Selected Social Documentaries:

Perspectives on

Hoop Dreams, Harlan County, USA, American Dream, and 28 Up

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Senior, 1995

[Signatures]
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Emerging From the Underworld

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Social Documentaries: Harlan County, USA
Dr. Gerry Veeder, R/TV/F
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Emerging From the Underworld

Harlan County, USA

Columbia Pictures, Barbara Kopple

Raucous, violent sounds overwhelm the viewer as this film opens, introducing us to the dirty and dangerous work of the coal mines in Harlan County. These are the sounds that accompany the men entering the dark corridors; when we see the other side of the mine where the coal exits, all is smooth and quiet. The coal emerges as if magically retrieved from the earth, no humans in sight at this moment, no dirty hands to tell another story. Leaving at the end of the day, the men ride the same conveyor belts that the coal rode. They don't look back, and the relief in their faces as they greet the world of sunlight is of men who have escaped some piece of hell—a hell that is part of every day and therefore no longer named hell but simply "life in the mines."

(The men are like pieces of coal themselves, lumps on the belt that takes them into the mine. The coal coming out gives the impression that the men themselves have somehow turned into coal, as if the men are no longer, and the coal is the only thing to make it out of the mine.)

Transformed by the mines: their skin, their lungs, their bodies. We see everyday activities take place in a setting most of us would never imagine. The camera shows a man talking on a phone with so much background noise one wonders if he or the person on the other end can possibly hear a voice at all. Another man eats a ding-dong during a break, barely noticing the flurry of machinery
and men around him. These activities and their actors seem out of place—how can one act so naturally in such an unnatural setting? The machines—spinning, grinding blades—so loud, so unstoppable, so inhuman, so violent.

We see the outer world as the men walk home from the mines. The county is barely there. Clotheslines filled with old cloth being blown by the wind, kids like weeds scatter the barren landscape of shed-like houses and old cars.

The next sound is a high and lonely voice telling the story of the coal miner's life in song, a life inside darkness "where the rain never falls/ the sun never shines." On camera we see a man of tough, loose skin, bright eyes, and bones that seem barely held together—perhaps held together only by the weather beaten clothes he might have worn through an eternity. His song speaks of aching knees and blackened lungs, the rocky realities of mining. When the song ends he tells us about the 18-20 hour days in the mines where the men are valued less than the mules that once joined them in the mines. Old clips of mines and the Brookside UMWA sign tell us there's no new story here, just another generation of workers.

From shots of the former United Mine Workers of America president John L. Lewis and Carl Horn, the president of Duke Power, (the company that owns this mine), the film introduces us to the tension between union and business. Our leathery narrator tells us of the forces opposing the worker, a stronghold of power made up of political parties, religion, capitalists and sometimes even the unions themselves. The violence he describes of the 1930's strikes
compares to guerilla warfare.

Other shots of women from Harlan county—daughters, wives, mothers, and supporters of the miners—tell the audience that several generations have been living and working here. Familiarity with the unions reminds the viewer that workers' struggles have been ongoing over several generations, with some issues as recurring themes. On screen we read that "in the summer of 1973, the men of the Brookside Mine in Harlan, Kentucky voted to join the NMWA," and later we read that "Duke Power and its subsidiary, Eastover Mine Company, refused to sign the contract," resulting in a strike. We see the strike round-up wagon—a truck with a loud megaphone—driving along the dirt roads lined with houses, encouraging people to come stand the line. One gets the feeling that the voice on the megaphone is the voice of the subconscious, a sort of collective kick in the ass.

This film represents a long struggle for workers' rights in the mines. The struggle has a history and a future, and everyone has something at stake in Harlan County. We meet the gutsy wives of the coal miners—tough, smart, and all heart. The camera takes us into houses with no running water that reveal children in washtubs, unaware of their poverty. The film takes us through months of striking, and the hardships that accompany the endeavor. Women lay in the road on the strike line forcing cars to halt and turn away. Violence breaks out one morning on the strike line. The community is torn, with anti-union men packing guns and fear running high. Songs of solidarity and survival weave the spirits
of the strikers together. In the end, the group is triumphant, but the struggle leaves all of us—audience included!—a little drained.

Amazingly, the camera crew has been with the strike nearly from the beginning and stays for the fight. The crew asks very few questions that we actually hear, and few interactions between filmer and striker take place for the audience. The moments in which we do hear the filmer say something remain in the memory. One moment is when the anti-union deputy, Basil Collins, drives up and questions the filmers' right to be on the line filming. He asks the woman filming if he can see her driver's license and press pass. She asks if she can see his, in return. He turns a little red, says he doesn't think he can find it, so her answer is the same—she can't find it. He nods his head and pulls away, the camera catching his expressions. It is a moment he's sure to regret.

One other moment in which the camera person becomes very real is when the anti-union men show up with guns and begin to actually fire shots; we hear the commotion of people worrying about what will happen to the filmer, and the filmer's confidence that she is not in danger. She ends up backing off a little, but her camera searches the gray fog of the morning to catch someone's face and provide proof of their involvement. She catches Basil Collins, gun behind his back (we see it, too) and a surge of indignation comes from the audience. We knew Basil was trouble, but this has gone way too far!
This film traces the dynamics of a group of people working towards a tangible goal, one that affects almost everyone in the same way. It looks at a community that is close knit and marginalized by economics and industry, and shows the process of organization the group begins. Leaders, speakers, motivators come out of the woodwork to keep the group going, to keep them focused, to maintain solidarity. We see moments where organization and the will to strike seem to fall apart, when disunity, apathy and fear run high. But we also see amazing moments of heroism. One woman speaks in the court room where arrested strikers await their turn to go before the judge. She approaches the microphone and says, "Can I say something, because I haven't had the chance to give any testimony today." What follows are words spoken forcefully and directly, catching the attention of the 200+ people in the room:

I knew we wouldn't get any justice here. The laws are not made for us, the working people of this country. There's a person missing today, and that's Carl Horn. The laws were made for people like Carl Horn, [president of parent company] not for us. What we did was right and we all know that.

Kopple's film catches so many moments like these, when we hear people let go of their fear and demand their lives and livelihood and common respect from anyone that dares try to enter their world. By capturing these moments, Kopple brings dignity and honor to a group that is usually disparaged by the rest of society for being uneducated (read: stupid) and unrefined (read: white trash). When we realize that most have not received above a sixth grade
education, we experience a moment of guiltiness. Despite their lack of education these men and women are articulate, forceful, and smart. And! They're figuring out "the system" and fighting it!

