

A NEW HISTORY OF
DOCUMENTARY FILM

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Chapter Seventeen

English-Language Documentary in the 1990s and Beyond—Reality Bytes

The centennial of cinema, including the one-hundred-year mark for the documentary, was 1995. The date of the first *public* projection of film, which took place on December 28, 1895, in Paris, was settled upon by hundreds of film organizations around the world as the moment when cinema officially began. As described in chapter one, that now famous Lumière brothers exhibition at the Grand Café consisted of an approximately twenty-five-minute program of very short—less than one minute each—films. In that first public screening, the dialectic between the “real” and the “staged,” which has continuously been included in discussion of documentary, was already in play. On that occasion, both pre-documentary “actualities” and fiction-based vignettes were shown together without distinction. It is probably safe to say that no one from the Lumière organization stood up and announced: “Here we have a selection of real, unscripted events, and other scenes which are acted for the camera.” In fact, those films in the program long deemed “actualities,” such as *Workers Leaving the Factory*, on close examination, appear to have been as rehearsed as the “enactment” of the comic *The Hoser Hosed* (*L'Arroseur arrosé*). The Lumière workers were surely told to exit the factory gates as the camera was rolling and not to look at the camera. Different “takes” of this scene, possibly shot months apart, remain extant over a hundred years later. Still, the workers were nonactors engaged in their everyday activities as the Lumière camera recorded them. The people in *The Hoser Hosed* were playing a comedy.

Over the next one hundred years, as suggested in this book, documentary and fiction filmmakers traveled mostly separate routes. However often the subjects and techniques of the two intersected, documentarians identified themselves as such, often by the social intent of their films. As with all rules, there were exceptions. Still, fiction filmmakers have generally created fictions, usually and primarily meant to entertain. The closing years of the twentieth century, the

"Century of Cinema," and the first years of the yet-to-be-named twenty-first century have brought documentary to a place where it sometimes seems more and more difficult to separate the real from the fictional. Technology, economics, and artistic experimentation continue to push and pull the documentary in new directions, and filmmakers themselves more openly challenge the label of "documentarian."

Business and Technology: The Bad and the Good

One of the major trends of the 1980s, the proliferation of cable channels, became even more pervasive in the 1990s. The consequences—ever more hours of television documentary programming, production cost per hour decreasing dramatically, lessening personal control by the individual filmmaker—all continued. What resulted was a marked decline in the overall quality of most televised documentary, even as the number of television hours devoted to nonfiction increased exponentially. This is not to say that there were not notable, even outstanding and groundbreaking, works. There were. But the vast majority of television time devoted to nonfiction was taken up by product whose artistic quality was limited and whose veracity was sometimes questionable. This was increasingly true even before the millennial onslaught of so-called "reality TV." Hours were filled with recycled stock footage on every imaginable subject, accompanied by bland commentary, and the duller kind of talking-head interviews. Point of view, investigative, and artful filmmaking often went by the wayside as cable channels scurried to fill endless hours.

With advances in technology anyone with a digital camera and a home computer could put together a documentary, and fortunately many more people can tell their own stories. At the same time, the professionalism of documentary craft and artistry, to say nothing of concern for ethical considerations, has suffered. The cost of small-format video is a fraction of that of older technologies. In the twenty-first century one or two people shoot major television documentary projects that once required lavish funding and at least four-plus crew members. When shooting in 16mm, or even Betacam, it was common for makers to travel with twelve to twenty cases of equipment, film, and supplies. The same work can now be done in small-format out of one small suitcase. This crush of quick, and above all cheap, work has considerably lowered the bar as to what television audiences accept as documentary. The speed of this kind of filmmaking, its low cost, and the fact that a person with almost no technical skill can perform it, has opened the field of documentary making to the entire industrialized world.

The need for low-cost programming affected not only documentaries shot mainly in the field. For some cable channels the exigencies of creating mass hours of programming about historical events that had taken place decades ago led to disturbing developments. The slideshow approach, with narration and talking heads, was one consequence. Cost conscious and inexperienced researchers

sometimes substituted any available footage for actual shots of the events under discussion. For example, a stock image of a sinking ship has more than once been passed off as a specific sinking ship, whether the ship in the image had actually ever sailed in the same ocean that the documentary claimed. In all too many cases an astonishing disregard for factual rigor overcame historical compilation films. This problem became so widespread that the Association of Moving Image Archivists' newsletter published a column by archivist Jerome Keuhl listing misused footage. His watchful beast, known as the office cat, keeps track of such documentary misadventures and anachronisms and reports to the community when an earnest film researcher starts looking for footage of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address or the sinking of the *Titanic*, events never covered by a camera.

On the commercial front, when the merchandising of documentary tie-in product began in earnest, it became abundantly clear that executives at cable channels were far more interested in "branding" themselves as saleable corporate commodities than in producing meaningful documentaries. A leader in the field was again Discovery Communications, with its Discovery Stores. Using the Discovery name and logos, along with those of its offshoot channels—Animal Planet, Discovery Health, Travel Channel, Discovery Kids, Wings, etc.—stores began to sell everything from plastic sharks to logo shirts, to audio CD, all loosely connected to documentary programming that played on the channels. Starting in 1997 Discovery.com's online store reached out to armchair adventurers with an e-commerce Web site to mirror the Discovery Stores found in retail malls around the world. Eventually most other channels joined in the trend. *National Geographic* magazine redesigned its logo and opened www.shopnationalgeo.com, and public television viewers were now invited continuously to shop the PBS Online Store. The work of Ken Burns in particular was enhanced by astute marketing tie-ins to books and recorded music.

There is nothing inherently evil in selling documentary-linked consumer products. And the cable channels were only adapting the long-time marketing techniques of major Hollywood movie studios in selling theme-related goods. Practices that Hopalong Cassidy and Disney mouse ears pioneered a half-century earlier, and George Lucas and *Star Wars* perfected in the 1970s, simply found expression in the 1990s documentary world. What is insidious for the documentary tradition is that the merchandise in these cases often became far more important to the presenting channel than anything the documentarian might have to say on a subject. Yes, legend has it that chocolate-covered ice cream bars were first marketed as "Eskimo Pie" or "Nanooks" in wake of the success of *Nanook of the North*. "Eskimo Pie" was trademarked in 1922, the same year as *Nanook's* release; prior to that the frozen treat was called "I-Scream-Bar." However, it seems evident that selling ice cream had no bearing on future Flaherty productions.

Great fiscal and artistic consequences have also resulted from the cable industry's contractual practices with individual filmmakers. In the twenty-first century

a majority of cable documentaries are works done for hire, in which the film-makers retain little control and hold no rights to their films. This is not the case for those producers who raise money independently and then license their work, but it is true for the majority of hours seen by cable viewers. Whereas at one time independent producers could hope to recoup costs, make a small profit, possibly take some creative risks, and see their work broadcast in a form resembling the film they intended, these options, at least in the cable marketplace, are almost nonexistent by the twenty-first century. The big exception remains HBO/Cinemax Documentaries, which is neither product nor advertising but rather subscriber- and awards-driven. In a long-term economic sense, too, the independent producer is left with little clout. At one time a television mogul like David Wolper chose the subjects and the forms in which he wanted to document them. He amassed capital by retaining the rights to rebroadcast, educational sales, and later home video. To run the *Biography* series and create the Biography Channel, A&E had to pay Wolper. Today's presenting channels demand control of these and any other ancillary rights, leaving the producers with no equity in the work they produced.

On U.S. television there are some alternatives to cable but not at the major broadcast networks. Fighting a defensive battle against the erosion of viewership by cable channels in the 1990s, the networks abandoned documentaries almost entirely. Except for the longstanding success of shows like *60 Minutes* and its spin-offs, the end of the twentieth century brought the demise of what at mid-century had seemed the salvation of serious documentary making (see chapter twelve). No one in network broadcast television was willing to take artistic or content risk, nor even to uphold the investigative reporting traditions of Edward R. Murrow of CBS, or NBC's *Project XX* and *White Paper*. Even Jon Alpert and DCTV's productive twenty-year relationship with NBC ended with the First Gulf War in Iraq. "We were the only independent documentary reporters in Baghdad during the war. But our footage documenting the death and destruction in civilian neighborhoods was a shocking message, so instead of broadcasting it, NBC killed the messenger," Alpert says. DCTV formed a new relationship with HBO, producing edgy one-hour investigative programs like *Lock-up: The Prisoners of Riker's Island* (1994), *One Year in a Life of Crime* (1989), *Rape: Cries from the Heartland* (1992), and *High on Crack Street: Lost Live in Lowell* (1995), the last two directed by Maryann De Leo.

Certainly there was high-quality programming on cable other than HBO and its sister channels. A five-part series, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (1996)—made by the highly respected English documentarian Brian Lapping for the BBC and The Discovery Channel and narrated by CNN's Christiane Amanpour—untangled the political and military events that led to the dismemberment of the country that was Yugoslavia. It integrates video footage of council meetings and other events with interviews of the heads of all six states involved in the resulting

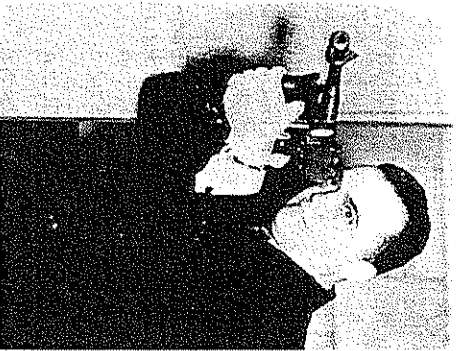
war. The series explains how Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic systematically and brutally controlled an entire region.

