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The Television Current Affairs Documentary:
Effecting Social Change

Rosa Caporicci

A Thesis

in

The Department of Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

The Television Current Affairs Documentary:

Effecting Social Change

Rosa Caporicci

This study explores the television current affairs documentary as it relates to civic engagement. It presents an argument for considering mass media as legitimate learning sites. In particular, through a case study approach, the documentary film is shown to be a vehicle for creating a community of learners whose actions lead to social change. The potential for harnessing the influence the documentary can exercise is further explored through a discussion of new technologies for disseminating information.

The results of this study contribute to the field of knowledge in adult education and informal modes of learning, social movements and mass media, and their implications for democracy.

DEDICATION

For my mother, my first teacher,
and in loving memory of my father

Ferdinando 'Freddy' Caporicci

(1930-1978)

All'anima mia

*Dell'inesausta tua miseria godi.
Tanto ti valga, anima mia, sapere;
sì che il tuo male, null'altro, ti giovi.*

*O forse avventurato è chi s'inganna?
né a se stesso scoprirsi ha in suo potere,
né mai la sua sentenza lo condanna?*

*Magnanima sei pure, anima nostra;
ma per quali non tuoi casi t'esalti,
sì che un bacio mentito indi ti prostra.*

*A me la mia miseria è un chiaro giorno
d'estate, quand'ogni aspetto dagli alti
luoghi discopro in ogni suo contomo.*

*Nulla m'è occulto; tutto è sì vicino
dove l'occhio o il pensiero mi conduce.
Triste ma sollegiato è il mio cammino;
e tutto in esso, fino l'ombra, è in luce.*

- Umberto Saba -

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PREFACE

I am a self-avowed documentary 'junkie'. I get my favourite 'fix' each Tuesday evening when I watch *Frontline* on PBS (Public Broadcasting Service). The program is a current affairs series carried on this public television network in the United States, and is produced by WGBH-Boston, a PBS affiliate. I have long been fascinated with the visual representation of the narrative, but beyond its talent for telling good stories, I was curious about *Frontline's* seemingly uncanny ability to incite action amongst its viewers. *Frontline's* feedback mechanism, an on-line discussion board, along with its website which provides a robust database of supplementary material on various documentaries, serve as key communication tools.

The level of post-broadcast audience participation was especially significant following the broadcast of a film written, produced, and directed by Ofra Bikel entitled, *An Ordinary Crime* which aired January 10, 2002. The film profiles Terence Garner who spent nearly four years in jail for an armed robbery he did not commit. His release and eventual exoneration were triggered by a series of events, including Bikel's film which resulted in more than 1,000 e-mails filling, in a matter of hours, *Frontline's* discussion board (personal communication, June 15, 2002). This and

other events led to a new trial being ordered less than a month following the film's air date. The district attorney ultimately dismissed the charges against Garner and released him from prison (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/smith/ofra/Rosenberg.html, ¶2).

My interest in the subject area was initially piqued by Bikel's previous film on the same theme—DNA evidence and wrongful convictions—entitled, *The Case for Innocence* which led to the exoneration of three men 18 months after its broadcast in 1999. I was curious about the power mass media can exert in galvanizing public opinion. Though the research reveals that there is no direct correlation between a film and any one event, new technologies, in particular (e.g., Internet discussion boards, and on-line communities) can sometimes act as a modern assembly hall in rousing people to become active members in their community.

The research also highlights the history of adult education as a vehicle for advancing civic engagement and participatory democracy. Correspondingly, the documentaries encourage their viewers to embrace, or at least consider new ways of thinking about issues, and perhaps even propel them to action. Within the context of my studies in adult education, I believe this issue, namely

the current affairs documentary, and in particular Bikel's repertoire, its history, purpose, and influence, is a compelling illustration of a less studied and less documented aspect of adult education—informal learning.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Among the many documentary orientations, including cinema vérité, first-person accounts and others, the current affairs documentary has its roots in investigative journalism. In this respect, it may form a particular sub-genre of the documentary tradition. The purpose of this study is to examine the current affairs documentary film as a tool for informing and educating adults. The research explores whether this documentary genre can effect social change, focusing specifically on the accomplishments of Ofra Bikel, a regular *Frontline* producer, and her work surrounding the criminal justice system in the United States.

My impression rests on the assertion made by Bikel herself: that the documentary does more than distribute information; it and the filmmaker teach (personal communication, June 15, 2002). By extension, learning and knowledge become powerful tools for democracy by fostering an informed citizenry. In exploring this subject matter, I am also training a spotlight on the 'pedagogy of images', asking specifically, how and why do visual representations succeed in teaching? What are the didactic elements of the

documentary film? And how does the audience analyse this specific cultural product?

The Documentary Film in 2004

He made the cover of *Time* magazine. Michael Moore, the 'agent provocateur' of the feature-length documentary, graced the cover of America's touchstone magazine on July 12, 2004 following his triumph at the Cannes Film Festival. There, he garnered the *Palme d'Or* award for *Fahrenheit 9/11*, his first-person exposé on the Bush administration's actions prior to the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The film set box office records for a non-fiction film, "becoming the first documentary to debut as Hollywood's top weekend film" (*The Montreal Gazette*, p. D5, June 28, 2004). The documentary seems to be enjoying a surge in popular, critical, and financial acclaim, as witnessed during the past year. Documentary films have occupied screens in first-run theatres (Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me*, Jehane Noujaim's *The Control Room*), and snatched up accolades at prestigious festivals, like *Capturing the Friedmans* did at Sundance, winning the Grand Jury Prize in 2003.

Though this study explores the television documentary, an admittedly different 'animal' within the documentary genus, the growing appetite for non-fiction film is at the

heart of this research and feeds the main questions: can the documentary film build community and effect social change? What becomes of these films once they're screened in theatres or appear on television? Are they other forms of consumables or trivia, or do they have a life after broadcast? What purpose do they serve—entertainment, artistic expression, information? Analogous to this query are questions related to the targeted audience—adults—and how popular culture might be considered a form of adult education.

The topic is multi-faceted and invites an almost inexhaustible multi-disciplinary approach, but the driving force in this study is the social dimension of the non-fiction film, and how the documentary art form is used in a democratic society. The role of journalism in a democratic society is inextricably bound to this examination. Similar to Corner's (2000) contention, I too

would like to see (an) emphasis as strongly 'cognitive' in character and one concerned with the development of 'pragmatics' able to see the documentary practice as a form of social action, and to locate the textual system of specific documentaries within this perspective (p. 143).

Thus the goal of this study is to provide a social-uses examination and social production analysis in order to understand "social contexts for creativity, and creative

stimuli for social participation and public life" (American University, 2003, p. 68). It does not delve into cognate areas of study, such as semiotics, nor does it fall into the category of film studies analysis. Instead, the theoretical framework is based on philosophies of adult education, mass communication, and film theory.

Additionally, I believe it is important to note that the study does not encompass the distinctly unique traditions of the Canadian or the French Quebec documentary movements, each deserving of separate study. Finally, I have employed a case study approach, centering on a particular film within Bikel's repertoire, employing a methodology of in-depth interviews.

The Documentary Film as a Form of Adult Education

If you ask the average person to define adult education, the likely response will revolve around concepts related to traditional schooling, such as courses given in a classroom setting, and led by a teacher working from an organized curriculum which should involve particular objectives and goals. Seldom, if ever, would an answer be returned that ventures into a discussion of popular culture, such as television, as a serious source of learning. I contend that the mass media is most certainly

a learning site, and can create a community of learning. Fundamental to my research are the ideas that: the television news documentary, in particular, is a form of education; that the mass media can be legitimate learning sites; and that through the particular filmmaker's work explored in the case study, a community of learning and learners was created.

Implicit in my view of adult education is what Proulx (1993) pointed out, that adult education

was first conceived as a tool for social change, (but) became a more functional tool. It became an enterprise determined by the market, without clear social goals (p. 34).

Similar to the philosophy advanced by Eduard Lindeman (1926), considered the 'father' of adult education in the United States, I also subscribe to the view that adult education, as it was conceived, has roots in civic engagement and community building. I propose that the particular current affairs film I describe satisfies this principle, precisely because it embraces John Dewey's ideology on the role of journalism in a democratic society:

His work suggests that journalism amounts to a form of continuing education. He and his followers often pointed out that a 'community was not fully democratic until it has 'socialized intelligence'' (Dewey cited in Westbrook, 1991, p. 436).

Bridging this belief, Corner (2000) notes that

documentary journalism made for television became a form of television product quite distinctively positioned as public knowledge and as popular culture (p. 145).

I maintain that the film selected for the case study embodies the tenets of adult education as an emancipatory form of learning, which promotes citizenship in a democratic society.

In addition, this topic contributes to the literature on informal learning environments, as explored by theorists and practitioners such as Foley (1999) who states:

At the heart...is a notion of adult learning...as complex and contested social activities. This conception stands against the received body of adult education theory in the English-speaking world, which focuses on individual learners, educational technique and course provision. This dominant view of adult education excludes a great deal of adult learning. Certainly the development of specific fields of adult education, such as human resources development and basic education, has ended the identification of adult education with the provision of liberal education and leisure classes. But among both adult educators and lay people, adult education is still generally equated with organised provision by professionals. Similarly, adult education research has focused on learning in institutionalised settings (p. 2).