In an interview with L.A. Winokur published in The Progressive, Kopple tells about her experience filming Harlan County USA. She describes this film as being about "workers whose lives are in crisis. People who are willing to stand up and rise to the things that are important to them in times when it's not that easy to do" (30). Winokur notes that "women played a vital role in the organizing efforts portrayed in... Harlan County..." (33). She asks Kopple, "with more and more women entering the work force, do you think it's likely that they will become the vanguard of the labor movement?" (33). Kopple's answer:

I don't know, but I hope it's true. I'd like to see more women in union leadership positions. I think we can be more humane. I think if women were in charge, many unions would be more responsive to their rank and file...women can also be very tough. I pity any corporation that crosses them" (33).

In these comments, Kopple demonstrates the power of her own film and its subject. A story of courage, dignity and community effort, the film teaches the viewer about their community and their own struggles. One might wonder, could I do that? If it came down to it, could I have stayed on the line or would I have crossed it? Or would I have ever made it to the line? Watching Harlan County is experiencing a world largely unknown by most viewers. As Kopple says, "that film taught me what life and death are all about, what
it means to stand up and fight for the things you believe in and to risk everything that you have" (30).

Cited

_Harlan County, USA._ Barbara Kopple, dir. Produced by Columbia Pictures, 197?.

Out of Bounds

by Sarah Oglesby

Senior Honors Colloquium
w/Dr. Gerry Veeder
1995
Out of Bounds

by

Sarah Oglesby

Hoop Dreams takes the audience behind the scenes of one of our most celebrated and most financially successful sports to show us two young men struggling to find a dream they can make real. The crux of the issue is that, as inner city African-Americans, few options are really open to them and hundreds of youths are swarming the courts looking for a door that opens out of the life they have known. This reality becomes evident as we watch families struggle with unemployment, low wages, and an environment that lacks playgrounds and relief from the concrete and buildings. Examining the role of education in taking young people to better jobs and more life options, the film also shows the audience the difficulties of maintaining educative goals when other aspects of one’s life are dysfunctional. Midst the hype and pressure of a ball game are the tensions of new parenthood, ongoing problems with their own parents, money concerns, and the need for community. Education gets lost. From the film we learn that we must rebuild all neighborhoods—not just our own—to include parks, trees, grass, and playgrounds with more than hoops and more than concrete. We must make education a real option and a real activity; but we must also recreate a world of work where women and minorities may work and earn money without being penalized for their gender or ethnicity.

Arthur Agee and William Gates play ball in the courts in
their 'hood. The camera introduces us to an amateur basketball scout, an older African American man, who then tells us about the kids with promise. We meet Gates and Agee, we see them play ball, we meet their families. The courts are full of teenage energy and emotion. Eventually, Agee and Gates are invited to a special basketball camp at St. Joseph's, a Catholic private school whose basketball team is one of the best in the country. Here they are watched by coaches and scouts, all commenting on the form and maturity of the boys. They also begin the endless game of comparison and forecast; which kids resemble which "great ball players," which kids will "make it" to the pros.

Gates and Agee make it to the school, with Gates receiving the most attention. Gates, more physically mature for his age, wins more praise for behaving "well" and playing hard and eventually is funded by a rich white couple, who pay for his schooling and help him get a job. Agee receives less attention, but remains at the school until his parents can no longer pay their portion of the tuition and Agee is forced to leave by the administration.

The film points out that when these two fourteen-year-olds arrive at St. Joseph's, both are academically at about the fourth or fifth grades. Gates moves through about four grade levels in one year, and seems to be on the path to success. Agee has less improvement, and the film does little to examine the issues of education up close. Yet at some point, for both boys, their transplant refuses take root. First Agee is kept from attending
school due to a balance owed, then he is forced to return to public school. Later, Gates faces injuries that keep him out of the game, and we meet his girlfriend with his new-born daughter. When Gates' performance on court falls short—after his long absence due to his injury—his world begins to fall apart.

While both boys do eventually end up in college and with families—boys to men—serious questions about education, family, racism, and opportunity arise from the text of the film. The most obvious area the film considers is the role of basketball as a dream and symbol of opportunity for young African American men. What basketball represents: god-like men with money, women, and regular T.V. coverage. What basketball really is: a money making enterprise that keeps young African American men from developing other important skills for survival and success in the American economic and political landscape. What basketball really is: yet another way for white culture to exploit minorities and make money off of it.

Responses to this film abounded when the Academy didn't nominate it for any significant awards. Outraged, many journalists deplored the reasoning behind this exclusion without really examining the film. Newsweek's commentary spent more time talking about why the Academy documentary screening committee was conservative than telling us about why this film is important and what we should have gotten from it. While we learn that "it's the films that have tried to push the documentary envelope that have been consistently overlooked," and that the "Academy feels
safer in the archives than on the streets," we never read any analysis of the film itself (71). In fact, many other films are mentioned and discussed, and the author's real point is that we take awards too seriously and that "probably more first-rate docs were made last year than good studio movies, but the form still struggles in obscurity" (72).

Margaret Spillane, writing for The Nation, gets closer to what the film was actually about and why we should acknowledge its importance as a story. She tells us that Kartemquin Films, a grass-roots Chicago based group, "achieves...something that can stop the heart" (333). That something, she describes, is a "life sized, tightly focused portraiture, within a sharp-edged frame of hopes dreamed amid economic depredation, racial discrimination and the international drug cartel's venture capitalism" (333). Urging us to believe in the importance of this story, she tells us that Hoop Dreams teaches us through "examples of how people with no connections to privilege summon monumental stores of faith and stamina to achieve--or not--what other citizens can have simply because of where and to whom they were born" (333).

Even still, one begins to wonder why there aren't more articles talking about what we've learned from Hoop Dreams and what we can do with what we've learned. It seems that the preoccupation with what the academy made of this film is just another way of being distracted by someone else's agenda and not setting our own--like young men waiting to be recognized on the court and "make it" to the big time. Two articles address the
film more directly, one by Verlyn Klinkenborg from The New Times, and one from bell hooks in Sight and Sound. Klinkenborg examines the myth of the ideal family in American media, looking at three documentaries including Hoop Dreams.

Challenging the "family values" rhetoric of politicians like Quayle, Limbaugh and Gingrich, Klinkenborg comments that "the realities of family life are always more diverse, more chaotic than politicians seem to remember" (2-1). Hoop Dreams, she claims, "challenge[s] this repressive fantasy of family life" (2-1). In Hoop Dreams we see complex family issues. We see Gates as a young father unable to be with his child or the child’s mother, unable to make time for them because he must be so focused on basketball. We see mothers losing their jobs, going to college, mothering with unreliable partners or without partners at all. We see fathers distanced from parenting roles that are lasting and binding. These families have strengths and weaknesses, but mostly they have few resources to cope with the complexities of their lives.

