



P.O.V.

Season

19

Discussion Guide

# Tintin and I

A Film by Anders Østergaard



[www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)



## Letter from the Filmmaker

FREDERIKSBERG, DENMARK, MAY 2006

### Dear Colleague,

It is exciting to know that you will be spending time discussing my film *Tintin and I*. Most probably, you will discover new aspects of the story that I am not even aware of myself. And it would be unwise of me to supply you with a fact sheet on how the film should be understood. But you may appreciate knowing a bit about why I was driven to make this film in the first place.

On the surface, *Tintin and I* is about the art of comics and about modern European history—and how the two, in this case, are tangled amazingly together. But on a deeper level, Hergé's life story also has an existential note, which may have been the real reason I got involved in it. To me, it is the story of a dreamer who wants to turn his back on the boredom of his upbringing and who looks for mystery and adventure in his imaginary world. And at a young age, he strikes a deal with the devil, so to speak. His editor allows him to keep on dreaming on a monthly salary if he stays within a set of strictly Catholic values. This pact becomes a great vehicle for Hergé's creativity, but it also leads him into personal disaster at the end of the war. From then on—with his innocence lost forever—everything is about growing up and facing the music, even if it means that he has to leave his wife.

Now, this analysis is not something I worked out all by myself. In fact, these are points and reflections that are embedded in Hergé's own testimony—things that I think were important to pass on. So having done that, I wish you a good discussion.

This film took me four years to make, but my idea of how I wanted it to be came in an instant. It was one of those rare moments when a drama presents itself within a clear visual framework—the perfect DNA for a film.

Being an average *Tintin* fan, like so many Europeans of my generation, I was skimming through the official *Tintin* Web site when I came across an article about one of my favorite books in the series—*Tintin in Tibet*.

The article revealed Hergé's first few sketches and notes as he approached the story, and they seemed to directly reflect his stream of consciousness: "They find themselves in Tibet. What are they doing there? There has to be a motive." And then—with an abrupt leap beyond the usual limits of children's entertainment—"A search for eternal wisdom . . . Buddha!" In these first notes, Hergé seemed to be sending his impeccable boy-scout hero out on a quest for spiritual enlightenment—nothing less. The author of the article then went on to point out how these disturbing lines coincided with a major emotional crisis in Hergé's life. This was the fall of 1957, when Hergé, a married man, was drifting into deep depression because he had fallen in love with another woman and didn't know how to handle the guilt.



*Anders Østergaard, Director of "Tintin and I."*

Photo Jan Buus



## Letter from the Filmmaker



"The Adventures of Tintin: Tintin in Tibet" (1960).

Photo © 2006 Moulinsart

There it was. Suddenly there seemed to be an answer to a hunch I had always had through my years as a *Tintin* reader. A hunch that something was going on behind the scenes. That a lot of nervous energy and personal experience was embedded in these apparently innocent stories. And this was why they continued to be such a rich and stimulating read. It was obvious to me that *Tintin in Tibet* had to be the climax of an intense personal drama—played out so movingly by Hergé in the snowy and desolate plains of the Himalayas. All I had to do was unearth the story that was bound to lie behind this crucial moment in his life and his art.

Then came the tapes. Quite miraculously, the Hergé Foundation was able to offer me 14 cassettes: the result of a marathon testimony Hergé had made about his life and work that until then had been thoroughly censored. Their technical state was generally miserable, but Hergé's serene and spirited voice filtered through the distortion and convinced me that it was possible to turn the film into an intimate biography that would truly move its audience 20 years after the artist's death.

The rest was hard work, never-ending negotiations and a sheer battle to keep everybody else's opinions about *Tintin* and Hergé out of what I wanted to do. But throughout the entire production it was such a delight to have the privilege of working with the colors, the graphics, the humor and the mystery in those immortal stories called *The Adventures of Tintin*.

### **Anders Østergaard**

Director, *Tintin and I*



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## Introduction

Decades after publication, the comic strip *The Adventures of Tintin*, about an intrepid boy reporter, continues to fascinate people all over the world. So does the strip's enigmatic Belgian creator, Hergé. ***Tintin and I***, a feature-length (72 minute) documentary, takes viewers on a fascinating journey into the psyche of this work-obsessed cartoonist.

Centered on rare and surprisingly candid 1970s interviews, the film reveals the profound insecurities and anxieties that drove Hergé, a dedicated Boy Scout with a Catholic upbringing, who held himself to an unachievable standard of personal perfection. His lifelong struggles to reach that ideal were often incorporated into his characters, which engaged readers with their depth. But this film is more than a biography.