The Public Broadcasting System (PBS)—its educational mandate and the Frontline series

PBS was founded in 1969 as a non-profit corporation headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, whose members are the public television stations across the United States. WGBH-Boston, which produces *Frontline*, is one of the 349

member stations. According to their website, the bulk of PBS's funding, 23.5%, is derived from private citizens, including Canadians, who contribute donations year-round. PBS itself does not produce programs but distributes them through their *National Programming Service*, relying on PBS stations, independent producers, and international sources to provide the actual shows (www.pbs.org/aboutpbs/aboutpbs_corp.html). Its funding agency, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was created by an act of Congress in 1967 (The Public Broadcasting Act) and states as part of its mission statement the following:

The fundamental purpose of public telecommunications is to provide programs and services which inform, enlighten and enrich the public. While these programs and services are provided to enhance the knowledge, and citizenship, and inspire the imagination of all Americans, the Corporation has particular responsibility to encourage the development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities (www.cpb.org/about/corp/mission.html, ¶2).

Frontline is considered PBS's

flagship public affairs series....(and) remains the only regularly scheduled long-form public-affairs documentary series on American television, producing more hours of documentary programming than all the commercial networks combined (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/us/, ¶3).

Frontline began broadcasting in 1983 (then called *World*) and explores a variety of subjects from biographies,

to race and religion, to science and technology. The documentary films are created by independent producers and are aired during a one-hour time slot. The films are in fact 52 minutes in length, 'book-ended' by PBS's version of commercials—formal acknowledgement of the program's underwriters or sponsors at the beginning and ending of each broadcast. Louis Wiley, Jr., Executive Editor, says *Frontline's*

mission is profoundly educational because that's where the roots of public television are...to change the way people look at something or see them in a new context (in order) to open viewers' eyes (personal communication, May 11, 2004).

There is a widely-accepted formula in affixing the label 'a good documentary' to a film: how successful it is in encouraging discussion about the issue being recorded, rather than about the film's aesthetic properties (Nichols, 1991, pp. 178-79). A prominent Canadian documentary filmmaker, Magnus Isaacson, goes even further suggesting that "real documentaries...are those that 'offer a vision, a message and are willing to take a stand'" (Isaacson as cited in Hogarth, 2002, p. 14).

Unlike the value statements assigned to fiction films with respect to creative elements like cinematography for example, the tradition of broadcast journalism assesses a film more on its quality of exposition, accuracy, and

objectivity (Corner, 1996, p. 19). Perhaps more overtly than the fiction film, the news documentary attempts to influence public opinion and attitudes surrounding the subject matter being treated (Ellis, 1989, p. 2). Ellis (1989) also purports that:

...the audience experience documentary filmmakers seek to provide is generally twofold: an aesthetic experience of some sort, on the one hand, and an effect on attitudes, possibly leading to action, on the other. Though much beauty exists in documentary films, it tends to be more functional, sparse, and austere than the beauties offered in fictional films. Also, documentary filmmaking offers more that could be described as professional *skill* than as personal *style*; communication rather than expression is what the filmmaker is usually after....John Grierson [considered the founder of the documentary film movement] stated that in documentary, art is the by-product of a job of work done (p. 3).

Similar to Bleum's (1965) contention, I purport that the current affairs documentary, as a form of communication, has a social purpose and this social purpose is to build public spaces that generate communities of learning and involvement.

Communication as community

The case study I present focuses on a Bikel's film, *An Ordinary Crime*. It tells the story of Terence Garner, a sixteen-year-old teenager from North Carolina, who in 1997 was incarcerated for close to four years for a crime he did not commit. As Bikel was quoted as saying in the Los

Angeles Times, "All I wanted to do was get this boy out...It was such a setup. He obviously didn't do it." (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/smith/ofra/rosenberg.html, ¶15). The nature of the documentary itself, the reaction it generated, and the outcome which it engendered is illustrative of the argument that

people construct relationships through communication, and the nature of the communication shapes their relationships. A democratic public needs individual access to knowledge—it needs to be an 'informed citizenry'. But that is not enough. A democratic public needs places both physical and virtual to go, information habits in common and common understandings (Bleum, 1965, p. 13).

I demonstrate that *Frontline* fulfilled the requirements of providing both a physical and virtual space for citizens to establish relationships that effect, and did produce, social change. Bleum (1965) wrote that the documentary is more than a vehicle for disseminating information; its purpose is to influence and persuade. He described a trajectory characterized by information being converted into knowledge, which in turn can be transformed into understanding. He posited that it is this 'understanding' which can incite social change in society (p. 14).

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY AND THEORIES OF THE DOCUMENTARY

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief historical overview of the research literature on: theories of the documentary, with a particular emphasis on the Griersonian tradition of documentary film theory; a theory of mass communication which focuses on an interactive system; the origins of adult education in American society; and the sociological theory of communication and culture advanced by Habermas (1971) of the Frankfurt School of critical theory.

Historical overview of the theories and research literature

The documentary film has a long tradition, dating back to 1922 when Robert Flaherty made the first non-fiction film, *Nanook of the North*, a study of Innu life in the Arctic. This example of the personal or ethnographic documentary has evolved to include a variety of forms, including the news documentary. The research expands on the rich body of knowledge surrounding the history and theory of documentary film, and its "Griersonian objective of public education and...vision of film as a tool to ameliorate social conditions" (Winston, 1995, p. 128). There are a multitude of works detailing the subject (Aitken, 1990; Armes, 1974; Barnouw, 1974; Barsam, 1973;

Guyann, 1990; Hardy, 1966, Rotha, 1963), some of them written by filmmakers themselves, like Grierson and Rotha who were instrumental in the documentary film movement in the first half of the 20th century. All of them expound upon what James Agee termed as "'human actuality'—rendering and representing for others what has been witnessed, heard, overheard, or sensed" (as cited in Coles, 1997, p. 87). The documentary differs from its fictional cousin in that it

dramatizes the factual rather than the fictional situation. The non-fiction film maker focuses his personal vision and his camera on actual situations—persons, processes, events—and attempts to render a creative interpretation of them (Barsam, 1973, p. 14).

A number of contemporary documentaries speak to the potential of this genre to attract popular and critical attention (Winston, 2000, p. 53). *Roger & Me*, produced in 1989, chronicled the rather hilarious but provocative attempts of Michael Moore to discuss the demise of General Motors in his home town of Flint, Michigan with then Chairman Roger Smith. It won a total of eight awards on the festival circuit (<http://www.michaelmoore.com/dogeatdogfilms/awards.html>). The 1974 championship bout in Zaire between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman documented in *When We Were Kings* won an Academy Award in 1996, providing another example.

Practitioners and theorists alike (Corner, 1986; Aufderheide, et al., 1997) have also contributed to an examination of mass media and the documentary, and form the basis for this literature review. Additionally, the research conducted on movements and action, and political theory and communication contributes to this study. As Edwards and Gaventa (2001) point out,

the arena in which people come together to advance the interests they hold in common, not for profit or political power, but because they care enough about something to take collective action (p. 2).

This is an intriguing thought, and of particular interest when considering how this research probes the manner in which Bikel's criminal justice work caused collective action to occur.

The topic's theoretical underpinnings also have their roots in the philosophies of adult education as advanced by John Dewey (1927), Eduard Lindeman (1926) and other educational researchers interested in informal learning, as well as sociological theories of communication and culture investigated by Habermas (1971), and the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Programs such as *Frontline* provide the spaces for thoughtful reflection, as well as the notion of human agency—the hope for something better as espoused by the tradition of critical theory—to take place. Coupled

with social movements, which I argue are integral to the events which erupted following the broadcast of the film in the case study, social transformation can take place.

The Griersonian tradition and television documentary aesthetics

Although John Grierson is credited with coining the term 'documentary' in 1926 after reviewing Robert Flaherty's film *Moana* for a New York City newspaper, some historians have traced the term back to at least 1914 (Winston, 1995, p. 9). Film historians (Ellis, 1989; Winston, 1995) believed Grierson's terminology was calculated since the source, 'document', comes from the Latin *docere* or *documentum* which means 'to teach' or 'a lesson'. Grierson was both a director and a producer with the Empire Marketing Board (E.M.B.), a trade organization in England.

In 1928, Grierson...organized the E.M.B. Film Unit, first as director and later as producer. The purpose of this group of film-makers was to 'bring alive' in terms of cinema some of the essential but taken-for-granted phases of modern life. While with the E.M.B., Grierson personally directed *Drifters*, a film about the North Sea herring fishermen, which laid the foundation for documentary film in Britain (www.onf.ca/e/highlight/john_grierson.html, ¶3).

Grierson's philosophy on film was one that perceived it as a tool for social propaganda and citizenship education. In

fact, in Hardy's (1979) collection of Grierson's writings, Grierson's intentions are quite clear:

The documentary film was conceived and developed as an instrument of public use. It was conceived, moreover, as an instrument to be used systematically in all fields of public instruction and enlightenment (p. 189).

Grierson's deliberate and didactic aims have become associated with authenticity and objectivity in contemporary times, as though the filmmaker stands outside the film as a neutral observer. It is exactly these connections that may be most problematic and "bedevil us to this day" (Linton, 1992, p. 86) since they are now misconstrued with an almost unadulterated 'truth' (Corner, 1995; Ellis, 1989; Godmilow, 2002, Nichols, 1991, 2001; Rosen, 1993; Rosenthal, 1988). In contrast, these authors argue that the documentary film is not so very different from its fictional cousin since even documentary filmmakers make very conscious choices about subject, lighting, editing, and other filmic constructs. Where they do part company is in what they stand for: "At the heart of documentary is less a *story*...than an *argument* about the historical world" (Nichols, 1991, p. 111). And, of course, there are different styles in making a film-based claim, which Nichols (1983) identifies as four techniques or modes of address:

The direct-address style of the Griersonian tradition...was the first thoroughly worked-out mode of documentary. As befitted a school whose purposes were overwhelmingly didactic, it employed a supposedly authoritative...off-screen narration (p. 17).

