

DOCUMENTARY AND SOCIAL CHANGE
MMC 6936/Section 8646
3 CREDIT HOURS
FALL 2014

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.petrginz.com/>

Office hours Monday, 10-11, 2-5, or almost any time by appointment

Class Time Time period 5 on Monday (11:45 a.m. 12:35 p.m.) time periods and 5 and 6 on Wednesday (11:45 a.m.-1:40 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 and economic 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 Documenting social change in the People’s Republic of China

- N. Social and economic change in the world’s most populated country
- O. Resistance to political change

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.

Basis for Grades

There will be two tests, a mid-term October 22 and a final exam Wednesday, December 17 from 3-5 p.m. in our regular classroom. Each test counts as 30 percent of your grade. (Note: I'll give 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 produce 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 Wednesday, December 10 (at the time of our last class). 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?

4. 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. Evan Osnos, **Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China** (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014), Epilogue, pp. 357-371.
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), causes of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s and the government's response

The River (Pare Lorentz, 1936), government documentary on the need to create the Tennessee Valley Authority and prevent flooding in the Mississippi River Valley

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

Chronicle of a Summer (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1961), influential French cinema vérité film that analyzed the sociopolitical conditions in France in the early 1960s

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 giant greedy 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

The Gate of Heavenly Peace (Richard Gordon and Carma Hinton, 1995), about the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989.

Searching for Lin Zhao's Soul (Hu Jie, 2004), a film about the tragic life of a gifted young woman who was executed for speaking out during the height of Chairman Mao's rule

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 migrant workers trying to balance earning a living, supporting their families, and getting home for Chinese New Year's celebrations

Ai Weiwei Never Sorry (Alison Klayman, 2011), the story of the renowned dissident Chinese artist

Weekly Lecture-Discussion Schedule

1. Week 1 (August 25-27)

Overview, theory

2. Week 2 (September 3)

Theory, Soviet film in the 20s and 30s

Readings: **Social Theory and Social Change** (complete by September 3);
Additional Reading No. 1

Labor Day holiday, Monday, September 1

3. Week 3 (September 8 and 10)

British documentary in the 1930s

Readings: **John Grierson: Trailblazer of Documentary Film** (complete by
September 8)

4. Week 4 (September 15 and 17)

German documentary in the 1930s

Readings: Additional Readings No. 2 and No. 3

5. Week 5 (September 22 and 24)

U.S. documentary in the 1930s

Readings: Additional Reading No. 4

6. Week 6 (September 29 and October 1)
Documentary in a hot war, documentary in a cold war
Readings: Additional Readings No. 5 and No. 6
7. Week 7 (October 6 and 8)
Civil Rights Movement
Readings: Additional Reading No. 7
8. Week 8 (October 13 and 15)
The Women's Movement and Lifestyles
Readings: Additional Readings No. 8 and No. 9
9. Week 9 (October 20 and 22)
Review and mid-term exam
10. Week 10 (October 27 and 29)
Religion
11. Week 11 (November 3 and 5)
War and anti-war
12. Week 12 (November 10 and 12)
Corporate America
13. Week 13 (November 17 and 19)
Corporate America
14. Week 14 (November 24)
China
Readings: Additional Readings No. 10 and No. 11

Thanksgiving holiday, Wednesday, November 26

15. Week 15 (December 1 and 3)

China

16. Week 16 (December 8 and 10)

China

Readings: **Documentary: A Very Short Introduction** (complete by December 8)

Final exam Wednesday, December 17, from 3:00-5:00 p.m. in 3020