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Art and Persuasion: A Communication Study of Contemporary Documentary Film

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ART AND PERSUASION:
A COMMUNICATION STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTARY FILM

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ABSTRACT

LAUREN ELIZABETH FREEMAN:

"Art and Persuasion: A Communication Study of Contemporary Documentary Film"
(Under the direction of Joe Atkins)

The focus of this study is defining and determining the area of communication in contemporary documentary films. In examining the structure and aesthetic composition of documentary film, this study will compare the film genre to the areas of journalism, persuasion and propaganda through secondary and primary research defining the elements that constitute these specific areas of communication.

Secondary research involved text, newspaper articles, online journals and websites, and the viewing of documentary film. The primary research was conducted through personal interviews with documentary filmmakers. Research findings resulted in a wide range of views on the definition and uses for documentary film which, as a result, determines that more than one area of communication is utilized in the documentary genre. The study concludes that a range between art, journalism, specifically alternative journalism, and propaganda is used in contemporary documentary film.

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study is to examine the film genre of the documentary. In examining the structure and aesthetic composition of documentary film, this study will compare the film genre to areas of journalism, persuasion and propaganda through secondary and primary research, defining the elements that constitute these specific areas of communication. It will address the question: Are popular, contemporary documentary films journalism or entertainment?

Film is the predominant social narrative in the twenty-first century making today's Hollywood blockbuster as popular as yesterday's best-selling novel. Documentary film, as well as other film genres, allows the audience to view the world as an outsider, exploring and understanding truths beyond personal perspective. Film directors can take complicated social issues and summarize them in a few minutes or a few hours with images and dialogue. The storytelling of film is not told with words on pages but with images and sound on a screen.

The connection with the characters, the art of film, and the ability to draw conclusions for the characters can guide one to find understanding and personal discovery in a complicated world. It is sociology and art; freedom of expression and truth; critique and sometimes answers. In short, it can be a mirror of society and its members, but above all other genres, a documentary can be used as a tool to inform viewers.

Film is an art and documentary filmmakers are practicing artists. Documentary films have celebrated recent success due to an ability to inform and entertain

simultaneously. More people are attending movies as a form of leisure than ever before. According to statistics by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, about 1.55 billion Americans attended motion pictures in 2004, almost a 23 percent jump since 1990[1]. Even more staggering, sixty percent of Americans attend movies,[2] while 47 percent of Americans read newspapers.[3] These recent statistics illuminate the desire of Americans to be entertained.

Theatrically released documentary films of recent years range from amusing stories told in unique or unfamiliar situations, profiles of the lives of famous celebrities, or can be examinations of political issues. While Michael Moore's documentaries, such as *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* address political issues, Toplin Marily Agrelo's *Mad Hot Ball Room,* and Luc Jacquet's *March of the Penguins* entertained audiences with a light-hearted look at unconventional situations. Alek Keshishian's *Madonna: Truth or Dare,* and Lauren Lazin's *Tupac: Resurrection,* portray the captivating life stories of popular American icons. Each of these films are in the top 10 list of the highest grossing American documentaries and are a good representation of what contemporary audiences like to see in documentaries.

This study seeks to examine several questions concerning the documentary film: Do documentaries present their stories and evidence in a journalistic manner; accurate, fair, and objectively researched? What is the difference between journalism, persuasion, and propaganda, specifically as it relates to images and film? Do documentarians meet the same ethical guidelines expected of a journalist? Are documentaries merely a form of entertainment?

[1] Bureau of Economic Analysis: "Selected Recreational Activities: 1990-2005."
[2] U.S. National Endowment for the Arts: "2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts"
[3]Pew Research Center for People and the Press's biennial survey of media consumption (Kovach 25).

CHAPTER 1

DEFINING DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING

Documentary is a clumsy description, but let it stand.

- John Grierson in *Grierson on Documentary*, 1966 (145)

In the early 20th century when film was becoming popular, documentaries were initially called *documentairés, actualités, topicals, interest films, educationals, expedition films, travel films*, or after 1907, *travelogues* (Barnouw 19). Filmmakers, theorists, historians, and critics alike have long debated the definition of documentary film. As a result, no clear definition has emerged, but a few characteristics of the genre have been consistently agreed upon. First, there is an understanding and assumed agreement between viewer and filmmaker that the content depicted in documentary film is factual, real, and is a representation, not a fabrication, of reality. The material included is from real events, real places, and real people. Second, documentaries also use social actors. Social actors, or non-actors, are unpaid and nonprofessional who represent themselves and their own opinions rather than those of the director or script writer. Interviews with social actors are intended to capture authentic, personal thoughts (Nichols 5, 20, 30 Ellis & McLane 1, 2 Barnouw 19).

The genre of documentary film is most clearly understood when defined in opposition to fictional film, the most common and recognizable film genre. Fictional

film, like fictional literature, is a reproduction of society in which viewers are expected to imagine and accept the world the filmmaker or author has created. The difficulty in defining documentary is that not every documentary follows a universal style or utilizes similar techniques.

In *A New History of Documentary Film*, five characteristics that documentaries have in common, especially in relation to fiction film, can be found in (1) subject matter, (2) purpose/viewpoint/approach, (3) form, also referred to as structure and construction, (4) production methods and techniques, and (5) audience response (1).

1. In the area of subject matter and content, documentaries choose something that is direct, factual, and specific, and they frequently cover public, rather than private, matters. The people, places, and events are actual and generally contemporary. Unlike fictional films, documentaries usually avoid matters of "the general human condition involving individual human feelings, relationships, and actions: the province of narrative fiction and drama" (1, 2).

2. The area of purpose/viewpoint/approach is what the filmmakers are trying to imply about their subject matter. Their documentaries record significant social and cultural events in an effort to inform viewers. In return, the filmmakers hope to increase viewers' understanding, interest, and sympathy for the characters on screen, and through this form of informal education, lead viewers to live more fully and intelligently. "The purpose or approach of the makers of most documentaries is to record and interpret the actuality in front of the camera and microphone in order to inform and/or persuade us to hold some attitude or take some action in relation to their subjects" (2).

3. Documentary form is determined predominantly by the subject matter, purpose of the film, and method of filmmaking. The form, also thought of as the construction or structure of documentary, tends to be more functional and less concrete than the structures of short stories, novels, or plays because there is no definite progression from exposition to complication to climax to conclusion. Although the story can be told chronologically within a documentary, plot and character development are not necessary as in fiction films. Instead, documentary resembles the structure found in essays, advertisements, editorials, or poems. Whether documentaries originate from a storyboard or are built from spontaneous and unscheduled actions, they are always derived and confined to presenting reality. If they recreate a scene, such as a reenactment, the scene is based on observation and not the filmmaker's imagination as in fiction (2).

4. Production methods and technique refer to how images are shot, sounds recorded, and the manner in which they are edited together. A basic requirement of documentary is the use of nonactors, real people who play themselves, rather than paid professionals "who are cast, costumed, and made up to play 'roles'" (2). The other basic requirement is shooting on location and not on a soundstage with lighting. In most instances, the lighting at location is what is used unless there is inadequate exposure and lighting is needed to supplement. There are exceptions to these general rules, "but generally, any manipulation of images or sounds is largely confined to what is required to make their recording possible, or to make the result seem closer to the actual than inadequate technique might" (2, 3).

5. Lastly, the desired audience response by a documentary filmmaker is twofold: an aesthetic experience and an effect on attitudes, possibly leading to action. The

aesthetic presented in documentary film aims to achieve a specific purpose and is less embellished than what is offered in fictional films. Professional *skill* rather than personal *style* is more often offered by documentary filmmaking; and communication rather than expression is the goal of a documentary filmmaker. "Consequently the audience is responding not so much to the artist (who keeps undercover) as to the subject matter of the film (and the artist's more or less covert statements about it). Generally, the best way to understand and appreciate the intentions of documentary film is to accept the precept of the Roman poet Horace that art should both please and instruct" (3).

After examining these characteristics of documentaries, it is important to also examine scholarly definitions of the documentary genre:

> Definition 1: Document (v): Anything printed, written, etc. that contains information or is relied upon to record or prove something.
>
> *Webster's New World College Dictionary (2002)*

The Webster's definition "to document" cites two reasons for documenting facts: the sake of documenting, which is at the foundation of documentary filmmaking, is for the purpose of collecting and recording information as well as for the purpose of proving something. By this definition, documentary film has the purpose of collecting, presenting, and disseminating information for the formation of opinion and to prove the author or filmmaker's view point.

'Relied upon to record or prove something' also implies gathering evidence. Brian Winston, in *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and Its Legitimations*, discusses the documentary as a form of evidence:

> The contemporary use of 'document' still carries with it the connotation of evidence. This sense of document provided the frame, as it were, into which the technology of photography could be placed. The photograph was received, from the beginning, as a document and therefore as evidence. This evidential status was passed to the cinematograph and is the source of the ideological power of documentary film (11).

Definition 2: "The creative treatment of actuality."

John Grierson, father of British documentary

The most noted of all definitions is from John Grierson, the first person to define the genre in 1926 in his review of Robert Flaherty's *Moana*. He described *Moana* has having 'documentary value,' but later Grierson described the genre officially as "the creative treatment of actuality" (Winston 8). This definition has been dissected by scholars of film due to the ambiguous meaning of 'creative' and 'actuality.' According to Winston, 'actual' means real and 'actuality' means reality in the American documentary filmmaking history. According to Ivor Montagu, "all Grierson might have meant by the 'creative treatment of actuality' was that the documentary goes beyond the 'purely journalistic skill' of the newsreel in that it treats the same sort of material 'creatively'" (qtd. in Winston 13). There is a creative element in documentaries since the filmmakers make decisions on who to interview, what to edit, what scenes to put in,

and many other choices that lend to the aesthetics of the film. Due to this, the question at stake is whether the creativity of actual, real material makes a significant difference in the authentic and accurate depiction of reality and its suggestive factuality (11-14).

Definition 3: "I think of it as ... an entertaining movie like *Sophie's Choice* [or] any Charlie Chaplin film that dealt with social commentary."
Michael Moore, *Roger & Me* (qtd. in Carroll 141)

Academy-Award winning documentary filmmaker Michael Moore defines documentaries are defined as entertainment dealing with social commentary. His description of an entertaining movie ranges from the dramatized *Sophie's Choice (1982),* an adaptation of William Styron's novel that portrays the life of a young Polish woman after she survives a Nazi concentration camp where she was forced to choose life for one of her two children (IMDB.com), to the films produced by the famous slapstick comedian of the 1920s, Charlie Chaplin. The stark difference of movie selections in Moore's definition offers broad interpretations for the content and uses of documentary film.

Definition 4: "Documentary is not a reproduction of reality; it is a *representation* of the world we already occupy... It makes reference to our shared historical world rather than a world imagined by the filmmaker."
Bill Nichols in *Introduction to Documentary* (20, italics original)

As with many things, documentary might also be more easily understood by explaining what *it is not.* Bill Nichols, a film theorist and professor of Cinema at San

Francisco State University, makes a compelling point that unlike fiction films, a documentary is not created out of a fabricated story but reproduced from reality and factual events. Documentaries are comprised of actual footage of reality and are therefore a representation of the real world. In his book, Nichols claims that audiences ask more of representations, or documentary films, than fictional stories because fiction depicts a make-believe world that reproduces society from filmmakers' thoughts and interpretations. Nichols also wrote that viewers make certain assumptions on the documentary's status based on its degrees of objectivity, reliability, and credibility (Nichols 20-22).

Perhaps the term documentary is a misnomer that cannot qualify and define the contemporary style and modern techniques of today's documentary films. Grierson wrote, "Documentary is a clumsy description but let it stand." He was clarifying that documentaries are always going to include creativity and the word 'document' has never really suited the multifarious genre (qtd. in Winston 14). Simply stated, documentaries are non-fiction films in which the filmmakers' creativity tells a factual story in a unique approach. Overall, the vague definitions and unspecified use, subject matter, or structure of the genre are the basis for the difficulty in classifying documentary films in a particular form of communication.

After careful examination of scholarly definitions of the genre, the author will define documentary for the purpose of this study as *a creative interpretation of society that uses factual, archival material, newsreel and photography that represents historical events, existing people, and the personal beliefs of those people in society.* By using factual and archival material, a director has the ability to assimilate scenes creatively,

interview various and hand-picked sources to create a story that can be both informative and entertaining.

NOTE: There are two main spin-offs of the documentary genre: mockumentary and docudrama. In *Faking It: Mock-documentary and the subversion of factuality*, the popular term mockumentary, also known as a pseudo-documentary, is referred to as a mock-documentary because the subgenre suggests origins in a pre-existing form (the documentary form.) This subgenre appropriates the existing codes and conventions of documentary because audiences are already familiar with it. In another words, mock-documentary is restricted to fictional texts, those of which make a partial or combined effort that fit documentary codes and conventions in order to represent a fictional subject (Roscoe and Hight 1,2). Some popular examples include *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan (2006).*

A drama-documentary, also commonly referred to as a docudrama or dramadoc, combines elements of both documentary and drama. The subgenre is "best described as the form that attempts to stay closest to the actual historical event or persons. ...This form uses drama to overcome any gaps in the narrative, and is intended to provoke debate about significant events" (Roscoe & Hight 43). Drama-documentaries are criticized for merging fact and fiction in a manner that could mislead viewers. It can combine historical footage with paid actors recreating the historical event through acting and replicating. Some examples include *The War Game (1966), Battle of Algiers (1965)*, or *Schindler's List* (1993) (57, 62).

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING

The three primary sources for this chapter's historical perspective and development of the documentary film, are Eric Barnouw's, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, and Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane's, *A New History of Documentary Film*. Eric Barnouw was the former Chief of the Library of Congress's Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division and headed the film division at Columbia University for an extensive period. Jack C. Ellis is a Professor Emeritus at Northwestern University, and his textbook, *A History of Film* (co-author Virginia Wright Wexman), is on its fifth edition. Betsy A. McLane was formerly the Executive Director of the International Documentary Association, and is currently the Director Emeritus. McLane is a past president of the University Film and Video Association. (Barnouw back cover; Ellis and McLane back cover)

Louis Lumière (1862-1954)

Multitudes frequented Paris' Salon Indien du Grand Café on December 28, 1895, to marvel at a film shot by French native Louis Lumière's *Cinématographe*, a newly invented camera that captured sequential images through a lens. Although there had been 12 private screenings of *La Sortie des Usines* (*Leaving the Factory, 1895*) and other short films in the previous months, this was the first time an unfamiliar and public audience would view this innovative use of of photography. With the help of his brothers, Auguste

Marie Louis Nicholas and Louis Jean, and the work of other inventors such as America's Thomas Alva Edison, Lumière helped lay the foundations of modern camera technology and the art of today's documentary filmmaking (Barnouw 5-9).

Many inventors of the late nineteenth century were experimenting and creating mechanisms that would film and document the world around them with images. Edison was initially at the forefront of this race. He was the first to build a camera device, but it was unwieldy, overly large, and had to be stationed in his "Black Maria" film studio in West Orange, New Jersey. Entertainers of all sorts came to the studio to be filmed and perform in front of a black background. Not only was the camera too big to film outside the studio, but all that could be filmed were staged performances. The camera was an accomplishment, but it did not lead to documentary filmmaking, at least initially (5).

Where Edison's filming opportunities were restricted, Lumière's were unfettered. Lumière's *Cinématographe* was smaller, according to film historian Georges Sadoul (Barnouw 6). It is suspected to have weighed only 5 kilograms, it could be carried like a suitcase, and unlike Edison's, it was hand cranked instead of powered by electricity (6). The sun from the outside world provided the lighting and, most importantly, the new invention could catch life on the run, or "sur le vif," as Lumière said (6).