The three other modes include cinema vérité, characterized by the effort not to intrude on events through any means of artifice (e.g., narration), direct address which distinguishes itself in the subject/filmmaker speaking directly to the camera, and the self-reflexive mode which is meant to acknowledge the filmmaker through the incorporation within the film of his or her own personal commentary (Nichols, 1983, pp. 17-18).

The films featured on *Frontline* are not necessarily of one ilk, but they most often fall into the category of direct address, distinguished by the immediately recognizable narration of Will Lyman, and employ the journalistic interview format. *Frontline's* films are anchored solidly within journalism's heritage of acting as society's 'watchdog'—its quarry, to support and protect democratic principles. In this respect I would argue that *Frontline* upholds the Griersonian documentary tradition: the film serving to inform the public in an effort to promote or propagate democracy. These days, 'propaganda' is likened to a four-letter word—a deliberate and suspicious form of influence— but Grierson himself took

pains to show that propaganda "was first associated with the defence of a faith and a concept of civilization" (cited in Hardy, 1979, p. 109). And according to Adam Symansky, a producer with the English Program at National Film Board (NFB), which was founded by Grierson, "his faith was democracy, and he needed to propagate it" (personal communication, April 5, 2004).

The creative elements which are particular to the television documentary as seen in *Frontline* are strictly tied to the function of broadcast journalism: the currency of a topic; a presenter (or narrator) who is familiar and therefore becomes trustworthy in the minds of his or her audience; a musical theme that again encourages acquaintanceship; scratching beneath the surface of a headline; and fairness in reporting which demonstrates objectivity (Corner, 1996). Nichols (2001) has said that documentaries are all a reflection of the very establishment that produces them (p. 22). Not surprisingly then, *Frontline* serves the task of any news-gathering operation within PBS's broader mandate of providing programming that informs and educates. Furthermore, all aesthetic considerations, including visuals, sound, and editing techniques are meant to buttress an exposition or pedagogy of images:

The expository text addresses the viewer directly, with titles for voices that advance an argument about the historical world.... Expository texts take shape around commentary directed toward the viewer; images serve as illustration or counterpoint. Nonsynchronous sound prevails....The rhetoric of the commentator's argument serves as the textual dominant, moving the text forward in service of its persuasive needs.... Editing...generally serves to establish and maintain rhetorical continuity more than spatial continuity (Nichols, 1991, pp. 34-35).

An interactive model of mass communication

But does this methodology necessarily translate into changing or influencing already-held beliefs and opinions amongst viewers? Is there a causal relationship between distributing information and affecting a shift in attitude? The transmission or behavioural model of communication has generally been discounted as naive by contemporary theorists (Corner, 1995; Figueroa et al., 2002; Hart, 1992; Kilborn and Izod, 1997). Current scholarship focuses on a non-linear process where "audience members have come to stand out as increasingly active and selective in their use...of mass media messages" (Höijer, 1992, p 583). This model favours more of an exchange between a mass media text, like television, and what viewers do with the knowledge gained from programs such as *Frontline*. As Bandura (2002) maintains

People are socially situated in interpersonal networks. When media influences lead viewers to discuss and negotiate matters of import with others in

their lives, the media set in motion transactional experiences that further shape the course of change. This is another socially mediated process through which symbolic communications exert their effect (p. 141).

This orientation also supports a theory of critical media pedagogy which is

concerned with the transformation of education, with producing new forms of pedagogy that will empower individuals and revitalize our decaying democracy (McLaren, Hammer, Sholle, Smith Reilly, 1995, p. xv).

Critical pedagogy, within an academic context, is concerned with acknowledging what students already 'know' in terms of their own personal experiences, which they carry with them into the classroom. It flies in the face of the traditional 'empty vessel' or transmission model of education. In cultivating a critical mindset towards real-world events and situations, questioning readily accepted worldviews for instance, the theory purports that students can become agents for social change. As it applies to all forms of knowledge, including information transmitted through mass media, an electronic educator as it were:

The critical educator...is most interested in...*emancipatory knowledge* (which) helps us understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by relations of power and privilege (McLaren, 2003, p. 73).

This theory differentiates between functional literacy—reading and writing, cultural literacy—basic knowledge

about one's culture, society, and political structures, and critical literacy—the skills to analyze cultural artefacts and their meanings. McLaren et al. (1995) purport that the media are most certainly instruments which 'instruct' their users, so they encourage acquiring the skills to critique those messages in hopes of people creating alternative media that will offer different messages. Though I am not convinced that *Frontline* can be considered a form of alternative media as perceived by these theorists, the program does speak to how critical pedagogy can resuscitate democratic principles which have deteriorated, and which have been replaced by a philosophy of consumerism.

Following McLaren's (1995) supposition,

A democratic society involves the participation of its citizens, which in turn requires that the citizens be informed so that they can intelligently participate in the events and issues of the day. This requires a media that actually informs its citizens and citizens who apply their knowledge to active social participation. The decline of democracy...is partially a result of a media spectator society where individuals passively consume media spectacles and fail to actively participate in their social life (p. 1).

Dewey, Lindeman, and adult education

Eduard Lindeman was a pioneer in developing a philosophy of adult education. In 1927 he wrote that "life itself is the adult's school....Adult education begins with the premise that education is life and that life is

education" (as cited in Brookfield, 1987, p. 27). Lindeman objected quite strenuously to ideas of education based on textbook learning, and the transfer of knowledge between teacher and student, whether for adults or for children. Instead, he stressed informal learning through small group discussion. The ultimate purpose of education within this context, according to Lindeman (1929), is social action (as cited in Brookfield, p. 77). It is interesting to note that Lindeman, to some degree, also advocated media literacy to buoy civic action in sustaining a democratic society. One example noted is his use of the film *Broken Arrow*, a 20th Century-Fox production about Native Americans starring Jimmie Stewart. Lindeman (1949) felt it was the "first and only picture of its kind, to date, to portray the American Indian accurately" (as cited in Brookfield, pp. 125-126). He prefaced a community screening by inviting audience members to learn more about the work carried out by The Association of American Indian Affairs, which hosted the event. Brookfield (1987) argued that

Lindeman would have subscribed to the concept of media literacy as much as he did to the concept of political (or civic) literacy....To Lindeman, a media literate populace would have been regarded as one of the hallmarks of a democratic society (p. 220).

Similarly, John Dewey (1916), who greatly influenced Lindeman's theory on adult education deplored the use of

textbooks in education, and equated communication with education and, as a consequence, the building of community (p. 5).

Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication (Dewey, 1916, p. 4).

Lindeman, among others, expanded upon Dewey's belief in informal opportunities for learning, which are bound with his views on democracy and how to support it. Dewey placed a particular emphasis on settings where many informal educators work, like associations and non-profit organizations for example, and argued that the very nature of these activities creates community (i.e., church-based, voluntary, leisure-oriented). This, in turn, is necessarily tied to democratic ideals and its practice (Dewey, 1927, p. 149). For Dewey, education, outside the narrow definition ascribed to schools and schooling, has a crucial role to play in observing and exercising democratic principles, and for him, democracy signifies a shared experience:

...democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion (and) will have his consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication (Dewey, 1927, p. 184).

That the television documentary form can be an example of this 'full and moving communication' is not a far-fetched notion when considering the research conducted by Putnam (2000) in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Putnam conducts an analysis of the decline of civic engagement in 20th century American society. Putnam sketches a portrait of the steady erosion of participation in community groups and gatherings, and collective action of all sorts. His study examines some of the commonly-held beliefs that are said to have caused, or are at least linked to the waning engagement of citizens in their communities, including the quintessential 'bogeyman', television.

Putnam argues that it is not television itself that is necessarily culpable, but the *kind* of television programs people watch that may have a correlation with either becoming involved or disengaging from community life, and by extension, democratic life. It seems that if television is used for information, as opposed to consuming programs which simply amuse, one is more likely to be civic-minded (p. 230). The problem lies with the majority of Americans who watch television for the latter reason—41% as compared to the 7% who watch television for information. Other

evidence he cites includes the DDB Needham Life Style surveys that examine

which programs attract and/or create the most civic and least civic audience...At the top of the pro-civic hierarchy...are news programs and educational television. In the late 1990s the audiences for programs like the network news and public affairs presentations...were generally more engaged in community life than other Americans (Putnam, 2000, p. 243).

Frontline's own research supports this claim indicating that

in 2003...viewers were 100% more likely to write an elected official than non-viewers; (and) 138% more likely to take an active part in local civic issues than non-viewers (personal communication, May 11, 2004).

The challenge, Putnam argues, rests with television executives who bear the responsibility of creating a public space which transforms the 'couch potato' into an active citizen (p. 410). Democracy, he argues, depends on it.

Sociological theories of communication and culture

As a member of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, Jürgen Habermas (1971) contributed the concepts of the 'public sphere' and 'communicative action' to the body of work analyzing social and cultural life in the twentieth century. These are important considerations when discussing the role of telecommunications and media in a democratic society. Habermas took the public sphere to

mean spaces where people congregate, whether physical (e.g., the neighbourhood coffee shop) or otherwise (e.g., newspapers), that allow citizens to exchange opinions and ideas to varying degrees (Schneider, 1999, pp. 54-55). Various public spheres permit citizens to question and critique different forms of authority. Furthermore, the influence he refers to relates not only to state or government control, but any body or organization, whether private or public, that stymies and censors free and open debate. Fostering an arena for 'unmanaged messages' is "central to Habermas's idea of the rights and duties of citizenship" (Corner, 1995, p. 42).