Klinkenborg’s analysis is that Hoop Dreams is a documentary that "remind[s] us of the high price that comes with admitting only a single model for successful family life" (2-20). Describing the film as "oblique and incidental in the way it presents family life," Klinkenborg believes that the film’s subjects find "their only refuge is family, no matter how imperfect or un-Republican it is" (2-20). In fact, Klinkenborg tells us that "nearly everything that happens in this film weighs
against the Gingrich-led attack on women who depend on welfare" (2-20). The truth revealed by the film is that women and men living in poverty have few real resources; jobs that pay minimum wages can't cover the costs of a family struggling to survive. Even when one has such a job, one is lucky to find it and keep it. Here high unemployment proves to be more than a statistic. Someone is experiencing it!

Klinkenborg posits that important in this film are the "scenes that...take place around the kitchen table, in the living room, within the emotional gravity of a strong if unconventional family core" (Klinkenborg 2-20). We meet Agee's mom and watch her work "as hard for her own ambitions as she does for her son's" (2-20). Making it through a small nursing program is a moving feat "precisely because the viewer has come to understand how remarkable, given the world that surrounds [Agee's mom], this achievement is" (2-20). Between scenes of basketball courts and screaming crowds, we meet the reality of living between games and off the court.

bell hooks' article examined Hoop Dreams and took her analysis beyond the boundaries of the other writers. Skeptical from the start about the intents of the talked-about-film, she comments that "in the U.S., when white folks want to see and enjoy images of black folks on the screen, it is often in no way related to a desire to know real black people" (22). As she watches the predominantly white crowd around her, hooks is aware of "the extent to which blackness has become commodified in this
society" (22). Instead of agreeing that this film is a great documentary, hooks proclaims its place is "within the continuum of traditional anthropological and/or ethnographic documentary works that show us the 'dark other' from the standpoint of whiteness" (22). Importantly, we must recognize the work of the filmmakers to enter this world, as hooks reminds us that "white filmmakers have crossed boundaries to enter [the world of the other], to document their subjects" (22). In the end hooks is moved as much as the rest of the audience, grateful that this film "acknowledges the positive aspects of black life that make survival possible" (22). For hooks the "most powerful moments" are those in which the filmmakers, with subtlety, display the "auction block mentality" of the basketball world the boys are thrust into (22). These moments, she says, "subversively document the way in which...young, strong, black male bodies are callously objectified and dehumanised by the white-male dominated world of sports administration in America" (22). She points out the tragedy of the film, mentioned earlier, which is that the boys, "their family and friends never imagine that they can be successful in any other way" except basketball (23).

hooks also criticizes the underpinnings of competition in the film. She identifies two forces at work in the film and in our society. One is the force of assimilation, which pushes us to conform to a majority set of values and beliefs that leave us de-ethnicized. On the other side, she sees "a logic of narrow nationalism, which suggests that staying within one's own group
is better because that is the only place where you can be safe, where you can survive" (23). Here she identifies the divergent reactions of our divided culture when faced with multicultural and diverse groups. The dominant culture demands conformity, the emerging ethnic groups demand independence and sovereignty. In the film, she adds, this narrow and "xenophobic" nationalism "wins" (23). Our obsession with sports seems to be a kind of spin-off from colonialism. hooks maintains that the ongoing competition in our lives leads us "to be seduced by the lure of domination, by conquest, by winning" which hooks and Mab Segrist, another feminist writer, believe "undergirds the structure of racism and sexism in the United States" (23).

In Hoop Dreams in general, we are seduced by the seeming magic of the game, the beautiful shots of bodies moving across the court, the shots that are slowed and paired with a dreamy soundtrack. We crave the basketball scenes as much as the players, unaware of the phoniness of our distraction. This desire to escape from the harsh realities and difficult jobs in our schools and neighborhoods pushes us to focus on the free-throw instead of the plays that take us out of the boundaries of the court and back into the realities of our lives.
Works Cited


The Legacy of Reaganomics:
Labor loses to the Multi-national

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Social Documentaries: American Dream
Dr. Gerry Veeder, R/TV/F
November 1995
The Legacy of Reaganomics: Labor Loses to the Multi-national

Barbara Kopple's film, *American Dream*, looks at the state of unions and the power of the strike in the political and economic milieu of the 80's. Kopple shows the complexities involved in taking on a company that is capable of moving production from one part of the country to another without loss, capable even of moving production to plants outside the United States. She brings the conflicts between local and parent unions into focus, and shows the conflicts inside a community which can't seem to hold a unified response to the company that exploits it. Leaving the viewer somewhat confused and uncertain about the good guys and the bad guys, this film brings us to a grey place in the struggles of labor.

The convoluted "plot" goes something like this. A local union in Austin Minnesota decides to take on the multi-national Hormel after the company cuts wages from $10.69 an hour to $8.25 an hour. The wage cuts are made in a year when Hormel reports a profit of 29.5 million dollars. Workers have connections to this company that go back as far as 200 years, and their dismay readily turns to anger. The parent union, led by Lewie Anderson, disagrees with Austin about how to deal with this company, pointing out that many meat packers in other parts of the country are making about six and a half dollars an hour. The local union hires Ray Rogers, a free-lance strategist for labor unions, whose strategy includes wide media coverage to gain the support of
Initially, the plan to strike brings the community together, and for several long months the enthusiasm and energy of the strikers carries them through poverty and failed attempts to gain the attention of Hormel executives. Rogers and Jim Guyette, (the president of the local union P-9,) attempt to rally support from other Hormel companies across the country, caravanning from one town to the next, speaking, and passing out fliers. This is partially in response to the rank and file of P-9 being dissatisfied with the concessionary stand the international bargaining crew from the parent union has presented to them. Many believe the parent union is in the way and unsupportive, and believe they can win their fight.

