

**DOCUMENTARY AND SOCIAL CHANGE**  
**MMC 6936/Section 09DB**  
**3 CREDIT HOURS**  
**SPRING 2015**

Instructor: Churchill Roberts, 3040A Weimer  
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Instructor's documentary film websites:

<http://www.pbs.org/harrymoore/>  
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/negroeswithguns/>  
<http://www.jou.ufl.edu/documentary/angelofahlem/angelofahlem.html>  
<http://www.petrinz.com/>

Office hours: Tuesday 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 4 p.m.-5 p.m., Thursday 3 p.m.-5 p.m. or almost any time by appointment

Class Times: Time periods 7-8 Tuesday (1:55 p.m.-3:50 p.m.) and 7 on Thursday (1:55 p.m.-2:45 p.m.)

Classroom: 3020 Weimer

#### Description

This course looks at documentary film as both an index and agent of social change—an **index** in the sense that documentary chronicles many important moments and movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and **agent** in the sense that documentary is often used to bring about social change. For the purposes of this course, the term social change is used in the broadest sense—to encompass social, economic, political, and cultural change.

Since its introduction at the end of the nineteenth century, film has been recognized as an important tool for social movements. Lenin considered cinema the most important of the arts. Governments worldwide were quick to recognize the propaganda value of film, particularly documentary film, and to enlist it to their ends. In World War II, the United States and its allies produced documentaries to mobilize the public and maintain troop morale. Germany and its allies did the same. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union used documentary film (as well as radio broadcasts and print media) to compete for the hearts and minds of people in the developing world. Today, activists use documentary to promote or protest a variety of causes from the environment and corporate practices to war, religion, and democracy.

Our study of documentary will focus on the following:

1. The various sociological perspectives that attempt to explain social change;
2. Documentary as a key component of social change worldwide;
3. Persuasive techniques in documentary;
4. Filmmakers at the forefront of social change.

## TOPICS

### Part I Historical look at documentary and social change

- A. Theories of social and economic change, the diffusion of new ideas and practices
- B. Soviet film in the 1920s and 1930s—the marriage of film and socialism
- C. British documentary in the 1930s—Griersonian documentary as a means of promoting democracy
- D. German documentary in the 1930s—selling Fascism
- E. U.S. documentary in the 1930s—Pare Lorentz and the New Deal
- F. Documentary in a hot war—softening attitudes toward the Soviets
- G. Documentary in a cold war—hardening attitudes toward the Soviets

### Part II Documentary and contemporary social change

- H. Civil rights—the struggle of African Americans in the United States
- I. The women's movement—women in the workplace
- J. Lifestyles—gay and proud
- K. Religion—social and political dimensions
- L. War—and the aftermath of war
- M. Corporate America—is what's good for GM really good for the country?

### Part III Political and social change in China, Cuba, and Burma

- N. China's economic transformation
- O. Political change and resistance to change in China, Cuba, and Burma (Myanmar)

Most class sessions will consist of lecture and discussion and viewing and critiquing of selected documentary film excerpts. Some sessions will be devoted to the presentation of class assignments.

Method of Testing

Basis for Grades

There will be two tests, a mid-term Thursday, March 13 and a final exam Wednesday, April 30 from 12:30-2:30 p.m. Each test counts as 30 percent of your grade. (Note: I'll give you sample questions prior to the mid-term so you'll have an idea of what and how to study.)

Another assignment, a critical look at documentary film and social change, will count 30 percent. The paper for this assignment will be 15-20 pages in length, numbered, typed in an appropriate style such as MLA, Turabian, APA, etc., and include accompanying endnotes/references.

**OR**

You may choose to write a documentary script in lieu of a paper. The script must be well researched, 30-40 pages in length, and typed in the Celtx format. Guidelines for the script and sample scripts can be found on the Sakai website.

The due date for the paper or script is Tuesday, April 22. The remaining 10 percent of the grade will be based on individual and group assignments.

I strongly suggest you miss as few classes as possible, for viewing of the films is, needless to say, *sine qua non* to understanding documentary.

Grading

90-100	A- to A
80-89	B- to B+
70-79	C- to C+
60-69	D- to D+
Below	E

As you are no doubt aware, grading in a class of this nature is highly subjective. Nevertheless, here are some guidelines I use for grading test questions, papers, and assignments.