Hergé's hero interacted with the contemporary world, serving as a witness to profound political and social change, including the rise of fascism and communism in Europe, World War II and its aftermath, the disintegration of European colonial dominance in the face of post-war nationalism and even the unrest of the 1960s protest era.

The social and political content of Hergé's work affords viewers of ***Tintin and I*** an opportunity to explore the impact of political ideology, ethics, religion and race, as well as consider the intersection of art and politics.



*Hergé and a model of the character Tintin.*

Photo © 2006 Moulinsart



## Potential Partners

*Tintin and I* is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Your local PBS station**
- **Groups that have discussed previous PBS and P.O.V. films relating to World War II or the intersection of art and politics, including *Hiding and Seeking*.**
- **Groups focused on any of the issues listed to the right**
- **High school students**
- **Faith-based organizations and institutions**
- **Folk/comic art museums**
- **Art schools**
- **Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities, community colleges and high schools**
- **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as P.O.V.'s national partners Elderhostel Learning in Retirement Centers, members of the Listen Up! Youth Media Network or your local library.**

## Key Issues

As an outreach tool, *Tintin and I* will be of special interest to people exploring or working on the topics below:

- **Art**
- **Biography**
- **Cartoonists**
- **Comic strips**
- **Cultural studies**
- **Ethics**
- **Francophile communities**
- **History**
- **Political science**
- **Political journalism/Cartoons**
- **Politics/Current affairs**
- **Pop culture**
- **Psychoanalysis**
- **Religion**
- **Social justice**
- **World War II**

## Event Ideas

Use a screening of *Tintin and I* to:

- **Hold a symposium on the impact of comic strips and political cartoons on public opinion. Include newspaper editors and invite them to talk about how they choose which comics or cartoons to print.**
- **Invite a panel of cartoonists to talk about the relationship between their lives and what they put on paper.**
- **Publicize the work of people in your community who use their art to inspire others to act.**



## Using this Guide

**This guide is designed to help you use *Tintin and I* as the centerpiece of a community event. It contains suggestions for organizing an event as well as ideas for how to help participants think more deeply about the issues in the film. The discussion questions are designed for a very wide range of audiences. Rather than attempt to address them all, choose one or two that best meet the needs and interests of your group.**

### Planning an Event

In addition to showcasing documentary film as an art form, screenings of P.O.V. films can be used to present information, get people interested in taking action on an issue, provide opportunities for people from different groups or perspectives to exchange views and/or create space for reflection. Using the questions below as a planning checklist will help ensure a high-quality, high-impact event.

- **Have you defined your goals?** With your partner(s), set realistic goals. Will you host a single event or engage in an ongoing project? Being clear about your goals will make it much easier to structure the event, target publicity and evaluate results.
- **Does the way you are planning to structure the event fit your goals?** Do you need an outside facilitator, translator or sign language interpreter? If your goal is to share information, are there local experts on the topic who should be present? How large an audience do you want? (Large groups are appropriate for information exchanges. Small groups allow for more intensive dialogue.)
- **Have you arranged to involve all stakeholders?** It is especially important that people be allowed to speak for themselves. If your group is planning to take action that affects people other than those present, how will you give voice to those not in the room?
- **Is the event being held in a space where all participants will feel equally comfortable?** Is it wheelchair accessible? Is it in a part of town that's easy to reach by various kinds of transportation? If you are bringing together different constituencies, is it neutral territory? Does the physical configuration allow for the kind of discussion you hope to have?
- **Will the set-up of the room help you meet your goals?** Is it comfortable? If you intend to have a discussion, can people see one another? Are there spaces to use for small breakout groups? Can everyone easily see the screen and hear the film?
- **Have you scheduled time to plan for action?** Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even when the discussion has been difficult. Action steps are especially important for people who already have a good deal of experience talking about the issues on the table. For those who are new to the issues, just engaging in public discussion serves as an action step.



## Using this Guide

### Facilitating a Discussion

**Controversial topics often make for excellent discussions. By their nature, those same topics also give rise to deep emotions and strongly held beliefs. As a facilitator, you can create an atmosphere where people feel safe, encouraged and respected, making it more likely that they will be willing to share their ideas openly and honestly. Here's how:**

### Preparing Yourself

**Identify your own hot-button issues.** View the film before your event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren't dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.