Kopple shows us the many facets of the arguments here. She takes us to the bargaining table with Lewie Anderson, and we get to hear what Anderson thinks is at stake. Anderson fears that P-9 is jeopardizing the wages of workers everywhere, and foresees the possibility that Hormel will close their plant and open another, hiring workers for five to six dollars an hour. Anderson is obviously a hard core bargainer; he's been at the table with many companies and represented unions in many countries. Anderson tells us that the unions are all under a lot more stress than usual. In the past, he explains, there would be problems with one group or another, but not more than one or two at the same time. Now, in the economic climate of the 80's, he tells us that everyone is in crisis at the same time.
In the beginning, Kopple shows us the slaughter house, perhaps reminiscent of Sinclair's *The Jungle*, except that these conditions are not conditions of rotting meat or a completely unsavory work setting. What's striking about it is the mundanity of huge, dead animals going through the process of becoming bacon and spam. Outside the meat packing plant we see Jesse Jackson in his 1986 campaign, speaking to the working men and women of America, probably one of the only political voices in favor of labor at this time.

The tensions that create the complexities of these films come from the struggle between grass-roots action and centralized planning and action. To the rank and file of the unions, the parent union is too huge to understand and not connected enough to their concerns. They want to see changes happen and action bring results. The necessity of the parent union is clear, however, when we see the local union trying to negotiate and write a contract on their own. It seems laughable that they could take on a company like Hormel and not get eaten alive. Anderson is sure that they will get eaten alive, sure that forty years worth of negotiation will be lost when they attempt to rewrite the contract. Rogers is accused by Anderson, Anderson by Rogers; no one seems to know what will work, but the rank and file of P-9 are confident of Rogers and Corporate Campaign.

The shattering truth at the end is that Anderson was somewhat right; strikers lose their jobs and very few get hired back. The ten dollar an hour wage gets into a contract, but not
one that those that stood the line can sign. Those that crossed the line were men and women who had been out of work many months, often years. The pressure of unemployment proves to be an advantage to Hormel. The community is distraught, and part of the Hormel plant is leased to another company which then hires workers for wages in the five to six dollar range. The aftermath is hard to analyze; the organization of the workers at certain moments was breath-taking. Families have gone for a year or more without work; morale of the men breaks down as they face no longer being the "bread winner" and face the extreme poverty of their families. Those that eventually cross the line experience an extreme pain, feeling that they no longer belong with the community that has been their lifeline for years. These men recall their fathers' and grandfathers' struggles with Hormel, and many feel they are betraying something scared. But they must pay for food, homes, and clothing somehow, and they are tired of public assistance.

Everyone ends up abandoning ship, and many people are forced to leave their homes and search for work elsewhere. Bitterness prevails. Where can this film have left us? Are we in the waste land?

Stuart Klawans points out in his article that "the P-9 members seem to have thought their company would remain non-antagonistic. When proved wrong they had the spirit to fight, but not the know-how" (426). Part of their disillusionment came from the fact that the world had changed without the people of
the insular Austin community being aware of it. Klawans says "they still believed the billboard at the city limits, which read, 'Austin—Where the Good Life is Here to Stay'" (426). The climate of the 80's was one in which multinationals began their steady increase and began the process of branching out to many industries, connecting money to from wide areas of public consumption to one company. Klawans describes American Dream as a film that "is both a sleek and gripping narrative of the P-9 strike and an argument, out forth with terrible urgency, against the calculated impoverishment of working people" (426).

Her argument certainly got to someone, because when she was done filming, one major investor pulled out of the project completely. Supposedly "the threat of a suit made distribution impossible" (427). Made for the large audiences of the American cinema, this film did eventually come out in 1992, and enjoyed a great deal of attention. Her argument, however, was not clear to everyone. As Joan Juliet Buck interprets the film, American Dream "is about idealism and the excitement of action, and in the end is an indictment of action and its concurrent heedlessness" (256).

What Buck misses is that careful analysis reveals no one was really right or wrong. Rogers' strategy of attracting the media and pulling unions across the country together was nearly effective, and posed a realistic way to play ball with the Hormel. Having P-9 negotiate alone was a mistake; but the mistake was really a result of internal tensions that kept
organizers from working together at pivotal moments. Buck's analysis implies that we should all just give up on trying to effect change in multi-national companies. She sums it up with: "Perhaps it is safer to just go on riding around all night, to avoid the late-industrial malaise" (256).

If Kopple thought this was the solution she wouldn't have produced the film. Obviously she hopes we will watch it and wake up. In this film she uses more voice over and she brings us up to speed often, tying the complexities of the plot together so that we can make sense of it. While it's true, as King points out, that Kopple's story was unable to penetrate the layers of the Hormel bureaucracy, the lack of footage from Hormel tells us something. In one of the only moments we meet or hear from Hormel executives they admit they are unafraid of the actions being taken by their workers and warn that these actions will only result in worse circumstances than what's being offered now. However, Kopple wants us to believe that as citizens and consumers we do have power; we can buy less from multi-nationals and lobby Congress for regulation. The footage of Reagan at the beginning of this film is supposed to remind us of the activities Reagan engaged in that allowed companies like Hormel to do whatever they wanted with our economy; the activity he engaged in most was deregulation of big business and back to laissez-faire.

Kopple's film allows a look into labor that we may never find anywhere else. The attitudes of those that own these
companies and who live in the protected classes are the attitudes that the "haves" have always had about the "have-nots."

Embarrassingly true, the landscape which Swift wrote about nearly three hundred years ago is very similar to the one we face now. Patricia King remarks about one moment in Kopple's film:

When workers passing out P-9 literature show up at the doorstep of Hormel president Richard Knowlton, whose salary was boosted more than $200,000 at a time when union wages were slashed by 23 percent...like a latter-day Marie Antoinette, Knowlton's wife lectures from behind the front door of her beautifully manicured home: "Do you know how many people would love to have your job at $8.75 an hour with all those nice benefits?" Her words are condescending, but also prescient. (49)

It is precisely because of the pressures from unemployment and deregulation all over that workers are in crisis everywhere and willing to cross picket line, thereby nullifying the power of the strike! Kopple's film is increasingly important in our world, which has only begun to witness a few citizens gathering information and protesting these company policies through lobbying and refusal to buy from or invest in these companies. The legacy of Reaganomics lives on as we struggle with deficit management and deciding where to cut spending. Republicans like Gingrich continue to know little and do little for the families that need help the most--real help, not a Contract for America. Kopple's film illustrates for us the struggles of these families
and shows us the roots of our misunderstandings about economics. Multi-nationals have no accountability, and we have lost the bargaining edge we once had as workers. The question now is, how do we retrieve the purse strings?