Though earlier theorists in the Frankfurt School were highly critical of mass society and mass communication because of its manipulative nature, Habermas argued that "the media can also become a critical wedge against the oppressive weight of political and economic domination" (Schneider, 1999, p. 57). The German critical theorist described the use of new and emerging technologies as a possible means of rousing people to act through communication—a contemporary form of a true public sphere that is defined by rhetorical activity—with emancipation from orchestrated messages being the ultimate aim. As he argues, mass media possesses the potential to create an

"...organization of society linked to decision-making processes on the basis of discussion free from domination" (Habermas, 1971, p. 55).

Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) further explore critical theory; they propose that the atrophy of critical thought in modern-day culture imperils the hope for an engaged citizenry on which a democratic society relies. They state that

since critical thinking is the fundamental precondition for an autonomous and self-motivated public..., its decline would threaten the future of democratic social, cultural, and political forms. And such democratic concern does not require a commitment to social change. What is required is a deep caring about the structure of power in society and its wide distribution to all social classes (p. 50).

This compassion is the bedrock of civic engagement, referred to as 'social capital', and is also essential for a healthy democracy. Returning to *Bowling Alone* (2000) once more, Putnam distinguishes between physical, human, and social capital in gauging a society's temperament. As he states,

just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups (p., 19).

If a society is lacking in social capital, the quality of its democratic nature will also be poor. Putnam's research

draws a noteworthy correlation between communities characterized by strong social capital—where members are linked to one another, preventing isolation and alienation—and their support for public broadcasting:

even when we control for all...other factors that are said to affect audience preferences and expenditures—education, affluence, race, tax deductibility, and public spending...communities that rank high on measures of social capital, such as (voter) turnout and social trust, provide significantly higher contributions to public broadcasting....(In) communities that are rich in social capital, civic norms sustain an expanded sense of 'self-interest' and a firmer confidence in reciprocity. Thus if our stocks of social capital diminish, more and more of us will be tempted to 'free-ride', not merely by ignoring the appeals to 'viewers like you', but by neglecting the myriad civic duties that allow our democracy to work (p. 348-49).

In the preceding literature review I have linked and elaborated upon several theories, beginning with the Griersonian theory of the documentary film as a tool for social good and civic virtue, a concept which fuels this research topic. As well, I have incorporated an examination of an interactive model of mass communication that favours a critical viewing of media culture, and concentrates on what the audience does with media—viewers as **agents** within a **process** of communication. Most importantly, the lens from which I am viewing the television current affairs documentary is an educational one, namely adult education. I embrace a theory of adult

education advanced by founders John Dewey and Eduard Lindeman which emphasizes informal learning and citizenship education serving to maintain a democratic society. Lastly, notions of social capital, communicative action, and the public sphere espoused by critical theorist Jürgen Habermas lend weight to the argument for the television current affairs documentary being considered as a vehicle for learning and having the potential to incite action. These concepts provide the groundwork for portraying the following case study as an embodiment of these theories.

CHAPTER 3

A CASE STUDY OF *FRONTLINE*

This chapter describes the film and events which took place surrounding the incarceration of an innocent teenager from North Carolina profiled in Ofra Bikel's film, *An Ordinary Crime*. The chapter also touches upon the filmmaker's motivations and intentions in producing the film, describes the in-depth interview methodology, and provides an analysis of the findings.

Outline

Shortly before Ofra Bikel's third documentary in the trilogy, *Innocence Lost* was about to air on *Frontline* in 1997, the two life-sentence convictions of daycare operators Bob and Betsy Kelly, profiled in the film, were overturned. The couple had been accused of sexually abusing 29 children at their *Little Rascals* daycare in Edenton, North Carolina. Bikel said her film achieved what every current affairs documentary filmmaker aspires to in their work: "You hope that it will change something" (personal communication, June 15, 2002). More than a personal triumph, Bikel's 25 years as a documentary filmmaker, seventeen as an independent producer with *FRONTLINE*, are an illustration of the relationship between the documentary, social action, and political communication.

The film on which this case study is based chronicles the events following an armed robbery at a finance company in Johnston County, North Carolina during which an employee, Alice Wise, was shot in the chest and head, ultimately losing an eye. Three men were involved in the crime, one by the name of Terrance Deloach. When one of the perpetrators was arrested and could only identify his codefendant and the 'shooter' by his first name, Terrance, police made a sweep of the community, photographing young black males. Based on housing records, they searched residential addresses. When no one answered at the first house they visited, they made their way to the home of Terence Garner, and arrested him. The tragic irony is that the real suspect lived at the first home police visited. Garner was convicted and sentenced to the Foothills Correctional Institution for 32 to 43 years, based on circumstantial evidence, including the eyewitness testimony of Alice Wise. Garner was sixteen years old at the time of the crime.

Using face-to-face interviews with prosecutors, defense attorneys, the presiding judge, Garner and his family, and the codefendants, Bikel carefully dissects the web of events that ultimately persuades the viewer that Terence Garner could not possibly have been involved in

that crime. A local newspaper, the *News & Observer* quoted Garner's attorney, Mark Montgomery, as saying he

credit(s) the documentary for Garner's release. 'It's humbling to realize I spent four years trying to get this kid, who I believe to be innocent, out of prison using all my lawyer skills, and a 90-minute television documentary springs him like magic. (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ordinary/etc/latest.html, ¶21).

Apart from *Frontline's* phone lines and website being inundated with calls and requests for information on how to help Garner get out of jail, the *Terence Garner Defense Project* was established to help fund an appeal. The *North Carolina Center for Actual Innocence*, a non-profit organization that helps prison inmates disputing their convictions, also took up Garner's case. The Center is run by volunteers from local law schools, with the assistance of the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill's School of Journalism to investigate wrongful conviction cases. The Center is part of the *Innocence Project* network that was founded as a non-profit legal clinic at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University in New York City. It was created in 1992 by Barry C. Scheck, best known as the DNA expert on O.J. Simpson's defense team, and Peter J. Neufeld, a leading U.S. criminal lawyer. The case even pushed ordinary citizens to embrace Garner's cause; John Longenecker, a Californian cinematographer and

director created a website dedicated to assembling information on the case (<http://jlsite.com/TerenceGarner/Directory.html>). Bikel earned professional recognition within the industry for the film in 2003, including first prize for the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award for Television, recognizing reporting on problems of the disadvantaged, and the Sidney Hillman Prize (Broadcast category), which acknowledges the work of journalists, writers, and public figures in the area of social justice and public policy.

Ironically, Bikel never set out to be a criminal justice crusader, or even a documentary filmmaker. Educated at the University of Paris and the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Bikel says she stumbled into filmmaking because she couldn't find work in her chosen field (personal communication, May 10, 2004). She learned her craft in the trenches, starting as a researcher at the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), and says, for her making films is a natural and logical extension of her passion for communicating. One subject that has taken hold of her imagination are the injustices that can be suffered by the disenfranchised, especially the poor (personal communication, May 10, 2004).

But she does not see herself as a social agent or torchbearer for any particular controversy or issue. As she puts it, "I try not to do that because there's nothing that puts people off more than when they think you're trying to convert them" (personal communication, May 10, 2004). Instead, she says she tries to be fair in her portrayal of all her interview subjects, even those with whom she may have fundamental disagreements, or whom she may even dislike outright because of their position on an issue. She sees her role as "telling people things they don't know", and enjoys the possibility of her work having an impact (personal communication, May 10, 2004). With respect to *An Ordinary Crime*, Bikel was approached by Garner's lawyer, and after speaking with the teenager's mother, Linda Chambers, confessed: "His mother broke my heart, and I thought, 'I'm going to do it for her'." She recalls, "Within a day the black community had mobilized", and says their championing Garner's case was a decisive element in his eventual release (personal communication, May 10, 2004).

Terence Garner's freedom is a compelling example of the synergy needed to propel social change, and in this case, Bikel's film was the engine that set things in motion. My findings indicate that the reactions to

Garner's story, in their various forms, are a compelling example of communicative action in a contemporary public sphere.

Methodology: In-depth Interviews

This section outlines the study methodology, emphasizing the means by which I managed ethical problems confronted when using volunteers. It also identifies the number, length, location, and persons contacted for the in-depth interviews, and alludes to the limitations of a case study approach.

Since the study's purpose is to contextualize, interpret, and understand the principal actors' perspectives on the issue of the current affairs documentary and its possibility for social change, this discussion demanded a qualitative methodology. The topic required an 'emic' investigation and inductive research approach precisely because the variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure. The case study design proved to be the most effective because it accommodates the natural context of this material, and produces rich data. The reliability and validity of the data has been ensured by the multiple sources of evidence I have assembled by using, namely, an examination of the literature on the subject, and in-depth interviews.

Of course, another researcher might have drawn different conclusions using the same case study in question, but I tried to compensate for this shortcoming by having developed three different interview questionnaires or protocols: one for the interviews at WGBH-Boston; another for the interview with Bikel; and a third for the balance of the interviews (please see appendices A, B, and C, pages 72-84). The interview with Bikel explored the concept of filmmaker as social agent, and the documentary as a medium. An examination of *Frontline's* mission and mandate, its demographics and viewer profile, and again, the documentary as a medium were considered during the WGBH interviews, and questions surrounding the documentary as a form of didacticism, subject focus, aesthetic properties, distribution channels, media development, and the future of the television documentary in a 'wired world' were put to the rest of the interviewees. In using multiple sources of evidence, I have attempted to produce a clear conclusion (Anderson, 1998, p. 159).

