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Using Documentary Film as a Historical Source

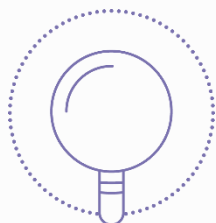
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Using Documentary Film as a Historical Source

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Abstract

This case study provides guidance on how to engage with film as a historical source. Using the documentary *Life is Not Black and White* (1977) as an example demonstrates how to deconstruct a film and critically evaluate it as a primary source while being mindful of its potential uses as a secondary source. Different types of films may call for different approaches, and there is no magic recipe for a critical analysis of any moving image. All films, however, regardless of their purpose—and this includes newsreels and documentaries—adopt certain narrative conventions and visual techniques that create particular meanings. They also use creative license and a complex visual

lexicon to immerse the viewer in the world presented on the screen. This study shows that a careful dissection of the content of the film, followed by a close analysis of the context of its creation combined with information about how the film was viewed and received, can lead to discovering its full potential as a historical source. While we should be careful when relying on film as a source and consider the issues of intention, authenticity, and restrictions on the film-making process, this study argues that a rigorous 'reading' of the film may provide material worthy of historical inquiry and offers tools required to embrace it as a valid historical methodology.

Learning Outcomes

After reading this case study, you will be able to:

- Consider documentary film as an object of study and reflect on its strengths and limitations as a historical source.
- Critically 'read' a film and understand how it creates meaning through visual and aural means.
- Assess the aims and impact of the documentary film within its historical context.
- Appreciate the ways historical films' presentations of the past are shaped by larger cultural forces.
- Understand the nature of film as a historical source and how films can shape our understanding of the past.

Initial Steps and Questions

Before reading this piece and evaluating the primary source in full, you may want to reflect on these questions and initial steps.

'Reading' a film is different from reading a written source, where the only language used is verbal. As film historian and a great advocate of using film as a historical source Robert Rosenstone has put it, '[t]o change the medium of history from the page to the screen, to add images, sound, colour, movement, and drama, is to alter the way we read, see, perceive, and think about the

past.¹ Working with film requires that we consider a wide range of elements and specific visual strategies in order to deconstruct it. In addition to considering the conditions of production and engaging in a critical analysis of the film itself, background reading and research will be required to provide a rigorous analysis of it as a historical source.

Despite the documentary's pretence of merely 'documenting' reality, like other films, it has a script and a storyline, and the historian's task is to discern how it crafts a certain narrative about the past and what tools it uses to achieve its aims. When approaching a film as a historical source, its critical analysis can be performed in two stages: (1) reading the film and (2) considering it as a historical source.²

Stage 1: Reading the Film

In order to prepare for the film's evaluation, first, gather the most basic data about the content and context of the film. This involves looking closely at the film and making observations about the following.

- **Content:** This includes narrative strategies (how the story is told and structured, how the film keeps the viewer's attention, and how it tries to enhance authenticity) and components such as framing (what is included and what is excluded within the shots), composition (camera angles, visual effects), the use of colour (vs black and white footage), *mise-en-scène* (how things are arranged within a frame, including settings, lighting, objects and people), sound (dialogue and narration, sound effects, music, and silence), ambience (e.g., the sound of rain to evoke sadness), and editing (how the scenes are put together, e.g., by using continuity or noncontinuity editing). All these factors influence meaning in any given film so look out for what strikes you in the film under analysis.
- **Production:** This concerns why the film was produced (e.g., to preserve the past, to educate, for entertainment, or purely for profit) and how, including who was involved in the production (to what extent the film expresses its creators' attitudes), technological opportunities and limitations, budget, censorship, social, and political influences, contemporary trends in film, etc.
- **Reception:** This involves audience exposure (who watched the film but also who was the intended audience), box office success, the impact of the film as seen in critics' reviews, and responses in the popular press. This information is the most difficult, and sometimes

impossible, to obtain, in which case, we can use knowledge about the cultural context of the film to help us assess or speculate about how it could have been received by audiences.