Works Cited


Education, Opportunity and Class Struggle:
The Call to Service in 28 Up

Sarah Oglesby
Senior

Honors Colloquium: Social Documentaries
Dr. Gerry Veeder, R/TV/F
Education, Opportunity and Class Struggle:
The Call to Service in 28 Up
Sarah Oglesby

When filmmaker Michael Apted challenges his audience—"give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man"—in Granada T.V.'s 28 Up, complex issues of social class, education and psychology arise. Beginning with seven-year olds in 1973 and originally titled 7 Up, Apted's film traces the expectations of these children into their adult lives. Fourteen children from a variety of social class backgrounds tell us whether or not they have a boy/girl friend, what they want to be when they grow up, where they think they will go to school or get training for the future, and what their interests are. We meet them all later as teenagers, then again at age twenty-one, then again at age twenty-eight. Each time we hear about their relationships, their goals, and the education or training that they expect to get them to their goals. We hear about their expectations for the future and their perspectives on where they are in their own development. For example, we meet young Tony, who wants to be jockey but ends up a cabby; we also meet young Bruce who wants to be a missionary and becomes a public school teacher and socialist.

As one follows the early interviews, one finds some of the children have a detailed awareness of the school systems and the range of possibilities offered there. These children relate their expectations of attending Oxford or Cambridge and their young
interests in newspapers such as The Financial Times. Most of the children who expressed this awareness did in fact attend college and enjoy an intellectually elite place in the middle class. The children who were least aware of the process of education and its tangible benefits in fact did not attend college or get beyond the working middle class. While the interviews reveal a certain essence of personality in each child, the audience is able to connect tangible results, such as eventual career choices, with early development. Ranging from energetic hopefulness to reflective acceptance, these interviews give the audience a glance into the reality of limited life chances for individuals developing in a hierarchical society.

Apted's interest in connecting the materials of seven-year-olds with the materials of their twenty-eight-year-old selves is not defined in the voice-over or text of the interviews. Very little of the interviewer's voice and questions are heard; most of what we hear comes from the fourteen subjects themselves and is connected by footage of the subjects. We don't see the interviewers on camera. The introductory information is brief and content oriented, without any interpretive guidance. By the end, when we hear a triumphant voice exclaim "give me the child until he is seven and I will give you the man," one is left with a complex set of questions. Is Apted indicating the inevitability of social class structures, and therefore asking us to just "let it be," or does he hope to leave us with the intention of intervening in childhood development to create real
opportunities for some children? Should we celebrate the predictability of our adult lives, or should we be angry?

These issues are unclear for several reasons. The adults seem satisfied with the overall results of their lives; most are married and employed, although the differences in education have created vast differences in occupations. If they aren't bitter about the results, why should we be?, one tends to want to ask. As Stanley Kauffman demonstrates in his review, it's possible to walk away with the impression that the film is "both fascinating and cheering" (25), and that "the dice couldn't very well have been loaded back there in 1963 when the children were chosen" (25). While Kauffman finds that "without exception, all of these young men and women are better-looking now than when they were children" (25), an itchy doubt stirs the conscious mind. The film seems to represent lives devoid of tension; the couples report no marital distress and the singles report no sense of "something missing." There are no revolutionaries here, and virtually no one expressing deep doubts. Without deconstructing the comments of the participants, one might use this film to prove the necessity of a hierarchy of roles.

"I'm not a politician, so let them worry about what's coming next. All I understand is dog races, horses, girls, streets, squares, mom and dad and love...it's all I ever need to know." These are the thoughts of twenty-one-year-old Tony, whose dream of becoming a jockey vanishes into the worlds of dog races and cab driving. As a married man and father, Tony speaks of the
stability of his home life and the importance of meaningful connections with his family. When asked about the role of education in his opportunities at age twenty one, Tony expresses a deep cynicism about the true content of education; he implies the furtherance of class distinctions as the only goal of Britain's education system.

At twenty-eight, Tony admits the important connections between education and opportunity in his society. However, he returns to the opportunities other than education which are now accessible to him, such as travel and middle class products like fashionable clothing. During some shots of Tony and his publican friends on a golf course, the audience sees the contrast between his group and the upper class groups who are also on the course. Clothing in the publican group is sporty and casual, while the other groups wear clothing suitable for an afternoon business lunch. Tony admits a tension exists, but seems uninterested in connecting that tension with policies or issues or opportunities. Later, we see Tony taking amateur acting classes and hear him discuss the possibility of owning a pub with his wife in few years.

In other words, one gets the impression that Tony has some ideas about new directions in the future, has a hobby which may expand his horizons, and feels satisfied with the home life he participates in. The question that comes to mind, then, is whether consumer identity has become the "opium of the people." Is Tony satisfied because he is able to consume the major symbols
of middle class society—vacations, nice clothes, leisure interests—and is therefore uninterested in the larger issues of the political arena and limits of working class opportunities due to class struggle?

Because consumerism has swept the industrialized world, the lines between middle class and working class are less clear. The availability of low-cost quality clothing as well as the prevalence of credit has brought many household items and "luxuries" to working class homes, such as stereos, computers, TV's, VCR's, blenders, washing machines, and more. Apted's film shows us several people who live in this grey area. Similar to Tony's story is the story of Simon, a working class black man whose interest in being an astronaut at age seven is lost in adulthood. Simon demonstrates a level of unconsciousness when we hear him say "everybody gets the same start in life," just some of us like to get through life nice and easy, no waves, and some of us want to be ambitious and fight our way through. As a fourteen-year-old, Simon answers the question concerning adult jobs with, "I'll just work 'round." He gets a job at a factory freezer room which at twenty-one he anticipates leaving, but at twenty-eight seems committed to staying with. Simon's believes that his early life in the children's home in London gave him a sense of discipline and routine, which translate for him into freedom. He conveys commitment to his wife and five kids, and admits to a general indifference to moving or traveling and a "narrow view" of life as a result. Simon wants "nothing too
"marvelous" and when the interviewer asks if he ever wanted to "fight" the norms of society his answer is plainly, "no, not really.

In the United States Simon would undoubtedly be an "Uncle Tom." The viewer can't possibly accept that black men and women in Britain have absolutely no institutional barriers to their progress. Even the interviewer seems incredulous to the passivity of Simon's answers. At twenty-one Simon says he could never stay at the freezer room or his "mind would go dead." One wonders, is your mind dead? when one sees him still punching the time card seven years later.

In contrast to London-bound Simon we meet Paul, who emigrated to Australia as a boy and now is a contract brick layer. As a seven-year-old, Paul wanted to be a policeman. Having made it to the University in Melbourne, Paul chooses a lifestyle of camping in the outback with his wife and living as an "average family" with his wife Susan and their two kids. He hopes his kids will enjoy the next step up from his lifestyle, and agrees that education brings choices. Given the choice, he would send his kids to private schools and feels that anyone can send their kids to private school if he just makes it a priority. During this segment of the film the music score sounds like an outdoors meditation tape with lyrical melodies, which brings a mystical and spiritual quality to his responses. Here we seem to be witnessing the triumph of everyman; he's a working man but he's in touch with himself. Anyone could be where his is,
couldn't they?

