

DOCUMENTARY AND SOCIAL CHANGE
MMC 6936/Section 8646
3 CREDIT HOURS
FALL 2012

Instructor: Churchill Roberts, 3040A Weimer
392-1545 (office)
371-7969 (home)
crobert@ufl.edu

Office hours: Monday, 10-11, 1:30-4:30, or almost any time by appointment

Class Time: Time periods 5 Monday and 5-6 Wednesday (11:45 a.m.-12:35 p.m. M and 11:45 a.m.-1:40 p.m. Wednesday)

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 it chronicles many important moments and movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and agent in the sense that it is used to bring about 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 rally 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 and religion.

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. Theoretical models of social 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 plight of African Americans
- I. The women’s movement—women in the workplace
- J. Lifestyles—gay and proud
- K. Religion—mainstream or cult movements?
- L. War—the anti-war movement
- M. Corporate America—is what’s good for GM really good for the country?

Part III Documenting social change in China

- N. Change and resistance to change in the world’s most populated country
- O. The case of nearby Burma (Myanmar)

Class Sessions

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

There will be two tests, a mid-term October 17 and a final exam Thursday, December 13 from 7:30-9:30 a.m. (We may want to change the time to later in the day!) Each test counts as 30 percent of your grade. (Note: I'll give you sample questions prior to the mid-term so that 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 should be 15-20 pages in length, numbered, typed in an appropriate style such as MLA, Turabian, APA, etc., and include accompanying endnotes/references. The due date for the paper is Wednesday, December 7. 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 assignments: How thoroughly was the assignment researched? How insightful was it?

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

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**, 3rd 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**, 2nd 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

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, Churchill Roberts, Cindy Hill, and Cara Pilson, 2005), forgotten heroes 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

The Fog of War (Errol Morris, 2004), American military as seen through the eyes of controversial Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara

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

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

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 greed 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

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

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

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 (August 22)

Overview, theory

2. Week 2 (August 27 and 29)

Theory, Soviet film in the 20s and 30s

Readings: **Social Theory and Social Change** (complete by August 29); Additional Reading No. 1

Labor Day holiday, Monday, September 3

3. Week 3 (September 5)

British documentary in the 1930s

Readings: **John Grierson: Trailblazer of Documentary Film** (complete by September 5)

4. Week 4 (September 10 and 12)

German documentary in the 1930s

Readings: Additional Readings No. 2 and No. 3

5. Week 5 (September 17 and 19)

U.S. documentary in the 1930s

Readings: Additional Reading No. 4

6. Week 6 (September 24 and 26)

Documentary in a hot war, documentary in a cold war

Readings: Additional Readings No. 5 and No. 6

7. Week 7 (October 1 and 3)

Civil Rights Movement

Readings: Additional Reading No. 7

8. Week 8 (October 8 and 10)

The Women's Movement and Lifestyles

Readings: Additional Readings No. 8 and No. 9

9. Week 9 (October 15 and 17)

Review and mid-term exam

10. Week 10 (October 22 and 24)

Religion

11. Week 11 (October 29 and 31)

War and anti-war

12. Week 12 (November 5 and 7)

Corporate America

13. Week 13 (November 14)

Corporate America

14. Week 14 (November 19 and 21)

China

Readings: Additional Readings No. 10 and No. 11

15. Week 15 (November 26 and 28)

China

16. Week 16 (December 3)

Burma

Readings: **Documentary: A Very Short Introduction** (complete by December 3)

17. Week 17 (December 13)

Final exam Thursday, December 13 (time to be determined)