

# *The History of Documentary Film*

## *Jour 3231*

**DR. KATHLEEN M. RYAN**  
OFFICE HOURS (ONLINE)  
TUESDAY 2:00-5:00 PM MT  
AND BY APPOINTMENT

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### *Course Description*

From the first non-fiction narrative film (Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, 1922) to the groundbreaking *Up* series (1964-present); from World War II-era propaganda films (Leni Riefenstahl, Frank Capra) to television-based storytelling on HBO and PBS, the documentary has had a rich and varied history. This course will explore the evolution of the documentary, both in feature films and on television, to understand how the genre offers both historical context and an understanding of the world in which we live.

### *Course Objectives*

- To explore and analyze a broad range of texts from the history of documentary film and video.
- To explore various genres of documentary film and video.
- Develop and apply the visual language of film and video aesthetics.
- To challenge and examine political issues related to representation and documentary.
- To frame documentaries as a social construction and to constantly challenge (or debunk) notions of “truth.”
- To examine a variety of historical contexts as represented by these texts.
- To examine how documentaries critique power in society.
- To develop insight into theoretical questions facing contemporary producers of visual culture and to articulate your own ideas with clarity, rigor, and imagination.
- To evoke an intuitive and playful creative spirit that doesn't fit nicely into academic categorization.

### *About Me*

My first television job was at a local station in Great Falls, Montana. I'd work my way through local stations (Albuquerque, Hartford, New York), and would eventually become one of the first Senior Producers at FoxNewsChannel, developing the first weekend newscast there. I later worked for ABC News Productions doing long-format stories which aired on cable channels like A&E, TLC, Discovery, Discovery Health, and Lifetime, as well as direct-to-video productions. In 2002, I co-founded TaylorCatProductions, a multimedia productions company, and have produced several award-winning documentary films, interactive documentaries, and shorts. I have a B.A. in political science from the University of California, Santa Barbara; a M.A. in broadcast journalism from University of Southern California; and a Ph.D. in communication and society from University of Oregon.

### *Course Policies*

The course meets asynchronously for the most part, allowing you to watch both films and video lectures online on your own time. I recommend that you use class time when possible.

All students will be randomly assigned to small breakout groups (less than 10 people). These group assignments are not negotiable and will be used for rolling assignment deadlines. The smaller groups will meet virtually with me biweekly during assigned course meeting time (Mondays, 5:20-7:50). Attendance at these sessions is mandatory.

Since we won't be meeting in person, efficient communication is important. Email is an accepted mode of communication for University of Colorado. I will respond to emails within 24 hours weekdays (48 hours on weekends) and you are expected to do the same. Online office hours will be held on on Zoom.

## Course Readings

Readings are due for every class section. You are expected to keep up with your course readings and use them as the basis for your course discussions and assignments.

Required Text: Betsy A. McLane, *A New History of Documentary Film* (New York/London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

Supplemental readings will be uploaded to Canvas.

## Course Assignments

The course is collaborative, with expected online participation in various formats. Students will be randomly assigned to one of six small groups to complete some of the assignments (Course Breakout Sessions, InMediaRes - Classroom Edition).

### Screencasts

I see screencasts as a way to replicate classroom lectures for key “big picture” points students should take away from the readings or to give greater detail to important trends in documentary film that the books don’t cover sufficiently. The screencasts may also be used to introduce edited selections from films that the entire class isn’t expected to view in entirety (students may do reviews of selected films discussed), or of interviews with documentary directors and producers. Screencasts for the term are posted on the course Canvas site.

You’re expected to use the course screencasts to prep for viewing of the course films. You will receive credit only if you watch each of the screencasts assigned for the week in their entirety.

DUE: Midnight Monday weekly.

### Collaborative Remote Film Viewing

Films are embedded on the course Canvas site. You are expected to watch the films asynchronously (outside of class time) and create what in essence would be the classroom equivalent of the “director’s commentary” on DVD releases. I will start the conversation with my comments and notes embedded – and students are expected to do the course readings, watch the screencast, and then watch the film. You then should insert your own commentary – either at the same points in the film that I’ve selected or in other areas.

### Grading Matrix

- Comments need to demonstrate a knowledge of course readings and screencasts. (5 points)
- Comments need to offer a brief explication so that others can understand what you mean. Comments like “cool!” or “WTF?” without explanation will be graded down. (5 points)
- At least two comments should be responses to comments from either other students or the professor. (2 points)
- At least two comments should be an individual response and not repeat with another student has said (2 points)
- While quality of comments is more important than quantity, comments should be distributed throughout the film. In other words, the comments should demonstrate that you watched the *entire* film and not just sections of it. Five well-thought out comments will be graded higher than ten superficial comments (5 points)
- Comments should use proper spelling and grammar. (1 point)

**FOR WEEK 15 ONLY:** Comments should be posted on the assigned Canvas discussion board because this is an immersive documentary film and doesn’t allow for Kaltura streaming.