**Be knowledgeable.** You don't need to be an expert on Hergé, comics or European history to lead an event, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact. In addition to the "Background Information" section below, you may want to take a look at the suggested Web sites and books in the "Resources" section on p. 16.

**Be clear about your role.** You may find yourself taking on several roles for an event, e.g., host, organizer or even projectionist. If you are also planning to serve as facilitator, be sure that you can focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion. As members of the group share their viewpoints, it is important to remain neutral and help the discussion along without imposing your views on the dialogue.

**Know your group.** Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to the issue, or have they dealt with it before? Factors like geography, age, race, religion and socioeconomic class can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles and prior knowledge. Take care not to assume that all members of a particular group share the same point of view. If you are bringing together different segments of your community, we strongly recommend hiring an experienced facilitator.

### Who Should Facilitate?

You may or may not be the best person to facilitate, especially if you have multiple responsibilities for your event. If you are particularly invested in a topic, it might also be wise to ask someone more neutral to guide the dialogue.

If you need to find someone else to facilitate, some university professors, human resource professionals, clergy and youth leaders may be specially trained in facilitation skills. In addition to these local resources, groups such as the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) and the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM) may be able to provide or help you locate skilled facilitators. Be sure that your facilitator receives a copy of this guide well in advance of your event.



## Using this Guide

### Preparing the Group

**Consider how well group members know one another.** If you are bringing together people who have never met, you may want to devote some time at the beginning of the event for introductions.

**Agree to ground rules around language.** Involve the group in establishing some basic rules to ensure respect and aid clarity. Typically such rules include no yelling or use of slurs and asking people to speak in the first person (“I think....”) rather than generalizing for others (“Everyone knows that...”).

**Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard.** Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion. If the group is large, are there plans to break into small groups or partners, or should attendance be limited?

**Talk about the difference between dialogue and debate.** In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening to each other actively. Remind people that they are engaged in a dialogue. This will be especially important in preventing a discussion from dissolving into a repetitive rhetorical political or religious debate.

**Encourage active listening.** Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for things that challenge as well as reinforce their own ideas. You may also consider asking people to practice formal “active listening,” where participants listen without interrupting the speaker, then re-phrase to see if they have heard correctly.

**Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of his or her own experience.** Who we are influences how we interpret what we see. So everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film they have just seen, and all of them may be accurate. It can help people to understand one another’s perspectives if people identify the evidence on which they base their opinion as well as share their views.

**Take care of yourself and group members.** If the intensity level rises, pause to let everyone take a deep breath. You might also consider providing a safe space to “vent,” perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces. If you anticipate that your topic may upset people, be prepared to refer them to local support agencies and/or have local professionals present. Think carefully about what you ask people to share publicly and explain things like confidentiality and whether or not press will be present.



## Background Information

### Hergé

Born in 1907, Georges Remi—better known by his pseudonym, Hergé (pronounced "air-SHAY," the French pronunciation of his initials reversed)—grew up in a middle-class district of Brussels, Belgium. Enamored with drawing from the time he could hold a crayon, Hergé was a self-taught artist. His childhood experiences as a boy scout and his Catholic upbringing would be a core source of his values and worldview.

Hergé first published *Tintin* in 1929 as a comic strip in the youth supplement of a Catholic daily newspaper. The main character, Tintin, was a young boy reporter who battled criminals and corrupt politicians in the course of covering stories. The strip caused a sensation because it had a very different look from other European cartoons, employing rich illustrations, cinematic-style framing and speech bubbles. The distinctive attention to realistic detail became one of the hallmarks of the style of cartooning now identified as the "Brussels School" in deference to Hergé.

Long before Hergé came to influence others, Abbot Norbert Wallez, the director of the newspaper that first published *Tintin*, influenced him. Like many religious people, Wallez was anti-communist and sympathetic to right wing politics. These views were reflected in Hergé's early work although they by no means represented his personal convictions.

In 1932, Hergé married Germaine Kieckens, Wallez's secretary. After almost thirty years of marriage, they separated in 1958 and divorced in 1975. In 1977 he married Fanny Vlaminck, a former colorist for the *Tintin* comic strip.



*Animation of Hergé.*

Photo © 2006 Angel Production / Moulinsart

When the Nazis occupied Belgium in World War II, Hergé was drawing comic strips for a newspaper called *Le Soir*. He continued to work for the paper while it was under Nazi control. As a result, after the war Hergé was accused of being a collaborator and arrested. He was ultimately exonerated, but he was blacklisted and unable to find work for several years.

