

'The River' Runs Through It: Pare Lorentz's Legacy

# documentary



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## IDA's Silver Anniversary Saluting the 25 Best Docs!

**PLUS:**

Perspectives from Sheila Nevins, Ted Leonsis, Cara Mertes, Ally Derks, Steven Okazaki, Scott Foundas, Emanuel Levy, Stephen Farber, Kenneth Turan, Sheila Benson, Claudia Puig, John Anderson, David D'Arcy and more!



# TOP 25 DOCUMENTARIES

Earlier this year, in commemoration of our 25th Anniversary, we appealed to our members to weigh in on at [www.documentary.org](http://www.documentary.org) with their Top 25 documentaries of all time. Voters selected from a list of over 700 titles, and could add up to five write-ins. In this section—and on [www.documentary.org](http://www.documentary.org)—is the consensus Top 25, representing a range of styles, sensibilities and eras. While any list is subject to discussion, debate and dispute, we offer these titles as a jumping-off point, an opportunity to revisit, reassess and reclaim, and a means to remind you of why you're part of this community in the first place.



NETFLIX

## 1 Hoop Dreams (1994)

Director: Steve James  
Producers: Peter Gilbert, Steve James, Frederick Marx  
Executive Producers: Catherine Allen, Gordon Quinn  
Cinematographer: Peter Gilbert  
Writers: Steve James, Frederick Marx  
Editors: William Kraggs, Steve James, Frederick Marx  
Composer: Ben Sidran  
Kartemquin Films, KICA-TV, Fine Line Features

## 2 The Thin Blue Line (1988)

Director: Errol Morris  
Producer: Mark Lipson  
Executive Producer: Lindsay Law  
Cinematographers: Robert Chappell, Stefan Czapsky  
Writer: Errol Morris  
Editor: Paul Barnes  
Composer: Philip Glass  
Third Floor Productions, American Playhouse, Miramax Films, MSM

## 3 Bowling for Columbine (2002)

Director/Producer: Michael Moore  
Producers: Charles Bishop, Jim Czarnecki, Michael Donovan, Kathleen Glynn  
Executive Producer: Wolfram Tichy  
Writer: Michael Moore  
Cinematographers: Brian Dantz, Michael McDonough, Ed Kalla  
Editor: Kurt Englehr  
Composer: Jeff Glick  
Dog Eat Dog Films, Alliance Atlantis, Sater Street Films, VF 2, United Artists, MSM

## 4 Spellbound (2002)

Director/Producer: Jeffrey Blitz  
Producer: Sean Welch  
Executive Producer: Sheila Nadin  
Cinematographer: Jeffrey Blitz  
Editor: Yara Garskaya  
Composer: Daniel Haskler  
THINKFilm, HBO, Columbia TriStar Home Video

## 5 Harlan County, U.S.A. (1976)

Director/Producer: Barbara Koppie  
Cinematographer: Hart Perry  
Editor: Nancy Baker  
Composers: Hazel Dickens, Merle Travis  
Cabin Creek Films, Cinema 5 Distributing, PBS, The Criterion Collection

## 6 An Inconvenient Truth (2006)

Director/Executive Producer: Davis Guggenheim  
Producers: Laurie David, Lawrence Bender, Scott Z. Burns  
Executive Producers: Jeff Skoll, Diane Weyman, Ricky Strauss, Jeff Ivers  
Cinematographers: Davis Guggenheim, Bob Richman  
Editor: Jay Cassidy  
Composer: Michael Brook  
A Lawrence Bender/Laurie David Production, Paramount Classics, Participant Productions

## 7 Crumb (1994)

Director/Producer: Terry Zwigoff  
Producers: David Lynch, Lynn O'Donnell  
Executive Producers: Albert Berger, Lianne Halton, Lawrence Wilkerson  
Cinematographer: Maryse Alberti  
Editor: Victor Livingston  
Composer: David Boeddinghaus  
Superior Pictures, Sony Pictures Classics, Columbia TriStar

## 8 Gimme Shelter (1970)

Directors: Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Charlotte Zwiern  
Cinematographers: Albert Maysles, David Maysles  
Editors: Elen Giffard, Robert Farrow, Joanne Buke, Kent McKinney  
Maysles Films, Cinema 5 Distributing, The Criterion Collection

## 9 The Fog of War (2003)

Director/Producer: Errol Morris  
Producers: Julie Ailberg, Michael Williams  
Executive Producers: Jon Kamen, Jack Lochner, Robert May, Frank Scharma, John Stoss  
Cinematographers: Robert Chappell, Peter Donahue  
Editors: Doug Abel, Chyd King, Karen Schweizer  
Composer: Philip Glass  
The Globe Department Store, Radical Media, SerArt Films, Sony Pictures Classics, Columbia TriStar Home Video