DUE: Midnight Monday weekly.

### Course Breakout Sessions

Students will meet remotely with me, via Zoom, in small groups for 45 minutes every other week. The meetings will be scheduled during our regular course time, e.g. if you are assigned to group A, you will be meeting with me from 5:20-6:05pm every other Monday (I will confirm your exact dates and times in Canvas and via email). You are expected to come to the meetings having watched the screencasts and films for the previous two weeks, and have questions or thoughts related to the topic(s) discussed. Grading will be based upon participation. If you miss a schedule meeting time or are late for your assigned section you will be graded down. Illnesses will be considered an excuse on a case by case basis.

DUE: During class time biweekly. It’s strongly recommended you view the film and screencast(s) for the week before your breakout session. For example, if your breakout session is in Week 3, it will help you to have viewed the materials for Weeks 2 & 3 before the session.

### InMediaRes - Classroom Version

During weeks when you are not scheduled to meet with me in small groups, students will participate in the InMediaRes assignment. In the assignment you will either:

- Curate a short multimedia think piece related to subjects discussed over the last two weeks OR
- Comment on the think pieces done by your fellow students.

**Curated Multimedia Think Piece:** Two times over the term you will be expected to “curate” a multimedia post based on the films we’re viewing and readings we’re doing. The curated artifact can be an edited film clip found on YouTube, archives.org or another site. Alternatively, it can be something unique you’ve created specifically for the course. In either case, the clip must be video based (i.e. moving images). It should also include a curator’s statement that connects the artifact to the topic of the current week and/or previous week. The video clip should range between :45-2:00. The curator’s statement should be between 350-450 words.

I’ve included a video tutorial on how to create the posts, and will kick off the discussion in Week One with my own InMediaRes post. Use the InMediaRes project as a template (<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/>)

#### Grading Matrix

- Is a video clip uploaded? (5 points)
  - Relevance of video clip to week’s topic (20 points)
  - Creativity in video clip selection (20 points)
- Is there a curator’s statement? (5 points)
  - Clarity of statement (20 points)
  - Does the statement incorporate ideas from the readings? (20 points)
- Grammar/spelling in curation statement (10 points)
- Are the clip and post uploaded on time? (-5 points for each day late)

**Comments:** Four times during the term, during weeks when you are either not curating a topic or meeting with me, you are expected to comment on three posts from your fellow classmates posted during that week. The comments will be graded on the following matrix

- Comments should demonstrate a knowledge of course readings and screencasts. (2 points per comment)
- Comments should engage with the ideas presented in the post. Comments like “cool!” or “WTF?” without explanation will be graded down. (2 points per comment)
- Comments should use proper spelling/grammar (2 points)

**DUE:** InMediaRes posts must be uploaded by midnight Thursday of the assigned week. Comments are due by the beginning of class time Monday of the following week.

### Film Review (Midterm and Final Exam)

Students will do reviews of films for the midterm and final exams. Each film will consist of two films selected from a list of suggested titles (if you wish to review a film not listed you should consult with the instructor). The reviews are expected to relate to the readings/lectures/discussions and place the films within an historical context (i.e. if the review is about *The Negro Soldier*, it should discuss the use of film as propaganda during World War II). You should pick films that are related (similar topics, similar genres, by the same director, etc.) and compare and contrast them with each other.

#### Grading Matrix

- The review should offer a basic summary of the films’ subjects and key points. (10 points)
- The review should place the films into an historical and stylistic context. (i.e. What other films were released in the time period and how do the films relate to them? Do your selected films build off of past films? What are the films’ genre(s) and how do each fit into the genre?) (25 points)
- The review should discuss the films’ storytelling conventions. Did the choices work or not? (15 points)
- The review should discuss the films’ aesthetic choices. Did the choices work or not? (15 points)
- The review should incorporate the course readings and discussions/screencasts. (15 points)
- The review should discuss how the films fit into the larger body of work by the producer and/or director. (10 points)
- The review should be 750-1000 words and use proper spelling and grammar. Reviews less than 500 words will receive an automatic F, as will those with more than 10 spelling/grammar errors (10 points)

You are welcome to hand the review in early. It is due on Canvas at the dates/time below.

