

Dennis Kucinich Documentary Synopsis

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The Film and its Scope

Wake Up America! The Dennis Kucinich Story is a feature-length documentary that, for the first time, will vividly document the life and 42-year political career of a United States congressman from Ohio who seems to defy all conventions and stereotypes of a successful American politician. At only 5'7", Kucinich is a short, Catholic vegan with a propensity for new age spirituality who proudly embraces a boldly progressive platform that no other nationally elected Democrat would even dare approach; but as this movie will demonstrate, his unshakable high moral resolve, soaring dynamic energy, and enduring political stature cannot be easily measured in physical inches. Borrowing heavily from two books that he authored, *The Courage to Survive* and *A Prayer for America*, the movie will tell a story of an extraordinary man who grew up in extreme poverty, on some of the roughest streets in Cleveland, but ultimately ended up on the highest national stage.

Consisting of original interviews with friends, family, colleagues, political science researchers, historians, and media analysts, as well as archived news stories and video footage, the movie will follow Kucinich's rise through the ranks of Cleveland politics, beginning in 1969. It will cover his turbulent, yet courageous, two-year term as the youngest mayor in U.S. history, in which he boldly stood up against bankers who tried to force him to privatize the city's public electric utility, ultimately leading to an assassination plot that fortuitously was never successfully carried out. The story will then trace his path to the U.S. House of Representatives, where it will highlight a number of bold, unique, and controversial pieces of legislation that Kucinich has crafted over his current 14-year tenure, demonstrating how he has unflinchingly stood up for peace and social justice.

Finally, this documentary will critically examine why Kucinich, as a senior member of

Congress, has not been able to get any of his boldest progressive legislation seriously considered within the mainstream media or the public sphere as a whole. Furthermore, it will ask why his party continually disregards him as a fringe idealist, while choosing, instead, to lean towards center-right positions. What does this reveal about our country's current political state and broader cultural identity? What lessons could Kucinich learn from brain scientists or cognitive linguists such as Drew Westen and George Lakoff in order to more effectively frame his ideological positions and moral principles? These are some questions that the movie will raise and attempt to answer.

The Context or Rationale

At a time in American history where our country is facing multiple economic crises and major challenges on all fronts, citizens and politicians need to be open to fresh ideas and new paradigms. The media has enabled some fairly extreme views on the conservative right to be circulated, promoted, and debated, thus legitimizing them within the public sphere. These include constitutional amendments to ban gay marriage, abstinence only sex education in schools, harsh immigration policies, and the privatization or abolishment of many longstanding government-based health and human services. Progressives, on the other hand, have not had nearly the same level of success in setting the agenda and framing issues that they believe are most important for the wellbeing of citizens in this country. Dennis Kucinich is a rare voice among national elected officials on the left who refuses to compromise on certain core progressive principles. Yet, partially because of this steadfast commitment, he has had an extremely difficult time swaying the rest of his party and significantly influencing its legislative or rhetorical direction. Because of this current political climate, a movie about a marginalized, yet popular national figure such as Kucinich is quite relevant to help progressives look in the

mirror and reflect on how to better brand themselves in a way that will allow them to effectively communicate a coherent identity that resonates with the American public while still remaining true to their ideals.

Beyond the obvious politics, Kucinich's life journey is fascinating in and of itself. He is an unlikely political hero who started with absolutely nothing, but still managed to rise to national prominence. This life journey is filled with many moments of both glory and tragedy. Some of the more tragic events include both his brother Perry and his sister Beth Ann dying unexpectedly at relatively young ages. While a talented artist, Perry also struggled with mental illness throughout his life.

As a public personality, Dennis is captivating because of his optimistic idealism and boyish physical qualities, as well as his intense, dynamic communication style. Many people are also intrigued by his young, beautiful wife, who is 31 years his junior, his vegan lifestyle, and the fact that he has never used his position of power to become wealthy. All of these unique characteristics of Kucinich's life and personality make for a rich, overarching narrative with plenty of interesting subplots to pick and choose from. They also give the Ohio Congressman's life story more universal appeal, which could help it be marketed to a broader audience.