Another noteworthy film, from the A&E-owned Learning Channel, is *Nanette Burstein and Brett Morgan's On the Ropes* (1999). It follows three young boxers, in and out of the ring, as they struggle with tough lives in their New York housing projects homes while they train for the Golden Gloves. Even community-activist-based DCTV teamed up in 2003 with Discovery and its *New York Times*-linked *DiscoveryTimes* channel to produce programming like *Off to War*, about the deployment of the Arkansas National Guard to the Second Iraq War. The Sundance and IFC channels program numerous documentaries but their viewership is limited. For the most part, socially critical documentaries were not the province of cable or network television.

American Public Television

There remained public television. Since its beginnings, U.S. public television has struggled, usually desperately, for enough funds to stay in business. The original Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) charter from Congress provided no guarantees of long-term financial support. This has left all three arms of public television—CPB, the PBS network, and the local stations—extremely vulnerable to the changing winds of political practice in Washington and to the vagaries of local tastes. (See the discussion of *Tongues United* in chapter 16.) Pledge drives and corporate underwriting provide most of the money for station operation, while much of the production costs are also dependent on corporate or foundation funding.

In 1988, after years of lobbying by media activists (chief among them Larry Daresa and Larry Sapadin of California Newsreel, theoretical physicist/media advocate Larry Hall, Dee Dee Halleck, and producer Mark Weiss), Congress appropriated funds for an independent PBS production service. Part of that money went to create the Independent Television and Video Service (ITVS). Although it took several years to begin operating effectively, ITVS in the 1990s and into the 2000s has been responsible for some of the more daring programming available on American television. Officially ITVS's mission is to create and present independently produced programs that engage creative risks, advance issues, and represent points of view not usually seen on public or commercial television. ITVS is committed to programming that addresses the needs of underserved and underrepresented audiences and expands civic participation by bringing new voices into public discourse. It divides six or seven million dollars each year among a wide range of producers for all types of work, the majority of which are documentaries. As of 2004, ITVS had partially funded 325 documentaries; 304 documentaries with ITVS funding had aired on some part of the U.S. public television system. Projects produced by minority and underserved makers have been emphasized. It has worked with the minority consortia of PBS (the Native



Frontline, "The Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover" (U.S., 1993, Bill Cran and Stephanie Tepper, WGBH)

American, Latino, African American, Pacific Islander, and Asian American organizations described in chapter 16) and has funded in whole or in part such noted gay-themed documentaries as Arthur Dong's *Coming Out Under Fire* (1995), Meena Spadola's *Our House: A Very Real Documentary About Kids of Gay and Lesbian Families* (1999), and Debra Chasnoff's *It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School* (1996).

ITVS-funded works that make it to national broadcast generally do so under the umbrella of one of two programming strands: *P.O.V.* or *Independent Lens*. These are limited showcases with twelve to fourteen premieres for *P.O.V.* and twenty-nine for *Independent Lens* each year. This means that on U.S. national public television there are fewer than 50 one- to two-hour time slots open in any year to stand-alone documentaries made by independent filmmakers. All the other documentaries offered for national broadcast are commissioned to order by strands such as *American Experience*, *American Masters*, and *NOVA*. A big advantage of a PBS broadcast over commercial channels is that producers generally have much more creative control, and the rights to their films revert to them after a period of time. For documentarians seeking to effect social change, a national public television broadcast also delivers a much larger audience than any single cable channel can.

Investigative reporting has remained alive on public television largely on another commissioned strand: through the efforts of WGBH in Boston and producer David Fanning's *Frontline*. A native of South Africa, Fanning came to WGBH from the BBC to start the documentary series *World* in 1977. As execu-

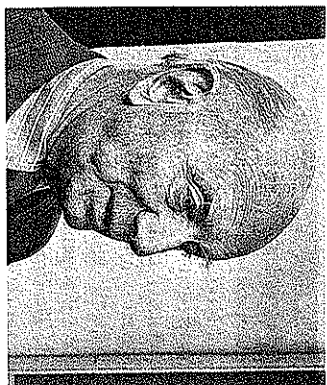
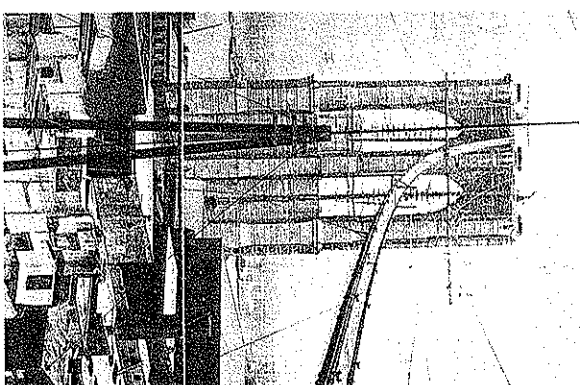
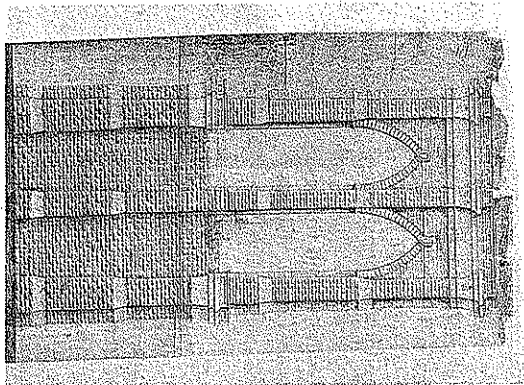
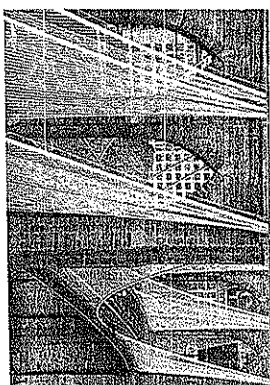
tive producer he produced and presented over fifty films for PBS in five years. Fanning conceived, and has executive produced, *Frontline* since it premiered in January 1983. For two decades it has remained America's only regularly scheduled public affairs documentary series on television and has won every major U.S. award for broadcast journalism. *Frontline* has tackled dozens of national and international issues. Important individual *Frontline* broadcasts include "Living Below the Line" (1984), "A Class Divided" (1985), "The Lifer and the Lady" (1985), "High Crimes and Misdemeanors" (1990), "Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo" (1994), "Ghosts of Rwanda" (2004), and many more.

The Ken Burns Phenomenon

Perhaps the biggest success story for PBS in the past twenty years has been the films made by Ken Burns and company. The multiple broadcasts of *The Civil War*, beginning in 1990, had deep and long-lasting effects on style, funding, and audience development for PBS documentaries. The series changed the way many in America thought about documentary, and it changed the way television executives thought about historical documentaries.

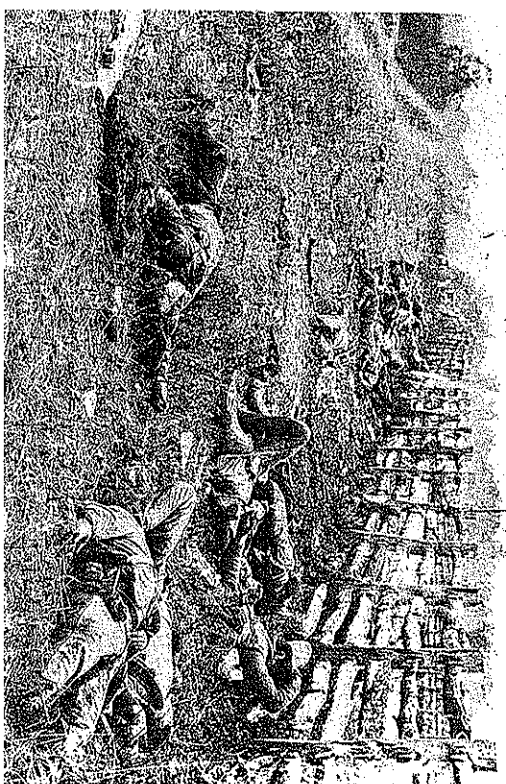
Burns had been making significant documentaries for over fifteen years before *The Civil War*. His first major film, *The Brooklyn Bridge* (1982), remains a graceful, reflective tribute to hard work and engineering genius in America and to many of the traditions of the historical documentary. Burns's output follows in the footsteps of other notable historical documentary makers discussed previously—Charles Guggenheim, Jeremy Isaacs, Lance Bird, and Tom Johnson—particularly in their shared insistence on accuracy and respect for the integrity and beauty of the image. The film that most anticipates the Burns formula is perhaps the National Film Board of Canada's *City of Gold*, made by Colin Low and Wolf Koenig (see discussion in chapter eleven). Like all of Burns's major work, *The Brooklyn Bridge* relies heavily on stills brought to life with a swooping rostrum camera, stunning live-action 16mm cinematography, talking-head interviews with sympathetic experts, and a memorable sound track and score. Burns and a succession of very key coproducers and collaborators were to take this formula and refine it in films such as *The Statue of Liberty* (1985), *The Congress* (1989), and others—a total of seven titles, all shown on PBS before *The Civil War*.