Stage 2: Considering the Film as a Historical Source

A film can be seen both as a primary and a secondary source, depending on how we use it and what questions we ask about it. Knowing the difference will help you to use it more effectively as evidence.

- **Film as a primary source:** Film footage can serve not only as evidence for a historical fact (e.g., when it records events) but also as evidence for social and cultural history (it can express the values and concerns of the time in which it was made, illustrating certain cultural assumptions and preoccupations, prejudices, or even a sense of humour).
- **Film as a secondary source:** Films interpret the past, rather than simply reflecting or reenacting it. They have a point of view, which they create through visual and rhetorical means. The aim of a historian is to understand the ways in which a film makes its points and how it represents the history, including what assumptions it makes, what cultural codes it works with, and how it is shaped by its own historical context.

It is important to resist dismissing the film as a valid historical source. A historian's response to film should be neither to reject it on the basis of comparison with more comprehensive written sources nor to accept it uncritically, but to become a critical viewer, to recognise a particular interpretation and to understand how visual techniques and conventions send subtle messages. While films use different techniques than written sources to convey meaning, they actively participate in explaining the past and, therefore, our role as historians is to understand their language. While we must be as cautious as with other primary sources, this caution should not prevent us from engagement with potentially rich and beneficial historical material.³

Contextual Information

Motion picture technology was first developed by early experimenters such as Étienne-Jules Marey in France and Thomas Edison in the United States, with the first public film screening organised by the Lumière brothers in Paris, in 1895. In these early productions, the camera was

always static, and films' dynamism relied on the movement in front of it. They were often shots of daily life, unpretentiously reflected in titles such as *Falling Cat* (1894), *Fred Ott's Sneeze* (1894), and *Leaving the Factory* (1895), or records of celebrities such as *Annabelle Serpentine Dance* (1895). Soon, however, these early filmmakers started experimenting with stop motion and in-camera effects to create visual tricks that would allow creating historical reenactments such as *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1895) and fantasies such as *A Trip to the Moon* (1902).

The emergence of cinema thus made possible a new visual invigoration of history. Fascinated by the possibility of capturing reality on the screen, filmmakers embarked on ethnographic and historical film projects that constructed and preserved visual chronicles of society, culture, and national identity. American filmmaker Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), which has been called not only the first documentary film but also the first ethnographic film and the first art film, focused on the daily activities of a family of Quebec Inuit. When it was released in Europe, the film fed into the existing fascination with Inuit people as 'a kind of cuddly "primitive" man', uncivilised and harmless.⁴ The film generated a discourse of authenticity around documentaries, which purported them to be always truthful and objective reflections of reality, especially when it came to documenting the so-called 'vanishing cultures'. But when historians looked closely at the film, they uncovered manipulations and staged reconstructions that revealed consciously built narratives.

While Flaherty's film settings and characters were foreign and exotic, British filmmaker John Grierson was more interested in the social issues that define and circumscribe people's lives. Had Grierson made *Nanook*, he might have focused more on food poverty and the encroachment of white explorers, presenting the Inuit family as endangered rather than 'cuddly'. He believed that the role of film was to bring political issues to light and to persuade the audience; he used to say to his crew that they were 'propagandists first, filmmakers second'.⁵ Grierson's definition of documentary as 'the creative treatment of reality' is key to understanding the genre from the historical perspective.⁶ It summarises the main tension in documentaries: while they purport to represent and reveal the truth, the creative elements required to put them together to present the content in a narrative, and even just to film it, inadvertently alters and subjectifies that truth.

