

Hist 615: Digital History Documentary



Digital History Documentary
History 615
Fall 2004
FAB 202
W 7:20-10:00

Office: Robinson B 335
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and by appointment
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SCHEDULE

Wednesday,
September 1 — Housekeeping & Introductions

LEARNING TO LOOK

Wednesday,
September 8 — Reading:
Eric Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film*
Viewing:
Ken Burns, *Civil War, Pt. 1*
Daniel McCabe & Paul Stekler, *George Wallace*
Internet Visit:
The Civil War
<http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/film/video.html>
Practicum: Getting the Shot

Wednesday,
September 15 — Reading:
Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties*
Viewing:
Eric Strange, *Murder at Harvard*
Ken Burns, *Lewis & Clark*
Internet Visit:
Eric Strange, "Shooting Back"
<http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-03/stange/>
Practicum: Digitizing Stills

ASSIGNMENT #1: SCENE ANALYSIS DUE

Select a scene from one of the four documentaries that we have viewed. In a 500–750-word blog entry, analyze both “what” documentary does in terms of history and “how” specifically in terms of video does it make the point. Conclude your entry by evaluating how effective the scene is in furthering the documentary as a whole.

VIDEO SOURCES

Wednesday,
September 22

—

Internet Visits:

Andy Schocken, "Old Glory"

http://atomfilms.shockwave.com/af/content/old_glory

Ephemeral Films

<http://www.archive.org/movies/movies.php>

iMovieFest

<http://www.imoviefest.com/>

American Memory: Motion Picture Collections

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi->

[bin/query/S?ammem/collections:@field\(FLD003+@band\(origf+Motion+Picture\)\):heading=Original+Format%3a+Motion+Pictures](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/collections:@field(FLD003+@band(origf+Motion+Picture)):heading=Original+Format%3a+Motion+Pictures)

Erickson Archival Links

<http://www.ericksonarchival.com/>

Wednesday,
September 29

—

Discussion: Treatments

ASSIGNMENT #2: TREATMENT DUE

Find any academic history article that you believe would be amenable to translation into a video documentary. Include in your TypePad blog in a short, narrative plan (500 words) outlining how you would go about adapting the article to video format. You might look at *The Journal of American History*, *The American Historical Review*, or more specialized journals such as *the Journal of Social History*, *Winterthur Portfolio*, and so on. The key is to find scholarship that would lend itself to a visual interpretation.

SOUND SOURCES

Wednesday,
October 6

—

Reading:

Mark M. Smith, *Hearing History*

Internet Visits:

Historical Documentaries for Radio

<http://www.albany.edu/faculty/gz580/documentaryproduction>

Practicum: Sound & Music

Wednesday,
October 13

—

NO CLASS

Wednesday,
October 20

—

Discussion: Short Videos

ASSIGNMENT #3: SHORT DOCUMENTARY & CRITIQUE DUE

Choose a short historical subject that can be dealt with effectively in 1–2 minutes. Using a selection of stills, transitions, and a sound track (v/o, music, or both), create a video that makes a point or tells a story. Once you have finished your video, export it in QuickTime format at 240 x 180 (or smaller) in a form suitable for the web and upload it to your TypePad blog.

Wednesday,
October 27

—

Open Lab

Wednesday,
November 3 — Discussion: Story Boards

ASSIGNMENT #4: STORYBOARD DUE

Using TypePad's Photo Album feature, put together the storyboard for your project. Each "page" of your storyboard should have an image (still from photograph or still from video), commentary or excerpts from a draft of your script, and some estimate of the section's duration. The storyboard should not only tell the viewer "what" the history is but also "how" the history will be presented. Be sure that your images are of uniform size and optimized for the web and that the storyboard has a title and introduction that sets out your historical argument or interpretation. If you do not have the necessary image, include a placeholder image ("Picture (or video clip) of X") and in your commentary suggest where and when the material is (or will become) available.

Wednesday,
November 10 — Open Lab

Wednesday,
November 17 — Discussion: Rough Cuts

ASSIGNMENT #5: ROUGH CUT DUE

The chief goal for this assignment is to get your video into rough form. To that end, lay out your stills, clips, audio, and so forth in the order of your narrative with rough timing. The rough cut need not have any transitions or a complete sound track but should suggest some idea of the v/o and sound track.

Wednesday,
November 24 — **NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING)**

Wednesday,
December 1 — Open Lab

Wednesday,
December 8 — Discussion: History Documentaries

ASSIGNMENT #6: FINAL PROJECT DUE (Preliminary)

The overarching goal for the major project is the creation of a 5–7 digital history documentary. First, the content should be solid and engaging. Second, the video should be clear in its purpose and audience. Third, the video should contain the following elements: stills, video (shot by author), v/o, an interview, sound track, titling, and credits. The video's should also reflect knowledge of the technical aspects of digital video documentary production: use of images (stills and compositing), sound (music, audio effects, narration, dialogue, and ambience), editing, and the narrative approaches to historical documentaries. Although this is a preliminary assignment, your project should be in the most finished form possible.