## 10 Roger & Me (1989)

Director/Producer: Michael Moore  
Cinematographers: Chris Seaver, John Fusak, Kevin Rafferty, Bruce Schermer  
Writer: Michael Moore  
Editors: Jennifer Berman, Wendy Stanzler  
Dog Eat Dog Films, Warner Bros. Pictures

## 11 Super Size Me (2004)

Director/Writer/Producer: Morgan Spurlock  
Executive Producers: J.R. Morley, Heather Winters  
Cinematographer: Scott Ambrosy  
Editors: Stela Gueorguieva, Julie "Bob" Lombardi  
Composers: Steve Horowitz, Michael Parrish, Doug Foy  
Samuel Goldwyn Films, Roadside Attractions, Showtime Networks, Arts Alliance America

## 12 Dont Look Back (1967)

Director: DA Pennebaker  
Producers: John Court, Albert Grossman  
Cinematographers: DA Pennebaker, Howard Alk  
Writer/Editor: DA Pennebaker  
Leacock-Pennebaker, Inc., Docurama

## 13 Salesman (1968)

Directors: Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Charlotte Zwerin  
Producers: Albert Maysles, David Maysles  
Cinematographer: Albert Maysles  
Editors: David Maysles, Charlotte Zwerin  
Contributing Film Editor: Elen Giffard  
Assistant Editor: Barbara Jarvis  
Sound Mixer: Dick Vorisek  
A Maysles Films Inc. Production, The Criterion Collection

## 14 Koyaanisqatsi (1983)

Director/Producer/Writer: Godfrey Reggio  
Executive Producer: Francis Ford Coppola  
Cinematographer: Ron Fricke  
Editors: Ron Fricke, Alton Walpole  
Writers: Ron Fricke, Michael Hoenig, Godfrey Reggio, Alton Walpole  
Composer: Philip Glass  
An IRE Production, New Cinema, Island Alive, MGM

## 15 Sherman's March (1986)

Director/Writer/Cinematographer/Editor: Ross McElwee  
First Run Features

## 16 Grey Gardens (1976)

Directors: Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Ellen Hovde, Muffie Meyer  
Producers: Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Susan Froemka  
Cinematographer: Albert Maysles  
Editors: Susan Froemka, Ellen Hovde, Muffie Meyer  
A Maysles Films Inc. Production, The Criterion Collection

## 17 Capturing the Friedmans (2003)

Director: Andrew Jarecki  
Producers: Andrew Jarecki, Marc Smerling  
Executive Producer: Sheila Nevins  
Cinematographer: Adolfo Doring  
Editor: Richard Hankin  
Composers: Bill Harrington, Andrea Morricone  
Magnolia Pictures, HBO Documentary Films, HBO Video

## 18 Born into Brothels (2004)

Directors/Producers/Cinematographers: Zana Briski, Ross Kauffman  
Executive Producers: Gerilyn White Dreyfous, Sheila Nevins  
Editors: Nancy Baker, Ross Kauffman  
Writers: Zana Briski, Ross Kauffman  
Composer: John McDowell  
THINKFilm, HBO Cinemax Documentary Films, DVD: HBO Video

## 19 Titicut Follies (1967)

Director/Producer: Frederick Wiseman  
Cinematographer: John Marshall  
Editors: Ayme Model, Frederick Wiseman  
Zipporah Films, Inc.

## 20 Buena Vista Social Club (1999)

Director: Wim Wenders  
Producers: Ry Cooder, Jerry Boys, Ulrich Felsberg, Deepak Nayar  
Executive Producers: Nick Gold, Ulrich Felsberg  
Cinematographers: Jörg Widmer, Robby Müller, Lisa Rinder  
Editor: Brian Johnson  
Road Movies Filmproduktion, Kintop Pictures, ARTE, ICAIC, Artisan Entertainment, Lionsgate

## 21 Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004)

Director/Producer/Writer: Michael Moore  
Producers: Kathleen Glynn, Jim Czarnecki  
Cinematographer: Mike Desjarlais  
Editors: Kurt Englehr, Christopher Seward, T. Woody Richman  
Composer: Jeff Gibbs  
Dog Eat Dog Films, Lionsgate Films, IFC Films, The Fellowship Adventure Group, Sony/Columbia TriStar, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