Grierson's fascination with Soviet filmmakers and social realism (whose mantra 'art is a hammer, not a mirror' meant that film shapes, not reflects, reality) was widespread among early British filmmakers. In the lead-up to the Second World War, Left political film culture established itself firmly in London art circles, with many film groups and societies forming (e.g., Ivor Montagu's Film

Society and the Progressive Film Institute) in order to distribute and screen politically conscious films, such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), banned by the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) until 1954.⁷ These groups also began to produce their own films, mostly in the 'substandard' 16-mm film stock instead of the customary 35 mm covered by BBFC regulations, which protected them against censorship.⁸ The protagonist of the film under study, Stanley Forman, met Montagu after the war, and this encounter resulted in Forman beginning to collect, archive, and distribute Left productions, including acquiring film footage from socialist countries.

Stanley Forman (1921–2013) joined the Mile End Young Communist League as a teenager and in later interviews claimed that he owed his entire existence to the Communist Party.⁹ It was Lenin's words, 'Of all the arts, for us the most important is the cinema', that inspired him to go into filmmaking.¹⁰ Driven by the desire to 'change British politics through showing films' and with the help of the British Soviet Friendship Houses, he established his first media company Plato Films, which later transformed into Educational and Television Films (ETV).¹¹ Forman travelled to the Communist Bloc countries (including Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, China, North Korea, as well as South and Central America) and brought socialist films to Britain for distribution and screenings under the slogan 'See the Other Half of the World'. In the process, he also 'picked up' filmmaking and began creating his own short features on the most pressing political and social issues of the day.¹² The most successful of those was his collaboration with Martin Smith on the story of the politically active folk singer killed by the Pinochet regime, *Compañero: Victor Jara of Chile* (1974), which was nominated for the Robert Flaherty Award of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA).

Forman's ETV film footage collection became so abundant and varied that filmmakers (including Grierson himself) drew on it for the production of numerous acclaimed documentary series such as Scottish Television's *This Wonderful World* (1957) or the BBC's *The World at War* (1973). His contributions to the world of film were recognised by various institutions and film festivals, and two biographical documentaries were created about him: *Life is Not Black and White* (1977) by Hungarian Television and *Life Can Be Wonderful* (1994) by Martin Smith, Forman's collaborator on *Compañero*. The ETV film library was donated to the British Film Institute National Archive in 2002 and subsequently organised, digitised, and made available online as Adam Matthew Digital's 'Socialism on Film' resource. It now offers a unique insight into the history of the Cold War and the cultural battlegrounds of the twentieth century.

The historical context of *Life is Not Black and White* is in itself a considerable force that contributed to shaping the documentary. Late 1970s were a time of economic and political strife across the world, including the United Kingdom. The postwar economic boom had ended, and the decade was marked by financial difficulties, power cuts, miners' strikes, rising inflation, and a humiliating bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Even Prime Minister Jim Callaghan gloomily advised, 'If I were a young man, I should emigrate' (1974). While the film illustrates these themes and preoccupations, the Hungarian lens of the producers must also be considered. In Eastern Europe, the 1970s was the time of increasingly vocal disillusionment with the communist system and a growing pressure to reform it. This context may have allowed for the more nuanced cultural and ideological conversations presented in the appropriately titled *Life is Not Black and White*.

Source Analysis Questions

The following questions will help you to 'read' the film and consider its value as a historical source:

1. *Content*: How does the film structure help to construct a particular narrative about the past? What tools does the documentary use to create that narrative? What is the function of different camera shots, supplementary photographs and stock footage, music, and voiceover?
2. *Production*: We know that the film was produced by Hungarian Television in the late 1970s; in light of this, what does it suggest about the creators' motivations? How did the producers' background and sociopolitical context shape the end product?
3. *Reception*: What contextual information would help us understand the film's impact?
4. How can the film be used as a primary source? What does it provide evidence for? How does it reflect the time of its making? Does it allow us to understand Britain in the 1970s?
5. How can the film be used as a secondary source? How does it interpret the past? Is it accurate? What other types of sources would be required to corroborate the authenticity of the source?