In Nick, the farmer's son, the answer seems to be yes. Nick's early interests in the moon and the natural workings of his outdoor surroundings eventually take Nick to Oxford for a degree in Physics. He is the only kid his age in his town, and spends most of his time working on the farm or wandering the countryside. At age seven he answers the question about girl friends by saying he doesn't answer questions like that, and this attitude continues as a sort of "what about them?" Nick's wife at twenty-eight is assertive and educated, conveying a confidence and independence which few other wives in the film convey. From Nick we hear that none of what he is today would be possible without the opportunity of attending University. Speaking to us from as a professor in the American university system, Nick is a rare case of the working man's son having made it to university.

Two other educated men seem to bridge the upper and working class by advocating for general education over private schools, although in some respects they represent an antithesis of each other. Bruce, whose private education and career in insurance get abandoned for teaching in the public schools of the East end of London (the very school Tony attended as a kid), speaks articulately of class struggle and socialism. He believes that private schools create class distinctions. He is also the only interviewee that mentions racism directly and connects his thoughts with immigration policies and unemployment issues. The other man, Peter, teaches at a comprehensive school after getting
a degree at London University. While Bruce communicates a love of teaching, Peter communicates general boredom and laziness. The only enthusiasm he expresses is over a rock band he used to play with. He says he believes in public schools in principle and admits that private schools keep the old system going. While he expresses cynicism for a government that he believes is incompetent and uncaring, his language is not the language of revolution, and his energy seems too low to make any difference.

In complete contrast we meet the three rich kids of the film, John, Andrew, and Charles. John, who makes it through his expected destinations of Westminster Law and Oxford expresses his class beliefs that "not everyone can be at the top," and insists that he "worked to get here." He believes that everyone has the right to education as they see fit under the current system, even though he admits as a twenty-one year old that knowledge of options is in fact access to options. He imagines that the schools he attended would have been "nasty and crowded" had one not had to pay for them, missing completely the point he has just made FOR getting rid of the private system. He seems oblivious to the reality that the public schools are nasty and crowded. John wants us to see the complexity of their lives and fears being typecast as the little rich kid. John may not seem complex, but Andrew and Charles give us a little less to be critical of.

At twenty-eight Andrew describes himself as a "precocious brat" of a child, remembering his own responses to the
interviews. "I read the Financial Times because I have shares in them...except on Mondays—they don’t run them on Mondays," says young Andrew. A solicitor whose career took him from Charter Law to Cambridge, he marries down-to-earth Jane and expresses both sides of the arguments about private education. He tells us that he’ll probably send his kids to private school because he doesn’t think that not doing so is going to solve the problem. His awareness is echoed by that of Charles, who stands out with long hair at age twenty-one. Charles wants "enough money" and anticipates a career at a newspaper. Not only does he become a reporter for some time, but eventually we hear that he has become an assistant producer of documentaries! He and John opt out of the last interviews at age twenty-eight.

The women in the film seem to end up married mothers regardless of their early opportunities. Suzy, the only upper class girl, seems the most satisfied with the timing of her marriage--she got married at age 22--and the results of it all. She will send her children to private school, but not as young as she herself went. Her husband is a partner in a solicitor’s office and she has given up her secretarial training to be at home. The other three women married at about age nineteen, and work--as do their husbands--and all have concerns about money. Each equates her happiness with her husband and her marriage as well as her children, although Jackie is the only one without kids. They want to be taken seriously, and think they deserve kudos for working and raising kids. Seeming somewhat tired and
cynical, these three defend their choices thoroughly. I paused to wonder what they'd say in twenty years. Sue mentions the pressure on young couples to have children and admits she misses being young.

The one interviewee that seems to completely reject consumerism and class identity is Neil. Starkly contrasted to everyone else, Neil is unemployed and collecting social security. He admits to a condition which he calls a "nervous complaint" but which appears to be manic-depression when he describes his highs and lows. He expresses many beliefs about the opportunities of the world he lives in. He tells us that social security is necessary to avoid putting people in the position of having to steal for necessities. Formal education doesn't prepare one for life, he reminds us. He warns us that society encourages us to head for "the suburban train" where we are asked to plug into our TV's and brainwash ourselves into a state of little thought and the "cheap satisfactions" of materialism. He feels his parents didn't teach him how to evaluate the world around him or live in it. In Neil's world, "God is unpredictable" and there is "no way out, no immediate future at all."

Neil expresses content with his travelling and state of flux. He would rather have a conversation about literature than shoot the breeze in a pub. He would like to do tech work in a theater, perhaps. He is introspective about his life, the choices he makes, and his "nervous condition." He blames no one for his life and names it a kind of anarchy to consumer life.
In many ways this film leaves us to judge for ourselves; who do we agree with, who seems most like us? If I walk away thinking Bruce the socialist teacher is the one I agree with most, is it only because he appeals to me more for expressing a view I already shared or because he really stood out? Even the final voice over is ambiguous. "This has been a glimpse of Britain's future..." says the voice, followed by dramatic music.

In his review of the film for Time magazine, Richard Corliss concludes that this film is about "the end of childhood dreams, and the notion of maturity as surrender to somebody else's status quo" (73). The title of his review, "Growing Up, Old and Fat," reveals a very different idea about the film than Stan Kauffman's. Corliss sums up these interviews as evidence of "Britain's defeat in every tentative sense," suggesting "accommodation to life's dreary compromises at an age when one might hope for a lingering anarchic impudence" (73). Molly Haskell writes in Vogue that the interviewees seemed like "round pegs fitting into smoothly round holes" (103). She adds that "ironically, although divided more than ever by class as adults, they sound more alike. The mindset of mediocrity has won" (103). In Christianity Today, Stefan Ulstein summarizes this film as one that "raises compelling questions about the effects of environment and parental expectations on a child's success in life" (64). He recommends it as a "helpful resource for parents, teacher's and youth workers who desire to help mold the lives of children" (64).
This film certainly raises questions about race, class, education and opportunities that need to be raised. While the answers may not be suggested directly, indirectly we come back to the issue of public and private education. The answers seem to be linked to resolving the inequities that arise from private education, although specific solutions are not outlined. Because the issues are complex and not clearly defined, Apted's film serves as a place to begin discussing our options, not a place to look for a detailed plan of attack. Perhaps Ulstein targeted the appropriate audience most accurately. Teachers, parents, and youth worker's who have already begun to care about and consider the issues of education, expectation and opportunity are most likely to interpret a meaningful message in these interviews. The unexamined life brings no insight to these interviews, but the thoughtful viewer brings initiative and energy to the directions being pointed out. Apted's film is a call to service for those who are already concerned with these issues. We are reminded of the importance of the intervention programs we have initiated in the last twenty years, American programs like Headstart, Upward Bound, and Talent Search which find the children without opportunities. His film asks us to think of more ideas and to reach more children, urges us to consider the future as one in which we will have few leaders representing the middle and working classes unless we address their needs now.
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The Role of Documentaries:
Getting Off the Bus and Exploring the Territory