Burns's combination of talent, sincerity, and personality has put him among history's elite group of documentarians whose names are known widely to their contemporary publics. Like Robert Flaherty and John Grierson before him, Burns also developed a bold public persona, which made him and his work fundable from many different arenas. Over the course of making his films he formed highly productive working relationships with his sponsoring PBS station, WETA, Washington, D.C. He also became one of the filmmakers most consistently funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, which provided



The Brooklyn Bridge commentator and historian Lewis Mumford (lower right) (U.S., 1982, Ken Burns), DCL © 2005, all rights reserved

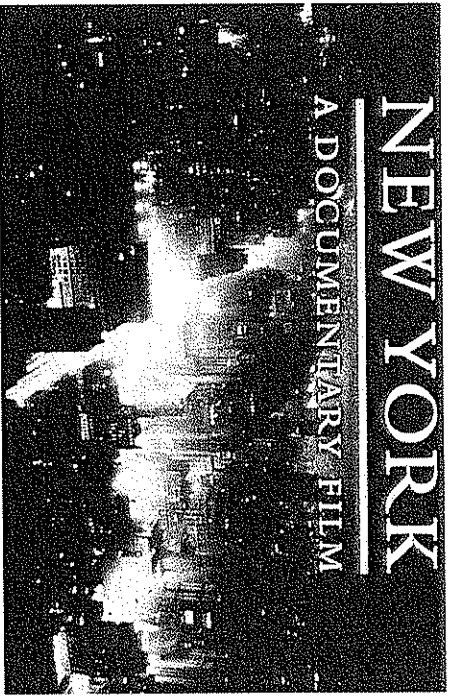
money for almost every production, and whose dictates about input from humanities scholars helped shape the form of his work. Burns was also able to cultivate major corporate sponsorship. *The Statue of Liberty*, for example, had funding from Liberty Mutual Insurance, and a later deal with General Motors guaranteed that it would put money into a series of productions following the success of *The Civil War*. Like Grierson or Flaherty, Burns has a strong mission for his work, but his goal is not social change or elegiac poetry. Rather, he considers himself first and foremost an historian, documenting the social and cultural changes of American life through portrayal of its individuals and institutions.



In *The Civil War* Ken Burns used photographs like this one attributed to Mathew Brady, and told an epic story by weaving into it many personal experiences (U.S., 1980, Ken Burns).

The Civil War remains Burns's masterwork. His later, longer films—*Baseball* (1996) and *Jazz* (2001), for instance—suffered somewhat from the lack of control that had been exerted by strong coproducers like his brother Ric Burns, in *The Civil War*, his then wife Amy Stecker Burns, on *Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God* (1974), or Richard Kilberg in *Huey Long* (1985). Collaboration is an important part of Burns's filmmaking technique, and he relies on a crack technical team, including editor Paul Barnes and sound mixer Lee Dichter. Part of the intrinsic beauty of Burns's work has come from an insistence on using film rather than tape or disk, shot by Burns, or more often by cinematographer Buddy Squires. The visual and aural elegance of the films set a high standard for the craft of historical documentary but, perhaps most important, they succeeded in engaging a mass audience in emotional nonfiction experiences.

Direct offshoots of Burns's approach coming from former collaborators include a number of important documentaries: Ric Burns's epic *New York* (1999) and *The Donner Party* (1992); Larry Hott and Diane Gary's *Niagara Falls* (1985), *Sentimental Women Need Not Apply: A History of the American Nurse* (1988), and *Tuberculosis in America: The People's Plague* (1995); Stephen Ives's *The West* (1996, executive-produced by Ken Burns), *Seabiscuit* (2003), and *Reporting America at War* (2003). All of these films were made for PBS broadcast and each bears the distinctive mark of its makers; still, they follow in the broad form of



Poster for *New York: A Documentary Film* (U.S., 1999, Ric Burns and Lisa Ades)

historical documentary made popular by Ken Burns. Another prolific historical documentary maker for PBS, who works in the same vein but was not a Burns collaborator, is David Grubin. Grubin has made dozens of television documentaries, many with commentator Bill Moyers. His work includes *The Secret Life of the Brain* (2002), *Abraham and Mary Lincoln: A House Divided* (2001), and *Napoleon* (2000).

Canada Soldiers On

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the National Film Board slowly shifted from a self-contained, government-sponsored production-distribution institution to a hybrid. In 1980 the Canadian government set up a Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, primarily to study the role of the Board. The committee recommended that it stop producing and distributing films and become, instead, a research and training center. The NFB did not like this recommendation but accepted the cultural thrust of the report, mainly to become "more relevant" to Canadians. While the NFB enjoyed a stellar reputation outside Canada throughout its history, to a large part of the Canadian public it had come to represent stodgy instructional films.

In 1984 the Minister of Communications' National Film and Video Policy redefined the NFB's mandate. Substantial changes in production and distribution activities followed, with savings from distribution reinvested in production. The plan also suggested a reduction in permanent personnel and the increased use of freelance filmmakers. In 1982 the NFB, in collaboration with the Canadian

Film Development Corporation, set up the Film Canada Program to support private producers; by the end of the 1980s freelancers accounted for 70 percent of production. This led in the early 1990s to works like the gay-themed documentaries of David Adkin's *Our Stories of Lesbian and Gay Youth* (1994), and Aetlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie's *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* (1992).

More restructurings—which reflected budget reductions, technological changes, and a 1996 Mandate Review Committee's Report—again changed the form of the NFB. It slashed its infrastructure, with far-reaching results. Based on the report, a new long-range plan was put in place by 2000, which emphasized coproductions with independent Canadian producers and international coproductions. It also reaffirmed the NFB's commitment to ethnic diversity, particularly to supporting work by aboriginal peoples. Early in the twenty-first century, the Canadian Department of Communications dedicated \$25 million for the NFB to undertake coproductions with independent producers. Additionally it mandated that 35 percent of funding go to new, emerging filmmakers. Tangible results of these policies are only beginning to emerge.

Other outlets for documentaries in Canada were principally on television. The History Channel in Canada is a completely separate entity from The History Channel in the United States. The state-run Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has long produced and shown documentaries. In 2000 the NFB joined with the CBC and several private partners to create The Documentary Channel, Canada, based on the observation that "Canadians have a special fondness for the documentary form." TVOntario, a private television network, has aired many acclaimed social issue documentaries. Rudy Buttignol, the Creative Head of Documentaries, Drama, and Network at TVO, was formerly an independent producer, director, and writer of documentaries. He has created a for-profit television home for independent documentarians in Canada.

The documentary spirit of individual Canadian filmmakers has remained vital. Vancouver documentarian Nettie Wild has created a number of ardent political films. From revolutionary guerilla armies in the Philippines and Mexico, to confrontations over heroin use in Vancouver's East End, Wild's films tend to focus on the flashpoints of social conflicts. Her work includes *A Rustling of Leaves* (1988), *Blockade* (1993), *A Place Called Chapas* (1998), perhaps the most telling document about the situation of indigenous people in Chapas, Mexico, and *FIX: The Story of an Addicted City* (2002).

Ron Mann has made mostly compilation documentaries for more than twenty years. An historian and educator as well as an experimenter with technique, Mann has primarily targeted areas of cultural interest. His first international recognition came with *Comic Book Confidential* (1988); he went on to make the definitive film on the *Twist* (1992), and explored marijuana use in North America with *Grass* (1999). Mann has made his technological interests evident in his work as well, with collage, archival footage, and animation used to



Go Further (Canada, 2004, Ron Mann). Home Vision Entertainment

recount the history of pop culture. Following the popular success of *Grass*, which was narrated by actor/activist Woody Harrelson, Mann focused on him in *Go Further* (2003), which follows Harrelson as he embarks on his Simply Organic Living Tour.

In some ways the Canadian documentary scene presents a middle ground between that of the United States and the United Kingdom. Canada has a much stronger system of public funding support for its documentarians than does the U.S. The NFB, even with the changes that took place in the past two decades, along with the government-supported CBC, provide a base from which filmmakers can build a budget. In the U.S., public funding is almost nonexistent. But like the U.S., Canadian documentary has embraced diversity in style, content, and in welcoming new kinds of filmmakers, particularly women. In the U.K., where public funding is strongest, the productions have remained largely in the hands of the traditional white male media stakeholders.

Developments in the United Kingdom

Unlike the often chaotic diversity of documentary in the United States, many of the filmmakers working in the United Kingdom come from a common background, university education at the "right" schools leading directly into apprenticeship programs in television. This has led to a very high quality of craftsmanship but also to a somewhat homogenized product. Unlike public broadcasting in the U.S., however, the government-supported broadcasting tradition in Britain does allow many socially critical documentaries to appear regularly on television. There are series such as producer Nick Fraser's *BBC Storyville*, which funds some works and acquires others, including some of the best North American independent documentaries. Fraser, a filmmaker in his own right, is

one of the most astute and articulate of commissioning editors active in the twenty-first century. He works with a range of filmmakers, from venerable British documentary filmmaker Leslie Woodhead, who was awarded an OBE in 1994 (Order of the British Empire, which Grierson had received in 1971) for "Services to Television," to startling newcomers like Luke Holland, whose films include *I Was a Slave Labourer* (1999) and *More Than a Life* (2002).

