



A New History of Documentary Film

By Jack C. Ellis, Betsy A. McLane



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A thorough and definitive survey/history of documentary films. Concentrating mainly on the output of the US, the UK, and Canada, the authors outline the origins of the form and then show its development over the next several decades. The book is completely up-to-date in discussing films like Fahrenheit 9/11 and Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer.

Written in a simple, chronological format, the text is straightforward and full of content, information, and historical perspective. Each chapter concludes with a list of the key documentaries in that particular time period or genre, and there are helpful appendices listing all the winners of the Academy Award for Best Documentary, as well as the winners of the Grierson Award.

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A New History of Documentary Film By Jack C. Ellis, Betsy A. McLane Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1454293 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Bloomsbury Academic
- Published on: 2005-08-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.00" w x 6.00" l, 1.40 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 400 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

The timing couldn't be better for a knowledgeable survey of documentary films that acknowledges (and appreciates) the work of Robert Flaherty but continues through the era of cable TV, digital video, Michael Moore and *Born Into Brothels*. This thoughtful appraisal will be useful to students as well as moviegoers who want to learn more about the history of nonfiction filmmaking. Leonard Maltin

This book expands Ellis's *The Documentary Idea* (1989), a classic history of English-language social documentary film and video. Here Ellis (Northwestern Univ.) partners with Betsy McLane (past president, University Film and Video Association) to bring the subject of documentary film forward into the global sphere of digital image-capture technologies, satellite and Internet distribution and exhibition, and the "frenzy of TV reality shows." Like the earlier edition, the book is homage to documentary pioneer John Grierson, who coined the term "documentary" in 1926, and largely limits itself to the English-language "social documentary," i.e., "the mainline of the documentary tradition Grierson set in motion." Within those parameters, each of the 18 chapters offers a concise and useful historical overview of a particular time period, topic, or filmmaker and adds a list of relevant film titles and publications. Soviet propaganda and European avant-garde experimentation are discussed, though less comprehensively. As a carefully considered and reader-friendly volume, this book takes its place alongside Erik Barnouw's classic *Documentary* (1974). Specialists and advanced scholars may prefer Michael Renov's *The Subject of Documentary* (CH, Feb'05, 42-3312), which reconsiders the Griersonian "objective" ideal in the light of the subjective practices of the autobiographical vernacular." **Summing Up: Recommended. Lower-/upper-division undergraduates, graduate students, general readers.**

(CHOICE)

"It's an excellent introduction for any student wishing to understand the major trends in documentary production in the UK and North America and the major films of various eras...Overall, *A New History of Documentary Film* is a worthy and ambitious book. The text would be a great resource for a library or for a documentary studies class" —L. Clare Bratten, *Journal of Film and Video* 60.1, Spring 2008
(L. Clare Bratten)

Documentary (1974)" -*Humanities-Performing Arts-Film* 2006<?xml:namespace prefix = o ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

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About the Author

Jack C. Ellis is Professor Emeritus of Northwestern University, where he taught film from 1956-91. He has also taught, over that period, at the University of Texas, NYU, and UCLA. He was a founding member of the Society for Cinema Studies, and was awarded Honorary Life Membership in 1998. His textbook *A History of Film* (co-authored with Virginia Wright Wexman) is currently in its fifth edition, published in the US by Allyn & Bacon. Betsy A. McLane is the Project Director of "The American Documentary Showcase" a presentation of the U.S. Department of State Bureau and Education and Cultural Affairs. Director Emerita of the International Documentary Association. She has taught courses on film and documentary at Loyola Marymount University, the University of Vermont, Emerson College and the University of Southern California. She is a Past President of the University Film and Video Association.

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