1. Tests: Is the response to the test question well written, coherent, and to the point (a bit redundant but you get the idea)? Does the response address the main points in our discussion or in the relevant assigned reading? How does the response compare to the responses of other students?
2. The paper: How original is it? That is, does it offer any new insights into the issue? How thorough is it in terms of the research? Put another way, does it suggest a superficial treatment of the subject or a comprehensive treatment? How narrowly focused is the paper? (Usually, the narrower the focus the better the paper is.) How well written is the paper? Are the pages numbered? Is it replete with typos? Does it follow a style manual?
3. The script: How original is it? Is it a good story? Is it dramatically told? Is it in the proper format? Do you have good characters? Do you know the intended audience?

**UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA HONOR CODE**

**We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.**

On all work submitted for credit by students at the University, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The University requires all members of its community to be honest in all endeavors. A fundamental principle is that the whole process of learning and pursuit of knowledge is diminished by cheating, plagiarism and other acts of academic dishonesty. In addition, every dishonest act in the academic environment affects other students adversely, from the skewing of the grading curve to giving unfair advantage for honors or for professional or graduate school admission. Therefore, the University will take severe action against dishonest students. Similarly, measures will be taken against faculty, staff and administrators who practice dishonest or demeaning behavior.

Texts

Patricia Aufderheide, **Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Trevor Noble, **Social Theory and Social Change** (New York: PALGRAVE, 2000).

Gary Evans, **John Grierson: Trailblazer of Documentary Film** (Lantzville, BC: XYZ Publishing, 2005).

Additional Readings (available on the Sakai website)

1. Richard Pipes, "Culture as Propaganda," in **Russia under the Bolshevik Regime** (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 282-336.
2. David Welch, **Propaganda and the German Cinema: 1933-1945** (I.B. Tauris: London, 2001), pp. 123-158.
3. David B. Hinton, **The Films of Leni Riefenstahl**, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2000), pp. 19-46.
4. Robert L. Snyder, **Pare Lorentz and the Documentary Film** (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), pp. 21-78.
5. Frank Capra, **The Name Above the Title** (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 325-342.
6. Lewis Jacobs, "The Turn Toward Conservatism," in **The Documentary Tradition**, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Lewis Jacobs (New York: Norton and Company, 1979), pp. 276-282.
7. Timothy B. Tyson, **Radio Free Dixie: Robert Williams and the Roots of Black Power** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 1-25.
8. Jo Freeman, "From Suffrage to Women's Liberation: Feminism in Twentieth Century America," in **Women: A Feminist Perspective**, edited by Jo Freeman (Mayfield: Mountain View, CA, 1995), pp. 509-528.

9. B.J. Bullert, "Tongues Untied," in **Public Television: Politics and the Battle over Documentary Film** (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 91-122.
10. Elizabeth C. Economy, "The Game Changer: Coping with China's Foreign Policy Revolution," **Foreign Affairs** 89 (2010), 142-152.
11. Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang, "Digital Communication and Political Change in China," **International Journal of Communication** 5 (2011), 298-319.

#### Viewing Schedule

**Battleship Potemkin** (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925), Soviet film about the 1905 revolution

**October** (Sergei Eisenstein, 1927), a film commemorating the 1917 revolution

**The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty** (Esther Shub, 1927), historical account of the fall of the czar and the triumph of communism.

**Man with the Movie Camera** (Dziga Vertov, 1929), a visual manifesto of socialist society

**Three Songs about Lenin** (Dziga Vertov, 1934), Vertov's poetic tribute to Lenin

**Grierson** (Roger Blais, 1973), Canadian National Film Board biography of the father of documentary film

**Triumph of the Will** (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935), powerful propaganda film about Adolph Hitler

**The Plow That Broke the Plains** (Pare Lorentz, 1935), the U.S. government and the New Deal

**The River** (Pare Lorentz, 1936), government documentary on the need to create the Tennessee Valley Authority

**Battle of Russia** (Frank Capra, 1943), the "Why We Fight" film showing the Soviets as heroic allies

**Nightmare in Red** (Henry Salomon, 1955), an NBC Project XX documentary showing the Soviet Union as a growing menace

**Red Nightmare** (1962), also called **The Commies Are Coming**, a fictionalized account of the communist takeover of America. Narrated by Jack Webb. 60 minutes.