Woodhead joined Granada Television as a graduate trainee in 1961, after Cambridge University, and in the mid-1960s worked on the series *World in Action*. During the early 1970s he pioneered the development of documentaries on British television, specializing in investigative reconstructions of major East European stories. His extensive filmography includes a documentary about the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979, the first on this subject shot inside Iran, a film about the Srebrenica massacre, *A Cry from the Grave*, and the dramatized reconstruction *The Holocaust on Trial*, about the trial of Holocaust denier David Irving. Other recent films include a documentary about a Russian nuclear missile base, a film about Slobodan Milosevic, and the autobiographical *my life as a spy for Storyville*.

Clive Gordon is one of England's prolific investigative documentarians. His work ranges from the tragedy of *Children of Chernoble* (1991), to the horrors of war in *The Unforgiving* (1993) or *The Betrayed* (1995), to the violence and misogyny of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, vice trade in *Pimp Snooky* (2000). In *The Mission* (2000), his third film about civil wars, Gordon focused on the conflict in Central Africa and exploitation of children.

John Pilger is an Australian-born investigative journalist/documentarian who works in England, where he developed a reputation as a television polemicist. For example, his Carlton Television documentary *Palestine Is Still the Issue* (2003) analyzes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, condemning Israel's injustices toward the Palestinians and arguing that Israelis were at the root of the Middle East conflict. The public outcry about this view was considerable. Pilger, a writer and presenter, was previously in the spotlight for his antiglobalization work, *The New Ruler of the World* (2001), which links economic globalization with mass abuses of human rights.

Among the very few women who have penetrated the male domain of the British documentary tradition is Molly Dineen. Born in Canada, she is a graduate of the U.K.'s National Film and Television School and has made a series of documentaries that, in a self-reflexive mode, make evident the filmmaker in the making. The first of these, her student production, was *Home from the Hill* (1985), about retired soldier and safari operator Colonel Hook, returning from Kenya to England. She went on to make *My African Farm* (1988), a portrait of Sylvia Richardson and her servants on a farm in Kenya, and *The Ark* (1993), a series of four one-hour programs about the London Zoo, filmed during a six-month period of internal crisis. More recent films include the sponsored promotional *Tony Blair*, a ten-minute portrait of Prime Minister Blair, screened across all four

television channels just prior to the election campaign of 1997. (Dineen publicly disavowed support of Blair during the Second Iraq War.) *Geri* (1999) presents a portrait of the predicament of modern celebrity by following Geri Halliwell (aka Ginger Spice) in the three months after her departure from the popular singing group the Spice Girls.

Dineen is a recurring presence in her films, although not on camera. It is her voice, heard asking questions offscreen, which integrates the filmmaker in the works. In the earlier films, her questioning depicts the subject in ways the subject likes, while later films contain more of the filmmaker. In *Geri*, Dineen adds her own commentary as a voice-over, in addition to probing the celebrity subject with questions about who is in control of this documentary. In 2003 the Grierson Memorial Trust presented its first Trustees Award, which recognizes an outstanding contribution to the art of documentary, to Dineen, whose films also include *The Pick*, *The Shovel and the Open Road* (1991) and *Heart of the Angel* (1989).

Angela Holdsworth, a seasoned television journalist and BBC producer, conceived *Out of the Doll's House*, an eight-part BBC series, broadcast in 1988. It aimed to "allow women of all ages and social backgrounds to tell their story in their own words." Relying heavily on personal recollections and oral testimony, the series tackled themes including home, work, health, sex, marriage, motherhood, fashion, education, and politics. Holdsworth's profile of the eighteenth-century media darling Lady Georgia Spencer, *The People's Duchess* (1999), drew comparisons with one of her descendants—Diana, Princess of Wales. Another woman who has recently made a mark in the U.K. doing both documentary and docudramas, is Philippa Lowthorpe, whose films include *Three Salons at Seaside* (2002) and *Remember the Family* (2003) for BBC's *Storyville*.

Nick Broomfield continued to press onward in the 1990s with the development of his own screen persona, to the extent of starring as himself in a Volkswagen television commercial. In this, and in other film projects, he and Joan Churchill again successfully collaborated professionally. Although his work sometimes veered over the top, a more insightful balance seemed to take hold with 2003's *Alien: Life and Death of a Serial Killer*, made collaboratively with Churchill. This follow-up to *Alien Wuoronos: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1992) pulls back a bit from the filmmaker as subject to convey the banal horror of a woman facing execution. Broomfield is still there onscreen, but seems less sure of the moral righteousness of his presence than in his other films, especially in the face of a clearly unstable woman about to be executed. At the close of the film, Broomfield holds a press conference in the parking lot of the state penitentiary as Wuoronos is executed. He and Churchill were the only journalists with whom Wuoronos would speak in the final days before her death.

From *Night Mail* onward the poetic documentary in Britain has had a long history. In the 1990s director Brian Hill collaborated with poet Simon Armitage in a number of unusual poetic works. *Drinking for England* (1998) is a documen-



Nick Broomfield



Joan Churchill

tary on alcoholism, and *Saturday Night* (1996) a commentary about nightlife in Leeds. These can be called "film poems," which evolved from Armitage's work. Some critics have called their later collaborations documentary musicals. In *Feltham Sings* (2002), producer Roger Graet provided Hill and Armitage access to Feltham Prison in the hope that their film might make the public look more closely at young criminals. Hill has said, "Feltham is grim; youth crime is serious; some of these kids have very tragic lives. But I don't think doing it as a musical belittles the problem. And some of the lads at Feltham have more talent than a lot of people who've got recording contracts. . . . I don't think any subjects are off limits." The lyrics are by Armitage, who fashioned them from months of interviews with the inmates, although some prisoners insisted on writing their own songs. Most of the film was shot inside cells; all of it behind the prison's bars. Hill and Armitage pushed the documentary musical format even further with *Pornography: the Musical* (2003). In its porn actresses sing and talk about their lives in a mix of staged studio/musical numbers, interviews, and glimpses into their daily jobs.

The Connection (1996), produced by Marc de Beaufort for Carlton Television about drug traffic between Colombia and the United Kingdom, in 1998 created a stir about ethics in British documentaries. Reporters from *The Guardian* newspaper revealed that many elements in the film were reconstructed, staged, and faked. The Independent Television Commission, the body responsible for the

control and regulation of British commercial television, picked up the allegations. The ITC condemned the film for its techniques, while supporters of the film argued that using reconstruction was a general documentary practice that the ITC had turned into a crime. Like other works, this one raises, but doesn't necessarily answer, many questions about documentary ethics.

Kevin Macdonald, a Scotsman, has become a very visible force in the U.K. during the past decade with a variety of documentaries. *Touching the Void* (2003), with its tagline "The closer you are to death, the more you realize you are alive," became an international theatrical success. Its story is of two young climbers, Joe Simpson and Simon Yates, who become the first people ever to scale the summit of Siula Grande in Peru. An accident during their descent left Simpson with three breaks in his leg. While trying to lower him down the nearly 90-degree face of the mountain, Yates was forced to cut Simpson's line in order to prevent them both from falling to their deaths. Yates assumed that the fall killed Simpson. Simpson, however, continued to crawl his way down the mountain back to the base camp just a few hours before Yates was set to leave. Macdonald takes the two back to Siula Grande to recount their adventure in a manner that includes many re-enactments as well as storytelling.

Macdonald's other films evince a wide-ranging sense of style and subject matter. *Humphrey Jennings: The Man Who Listened to Britain* (2000) is of particular interest in its sympathetic and penetrating portrayal of one of England's most artful filmmakers. Others on film subjects include *Chaplin's Goliath* (1996), *Howard Hawks: An American Artist* (1997), and *A Brief History of Errol Morris* (2000). *One Day in September* (2000), made with Arthur Cohn, deals with the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Its careful recounting of the act a time when few expected or knew how to deal with such a thing won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

Michael Apted studied law at Cambridge before joining the BBC. He began his film career in 1963 with a Manchester-based training program for Granada Television. He is a prime example of the English system for turning out filmmakers highly skilled in craft, who can move freely from one genre to another. (His fiction work ranges from *Nell* to the James Bond film *The World Is Not Enough*.) One of his first assignments was to research a film entitled *Seven Up* for producer Tim Hewet, whose idea it was to take a survey of English society from the eyes of a group of seven-year-old children. Following the Jesuit saying, "Give me the child until he is seven, and I will show you the man" as a theme, Apted spent three weeks selecting fourteen children from a range of class backgrounds. He has since returned every seven years to visit the same individuals, and in the process has created one of the most remarkable phenomena ever in English-language documentary. He has been a dignified champion of the documentary form in Hollywood throughout ups and downs of its popularity.