My interview subjects share commonalities in their interest or active involvement in documentary filmmaking, their work in resolving social injustice, or in mass media. This group has been amassed from: academic experts in the field of mass media, communications and film theory to

contribute to the discussion of these issues' ramifications; current affairs documentary filmmakers to contribute to the dialogue; television and film production and distribution representatives to shed light on distribution options and challenges; and community activists who play an integral role with respect to, in this case, 'righting the wrongs' of the criminal justice system in the United States.

I addressed the ethical considerations related to the study by insuring informed consent, explaining the benefits of taking part in the study, guaranteeing that the volunteers have the opportunity to end their participation at any time, but also debriefing them by providing an opportunity to receive a summary of results should they remain an active partner in the study. Addressing these ethical problems was necessary in order to promote a vigorous exchange of ideas.

Between March 23, 2004 and May 11, 2004, I conducted 17 interviews. Sixteen of those took place in face-to-face encounters ranging in length from a half-hour to one-and-a-half-hour discussions. One set of responses to the questionnaire developed were received on-line, via e-mail. Seven of those took place locally here in Montreal with two filmmakers (Barry Lazar and Garry Beitel), four NFB

executives (Laurie Jones, Director General, Communications and Outreach Development; Sally Bochner, Executive Producer-English Program, Quebec Centre; Adam Symansky, Producer-English Program, Quebec Centre; and Christian Medawar, Line Producer-Studio Documentary B, French Program), and the former host of *Man Alive*, a CBC television production, Peter Downie, who currently teaches broadcast journalism at Concordia University.

Four interviews were conducted with subjects in or from Toronto: Michael Harris, Vice President, General Manager of Corus Entertainment (producers of The Documentary Channel); Neil Docherty, Producer and Senior Editor of the CBC's *The Fifth Estate*; Linden MacIntyre, host and journalist with *The Fifth Estate*; Frances-Mary Morrison, a producer with CBC-Television, and Lisa Barry, a senior producer with Anglican Video, who participated via e-mail and also resides in Toronto. While in Toronto I attended two screenings of the *Canadian International Documentary Festival (HotDocs)*, including *And Thereafter*, a film about a Korean war bride, and *Thirst*, which explores the global privatization of water. I also participated in the question period with the two filmmakers of *Thirst* following the screening.

Aliza Kaplan, Director of Development and External Affairs with *Innocence Project*, and Ofra Bikel were interviewed in New York City. Interviews in Boston with Louis Wiley, Jr., Executive Editor, Marrie Campbell, Editorial Director, and Jessica Smith, Publicist, all with *Frontline* rounded out the schedule.

All but the one 'virtual' interview were digitally recorded and then uploaded on my personal computer in order to be transcribed. I also took notes during the interviews which were saved in my computer files. This primary data has been maintained for the duration of my study in order to provide clarification, and in order to fact-check.

Based on all the data collected during these in-depth interviews, the following is dedicated to a comparison of the interview testimonies or findings, and the literature review.

Findings: A Comparison of the Data and the Literature

Review

I set out to discover if the current affairs documentary film can effect social change. I found that it can, if it is supported by movements in society that are working towards the same objective; it can be the catalyst that causes a chain reaction of events. I also observed that the television documentary film can still make

concrete the Griersonian principle of citizenship he urged more than 70 years ago, and that the television documentary can also be a contemporary form of what adult education set out to be—a tool for nurturing a democratic society. Since I used key informants as interview subjects, my analysis will begin by portraying the significant views of the respondents as a collective (Anderson, 1998, p. 188). This data will then be related to the review of the literature.

The documentary and didacticism

Overwhelmingly, respondents shared the view that the documentary is not inherently didactic, “if (the) interpretation of ‘didactic’ means that the work should be boringly pedantic or moralistic” (Lisa Barry, personal communication, April 20, 2004). Bikel, for instance, suggests that “every good book, every good documentary teaches something” keeping in mind, though, that there has to be an element of entertainment, something to give the viewer a reason to keep watching (personal communication, May 10, 2004). Opinions were also characterized by comments offered by industry professionals like Adam Symansky who says that the didactic notion is the hallmark of “bad documentaries and what gives them a bad name” (personal communication, April 5, 2004). He explains further saying that if a film is overt or naked in its

attempt to teach, it is not likely to engage an audience emotionally; in failing to do so it will likely falter in its objective to send a message and reach an audience outside the one that already has a vested interest in the issue being described in the film.

Similarly, Garry Beitel says documentaries are by nature instructive, but are educational by tradition. He says filmmakers nowadays try to be more subtle in the messages they try to convey, as opposed to an earlier tradition that was more transparent, referring to the Griersonian era as a time during which propaganda was not frowned upon. He says he would agree that most documentaries are 'serious' in that they have a message, but he notes that there are also documentaries that are whimsical or playful in their portrayal of a subject. Beitel says documentaries, on the whole, attract people who want to use the medium to convince people of something, but increasingly they have become more discreet because of this resistance, even if the film has a specific purpose in telling the story it does. As he puts it, implicitly the filmmaker is saying, "I don't want to tell you what to think", but at the same time there is a moral message that accompanies these documentary films, more so than with fiction films (personal communication, April 13, 2004).

Lisa Barry, a documentary filmmaker with *Anglican Video* says, "My answer is a resounding 'yes', and a resounding 'no'. To me, documentaries are no different than any other art form in that they are a product of an artist's vision or interpretation. That is to say, they are a creation of someone with something to express, with the difference being only in the medium of expression, not in the fundamental art itself. So—are documentaries inherently didactic—yes, they are, as all art is" (personal communication, April 20, 2004).

From a journalistic standpoint, Lynden MacIntyre of *The Fifth Estate* believes "information is education—about how society works and how the use of power in the world can impinge upon and (possibly) ruin your life" (personal communication, April 27, 2004). His producer and the show's senior editor, Neil Docherty, agrees saying the *Fifth Estate's* documentaries are instances of "giving a lesson in an entertaining and engaging fashion, (which) is the secret to it, and then backing it up with facts" (personal communication, April 27, 2004).

Frances-Mary Morrison also feels suggesting the documentary is didactic by nature "sounds self-consciously educational. I prefer 'revelatory', the ability to open up a world" to the viewer (personal communication, April 27,

2004). Finally, Lou Wiley Jr. of *Frontline* believes that with respect to the program's documentaries, "there's indirect learning going on" and that *Frontline* is a form of "literate television—not educational in the instructional sense of the word, but a learning experience" (personal communication, May 11, 2004).

If the documentary film has the power to effect social change or, as Downie puts it, "at least (possessing the possibility of) chang(ing) one's mind or showing an audience something they haven't seen before or considered in a different light" (personal communication, May 3, 2004), doesn't logic follow that it is necessary to use the documentary as a tool for promoting change where change is needed (e.g., in eradicating poverty, rooting out racism, etc.)?

The documentary as social 'hammer'

Within a journalistic context, respondents from *The Fifth Estate* and *Frontline* agree they have an "obligation to look at the powerful in society where people can be hurt by decisions made by either public or private institutions—we feel this is a social responsibility we have" (Lou Wiley Jr., personal communication, May 11, 2004). However, some, like Bikel, feel the documentary should not be used to set an agenda, or as a tool to push any one subject. She

acknowledges the power of the mass media, but as an artist she feels one must use that power judiciously, especially in being respectful towards one's audience and caring not to condescend towards them in telling them what it is you think they should hear or see (personal communication, May 10, 2004). Likewise, Morrison believes "you can achieve a level of serious investigation and be compelling without being earnest" but she does say that within the 21st century television forum, it is "used almost exclusively for entertainment only" (personal communication, April 27, 2004), echoing Putnam's (2000) analysis.

Beitel also believes the 'should' position is antiquated and says instead documentaries "should be as wide and as diverse as the people who are attracted to using images of reality as opposed to images using scripts and actors...Ultimately the documentary is an art form and not a political medium. It's healthy that there's an opening up and freeing up of artistic techniques in documentary that is not in the service of a message, but in the service of artistic expression" (personal communication, April 13, 2004). Grierson, on the other hand says Symansky, was emphatic that NFB films should be "one inch to the left of the party of power" (personal communication, April 5, 2004). Should they veer too close

or too far from that target, they would enter into the realm of self-indulgence, which Grierson would have regarded as a violation of the essence or spirit of the documentary film. However, Symansky recognizes that the documentary having an exclusive social purpose, as Grierson had seen it, has changed dramatically. He says in the same way humans are complex—their ideas and avenues for creativity being innumerable—the documentary film, therefore, should give one a sense of entering another world, whatever that 'world' may be (personal communication, April 5, 2004).

The belief that the documentary has a responsibility to elucidate society's ills, though, is still strong. In her e-mail response, Barry says: "In a recent address at the RealScreen Summit, New York filmmaker Albert Maysles said, 'as documentary filmmakers we have a powerful mission. We have in our hands instruments to do this most honorable thing—to fight the trend towards lousy people doing lousy things'" (personal communication, April 20, 2004). Barry goes on to argue, "If one agrees with Maysles (and I do), perhaps in this endless field of documentary fodder we need to ask ourselves if there is anything instructive or enlightening or uplifting or inspiring about our approach and/or our subject. There are perhaps enough

programs around about people tricking each other into matrimony or dangling from bungee cords while eating bull testicles" (personal communication, April 20, 2004).