The preamble to Lumière's patent read:

> The basic property of this appliance's mechanism is to act intermittently on a regularly perforated strip to transmit successive displacements to it separated by stationary periods, during which photographic images are either exposed or viewed. (www.institut-lumiere.org)

Lumière, joined by his brothers and hand-selected operators, exhibited the *Cinématographe* internationally and called for debuts across Europe, North Africa, Russia, North America and every continent in between. So determined to keep his new mechanism a secret, Lumière instructed his operators to conceal its secrets and design from everyone, including "kings and beautiful women" (Barnouw 11).

Two months before the *Cinématographe* landed on American soil, Edison purposefully introduced his *Vitascope* in New York and soon he presented it worldwide. Competition would remain fierce between the two extraordinary inventors (19). Due to the fame and heritage of Lumière, France became the leader in film production and exportation (19).

Documentary-type films were the most popular film genre at the beginning of the 20th century, outnumbering the fiction genre (21). By 1907, tides turned and fiction films began to catch the interest of viewers. One major factor for this was due to the new art of editing, something highly practiced in fiction films and a process that had begun "to change the whole nature of film communication" (22). The documentary film also was forced to become a medium and agent for public relations (22).

Even at its beginning, documentary film was recreated through editing and added effects that made it at times inaccurate and fabricated (24). Albert E. Smith and J. Stuart Blackton's editing of the footage containing Roosevelt charging up San Juan Hill to claim victory over a battle in Cuba is one example. Since Roosevelt's surge lacked impressive drama, the two editors supplied large amounts of cigarette and cigar smoke, explosions, and sinking cardboard ships to add the dramatic effect needed to impress audiences. Thoroughly entertained, viewers did not suspect dramatic interpretation of

any sort (24). Many used this technique, but it was not to deceive as much as it was for the sake of entertainment, an element that today's documentary factors in as well.

The documentary filmmakers that succeeded acted as explorers, revealing to audiences unseen destinations, footage of battles, or unordinary interpretation of everyday life. At the top of the list was Canadian Robert J. Flaherty.

Robert J. Flaherty (1994-1951)

In 1922 Robert J. Flaherty released what is now distinguished as the first commercially successful documentary, *Nanook of the North,* about Canada's sub-Arctic Eskimos and their daily lives (*Nanook of the North* DVD). At the time, the term 'documentary' did not distinguish films until film critic and maker John Grierson coined the phrase when writing about Flaherty's subsequent motion picture, *Moana (1926)*, in the *New York Sun*. On February 8, 1926, Grierson wrote, "Of course *Moana*, being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value" (qtd. in Ellis and McLane 3). Films that favored Flaherty's style were eventually recognized by film critics as a separate genre than that of the Hollywood fictional film, and became identified as documentary (3).

Flaherty's pioneering of the feature length documentary and passion for exploring the unknown or the undocumented, led him to create masterful documentaries including *Nanook, Moana, Tabu, Man of Aran, Elephant Boy, Louisiana*, and others (22-24).

The story of *Nanook* did not begin as a documentary but as an expedition commissioned under Sir William Mackenzie to explore mineral deposits and resources in the Hudson Bay Region of modern day Canada in 1910. Three years later at the age of

29, Flaherty was a respected explorer and again asked to embark on what would be his third expedition under Mackenzie. This time he would take a Bell & Howard camera along with his basic knowledge of cinematography from a three-week course at Rochester to document the natives and the land of the region. Fascinated by the capability of the camera, the next two expeditions evolved more into a film shoot than expeditions for the explorer. Flaherty gathered a tremendous amount of data and was eager to bring it back for show (Barnouw 33).

Frances Hubbard Flaherty, the new young bride of Flaherty, wrote in her diary on February 1, 1915:

> R. is full of the idea of the use of moving pictures in education, in the teaching of geography and history. Someone might well make it a life work. Why not we? (qtd. in Barnouw 3; Originally from "The Flaherty Papers")

In the next year, Flaherty had composed a film that focused on Inuit Eskimos in the primitive form. He even initiated film previews at the Ontario Museum of Archeology which gave great responses (35).

While Flaherty was preparing to ship the final version of his film to New York, it accidently caught fire when his cigarette dropped from the table to the floor. The fire destroyed his entire negative of 30,000 feet of film and badly burned Flaherty requiring hospitalization. Determined to complete the documentary, Flaherty realized he would need to return to the sub-arctic region and start his film anew with fresh footage. This time he wanted to tell the story of Eskimo life and culture by focusing on one Eskimo and

his family. But he would need funds, and in the middle of World War I (1914-1918), raising the funds would prove to be a difficult task (35).

Eventually, a French fur company, Revillon Frères, took interest in Flaherty's film idea and gave him enough funding to complete the project. After his two month trek to the location in the subarctic and northeast coast of the Hudson Bay region, he met his main subject, Nanook, and settled down for a total of 16 months to fill (36).

The film was inaccurate in many respects because it required the Inuits to regress back to their ancestor's lifestyle of harpooning and hunting. Flaherty put the Eskimos in danger when he insisted the use of harpoons and spears to catch walruses and seals because he believed a more modern method originated from European influence.
His persistence on filming the indigenous lifestyle of not only the Inuit Eskimos, but other groups of people, continued throughout his work.

Flaherty had apparently mastered the "grammar" of documentary film just as it had evolved in the fiction film (38). This evolution changed not merely techniques; it had transformed the sensibilities of audiences. The ability to witness an episode from many angles and distances, seen in quick succession, a totally surrealistic privilege unmatched in human experience, had become so much a part of film viewing that it was instinctively perceived as "natural" (39).

He was able to take the artistic side of fiction film with its different angles and effects and apply it to a film that was not performed by actors from a script: "Thus drama, with its potential for emotional impact, was wedded to something more real, people being themselves" (39). Subtitles were added due to the lack of sound technology. Flaherty allowed his viewers to become an "explorer and discoverer" (40).

Early in 1922, with the editing help of Charles Gebb, *Nanook of the North,* was ready public viewing after two decades of exploration, filming, and editing (41). Paramount, along with four other major international distributors, rejected *Nanook* based on the presumption that it would fail to draw the crowds. Once again a French company took interest and distributed the film. The Pathé Organization was able to open it at the prestigious Capitol Theater in New York on June 11, 1922. It was an immediate audience and critic pleaser in the United States and abroad (42). Film Critic Robert E Sherwood said:

> It stands alone, literally in a class by itself. Indeed, no list of all the best pictures of the year or of all the years in the brief history of the movies could be considered complete without it" (qtd. in Barnouw 42; Originally from Sherwood, *The Best Moving Pictures of 1922-1923).*

For Flaherty, the purpose of a documentary was to preserve the historical and traditional way of life of indigenous people such as the Inuit Eskimos and Samoa natives. He felt it his duty to film those groups of people in which their indigenous ways of live would soon be obliterated by first world technology (45).

His wife, Francis Flaherty, continued the work as a filmmaker after her husband's death. She was quoted as saying:

> But, this is the point, that one forced gesture, one hint of superficiality appears and separateness comes again. Again, we are just looking at the people on the screen. [...] The secret to *Nanook* is in those two words: being themselves. Not acting, but being (*Nanook of the North* DVD; Special Feature: BBC Interview).

Dziga Vertov (1896-1954)

In the same year of *Nanook*'s release, a developing Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov (Denis Arkadievich) started the famous newsreel series *Kino-Pravda* (Film-Truth) that employed documentary style filmmaking. The title was taken from the national newspaper *Pravda* that was established by Lenin a decade earlier in 1912 (Barnouw 55). Barnouw wrote that *Pravda* epitomized Vertov's doctrine: "Proletarian cinema must be based on truth – 'fragment of actuality' – assembled for meaningful impact" (55).

Born in Russia, Vertov studied medicine and psychology, and was one of Russia's Futurist poets. Despite his studies, it was not long before Vertov desired to use the new technology of the camera as a means to film, document, and report socialist reality of his country (52, 54).

Vertov was able to become successful in great part because of the support from the government of the Soviet Union. Soviet leaders saw the medium as a highly valuable tool to publicize their work to the citizens and elsewhere. In a conversation between the Commissioner of Education Anatoli Lunarcharsky in 1922, Lenin said, "Of all the art, for us film is the most important." Barnouw goes on to explain that Lenin "spoke especially of films 'reflecting Soviet actuality.' Such films, thought Lenin, 'must begin with newsreels.' Later he called for what came to be known as the 'Lenist film-proportion,' a doctrine that every film program must have a balance between fiction and actuality material" (55).

Vertov coined himself and his co-workers as the "Council of Three," which consisted of Vertov, his wife Yelizaveta Svilova (film editor), and Vertov's brother, Mikhail Kaufman (54).

When it came to defining documentary filmmaking and editing, Vertov said: "But it is not enough to show bits of truth on the screen, separate frames of truth. These frames must be thematically organized so that the whole is also a truth" (qtd. in Barnouw 58).

He strongly believed in non-staged events with a subject's authentic actions or reactions so as to portray actuality. When his brother went to the streets to film, he never asked for permission to film a bystander and the camera was frequently concealed to catch certain moments in market places, factories, schools, taverns, and streets which is very unlike the limited freedoms of today's filmmakers (57).

Most importantly, Vertov called fiction films "opium for the people" and put the genre in the same class as religion – something that was theatrical and fed on emotions. (54) Vertov used this definition as an antithesis for what he wanted to film and produce. He wanted something real, life-like, and honest. For Vertov, that was the best kind of drama.

John Grierson (1898-1972)

Making his own footprints on the immerging documentary trail behind Flaherty and Vertov was film critic John Grierson, the founder of the documentary film movement in England. In a *New History of the Documentary Film*, Jack Ellis and Betsy McLane assert that Grierson was the most influential person in developing the documentary film genre in English-speaking countries (70). Along with coining the 'documentary' term for films, he was a leader on the National Film Board of Canada and influential as the Film Officer to the Empire Marketing Board in Great Britain. He believed film to be an

amazing medium to inform and educate his fellow country men as well as a tool for propaganda. One of his most famous writings was in the magazine, *Sight and Sound*:

> I look on cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist. [...]and cinema is to be conceived as a medium, like writing, capable of many forms and many functions.[...]But principally there is this thought that a single say-so can be repeated a thousand times a night to a million eyes, and, over the years, if it is good enough to live, to millions of eyes. That seven-leagued fact opens a new perspective, a new hope, to public persuasion (Forsythe 15-16; Originally from "Sight and Sound" article, Winter edition, 1933-34).

A Scottish native, Grierson graduated from Glasgow University and soon after studied social sciences at the University of Chicago as a Rockefeller Foundation scholar. During that time he studied American film and developed a long-term friendship, what times resembled a love-hate relationship, with Robert Flaherty (Barnouw 85).

After returning to Britain, Grierson encouraged the Empire Marketing Board to not just use posters, pamphlets and exhibitions to promote trade and unity in the country, but also film. He was granted £2500 by the board to produce his first film which would be on the herring fishery industry. The film, titled *Drifters*, became a success with audiences. Grierson wrote:

> There was nothing doctrinally radical about it, but the fact that British working men – virtually ignored by British cinema except as comedy material – were the heroes that gave the film an almost revolutionary

impact. In a British cinema grown stale with artificiality, it was a breath of salty sea air (qtd. in Barnouw 87-88).

Shortly after, Grierson went on to be an organizer of financial funds under the marketing board and also gather untrained recruits to make films. Guiding and teaching them the art of filmmaking, he shielded his students from bureaucratic interference. (Barnouw 89). Barnouw wrote, "Grierson importuned his staff to avoid the 'aestheticky.' He told them they were propagandists first, filmmakers second. 'Art is a hammer, not a mirror,' he said" (qtd. in Barnouw 90).

Grierson made films from a socialist perspective, although his films never advanced partisan politics (Ellis and McLane 74). Although he may have had a preoccupation with using film as a form of propaganda, his "central concern was always with communicating to the people of a nation and of the world the information of attitudes he thought would help them lead more useful and productive, more satisfying and rewarding lives" (73). He wanted to give his fellow country men a better and richer life through "citizenship education," something that would be done through "vital and necessary propaganda" (Barnouw 90).

Leni Riefenstahl (1902-2003)

Under the political and social pressures of World War II came a gifted and changing director whom Adolf Hitler admired extensively. The young Leni Riefenstahl began as a dancer and screen star then later developed into a director of German "mountain films," a genre similar to American westerns. Early in her directing career, Hitler insisted that she make a film to be titled, *Victory of Faith,* covering his first annual

rally of the National Socialist German Workers (Nazi). She accepted the offer and the Nazi party financed the project (Barnouw 101).

The following year, Hitler contacted Riefenstahl to ask if she would make another film for the same annual rally. He explained there would be a major difference between that year's rally compared to the previous year; it was to be the biggest yet and Hitler wanted to let the world know that Germany had been reborn (101).

Reifenstahl encouraged Hitler to choose Walther Ruttman (*Berlin: Symphony of the City*) instead, but Hitler insisted that she be the director. She reluctantly agreed on the condition that neither Hitler nor Goebbels, whom she had previous conflicts with, would be able to interfere with her work. Insistent upon avoiding official sponsorship, Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft (UFA) funded and later distributed the acclaimed documentary film (101).

The project became one of the largest productions of its kind. With the help of 120 people on staff, including 16 camera crews dressed in elite-troop uniforms, Riefenstahl, at the age of 32, successfully filmed and directed the spectacular Nuremberg rally on September 4-10, 1934 (101).

After a hectic week of photography and months of editing, *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will)* premiered March 1935. Critics immediately called it a masterpiece, and it was given top awards at the Venice and a Paris film festival (103).

The outstanding aesthetics of the film were extremely powerful and progressive for the time. Riefenstahl omitted a narrative voice except for speeches given by Hitler and other Nazi leaders (103). The large visual impact of the film came from the photography of thousands of Nazi troops all perfectly aligned in stand-still or marching in

perfect cadence. Her photography captured incredible camera angles from firemen ladders, high buildings, and overhead plane shots. Viewers are shocked yet engaged from these horrific pictures that make the historical account of the event so much more vivid for a person in the 21st century. Barnouw comments, "Riefenstahl's camera did not lie; they told a story that has never lost its power to chill the marrow" (105).

The film portrays the powerful resurgent Germany united under a Nazi party. It cast Hitler as a god. It was so captivating that individual reason was lost in the mass emotion of such grandeur during the staged event. By molding tens of thousands of military men into artistic patterns, Reifenstahl exemplified her capabilities as an artistic director. It epitomized the losing of self for the whole, and encouraged citizens to be dedicated to the ideal of a strong and united nation (Ellis and McLane 102).

One of the most successful and effective propaganda models in documentary film history, the film displays Germany's military strength and demonstrates Hitler's command over masses of Nazi soldiers. Although continuously noted for her aesthetic filmmaking skills, Reifenstahl has received much more attention from her film's apparent style of propaganda. She was one of the most successful propagandists of all time despite her probable unintentional goal of creating a documentary of such profound communication (103).

Whether she had a philosophically strong alliance with the Nazi party or was just an artistic filmmaker as she claimed, Reifenstahl kept a low profile at her home in Austria until she emerged in1952 with the film, *Tiefland.* Her film, *Triumph,* later influenced America's Frank Capra of Columbia Pictures (131).

Frank Capra was asked during World War II to make a series of U.S. propaganda films, also referred to as *orientation* films, which would draw civilians into military personnel (131). His 7-part series was called, *Why We Fight*, which used film footage captured from the German army and other enemies with some additional material from the Allies. The films explained to American soldier an sailors why the United States was involved in the war and why they were obligated to fight against Germany, Italy, Japan, and other Axis members. It also explained the U.S. government's new alliance with the USSR; a country portrayed previously as a threat to the United States (132).

