

Course: **The Changing Character of Documentary Film**
Instructor: Lisa Molomot
Contact Info: lmolomot@gmail.com
Location/Time: PAC 107/ Tuesday 7-9:30pm

Course Summary:

This course traces the development of the documentary film from the late Nineteenth Century to the present. The goal of the course is to learn critical thinking skills as they relate to nonfiction film. As students learn about the construction of documentary films, they will be able to question what it is they are actually seeing and critique the films in class discussions and papers.

Methods of Evaluation:

Class participation: 25%
Mid-term paper: 20%
Final paper: 25%
Journal assignments: 30%

Journal Assignments and Papers:

Each week students will write a 1 page journal entry about the film(s) viewed outside of class. There will be both a mid-term paper and a final paper.

Course Materials:

Students are required to purchase Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film by Erik Barnouw and The Documentary Tradition by Lewis Jacobs. Both can be found at Broad Street Books. Students will be required to watch films outside of class each week. All films are on reserve at Olin Library. Ask for the dvd's with the call number and specify that it's a video. Please return all DVD's back to the reserve desk. Films are also available through Netflix and at local video stores such as Best Video in Hamden-(203) 287-9286.

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend ALL 12 classes. If anyone misses more than 2 classes, they will be unable to pass the course.

Class 1 (1/31)

Introduction to Documentary Film/The Modes

In Class:

Short films by the Lumiere Brothers (1895)

Travelogue films

Happy Go Lucky (2008)-Mike Leigh**Class 2 (2/7)**

Robert Flaherty and John Grierson, the fathers of documentary

In Class: *The March of Time* (1935-51)Assignment Due:*Nanook of the North* (1922)-Robert Flaherty*Night Mail* (1936)-Harry Watt and Basil Wright

Read: Jacobs pp.12-21 and Barbouw pp.3-30, 33-51, 85-139

Journal Assignment: In your opinion is *Nanook of the North* a fiction film or a documentary? Why?**Class 3 (2/14)**

Avant-Garde and Poetic Films of the 1920's

In Class: *Rain* (1929)Assignment Due:*The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)-Dziga Vertov

Read: Jacobs pp.49-63 and Barnouw pp. 51-81

Journal Assignment: Why is *The Man with a Movie Camera* a self-reflexive film?**Class 4 (2/21)**

World War II and Propaganda Films

In Class: *Why We Fight* (1942-45)-Frank Capra*The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* (1993)-Ray MullerAssignment Due:*Triumph of the Will* (1935)-Leni Riefenstahl

Read: Jacobs pp.136-140 and Barnouw pp.139-172

Journal Assignment: Was *Triumph* a propaganda film or an art film?**Class 5 (2/28)**

Postwar Documentary and the Rise of Television

In Class: *L'Opéra Mouffée* (1958)-Agnes Varda

Assignment Due:

Night and Fog (1955)-Alan Resnais

Read: Jacobs pp. 276-282, 327-333 and Barnouw pp.172-182

Journal Assignment: How is the voiceover narration similar to or different from the VO used in documentaries today, such as in Ken Burns' films?

Class 6 (3/6)

New Technology of the 1960's/Cinema Verité and Direct Cinema

In Class: *Le Joli Mai* (1963)-Chris Marker

Assignment Due:

Chronicles of a Summer (1960)-Jean Rouch

High School (1968)-Fredrick Wiseman

Read: Barnouw pp.230-262 and Jacobs pp.368-380

Journal Assignment: Do you feel the the characters in *Chronicles* were more or less "real" with the presence of the camera?

March 13/20-Spring Break

Class 7 (3/27)

Ethics

In Class: *Greg Ford For Congress*(1998)-Stephen Lipscomb

Assignment Due :

Grey Gardens (1975)-The Maysles

Harlan County, USA (1976)-Barbara Kopple

Read: Jacobs pp.400-405, handout

Journal Assignment: What ethical issues do you imagine may have come up for the filmmakers while filming *Grey Gardens*?

Class 8 (4/3)

Documentaries of the 1970's and 80's

Mid-term exam in class

Assignment Due:

The Thin Blue Line (1988)-Errol Morris

Roger and Me(1989)-Michael Moore

Journal Assignment: Compare the above films in terms of your experience as a viewer.

Class 9 (4/10)

Watch and discuss: *The Gleaners and I (2000)*-Agnes Varda

Assignment Due:

Watch *Sherman's March (1986)*-Ross McElwee- Why was this a successful or unsuccessful film?

Class 10 (4/17)

The 3-Act structure/Finding the Narrative

Assignment Due:

Blue Vinyl (2002)-Judith Helfand

51 Birch Street (2005)-Doug Block

Final Paper assignment will be handed out

*****NO CLASS APRIL 24**

Class 11 (5/1)

Contemporary Independent Documentaries

Assignment Due:

The Last Train Home (2009)-Lixin Fan

Daughter From Danang (2002)- Gail Dolgin and Vincente Franco

Class 12 (5/8)

PBS/Television Documentaries

In Class: *Precious Knowledge*-Eren McGinnis and Ari Palos

Assignment Due:

Read grant proposal for *Precious Knowledge*

ON RESERVE at OLIN LIBRARY:

1. *Workers Emerging From a Factory*-Lumiere brothers
2. *Nanook of the North*-Robert Flaherty
3. *The Man with a Movie Camera*-Dziga Vertov
4. *Rain*-Joris Ivens
5. *Night Mail*- Harry Watt and Basil Wright
6. *Triumph of the Will*-Leni Riefenstahl
7. *Why We Fight* (series)-Frank Capra
8. *Night and Fog*-Alan Resnais

9. *Chronicles of a Summer*-Jean Rouch
10. *High School*-Fredrick Wiseman
11. *Grey Gardens*-The Maysles
12. *The Thin Blue Line*-Errol Morris
13. *Roger and Me*-Michael Moore
14. *Gleaners and Me* Agnes Varda
15. *Daughter From Danang*-Gail Dolgin and Vincente Franco
16. *Blue Vinyl*-Judith Helfand
17. *51 Birch Street* Doug Block
18. *The Last Train Home*-Lixin Fan
19. *Harlan County, USA*-Barbara Kopple
- 20 *Precious Knoweldge*-Eren McGinnis and Ari Palos