Critical Evaluation

Life is Not Black and White is a film portrait of Stanley Forman, who was a significant figure in British Left political cinema. It presents him as a film collector and distributor, filmmaker, and activist, but above all, as a lifelong communist dedicated to the idea that film had the power to persuade British people to socialism. His personal story is interwoven with the changing social and political realities in Britain and ends with Forman reflecting on the nuances of life and the lessons he learned since his induction into communism.

Reading the Film

All films, including documentaries, construct a story about their subjects by using a range of visual and aural devices to create a range of meanings. These elements are carefully chosen and edited by the director, producer, writer, and other film collaborators to craft a particular narrative about the past, and our task is to decode the different strands of this narrative, including the film's content and structure, as well as the conditions of its production and reception.

Content

In just over twenty-seven minutes, *Life is Not Black and White* (1977) attempts to present 'a little corner' (00:25:26) of the life of Stanley Forman, as narrated by himself. The film has a well-defined structure. It opens with the clapperboard, a theatrical device used to signal the beginning of action. The setting is Budapest, 1976. Forman explains the rationale for the film, which is followed by its title in Hungarian (*Élet nem fekete-fehér, Az*). The second segment focuses on Forman's early life—imaginary childhood scenes narrated by Forman blend with current footage of London. He makes comparisons between the 1930s as he experienced this formative decade and the 1970s as captured on the camera, with added commentary. The transformation of Forman's Britain is illustrated with footage of a multicultural group of children (e.g., a black girl's face is visually aligned with the words 'tremendous changes' [00:02:15]) and its continuity with static footage of buildings and place names. The next section of the film explains not only Forman's ideology—he talks about being radicalised into communist values while living in 'the bleak poverty of the 30s' (00:04:03)—but also reflects on his 'blind conviction' and 'over-optimism' (00:09:00). The story culminates with a crisis point—here, Forman talks about his future, his family, and professional life facing a 'real fundamental crisis' (00:12:15), and he links this crisis to 'the general crisis that is raging in Britain' (00:13:05). At this point, the documentary changes its character and begins to tell the story of the making of his own film produced with Martin Smith in 1975, *Compañero: Victor Jara of Chile*. The scenes from the film are interspersed with the

interviews with Smith and Joan Jara (dubbed in Hungarian) and present the film as a 'genuine love story' (00:22:05) so closely linked with the current economic and political issues that it became 'a drama of everybody else' (00:19:30). The documentary ends with an epilogue—spirited back to Budapest a year later, Forman talks about the impossibility of capturing one's life in a 'film portrait' (00:24:50). Looking back at his life, he disavows idealism and reassesses his choices, although he does not explicitly renounce communism. His last words, spoken against the background of a river symbolising change, state: 'One has to learn, painfully. But one has to learn' (00:27:00). The film then cuts to black, offering no closing credits that would provide attribution to the production crew.

In the film, the multifaceted and complex life of Stanley Forman is simplified to a linear narrative, with the main protagonist's voiceover narration aimed directly at the viewer, giving credence to the story and conveying a sense of a journey. The location sites bookending the film reinforce the ideological and material links between the concrete existence of socialist Hungary, which Forman visited on multiple occasions, and the ephemerality of his communist beliefs. These are consistently emphasised through Forman's personal reflections as well as the use of stock footage (e.g., from the World Youth Festival in Hungary, 1949 [00:07:02–00:08:47]) and black and white photographs that serve as evidence for his life events. Scenes from London include authenticity markers, such as the red bus and the black cab, mixed with voiceover narration, street noises, children's chatter, and oral testimony. Close-up shots are used to establish an emotional connection with the audience; for example, when Forman talks about his dreams of studying at the Royal Academy the camera zooms in on his face allowing the viewers to empathise with his sense of unfulfillment and personal transformation (00:06:10).