After viewing Riefenstahl's film, Capra believed that the most compelling way to motivate U.S. soldiers was to show on film the power of the enemies. The series included animated maps provided by Disney with a persuasive narrator that told viewers how to interrupt the images on the screen. New military recruits were required to watch the film. Only a few of the films were shown to the general public, unlike Riefenstahl's *Triumph,* which was shown to masses of German citizens. This 7-part series directed by Capra demonstrates that Germany was not the only country willing to make propaganda documentaries for its own nationalistic purpose. It was a horrific time for the countries involved in WWII. Documentary filmmaking was seen by national leaders as an effective way to educate fellow citizens of the enemy's intent and of their own country's resolve to win (Thompson and Bordwell 313).

Barbara Kopple (1946-)

"Documentaries are not just about the raw side of life, not just the underbelly, but documenting the beauty and joy of what people are all about."

Barbara Kopple in an interview with David A. Goldsmith (76)

By the 1960s, camera equipment was transformed with new technological advances. Smaller, easier to handle cameras, synchronized sight and sound capabilities outside a studio, and zoom features brought forth new methods for filmmaking.

The new technology paved the way to a new filming approach called direct cinema, also known as cinéma vérité. Just as Dziga Vertov's Kino-Pravda translated to film-truth, so did the French phrase cinéma-vérité. The filmmaker was to present truth by filming as an "objective observer" (Ellis and McLane 215).

Although the film director can interview someone from behind the camera, the director is a distant participant during the filming. The style that evolved in the 1970s contained music, no narrator, the scenes were shot on the fly, and compilation footage and interviews with subjects from an off-screen questioner, usually the director, were included (Thompson and Bordwell 583).

Director Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, U.S.A.* received the 1976 Academy Award for Documentary Feature (Ellis & McLane 256). Her later documentary, *American Dream* (1990), another film in the cinéma vérité style, also received an Academy Award. The film chronicles a 13-month strike of Harlan County, Kentucky, coal miners and their fight for higher wages and safer working conditions. Kopple included a special feature in the documentary with interviews of the main characters in the film (*Harlan Country, U.S.A.* DVD).

In an interview with David A. Goldsmith in 2003, Kopple explained the story behind the documentary:

> Harlan Country, USA was a pretty heavy film to make. It was also the one that meant the most to me. [...]These people worked in what was one of the most dangerous industries in the country, where a man and a woman die almost every other day from a rock fall or the inhalation of coal dust. These people were fighting to have the right to a union so they could work in a safe place and get a decent wage. And the coal operators were fighting with every ounce of energy to try to stop them (Goldsmith 81).

John Sayles, a director of a film about unions prior to *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, commented on the hours of footage the film crew had to get in order to follow the cinema verité style. They went to all the meetings and covered riots at dawn by putting their lights and cameras up to simply capture the drama, he said. Kopple aimed to document and reveal the true lives of her characters through the cinema vérité style.

Kopple's crew was able to film people involved in the strike and penetrate into their lives because they "did it in a way where the people did not become performers – they did what they did and the camera got to see them. That is fairly rare thing, still to this day," said Sayles (*Harlan County U.S.A.* DVD).

Ellis and McLane in *A New History of Documentary Film* wrote, "While acknowledging that subjectivity occurs in selecting persons and situations and aspects of them, once those choices are made the filmmakers do not direct or participate in, or even influence (they contend) the scene in any way" (215).

Sayles explained that when it comes to the cinema verité style, the storytelling occurs through the editing process because there is reel after reel of footage and it has to be edited down into an hour or two. Due to the abundance of time it takes to gather the footage, the filmmaker can began to make personal judgments of the events and characters, he said. (*Harlan County U.S.A.* DVD)

In the same interview with Goldsmith, Kopple explains how she began to side with the miners.

> I definitely had a passion for these miners, although we tried to include as much as we could of the coal owners and operators. So yes, the film totally sided with the coalminers because they were the people I'd spent time with, the people whose lives were at stake, and the people who were willing to give up anything for what they believed in (Goldsmith 81).

One of the most common complains of cinema verité is that it many times fails to give background or historical information. Although Kopple states to have included the history of miners and what black lung was, it became clear while viewing the film that there was not enough background information provided to fully understand the event. The viewer's previous knowledge on the topic presented in the film, will affect how the viewer understands the film.

Kopple's most recent project, *Dixie Chicks: Shut Up and Sing,* was released in 2006. This film documents the band's struggles after their controversial comment about President George W. Bush while on a concert tour in Great Britain.

Michael Moore (1954 -)

> "I'd learned a long, long time ago that Michael Moore, a man who could've talked Hitler into hosting a bar mitzvah, was the absolute master of wily persuasion."
>
> Ben Hamper, friend of Moore and "Rivethead" columnist in *The Michigan Voice.*

Born in Flint, Michigan, and raised by parents who worked at the nearby General Motors factory, Michael Moore always had strong opinions mixed with a fearless attitude that would present themselves at any occasion or setting. As a young man he had a reputation almost too big to live up to, and those tall tales of his younger days gave lead to his controversial and flagrant films of today. In Emily Schultz's *Michael Moore: A biography*, she describes Moore as always having an interest in society, leftist politics, and confrontational actions (Schultz 8).

After spending one year in a youth Catholic seminary at age 14, he dropped out after he was forbidden to watch baseball. He ran for the city's public school board and helped open a youth crisis center by the age of 18. He even managed to start his own alternative newspaper which he ran for ten years. He was briefly the editor of "Mother Jones," San Francisco's famed leftist political magazine and organized weekly bingo sessions to fund his first film, *Roger and Me* (8).

Throughout his high school career, Moore witnessed the Vietnam War on the television and through newspapers. During his last semester at Davison High School, he ran and was elected to the public school board. His agenda was to remove Davison

High's principal and assistant principal. Not only did he accomplish that, but he also supported student rights, teachers unions, and sued the school board for securing the right to tape-record public meetings (21).

After graduation, he attended University of Michigan-Flint campus, but after a year he dropped out because he supposedly was not able to find a parking spot after an hour-long search. He would rather spend his time in other time-effective activities. He later broke the family tradition of working at General Motors, and instead found his calling in the newspaper world and later as a film director (27).

Roger and Me was his first major documentary success and launched his film career. The documentary traces Flint's economic downfall after General Motors closed it local headquarters that left "a rat population that surpassed the human one in the 80s" (Schultz 64). The film's plot was to hunt down the CEO of General Motors Roger Smith, and ask him why he moved the General Motor factories from Flint to Mexico and, consequently, taking away many jobs and stable incomes (8). The documentary uses Moore's personal footage of the city's economic conditions and of the hunt for Roger Smith, CEO of the car company.

The style marked a new trail for films and established Moore's famous methods of film footage which includes himself as a main character. Shultz describes Moore as

> Impassioned, impulsive, and dedicated to standing by his decisions; another reading of Moore's personality might use terms like short-tempered and short-sighted...Quite simply, Moore asks the questions. When he answers them, he tends to give reportage itself-usually political. The result is a spate of blogs and magazine articles in which two reporters

are present, rather than a reporter and a subject...alternative journalism became Moore's new trade (27-28).

The left and right have both been offended and have criticized his work. *The New York Times* called him a populist. Pauline Kael, long-time critic for *The New Yorker* magazine, gave a strong critique of Moore when she stated "omitting dates and reordering information for the purpose of narrative coherence, a device Moore has continued to use over the years" (9). Concerning Moore's *Roger & Me*, she also commented, "It does something that is humanly very offensive; "*Roger and Me* uses its leftism as a superior attitude" (qtd. in Schultz 9).

Ten years later, Moore found the idea for his second documentary feature. On April 20, 1999, on the 110th anniversary of Adolph Hitler's birthday, two senior students of Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, attended their 6.15 a.m. bowling class. Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris would later that day kill twelve of their fellow students, one teacher, and then take their own lives. Moore was horrified and devastated by the violence and the violence America was conveying to the world. Moore named his next film, *Bowling for Columbine,* with a gun control theme (176).

Moore gained rare video surveillance footage from inside the school through the Freedom of Information Act. *Bowling for Columbine* also used edited archival footage, voice-overs, and original footage (180, 182).

Gus Van Sant, a friend of Moore and the director of the Columbine-inspired feature film *Elephant*, commented that Moore's film was trying to get directed answers, like, "too many bullets," "too many guns" (qtd. in Schultz 183). In contrast, Van Sant's

Elephant was trying to give viewers multiple ideas of causes while letting them decide what to think (183-4).

Bowling for Columbine was embraced by the French, winning the Cannes Film Festival 55th Anniversary Prize and a fifteen minute standing ovation (188). The film's success traveled across the globe. It was the most successful documentary ever released to date in North America (189). It earned over $60 million theatrically. Moore went on to win an Oscar for Best Documentary at the 2003 Academy Awards. His acceptance speech introduced his next film project that would focus on the Iraq War. His speech elicited both claps and booing: "We like nonfiction and we live in fictious times...We live in a time where we have a man sending us to war for fictitious reasons...Shame on you, Mr. Bush, shame on you." (190-191). The idea behind Moore's next film, *Fahrenheit 9/11,* was officially introduced to the American people.

Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* was the highest grossing theatrical documentary up to that time, but the release of *Fahrenheit 9/11,* which cost only $6 million to make, far surpassed those records and is still the highest grossing documentary to date. *Fahrenheit 9/11* was released in the summer of 2004 and eventually earned over $200 million worldwide. For the first time in modern Hollywood history, a documentary film reached the No. 1 spot during its opening week and made more than $100 million domestically during its first month of distribution and millions more in foreign and home video sales. In terms of box office sales, Moore has been the most successful documentarian in American history (Toplin 3, 137). His influence is dramatic and is changing the idea of documentary in American filmmaking.

Table 2.1 Top 12 Documentaries according to Box Office Sales (1982-present)

Rank	Title	Year	Box Office Sales
1.	*Fahrenheit 9/11*	2004	$119.2M
2.	*March of the Penguins*	2005	$77.5M
3.	*An Inconvenient Truth*	2006	$24 M
4.	*Bowling for Columbine*	2002	$21.6M
5.	*Madonna: Truth or Dare*	1991	$15M
6.	*Winged Migration*	2003	$11.7M
7.	*Super Size Me*	2004	$11.5M
8.	*Mad Hot Ballroom*	*2005*	$8.1 M
9.	*Hoop Dreams*	1994	$7.8M
10.	*Tupac: Resurrection*	2003	$7.7M
11.	*Roger and Me*	1989	$6.7M
12.	*The Aristocrats*	2005	$6.4M

Source: Box Office Mojo

In *Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11: How One Film Divided a Nation*, Robert Brent Toplin wrote:

> If he suddenly shifted strategies and adopted a more subtle approach to cinematic persuasion, he probably would not have reached the huge audiences that typically showed up at his movie screenings. The millions who turned out to watch *Fahrenheit 9/11* expected to see the exploits of a funny and audacious filmmaker, not a scholarly cineaste who conceded points to people who disagreed with his thesis (6).

The art of documentary filmmaking continues to advance as filmmakers try to find better ways of depicting reality. Documentaries have been used for exploration in the case of Flaherty, reporting in the case of Vertov, propaganda in the case of Riefenstahl and everything in between.

Joseph Addison in *Lives of the Poets* said, "Poetry is where new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new" (qtd. in Ellis & McLane 70). Great documentary filmmakers Robert Flaherty and John Grierson eloquently created poetry in their documentaries. By establishing the techniques of the documentary film, they created and defined a genre. Flaherty was able to make new things, such as the Inuit Eskimos in *Nanook of the North*, seem familiar. Grierson made familiar things, such as the herring fishery in *Drifters*, seem new by showing it through a different perspective (70).

Documentary film will continue to be used as a means of documenting the undetected things for all to see and an expression of new perceptions that make common ideas or activities seen fresh.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS JOURNALISM?

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

United States Constitution Bill of Rights, 1st Amendment

Democracy and the Press

When German goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1436 (www.britannica.com), he did something far better than striking gold. The early mass printings of Martin Luther's 95 Theses and Gutenberg's Bible that circulated during the Reformation paved the way for modern-day printing and newspapers. The technology of the Gutenberg's printing press provided the capability to print multiple pages. Prior to the invention of the printing press, only elite religious and governmental authorities had access to printed documents positioning them to interrupt documents and consequently influence those under their authority. The invention of the printing press gave way to the circulation of ideas and truth, providing opportunity for the masses to draw their own assumptions and beliefs giving them more control over their own lives.

The writers of the United States Constitution (1787) were relying on journalists to keep the masses informed, to be the voice of the people, providing the tool of a check and balance system between the newly formed democracy and its citizens. The foundation of American journalism within our democratic system is in the First Amendment (www.house.gov). In *The Elements of Journalism*, Bill Kovach's and Tom Rosenstiel's definition of journalism emphasizes and echoes this calling: "The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (12).

Since the founding of our nation when a newspaper or books were the only form of mass communication, the avenues of communicating with the public have spread to multiple media sources. The media have evolved into magazines, television, radio, film, and the most recent dynamic source, the Internet. With television news programs like *Entertainment Tonight, 20/20*, 60 Minutes, cable news channels such as CNN, MSNBC, FOX, the World Wide Web, alternative newspapers or magazines, the definition of journalism is broadening and changing rapidly. What exactly is journalism in the twenty first century?

Students of journalism learn the values of news timeliness, proximity, impact/consequences, human interest, currency, prominence/imminence, and conflict (Stovall 113-115).

Although not all news stories possess all of these elements, each one will possess at least one or two. Hard news stories differ from feature stories just as fashion magazines will differ from weekly news magazines. The most important element of news is that it provides the public true and factual information, and makes them aware of

information beyond what they already know. If readers, viewers, and web surfers are more informed and aware based on factual information from a story, then they have just seen or read news. Most importantly, news is timely. Even feature stories about yesterday's news will have relevancy for today's readers if written and focused well. As many journalists say, news is the first rough draft of history.

Journalists use those news stories that will most appeal to their readers. There is room for niche marketing within journalism, but with only a limited amount of air time or page numbers, editors have to make decisions on what is the most newsworthy to the most people. Also important is how much coverage and exposure a news story gets depends on the number of readers/viewers who will be impacted. In summary, news is timely information presented in a factual and truthful manner that enlightens the public by making it aware and informed of issues. The mediums of television, newspapers, Web, radio, and film can all be valid sources.

Nine Principles of Journalism

The purpose of journalism has a clearly defined mission to keep citizens informed and self-governing, but the practice of reporting can be more complicated. There are certain principles and a code of ethics that responsible journalists follow in order to keep their news organization and news stories credible and reliable.

Bill Kovach, Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell conducted extensive research on what journalists value in reporting and the underling guidelines of the craft and profession of journalism. This research was funded through the Committee of Concerned Journalists, an organization administered by the Pew Research Center for the People &

the Press. After four years of research, including 20 public forums and a national survey for the news media (news managers, executives, and newsroom staff), the results identified nine principles that journalists share. The organization released a statement of shared purpose which describes nine common principles. More than just ideas and values of journalism, the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) considers these nine principles to be the theory of journalism. The study's results later became the basis for Kovach's and Rosenstein's book, *The Elements of Journalism* (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 11-12).

One of the forums held by the PEJ was sponsored by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. The diverse group of journalists attending agreed that the core values of the profession are a commitment to accuracy, to fairness and balance, to reflecting the diversity of their readership (or community), to approaching reporting with an open mind, to having their primary commitment to the reader and not the advertiser or shareholder. Simply stated, the journalist needs to be a "seeker of truth" (11-12).

The purpose of journalism and its nine core principles as outlined by Kovach and Rosenstiel are as follows:

Purpose: The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing (12).