**DUE DATE:** Midterm Exam 10pm October 23. Final Exam 10pm December 11.

## Grading

The overall course score will be assigned based on the following criteria:

• Course Screencasts	10%
• Collaborative Remote Film Viewing	15%
• Course Breakout Sections	10%
• Curated InMediaRes Think Piece	25%
• InMediaRes - Comments	10%
• Film Reviews	30%

Students should understand that an “A” is considered outstanding. Students who earn an “A” are students who have gone well beyond the class requirements and who have outperformed their fellow students. By contrast, a “B” is an above average performance. A “B” indicates that a student has displayed due diligence and standards of excellence while completing their requirements. A “C” represents an average performance, indicating merely that the class requirements have been adequately completed. A “D” indicates a below average performance by a student who completes the class requirements. An “F” indicates a student has not met the course requirements and so will not receive credit for having done so.

Grades will be weighted to reflect the above percentages. Individual grades will be available on the course Desire2Learn site.

## Grade Distribution

94-100%	A
90-93.9%	A-
87-89.9%	B+
84-86.9%	B
80-83.9%	B-
77-79.9%	C+
74-76.9%	C
70-73.9%	C-
67-69.9%	D+
64-66.9%	D
60-63.9%	D-
Below 60%	F

## Course Calendar

### Documentary Foundations

#### Week 1 - August 24

Thinking About Documentaries

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 1

ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES COMMENTS (ALL GROUPS)

#### Week 2 - August 31

The Ethnographic Tradition

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 2

GROUP VIEWING: NANOOK OF THE NORTH ROBERT J. AND FRANCES HUBBARD FLAHERTY (US, 1922)

BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS D, E, F

ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUP A); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS B-C)

#### Week 3 - September 7 Holiday

Holiday (Labor Day)

NO CLASS

#### Week 4 - September 14

Expository Films

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 9

GROUP VIEWING: HARVEST OF SHAME FRED FRIENDLY/CBS (US, 1960)

BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS A, B, C  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUP D); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS E-F)

## Genres

### Week 5 - September 21

Historical

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 5  
GROUP VIEWING: *THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ROSIE THE RIVETER* CONNIE FIELD (US 1982)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS D, E, F  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUP B); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS A, C)

### Week 6 - September 28

Government Messaging/Propaganda

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTERS 6-7  
GROUP VIEWING: *THE NEGRO SOLDIER* STUART HEISLER (US 1944)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS A, B, C  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUPS E); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS D, F)

### Week 7 - October 5

Biography

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 8  
GROUP VIEWING: AMY ASIF KAPADIA (UK 2015) [HTTPS://DIGITALCAMPUS-SWANKMP-NET.COLORADO.IDM.OCLC.ORG/UNIVCOBOULDER359883/#/PLAY/7F4E6BA734BF98D6?WATCH=1](https://digitalcampus-swankmp-net.colorado.idm.oclc.org/univcoboulder359883/#/PLAY/7F4E6BA734BF98D6?WATCH=1)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS D, E, F  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUP C); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS A-B)

### Week 8- October 12

Sports

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 15  
GROUP VIEWING: *HOOP DREAMS* STEVE JAMES (US 1994)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS A, B, C  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: I INMEDIARES (GROUP F); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS D-E)

### Week 9 - October 19

Reality TV and other genres

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 14, MURPHY "THEY GROW UP, BUT THEY REMAIN A LIFETIME PURSUIT" *NEW YORK TIMES*  
GROUP VIEWING: *7 UP* MICHAEL APTED (UK 1964)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: ALL GROUPS (20 MINUTES EACH)  
ASSIGNMENT DUE (OCTOBER 23 10PM): MIDTERM EXAM (FILM REVIEWS)

## Observation and Participation

### Week 10 - October 26

The Observational Film

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 11; APOGEL, "THE BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH OF A NATION: A PORTRAIT BY FREDERICK WISEMAN" [HTTP://SENSESOFCINEMA.COM/2002/FEATURE-ARTICLES/WISEMAN/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/feature-articles/wiseman/)  
GROUP VIEWING: *TITICUT FOLLIES* FREDERICK WISEMAN (US 1967)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS D, E, F  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUP A); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS B-C)

### Week 11 - November 2

Participatory Documentaries

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 13

GROUP VIEWING: *PARIS IS BURNING* JENNIE LIVINGSTON (US 1991)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS A, B, C  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUP D); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS E-F))

### **Week 12 - November 9**

Advocacy

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 12  
GROUP VIEWING: *HARLAN COUNTY USA* BARBARA KOPPLE (US 1976)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS D, E, F  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUP B); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS A,C)

### **Experiments and Innovations**

#### **Week 13 - November 16**

Reflexive Filmmaking

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 3  
GROUP VIEWING: *MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA* DZIGA VERTOV (RUSSIA 1929)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS A, B, C  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUP E); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS D,F)