Target Audience

The primary target audience for this documentary will be Democrats and progressive-minded independents, of all ages, who have become frustrated and disillusioned by the unfulfilled promises of politicians in Washington, including the hope-fueled Obama. Increasingly, many of these American citizens are desperately seeking leaders who do not allow their governance to be controlled by destructive special interests, and who are willing to take principled moral stands that are legitimately in the best interests of all Americans. They want

someone who is courageous enough to take political risks in order to truly protect and empower all Americans through education, healthcare, localized public services, and appropriate regulation of corporate powers, while also using peaceful means to legitimately support workers rights, civil rights, and human rights around the entire world. Based on his longstanding political history and voting record, Dennis Kucinich appears to be one of those rare public servants that can be trusted to meet such criteria. Therefore, such a target audience should find his message of social justice and peace very refreshing and inspiring.

It is also possible that this film could have broader appeal across partisan lines, simply because Kucinich's life story is so universally captivating. Furthermore, for the same reasons that Ron Paul intrigues many Democrats, despite the obvious ideological differences, there are certainly Republicans and Libertarians that would find Kucinich interesting specifically because of his status as a uniquely bold, oppositional voice within his own party.

What Makes this Film Unique?

This film is most clearly unique because no one has ever produced a documentary exclusively devoted to Kucinich's life and political career before. His life story inherently is a captivating narrative but it also has larger implications for American politics and cultural identity, as well as the future of our country. It is a valuable case study on a real-life politician who chooses not to settle for business as usual in Washington. Kucinich offers Americans a fresh model on how this great nation could potentially be governed, but his political struggles also force us to reflect on why there is so much intense cynicism and resistance surrounding such progressive leadership ideals and moral principles.

Fundraising Strategy

In order to secure the necessary funding to fully produce and distribute this film, a number

of grants will be sought out through various government, religious, labor union, entertainment, and special interest organizations. Because Kucinich is Catholic, it may be worthwhile to contact some of the more liberal Catholic churches in Cleveland, Washington, D.C, or other cities. It is quite possible that some of them would be interested in contributing to a film about a man within their faith who espouses many traditional Catholic values, such as loving your neighbor or viewing social services like healthcare as a basic human right, rather than only a conditional privilege.

Kucinich is very passionate about media reform and defining the democratic role media should play in American society. This means that if I am willing to integrate a few explicit media reform messages into this documentary, non-profit organizations devoted to such causes, such as Media Matters for America and Free Press, may be interested in directly funding or at least sharing their donor channels with me in order to get this documentary produced. For them, it would be mutually beneficial to sponsor a film about a congressman who has consistently championed such legislation as net neutrality, the Fairness Doctrine, and the equal opportunities provision. Along these same lines, Kucinich is one of the strongest advocates of labor rights in Congress. According to his biography on his official website, he is even a member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States (IATSE). This means that a number of unions in Ohio, and across the country, may be compelled to fund a movie about him.

Finally, Kucinich appears to have some friends in the entertainment industry, including actress Shirley MacLaine. It is possible that certain celebrity actors or Hollywood-affiliated organizations might be willing to pitch in, potentially acting as angel investors.

Distribution Strategy

I happen to know Nick McKinney, one of the founders of HonestEngineTV, a production company devoted to creating “provocative documentary-based television and film.” In the past, Nick has worked for the Daily Show, as well as with Morgan Spurlock. His co-founder, Meghan O’Hara, has produced three of Michael Moore’s films. Together, Nick and Meghan recently produced a show for IFC called *The IFC Media Project*, hosted by Gideon Yago of MTV fame. Because of this personal connection and the relevancy of my documentary to their mission, HonestEngineTV will be the first and primary distribution vehicle that I will attempt to pitch this project to. It is my hope that they will not only be willing to help me to distribute the film, but will also collaborate with me on the production, and perhaps even help me secure funding. They obviously have the experience, connections, and reputation to successfully get a documentary widely distributed.

If this first approach fails, I will individually submit my movie to various film festivals that tend to favor political and biographical documentaries. I may also consider self-publishing the movie over the Internet via an on-demand publishing company such as Amazon’s CreateSpace. In order to market it and create buzz, I will build a social media advertising campaign via Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking channels. Additionally, I will ask any sponsors who funded the documentary to help me market it through their own communication channels via links, press releases, and articles. Finally, since I am competent at building websites, I will construct and launch a professional-quality, dedicated website for the film where people can go to check out the trailer and read all about it. I have already purchased and secured the domain name “www.KucinichMovie.com” for this purpose.