The difference in ideological stance seems to stem from whether one describes himself as a 'social documentarian', says Beitel, like Isaac Magnusson and Peter Wintonick. "They say, 'This is what's wrong with the world and we have to change it.' They believe knowing about things leads us to act" though Beitel, like many other respondents, is not convinced that this actually occurs (personal communication, April 13, 2004). So it begs the question, can the documentary film effect change?

Effecting social change

Symansky also doubts there is a strict correlation between a film and social change. Instead, he believes the broadcast may "build a climate of opinion and start people thinking" (personal communication, April 5, 2004). He cites as an example a film he produced in 2002 called, *A License to Remember: Je me souviens*. The film is about a new Quebecer's search for the meaning of this ubiquitous expression, hammered out in the province's psyche via its automobile license plates. He says teachers now use the film to explore issues of identity (personal communication, April 5, 2004). Similarly, *Discordia* had the same effect.

The NFB film, produced in 2003 explores the stand-off between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli students at Concordia University following a scheduled, but failed attempt by former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address *Hillel Concordia* in September 2002. It toured Canadian campuses last year with roundtable discussions following screenings, and is currently on the festival circuit in Canada and the U.S.

Downie argues that the documentary can lift the veil from the sanitized version of news to which society has become desensitized (personal communication, May 3, 2004). In explaining why Bikel's film, *An Ordinary Crime* caused a stir, Marrie Campbell says it is in part due to Bikel's "extraordinary investment in journalism, extraordinary reporting—it's not just a sound byte—she unravels their (the interviewees') soul, and it's great drama" (personal communication, May 11, 2004). Wiley Jr. too says the reaction was tied to the film's "great storytelling—you're on the edge of your seat, but (Bikel is) also fair, she tells her story carefully, factually, and calmly" (personal communication, May 11, 2004). Speaking for herself, Bikel feels mass media can be 'the spark that lights the fire', but only in so far as the conditions are ripe for change to take place. For instance, she says by the time *An Ordinary*

Crime aired, the public was already well schooled in the importance of DNA evidence; she says this awareness, along with the support of the *Innocence Project* were critical to the film's success in provoking events (personal communication, May 10, 2004).

Filmmakers Alan Snitow and Deborah Kaufman also said they worked with community groups in developing their film, *Thirst*. After the screening at the Toronto *HotDocs Festival* in April 2004, Kaufman said their aspirations, now that the film has been made, is for community activists to use the film to advance their views on the perils of privatizing water. "The ideas are percolating and we hope the film helps them along" (Deborah Kaufman, *HotDocs Festival* post-screening address, April 28, 2004). Bikel's film, *The Case for Innocence* is a case in point with respect to brokering partnerships with social action groups: the *Frontline* producer used existing cases being investigated by the *Innocence Project* in New York City (A. Kaplan, personal communication, May 10, 2004), and her final product most assuredly helped Garner's case along.

Local filmmaker, Barry Lazar of Beitel/Lazar Productions Inc. recently premiered their latest feature documentary, *The Man Who Learned to Fall*, at the 15th International Congress on the Care of the Terminally Ill at

McGill University in September 2004. The film tells the story of teacher and writer, Phil Simmons, who is dying of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). "Good films create a dialogue and have their own life," says Lazar (personal communication, March 23, 2004). He says social change or individual transformation may very well be a by-product of a film, but he does not believe that this can be its starting point; to imagine that it can be, he says, would be presumptuous.

Audacious in its purpose or not, the case exposed in *An Ordinary Crime* was dear to Bikel, and echoes Downie's opinion that "part of the richness of documentary filmmaking is that you tell the stories that matter to you, and you tell them from the heart" (personal communication, May 3, 2004). Bikel says the caliber of her interviewing skills has much to do with the reception her films receive, which she likens to a psychotherapy session in that she establishes a relationship of trust where the interview subject feels safe telling their story. Wiley Jr. and Campbell both agree that how these images are captured and presented—all the aesthetic parts that make up a film—are an important part of it. As Bluem (1965) wrote:

It is not merely by chance that the documentary concept has been characterized as existing in a 'gray area' between art and journalism. The selecting and

arranging process which takes place during perception and transmission of experience is fundamental to both subjective (artistic) and objective (journalistic) communication (p. 14).

For that reason Beitel now sees himself "not only as a teacher, but also as an artist where I can explore the form because, ultimately, the world is an ambiguous place and we don't always have the answer" (personal communication, April 13, 2004). The skill in television, says Docherty, is in tailoring the facts for optimal visual appeal—"only that way can you get people to watch. You have to make a piece of television, not just a piece of journalism" (personal communication, April 27, 2004). What triangulation is to research methods in validating claims and suppositions, fact-checking through the use of multiple sources is to the journalistic effort. Questions that arise in Barry's mind while editing, for instance, are "'Will they understand this?' or 'Will they be able to feel what I am feeling as I stand here and watch this?'" and says "most aesthetic decisions that I make about style or approach are subject-driven rather than audience-driven" (personal communication, April 29, 2004).

But what happens after the film is shown, either on television, in theatres, or at film festivals? Is it

simply just another commodity that is bought and traded, and then gathers dust on the shelf?

The documentary as commodity

One way to slow down a culture of consumption, says Beitel, is to use alternative distribution channels like the institutional route, which provides longevity and can be more satisfying and more educational than 'the big bang' of television or theatre distribution, for example. In his experience, he is still invited into classrooms and to community groups to discuss films he made ten years ago: *End Notes* made in 1999 is a film about palliative care and it is still shown every week to medical residents at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal as a way to encourage students to look at end-of-life issues with a different eye. He says the benefit of working with educational distributors is that it allows the film's issues to be explored more thoroughly; this avenue permits the filmmaker to move beyond the immediate, but short-lived impact mass distribution provides (personal communication, April 13, 2004).

If the objective is reach as wide an audience as possible in order to promote discussion, thereby building community, isn't the vehicle with the most audience reach, the Internet, an obvious venue? As Putnam (2000) suggests,

communication is a fundamental prerequisite for social and emotional connections. Telecommunications in general, and the Internet in particular substantially enhance our ability to communicate; thus it seems reasonable to assume that their net effect will be to enhance community, perhaps even dramatically. Social capital is about networks, and the Net is the network to end all networks (p., 171).

The findings suggest how *Frontline* is addressing issues of audience reach and creating tools that promote it. The findings also describe media that more closely match the concept of alternative media, launched here in Canada under the auspices of the National Film Board of Canada.

Documentary and e-exposure

Some, like Downie, are skeptical about the Internet saying it creates a false sense of community, but as *Frontline's* Campbell points out, it is a growing trend. There are roughly 27 million visitors a year to *Frontline's* website, with 70,000 on-line views of the films uploaded on the program's website (personal communication, June 10, 2004). Campbell suggests the "'fireplace' (viewers) sit in front of (nowadays) is the website" and that the website is the community that connects viewers once they have turned off their television. She also says numbers are quite high for the 'discussion group' feature on the program's website, the 1,800 messages posted following the broadcast

of Bikel's *An Ordinary Crime* being a "watermark" (personal communication, May 11, 2004).

Campbell and Wiley Jr. both believe the 'Join the Discussion' section is a forum for continuing the debate on any given topic once the television screen fades to black. As Wiley Jr. puts it, "if they're taking the time to write I think it does propel things" (personal communication, May 11, 2004). Campbell believes the Internet is "a populist way of reaching people." She says it is allowing the program to find a new audience, picking up a new demographic—"teenagers and '20 somethings'...who already know how and like getting their information on the computer" (personal communication, May 11, 2004).

Another technique for reaching a new community, notes Jessica Smith, publicist for *Frontline*, is through outreach programs. *The Ghosts of Rwanda*, a harrowing look into the Rwandan genocide, was used as part of a panel discussion at Harvard University in the spring of 2004. *Frontline* is also a member of *The National Center for Outreach* which is

public television's service arm that purposefully extends the impact of broadcasts by giving them legs into the local community...Public broadcasting outreach extends the impact of public broadcasting through a variety of media services, educational materials and collaborative activities. This work is designed to engage individuals and foster community participation to raise awareness and effect change (www.nationaloutreach.org/AboutOutreach/Index.htm).

Closer to home, *Parole citoyenne* is an Internet project created by the NFB's French program. Chris Medawar, Line Producer, says it was developed to "literally use the website as a platform to bring in people as an outreach initiative" (personal communication, May 6, 2004). The website is based on a magazine format with themes on relevant social issues, and offers alternative points of view through images, not text. *Parole citoyenne* also puts the cameras in the hands of ordinary citizens, inviting the 'engaged filmmaker' to submit short documentaries. The website describes the project's mission and speaks evocatively of its mandate to stimulate social engagement:

Le projet Internet **Parole citoyenne** s'inscrit à l'intérieur du projet parapluie **Projet citoyen**. Dans un contexte de mondialisation qui engendre les inégalités, l'exclusion sociale et la remise en question du rôle de l'État, le PROJET CITOYEN de l'ONF veut contribuer à raviver la participation démocratique des citoyens et citoyennes. De ce fait, il vise à retisser les liens sociaux en produisant des œuvres documentaires dont la démarche prend ses racines dans les collectivités (www.citoyen.onf.ca/apropos/apropos.html).

