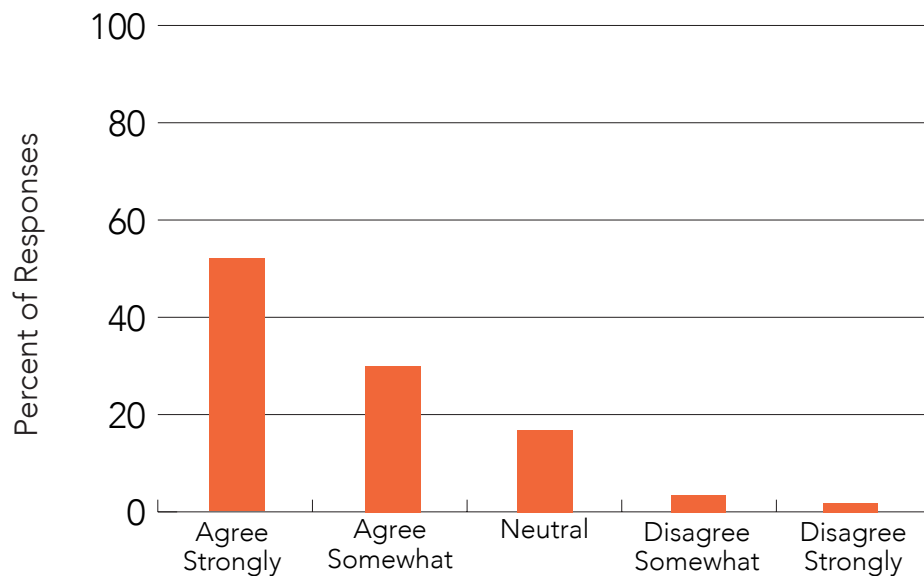


Actor and Activist Jesse Williams featured in episode 8: ***Class Divide: The Battle to Fix Inequality in Education.***

DID AUDIENCES THINK THE STORIES ARE RELEVANT? DID THEY FEEL MORE EMPATHY FOR OTHERS?

Screening hosts reported selecting stories that were relevant to their interests. Hosts often emphasized the series' ability to illustrate viewers' own experiences. More frequently, hosts commented on the series' ability to bring new perspectives. Survey respondents said the series helped make connections about social injustice across topics:

FIGURE 9
AMERICA DIVIDED helped me understand how inequality in different topics like health, wealth, and opportunity, have the same intersecting causes.



Screening hosts emphasized how audiences moved from feelings of surprise and compassion to action, and efforts to address the issues of concern. One university educator said: “Some of the students were overwhelmed. They knew what the issues were and had read about them, but they hadn’t been up close and personal in their face before they saw the films.” Another audience member opined: “I think it was an ‘a-ha’ moment for the crowd – it was mostly an audience of Caucasians – and it was eye-opening for them because they don’t often see discrimination in their own lives.”

DID PEOPLE FEEL EMPOWERED AFTER VIEWING THE EPISODES? DID THEY TAKE ANY SPECIFIC ACTIONS?

Hosts reported that screenings were followed by meaningful discussions in which 87% of audience members said that solutions-based ideas were aired. **Citizens discussed feeling empowered to act following these discussions.** Respondents did reveal changes in behavior regarding voting, indicating they would become involved in voting registration, create Facebook and social media pages, get involved with local politics, call and organize events, petition, contact representatives, work to inform others, become an informed citizen, work to publicize events, election work, canvassing and participating in protests and marches.

The episode “Something in the Water” kicked off a Martin Luther King celebration in a local community experiencing its own water system pollution issues... “[Medical students] became engaged not just around the water issue, but other issues,” a host at Dartmouth medical school explained. “The conversation kicked off a big picture conversation about how to actively engage with the underserved and how to empower communities to speak more, and not feel like they’re disempowered or voiceless.”

In North Carolina, screenings served as a tool for organizing action: people were inspired to sign petitions, campaign, canvas and march. One host characterized his audience: “I think I would say they were moved, and I love it because I believe you have to move people emotionally – you don’t get action without it.” Specific calls

to action were organized around *America Divided* events. During screenings leading up to two rallies, hosts and their partners encouraged audience members to attend and sold bus tickets. Hosts also provided handouts with anti-gerrymandering petitions and information about independent redistricting.