1. **Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.**

The "journalistic truth" on which democracy depends is to provide reliable and accurate facts placed within a meaningful context for citizens. It begins with assembling and verifying the facts in a practical manner while almost always verifying sources so audiences can draw their own interpretations of events. The foundation of journalistic

truth is ***accuracy***, from which context, interpretation, comment, criticism, analysis and debate are built.

2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.

Journalists' interest must be devoted without fear to the well-being of those it serves. In order for a news organization to remain credible it must have loyalty to citizens above the other financial relationships from advertisers and shareholders. This implies representing all social groups, political groups, and other business or political leaders in a ***fair*** and honest light.

3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.

The discipline of verification involves seeking out multiple witnesses, disclosing information pertaining to sources as much as possible, and finding quotes from different or opposing views. Verification is the basis for the method of ***objectivity***. Objectivity means to provide accurate information that does not favor certain personal or cultural biases. Although the journalist is not to be objective, the method of verifying information is to be objective. This journalistic principle, above any of the other eight, separates journalism from propaganda, fiction, entertainment, and other modes of communication.

4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.

Keeping an ***independence of spirit and mind***, rather than neutrality, is a requirement of journalists. Although reporters and editorialists will still have biases, there needs to continually have a commitment to accuracy, intellectual fairness, and informing citizens.

5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.

To be an effective journalist and ***watchdog*** for citizens, newspapers have to be as free as possible from governmental ties and financial loyalties of advertisers. Their first commitment has to be to its audience, not the leaders.

6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.

News media help shape public discussion by informing the public of political and societal situations. In order to have a fair basis of public discussion, journalists need to represent ***diverse and varied viewpoints*** that allow citizens to put the debate and situation in context. By only highlighting the conflicting fringes of debate, society is not informed in the most accurate and truthful manner.

7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.

Journalism is storytelling with a purpose, and that purpose is to ***engage and enlighten*** its audience. Journalists must recognize what information will be most valuable to citizens' lives and relay it in a manner that effectively connects to its audience and ultimately allows them to be informed and more aware. Although hard news stories usually deal with government or public safety, journalists can inform on other information that is more entertainment and human interest focused. Yet it is important to recognize that trivial information that embodies false significance will only lead to a trivial society.

8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.

Good journalism can be thought of as a **map for citizens to navigate society**. The map's truthfulness is based on its proportion of facts in stories and not leaving vital information out. All communities should be focused on, not just those that have more

attractive demographics. Sensationalism, neglecting voices, or stereotyping are all negative ways to be less truthful and accurate.

9. Journalists must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

Journalists must carry with them a sense of responsibility and ***ethics***. This is not only applied when reporting a story, but also if needed in disagreeing with other reporters or even a boss. Diversity of minds and voices within a newsroom keep a news organization capable of producing accurate and fair stories. (*The Elements of Journalism* by Kovach and Rosentstiel and www.journalism.org/resources/principles)

In addition to the fundamental purpose of helping citizens to be self-governing, *The National Survey of Journalists* by Kovach, Rosenstiel, and Mitchell reported that the journalists saw their role as "informing the public, being a watchdog, facilitating democracy, and supporting community" (par. 7).

The three main reoccurring principles among journalists were accuracy, balance, and reporting objectively by keeping a distance from those who financially support the news organization and those that are sources within the story.

Alternative Journalism

America's wide variety of news outlets are not only comprised of traditional journalism but also alternative journalism that stresses fairness instead of objectivity. Patty Calhoun, editor of the alternative Denver weekly *Westword*, said that when objectivity is replaced with fairness and joined with the other traditional journalism principles, the outcome is alternative journalism (Kovach, et al.).

During the Northwestern University Medill Forum, *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Mary Mitchell commented that journalists cover certain stories for certain reasons. When journalists cover beats they have interest in, the outcome of their stories is not completely hands-off objective reporting but fair reporting (Kovach, et al.).

Alternative media can also be thought of as general interest media that includes city and regional magazines, "minority" newspaper and newsletters, and low-power community radio stations (Gordon and Kittross 118). This type of journalism focuses on the problems and achievements within communities that are commonly overlooked by traditional news and information media (118). Alternative media can be thought of as journalism that promotes the interests of commonly unheard voices, such as minorities, the working class or the poor (Croteau and Hoynes 210).

In *Grassroots Journalism: A Practical Manual*, Eesha Williams comments, "The views that the powerful technique of objective news writing has been used to advance most often are those people who own printing presses, people with power. Their interests are generally the opposite of the interests of the majority" (Williams 46).

Barbara Kopple has made two documentaries that focus on the unheard voices, *Harlan County, USA* and *American Dreams*, a film that traced the lives of those from the Midwest during the economic crisis under former President Ronald Reagan. Embracing filmmaking as a journalist, Kopple said,

> Telling a story that nobody else cares about gives me
>
> energy, and when we get something really wonderful; a moment, a scene,
>
> watch somebody change, sees them connect, or do something courageous,

> it gives me strength as a filmmaker, because I feel I'm doing justice to them (Goldsmith 82).

In the same way that journalists believe they bring justice to the unheard voices and take part in sharing the lives of everyday Americans through their stories in newspapers and broadcasts, likewise do the documentary filmmakers. By documenting unheard voices, journalists and filmmakers like Kopple, believe that their storytelling and work as a journalist brings those stifled, but valuable voices to the masses and those in leadership. Those journalists who tell stories with integrity and passion can make a difference, regardless of the medium they choose.

In many ways, contemporary documentary film is a form of alternative journalism. *Harlan County, U.S.A.* by Kopple, *Born into Brothels* by Ross Kauffman and Zana Briski, and *Roger & Me* by Michael Moore, present an avenue to be heard for the mostly unheard voices. *Harlan County, U.S.A.* documents coal miners in Virginia who want safer working conditions and higher wages. *Born into Brothels* follows the lives of eight children in Calcutta's red light district. *Roger & Me* investigates why Roger Smith closed General Motors' headquarters in Michigan and left numerous local residents without work. All these stories are newsworthy, but demand more than headline news in prominent traditional newspapers across the country to effectively tell their story. After careful review, it is evident that documentaries may utilize an approach similar to alternative journalism while reporting on their subjects and content.

Code of Ethics

The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), an organization "dedicated to the perpetuation of a free press as the cornerstone of our nation and liberty," adopted a Code of Ethics in September 1996. (www.spj.org) Four main issues are highlighted:

1) Seek Truth and Report It
2) Minimize Harm
3) Act Independently
4) Be Accountable

The organization believes that the duty of the journalist is to further public enlightenment, be a forerunner of justice, and be the foundation of democracy by "seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues" (SPJ Code of Ethics).

According to the SPJ Code of Ethics, for a journalist to seek truth, he or she must be honest, fair, and courageous when gathering, reporting and interpreting information. A journalist uses his or her ethical conscience in treating sources and coworkers with respect in an effort to minimize harm. For a journalist to act independently, he or she only needs to be committed to the public's interest and the right to know. A journalist must keep in mind that he or she is accountable to fellow journalists and to their audience, whether that is comprised of readers, listeners, or viewers (SPJ Code of Ethics).

The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) also has a widely-used code of ethics, Statement of Principles, which includes six principles:

- Responsibility
- Freedom of the press

- Independence
- Truth and accuracy
- Impartiality
- Fair play

The ANSE's "Statement of Principles" was initially adopted in 1922 under the title the "Canons of Journalism." It was revised and updated in 1975 to its current title. The preamble reads:

> The First Amendment, protecting freedom of expression from abridgment by any law, guarantees to the people through their press a constitutional right, and thereby places on newspaper people a particular responsibility. Thus journalism demands of its practitioners not only industry and knowledge but also the pursuit of a standard of integrity proportionate to the journalist's singular obligation. To this end the American Society of Newspaper Editors sets forth this Statement of Principles as a standard encouraging the highest ethical and professional performance.
>
> (ANSE website: http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=888)

The Associated Press adopted the revised Associated Press Managing Editors (APME) Code of Ethics in 1994. The main points include responsibility, accuracy, integrity, and independence.

> These principles are a model against which news and editorial staff members can measure their performance. They have been formulated in the belief that newspapers and the people who produce them should adhere to the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct....No

statement of principles can prescribe decisions governing every situation. Common sense and good judgment are required in applying ethical principles to newspaper realities (Irby et al. 81, 82).

Many major newspaper groups, including Dow Jones, Gannett, Hearst Newspapers, E.W. Scripps Co., Knight Ridder, The National Press Photographers Association and more, have a code of ethics or statement of principles. In journalism, the pursuit of ethical reporting is always at the forefront, and the disregarding or negligent adherence to the rules result in high penalties, such as the loss of job and loss of credibility (Irby et al. 82).

Documentary Film as Journalism

Erroll Morris' *The Thin Blue Line*, an award-winning theatrical documentary film released in 1984, is an example of a documentary film containing journalistic elements, especially those characteristic of alternative journalism. The documentary tells the story of 28-year-old Randall Dale Adams who was convicted and given the death penalty for the shooting and murder of a Texas police officer in Dallas, Texas. The passenger in the car with Adams, 16-year-old David Harris was also charged of the crime. Using archival footage of case documents, a dramatized reenactment of the shooting was included in the film. Extensive interviews with differing points of view with Philip Glass's eerie musical score in the background, Morris creates an impression that Adams was denied justice and falsely accused. The film's evidence influenced the court's decision that eventually released Adams from death row and commuted his sentence to life imprisonment (Ellis and McLane 265).

When compared to Kovack's definition of objective journalism, Morris' methodology for the film included objective research. Although, Morris presents his own perception of the events surrounding this story, his extensive research included interviews with the two men convicted, the trial judge, three homicide detectives, two defense attorneys, three surprise eyewitnesses, and appellate and defense attorneys. This type of reporting allows the documentary to appear as a work of investigative journalism. In an interview, Morris emphasizes his role as an investigator in the film: "I read all the time that *The Thin Blue Line* is the movie that got an innocent man out of prison, saved an innocent man from death row. But what's forgotten is that it's a movie and the investigation that did it" (Cunningham 53).

Before making documentary films, Morris was a graduate philosophy student and spent a great deal of time watching films at San Francisco's Pacific Film Archives. After he completed his first two theatrically distributed documentaries, *Gates of Heaven* and *Vernon, Florida*, Morris spent two years as a private detective. His previous work as a detective was undoubtedly helpful for the filming of *The Thin Blue Line* as the story is centered around the investigation of a wrongfully convicted man on death row. His investigative experience and education have influenced Morris' innovative and unique personal style of filmmaking: "Morris's talent for investigating the implied truth of documentary filmmaking, and for appreciating how people reveal themselves to the camera, is at the heart of his art" (Ellis and McLane 265, Baker 1).

In the 1980s when Morris was making his major documentaries, *Gates of Heaven*, *Vernon, Florida*, *The Thin Blue Line*, and gaining popularity as a filmmaker, something

called 'personal essay films' emerged from the technological advances of the time period (262).

In *A New History of Documentary*, Pat Aufderheide, the Director of the Center of Social Media at American University, points out:

> Personal essay documentaries were part of a trend in documentary work overall toward a more intimate approach, even in explicitly public affairs subject matter, with the goal of intervening in a shared understanding of meaning. In this documentary genre, the narrator takes clear ownership of the narration, at the same time that the narrator is a character. They are frankly, inevitably personal (262).

Morris is not identified as a personal essay filmmaker, but he is compared to Ross McElwee, a personal essay filmmaker, because of the similarities of McElwee's and Morris' work. As Ellis and McLane state, "Morris' films are not personal diaries, but they have an unmistakable aura in which the presence of the filmmaker as creator is always evident" (Ellis and McLane, 264).

In an interview in which Morris was asked repeatedly if his films are documentaries, Morris responded, "The answer is 'yes' and 'no.' There are elements of fiction and nonfiction in all filmmaking. I use real people. They're not reading a prepared script. They're attempting to talk about themselves. That's real. But I do other things that are closer to fictional films, like I use a storyboard, for instance" (qtd. in Ellis and McLane 265).

Morris has been continually recognized for his work in documentary, and has been noted extensively for his use of "voice," or point of view, within his films. In the

same interview previously mentioned Morris comments on his point of view in *The Thin Blue Line*:

> You could say accurately that part of my point of view is to how easily we can be deceived by visual images and by appearances. Part of it is that I'm telling a visual story, and telling you that the visual story is undermining itself at the same time. And it's one of the things that makes *The Thin Blue Line* a really interesting film for me" (Cunningham 56).

Through comprehensive research and investigation, being fair to subjects in portraying their thoughts and opinions, and using a "voice" to convey the director's own opinion, Morris' work in *The Thin Blue Line* can be defined as a form of journalism, specifically alternative journalism.

It is important to recognize the ideals and limitations of the practice and what audiences can rationally expect from journalists. Consumers of news can expect fairness and the pursuit of objectivity. Kovach makes the following comment at a forum sponsored under the Committee of Concerned Journalists on November 6, 1997, at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism:

> Everybody knows there's no such thing as objectivity. Scientists know there's no such thing as objectivity, but they do not give up the pursuit of an objective experiment to try and understand what

> they are examining. Why should journalists give up the notion of a pursuit? Not the attainment of, but the pursuit of objectivity in their work? (Kovach et. al. "What is Journalism? Who is a Journalist?" Session 5)

Although the profession of journalism has pursuits of ethics and goals, documentary films cannot be asked to achieve what journalism in its purest form is unable to achieve, such as to be objective, to be completely free of bias, and to be severed from financial strains and sponsorship without exception. However, the pursuit of those principles counts for something important. While journalism and film might not be able to idealistically provide stories completely free of bias, there is still an understood pursuit of those principles within the journalism code of ethics. As mentioned previously, when objectivity is replaced with fairness and joined with the other traditional journalism principles, the outcome is alternative journalism (Kovach, et al.). Based on this definition of journalism many documentary films are comparable to alternative journalism and the pursuit of fairness. Still newsworthy and informative, the documentary has the director's and the filmmakers' "voice" or point-of-view more embodied within the story.

CHAPTER 4

DOCUMENTARY: PERSUASION OR PROPAGANDA

You cannot wage a war without rumors, without media, without propaganda. Any military planner that plans for a war, if he doesn't put media propaganda on the top of his agenda, he's a bad military [leader].

Control Room: Samir Khader, Senior Producer of Al Jazeera

Persuasion and propaganda are forms of communication that have similar techniques yet different outcomes and effects. While persuasion tries to satisfy the needs of the persuader and persuadee[1], propaganda has an aim to satisfy the persuader by achieving his or her desired results. In *Propaganda and Persuasion*, propaganda is defined as "the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett and O'Donnell 16).

The most infamous propagandists, Germany's Joseph Goebbels, Russia's Joseph Stalin, or the government in George Orwell's famous novel, *1984*, gave the word propaganda connotations of fear, negativity, and dishonesty. Although propaganda has

[1] Authors Jowett and O'Donnell refer to the receiver of persuasion as the persuadee.

these extremes, it can also be as simple as the subtle social propaganda seen in movies. It is also important to note that not all propaganda is political but can be social (Ellul 63).

With such fine lines between advertising, persuasion, and propaganda, it can be difficult to separate communication strategies into distinct groups. This chapter will explore when it is ethically important to identify information as advertising, persuasion, or propaganda. The author will analyze a recent documentary film in which the director utilizes propaganda to persuade audiences toward his viewpoint. By comparing the definition of propaganda to the recent documentary, it will demonstrate the genre's capacity for use of propaganda.

Jacques Ellul in *Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes* claims that modern propaganda cannot survive without mass media, especially when there is centralized control and a variety of outlets (Ellul 102). From communicating ideas and events to relaying messages from a leader to his fellow citizens, media outlets are the world's largest gatekeeper of communication. In times of war or upheaval, a nation's leaders are likely to propagate the countrymen through media outlets (Ellul 102).

