

# Documentary Films

strictly speaking, are non-fictional, "slice of life" factual works of art - and sometimes known as *cinema verite*.

A documentary film is a movie that attempts, in some way, to document reality. Even though the scenes are carefully chosen and arranged, they are not scripted, and the people in a documentary film are not actors. Sometimes, a documentary film may rely on voice-over narration to describe what is happening in the footage; in other films, the footage will speak for itself. Often, a documentary film will include interviews with the people in the film.

# Origin of the Documentary

- Originally, the earliest documentaries in the US and France were either short newsreels, instructional pictures, records of current events, or travelogues (termed *actualities*) without any creative story-telling, narrative, or staging. The first attempts at film-making, by the Lumiere Brothers and others, were literal documentaries, e.g., a train entering a station, factory workers leaving a plant, etc.
- Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, better known for **King Kong (1933)**, directed the landmark documentary **Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life (1925)**, the first documentary epic, which traced the travels of the Bakhtyari tribe in Persia during their migrational wanderings to find fresh grazing lands. The filmmakers' next film was the part-adventure, travel documentary filmed on location in the Siamese (Thailand) jungle, **Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness (1927)**, about a native tribal family.

# Famous Documentary Film-makers:

- **Barbara Kopple** -
- Director Barbara Kopple's **Harlan County, USA (1976)**, another Academy Award winner for Best Documentary, documented a Kentucky coal miners' strike in the early 1970s against the Eastover Mining Company. She also directed a second Oscar-winning documentary film on labor struggles, **American Dream (1990)**, about striking employees at a Hormel meat-packing plant in Austin, Minnesota. In addition, she filmed an in-depth documentary on comedian/musician/director Woody Allen and his 1996 jazz band tour of Europe, titled **Wild Man Blues (1997)**.
- **Michael Moore** – Moore is well known for his films:
- **Bowling for Columbine (2002)**, the Best Documentary Feature Academy Award-winner, presented the US' trigger-happy obsession with gun rights, violence, and the American culture of fear, including a remarkable interview with NRA spokesman/actor Charlton Heston. The film was the first documentary to compete in the Cannes Film Festival's main competition in 46 years, and was the unanimous winner of the festival's 55th Anniversary Prize.
- Another critical expose, Moore's **Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004)** provided a scathing indictment of President George W. Bush's handling of the terrorist crisis and his alleged connections to Al-Qaeda leader Bin Laden's family. The documentary film was included among the Cannes Film Festival's main competition (only the second time in 48 years for a documentary) - and won the top prize - the first for a documentary in nearly 50 years. Moore's film set box-office records as the highest-grossing non-concert, non-IMAX documentary film of all time - and at the time the only one ever to win a box-office weekend during its debut showing. His next film was the searing look at the American health care system, **Sicko (2007)**.

# Supersize me – a Documentary

- [http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/super\\_size\\_me/](http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/super_size_me/)