The film is visibly conditioned by technological limitations that imposed constraints on its content. The range of camera movement is limited and colours lustreless; the sound of the voice occasionally misaligns with the movement of Forman's lips and the footage itself is of fairly low quality. These limitations may pose a challenge when it comes to engaging twenty-first-century viewers. Technology has an impact both on reception (how audiences engage with a film) and production (what is possible to portray in a film at a given time due to technological advances), a phenomenon best illustrated in film remakes (which are additionally influenced by the social and cultural concerns of the time of their making).

Production

An oft-made assumption is that film is a product of one person and one vision, usually the director's. Film producers, scriptwriters, actors, or voiceovers can have an equally profound effect on a film, however, and it is always crucial to consider their role in a given production. In the case of *Life is Not Black and White*, this information is very limited. Due to the lack of captions and credits, it is difficult to ascertain how the film was produced; what we do know is that the film was commissioned by state-funded Hungarian Television (Magyar Televízió [MTV]) in the mid-1970s. There is no information about the specific people involved in the production (only that Forman calls them 'a very nice crew' [00:25:50]) or about its budget, although shooting on location in London implies considerable investment. Similarly, the motivations behind the documentary are not fully clear; Forman only reveals that it seemed 'very strange' to him to be asked to do it and that he 'resisted the idea very strongly' (00:00:27).

Understanding the context of the time, however, allows us to speculate that Hungarian producers were interested in portraying the life of a man who was committed not only to communism but also to preserving its creative output on film and using it to attempt to sway the British public opinion. Presented as a Western ally, Stanley Forman signals to his Eastern European audiences that communist ideology can be freely adopted, rather than imposed, and that British people also face economic challenges. This would have served as a confirmation of communism's appeal and thus could be seen as a form of soft propaganda.

Censorship most certainly played a role in the film's production. Despite a lack of official state censorship in Hungary at the time, such documentaries would have followed tightly demarcated ideological boundaries regarding what was permitted to show and disseminate in Eastern Europe, and what was considered hostile to the dominant system. In the 1970s, only independent publishers (*samizdat*) ventured outside these boundaries producing works that expressed dissent and promoted anticommunist resistance.¹³

Overall, looking at the conditions of production, including who made or commissioned the film and why it was made, as well as what constraints were placed on the producers (such as censorship), allows us to understand the overall vision and aims of the film and how they impacted on the development of the storyline. The next step is to consider its reception.

Reception

As an MTV production, the film was probably first aired in Hungary. Since MTV was part of a broadcaster network called Intervision, established to enable an easy exchange of

broadcasting material among Eastern European countries, it is very likely that the documentary was also aired in countries such as Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland, as well as perhaps Cuba or Vietnam which were also included in the network.¹⁴ Considering the reach and monopolistic character of these networks, the film could have had a large audience exposure in Eastern Europe.

Without accessing the ETV documentary archive that recorded Forman's film screenings and viewers' responses, the facts related to viewership are equally difficult to establish when it comes to audience exposure in Great Britain. We know, however, that viewers' social identity and ideological worldview largely determine what films they choose to see.¹⁵ The niche topic of the documentary and the fact it was a Hungarian production did not facilitate broader public distribution. Given that the films in Forman's collection were usually privately screened to selective audiences such as political groups and artist circles, *Life is Not Black and White* was likely seen at least within the London community of socialist filmmakers and enthusiasts.

It is not known how the film was received either in Britain or abroad, due to the lack of available critical reviews or mentions in the popular press. Although a full range of interpretations will not be possible to obtain, it is not inconceivable that the film was received favourably by its targeted audiences, especially in the light of its subtly contemplative outlook on the communist ideology. One must be careful, however, not to generalise about audiences while also considering the process of film viewing as an event with its own discursive context (e.g., a film can be viewed at home or in a venue, alone or in company, and all of these have an impact on whether viewers accept or resist its message).¹⁶

Considering the Film as a Historical Source

Once the deep reading of the film is performed and its nuances of meaning explored, including its narrative structure and cinematography as well as the conditions of production and reception, we are ready to interrogate it as a historical source. The same film can be used both as a primary and a secondary source, depending on the questions we ask, and the following sections will critically analyse *Life is Not Black and White* from the perspective of what it offers the historian as a primary and secondary document.