It is important to state that not all opinions or persuasive communication from the media is propaganda, but could merely be a bias of the individual at the network or a bias philosophy of the newspaper editorial staff.

Chuck Trapkus, the former editor and publisher of *The Catholic Radical,* wrote unashamedly that his newspaper was "unabashed propaganda" and biased (Atkins 212). The founders of the Catholic Worker Movement started this penny-a-copy newspaper, *Catholic Worker*, with sympathetic coverage on the issues of the poor and voiceless.

Founders Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin were honest and open from the first publication concerning their biases.

In *The Mission: Journalism, Ethics and the World*, Trapkus wrote:

> To speak of degrees of objectivity sounds to me like degrees of truth. Either something is or it isn't objective. I say the press isn't- there's just no such thing[...] All journalists bring a bias to stories they cover, no matter how hard they try to avoid it. When the bias seems too obvious, we call it propaganda (Atkins 212).

Propaganda is an obvious bias, as defined by Trapkus, as in the case of *The Catholic Radical* and other similar news outlets. Also, propaganda may change the people's ideologies and behavior (Jowett and O'Donnell 13). Persuasion, on the other hand, is more engaging and the persuader and persuadee are both benefited in the end (13). Persuasion attempts to give mutual understanding between the persuader's message and the persuadee's desires. Propaganda attempts to promote a partisan cause in the best interest of the persuader. Propaganda, unlike persuasion, is used to convince masses of people and not just a few (21, 23).

In the area of persuasion, Ellul compares propaganda to advertising and general information. Advertising based on information is rational because it is addressed to intellect, reason and experience, whereas propaganda is directed at the irrational feelings of passion, empowerment, pride, hate and other strong emotions (84-85). It is important to recognize that propaganda can use rational information just like advertisements. In fact, the most successful wartime propaganda has been based on fact and is the foundation of much modern propaganda (Ellul 84-86).

Ellul wrote, "Modern man needs a relation to facts, a self-justification to convince himself that by acting in a certain way he is obeying reason and proved experience" (Ellul 85). Although most propaganda is based on fact and is rational, it is used to change opinions so drastically that can change behavior. This is accomplished when the persuader uses statistics and general information to form an impression in the viewer's mind. Numerous statistical facts and technical information presented in an advertisement or propaganda cannot be remembered in detail by viewers but will serve to form a general picture or impression in their minds. Rational propaganda creates an inaccurate impression through the use of technical information that elicits overwhelming, irrational emotion that causes behavioral change. Although the technicalities within the argument are forgotten, the impression of technicalities will still remain in the minds of the audience (Ellul 86).

However, the result of rational advertising and rational propaganda are different. Rational propaganda, although based on factual information like advertisements, is still considered propaganda because it creates an irrational reaction of strong emotion; and advertisements do not (Ellul 87).

Propaganda as communication is studied in areas of history, political science, sociology, and psychology. Documentary and other types of film tend to focus on the areas of political science and sociology analyzing the ideologies of persuaders and the effect on public opinion, social movements, and counter-propaganda that emerges from them. Even more recently, propaganda has been studied as mass culture and the ways it is dispersed within the culture as ideas and practices (Jowett and O'Donnell 13-14).

Ellul describes sociological propaganda as "the penetration of an ideology by means of its sociological context" (63). He says that public relations, human relations, and motion pictures, especially big box office Hollywood films, can all take part in sociological propaganda by advertising and spreading a certain style of life – the American lifestyle (65). This type of propaganda shows that not all propaganda comes through political efforts or carries the potent connotations of dishonesty and negativity (Ellul 63-65).

Historically, the term 'propaganda' began with the Roman Catholic Church, and had a more neutral connotation meaning only to "disseminate or promote particular ideas" (Jowett and O'Donnell 15). The heavy-handed use of political propaganda during World War II developed an assumption that most, if not all, contemporary propaganda is political, and considered "lies," "distortion," "deceit," "manipulation," "psychological warfare," and "brainwashing." (15) A more rational explanation defines it as a persuader sending a message with a set ideology and purporting a specific objective (15). When met, the objective reinforces or modifies audience attitudes and/or behavior (Jowett and O'Donnell 15; Carroll 351).

In *Propaganda and Persuasion*, three levels of propaganda are outlined: white propaganda, gray propaganda, and black propaganda. White propaganda is when the sender/source is correctly and clearly identified and the information within the message is accurate. Gray propaganda is when the source/sender might be correctly identified but the accuracy of the information is uncertain. Black propaganda is usually more covert and can be described as "disinformation," when the source/sender is improperly

identified and the message contains lies, fabrications, and deceptions (Jowett and O'Donnell 17, 18).

In the case of the modern documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*, director Michael Moore employs both white and gray propaganda. Although Moore is not a political leader, does not represent an established political party, nor is he member of a larger pressure group, his films are politically oriented and present a definite bias: in result, his films follow many of the traditional characteristics of political propaganda. Moore does not officially affiliate himself with any political party in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, but he criticizes both Democrats and Republicans for their lack of integrity in leading the country into the Iraq War. In the documentaries *Roger & Me, Bowling for Columbine*, and *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore as director places himself as the protagonist and portrays himself as one who seeks truth and demands justice from heads of government and national corporations. Much of the controversy and criticism surrounding his films can theoretically be placed around the "truth" he is seeking (Toplin 7). His documentaries not only represent society but also represent Moore within the society.

Upon further examination of the receivers of propaganda, one must ask: are they innocent bystanders who are manipulated and propagandized or do they in some way volunteer to be informed by the ideology of the propagandist?

Ellul wrote that although people would most likely not desire to be subjected to propaganda, the act of buying a newspaper, a television, radio, or going to the movies makes the propagandee complicit (103). Most likely, the propagandee will buy, listen or read certain news sources because those sources reflect the consumer's own view or opinions on a regular basis (103); for example, a person who is philosophically liberal

might prefer to read *The New York Times*, a publication that historically has leaned toward the left in their bias, while a person who is philosophically conservative might prefer *The Wall Street Journal,* a publication that historically has leaned toward the right.

Aldous Huxley wrote that propaganda is very effective when directed to receivers who are susceptible to believe that the propaganda will further their own interests and beliefs:

> Social and political propaganda, as I have said, is effective, as a rule, only upon those whom circumstances have partly or completely convinced of its truth. In other words, it is influential only when it is a rationalization of the desires, sentiments, prejudices, or interests of those to whom it is addressed (Baker and Sexton 111, Originally in *Harper's*, 1936).

Robert Brent Toplin, a University of North Carolina professor and author of *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* and *Oliver Stone's USA: Film, History, and Controversy*, recently wrote *Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11*, a book that discusses the wake of controversy over the film's release during the 2004 presidential election and how it fueled political debate over Bush's presidential leadership. Toplin makes the assertion that the documentary played to crowds already convinced of Moore's cause, people who were fiercely antiwar and anti-Bush (Toplin 120).

In Ellul's view this film could still be considered propaganda because what initially began as a viewer's lukewarm opinion would progress into action as a result of repeated reinforcement of the propaganda argument (104). In the case of Moore's documentaries, many viewers may be drawn to his films due to their interest in gun control, as discussed in *Bowling for Columbine*, or because of their interest in the Iraq

War, as discussed in *Fahrenheit 9/ll.* But his films can create stronger sentiments and even elicit action from his audience by further enforcing the same notions already founded in viewers' opinions.

Ellul states that it has been proven that "violent, excessive, shock-provoking propaganda text" actually has negative effects on audiences because it leads to less conviction and participation than reasonable propaganda would (86). This applies to those viewers who were skeptical of Moore's argument in *Fahrenheit 9/11* before watching the film. If viewers are skeptical and dubious of Moore's opinions prior to seeing the film due to what they have heard or read about the film and its director, then the strong opinions expressed in the film will usually do less to convince those viewers and more to shock them. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore's opinions may inhibit rational persuasiveness because viewers can be distracted by the audacity and the intricate reasoning behind his argument against President Bush and the Iraq War.

In the film's initial stages, Walt Disney Co. refused to release the *Fahrenheit 9/11* through its subsidiary Miramax Films due to the film's controversial political content. The film eventually succeeded in getting distribution from after it won the Palme d'Or at the 2004 Cannes festival (Corliss par.2). The win was described as a reflection of "not only the anti-American sentiment of Europe at the time but the fact that director Quentin Tarrantino, the head of the Cannes jury, owed much of his career success to Miramax Film Corporation, the distributor of *Fahrenheit 9/11*" (Ellis and McLane 319). The film grossed $21.8 million in over 800 theatres in its first weekend, $10 million was spent on release advertising, and more than 2,000 35mm prints were eventually struck (320).

Toplin explains that Moore was strongly criticized by critics, who compared him to the Nazi minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels and to Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler's favorite creator of nationalistic documentary movies (2). Rush Limbaugh called it "a pack of lies" and liberal *Washington Post* columnist and opponent of the war Richard Cohen said he "recoiled from Moore's methodology" (Corliss par. 5). And Bush's democratic opponent steered away from the politically hot film: "John Kerry has stayed away from Michael Moore, and that's very smart," noted a senior Democratic strategist (Corliss, par. 29). Toplin wrote, "*Fahrenheit 9/11* has become recognized in the eyes of many Americans as an embarrassing example of over-the-top cinematic journalism, and Michael Moore has gained a reputation as an extremist and a propagandist" (Toplin 4).

By making this documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, director Moore assumed the persona of a journalist. In a panel discussion, Moore said, "Have any of us in America seen a single anchor or news person confront Mr. Bush with a hard question and then not let him out of it when he tries to give his bull shit response?" (DVD Special Feature: "The Release of *Fahrenheit 9/11*")

In a March 2005 *New York Times* story, THINKFilm U.S. Theatrical Head Distributor Mark Urman said, "There's a world of difference between filmmaking and journalism. Michael Moore is a humorist. He's a filmmaker. One thing he isn't is a reporter. And fair and balanced and art are as day is to night." THINKFilm released the Academy-Award documentary feature winner, *Born Into Brothels* in 2004, the same year of Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* release (Lacher, par. 22; www.thinkfilmcomany.com).

Fahrenheit 9/ll was released in the summer 2004, prior to the presidential election in November in which incumbent President George W. Bush was running against the

democrat candidate Senator John Kerry. Moore made no hidden agenda and desire for the upcoming election. "I would like to see Mr. Bush removed from the White House," Moore said in a June 2004 interview on ABC's *This Week* with George Stephanopoulos briefly after the release of his film (Kasindorf and Keen, par. 4). The film specifically wanted to reach young voters who would waver with uncertainty about who to vote for or would not bother to vote at all (Corliss, par. 25). As Moore said, "There's millions of you on the sidelines, and I'm like the coach saying, 'Come on, bench, get in the game!" (Corliss, par. 25). Because of Moore's timing of the film's release and his hopes to influence the audience to action to vote in the fall election, this film can be considered propaganda.

Although Moore does extensive research like any good investigative reporter, he differs from investigative reporters who must give an account of their work to their editors. He is free to manipulate facts, draw assumptions, and build a case that is debatably accurate because he is the reporter as well as the editor. The numerous arguments in the documentary are constructed in a way to manipulate the facts in order to show the Bush administration as incompetent, deceitful, intent on going to war, and personally responsible for the casualties in Iraq (*Fahrenheit 9/11* DVD).

This documentary takes advantage of the speed of moving images and presents fast-paced arguments that leave little time for a viewer's reflection. In doing so, the viewer has to accept the arguments and supporting evidence presented as fact in order to understand the continuing storyline. Although the documentary has the traditional characteristics of propaganda, the last half of the film uses less narration, more

interviews with sources and more personal footage that represent the voices of the American public instead of not Moore's own personal views (*Fahrenheit 9/11* DVD).

Regardless of political opinions, a documentary film critic can view this film and see that there are some inherent ethical offenses that require serious consideration. Representing social actors improperly in a demeaning and false light, as well as providing inaccurate information that draw debatably false conclusions for viewers are two ethical struggles in this film. (*Fahrenheit 9/11* DVD).

Fundamental documentary ethics explicitly imply that filmmakers treat social actors within their documentary with respect and present them truthfully and consistently (Nichols 9-10). While Moore as director plays the main role in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, he does not lead the audience around by being a visual character as in *Roger & Me* and *Bowling for Columbine.* Instead Moore acts as the narrator, and therefore, his opinions set the overall tone of the film. As the narrator, Moore speaks on behalf of the main characters in his film who he is trying to disprove, namely President Bush and his administration.

Although President Bush is the central focus of the material presented in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore never once interviewed President Bush personally for the film. Bush is not represented in the film as a social actor; instead Moore manipulates newsreel and archival footage of the president to represent Moore's personal opinions (Moore DVD). The most poignant scene in the film shows newsreel footage of Bush visiting an elementary school in Florida on the morning of September 11, 2001. The president was informed of the first attack on the World Trade Center tower prior to reaching the school, but as Moore states, "decided to go ahead with his photo opportunity" (Moore 17). Although, Moore is unaware of the actual thoughts or intentions of President Bush, as

narrator, Moore concludes for the audience that Bush had little care of the catastrophic situation and would have rather taken the photo opportunity to increase approval ratings (Moore 17-19).

As the footage rolls on, viewers see the president's chief of staff enter the room and whisper in Mr. Bush's ear that a second plane had crashed into the second tower. "The nation is under attack," narrator Moore said. "Not knowing what to do, with no one telling him what to do, and no Secret Service rushing in to take him to safety, Mr. Bush just sat there and continued to read *My Pet Goat* with the children" (Moore 18).

In mass communications law, governmental officials are less protected by libel laws and more subjected to ridicule due to their leadership roles within society. However, Moore's critique of Bush is subjective and demeaning. Because a narrator's voice is often used in educational and TV documentaries it can seem more authoritative (Nichols 14). Moore's comments communicate to the audience that what he is saying as a narrator is factual information. When the comments are actually Moore's personal interpretation of what the audience is seeing presented on film footage without the actual sound. Toplin wrote:

> Furthermore, the question is not whether *Fahrenheit 9/11* delivered *the* truth to audiences but whether the movie communicated *a* truth. Moore's arguments in *Fahrenheit 9/11* concerned the United States' war making and the subsequent occupation of Iraq. Moore maintained that the war with Iraq was unnecessary and that the occupation was counterproductive in terms of U.S. interests. He focused on the war's unfortunate consequences for both Iraqis and Americans. Moore also claimed that the

Bush administration frequently aroused fear about terrorism for political purposes. These are Moore's "truths" (7).

Throughout the film Moore uses newsreel footage, newspaper clippings, and interviews with experts, but he leads the audience to a conclusion without presenting a complete picture of the facts. Many times, Moore alludes to "the real problem" or "the real reason," as he says, implying that the American government and news outlets fed false information to the public. This study does not attempt to refute Moore's alleged assertions – as evidential truth could be revealed in the future – but rather focuses on the assertion's lack of factual and accurate foundation based on what the public and media knew at the time of the film's release and in existing times.

Below are facts presented in the documentary as well as Moore's debated interpretation:

Fact: (Note: Moore's source for this evidence was from a *St. Petersburg Times* story, June 9, 2004) U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) confirmed in an interview that airplanes were authorized at the highest levels to fly Osama bin Laden's family members and other Saudi Arabians (142 Saudis in all) out of the country immediately following September 11, 2001, when civil aviation was still grounded. Due to the speed at which they left, none were screened or investigated before flying out of the country. The White House has denied the flight ever existed (Moore 148).

Moore's alleged interpretation: Bush's close friendship and business relations with many Saudis due to mutual oil investments gained for Bush an estimated $1.4 billion in profits. Moore makes the assertion that Bush's interest was in money and his own

personal gain. "Is it rude to suggest that when the Bush family wakes up in the morning they might be thinking about what's best for the Saudis instead of what's best for you or me? Because 1.4 billion just doesn't buy a lot of flights out of the country. It buys a lot of love." said Moore (36).