"Can picking up a camera itself transform people?" Medawar asks. "People like to tell stories, they feel the need to tell stories maybe because they feel unrepresented...or misrepresented,...and we can use film as a tool to communicate." Ultimately, says Medawar, "good film, good

art does challenge the mind, does transform" (personal communication, May 6, 2004).

Laurie Jones of the NFB describes the 'e-cinema network' of webcasts that the Film Board is nurturing. She says they are a modern-day version of the classic NFB itinerant projectionist who would visit church basements and local community halls to screen films, and discuss them afterwards with community members. An example of a recent webcast is that of *Zéro tolerance*, a 2003 production about 'racial profiling' among Montreal police which toured police academies in a virtual environment. Students were able to watch the film, and then discuss it with the filmmakers in a real-time setting. Jones argues that "watching a film together...makes a lot of difference—the quality of discussion brings you a lot further in your reflection, and in terms of civic participation—(there's) nothing better" (personal communication, March 25, 2004).

Internet communication is not without its drawbacks. Putnam (2000) points to several, including the lack of accessibility to all citizens which can produce 'elites'; the non-verbal obstacle; the risk of 'cyberbalkanization' or how the "Internet enables us to confine our communication to people who share precisely our interest"; and the threat that like television, it too will become a

predominant purveyor of entertainment (pp. 174-79). In terms of creating a 21st-century public sphere, Putnam, and I believe rightly so, states that the Internet will enhance, not become a substitute for face-to-face communication. But that does not discount the power the new technology offers. As Putnam (2000) contends,

the most important question is not what the Internet will do to us, but what we will do with it. How can we use the enormous potential of computer-mediated communication to make our investments in social capital more productive (p. 180)?

Summary

The case study results analyzed in this chapter indicate that a model of reciprocal communication was in operation with respect to the events that unfolded once *An Ordinary Crime* was aired on *Frontline*. Furthermore, the outcomes support a theory of communication based on a 'convergence/network model'. This model differs significantly from a transfer model of communication, which favours a sender-receiver paradigm and causal effect. Rather, the convergence/network system "describes a process of dialogue, information sharing, mutual understanding and agreement, and collective action" (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2002, p. 3). Following the rationale set out in this model, the findings show that a 'catalyst/stimulus' did exist both internally and externally to the community

in question, leading to a dialogue that was effective in engendering an act of solidarity to resolve a problem. What was notable in this study's research was the critical involvement of existing community awareness and organization. In keeping with Kilborn and Izod's (2000) view, I agree that

documentaries, as other forms of media output, cannot be isolated from those other forces at work in society (political, social and cultural), which, over the longer or shorter term, result in change occurring (p. 235).

The documentary, as explored through *Frontline*, can indeed be influential instigator. Appropriately, the case study also supports Habermas's ideal, and illustrates how media

...are not inevitably fated to become forms of domination; they are also forms of emancipation. The media also have the power to facilitate and extend the ordinary communication processes within a society instead of displacing them. With their ability to transcend restrictions of time, space, or social position, they can foster public debate across boundaries and barriers normally prohibited in practices or ordinary conversation. They can foster mutuality and cooperation among peoples and be an arm of their liberation from oppression of all types (Schneider, 1999, p. 59).

The findings also demonstrate how new technology can be used by the media to move closer to the concept of a true public sphere. Giroux (1989) suggests how the television documentary film, in particular, holds out some hope of communicative action because "it gives it the power to

bring forward all sorts of unheard voices, and sometimes launch them onto a career in the public sphere" (p. 226).

Along the same lines and with a focus on the documentary film specifically, Chanan (2000) proposes that

what Grierson was about can be seen as advancing a claim for documentary as a contribution to public knowledge of social issues; or following Habermas, a form of communicative action in the public sphere of an aesthetic kind (p. 221).

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Among the areas discussed in the history and theories of the documentary in Chapter 2, this study adds to the body of knowledge on mass communication and its many implications. David Fanning, *Frontline's* executive producer, states on the program's website:

Literate television combines reporting that does not speak down to the viewer and filmmaking that avoids packaging news in the disposable, formulaic pattern of standups and sound bites. It raises and addresses questions without skirting complexity (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/us/david.html).

Again, the literature on the power of mass media is impressive, but this thesis's findings contribute to an aspect of the topic that offers an opportunity for more precise study, namely the power of the public affairs documentary to educate and encourage social redirections, and how it can move beyond the living room and into even more public spheres of activity. As Winston (2000) argues,

it is wrong...to suggest that documentary can have no popular appeal outside television and cannot attract an audience broader than the traditional minority, well-educated upper-class viewer (p. 52).

The important ingredient, as explored in the case study analysis, is the bridging of existing community awareness, and the authority and exposure that mass media can wield.

I began my research thinking there was a strict causal link

between the current affairs documentary and change taking place, after witnessing how the public had been galvanized following the broadcast of *An Ordinary Crime* on *Frontline*. My investigations have led me to a richer yield of conclusions, namely in acknowledging the process by which the documentary can be a strong thread in a thicker strand of communicative action. Impressive examples of those can be found, for instance, in community outreach programs, and Internet-based outreach initiatives as raised through the work of the *Innocence Network*, *Parole citoyenne*, and *The National Center for Outreach*.

Further research may lie in studying, in even greater detail, the relationship between dialogue and collective action by implementing the communication for social change model (CFSC), described by Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani, and Lewis (2002) in their paper, "Communication for Social Change: An Integrated Model for Measuring Processes and Outcomes". The paper was prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation, and describes a methodology the authors believe can be applied to encourage social outcomes in communities. Developed out of the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School for Public Health, the CFSC model centers on problems related to health, but as the authors point out, social change can address a variety of social problems (The

Rockefeller Foundation, 2002, p. iii). It would be interesting to measure the outcomes across a number of communities working on the same social problem following the application of the CFSC model. Though this study's objectives do not include describing the complexities of the model in any great detail, it can be briefly said that

...the dialogue and collective-action process described in (the CFSC) model is a *learning process*, in which individual members through their participation in community projects increase their capacity for cooperative action with one another and form social structures—networks, teams, leader-follower relationships—which increase the community's overall capacity for future collective action (Figueroa et al., 2002, p. 12).

With respect to the value of my research within the field of adult education, I believe it contributes to the knowledge documented on the philosophy of education as a form of intellectual freedom, and its importance as a vehicle for building a democratic society. As Murphy (2001) explored in his study of the politics of adult education:

there has been a recent resurgence of interest in civil society, a resurgence that is also found in adult education. Radical adult educators, in particular, view civil society as the privileged sphere of radical learning and social change. It is seen as the site to engage in democratic struggle, social movements and political change (p. 345).

How does the current affairs documentary, a messenger of ideas, information, and knowledge for the adult learner fit

into this framework? Furthermore, does it play a role in bringing about social change and if so, how can it become more visible? All of these questions have a central theme and impetus in what Barron (1968) explored in his essay, "The Documentary Tradition":

news documentaries have a common purpose...to inform and instruct. It is a purpose that sees films as politically useful and is based in political theory, i.e., the Jeffersonian idea of the marketplace of ideas and the role of an informed electorate; that democracy is doomed unless the public is informed (p. 496).

Perhaps its increased exposure lies with the contemporary roving projectionist, the webcast, as embraced by the NFB, or perhaps along the educational path as experienced by filmmaker Beitel.

In closing, it was the Dean of Medicine at McGill University who, following the screening of the Beitel/Lazar production *The Man Who Learned to Fall*, offered an observation that was strikingly powerful in its brevity, but spoke volumes about the impetus for the research carried out in this study. Dr. Abraham Fuks simply said, "Stories teach" (September 22, 2004). However the documentary, and the stories it tells gains a greater distinctiveness in the media landscape and in the minds of the viewers who navigate it, it will be interesting to watch.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol—Frontline

Introduction

As may have been explained to you, I am conducting research for my thesis towards an M.A. in Educational Studies, with a specialization in Adult Education. The focus of my research is to examine the television current affairs documentary as a tool for educating adults, and its potential for effecting social change.

Specifically, I'm carrying out a case study of Ofra Bikel's films on the criminal justice system. After learning that 18 months after the broadcast of *The Case for Innocence* in 1999 the three inmates profiled were exonerated of their crimes, I was fascinated by the power this documentary, and correspondingly this medium, could wield in shaping public opinion, and changing public policy.

The purpose of the interview is to explore three areas:

- FRONTLINE's mission and mandate
- FRONTLINE's demographics and viewer profile
- the documentary as a medium.

1.0 Context

1.1 What was the political and cultural climate when FRONTLINE was first conceived and broadcasted in 1983?

- 1.2 What do you consider FRONTLINE's mandate to be, and what is its aim? Do you regard it as a particular type of media agency?
- 1.3 Would you agree that there is a didactic agenda (i.e., consciousness raising, or civic engagement) in FRONTLINE's programming, whether overt or not? Why or why not? Do you agree that the documentary is inherently didactic? Why or why not?
- 1.4 How is the series performance evaluated? How is success measured?
- 1.5 What are the influences that drive program choices? Is there a FRONTLINE "formula"? How does FRONTLINE navigate the issues surrounding sponsorship, promotion, and distribution?
- 1.6 Why do you think people tune in to FRONTLINE? Why FRONTLINE as opposed to other informational, current affairs television?
- 1.7 What do you think are the residual effects, if any, in watching FRONTLINE? Does the threat that the films become "inert knowledge" or trivia shortly after they're broadcasted exist, or is there an effort made to sustain the life cycle of the films (i.e., the use of message boards on the series' website)?