Film as a Primary Source

A moving image becomes a primary source when it captures historical events as they unfold. This usually includes raw footage (e.g., in the film under study—recording the scenes of London in the 1970s or, for comparison, the famous Zapruder film that captured the moment of the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy). As such, either the entire documentary or its portions can serve as evidence for historical fact. *Life is Not Black and White* provides an autobiographical statement about what it meant to be a communist filmmaker in twentieth-century Britain. The actual footage used in the film, the photographs, and segments from Forman's film *Compañero*, all serve as visual evidence for the filmmaker's intellectual journey. While he interprets that journey for his audience, it is possible for the viewer to make other inferences and construct a different meaning from the presented footage. Viewers are free to interpret the facts and events in a less favourable way and might apply their own context, knowledge, and worldview to the issues of the past.

In addition to providing primary source material as a filmic record, documentary can also serve as evidence for cultural history. Every film expresses the cultural values and preoccupations of the time, thus, providing a lens into the society that created (and viewed) it. This means identifying the ways in which it reflects and mediates the past; more specifically, what it tells us about the context in which it was made. For example, there is a very discernible difference in the representations of race in films such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *12 Years a Slave* (2013), and this difference tells us more about American society a century apart than it does about the events both films portrayed.

When seen in its historical context, *Life is Not Black and White* illustrates the preoccupations of its time, reflecting and mediating contemporary attitudes and realities. The film speaks to the anxieties experienced in 1970s Britain, consistently referring to the economic and social challenges of the decade. The narrative is about the complexity of an ideologically driven life and the extent to which it is inevitably entangled with political and economic realities. It shows the growing cultural tensions between continuity and change, although—being recorded in the pre-Thatcher era—it escapes the most familiar representations of a divided Britain.

Stanley Forman uses the film to mediate his own sense of himself, offering the viewers a chance to go on a similar journey and make sense of themselves. As part of his intellectual journey, Forman expresses his doubts over communism as a system that could redress the social problems of the nation, a belief he had held for most of his life. At the end of the film, he reflects that 'one must be careful before jumping to conclusions' because 'life isn't as pure as [he] thought in [his]

youth' (00:26:45–00:27:11). He does not interrogate his views critically, however, nor does he disavow communism. While it would be tempting to see this absence of repudiation as an impact of the context of the film's production (for Hungarian television), multiple people close to Forman later observed that he in fact never renounced communism.¹⁷ The documentary may therefore be seen as a genuine expression of his beliefs.

Film as a Secondary Source

A film becomes a secondary source when it engages in an interpretation of the past. When documentary comments on historical events, it enters the historiographic discourse, for example, *Television's Vietnam: The Real Story* (1985) was a response to *Vietnam: A Television History* (1983)—both interpreting the war in different and conflicting ways. In *Life is Not Black and White*, Stanley Forman provides a critical commentary on Britain between the 1930s and 1970s through the lens of his experience and ideology. His analytical observations focus on the political status quo and on the lack of public interest in global injustice, on the state of 'educational world' that 'cannot afford any longer to hire films [from ETV]' (00:13:45), and on the power of film to bring social issues to the fore. As such, the documentary gives us an insight into one of many historical viewpoints and interpretations, but one that is less represented in mainstream documentary film. It is not only an interpretation of his life but also his interpretation of Britain.