Debatable Accuracy Presented in Media: Moore's assertion concerning 118 Saudis who were allowed to immediately fly out of the country after the 9/11 although civil aviation nationwide was grounded, is debatably accurate. According to a *USA Today* story about the flight of 118 Saudis, commercial flying had already resumed when the Saudis were flown out of the country and many were screened by the FBI before leaving (Kasindorf and Keen, par. 20).

Fact: The government heightened security after September 11, 2001, and Congress enacted the U.S. Patriot Act (H.R. 3162 RDS) on October 24, 2001 "to deter and punish terrorist acts in the United States" (www.epic.org/privacy/terrorism/hr3162.html).

Moore's stated Interpretation: The act was pushed through Congress in a manipulative manner by the Bush Administration, and few members of Congress had time to read the act fully before it was passed. Moore also believes that it was an irrational act that infringed upon the nonthreatening personal life of many citizens: "Okay, let me see if I got these straight...old guys in the gym? Bad. Peace groups in Fresno. Bad. Breast milk? Really bad. But matches and lighters on the plane? Oh, hey, no problem! Was this really about our safety, or was something else going on?" said Moore (68-69).

Fact: The federal government aired warnings for the American public to guard against terrorist attacks (i.e. terrorist attacks in New York City on New Year's Eve) on national television and radio broadcasts.

Moore's stated interpretation: The government wanted to create a scare and bring a sense of fear to the American public for easier manipulation: "Of course, the Bush Administration did not hand out a manual on how to deal with the terrorist threat because the terrorist threat wasn't what this was all about. They just wanted us to be fearful enough so that we'd get behind what their real plan was," said Moore (70).

Fahrenheit 9/1 as Propaganda

According to Ellul's theory of propaganda, Moore was able to use rational facts with upsetting images, which may or may not be related to the facts, and the result is an irrational reaction from viewers driven by overwhelming emotion (Ellul 85-86). As the associate producer of the film, Joanne Doroshow, said "the sequence is 'somewhat confusing, admittedly'" (Kasindorg and Keen, par. 21). The footage interplay between factual statements and interpretative conclusions distinguish *Fahrenheit 9/11* as propagandistic cinema.

In *Communicating Ideas with Film, Video, and Multimedia,* Motion-media expert S. Martin Shelton explains factors that affect a film's influence on viewers. He wrote that it is essential for the scenes to be presented in a tone that is "familiar, relevant, and sympathetic to the audience. Such messages engender understanding, acceptance, involvement, and empathy. And without empathy, there's little or no communication" (Shelton 35). Coupled with the thought that propaganda is effective when it presents

rational facts that give impressions and lead to irrational emotions, Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* is one of the best examples of propaganda in American film history. He utilizes disturbing images to draw empathy from the audience and associate it with the previous fact presented.

Moore juxtaposes footage of Bush playing golf while on vacation with footage from September 11, 2001, and newsreels of Condoleezza Rice, the then national security advisor, responding to the 9/11 Commission to show the faults and inadequacies he sees in the president and his administration. This sequence of scenes presents the Bush administration as failing the American public because, according to Moore's evidence, they were warned that the attack was to occur. It is important to note that Moore never had access to the "Bin Laden Determined to Attack Inside" security briefing because it was never released to the public. He stated his assumptions as fact and lead viewers to believe him despite contradicting information (DVD Special Features: "Condoleezza Rice's 9/11 Commission Testimony").

As a director, Moore uses artistic expression by selecting disturbing images and placing them in a specific sequence along with factual data and over-voice narration. The audience is led to assume that the images and data are directly related and therefore, the audience naturally draws inaccurate conclusions. Moore implies with edited footage that Bush did not have sympathy for the victims of the World Trade Center attacks nor was he concerned about the state of hysteria and fear the country was in that morning, instead Bush was focused on his approval ratings by taking a "photo opportunity." (*Fahrenheit 9/11* DVD Special Features).

Another sequence of scenes includes footage of gory war scenes in Iraq, U.S. soldiers harassing Iraqi detainees and a poignant and personalized account of a once patriotic but now grief-stricken Flint, Michigan, mother who lost her son in Iraq (*Fahrenheit 9/11* DVD; Kasindorf and Keen, par. 19). Lila Lipscomb was interviewed heavily by Moore during the second half of the film, and her highly emotional scenes bring forth strong waves of empathy from audience members. In this instance, the film is credible because it is uses sources and social actors, not just Moore's narration or newsreel. These scenes conducted with Lipscomb are the most dramatic and further advance Moore's argument more than any other part of the film because he allows the evidence to speak for itself (*Fahrenheit 9/11* DVD Special Features).

After the documentary was viewed, many audience members developed strong opinions and were passionate about seeing that Bush was not in office for the next presidential term. Toplin explains that Moore never concealed his goal of making an impact on the 2004 presidential elections through the making of the documentary:

> The filmmaker stated frankly that he hoped the movie would help drive George W. Bush out of the White House...Through numerous appearances on television programs and through Internet streaming, he tried to draw attention to the issues raised in *Fahrenheit 9/11*...He focused particularly on young Americans in the eighteen to early-twenties age range – individuals who tended not to take an interest in politics or to vote. If many of them could be mobilized, he judged, their ballots would likely put John Kerry over the top (120).

After viewing the documentary, a 17-year-old youth told that she was eager to reach voting age so she could "take action" (*Fahrenheit 9/11* DVD Special Features). Her opinions had been so radically changed that she saw action necessary for young people like her:

> I was so astounded by what I saw...I thought 'oh my gosh, did this really happen?' And it...makes you know what is going on and just [want to] hurry up and turn 18 so you can get down to the registration booths and just change how things are. But even though we are not 18, we can still change the way things are by going out to the precincts and telling people what's really going on (DVD Special Features: "The Release of *Fahrenheit 9/11*").

In Moore's *Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader*, he includes numerous e-mails from those whose opinions were radically changed and pressed them to vote for Senator Kerry. One e-mail from a Las Vegas resident said:

> What a night in Vegas! Standing room only, oversold theaters, lines so long it felt like the 1977 premiere of *Star Wars*...and after the movie ended, people asking others to register to vote. What a powerful film when people actually are so moved to register to vote on the spot (Moore 196).

Another e-mail from a Chicago resident encouraged Moore to release the documentary on DVD at a time that would effect the presidential elections: "I'm sure that you are aware that it would be a great idea to release *Fahrenheit 9/11* on DVD in late October to ensure its effect on the upcoming election" (Moore 197).

The strategic release of the documentary was planned specifically to encourage election results in favor of Moore's personal beliefs. He utilizes disturbing footage that many times was unrelated to the facts being discussed. He interpreted the facts according to his own assumptions, even though many White House personnel insisted they were erroneous (*USA Today*, June 2004).

Fahrenheit 9/11 can be defined as propaganda because of the film's deliberate timing of the documentary's release in conjunction with the film's objective to radically change the viewer's opinions in order to affect the outcome of the 2004 Presidential election. As Ellis and McLane wrote, "The film's intent was to mobilize the American public to vote President George Bush out of office. Although it failed to do that, it took upon the role of the socially conscious documentarian to its logical democratic conclusion" (320). Although not all contemporary documentary films are propaganda, *Fahrenheit 9/11* is one example that demonstrates that it is possible within today's society to produce a theatrically released propaganda documentary to the masses.

CHAPTER 5

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN DOCUMENTARY FILM

There are various art forms in which many ethical issues are raised, and film is indisputably one of those forms. The ethical considerations that are central in documentary filmmaking focus on filmmakers' honesty and responsibility toward their audiences and subjects in their film (Ellis (1989) 231). While there is an abundance of scholars' respective opinions on the issues of responsibility and honesty, this chapter will examine those areas pertaining to journalism and propaganda (231). The four areas of focus for this chapter will deal with the use of images as a medium, the audience of film, the director's "voice," and an unofficial documentary code of ethics according to filmmakers and scholars. Excerpts of the interviews conducted by the author with documentary filmmakers Christie Herring and Ralph Braseth are included (See Appendix for a full transcript of the interviews).

The Medium of Moving Images

Renowned French film theorist André Bazin answered the question "What is cinema?" by stressing the photographic foundation of film. Photography, to Bazin, was what separated film from other forms of pictorial art, such as painting (Kolker 7). Whereas paintings represent objects, persons, and events of the past by means of resemblance, photography has the ability to present or re-present the same past objects,

persons, and events to viewers in a precise manner. Pictorial images resemble their subjects whereas photography identifies their subjects with the accuracy allotted by technology and the lens (Carroll 118). Bazin saw the photograph as something pure and *objectif*, or objective, art because the moment that the image is transferred to the film, the human hand is not involved (Kolker 7).

Bazin explained that capturing reality in the initiative of taking a picture was "to give significant expression to the world..." (qtd. in Kolker 9). Kolker emphasizes that the thing we perceive is not "the thing itself," but interpretation of such things. It is constructed out of our "education, assimilation, acculturation, and assent" from birth on (8). In images, reality is not what is emphasized, but the "significant, mediated expression. In turn, reality is socially constructed and mutually agreed-upon. For Bazin, such expression becomes very significant in photography and film because of the apparent lack of interference from a human agent" (9).

Carl Plantigna, in *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*, expresses that images can be indeterminate and ambiguous when they stand alone. For example, a picture of a dog could mean several things: "This dog is sitting," or "Many dogs sit a lot," or "Here is a dog." The message of the photograph created by the photographer's expression is unclear. Plantigna explains that photographs are interpreted based on the photograph's relation to three factors: (1) conventional use, (2) linguistic accompaniment, and (3) context (73-75).

The conventional use and meaning of a photograph, especially within cinematography, is dependent upon its identification as fiction or nonfiction: "In the case of nonfictions, the conventional *use*, when recognized by the audience, in part determines

their prior expectations and how they approach the image" (74). For nonfiction cinematography, the image illustrates information and accurate portrayal rather than whimsical fantasy in fiction (73-74).

Linguistic accompaniment brings meaning to nonfiction cinematography through the use of "voice-over narration, interviews, recorded speech of other kinds, or printed titles" (74). Specifically, Plantinga says that film cannot communicate as precisely and direct as words can, which is the reason that the accompaniment of language and words is extremely useful. While "film images alone may imply or suggest propositions...[they] cannot match the efficiency, intricacy, directness, nuance, and complexity of argument that words allow" (73). Based on Plantinga's statement, it is thereby significantly useful in documentary film to use interviews and narration as a means of presenting the story.

> The intended meaning of a moving image depends on its placement within a textual whole, and in relation to other images and sounds that make up the text....Pictures do not mean or function by virtue of their internal characteristics alone, but always in relation to their conventional use in a particular context (75).

When images are purposefully used in a conventional manner, have linguistic accompaniment, and are placed within context, they can convey clear messages and propositions, and even be translated into words (75).

The arrangement of images and footage along with the backdrop of narration and music within the context of the whole film is crucial in determining the message (Plantinga 75; Kolker 10). In the case of Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* and Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the arrangement of scenes builds the story and relays their message.

Understanding the image and the sequence of images in film is central to understanding cinema. Film theorist Terrence Rafferty wrote:

> The techniques of film are unusually coercive, a fact quickly grasped both by the art's early masters [...] who reveled in their ability to manipulate the viewer's responses, and by the leaders of totalitarian states, who recognized cinema's potential as an instrument of propaganda (Eds. Carroll and Choi 45).

Grierson was one of the first to foresee the propagandistic uses of documentary film because of the way it could subliminally affect the thoughts and ideas on a viewer's psyche. Grierson's statement was prophetic of how film was utilized by Hitler and the Allied governments during the Second World War (Forsythe 15-16).

Images can be effective in persuading, informing, or propagating because they can be a form of evidence in building an argument: "The photograph was received, from the beginning, as a document and therefore as evidence. This evidential status was passed to the cinematograph and is the source of the ideological power of documentary film" (Winston 11).

Ralph Braseth, an experienced broadcast reporter and documentary filmmaker, discusses when an image is preferred over words: "I think some stories lend themselves better to being told with video, but some stories have to be told in-depth with words. But there are some stories that really lend themselves to a visual medium and it can be more impactful" (Braseth). Although moving images do not replace words, they can be better suited for certain stories because of their ability to be more concise, descriptive, and evidential in showing than printed words can in telling.

Audience

The study of contemporary audiences is still relatively rare in film studies (Ed. Hill & Gibson 204). There is some quantitative data gathered by the Endowment of the Arts and the Census, yet it does little to narrow the specifics and give insight into the audience of film and, more specifically, documentary film audiences. Instead of focusing on quantitative date, this section will focus on qualitative data and analysis as it relates to cinematic audiences as a whole.

The hundredth anniversary of cinema was celebrated in 1995, and 'cinema' was reiterated and defined as "the screening of moving images for a paying audience" (Gripsrud 202). The audience is crucial to the ongoing development and definition of the film medium (202). In its beginning stages, film was considered a "paradigmatic mass medium," and the intense and enjoyable experiences that people experienced at the cinema gave much heeded concern for whether the influence would play a role in people's mindset and opinions (Gripsrud 202). These fears instigated much of previous audience studies (202).

Film's enormous potential for influencing the masses developed from the historical Marxist film theory (202). It was Russia's Lenin who saw the medium of film as the most efficient medium for propaganda, and the theories of famous Soviet Sergei Eisenstein was concerned with how have mass audiences of film view the world in a specific way and then act accordingly (202). The Marxist conception of film developed from two prominent historical Marxist theories and conceptions: Film could alter viewer's way of thinking "in 'progressive' directions, or, on the contrary, for the

reproduction and dissemination of ideology in the sense of 'false consciousnesses" (Gripsrud 203).

During the 1920s when film was rapidly gaining popularity, a censorship was introduced in most Western countries due in part to the fearful perception that movies could be seriously dangerous, especially to children and adolescents who were frequently attending (203). Since that period in which movies were perceived as the source of many negative effects within society, the film medium has moved through several stages until contemporary times (204).

In the 1970s, contemporary theory began to redefine audience studies and focus on the idea of images and film as constructed by the spectators themselves, as previously discussed in the section on moving images (203).This theory that focuses on the 'processing' of film in the human brain, has gathered popularity in recent times (203).

The latter examples of film theory and the use of images have one theme in common: "the encounter between audiences and films share the idea that it is through the existence of an audience that film acquires social and cultural importance. The production of a film provides a raw material which regulates the potential range of experiences and meanings to be associated with it, but it is through audiences that films become 'inputs' into larger socio-cultural processes" (203).

As discussed briefly in Chapter 4, S. Martin Shelton, in *Communicating Ideas with Film, Video, and Multimedia,* outlines five factors that influence the effectiveness of information motion-media for audiences: motivation, credibility, audience profile, content, and structure (35-36). Motion-media is defined by Shelton as communication in the form of "video, film, multimedia, and all their spin-offs" (6).

Motivation: Viewers have to believe that the information presented will be to their advantage, which allows a motivation to pay attention during the presentation (35).

Credibility: If the information within motion-media is to be successful, the film designer, sponsor, and the medium itself must be seen as credible and prestigious in the viewer's mind (35).

Audience Profile: Knowing the target audience is essential. Audiences are comprised of different age groups, values, backgrounds, and education levels. It is important therefore to know the target audiences' characteristics and profiles in order to engender understanding, acceptance, involvement, and empathy. Without empathy, there is minimal communication (35).

Content: There are four main points Shelton identifies for good content: 1. Messages need to be short and concise. 2. Cute gimmicks can blur the primary message by creating "noise." 3. About 70 to 80 percent of the information should be visual. 4. Auditory messages are only secondary to the visual messages and should be used to reinforce the visual messages (35).