- 1.8 Would you describe FRONTLINE's films as belonging to a group of media which advocate social change, or perhaps civic engagement?
- 1.9 Jil Godmilow, a filmmaker and professor at the University of Notre Dame, has coined the term "the pornography of the real", referring the commoditization of film subjects. Do you think FRONTLINE is a substitute for social action, or do you think it has the potential to be what she calls a "transformative experience" in that it can change the way people think?
- 1.10 What is the role of FRONTLINE's outreach initiatives and community engagement via the Internet?

2.0 Viewer profile

- 2.1 Who are FRONTLINE's viewers? Who is its imaginary audience?
- 2.2 Traditionally, the audience base for public television is significantly smaller than for commercial networks. What do you feel accounts for this phenomenon?
- 2.3 What do you think causes viewers, in general, but FRONTLINE viewers in particular, to join on-line discussion groups? Have you an idea whether the

rate of participation is less than or greater when comparing it to other programs of the same ilk?

2.4 Who benefits from your programming? Who do you think should benefit from it?

2.5 Have you measured or tried to assess the impact FRONTLINE's programming has had on attitudinal change of your viewers?

3.0 The documentary form

3.1 Is television the most effective vehicle for disseminating the various subject matter explored in FRONTLINE's programs? What about alternative distribution channels (e.g., video-on-demand, broadband Internet service)?

3.2 What place do you think the Internet has in the evolution of the documentary when referring to FRONTLINE?

3.3 When speaking about FRONTLINE's "media language", what do you feel are the series' structural features (i.e., aesthetic considerations such as sound, motion, narration, etc.)?

3.4 Do FRONTLINE's films show things the way they are? Why or why not? Would you say FRONTLINE falls into a journalistic tradition of documentary filmmaking?

- 3.5 How do you reconcile the implicit contradiction of documentary work (i.e., it's not fiction because it represents reality, but at the same time, there is creativity involved)?
- 3.6 There are social documentarians who feel media development is needed to attract filmmakers to audience's concerns rather than concentrating on finding viewers for independent productions (i.e., advocacy filmmaking). What is your opinion?
- 3.7 Is, can, or should social action and change be the domain of the mass media, or is this issue more appropriately led by activist groups and grassroots organizations?
- 3.8 What subjects should the documentary be covering?
What form should the documentary take?

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 In conclusion, why do you think Ofra Bikel's films have had such an extraordinary reaction? Why do you think this doesn't happen with other films whose subject matter may be as contemporaneous or compelling?

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol—Ofra Bikel

Introduction

As discussed, I'm conducting research for my thesis towards an M.A. in Educational Studies, with a specialization in Adult Education at Concordia University in Montreal. The focus of my research is to examine the television current affairs documentary as a tool for educating adults, and its potential for effecting social change.

Specifically, the focal point of my research stems from your films revolving around criminal justice system. After learning that, 18 months after the broadcast of *The Case for Innocence* in 1999, the three inmates profiled were exonerated of their crimes, I was fascinated by the power your films and correspondingly, the power the documentary can wield in shaping public opinion, and changing public policy.

The purpose of the interview is to explore three areas:

- the filmmaker as social agent
- the documentary as a medium.

1.0 Filmmaker as social agent

1.1 How did you come to filmmaking? Why the documentary?

1.2 How do you go about choosing the subjects you explore in your films?

- 1.3 What were the circumstances surrounding your decision to make *The Case for Innocence*?
- 1.4 What was your objective in making the film? Were you surprised by the reaction to, and ultimate outcome resulting from the film?
- 1.5 What do you see as your role as a documentary filmmaker? Do you consider yourself a social documentarian?
- 1.6 Acknowledging the fact that not all documentaries, no matter how compelling, necessarily produce the spontaneous reaction your film did, why do you think yours did?
- 1.7 What role did social organizations or community groups play in propelling the release of these men? Do you think it's possible for a film to do so on its own, or do you think there has to be an alliance with grassroots groups to advance an issue?
- 1.8 There seems to be a growing appetite for the documentary, outside of the television current affairs format (e.g., *Bowling for Columbine*, *Capturing the Friedmans*, *The Corporation*, *Super Size Me*, etc.). What do you think accounts for this?

1.9 Do you think the documentary can effect social change, as Michael Moore suggested in *The Corporation*?

2.0 The Documentary Form

2.1 Why do you think FRONTLINE is a good platform for the work you do? Do you think *The Case for Innocence* would have had the same effect had it been broadcasted on a commercial network? Do you see a difference in the work you do for a public network and the current affairs reporting you see in popular commercial programs, such as *Dateline* and *20/20*?

2.2 What voice do you think you're speaking in in your films? What is your means of address?

2.3 What does the documentary form mean to you?

2.4 Jil Godmilow, filmmaker and professor at the University of Notre Dame, has suggested the documentary film should be a transformative experience. Do you agree?

2.5 Do you think the documentary is inherently didactic?

2.5 What subjects should the documentary be covering?

2.6 What do you think about the argument some socially-engaged documentary filmmakers have that

there should be media development to attract filmmakers to and audience's concerns, rather than following the conventional route of attracting viewers to independent productions?

3.0 Conclusion

3.1 In conclusion, do you think your documentary films are a form of education?

APPENDIX C

Interview Transcript

Ofra Bikel

Caporicci: I know a bit about your history...that you studied law, for instance. Can you tell me how you got into filmmaking?

Bikel: Because I couldn't find another job. I couldn't have cared less, I wasn't interested at all. I couldn't get a job and I didn't know anybody except in theatre and television. When I look back...I studied political science and law—everybody studied law—one would think I put it all together, but I didn't at all. I love international stories...everything came together, but not by design.

Caporicci: Have you always been involved with documentary filmmaking?

Bikel: Yes. I did some dramatic shows...I love movies, but that doesn't really interest me.

Caporicci: Why the documentary?

Bikel: Because I really like to communicate. I like to go and look at something...it takes me seven or eight months to do a show. I want to learn. I love to research...I go, I see, I talk to people....

Caporicci: How do you go about choosing your projects? You said you want to learn...

Bikel: Basically I do it the hard way. I look for an idea, not a story...a story that will communicate an idea.

Caporicci: You've done quite a bit of work on the criminal justice system. Do you see yourself becoming a specialist? Any why the Terence Garner story?

Bikel: The circumstances making the films and then seeing people freed were based on work being done with DNA evidence...that is one thing that is undeniable. I don't know if I was lucky...with Garner, his mother broke my heart...I loved her, and I thought, I'm going to do it for her.

Caporicci: So you had a personal stake in that particular case?

Bikel: Of course! How could you not?

Caporicci: Would you say your films are somewhat a form of social advocacy?

Bikel: I try not to do that because there's nothing that puts people off than when they think you're trying to convert them.

Caporicci: There is a viewpoint though, but you say that you don't cross the line in becoming overly zealous...

Bikel: I try to be careful in giving the other side.

Caporicci: Were you surprised by the reaction and the ultimate outcome?

Bikel: No, because...it was unbelievable, it was such a mistake. I knew he would come out, but I didn't know when.

Caporicci: So how much of an influence do you think the public's reaction had?

Bikel: A lot...the black community mobilized...it's only the people...of course the show helped, but it's definitely the people.

Caporicci: What do you see your role being as a documentary filmmaker?

Bikel: It's really important for me to do a show where I can really learn and then really do something about it.

Caporicci: Do you think there would have been the same level of reaction if your films were broadcasted on commercial networks?

Bikel: Commercial networks would not do that...they would never let me do that...in the first place because it's not sexy enough...it's not 'Friends' (laughing). I mean, I was able to look at the whole process with the criminal justice system...law...and see that there was something wrong with it. That's not something the networks would do—they would do **a** story.

Caporicci: How many films have you made?

Bikel: A lot (laughs)...I don't know, I really don't know.

Caporicci: What do you think it is about your films...because not all documentaries necessarily receive this spontaneous reaction that yours have?

Bikel: I think I'm smart really...I mean I think I don't underestimate people, and also I'm a very good interviewer and this is very important. The greatest compliment I received was from an editor who was screening my tapes and said she could tell I cared.

Caporicci: How important do you think grassroots organizations—the information, the assistance, the input they offer—like the Innocence Project was with your films, are in helping?

Bikel: Very important...tremendous.

Caporicci: If we're talking about social change, changing opinions, changing public policy, does film possess the power to transform?

Bikel: I think so, I think it does...

Caporicci: ...in and of itself?

Bikel: It depends on the climate. I think the fact that people knew about DNA evidence, that they were sensitive to it, helped with the Garner story...that they knew something could be wrong with the system. I think it's both.

Caporicci: Do you think the documentary is inherently didactic?

Bikel: I think that every good book, every good documentary teaches something...you're going to learn something.

Caporicci: Do you think the documentary should be covering particular subjects, should have a purpose?

Bikel: No...look, there are some people who do documentaries on their mother, their grandmother. I mean it's not the type of thing I do because it's not what motivates me, but why not?

APPENDIX D

General Interview Questions

1. Do you agree that the documentary is inherently didactic? Why or why not?
2. What subjects should the documentary be covering?
3. How important are the aesthetic properties of a film with respect to engaging an audience, and possibly stimulating discussion on an issue?
4. What do you feel is the best distribution channel to build exposure or does it necessarily have to be multi-platform (i.e., television, festival, theatres, etc.)?
5. Do you think there should be media development to attract filmmakers to an audience's concerns, rather than the conventional route of attracting viewers to independent productions?
6. What do you think is the future of documentary?