The films, known as the "Up Series"—*14 Up*, *21 Up*, *28 Up*, *35 Up*, *42 Up*, and *49 Up* (due in 2005)—have documented the personal and social changes in



Jackie, Lynn, and Sue in various stages of Michael Apted's *The Up Series*. Michael Apted

this small sample of English people for over forty years. The only comparable documentary exercise is John Marshall's ethnography of the Kung! people, an African tribe whom he has revisited regularly for fifty years, recording the vast changes in their lifestyle. The characters of the "Up Series" have not been subjected to the immense physical upheavals of the Kung!, but their stories weave both engrossing personal drama and a broad sociological tapestry. Apted has also made other significant documentaries, among them *Incident at Ogilala* (1992), *Inspirations (Me and Isaac Newton)* (1999), *Married in America* (2002), and *Bring on the Night* (1985).

American Independents

Given the state of public and corporate funding for documentaries, American independents have resorted to a wide variety of means to make and exhibit their projects. The innovations that have emerged are as diverse as the many populations of the United States. San Francisco-Bay-Area-based Les Blank is a man of few words and many films. It has been said by fans that with Les you get less. With over thirty self-made films to his credit, he has continuously explored American subcultures, finding revelation and celebration in life's ordinary details. Blank captures on film the sensual human spirit, often seen through the cultures of music and food. Born in 1935 in Florida, Blank attended film school

at the University of Southern California. His first personal films were on Texas blues singer Lightnin' Hopkins—*The Blues Accordin' to Lightnin' Hopkins* (1970)—and the hippie subculture—*God Respects Us When We Work, But Loves Us When We Dance* (1968). To finance these and other projects, he made industrial and promotional films, generally working as cameraman.

Blank's work continued with a series of intimate glimpses into the lives of passionate people who live at the periphery of American society—a series that grew to include rural Louisiana French musicians and cooks in *Yum, Yum!* (1990), *J'ai Été au Bal—I Went to the Dance* (1989), *Hot Pepper and Dry Wood* (1973), and *Marc and Ann* (1991); Mexican Americans in *Chulas Fronteras, Del Mero Corazon* (1979); New Orleans music and Mardi Gras in *Always for Pleasure* (1978); chef Alice Waters and other San Francisco Bay Area garlic fanatics in *Garlic Is as Good as Ten Mothers* (1980); filmmaker Werner Herzog in *Burden of Dreams* (1982) and *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe* (1980); Appalachian fiddlers in *Sprout Wings and Fly* (1983); Polish-American polka dancers in *In Heaven There Is No Beer?* (1984); Serbian-American music and religion in *Ziveli: Medicine for the Heart* (1987); Hawaiian music and family traditions in *Puamana* (1991); Afro-Cuban drumming and religious tradition in *Sworn to the Drum* (1995); East Texas bluesmen Mance Lipscomb in *A Well Spent Life* (1972) and *Cigarette Blues* (1985) with Sonny Rhodes; and the extraordinary *Gap-Toothed Women* (1987). Several of these were made with collaborator and editor Maureen Gosling, whose work apart from Blank includes *Blossoms of Fire* (2002).

Blank is perhaps the most independent American documentarian. His films have been financed by the sale of previous films through his distribution company, Flower Films, by lecture and screening fees, and by selling T-shirts and tapes from the trunk of his car. Every one of his works bears his own definitive stamp. The subjects are allowed to speak for themselves; the camera is respectful, not intrusive. The editing is not jarring or flamboyant, and the music flows naturally from the situation at hand. Blank is not an invisible filmmaker, the subjects often speak directly to the camera, but he is one who becomes a part of people's lives. His documents are important as ethnographic evidence, but they are just as important for the singular artistic worldview they create. If Ken Burns captures the realities of American history with the accuracy of detailed research and minute exactness, Les Blank captures it simply by witnessing.

Among the many independent American documentarians to begin creating significant work in the late 1960s and the earliest part of the twenty-first century, Judith Helfand is one who has most obviously combined the personal self-reflexive mode with a Griersonian dedication to education and social change. She coproduced and codirected, with George Stoney, along with Susanne Rostock, *The Uprising of '34* (1995), a documentary that draws on the hidden history of the General Textile Strike of 1934 to explore labor, power, and economics in the South at the time.



Cleveland Chenier in *Dry Wood and Hot Pepper* (U.S., 1973, Les Blank). Flower Films

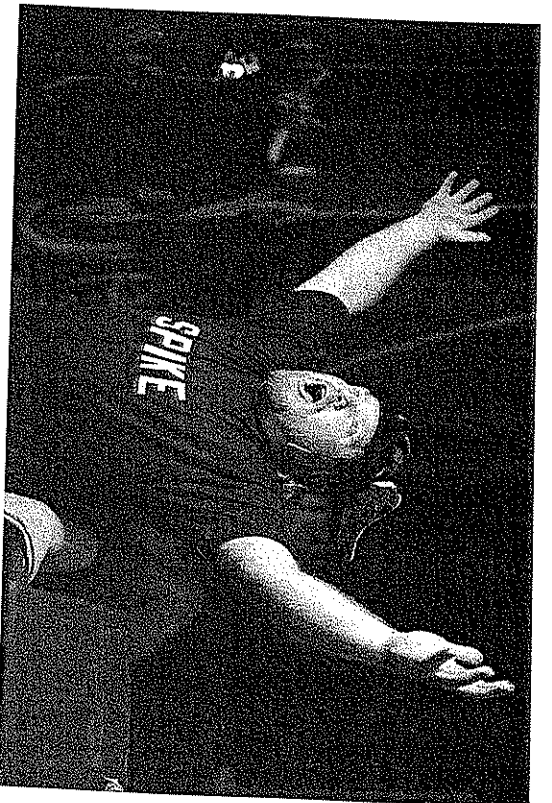
Helfand was working for other producers when at twenty-five she was diagnosed with DES-related cervical cancer. In 1963 Helfand's mother, pregnant with Judith, had been prescribed the ineffective, carcinogenic synthetic hormone diethylstilbestrol (DES), meant to prevent miscarriage and ensure a healthy baby. After a radical hysterectomy Helfand went to her family's home to heal and picked up her camera. The resulting video-diary is an exploration of how science,

marketing, and corporate power can affect our deepest relationships. Shot over five years, *A Healthy Baby Girl* (1997) tells a story of survival, mother-daughter love, family renewal, and community activism. Continuing to combine the personal and the political, Helfand teamed up with Daniel B. Gold to make the "toxic comedy" *Blue Vinyl* (2002), which addresses the complex issue of toxins in vinyl production by bringing viewers into her parents' home, recently resided in blue vinyl. The film balances Helfand's efforts to convince her parents to have the siding, which is "embossed to look like wood," removed, and her detective work to discover the conspiracy by the vinyl industry to conceal its knowledge of highly harmful toxic byproducts affecting workers in the factory and the surrounding environment.

Another example of the personal diary film that became a powerful public document is Deborah Hoffmann's *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* (1995). Nominated for an Academy Award, the film uses both humor and insight to explain how Hoffmann comes to terms with her mother's deterioration from Alzheimer's disease. A more traditional documentary made by Hoffmann, along with Frances Reid, is *Long Night's Journey into Day* (1999), which follows the stories of four individuals whose cases come before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission following the abolition of apartheid. This film, too, was nominated for an Academy Award.

Reid and Hoffmann are both documentary veterans from the Bay Area, as is Jon Else, another independent who believes firmly in using media for social change. Else, who was series producer and cinematographer for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years*, teaches documentary filmmaking at the University of California at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism. He directed the first three parts of the four-part PBS series *Cadillac Desert: Water and the Transformation of Nature* (1997), which examines the history and struggle for water in the American West. His Academy-Award-nominated *The Day After Trinity* (1980) looks at the life of J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, while *Sing Faster: The Stagehand's Ring Cycle* (1998) views Wagner's operas from the point of view of people backstage. Else also has a career as an accomplished cinematographer, working on everything from commercials and music videos to feature-length documentaries such as John Korty's *Who Are the DeBohs? And Where Did They Get Nineteen Kids?* (1977), and Lauren Lazin's *Tipac Shakur: Resurrection* (2003). After being frustrated with the amount of time and effort it requires an independent filmmaker to raise money through grant writing (310 funding proposals for *Cadillac Desert*), Else launched a program to make documentaries using very low-cost technology, providing access to a wide range of young would-be documentary makers.