Before Hergé's death from leukemia in 1983, he published no fewer than 24 *Tintin* adventure books and won numerous awards for his comic strip. More than 200 million *Tintin* comics have been sold around the world and the strip has been translated into 55 languages.



## Background Information

### Selected People Featured in *Tintin and I*



**Georges Remi** - The cartoonist better known as Hergé.  
Photo © Numa Sadoul



**Abbot Norbert Wallez** - The Catholic priest who first published *Tintin* and who was one of the greatest influences on Hergé.



**Tchang Chong-Chen** - The Chinese artist who introduced Hergé to Chinese poetry, calligraphy and art. Separated for decades by war and political divisions, Hergé and Tchang were reunited shortly before Hergé's death.



**Numa Sadoul** - The actor, director and writer who was the interviewer in *Tintin and I*.



**Germaine Kieckens** - Hergé's first wife and Wallez's secretary.



**Fanny Vlamincq** - Hergé's second wife and a former colorist for the *Tintin* comic strip.

unless noted otherwise all photos are  
Simon Plum, © 2006 Angel Production / Moulinsart



## General Discussion Questions

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you may want to pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question, such as:

- If you could ask Hergé a question, what would you ask and why?
- Did anything in this film "speak truth" to you? If so, what?
- What insights, inspiration or new knowledge did you gain from this film?
- Two months from now, what do you think you will remember from this film and why?



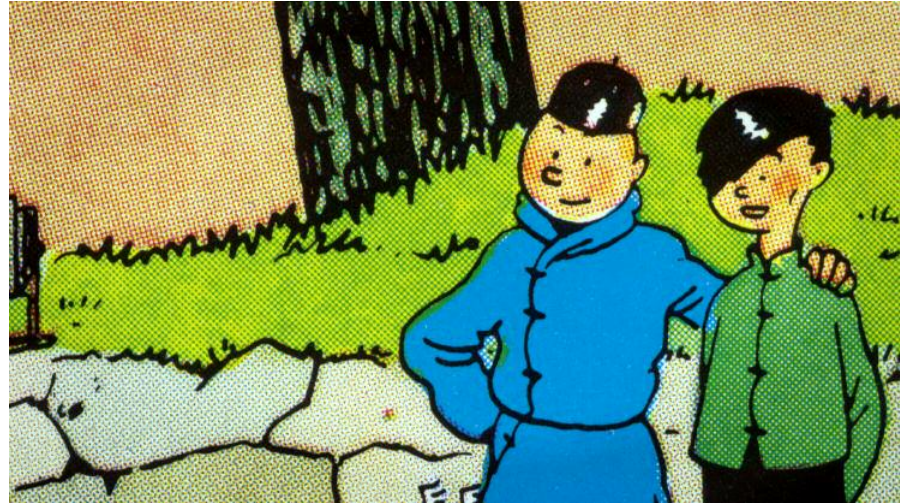
*"The Adventures of Tintin: Prisoners of the Sun" (1949).*  
Photo Simon Plum, © 2006 Moulinsart



## Discussion Prompts

### Artist as Messenger

- In the film, Hergé said that *Tintin* “definitely carries a message, don’t you agree?” How would you respond? What do you think Hergé wanted to communicate through his work?
- Through *Tintin*, Hergé took his European readers around the globe despite having never visited the places that he drew. What are the drawbacks of representing a place through information and images taken from secondary sources? What are the advantages?
- Do you think *Tintin* influences people’s political views or the issues they think about? What are some significant artistic expressions that impact your community today? How would you describe their impact? Can you think of any contemporary comic strips that convey a message to their readers?
- In your view, can cartoonists like Hergé be considered artists? What differentiates popular art, like comic strips, from fine art, like paintings? Why might Hergé have had difficulty defining himself as both a cartoonist and a painter?



“The Adventures of Tintin: In the Blue Lotus” (1936).

Photo © 2006 Moulinsart

collaboration than everyday workers, such as miners and bakers. Why do you think that was so?

- What choices must artists consider who want to continue creating art despite living under a repressive regime? Under such circumstances, where is the line between simply creating politically acceptable art and contributing to political propaganda? In your view, was Hergé a propagandist? Why or why not?

- Hergé’s mentor was drawn to fascism. Beyond seeing fascism as a way to oppose communism, how might Hergé’s Catholic foundation have influenced his views on his mentor’s fascist ideals?