**A Time for Burning** (1966), William Jersey's use of the direct cinema approach to reveal the turmoil caused by a minister's attempt to integrate a Lutheran Church

**Negroes With Guns: Rob Williams and Black Power** (Sandra Dickson and Churchill Roberts, 2005), forgotten hero of the Civil Rights Movement

***The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*** (Connie Field, 1980), a film about working women in World War II

***Tongues Untied*** (Marlon Riggs, 1989), classic film about gays blacks and the homophobia and racism they encounter

***Before Stonewall*** (Greta Schiller, 1985), the life of gay and lesbian Americans prior to the famous raid on a gay bar in Greenwich Village in 1969

***Jesus Camp*** (Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, 2006), a look at a summer camp for Evangelical Christian kids

***Regret to Inform*** (Barbara Sonneborn's 1998 film about her journey to Vietnam to try and understand the death of her husband who was killed during the Vietnam War

***Sad Song of the Yellow Skin*** (Michael Rubbo, 1970), National Film Board film about the people of Saigon as seen through the experiences of three young American journalists

***The Invisible War*** (Kirby Dick, 2012), investigative documentary about sexual assault in the military

***Capitalism: A Love Story*** (Michael Moore, 2009), Michael Moore examines the impact of corporate dominance over people's everyday lives

***The Corporation*** (Jennifer Abbott and Mark Achbar, 2003), based on the book, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*

***Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*** (Robert Greenwald, 2005), a portrait of Wal-Mart as a greedy giant corporation

***Food, Inc.*** (Robert Kenner, 2008), a shocking look at what we eat and how the fast food industry puts value and convenience over nutrition and environmental impact

***Forks Over Knives*** (Lee Fulkerson, 2011), penetrating look at whether degenerative diseases can be controlled and eliminated by rejecting animal-based and processed foods

***China from the Inside*** (Jonathan Lewis, 2006), a four-part series on China focusing on the Communist Party, women, the environment, and freedom and justice

***Please Vote for Me*** (Weijun Chen, 2007), democracy at work—a look at the first open elections of a class officer in a third-grade, public elementary school in Wuhan, China

***Up the Yangtze!*** (Yung Chang, 2007), a story about modernization in China and its impact on families living in the shadow of the Three Gorges Dam

***Last Train Home*** (Lixin Fan, 2009), the story of some 130 million migrant workers trying to get to their home villages for Chinese New Year's celebrations

***Ai Weiwei Never Sorry*** (Alison Klayman, 2011), the story of a famous Chinese artist and activist

***Campaign for Cuba*** (Sandra Dickson and Churchill Roberts, 1992), chronicles the struggle for political and social change in Cuba

***Burma VJ: Reporting from a Closed Country*** (Anders Ostegaard, 2009), dangerous attempts to report on the military-controlled country of Burma (Myanmar)

#### Weekly Lecture-Discussion Schedule

1. Week 1 (January 7 and 9)

Overview, theory

2. Week 2 (January 14 and 16)

Theory, Soviet film in the 20s and 30s

Readings: **Social Theory and Social Change** (complete by January 16);  
Additional Reading No. 1

3. Week 3 (January 21 and 23)

British documentary in the 1930s

Readings: **John Grierson: Trailblazer of Documentary Film** (complete by  
January 23)

4. Week 4 (January 28 and 30)

German documentary in the 1930s

Readings: Additional Readings No. 2 and No. 3

5. Week 5 (February 4 and 6)

U.S. documentary in the 1930s

Readings: Additional Reading No. 4

6. Week 6 (February 11 and 13)

Documentary in a hot war, documentary in a cold war

Readings: Additional Readings No. 5 and No. 6

7. Week 7 (February 18 and 20)

Civil Rights Movement

Readings: Additional Reading No. 7

8. Week 8 (February 25 and 27)

The Women's Movement and Lifestyles

Readings: Additional Readings No. 8 and No. 9

9. Week 9 (March 11 and 13)

Review and mid-term exam

10. Week 10 (March 18 and 20)

Religion

11. Week 11 (March 25 and 27)

War and Anti-war

12. Week 12 (April 1 and 3)

Corporate America

13. Week 13 (April 8 and 10)

Corporate America/China

14. Week 14 (April 15 and 17)

China

Readings: Additional Readings No. 10 and No. 11

15. Week 15 (April 22)

Political dissent

Readings: **Documentary: A Very Short Introduction** (complete by April 22)

16. Week 17 (April 30)

Final exam Wednesday, April 30 (12:30-2:30 p.m. in Room 3020)