The campaign professional in North Carolina stated: “**One of the ways this screening tour really worked, was that it provided cohesion for organizations across the state.** Groups of concerned individuals have been popping out of the woodwork, and individuals active in smaller groups had a chance to meet and form connections bridging across specific social issues, which might not have occurred without the screenings.”

Viewers identified with Zach Galifianakis and were vocal in their support for the points of view in the episode (although some commented that Democrats have been gerrymandering for decades). The targeted engagement campaign was an effective tool for meeting *America Divided* goals. Future iterations should include plans for statewide tours around individual episodes and continue utilizing celebrity connections to enhance engagement.



Screening hosts emphasized how audiences moved from feelings of surprise and compassion to action, and efforts to address the issues of concern.

In other screenings, participants discussed actions such as confronting environmental polluters, marching, volunteering to organize, demanding responses from legislators and supporting advocacy efforts and educating themselves about local issues and keeping local officials accountable. Educators were interested raising awareness among parents as well as students: “I’d like to show this video to help connect and facilitate deeper discussions around these issues.” Virtually all screening hosts indicated they would recommend the series to others, and 95% of audience respondents would recommend the series to others.

Following a screening at Dartmouth University’s Geisel School of Medicine, the administrator opined: “From this conversation, our students have been more vocal about wanting more content on domestic violence and sexual assault, and I think next year our On Doctoring course will address those issues.”

CONCLUSIONS

Key findings indicate that producers can build their base audience among like-minded organizations by forging partnerships for screenings. Panel discussions following screenings engage viewers in deeper conversations and provide a forum in which people can voice their questions, feelings and concerns. These events can become a flashpoint for organizing political action, and thus the documentary can become a real catalyst for change.

Schools and universities can use documentaries and welcome curricula materials and study guides as well as active and relevant online materials that can help them keep abreast of ongoing issues and learn more about their topics. Educators are wary of screenings materials deemed too ‘one-sided’ to their students, especially in public schools. At the university level, topics can be woven into ongoing curricula.

Celebrities are a plus for the campaign: they draw people to screenings and to online platforms, and famous names can be used to cross-promote the series on more entertainment-oriented sites and provide recognizable, human faces for complex social issues. Pairing celebrities with an issue and, when possible, a region they relate to boosts their draw with audiences. A campaign that focuses on a specific region can use local players to build cohesion across the area and drum up enthusiasm for action.

Converting interest into action can be achieved during screening events through specific calls to action, sign-ups to future events and other organizing activities. Building audiences outside the traditional base of like-minded and, in this case, liberal viewers can be challenging. In this report, MIP researchers recommend promoting civil dialogue among groups who may not share viewpoints by conducting civic and civil debates and discussions. Producers who want to create action around a documentary project should consider re-educating, raising awareness and motivating viewers in group experiences.

Tips for Media Makers

Insights from the *America Divided* case study for practitioners include:

1. Think of broadcast as just the first step in your campaign
2. Forge partnerships with groups who can screen and promote your work
3. Seek connections between your issue and any arts, civic, philanthropy or cultural groups and their own activist work.
4. Focus touring campaigns around one rallying issue
5. Partner with regional film pr firms that know the local players and issues that affect them and can unite disparate groups.
6. Be open to re-purposing edits that allow for issue or region specific coalitions
7. Exploit any celebrity power to cross-promote online, draw live audiences and create a “face” for the issues.
8. Use screenings as forums for people to assemble and discuss
9. Engage audiences in panel discussions following screenings to promote deeper dialogue and create specific plans for social action.
10. Support learning with fact-based resources for deeper study
11. Keep the momentum going by continuing to supply content to your partner groups.
12. Reach out to different-minded audiences to promote civil discourse
13. Make the information in your documentary searchable
14. Allow partners easy online access with multiple viewings
15. Keep online voice current so that it becomes a source for news on your issues, and maintain ongoing dialogue with your digital audience.

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