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Social Documentaries: Summary Paper
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The Role of Documentary Films:  
Getting Off the Tour Bus and Exploring the Territory  

Documentarist Barbara Kopple describes "one of the great things about documentaries" which "is that there are no actors and there are no scripts; you simply follow real-life people and events" (Winokour 31). This comment might lead one to believe that documentarists film without making ethical decisions and without shaping the content of the film. After watching several films, reading many articles, and reading a book on the history of documentaries, I don't need someone to tell me that the truth about documentaries is more complex. However, in grappling with this complexity, I realized the power of documentaries to present complex issues as well as to hide complexities. Skills in critical analysis must be employed when one views a documentary, skills similar to those employed when reading literature or when reading the newspaper. This is clear from the beginning, as discussed in Eric Barnouw's history of non-fiction film, where the reader learns about one of the first social documentarists, John Grierson.

Grierson's career in documentary films began with his "[sense] that film and other popular media had acquired leverage over ideas and actions once exercised by church and school" (Barnouw 85). What accounts for this shift in leverage? Popular media and film have access to people in ways that the church and even our schools do not. As consumers, we interact with these forms of communication in so many different ways that it becomes impossible to extract ourselves from them.
Television, videos, movies, and mass media press such as *Newsweek* all infiltrate our lives at every level to create images about our society and its functions.

In turn, we must attempt to examine their messages in order to find a meaningful reaction. Eventually these messages and images become a kind of cultural paradigm, which Barnouw describes as a mythology. Our prevailing mythology has obscured important relationships in our society between citizens and decision makers, a situation which led Grierson, among others, "to feel...that expectations once held for democracy were proving illusory" (Barnouw 85). Contemporary complexities, as Grierson saw it and many still see it, have created "problems... [which] ha[ve] grown beyond the comprehension of most citizens" (85). This has made many feel that "their participation" in solving problems "ha[s] become perfunctory, apathetic, meaningless, often nonexistent" (85). Many of us have moved from being citizens to being consumers, and often uninformed consumers and social actors. Barnouw says the documentarist "is likely to run counter to endlessly recycled mythologies...indeed, his/[her] work may well be considered a kind of subversion--an essential one" (315). In this perspective, the role of the documentarist it one of leader and interpreter.

The basic belief that "the documentary film maker, dramatizing issues and their implications in a meaningful way, could lead the citizen through the wilderness" pushes men and women like Barbara Kopple and Michael Apted to produce non-
fiction films (Barnouw 85). In the films American Dream, Harlan County USA, 28 Up, and Hoop Dreams one sees the work of artists who have, as Orvell describes it, "exercis[ed] the authority of observation (an authority that is visible in ethnography, sociology, and psychiatric observation as well)" (10). This authority is then used to "[establish] an ethical norm that is implicit in the narrative and that we are asked to identify with: we are 'for' the victims of oppression" (Orvell 10).

How do they do this? As each documentary follows human lives through important issues and life struggles, the themes of individuals fighting marginalization and bettering one's social and economic prospects are interwoven with class and race issues. Filmed cinema verite and direct cinema style¹, these films are a result of the questions and research of the filmmakers, with little use of voice-over. Although none of these films fits the problem-solution format, two develop a clear point of view--Hoop Dreams and Harlan County USA. However, all of these films imply the possibility of solutions to the problems portrayed without directly presenting them. Each film has a unique style in presenting its issues, ranging from distanced and action-oriented footage to a more direct dialogue and interview style of filming that brings a sense of self-evaluation.

Looking at the work of filmmaker Barbara Kopple in her

¹ Cinema Verite is a style in which the filmmaker sets up a situation or provokes people's responses. Direct Cinema is observatory, with no voice over and an implicit point of view. Problem/solution filming gives a clear argument for a strategy in solving an outlined problem.
feature length documentaries *American Dream* and *Harlan County, USA*, Orvell notes that "Kopple works within the relatively traditional documentary forms that Bill Nichols calls expository and observational" (10). The questions asked from behind her cameras usually aren't included in the film, and one gets the sense of very little interaction between the camera person and the subject. This is much more true of *Harlan County, USA* than of *American Dream*. *American Dream* is simply much more complex; the issues presented can't be accessed by merely observing. The complexity must be explored by both the camera/filmmaker and the audience in order to know its parameters. More questions are asked of the subjects being filmed, more subtitles explain relationships on screen, more voice over is used in *American Dream*.

Kopple's filming is described in *The Nation* as "moving; it's absorbing; it understands everything but is too wise to pardon all" (Klawans 42). The power of the form itself is subtle, and one finds there is an inherent tension between the subject and the filmer when the documentarist sets him/herself up to be the "observer." The reality that such a documentarist makes choices over which the subject has no control has led some to criticize this traditional filming tactic. Orvell states that "it is important to recognize that Kopple's documentary mode is...squarely in the mainstream of the tradition" (14). This means that her work "offer[s] us the implicit spectacle of a sympathetic observer...picturing the powerless for the
information (and often entertainment) of the more powerful" (14).

In other words, Orvell feels that "Kopple extends [the]
tradition[al] [filming paradigm] without essentially questioning
it" (14). This statement is true for all of the films I viewed
this semester, and represents an important criticism of
documentary films. While these films may help us to know a
segment of society or an issue in society of which we have little
knowledge, we are like a group on a tour bus as we watch these
films. We aren't connected in any essential way to the problems
on camera; we are sympathetic but not empathetic. While these
films were able to reach fairly large audiences, they did not
reach the kinds of audiences and numbers that a T.V. program at
prime time or a block buster movie would reach. They continue to
be examined in film schools and sociology classes--academia--but
probably aren't ranked with pro-football and talk shows in terms
of viewing. Even when large audiences got to see them--as with
Hoop Dreams--those audiences were often largely white, largely
middle class viewers. One gets the sense that these films are
better handled with a facilitated discussion than simple
digestion followed by a return to "business as usual."