Structure: How the filmic structure unfolds is critical. Although there are many variations on structure, Shelton identifies some of the most effective will use anticipation; repeating major points, concepts, and meanings; presenting the argument in a rhythm that allows the audience to time assimilate and reflect on the new information; enabling audience participation through interactive media; using plots that the audience can relate to on some level; and summarizing key points to give review and relevance of the information presented (35-36).

Although the filmmakers have a crucial role in whether or not a message is effective, it is the audience who will decide or not to accept the message. In an interview, filmmaker Barbara Kopple, a two-time Oscar winner, said, "Audiences are smart enough to decide for themselves if they agree with the point of view onscreen. I'm not sure that 'distance' is a positive thing in nonfiction filmmaking. I think there's a time and place for distance, in television journalism, for example" (Lyons par. 18,19). In a *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*, Stella Bruzzi also said viewers of documentary films are not so easily manipulated by the message of the film because she believes viewers have the ability to recognize the director's "voice." "Furthermore, the spectator is not in need of signposts and inverted commas to understand that a documentary is a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other" (4). In addition to the lack of accurate representation in film, Bruzzi writes that because reality will never be perfectly achieved, representational reality is not invalidated or erased (4).

Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* is a perfect example of an extremely well made documentary with beautiful aesthetics that can still trick an audience. Addressing the idea that viewers are not 'innocent bystanders' also implies that an effort to research the content or ideas presented in a documentary is also needed by viewers. As viewers become more informed, filmmakers are more likely to be accountable.

The "Voice"

In *Introduction to Documentary*, Nichols extensively discusses the idea of the filmmakers' "voice," or the impression the filmmaker leads the viewers to think. Does the director let viewers come to their own conclusion by having sufficient evidence through interviews with subjects and footage, or does the director use footage and evidence that leads the viewers to their conclusion. Nichols comments on the director's point of view, not as a bias but as the director's original way of seeing the world and personal artistic expression:

> Some [filmmakers] will stress the originality or distinctiveness of their own way of seeing the world: we will see the world we share as filtered through a particular perception of it. Some will stress the authenticity or fidelity of their representation of the world: we will see the world we share with a clarity or transparency that downplays the style or perceptions of the filmmaker. (xiv)

The decision made by the director of whether to lead the audience to a conclusion or to let the audience derive its own conclusion from sufficient evidence can alter the style and ethical credibility of a documentary film dramatically. An example of "voice" can be seen in Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* (Plantinga 62-63). Morris uses his "voice" through the use of lighting and photography when he interviews the convicted Randall Adams and innocent David Harris. Adams is wearing a bright, white button-down shirt with a relatively colorless background, while Harris is wearing an orange prison jumpsuit with red lighting in the background (62-63). Although the attire of the two men and the

lighting is subtle and likely unnoticed by the average eye, it represents Morris's viewpoint and conclusion as he presents his evidence through images to his audience.

Although the interviews with the two men and other sources are extremely crucial for providing visual evidence and building a case for viewers, Carl Plantigna states, it is not the only thing that builds the argument: "Although these interviews constitute powerful evidence, the case for Adams' innocence that Morris presents depends on his organization of materials as much as on any single interview. A documentary is more than the sum of its documents" (72).

Concluding with the notion of the "voice" and idea of objectivity as a theory, is Nichols' idea that a documentary can gain status by being objective, reliable, and credible (22). A film's credibility can be more easily called into question when the message of the film is controversial or debatable to a viewer, as in the case of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The question perhaps is not whether the film is perfectly unbiased and objective, but if the filmmakers have gathered research in an objective manner and used all their understanding and knowledge from that research to portray an accurate story. The filmmaker is not expected to be objective but fair to his audience and subjects in his storytelling.

As he considered his experience as a journalist and the idea of objectivity in reporting, Braseth commented,

> Objectivity is a myth.... You bring all...baggage with you on any story you are going to cover as a journalist. You can be objective? I say no. Now what you can do – and this is what good journalists do – is understand and identify the biases you have and then you make every

attempt to be fair in every story you cover. If you ask someone to be objective, you are asking them to remove everything that is human about them (Braseth).

Through the definitions and commentary presented in this section, it would seem that a documentary film would be a form of persuasion. When factual data is taken, rearranged, edited, and even manipulated, the original story is altered. The filmmaker's "voice" is very similar to the construction of the voice within advocate journalism or alternative journalism in which the story with facts is presented but a point of view is inserted. On the whole, documentaries with the component of the "voice" resemble the work of alternative journalism.

Ethics in Filmmaking

No distinctive set of guidelines, principles, or ethical codes steer the documentary genre. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Academy Awards®) does not set ethical guidelines for documentaries, but do only accept submissions of documentaries that are "theatrically released non-fiction motion picture dealing creatively with cultural, artistic, historical, social, scientific, economic or other subjects. It may be photographed in actual occurrence, or may employ partial re-enactment, stock footage, stills, animation, stop-motion or other techniques, as long as the emphasis is on fact and not on fiction" (www.oscars.org). Although there is no official set of ethics for documentaries, many documentary filmmakers feel there is still an unwritten code that should dominate the integrity and credibility of documentary filmmakers' work.

Documentary filmmaker Christie Herring commented,

> If a filmmaker calls a film a documentary, should the viewers have a certain expectation of a standard of truth presented? Some people would say no. I think so, I do. If I am leading someone to think something is true, then it should be true and it should be fair. I have a sense, although it's not the same thing as journalist where you have this professional ethic that is based on two sources, etc. There is a recognized professional standard for measurement in journalism and in documentary filmmaking there is not – it is personal discretion. I do think that I have a responsibility to other documentary filmmakers to present myself in a certain way and follow-up with people in my films (Herring).

Additional thoughts from Choi reiterate the idea of filmmaker responsibility to viewers:

> Filmmakers are not free of any responsibility to commit to either the truth or the plausibility of content in their films. They should be more responsible and committed to preserving a documentary's tie to the world, because of the audience's general expectation of characteristics for a film of presumptive assertion. In addition, the viewer is capable of applying a set of standards of evidence and logic relevant to the subject matter in order to evaluate the objectivity or plausibility of an argument embedded in the film (139).

Documentaries are art and can be a freedom of expression for those that produce them. It should remain that way. But as Choi was implying, there should also be an expectation for filmmakers to produce credible work committed to the truth. As with reporters and newsrooms across the country, credibility has to be earned, not given.

CONCLUSION

Film is an art, and documentary filmmakers are practicing artists. Their work entails capturing reality with a camera, and editing it to create a final product that is interesting, captivating, and informative for viewers. Their work can be an expression of their artistic endeavors and even their beliefs, but in documentary film, representations of reality filmed with a camera need to uphold certain ethical guidelines in order to be credible and merit the trust of the audience.

Documentary films have recently passed into a new era where entertainment is prized as much as informing and accuracy. More people are making, watching, and talking about documentaries than ever before. It might be because of an increasing population, but it also has to do with the "worldwide access to production, distribution, and exhibition mechanisms" as well as the strength of the "documentary impulse." (Ellis and McLane 338)

This study sought to examine several questions concerning the documentary film: Are contemporary documentary films journalism or entertainment? Do documentaries present their stories and evidence in a journalistic manner by being accurate, fair, and objectively researched? What is the difference between journalism, persuasion, and propaganda, specifically as it relates to images and film? Do documentarians merit the same ethical guidelines expected of a journalist?

Bill Kovach emphasized the idea of objectivity, an ethical guideline at the forefront of journalism when he said, "Everybody knows there's no such thing as objectivity. Scientists know there's no such thing as objectivity, but they do not give up the pursuit of an objective experiment to try and understand what they are examining. Why should journalists give up the notion of a pursuit? Not the attainment of, but the pursuit of objectivity in their work?" (Kovach et. al. "What is Journalism? Who is a Journalist?" Forum). Should audience members expect this from documentary filmmakers as well?

The ethics that documentary filmmakers and journalists are expected to ideally apply are the same: accuracy, fairness, and well documented reporting. The overwhelming difference between a daily newspaper and weekly news magazine to that of a documentary is that frequently independent documentary filmmakers have no editorial staff that either proofs their work for accuracy or authenticity. In recent years, Jayson Blair, a reporter for *The New York Times* and Stephen Glass, a reporter with *The New Republic,* were fired because of the fabricated and inaccurate printed stories they wrote and published for their news organization. Although editorial pages are clearly identified as opinions of the editors and not as news stories, editors are still held to a standard of quality and ethics. In a recent *New York Times* story, documentary filmmaker Mike Wilson said concerning Moore, "I understand what the guy struggles with. I interviewed John Stossel of ABC [co-anchor on *20/20*] and asked him how he managed to keep out of trouble with what are essentially op-ed pieces, and he said 'Because I could get fired.' Michael Moore doesn't have that" (Anderson, par.16).

In the case of documentaries, editorial commentary is equivalent to filmmakers' "voice" that permeates the message and structure of a documentary film. There are no stated professional ethical standards to guide the director when making a documentary and consequently, no immediate direct consequence or penalty for ethical misconduct. This is the central issue that divides journalism and art.

What are the consequences if the documentary film industry does not provide guidelines for its profession? Will the documentary film genre lose its credibility or effectiveness without ethical guidelines? Currently, there is unrestricted editorial license for those who direct or produce a documentary. Equally as important as the issue of professional ethics, is the issue of no distinctive defined purpose for the documentarian as there is for the journalist. In *The Elements of Journalism*, Bill Kovach's and Tom Rosenstiel's definition of journalism emphasizes and echoes this calling: "The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (12). Although the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (The Academy Awards®) identifies the documentary separately from fictional film, it does not specifically define a purpose or ethical standard for the industry.

So what then is the primary purpose of the documentary? Much of documentary films' recent success – as well as the success for many traditional news sources – is due to their ability to inform but also entertain. The research provided examples of films that were artistically persuasive that illuminated an issue and informed viewers. Yet some documentaries probe deeper questions, leaving audiences to reassess their ideas on politics, environmental issues, the court system, or societal behavior. They not only tell a story, but prompt viewers to ask questions and view society and their place within it

differently. These documentaries, in many ways, are critiquing society and in doing so, lead viewers to draw a conclusion by presenting a story built on "evidence." Leni Riefenstahl won the favor of her fellow citizens after *Triumph of the Will* and answered any question of Hitler's leadership by making him appear god-like and invincible against any challenge or outside force. Contemporary film directors Errol Morris and Michael Moore have made their own personal footprints in documentary filmmaking. Moore has packed theatres, probed the question if whether the Bush administration was adequately leading the country. Morris helped evict a man of a life sentence in prison by presenting a story through evidence that entailed extensive interviews and court documents. A documentary's purpose can vary, but, generally, the purpose of each documentary will be based upon the director's intention and motivation for making the documentary. The purpose is what the director defines the purpose to be.

In summation, there are four assessments about contemporary documentary film as a form of mass communication that this study's research embodied. Overall, the vague definitions and unspecified use, subject matter, varied techniques and structure of the documentary genre makes it challenging to classify the documentary film genre in a particular area of mass communication.

Secondly, the ranges of techniques utilized in documentary filmmaking alter the accuracy and fairness of the film. A careful review of the research demonstrates that while some of documentary films are journalistic, such as *The Thin Blue Line*, there are those films that are promoted as a work of journalism but have strong propagandistic elements, like Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Therefore, one can conclude that documentaries

are capable of these two extremes, but most often the documentary will fall somewhere between the extremes.

Patty Calhoun, editor of the alternative Denver weekly *Westword*, said that when objectivity is replaced with fairness and joined with the other traditional journalism principles, the outcome is alternative journalism (Kovach, et al.). Based on Calhoun's definition of alternative journalism, one can conclude that the documentary film usually falls into the category of alternative journalism by utilizing all the elements of traditional journalism yet seeks to be fair, rather than objective. This type of journalism usually has a stronger, more persuasive voice than traditional journalism, and engages readers to think from the filmmaker's perspective.

Thirdly, there is the issue of ethics and the film's responsibility to the viewer. There is currently no code of ethics in documentary filmmaking and there is no requirement to inform viewers when the opinions of the director are being presented versus the facts that are being represented in the film. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the viewers to filter what is seen and heard through other credible sources of information. In other words, the viewer is forced to research the topics discussed in the movie if he or she wants to be adequately informed. Viewers may need to take the initiative to learn more about the subject matter, read critiques of the documentary film, as well as review the documentary through its own website.

And finally, it would be beneficial to have a code of ethics for documentary filmmaking, to have certain guidelines on re-enactments and social actors. Unless those of influence in the documentary industry take the initiative to pursue consensus for professional guidelines, there is no such entity where the responsibility for implementing

ethical standards rest. Most importantly, executing a disclaimer before each viewing of a documentary could inform viewers of the work in the documentary. An example of a disclaimer could appear as: "This film is produced by filmmakers, not journalists. Although the content may be factual and researched, it may represent the ideas and opinions of the filmmakers." This disclaimer will inform the audience that they are watching a film that is not a news segment or an educational, scholarly film.

Documentary film is art. Evolution in art is something to embrace because it advances society to a new representation of our world through the work of an artist, just as Pollack did in painting, Elvis did in music, or DaVinci proved to do in sculpture. Their art is an aesthetic representation of the moods and times of their society. Michael Moore is turning a new leaf in the film genre through his stylized techniques and box office sales. But as new techniques in art immerge, so does the need for reflecting and interpreting the art. While more documentarians push forward the art of documentary filmmaking, audiences need to move forward in their way of viewing documentaries. The more sophisticated the audience, the more the film will be examined for its content, not just its entertainment value. Something great can be drawn from this new style of filmmaking when the twenty-first century viewers question their own perception of reality in digital images seen on the screen and heard in its context. Just because something looks like a nightly newscast or is made out of archival footage does not mean the story is portrayed accurately. Truth in storytelling will emerge when the story is presented accurately, fairly, and in its entirety.

To achieve complete objectivity in filmmaking, as in journalism writing, is impossible, but the pursuit of objectivity and an earnest desire to find credible sources

and gather information is not. Filmmakers should always produce work that upholds the integrity and reputation of all filmmakers, and they should build their credibility as an artist by always keeping in mind that audience trust must be earned and not warranted by means of entertainment.

APPENDIX

Table 2.1 Top 12 Documentaries according to Box Office Sales (1982-present)

Rank	Title	Year	Box Office Sales
1.	*Fahrenheit 9/11*	2004	$119.2M
2.	*March of the Penguins*	2005	$77.5M
3.	*An Inconvenient Truth*	2006	$24 M
4.	*Bowling for Columbine*	2002	$21.6M
5.	*Madonna: Truth or Dare*	1991	$15M
6.	*Winged Migration*	2003	$11.7M
7.	*Super Size Me*	2004	$11.5M
8.	*Mad Hot Ballroom*	*2005*	$8.1 M
9.	*Hoop Dreams*	1994	$7.8M
10.	*Tupac: Resurrection*	2003	$7.7M
11.	*Roger and Me*	1989	$6.7M
12.	*The Aristocrats*	2005	$6.4M

Source: Box Office Mojo

PERSONAL INTERVIEW WITH DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER AND JOURNALIST RALPH BRASETH:

March 19, 2007

Ralph Braseth is an assistant professor and the director of the S. Gale Denley Student Media Center at the University of Mississippi. Originally from Seattle, Braseth attended Western Washington University and later continued his education at the University of Missouri and the University of Mississippi. He has since worked in print, radio and been a TV news reporter in Columbia, MO, Yakima/Tri-Cities, WA, Jackson, MS, Grand Rapids/Kalamazoo, MI, and Memphis, TN, and currently spends most of his time in new media. Braseth has made about 10 documentaries – defined as a video longer than 15 minutes according to Braseth. The most recent titled *Press On* (2006) that documents how the five coastal Mississippi newspapers were destroyed through Hurricane Katrina yet endeavored to continue reporting.

