

AUDIO SCRIPT

[F1: Female Lecturer]

F1: Today I'll be talking about the history of documentary filmmaking. A documentary refers to a film that provides a factual record or report of real events. It's a form of nonfiction storytelling that shows real situations for the purpose of educating or informing the viewer. Though the term "documentary" wasn't coined until 1926, some of the very first films were documentaries. For instance, in the 1890s the French brothers Louis and Auguste Lumière made short movies that showed scenes of everyday French life, such as workers leaving a factory or a train pulling into a station. Nevertheless, the films thrilled audiences in Paris.

At the same time as the Lumière brothers were making their films, another pair of brothers—Charles and Emile Pathé—founded their own company. Subsequently, the Pathé-Frères Company became the largest producer of films in the world. Starting from 1908, *newsreels* gained enormous popularity. Newsreels were short films about current events. At first, newsreels were sometimes staged, which meant the director recreated events, such as a battle, and assigned actors to play various roles. These newsreels were edited to look realistic to the audiences. They were shown in movie theaters prior to feature films and accompanied by live music, owing to the fact that sound for films hadn't been invented yet. When sound was introduced in the early 1930s, a narrator's voice described the events in the newsreel.

In the late 1930s, newsreels assumed the role of propaganda. The term *propaganda* refers to information that is specifically designed to influence people and to make them agree with a political point of view. The Pathé News Company created thousands of newsreels during this period. It is important to remember that television hadn't been invented yet, so people depended on newsreels for information about world events. Newsreels often presented a positive view of these events, even if the reality was somewhat different.

Perhaps the most famous propaganda filmmaker of this period was Leni Riefenstahl. She introduced several techniques in film that were revolutionary at the time. For instance, she used constantly moving cameras and dramatic aerial cinematography. She had refined these techniques by making highly cinematic, visually breathtaking "mountain" movies, a popular genre in the 1930s. Filmmakers at this time, like Riefenstahl, often had a bias. In a situation in which the filmmaker is obviously biased—that is, has a specific point of view—it is debatable whether the film can be called a documentary. Despite the fact that the film is a piece of propaganda, it is technically and artistically important nevertheless. We should ask ourselves, is it possible for a documentary filmmaker to be completely objective about his or her subject? The logical answer is no. Filmmakers are human beings and we each have our own point of view.

Now let's return to France where a new kind of documentary filmmaking emerged in the 1960s called *cinéma vérité*, which means "truth cinema." By the 1960s, cameras had become smaller and less expensive, which meant they were more portable and accessible than the old cameras. Vérité filmmakers used hand-held cameras that showed people in everyday situations speaking naturally. They reacted against the Hollywood formula of actors performing dialogue from scripts. Instead, they wanted to attain a sense of realism and truth in their work. They also broke away from the documentary formula by abandoning devices such as music, interviews, and narration. Verité filmmakers established a new standard of documentary filmmaking that continues to inspire a new generation of documentary filmmakers, especially women. According to a recent study, women represent 39 percent of documentary filmmakers, but only 18 percent of feature filmmakers.

So today I've covered newsreels, propaganda, and *cinéma vérité*. Your assignment for next week is to choose one film from each of these documentary genres and write 1,000 words by next Friday...