One of the most important steps to take when considering film as a secondary source is to assess its authenticity, which is a function of factual accuracy and historical truth. This requires verification with other historical sources, including visual and written documents. For a historian analysing a film scene, it is not enough to focus on the words spoken by the person or the person itself but also on how they are depicted. Each choice about these depictions and representations 'constitutes an interpretation of the evidence, a construction of a historical point of view'.¹⁸

Life is Not Black and White attempts to present an authentic account of what it meant to be a communist filmmaker in Britain, using Forman's voiceover as 'the voice of history'.¹⁹ Its limitations come from the fact that the film presents only one person's point of view, and this fails to show other perspectives. In this sense, the film fulfils both Forman's and Hungarian Television's agendas and publicises their work. Nonetheless, the value of it to the historian derives from the fact that it is a unique narrative of an underrepresented and nondominant ideology and offers an insight into an otherwise hidden world. The film also allows the viewer to connect their cultural

experience with the experiences and perspectives presented in the film, thus, generating links to the past and to history in its contemporary context.

Finally, it might be productive to compare a documentary as a historical source to a written academic source. In the case of *Life is Not Black and White*, while reading a biography of Stanley Forman could perhaps offer a more complex and comprehensive insight into the man (caveat: such a biography does not exist) and reading about Britain in his lifetime would provide a more detailed historical account, what the film offers is an opportunity to sense the character of the man and make one's own decisions about what he was like and what Britain looked like through his own unique lens. The film, thus, allows us to visualise this past and get the 'feel' for it, an appeal that often eludes academic texts.

Conclusion

As visual sources, films organise ideas differently than written sources and using the methodological approach proposed above can increase our appreciation of a given film and understand its messages. Critically approaching a documentary by deconstructing its content as well as exploring the conditions of its production and reception not only reveals surprising levels of complexity in a moving image but also allows us to see its value as a historical source. Being one of the most popular and influential mediums for representing history in the twenty-first century, it should not be ignored by historians but seen as a unique form of insight into society, culture, and history.

Post-evaluation Questions

1. To what extent may the conditions of production and distribution of the film have altered its content and reception?
2. How can the lessons learnt from analysing this film be applied to other documentary films? To what extent can this model of approaching documentary film analysis be applied to other types of film?
3. To what extent does the film confirm or challenge the value of documentary as a historical source?

4. How does the film compare to other documentaries? What trends and documentary conventions does it follow? Does it break any new ground with regard to its documentary style?
5. Is there anything inherently fallacious about using this film as a historical source?

Further Research Considerations

If you were to research this area further, you might consider the following questions and discussion points.

1. What do films add to our understanding of history? Do they provide a useful means of educating the public about historical events?
2. How does watching documentary films provide a different historical experience from that of reading written histories?
3. What role do archival collections play in preserving documentary films for historians and the public?
4. What does the documentary mode have to offer the historian, and what are its pitfalls? Is it capable of capturing historical 'reality'?
5. How has the postmodern undermining of notions of 'truth', 'objectivity', and 'fact' affected the historian's engagement with documentary?
6. How far can filmmakers strike a balance between the conflicting agendas of history and the box office? Can history be both popular and academically rigorous?

Further Resources

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Notes

1. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 164.
2. For a more detailed explanation of this methodology, see O'Connor, *Image as Artifact*.
3. Edwards et al. *Histories on Screen*, 23.
4. Rony, *The Third Eye*.
5. Barnouw, *Documentary*, 90.
6. Raack, "Historiography as Cinematography."
7. Burton, "See the Other Half of the World."
8. Dickinson, "Film as an Ideological Weapon," Accessed January 22, 2021.
9. Pomfret and Fogg, "Stanley Forman: A Retrospective."
10. Ibid.
11. Burton, "See the Other Half of the World."
12. Pomfret and Fogg, "Stanley Forman."
13. Béla Nove, "Talking about censorship and the lost world of samizdat."
14. Badenoch et al., *Airy Curtains in the European Ether*.

15. James, "Popular Film-going in Britain in the Early 1930s."
16. For more on reception theory, see Staiger, *Interpreting Films*.
17. Forman, "Stanley Forman Obituary."
18. O'Connor, *Image as Artifact*, 30.
19. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 32.

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