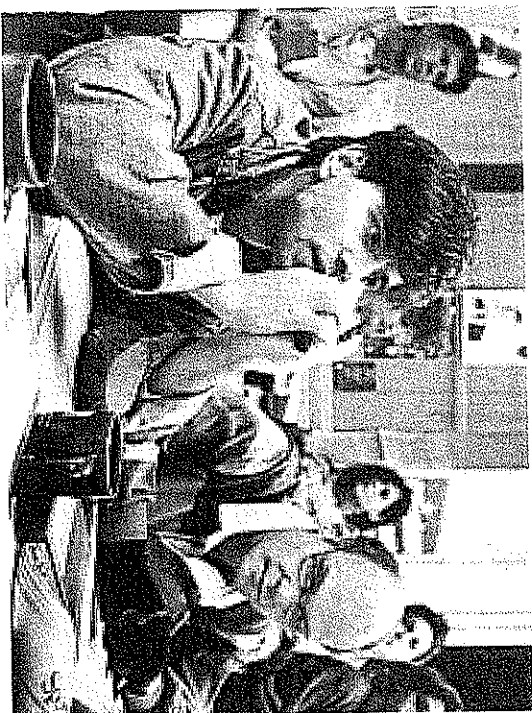
Formerly the co-curator of the Margaret Mead Film Festival, Jonathan Stack began his filmmaking career in 1991, forming Gabriel Films, "an independent documentary film company that specializes in social issue storytelling." His first production was *One Generation More* with the BBC, about the resurgence of Jewish culture in Estonia. He was nominated for an Academy Award for his



The view from behind the curtains in opera in *Sing Faster: The Stagehand's Ring Cycle* (U.S., 2001, Jon Else).

documentary, produced with Liz Garbus, *The Farm: Angola USA* (1998), and was nominated a second time for *The Wildest Show in the South: The Angola Prison Rodeo* (1999), produced with Simon Soffer. Both of these films deal with Angola Prison in Louisiana, the largest maximum-security penitentiary in the U.S., which houses around 5,000 men, three quarters of whom are black and 85 percent of whom die within its walls. Stack is a filmmaker who works very much in the Griersonian tradition of explaining social problems that general audiences might not fully understand, with an aim of bettering social conditions. His 2004 film, made with James Brabazon, *Liberia: An Uncivil War*, takes a very hard look at a brutal African war that few people wanted to know existed.

It is also important to remember that many of the stalwarts of American independent documentary filmmaking remained vitally active in the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Verité pioneers such as Robert Drew, Albert Maysles (David Maysles died in 1987), D. A. Pennebaker, Ricky Leacock, and Frederick Wiseman all continued to make important contributions. For Pennebaker, the 1990s was a prolific time, greatly enhanced by his personal and professional partnership with filmmaker Chris Hegedus. Their film (with R. J. Cutter) *The War Room* (1993) was one of the most fascinating studies of a political campaign ever undertaken. It presents a classic vérité chronology of the 1992 presidential campaign waged by candidate Bill Clinton, and among other things made a media star of campaign manager James Carville. *Down from the Mount-*



George Stephanopoulos and James Carville in *The War Room* (U.S., 1993, Chris Hegedus and D. A. Pennebaker). Pennebaker-Hegedus Films

tain (2000), which Hegedus and Pennebaker made with Chris Doob, is a concert documentary and historical document of American bluegrass music. In 2001 Hegedus, working without Pennebaker but with Jehane Noujaim, made *Startup.com*, which traces the rise and fall of a new media company during the "dot.com" business craze of the 1990s.

Al Maysles teamed with Susan Fromke and Bob Eisenhardt to make *Concert of Wills: Making the Getty Center* (1997). Filmed over twelve years, it documents the conception, construction, and completion of the Los Angeles "Parthenon," the Getty Center. Fromke and Maysles also made, with Deborah Dickson, the Academy-award-nominated *Latee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton* in 2001. Robert Drew continued making films in the cinema vérité/direct tradition almost non-stop for over forty years, often working with his wife and partner, Anne. Among the many titles are shows for PBS's *Frontline* and stand-alone pieces for PBS such as *For Auction: An American Hero* (1986). In the twenty-first century Drew made a radical departure to create a personal film using recreations and a poetic historical style to tell the story of his own experiences as a WWII fighter pilot shot down behind enemy lines in Nazi Italy. *Two Men and a War* (2005) explores not only a dramatic adventure but the origins of Drew's thinking about filmmaking. Frederick Wiseman remained true to his format throughout a career that includes over thirty-five films. *High School II* (1994), *Baller* (1995), *Public Housing* (1997), *Belfast, Maine* (1999), *Domestic Violence* (2001), and *The Garden* (2004)



Robert Drew (far left) and his family during World War II, from *Two Men and a War* (U.S., 2005, Robert and Anne Drew). Drew Associates

about Madison Square Garden are only some of the more recent titles. Continuing to examine American institutions in his own distinctive style, and continuing to have his films broadcast on PBS, Wiseman has himself become something of an institution. Leacock's latest work in progress is one of his many performance films, *A Musical Adventure in Siberia*, about opera impresario Sarah Caldwell.

Theatrical Documentary

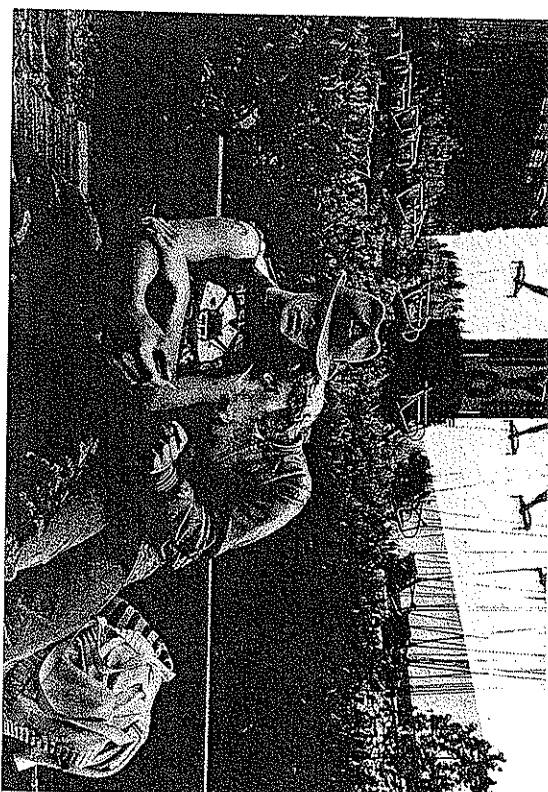
The first years of the twenty-first century were good for the theatrical exhibition of documentaries, but it would be wrong to think that the theatrical documentary had ever completely vanished. In the 1920s Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* was such a financial success in theaters that Jesse Lasky, at Paramount Pictures, decided to finance Flaherty's next effort (*Moodna*). In the 1930s Pare Lorentz's *The River* and *The Plow That Broke the Plains* played to enthusiastic audiences in mainstream movie theaters across the country. WWII documentaries were featured theatrically. It was through theatrical newsreels that people knew about that war, and "The March of Time" appeared on the marquees once a month, sometimes above the feature. It was not until the advent of television in the 1950s that it, and nontheatrical distribution, replaced theaters for documentary exhibition. In the 1950s and most of the 1960s documentaries were almost entirely absent from the big screen. Exceptions were *Kon Tiki* (1951), *Sky Above*,

Mad Below (1961), *The Endless Summer* (1966) or, perhaps most typically Hollywood, *This Is Cinerama* (1952). Those were difficult years for the film industry as a whole as it struggled to find a way to compete with television for audiences.

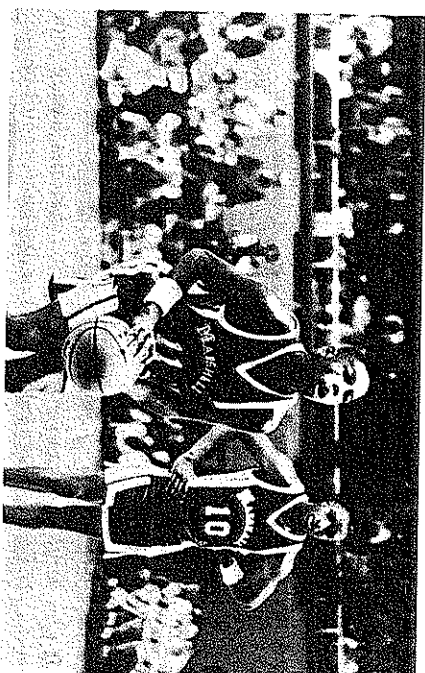
The end of the 1960s and the 1970s brought something of a change. The independent cinema, which emerged from the social and political upheaval of that era, gave rise not only to a group of new fiction filmmakers but also to documentarians whose work was shown in theaters. The rock-and-roll and music films such as *Don't Look Back*, *Gimme Shelter*, *Monterey Pop* and, most significant, *Woodstock* were treated as major theatrical events. Emile de Antonio had his theatrical heyday with *In the Year of the Pig* (1969). In addition to many more music films, the 1970s saw the release of theatrical documentaries such as *The Hellstrom Chronicle* (1970), *Maryjoe* (1972), and *Hearts and Minds* (1974)—all of which won Academy Awards. In 1972 *The Man Who Skied Down Everest*, *The California Reich*, and Shirley MacLaine's *The Other Half of the Sky: A China Memoir* all played in theaters. Errol Morris first appeared in theaters in 1978 with *Gates of Heaven*, as did the now somewhat discredited Arnold Schwarzenegger profile *Pumping Iron* (1976). Other theatrically exhibited documentaries included *The Secret Life of Plants* (1978) and *On Any Sunday* (1970). Warner Brothers released *Malcolm X* in 1971, the same year that *Manson* was in theaters.

In the 1980s the following were only some of the documentaries released theatrically in the United States: *This Is Elvis* (1981), *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China* (1981), *The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time!* (1982), *Seeing Red* (1982), *Streetwise* (1983), *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1983), *Sixteen Days of Glory* (1985), *Pumping Iron II* (1985), *Shoah* (1986), *Imagine: John Lennon* (1988), *U2: Rattle and Hum* (1988), *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), *Broken Noses* (1988), *Let's Get Lost* (1989), *Nobody Listened* (1988), *For All Mankind* (1989), *Roger & Me* (1989), and *Paris Is Burning* (1989). The list in the 1990s and early part of the 2000s is even longer.

