

Documentary in the 1990s

Ken Burns, Errol Morris & Michael Moore

Context

Major trend in 1980s-90s - proliferation of cable channels

positive & negative effects

- quantity of programming increased substantially

- cost & quality decrease

- ethical concerns about use/misuse of footage

- merchandising

Cable channels commission documentaries - HBO Showtime

Cinemax

American Public Television

3 arms of public television in USA

CPB - Corporation of Public Broadcasting

chartered by Congress – no guarantee of long
term financial support

PBS network

PBS affiliates - e.g. KOCE in Orange County

KCET in Los Angeles, former affiliate

Since 1988 Independent Television and Video Service – ITVS
Congress-funded PBS service to fund documentaries

ITVS – Independent Television and Video Service

Mission - to create & present independently produced programs
that engage creative risks

advance issues

represent points of view not usually seen

Committed - to programs addressing the need of underserved
& underrepresented audiences

to bringing new voices into the public discourse

Funds allotted - 7 million dollars a year

mostly to documentaries

Documentaries shown stand-alone or on PBS series

Frontline *P.O.V.*

American Masters *American Experience*

Ken Burns

His historical documentaries – biggest PBS success story in 20 years

The Civil War (1990) - deep & long-lasting effect on PBS docs

style

funding

audience development

Changed the way we think about historical documentaries

the “Ken Burns” style of compilation film

Burns – born 1953 – had been making films for PBS before

1982 *The Brooklyn Bridge*

1985 *The Statue of Liberty*

Ken Burns – bold public persona - like Flaherty & Grierson
combines talent & sincerity

Goal - to use documentary as a visual/sound tool
to write history for a large audience

First & foremost – a US historian

documenting the social & cultural changes
through individuals & institutions

Works with a sponsoring PBS station, WETA – Washington D.C.

Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities

major corporate sponsors, e.g. General Motors

The Civil War 1990

Burns' masterwork

collaborative effort – artistically & intellectually

visually & aurally elegant

made on film

engages the audience in emotional non-fictional experiences

Nine episodes covering the Civil War, its causes & aftermath

Other documentaries by Burns

The Vietnam War 2017

The Roosevelts 2014

The Dust Bowl 2012

Prohibition 2011

Baseball 1994-2010

The National Parks: America's Best Idea 2009

The War 2007

Mark Twain 2001

Jazz 2001

Frank Lloyd Wright 1998

Lewis & Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery 1997

Thomas Jefferson 1997

Empire of the Air 1991

Michael Moore

Filmmaker, author & political activist

Born Michigan 1954

Following graduation from high school began his populist assault on what he viewed as the injustices of US capitalism

Burst onto the American cultural scene in the 1980s

an extroverted rabble-rouser

who hitched his political message

to the medium of satirical comedy

in a crusade to rouse the national conscience

against corporate injustice

Michael Moore & documentary

Uses sensationalism & humor to capture the audience

Best-selling author & box-office success

Cultural celebrity

Master of publicity stunts in documentaries & outside

Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004) - theatrical documentary phenomenon

Presents serious issues in an unusual & effective form

Seriocomic entertainment

Uses self-reflexivity & introspection for comedic purposes

Marries explicit ideological messages to

commercially successful documentary filmmaking

Documentaries by Michael Moore

Capitalism: A Love Story 2009

Sicko 2007

Slacker Uprising 2007

Bowling for Columbine 2002

The Awful Truth 1999- 2000 TV documentary series

The Big One 1997

Roger & Me 1989

Books

Stupid White men 2001

Dude, Where's My Country? 2002