Wednesday,
December 15 — **FINAL PROJECT DUE
SELF-EVALUATION DUE**

Once you satisfied with your project and have taken into account class suggestions, burn a DVD or put your project on a mini-DVcassette and drop it off in my office mailbox. In addition, export a web-ready version for inclusion in your TypePad blog. (Because of TypePad's space constraints, the version for your blog may have to be on the order of a "trailer.")

COURSE

Peter Burke wrote in *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*: “Images embodied in film are more powerful yet. One mode of liberation from this power might be to encourage students of history to take control and to make their own films as a way of understanding the past.” This course sets out to test Burke’s proposition by using digital tools to make a short history documentary. To that end, the course will begin by screening several documentaries and continue on to writing a script, collecting and selecting materials, filming (including an interview), and editing the materials into a mini-documentary (7-10 minute). The finished products will be transferred to DVD format in time for our own film festival.

The course is designed for those who have an interest in exploring history in a different way, who work in applied or public history, or who want to try their hands at incorporating a different approach to teaching history. Although the course assumes no advanced computer skills, it does require a solid knowledge of computer use and a degree of enthusiasm for digital work and history. Except for graduate standing, therefore, there are no prerequisites for the course. Experience with image editing software, web design, or commensurate skills in music, art, or communication as well as a history course or two will, however, be assets. Enrollment limited to 18.

BOOKS & SUPPLIES

The texts (of one kind or another) serve three purposes: 1) to provide you with the background in several areas that might be relatively unfamiliar to historians; 2) to introduce you to some texts that are intended to promote some “left brain” thinking or provide inspiration; and 3) to furnish you with a modest technical, reference library. We will discuss some of the books briefly, some in depth, and some not at all, but they all should be read either in toto or in small bites.

Eric Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film*

Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties*

Mark H. Smith, *Hearing History*

Michael Rubin, *The Little Digital Video Book*

Diana Weynand, *Final Cut Express 2 OR Adobe Premiere Classroom-in-a-Book*

1 or 2 MiniDV cassettes

1 pack 10 DVD disks

ATTENDANCE

By its nature, this is a small class and offers the participants a singular opportunity to learn new skills and new ways of thinking about history. The class also introduces its participants to elements of multimedia production. As such, the class asks that you prepare for class and participate energetically. And you cannot participate without attending class. Attendance is especially critical for the software practicums in which you will be introduced to useful techniques and strategies.

A NOTE ON COMPUTER USE (AND COST)

Computers are a great boon to historians. But, as with any technology, you must take steps to minimize the problems that computers inevitably cause—and, believe me, in a course like this, you *will* have problems. Do not expect to get through the semester without having at least one computer meltdown. Prepare for this well in advance. Back up your work and have “plan Bs” for obtaining computer use or software access, if your primary options fail you. I will not accept computer problems as excuses for missed assignments. (Oh, all right, maybe in this course there will be some latitude but not much.) You must also keep backup copies of submitted assignments—either in electronic form or hard copy. You might wish to invest in a FireWire drive for the purposes of archiving your material and transporting your projects.

All of the assignments in the course depend on your having access to a computer and an internet account. Please obtain an internet account at the earliest available moment and become comfortable with the software and protocols. Should you work at home or off campus, learn how to do remote access so that you can be productive no matter your location. Although the university does not require the purchase of a computer and the necessary software, I would encourage you to consider the investment. Because of the nature of the course, you cannot depend on the university’s public clusters or the availability of software. Your enrollment in the

course indicates your interest in computerish things, and your tool set should reflect that interest.

No doubt about it, new media, especially digital video is expensive, and George Mason does not have a high-end lab available for scheduling classes or open lab work. You will, however, need access to a digital camera and software. If you do not own a camera or digital video software, you can check out video cameras from the Star Lab (229 Johnson Center). Final Cut Pro (Mac) and Adobe Premiere (Wintel) are also available for student use in the Star Lab, but you will have to do your work in the lab. (Be aware that although you can open Final Cut Express projects in Final Cut Pro, you cannot open Final Cut Pro projects in Final Cut Express.) The Mason Media Lab (311 Johnson Center) has, in addition, made its sound booth available to the class. You must make an appointment with the MML folks to obtain instruction in the software and schedule the use of the lab. Finally, both Adobe and Apple maintain websites that include a number of resources: tutorials, how-tos, readings, and other resources.

Because of institutional constraints, the technical instruction will be on Final Cut Express, the prosumer version of Final Cut Pro. Those who need particular instruction in Premiere can consult the Star Training Schedule. These sessions will provide you with an introduction to using the software. For those who need help with Final Cut, lynda.com has an excellent Online Learning Library for Final Cut Pro that is applicable to Final Cut Express 2. Lynda.com will also offer a Premiere online training service in Q4. This service is not free but, depending on the subscription, it is very inexpensive considering the other options.