### Artist as Citizen

- Hergé was labeled a Nazi collaborator and blacklisted for continuing to work for his employer, *Le Soir*, while the newspaper was controlled by the Nazis. Do you think these consequences were fair? Why or why not? What would you have done under the same circumstances?
- Hergé notes that people who worked in the press were more frequently accused of Nazi



Animation of Hergé.

Photo © 2006 Angel Production / Moulinsart

- With respect to current events, what lessons do you take away from Hergé’s approach to faith and politics?

- If you were a publisher faced with the decision of reprinting racist *Tintin* books or comic strips, would you? Why or why not?



## Discussion Prompts



*Hergé working in his office.*  
Photo © 2006 Moulinsart

### Artist as Man

- Hergé says that Tintin is a projection of himself, “the hero without fear or flaws. It is how I would like to be. In any case, what I strove to be.” What are the benefits of striving for perfection? What are the drawbacks?
- At several points during the interview, Hergé describes himself as a boy scout. What values or characteristics does Hergé consider to be embodied in the ideal of the boy scout? In what ways did his devotion to that ideal serve him well? In what ways did it hinder him?
- What does Hergé define as “heroic” behavior? Do you agree with his vision of a hero? How do you define a hero, and who are the heroes in your life or community?
- Hergé often appears to be on a quest for a “certain morality.” What is the appeal of restrictions when it comes to morals or values? What kind of community does adherence to a “certain morality” produce? Is it the kind of community that you would want to live in? Why or why not?



## Taking Action



# TINTIN ET MOI

*Still from the Belgian short film "Stadissimus."*

Photo © RTBF - Belgian Television

- Create a guide to political art and artists in your community. Include observations about the types of issues that the artists address as well as interviews with the artists about their work.
- Encourage people to create their own comic strips and create a public display of their work.
- Start a study group to examine the long-term ethical lessons of World War II. Focus on which lessons are most central to the issues confronting your community today.



## Resources

### WEBSITES

#### The film

**P.O.V.'s *Tintin and I* Web site**  
[www.pbs.org/pov/tintinandi](http://www.pbs.org/pov/tintinandi)

The *Tintin and I* companion Web site offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Anders Østergaard, ample opportunities for viewers to “talk back” and talk to each other about the film and the following special features:

#### ARTICLE

##### *Tintin's* Effect on American Artists and Culture

In Europe and Canada, *Tintin* is as popular as Mickey Mouse and Bart Simpson are in the United States. Though the comic hero is still largely unknown in this country, his influence on American art and pop culture is more far-reaching than most people realize.

#### CARTOONIST ROUNDTABLE

**Participants: Jessica Abel, Daniel Clowes, Phoebe Gloeckner, Jason Lutes, Seth and Chris Ware**

Comic books are gaining acceptance as reading for grown-ups and as a serious art form. Six contemporary comic artists, including Daniel Clowes and Chris Ware, talk about Hergé's influence, visual narratives and the art of cartooning.

#### TINTIN.COM

[www.tintin.com](http://www.tintin.com)

This official *Tintin* Web site includes a timeline of Hergé's life.

#### THE CULT OF TINTIN AT TINTINOLOGIST.ORG

[www.tintinologist.org](http://www.tintinologist.org)

This unofficial *Tintin* fan site lists a variety of articles about the comic strip and its creator as well as links to other *Tintin* sites.

### What's Your P.O.V.?

*P.O.V.'s online Talking Back Tapestry is a colorful, interactive representation of your feelings about **Tintin and I**.*

*Listen to other P.O.V. viewers talk about the film and add your thoughts by calling 1-800-688-4768. [www.pbs.org/pov/talkingback.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/talkingback.html)*



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and entering its 19th season on PBS, the award-

winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

**P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education**

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public-television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films.

Front cover photo:

*Tintin and Hergé.*

Photo Simon Plum, © 2006 Moulinsart

Corner photo:

*Tintin and Snowy.*

Photo Simon Plum, © 2006 Moulinsart

**P.O.V. Interactive**

[www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov) houses our unique Talking Back feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

P.O.V. is a project of American Documentary, Inc. Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s Community Engagement activities and the Diverse Voices Project is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET/Los Angeles, WGBH/Boston and WNET/New York. Cara Mertes is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

**American Documentary, Inc.**

[www.americandocumentary.org](http://www.americandocumentary.org)

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