#### **Week 14 - November 23**

Artistic/Poetic

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 4  
GROUP VIEWING: *RAIN MANNIS* FRANKEN AND JORIS IVINS (NETHERLANDS 1929), *NY NY* FRANCIS THOMPSON (US 1957)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS D, E, F  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUP C); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS A-B)

#### **Week 15 - November 30**

The Documentary Essay

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 10  
GROUP VIEWING: *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO* RAHOUL PECK (HAITI 2016) [HTTPS://  
COLORADO.KANOPY.COM/PRODUCT/I-AM-NOT-YOUR-NEGRO](https://colorado.kanopy.com/product/i-am-not-your-negro)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: GROUPS A, B, C  
ASSIGNMENT DUE: INMEDIARES (GROUPS F); INMEDIARES COMMENTS (GROUPS D-E)

#### **Week 16 - December 7**

Hybrid and Other Nontraditional Formats

READING DUE: MCCLANE CHAPTER 16  
GROUP VIEWING: *THE FIRST WORLD WAR: THE STORY OF A GLOBAL CONFLICT* KILN.IT, FRANCESCA PANETTA, LINDSAY POULTON, ALEX PURCELL, STEPHEN MOSS, NABEELAH SHABBIR, AND LILY BRAZIER (UK 2014)  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS: ALL GROUPS (20 MINUTES EACH)

### **Final Exam**

**December 11, 10:00 pm**

Film Review Due

## *University of Colorado Policies*

### **Honor Code**

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code ([honor@colorado.edu](mailto:honor@colorado.edu)); 303-492-5550). Students found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

### **Classroom Behavior**

Both students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote or online. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

### **Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment, and/or Related Retaliation**

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner violence (dating or domestic violence), stalking, or protected-class discrimination or harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or [cureport@colorado.edu](mailto:cureport@colorado.edu). Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, stalking, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

### **Religious Holidays**

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. This class is offered largely asynchronously, with students expected to participate in group discussion sections generally every other Monday. Please let me know no later than midnight on Wednesday, August 26th if you celebrate a religious holiday which coincides with a course meeting date, so that you can be assigned to an alternative group without a conflict.

See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

### **Preferred Student Names and Pronouns**

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their preferred names and pronouns via the student portal; those preferred names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name.

### **Disability**

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or [dsinfo@colorado.edu](mailto:dsinfo@colorado.edu) for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) on the Disability Services website.

### **Requirements for COVID-19**

As a matter of public health and safety due to the pandemic, all members of the CU Boulder community and all visitors to campus must follow university, department and building requirements, and public health orders in place to reduce the risk of spreading infectious disease. Required safety measures at CU Boulder relevant to the classroom setting include:

- maintain 6-foot distancing when possible,
- wear a face covering in public indoor spaces and outdoors while on campus consistent with state and county health orders,
- clean local work area,
- practice hand hygiene,
- follow public health orders, and
- if sick and you live off campus, do not come onto campus (unless instructed by a CU Healthcare professional), or if you live on-campus, please alert [CU Boulder Medical Services](#).

Students who fail to adhere to these requirements will be asked to leave class, and students who do not leave class when asked or who refuse to comply with these requirements will be referred to [Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution](#). For more information, see the policies on [COVID-19 Health and Safety](#) and [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#). If you require accommodation because a disability prevents you from fulfilling these safety measures, please see the “Accommodation for Disabilities” statement on this syllabus.

Before returning to campus, all students must complete the [COVID-19 Student Health and Expectations Course](#). Before coming on to campus each day, all students are required to complete a [Daily Health Form](#).

Since this class is offered fully remotely, if you are sick or quarantined, you will still be expected to complete your assignments on time unless you are otherwise unable to do so. Please email me at least one hour before any missed class, or 24 hours before any assignment due date, if your illness prohibits you from doing asynchronous work on time or from participating in Zoom meetings so that we can arrange potential accommodations.

## *CMCI Policies*

### **A Commitment and Invitation from Our College**

CMCI strives to be a community whose excellence depends on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We aim to understand and challenge systems of privilege and disadvantage in higher education, such as those based on class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability. We seek to reach across social and political divides and to make space for voices historically underrepresented in higher education and marginalized in society. In other words, diversity is not just a future reality for which we try to prepare students. It is a priority we want to put into practice here, now, and together, in order to foster places of learning where all members can thrive.

Our question for you is, how are we doing? Please contact the CMCI diversity team (email [Lisa Flores](#) or visit the [CMCI Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Staff](#)).

- If you need support or other resources but don’t know where to turn
- If any aspect of your educational experience with CMCI does not reflect the commitment expressed here, or if you want to share a positive instance of this commitment in action
- If you have any questions, concerns, or ideas related to diversity

We want to hear from you so that we can do better, and to support you however we can!