Mason Media Lab (sound booth)
<http://medialab.gmu.edu/workshops.html>
Star Lab (training schedule)
<http://media.gmu.edu/workshops/>
Apple: Final Cut Express
<http://www.apple.com/finalcutexpress/resources.html>
Adobe: Premiere
<http://www.adobe.com/products/premiere/main.html>
lynda.com (Final Cut Pro)
<http://www.lynda.com>

TYPEPAD

You are required to obtain a Plus-level subscription to Typepad, an online blogging service. All of your projects will be posted to your Typepad blog. The cost is \$8.95 per month or roughly \$27.00 for the semester (the cost of a trade paperback). The best thing to do is sign up for a free trial; this will furnish you with a month's free service. At the end of the term, you can cancel your subscription. Or, you may discover that you like blogging so much that you retain your subscription. The reasons for making the blog a part of the course are two: its photo album capability and its ease of use. It also furnishes the class with a "web presence" without spending time with web editing software. (We'll have enough software challenges without coping with web design and construction.)

Alternatively, you can obtain the Movable Type software. (GMU has a license.) It is free, but the installation of the software is challenging and you will need to contact the IT folks here at GMU to arrange installation. *I do not do tech support for Movable Type.* Six Apart, the company that created Movable Type will install the application for you for a \$40.00 fee, but you will need to arrange to have CGI and MySQL in place on your ISP. Be aware that most free web page areas do not support CGI or MySQL or charge extra. I do not recommend this option unless you have some solid computer skills and access to a sophisticated ISP, but there may some in the class who can avail themselves of this option. I am aware that there are "free" blogging applications available, but they come with the price of advertising, and the course is not a commercial venue. You are, of course free to use any blogging application that suits you, but it should have photo album capability and no, I repeat, no advertising.

GRADES

Grades, including +s and -s, will be assigned in the following manner. REMEMBER THEY REPRESENT AN EVALUATION, NOT A REWARD. To rephrase Smith-Barney, the investment folk, we do grades the old-fashioned way—earn them.

A—Outstanding work, complete mastery of the material presented, combined with some originality.

B—A solid command of the material with some gaps or mistakes in a basically sound essay or discussion.

C—Some knowledge of the material; mistakes and confusion are acceptable if mixed with some understanding. Not a reward for attendance or effort.

D—An incomplete and minimal knowledge of the material, major confusions and errors.

F—A failure to present the material in a reasonably accurate and comprehensible manner.

I—There are no “incompletes” given in this course except in cases of bona fide and documented instances in accordance with the regulations of the university.

P—For a “pass” a “C” average is required.

The nature of the course suggests that breaches of academic integrity will be difficult to accomplish. If, however, a class member engages in plagiarism or other forms of cheating, he or she will receive a zero for that assignment and an accompanied trip to the Dean’s Office to discuss further academic action.

If you receive a grade or criticism that seems unfair or if you desire further explanation, come and see me. If you come to argue for a better grade, come prepared to present your case in the most coherent and organized manner possible.

REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for the course are as follows: (1) Scene Analysis (10%); (2) Treatment (10%); (3) Short Video (15%); (4) Storyboard (15%); and (5) Rough Cut (20%); (6) Final Project (30%); and (7) a self-evaluation (1 page, typed, single-spaced) assessing your performance in the course (not graded but required).

ASSIGNMENTS

There are five preliminary and one major assignment in the course. All of the assignments should be part of a TypePad. At the conclusion of each assignment, the link to the assignment should be forwarded to the instructor for inclusion on the instructor's course page. The details for each assignment are outlined on the schedule page of both the print and web syllabus.

SELF-EVALUATION GUIDELINES

Oftentimes, a letter grade does not reflect the effort that students put into a course, the amount a student has learned, or the skills that a student has acquired. A self-evaluation is one way of remedying this deficiency by illustrating and documenting your participation in the course from your perspective. This is the time to argue for yourself and put your best foot forward. In fact, it is in your interest to do the best job that you can on this assignment. The self-evaluation should be a one-page, typed single-spaced paper in which you address the following topics:

- I. Evaluation of your participation in the class
 - A. attendance
 - B. class participation
 1. in-class contributions
 2. peer work
 3. class preparation
 - C. time devoted to the materials

1. assigned reading
 2. preliminary assignments
 3. research
 4. video production
- D. the ways in which you think you improved or not
- E. the problems you encountered in your effort to complete the class assignments to your satisfaction.
- F. what you would have done differently
- G. some of the skills or knowledge that you acquired
- II. A general assessment of how you will apply what you have gained (or not) from the class in the future
- III. Other activities of a historical or new media nature that you participated in