When did you start making documentary films?

First of all, I do not consider myself a documentary filmmaker. I've been a reporter for years and years. If you get 2 minutes in TV news to tell a story, that's really a long time. I ended finding stories that simply couldn't be told in two minutes. About 15 years ago, I started doing stories that would be 15 minutes or 30 minutes instead of 2 minutes, and people would say, "That's a documentary." So people have often characterized my longer stories as documentaries – and maybe they are – but I've never considered myself to be a "filmmaker."

Would you consider the film you submitted to the Oxford Film Festival ["Press On"] a "documentary"?

Yes. A documentary is documenting something. People have different definitions of what constitutes a documentary.

Tell me about the documentary "Press On."

It's about Hurricane Katrina. There are five newspapers along the coast of Mississippi, and they were pretty much destroyed. My story is how those newspapers coped with covering the news while being mired [in the destruction.]

Do you use interviews and archival footage?

Yes, but mainly I shoot my own video. A major part of the documentary isn't just talking but showing. I will probably do three or four more stories but I chose to do this one first. I was down there the day after the storm, and what journalist wouldn't want to cover the biggest story in the country other than the Iraq War?

There has always seemed to be this confusion on reenactments. In 2005, there was an Oscar-winning short documentary ["Mighty Times: The Children's March" by Bobby Houston and Robert Hudson] that received wide controversy because it used reenactments. What is your opinion on reenactments and are they accurate?

Of course they're not accurate. Reenactment by its very nature is making something up – you're interpreting what someone else has said. So while it can be helpful you have to immediately question whether or not it is factual.

Most people think of the documentary and go back to the times of Edward R. Murrow and they have these high journalistic standards. Today, most documentaries have a really strong point-of-view; Take for example *Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11* or *Bowling for Columbine*. Michael Moore is a social critic and he goes into his subject matter with a

very strong agenda. When you simply look at all his material, which some or maybe all is factual, it's told with an advocacy point-of-view.

I wonder since Moore has produced the highest grossing documentaries – *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* – if this is the documentary direction filmmaking is headed or if it is just a phase. I wonder what Moore's films mean for the future of documentary filmmaking?

I believe we are getting ready to see the golden era of documentary filmmaking. Let's take my 13-year-old son for example. I bought him a camera for Christmas, and his current documentary is his friends on a skateboard. The point is that he has an inexpensive camera, goes home with it, and can edit it on his computer.

There are no rules into what constitutes being a documentary filmmaker, and so lots of people are beginning to say "I...". Not many people may see them, but I have a feeling many people are going to produce documentaries because the tools are so readily available. How many people will see them? I do not know. But among them, 90 percent [will be] trash but you will find some diamonds too.

There has been discussion in my classes about how European newspapers now have front-page news stories that resemble editorials instead of the "objective" hard news story on the front pages of American newspapers. Is the point-of-view style in documentary filmmaking prophetic to the future of our American newspapers?

I do not know. But if you go back into the history of newspapers in this country, every newspaper started out that way, too. These ideas of being fair and objective in journalism history are fairly new. The earliest American newspapers started out as being mouthpieces for the political organizations or a politician wanted to get into office so he started his own newspaper.

Straight news documentaries have always been fairly rare, and we have conceptions of what they should be. Going back to my opinion on "the golden era" of documentaries, people will continue to do them [documentaries] with strong point-of-views. But because of the sheer number of documentaries [being made], some will use non-biased attempts to be objective in their reporting. But there is nothing really new there – documentaries run from entertainment to the highest ideals of objectivity and being fair, and there will always be something in-between.

Can I ask what you think of objectivity as a journalist?

Objectivity is a myth. For example, how old are you?

22.

Do you have an opinion regarding abortion?

Yes.

Do you generally have a more favorable opinion on a particular party over another?

Yes.

Do you have an opinion about capital punishment?

Yes.

Do you have an opinion about the war in Iraq?

Yes.

How in the hell do you think you are going to be objective covering anything? You bring all of that baggage with you on any story you are going to cover as a journalist. You can be objective? I say no. Now what you can do – and this is what good journalists do – is understand and identify the biases you have and then you make every attempt to be fair in every story you cover. If you ask someone to be objective, you are asking them to remove everything that is human about them.

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel wrote the book *Elements of Journalism* based on research they conducted. They state in the book that the reporter as a person is not objective but how he or she gathers research should be. So the reporter goes to different sources and gathers ideas and opinions of each side. So the researcher is not objective but the research that goes into is.

Well, let's take the issue of abortion again. I want to be fair, and so I choose who I am going to interview so I can get both sides of the issue. When we go to the pro-abortion side, people who support a woman's right to have an abortion, we can get someone that sounds very reasonable and smart. Then people will say, "Well, there are a lot of good points to her argument." Then the person I choose on the opposing side can be a raving lunatic. And they say, "It's death! It's murder! And anyone who does it is going straight to hell!" Well that's not really being objective either. You are finding a wacko on one side, and that voice compared to a well reasoned, rational voice will make the other side look like wackos.

So objectivity is very, very difficult – that is why I think it's a myth. It's a journalist's job to be as fair as you can.

Did you have a specific audience in mind when you made "Press On"?

I am a journalist, and there are a lot of stories out there that should be told but do not get told. So I am interested in anyone – that's why I give a copy to you and I keep a hundred copies with me. I am not interested in making money; I am interested in telling stories. I appreciate anyone who is willing to give me their 28 minutes and 30 seconds of their time watching it and hopefully won' think it is a waste of their time.

Did you make this documentary because it a story that needs to be told but is too long to tell in a newspaper?

Ya, and that's the ironic thing, too. It's is a story about newspapers, but it takes television and video to best tell their own story. I think that's ironic. You simply couldn't tell the story that I told as effectively – and I am not saying this thing ["Press On"] is good – but what I am telling you is that the medium is more suited to video than print. It's a story about newspapers but it's a story that newspapers could never tell very well about themselves. Print doesn't lend itself to the emotions that are involved – to the utter destruction. You need visuals to go along with that, and that's what makes it a more powerful story. For instance, when 9/11 happened, you can get the finest writer from *The New York Times* and give him 15,000 words to vomit and explain to the audience what happened on 9/11. And I would say give me 30 seconds, which is about how long it took for the south tower to fall to the ground. What is more effective reporting? We

learn through our senses – by watching, by listening. So there is something so powerful about documentaries in that they are so visual. Visuals reinforce everything. It's such a powerful medium, and that is why it will always be around.

Do you think that video has more impact than print?

I think some stories lend themselves better to being told with video, but some stories have to be told in-depth with words. But there are some stories that really lend themselves to a visual medium and it can be more impactful.

On the issue of print, some would say there is more popularity in watching films more so than reading books.

Yes, we read less today. That's unfortunate.

I want to mention something else to you. Network television used to produce great documentaries. When you look at the Edward R. Murrow's *Harvest of Shame* that talks about the Mexicans harvesting grapes, that was one of the greatest documentaries of all time. But roughly 20 years ago, documentary filmmaking for the news networks disappeared because it's really hard to justify the expenses associated with it. Networks are businesses and they are about making money. So it's very hard for documentarians to be commercial, and really hard for networks to justify those resources for telling a great story to run for half an hour or an hour. There's a limited audience for it but none of the networks do it anymore. And they care less about great journalism than making sure their shareholders get paid at the end of the quarter. It's just too expensive and there aren't enough people who want to watch them.

Is making a documentary more expensive than something that *Dateline* or *20/20* do?

The thing about *Dateline* and *20/20* is that half of production is shot with head Stone Phillips sitting in the studio talking –that's a lot cheaper than sending a great crew out into the field. And so, they do a little of both. So 20/20 and others like it, is highly entertaining. They are going out and basically telling a 10-minute news story not a documentary. So Stone does a dramatic introduction and then he comes back and has an assessment of it. It's very entertainment-oriented. There is a star at the beginning and they end it with Stone Phillips. So I would say that is not necessarily documentary filmmaking.

Do you think these news magazine shows and the more entertainment-oriented documentaries alter people's perception of what news really is?

I think it blurs it. We have a war going on. We have had more than 3,000 soldiers die and tens of thousands of causalities, and who knows how many Iraqis have died. But we are more concerned about when Anna Nicole Smith is going to be thrown into the ground or the high school girl who has been missing in Aruba. Why are we so fascinated with that? That's entertainment. That's morbid entertainment that is very appealing to people for some reason. So there has been a growing blur on the line between strong journalism and entertainment, and that continues to blur.

PERSONAL INTERVIEW WITH DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER CHRISTIE HERRING:

February 2007

Christie Herring, a native from Canton, Mississippi, graduated from Duke University in 1996 with a bachelor's in English and certificate in film studies. After graduation, she filmed her first documentary based in Canton entitled *Waking in Mississippi*. Soon after, Herring worked at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston for four years where she gained a deeper knowledge and interest in health care. She later went on to get her M.A. in Documentary Film and Video from Stanford University.

She has made a documentary *Chickens in the City* and an award-winning short documentary *Bodies and Souls*, a story about the only health clinic in the impoverished Delta town, Jonestown, Miss. Herring recently finished working on a documentary on the aluminum can for a National Geographic three-part series entitled "Man Made," which premiered in March 2007. She currently resides in San Francisco and plans to continue making documentary film and online media.

What made you decide to make a documentary on healthcare?

I made my first film as an undergraduate in 1995. During my senior year of college and after I graduated, I made an hour-long documentary ["Waking in Mississippi"] about my hometown Canton, [Mississippi], and the race relations there. At the time, the town had just undergone the election of its first black mayor who was also the first female mayor, Alice Scott. It was a really difficult experience for the town, which is 75 percent black. Basically, somebody called for a race riot during the absentee ballot counting on a local radio station. So basically the National Guard was brought in to march around the Square in 1994, and it was kind of crazy. In fact, a year later Warner Bros. came in to shoot *A Time to Kill* (a film directed by Joel Schumacher based on John Grisham's novel) in Canton. After I finished that project I was exhausted and I didn't know if my interest was documentaries or race relations. I didn't know what to do next.

Why choose documentary film and not fictional film?

I have always been drawn to documentary film. When I was in high school I read *All the President's Men*, and I wanted to seek truth and justice. I grew up not learning about the Civil Rights Movement in high school, and a part of me felt somewhat mislead about local history. And so I felt like seeking truth and justice – I wanted to find out what really happened, and, literally, document reality. So that is kind of how I ended up there. It's not that I'm not interested in doing fiction film, except that I just love the documentary form.

(I describe the topic of my honors senior thesis)

What do you think of the idea of documentary as artistic expression vs. journalism?

This whole questions of journalism versus whatever is very interesting. The Stanford film program I was in just switched. When I was there it was within the Communication Department and housed with the Journalism Department, but it has been moved to the Art Department this year. So it has been a discussion that has been happening. I think that documentary is somewhere between art and journalism with a huge span, and I celebrate that span. I am interested in doing work all along that continuum.

What are some ethics that should be practiced in documentary filmmaking?

If you [a documentary filmmaker] call a film a documentary, should people expect you to have a certain standard of truth or not? Some people would say no. I think so, I do. If I am leading someone to think something is true, then it should be true and it should be

fair. I have a sense, although it's not the same thing as journalist where you have this professional ethic that is based on two sources, etc. There is a recognized professional standard for measurement in journalism and in documentary filmmaking there is not – it is personal discretion. I do think that I have a responsibility to other documentary filmmakers to present myself in a certain way and follow-up with people in my films – I need to treat them a certain way. Otherwise it speaks poorly for everyone and we've all met people who had bad experiences with other filmmakers, all the time. And it's really unfortunate.

While you were involved in the documentary program in the Department of Communications at Stanford, were you required to take any journalism classes?

No, not at all. You could take electives if you wanted to, and many of my fellow students came from a journalism background because there is an obvious crossover. Some graduates [of the program] end up working in a TV Magazine, News Magazine format, such as *Frontline*, *Frontline World*, and that type of thing.

How do you choose the characters in your documentary?

You cast people, and we talk about it as casting. On the gut level it's 'Who do you connect with?' because a film is a labor of love. So 'who do you want to spend time with in the editing room for a year?' because you are spending a lot of time with that person and their personality. It's a complicated thing. But basic things like do they speak clearly. Yet it's a complicated thing and I think it depends on the project and depending on who is making the film it could be very different. I think if you are making a film for

MTV they would want an attractive, slim person that spoke in a certain way. At the same time, people want to film situations that look exotically good or exotically poor.

Then there is the idea of the other. You're filming someone so its easy to objectify them. Yet for me filming is more about humanizing and creating empathy. So it's a challenge to be using a camera which totally objectives but trying to do kind of the opposite of what a camera does. I see a lot of films that I do not like that I feel objectify and demean people, and that just do not respect their subjects.

After spending months and even years with your characters, how do you try be objective when filming and editing their story when it feels like your own?

You have to watch the film with other people or in an environment outside the editing room. Walter Murch, a Final Cut Pro editor, has written this book in which he says that you never need to forget the audience while in the editing room and always trying to see through the audience's eyes. Sometimes I watch a cut in my living room outside the editing room or watch it with a friend who hasn't seen it before. It's important not to get too insular in your own editing room.

I was unable to catch your film at the festival, would you tell me a little about your film *Bodies and Souls*.

It was my thesis film, and I had a year to work on it. I produced, directed, and edited it, and I brought two classmates as a crew. So I had a friend shoot it and the other did the sound. I did site visits the summer before the year. I wanted to get back to why public health question because I had spend the four years in public health. All the studies we did

[at the Harvard School of Public Health] were in urban areas and it seemed that rural healthcare care was just this difficult thing to tackle. I wanted to do an observational film in a rural health clinic because of the format of the thesis and how long I could be there. It's full of interviews but there is a lot of observational film in there too and that's kind of the heart of the film, I think.

When you say observational film, do you mean the same thing as cinema vérité style?

Yes – where you are just shooting and not interacting. And for me it was about capturing the relationship between her [Sister Manette, the previous owner and operator of the health clinic] and the people in town. We shot a lot of footage because you do not know what is going to happen.

What do you hope the audience will take away after watching your film?

I hope that people will give money to the clinic. Although it wasn't a fundraising film, I hope that is an offshoot of it. Another hope is that people in nursing schools and medical programs will think about where they practice. Mississippi had the lowest rate of doctors per capita in the country and the highest rate of obesity, and also really high rates of heart disease and diabetes.

Do you feel there is a solution to this problem?

I am not a policy maker, although the film touches on some policy issues. It more raises questions, and what I really hope for is that it gets people to think about the practical

difficulties, such as 'what does it really take for this health clinic to stay open?' It's not about this hopeless situation and look at these poor people, but about these people working really hard to get by. And here is this thing we take for granted, which is being able to go to the doctor when you are sick and what does it really take in order for that to happen? For me, policywise,...the building here [points to building in a photograph] was built in the '60s as part of a huge public health and public services work during the Kennedy Administration. As Sister Manette says, "It was built in the Kennedy Administration when we were going to get rid of poverty."- It's very tongue in cheek. So in the '80s, Reagan defunded public hospitals and these clinics all over the country are closed. This clinic was closed for about 10 years with no doctor or healthcare in Jonestown at all. During segregation and for years after, they couldn't necessarily go to white doctors so they would go to Mound Bayou which is two hours away and then they would wait two hours in the waiting room. You are just not going to go unless you are the verge of death and by that time you have to be really sick. So Sister Manette heard about the building and so her and some other sisters got together and reopened the building. But isn't not dramatic. It's not that she arrived and all was better, it was slow work.

The building is no longer owned by the government but the health care workers never turn people away who are unable to pay. She sold the clinic to a son of somebody in the town and it continues to be a community institution.

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