Film Production – Documentary Unit

"… documentaries explore the mysteries of actual people in actual situations."

- Michael Rabinger "Directing the Documentary"

Overview: the Documentary Unit will make up the bulk of the third quarter. Students (either alone or in groups) will shoot a documentary film. The first five weeks of the unit will be spent viewing current documentary films and establishing the tenets of each genre.

Documentary Genres:

1) Sports Documentary. Examples: Hoop Dreams, Crash Reel
2) Social and Cultural Documentaries: Indie Game, Exit Through the Gift Shop, Fog of War, Bowling for Columbine, Hearts of Darkness, Mitt
3) Music and Concert Documentaries: The Last Waltz, Stop Making Sense, Twenty Feet from Stardom, Gimme Shelter
4) Crime Documentaries: Man on Wire, Crips and Bloods, The Thin Blue Line
5) Historical: The Civil War, Sunset Strip, The Art of the Steal
6) Biographical Documentaries: Senna, Salinger, Woody Allen, Gonzo, Buck
7) Nature Documentaries: March of the Penguins, Black Fish

"Ammunition" for Documentary Films:

- "Talking Heads" – interviews conducted by the filmmaker
- Filming present events as they happen… sports footage, concert footage, etc.
- Archival footage – previously shot footage
- Still photographs

Filmmakers agreement with audience:

- strive to tell the "truth"
- strive to be "authentic"

- always avoid "making things up" (recreations must depict "true" events)
- a documentary filmmaker is allowed an opinion on his/her subject

Elements of Documentary Films:

- Voice of God
- Presentation of Facts
- Evidence
- Present Tense
- Invisible Filmmaker
- Interactive Filmmaker – filmmaker is present on screen and pushes action/narrative forward

Structure of Documentary Films:

- Linear – tell story from beginning to end
- Circular – begin at the end
- Narrative – three act structure

Elements of the Narrative Documentary Film

- defined act breaks
- defined goal
- film leads to climatic event
- people in film have character "needs"
- people in film must overcome internal and external obstacles

Documentary Project:

1. Group/Genre/Subject/Structure/How evidence will be gathered

Due: ___

2. Outline – Scene by Scene breakdown of how film will be structured

Due: ___

3. Documentary Film

- 7-10 minutes
- posted to Youtube

Due: ___