For the viewer that arrives at the text of these films with
a social conscience and desire to take action, there are implied
messages about what we should be doing and what we should
investigating as citizens. Indeed, the reality that the filmer
has an agenda is apparent because "the documentarist makes
endless choices. He selects topics, people, vistas, angles,
lenses, juxtapositions, sounds, words" (Barnouw 313). Throughout this process it becomes clear that "each selection is an expression of his/[her] point of view, whether [s]he acknowledges it or not" (313). In Kopple's films we are asked to side with the struggles of labor and the unions. In American Dream in particular we are asked to see our role as consumers as a powerful role that influences decisions in companies in regard to their treatment of employees. This message is implied when we see Hormel plant workers attempting to catch the attention of the public and effect a boycott of Hormel products. Another way we are asked to be powerful agents of change for workers is found in the scenes when stock holders are asked to pressure the company into giving in to the workers' demands. While the viewer is not directly asked to participate, the notion that someone in the film is being called to service should alert the viewer to a similar call.

Hoop Dreams and 28 Up reveal serious educational conditions that allow society to reproduce a debilitating class structure--often based on racist and sexist ideologies--which we support through property tax funding of schools and a system of both private and public schools. Although Apted's films are filmed in England, there are significant parallels between the U.S. education system and England's, especially in the debate over private versus public education.

Hoop Dreams displays the system by which underprivileged minorities are deprived of educational environments and
opportunities available to middle class and white children. This film also depicts a system of distracting children from underprivileged groups with a "pot of gold under the rainbow." Here, basketball is presented as a mythological means to earning power and a permanent place in American history and the American imagination. However, if one isn't paying attention, _Hoop Dreams_ can actually distract the viewer as much the ball game distracts the subjects of the film. The shots of basketball dominate the footage of this film, beautiful and powerful, tense and immediate. For the viewer caught by these images, the stories of a mother that finally makes it through nursing school, a father trying to kick a drug habit and find work, the scarcity of work for inner city inhabitants, and the harsh realities of inner city schools are stories that get lost.

Documentarists face many difficulties and challenges when filming. Kopple faced problems with her subjects--some of the upper echelons of the Hormel company weren't at all open to her cameras filming their activities. Orvell comments that "Kopple's camera is thus witness" to the reality "that management controls the discourse and can exclude or limit her presence from the decision-making process as much as it can the worker's" (13). Even when a filmmaker wants to show the complexity of an issue, cooperation from one's subjects can be a challenge. Apted faced this problem when his subjects began to decline participation in his longitudinal filming project. Some decided at age twenty eight and thirty five that the filming was
too intrusive in their lives. One subject's wife refused to be filmed because she claimed that the footage of her at twenty-eight had made her appear negatively and she'd received unpleasant comments related to it. The same couple refused to have their two-year-old baby filmed. One subject that refused to be included at age twenty-eight agreed at thirty-five in order to plug a cause he was involved with!

Kopple comments that she had some advantages which other filmmakers might not have. In an interview she explained that "being a woman helps, because you can be a lot more intimate. People aren't as intimidated by you and you can ask things maybe a male would have a tougher time doing" (Winokour 32). She also points to the most important quality of the documentarist--whose work is similar to both journalism and investigation--"I'm persistent," she says (32).

Kopple also discusses funding as a prevalent issue for documentarists. As Klawans notes in his article, "projects such as American Dream don't get made without money from many investors, both large and small" (42). In Kopple's case, "one of them [an investor] wanted his money back immediately, even before the film laboratory was paid for processing" (42). This problem was related to "the threat of a suit [which] made distribution impossible" (Klawans 42). In general, getting funding and a good distributor are related to convincing others that the film will have an audience and that its message for that audience is urgent and compelling.
"Message" is a benign word which some would decline to use. Documentary is a kind of propaganda, according to Barnouw. Indeed, Barnouw explains that influential Grierson "believed in 'the elect having their duty'" (85). He believed that documentarists "must not only explain, they must inspire. He was not frightened by the word 'propaganda.'" (85). The word propaganda can be disturbing for many, especially those that think of the pro-Hitler documentaries such as "Triumph of the Will," which "was considered an overwhelming propaganda success, rallying many to the Hitler cause" (Barnouw 105). We tend to think of propaganda as a form that controls our actions and causes us to engage in activities we might not otherwise engage in.

However, Barnouw reminds us that "...documentary should be seen as a very difficult medium for propaganda, precisely because it confronts its subject matter openly. It announces its topic," he says, and explains that these same films were used to show the menace of Nazi Germany and the maniacal behaviors of its leadership (314). In conclusion, Barnouw's comments encourage us to pay attention to the kind of images we call "propaganda" with distaste and those which we accept as "truth." Usually those ideologies and beliefs which we accept without analysis are the result of effective propaganda. Those which we reject as blatant attempts at controlling our actions are simply ineffective propaganda. According to Barnouw, "the irony is that we invoke this word just when a film has failed as propaganda"
So how does a documentarist effectively inform his/her audience? When Winokour approaches Kopple by asking "How do you keep your biases from getting in the way of the story unfolding?" Kopple answers:

I let my biases get in the way. I'm not objective at all in my filmmaking. With American Dream, I figured that if you're going to be out filming in weather that's sixty below with the wind-chill factor, you'd better care about something. Something's got to keep you warm inside. I just hope that I'm responsible to the people I'm filming. (32)

Kopple never makes clear what she means by "responsible to the people I'm filming." Which people? Responsible in what way?, I want to ask. All of these films depict people who can be interpreted as protagonists and antagonists. It seems impossible that everyone she filmed in American Dream and Harlan County USA would happy with the way her camera caught them. It seems impossible that everyone would feel that her films depict the stories they've lived in the way that each subject would have told the story.

Clearly, documentary films can bring issues of importance to their viewers. As a form, these films allow the idea-makers of today to connect with their audiences through a different medium of communication. This medium, they hope, will allow them to capture our imaginations and move us to at least think about issues which we might not otherwise consider. As viewers,
however, we must be alert and analytical—prepared to ask ourselves about footage that seems to give only one perspective and subjects that seem to be responding to a stimulus we may never see or hear. As idea-makers ourselves, we can be inspired to action and collaboration, aware of the issues presented and ready to return to our work in our communities to solve problems and make needed changes.

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