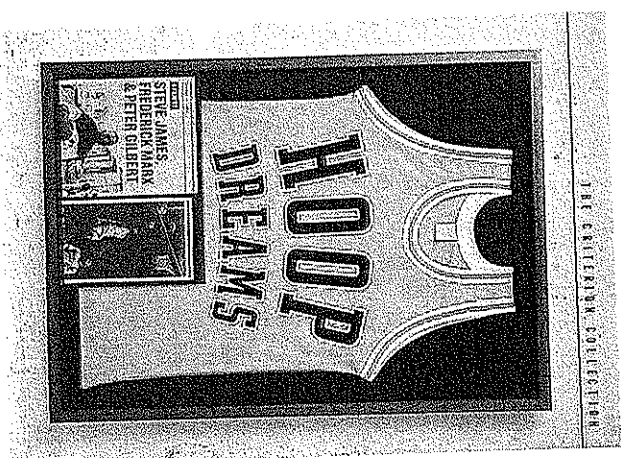
The film that turned the steady stream of theatrical documentaries into a wider river was *Hoop Dreams* (1994). Its three principal filmmakers were all film-school graduates based in Chicago. Peter Gilbert, Steve James, and Frederick Marx approached Gordon Quinn of Kartemquin Films with the basic idea for the film in 1986. Their objective was to create a short about the street culture of basketball in inner city neighborhoods. Quinn moved the project in the direction of PBS funding and broadcast. Two of the boys selected by the filmmakers, William and Arthur, became the focus, and as time went on, it was obvious that a longer, far more complex film was needed. Shooting, and funding, continued on and off for five years. *Hoop Dreams* won the Audience Award for Best Documentary at the 1994 Sundance Film Festival. With the success at Sundance, PBS agreed to delay broadcast until Fall 1995 so that the film could be released in theaters. Fine Line Features bought the theatrical distribution rights after the Sundance success, and *Hoop Dreams*, originally shot mostly in Beta, was blown up to 35mm and remixed in Dolby Stereo and Surround sound. The cost of the



Shadown (left) and Shellie in *Streetwise*, a theatrical release in 1983 (U.S., Martin Bell, Mary Ellen Mark, and Cheryl McCall). Photo by Mary Ellen Mark



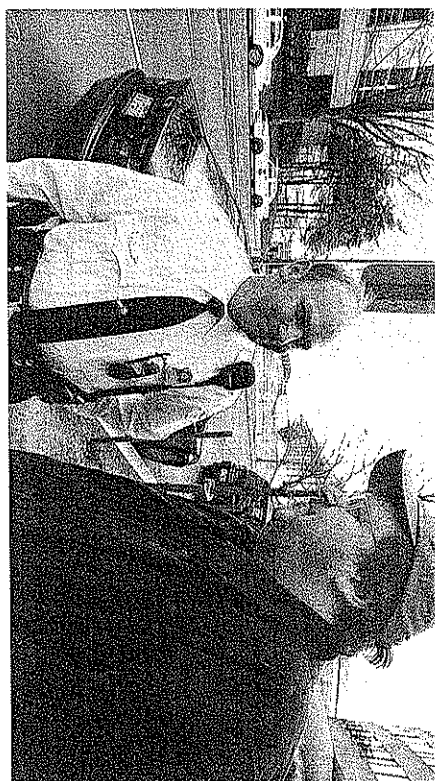
Hoop Dreams (U.S., 1994, Peter Gilbert, Steve James, and Frederick Marx). Kartemquin Films



The DVD box cover for *Hoop Dreams*. Home Vision Entertainment

film, up through its screening at Sundance, was about \$400,000. The cost of its preparation for theatrical distribution was roughly an additional \$150,000. Some of these costs were borne by Fine Line, the rest by the producers.

The theatrical success of the film was propelled by rave critical responses. Roger Ebert again led the way for a documentary by writing in the *Chicago Sun Times*: “‘Hoop Dreams,’ however, is not only a documentary. It is also poetry and prose, muckraking and expose, journalism and polemic. It is one of the great moving experiences of my lifetime.” The film eventually grossed over \$7 million at the U.S. box office, although, as always, it is not clear how much was ever returned to the filmmakers. The gross in this case is important because the sense that *Hoop Dreams* was making money was one of the reasons more attention was brought to theatrical release for documentaries. And unlike Michael Moore’s 1988 *Roger & Me*, *Hoop Dreams* is a documentary in very traditional ways. It uses verité and interviews to tell personal stories having wide social implications. The warmth and value placed on the human spirit caused people to tell others to see the film, at the same time that it exposed the brutal nature of high-stakes high school athletics. *Hoop Dreams* showed that serious and thoughtful social-issue documentary could become a success at the box office.



A secret service officer and Michael Moore confront one another in *Fahrenheit 9/11* (U.S., 2004, Michael Moore). Dog Eat Dog Films

Michael Moore confirmed that sensationalism and humor used in documentary could also capture a crowd. Legions of fans have made his books and films runaway best-sellers and box-office successes. This has been accomplished by the marketing departments of some of the very conglomerates Moore attacks as being at the root of America’s troubles. His book *Stupid White Men* was published by HarperCollins Regan Books (owned, along with Twentieth Century Fox, by Rupert Murdoch), and remained on the *New York Times* best-seller list more than fourteen weeks—without ever being reviewed in the paper! *Dude, Where’s My Country?* was published in 2002 by the former AOL Time Warner. Warner Brothers released *Roger & Me*; MGM distributed *Bowling for Columbine*.

The distribution of *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), about the unholy business ties between the Bush and bin Laden dynasties, became one of Moore’s better publicity moves when a hue and cry was raised about Disney’s refusal to release the picture through its subsidiary Miramax for political reasons. The buzz surrounding this film created a singular moment in documentary history, pushing the form to the forefront of popular Western culture. For at least a week Michael Moore and the documentary were a primary focus of many news outlets. Individuals and organizations rallied to both support and decry Moore’s anti-Bush exposé of the war on terrorism and the war in Iraq. The film won the Palme d’Or at the 2004 Cannes festival. This was an astonishing feat that reflected—aside from the merits of the film—not only the anti-American sentiment of Europe at the time but the fact that director Quentin Tarantino, the head of the Cannes jury, owed much of his career success to Miramax Film Corporation, the distributor for *Fahrenheit 9/11*. As a theatrical documentary phenomenon,

Fahrenheit 9/11 is unmatched. In its opening weekend in the United States it grossed \$21.8 million at the box office in over 800 theaters; \$10 million was spent on release advertising; more than 2,000 35mm prints were eventually struck. 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 the role of the socially conscious documentarian to its logical democratic conclusion.

The cultural celebrity Moore has gained through the documentary medium is perhaps fitting for his times. His muckraking "average Joe" persona (complete with baseball cap and unfashionable girth) struck a responsive chord in a public grown cynical about its own institutions. Michael Moore's films raise innumerable questions about documentary ethics, but there is no denying that they present serious issues in an unusual and effective form—that of seriocomic entertainment.

Moore charged onto the American documentary scene in 1989 when Warner Brothers agreed to distribute his debut feature *Roger & Me*. Ostensibly it told the story of muckraking journalist Moore attempting to track down the head of the General Motors Corporation to get him to explain plant closings in Moore's (and GM's) hometown of Flint, Michigan. This narrative device allowed Moore to show the economic hardships and very real personal pain of ordinary people who suffered from the loss of tens of thousands of blue-collar jobs. It also allowed Moore to create situations in which his chief targets—big business, callous rich people, ignorant bureaucrats—could look genuinely foolish in front of the camera. This formula served Moore well in all of his subsequent work. *Roger & Me* was the first in a number of antiglobalization-themed documentaries that appeared in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It bridges the gap between serious labor films such as Barbara Kopple's *American Dream* and the personal documentary. *Roger & Me* also gave new meaning to self-reflexivity in the cinema, turning it from introspection to broad comedy. The film did well at the box office and Moore was able to capitalize on the fact that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences failed to nominate it, the year's most commercially successful documentary, for an Oscar, despite the fact that the Academy claimed to support theatrical exhibition of documentary.

Moore's propensity for inflaming media controversy also served him well in his next work, *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), about the tragic Colorado high school massacre. Taking the title from the fact that the teenage murderers were enrolled in a bowling class, Moore takes on the issue of guns and violence in America with mixed results. His confrontational approach is nothing short of brilliant when he visits K Mart headquarters with students shot in the attack who still carry in their bodies bullets purchased at K Mart. Its shortcomings are painfully evident when Moore stalks National Rifle Association President Charlton Heston in Heston's home. By this time the Academy had changed its rules (again) for awarding documentary Oscars, and Michael Moore created another media stunt when he accepted the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature.

Moore's brand of political filmmaking did not spring full-blown to the screen on its own. It has a direct antecedent in the work of a much less well-known proletarian documentary maker, Tony Buba, who has been making documentaries through his western Pennsylvania based company, Braddock Films, since 1974. After spending time on a factory assembly line and then attending college to study film, Buba's initial work consisted of a dozen black-and-white shorts known collectively as *The Braddock Chronicles*. These are portraits and vignettes of life in his own community, the dying mill town of Braddock, Pennsylvania. *Voices From a Steeltown* (1983) followed in this vein. Buba becomes an often-comic onscreen guide in this and other films. His first feature was *Lightning Over Braddock: A Rusty Owl Fantasy* (1988). It mixes outlandish fictional fantasy sequences with serious footage of the problems of daily life for deindustrialized blue-collar workers. Buba and coproducer Raymond Henderson made *Struggles in Steel: A Story of African American Steel Workers* (1996). A documentary of industrial racism, the film has as its core a series of interviews with over seventy African-American workers whose stories had never before been told. Michael Moore was obviously familiar with Buba's films before he made *Roger & Me*. In fact, according to Buba, Moore contacted him to work as an editorial consultant on that film and eventually hired Buba's editor to work on the project.

Other documentaries of various types have played their way into theaters. It would be remiss to discuss theatrical exhibition of documentaries without noting the importance of large-format (IMAX) films. Although few large-format documentaries take a strong social position, very many of them use the beauty of nature and the adventures of humankind in a manner reminiscent of Flaherty's legacy. And perhaps more important, the vast majority of films made for large-format screens are documentaries, not fiction.

The creators of the IMAX film system, Canadians Graeme Ferguson, Roman Kroitor, and Robert Kerr, came together at "EXPO '67" in Montreal and went on to premiere their system at the Fuji Pavilion of "EXPO '70" in Osaka, Japan. Permanent IMAX theaters started being constructed in the early 1970s (primarily in museum and science park settings). Now a public corporation, IMAX continues to introduce evolutionary changes (such as 3D and high-definition versions) at World's Fairs, and several other companies produce large-format films. The technology creates an image of unsurpassed clarity and impact by using 70-mm film stock that runs horizontally through a massive projection system. Specially designed large-format cameras record images with much greater detail than do 35mm motion picture cameras. The projected area can be up to twenty-five times larger than conventional screens and can stand up to eight stories high and over 100 feet across.

Large-format films have been very good at educating people about scientific achievements and natural wonders. They have been less good at developing narrative capabilities. Like the history of all moving image technologies, it has taken experimentation and time for large-format makers to master their craft. And

working in large format is many times more expensive than any other technology. There have been successful large-format films since the early 1970s, but it was not until *Everest* (1998) that there was a documentary blockbuster. It is the most financially successful large-format film ever made, having grossed over \$125,700,000. It could also be considered the most financially successful documentary ever made, since in many ways it fits the classic definition of documentary. A MacGillivray Freeman production, *Everest* is the story of a team of climbers who triumph in the wake of tragedy. Their 1996 successful ascent of Mount Everest, just days after fellow mountaineers and friends died there, is a compelling tale, witnessed by the large-format camera. Producer Greg MacGillivray said, "Great fictional films impart an emotional story of a life-and-death struggle. Our large format films, being nonfiction, have never before had that same urgency and poignancy. But with *Everest* we have these powerful story elements in a real, nonfiction film, photographed . . . in the most realistic format yet invented."

As a specialized category of documentaries, large-format films can perhaps be considered akin to the "actualities" of one hundred years ago. They, too, were the beginnings of a new form of nonfiction. Both intended to show audiences the world around them in a new way. The same can also be said of the tiniest of formats, the use of computer and Internet technology to spread the documentary movement, a subject that is addressed in the final chapter of this book.

Films of the Period

1990

Berkeley in the Sixties (U.S., Mark Kitchell)
The Civil War (U.S., Ken Burns)

1991

American Dream (U.S., Barbara Kopple)
Brother's Keeper (U.S., Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky)

1992

A Brief History of Time (U.S., Errol Morris)
Forbidden Love: The Unshamed Stories of Lesbian Love (Canada, Lynne Fernie and Aetlyn Weissman)
Nitrate Kisses (U.S., Barbara Hammer)
The Panama Deception (U.S., Barbara Trent)

1993

The War Room (U.S., D. A. Pennebaker, Chris Hegedus, and R. J. Cutler)

1994

D-Day Remembered (U.S., Charles Guggenheim)
Hoop Dreams (U.S., Peter Gilbert, Steve James, Frederick Marx, and Gordon Quinn)
Lock-up: The Prisoners of Riker's Island (U.S., Jon Alpert)

1995

Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter (U.S., Deborah Hoffmann)
Crumbs (U.S., Terry Zwigoff)

1996

When We Were Kings (U.S., Leon Gast)
Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation (U.K., Brian Lapping)

1997

Cadillac Desert (U.S., Jon Else)
Concert of the Wilks: Making the Getty Center (U.S., Susan Fromke, Bob Eisenhardt, and Albert Maysles)
Four Little Girls (U.S., Spike Lee and Sam Pollard)
A Healthy Baby Girl (U.S., Judith Heland)
Licensed to Kill (U.S., Arthur Dong)
Waco: The Rules of Engagement (U.S., Dan Gifford and William Gazecki)

1998

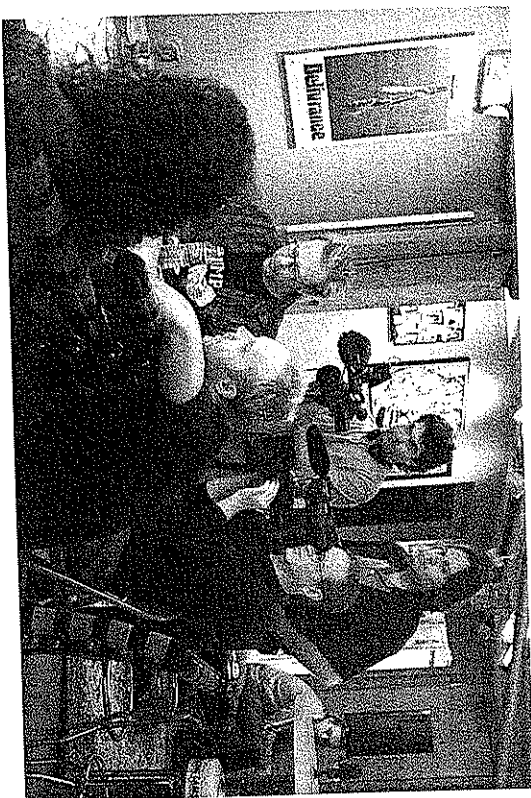
The Cold War (U.S./U.K., Jeremy Isaacs)
Everest (U.S., MacGillivray, Freeman Films)
The Farm (U.S., Jonathan Stack and Liz Garbus)
42 Up (U.K., Michael Apted)
Hunan Remains (U.S., Jay Rosenblatt)
A Place Called Chiapas (Canada, Nette Wild)

1999

Belfast, Maine (U.S., Frederick Wiseman)
Geri (U.K., Molly Dineen)

2001

Domestic Violence (U.S., Wiseman)
Startup.com (U.S., Hegedus and Jehane Noujaim)



Filmmakers Joe Berlinger (left) and Bruce Sinofsky with cinematographer Bob Richman filming *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster* (U.S., 2004, Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky). Photo by Annamaria Disanto

2002

Dogtown and Z-Boys (U.S., Stacy Peralta)
Feltham Sings (U.K., Roger Graef, Brian Hill, and Simon Armitage)
The Fog of War (U.S., Morris)

2003

Alien: Life and Death of a Serial Killer (U.S., Nick Broomfield and Joan Churchill)
Bowling for Columbine (U.S., Michael Moore)
Capturing the Friedmans (U.S., Andrew Jarecki)

2004

Fahrenheit 9/11 (U.S., Moore)
Metallica: Some Kind of Monster (U.S., Berlinger and Sinofsky)
Super Size Me (U.S., Morgan Spurlock)

Books on the Period

Bullert, B. J., *Public Television: Politics and the Battle Over Documentary Film*. Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.
 Bruzzi, Stella, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2000.

- Cornet, John, *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary*. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1996.
 Edgerton, Garry R., Ken Burns's *America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001.
 Goldsmith, David A., *The Documentary Makers: Interviews with 15 of the Best in the Business*. Switzerland: Rotovision, 2003.
 Hogarth, David, *Documentary Television in Canada: From National Public Service to Global Marketplace*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.
 Kilborn, Richard and John Irod, *An Introduction to Television Documentary: Confronting Reality*. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1997.
 MacDonald, Kevin and Mark Cousins, *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of the Documentary*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.
Sights of the Turn of the Century: New Tendencies in Documentary Cinema. lectures. CLECT, 1996.
 Singer, Bennett, ed., *42 Up: A Book Based on Michael Apted's Award-Winning Documentary Series*. New York: Free Press, 1998.
 Steven, Peter, *Brink of Reality: New Canadian Documentary Film and Video*. Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1993.
 Stubbs, Liz, *Documentary Filmmakers Speak*. New York: Allworth Press, 2002.
 Vaughn, Dai, *For Documentary: Twelve Essays*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
 Waldman, Diane and Janet Walker, eds., *Feminism and Documentary*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
 Winston, Brian, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
 Zimmerman, Patricia R., *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.