## 22 Winged Migration (2002)

Director/Producer/Writer: Jacques Perrin  
Producer: Christophe Barratier  
Executive Producer: Jean De Trégnant  
Cinematographers: Michael Benjamin, Sylvie Carozzo-Dreujou, Laurent Charbonnier, Luc Dilon, Laurent Floutot, Philippe Garguil, Dominique Gentil, Bernard Luce, Thierry Machado, Stéphanie Martin, Fabrice Moinrot, Ernst Sasse, Terrasse, Thierry Thomas  
Editor: Marie-Joséphe Yoyotte  
Writer: Stéphane Durand  
Composer: Bruno Coulais  
Sony Pictures Classics

## 23 Grizzly Man (2005)

Director: Werner Herzog  
Producers: Erik Nelson  
Executive Producers: Erik Nelson, Billy Campbell, Tom Ortenberg, Kevin Beggs, Phil Finkelough, Andrea Meditch  
Cinematographers: Timothy Treadwell, Peter Zelinger  
Editor: Joe Bini  
Composer: Richard Thompson  
Lionsgate, Discovery Docs

## 24 Night and Fog (1955)

Director: Alain Resnais  
Producers: Anatole Dauman, Sammy Hafton, Philippe Lifchitz  
Writer: Jean Cayrol  
Cinematographer: Ghislain Cloquet, Sacha Wiemy  
Editors: Jasmine Chasney, Henri Colpi  
Composer: Hanna Eisler  
The Criterion Collection

## 25 Woodstock (1970)

Director: Michael Wadleigh  
Producer: Bob Maurico  
Cinematographers: Malcolm Hart, Don Lenzler, Michael Margolis, David Myers, Richard Pearce, Michael Wadleigh, Al Wertheimer  
Editors: Michael Wadleigh, Martin Scorsese, Stan Warnow, Yeu-Bun Yeo, Jere Huggins, Thelma Schoonmaker  
Warner Bros., Warner Home Video

All of these films, with the exceptions of *Salesman* and *Titicut Follies*, are available through Netflix.



## 8 Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin's *Gimme Shelter* (1970)

BY GEORGE BUTLER

In late 1974, I published a book, with writer Charles Gaines, called *Pumping Iron: The Art of Bodybuilding*. I thought this could be a subject for a film and that its main character, Arnold Schwarzenegger, could become a big movie star.

No one agreed with me. It was impossible to find an experienced director to touch the subject. After being turned down by Frederick Wiseman, DeWitt Sage Jr., Howard Smith, David Wolper and others, I decided I would direct and produce my own movie.

I had never directed a film before, so in preparation, I rented a 16mm projector and a dozen top documentary films. I set up the projector in the cellar of my farm in New Hampshire and began watching films by Wiseman, DA Pennebaker and others, watching carefully to see how you opened a film, developed the characters, told the story.

Then I put on the first reel of *Gimme Shelter*. Nothing on earth could have given me a quicker study on how to make a cutting-edge film that not only captured its subject beautifully, but played out the subject like a novel—a Russian novel, even. At the time, I had been a writer, then a photographer. I was influenced by the nonfiction novelists of the late '60s—Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, Tom Wolfe, Truman

Capote, et al—and I had it in mind to employ their techniques in imposing dramatic structure on documentary film.

In *Gimme Shelter*, I saw it playing out on the screen from the start of the film. As is well-known, *Gimme Shelter* starts with directors Albert and David Maysles filming the Stones viewing footage on the Maysles' editing machine. Fellow director Charlotte Zwerin presides, showing Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Mick Taylor, Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts the film within the film, thus making another story out of the murder at Altamont Speedway that becomes the center of *Gimme Shelter*.

The music drew me in like a magnet. But there was more coming: behind-the-scenes shots that were almost unbearably candid. Faces, scenes and motions that revealed truth. The end credits of the film listed at least a dozen camera-people. (Two of them, Bob Fiori and Joan Churchill, would work for me on *Pumping Iron*.) But the trick, as I interpreted it from what I was viewing, was to roll the camera—many cameras—a lot and see what they might capture. Of course—and the Maysles brothers knew this—it was essential to find a great subject (who in the '60s was more electric than Mick Jagger at a big concert?) and then get access to it. But then, the super trick is to



pick the story over carefully, establish an editing plan and then allow the story to flow forward. By selecting certain characters—big game lawyer Melvin Belli, specific fans from the audience and the Hells Angels, disastrously requested by organizers to police the concert—the movie becomes a mirror of its age.

I watched *Gimme Shelter* three times in May 1975. I watched it again three times before writing this article. I could watch it again tonight, remembering my own youth in the '60s. □

*Editor's Note: This essay was originally published in the June 2003 Documentary as a Playback piece.*

George Butler's recent films include the 2006 MAX film *Roving Mars*, *The Lord God Bird* and *One Heartbeat*.

11

## Super Size Me (2004)



Courtesy of TC OM and Associates

*Super Size Me* is one man's journey into the world of weight gain, health problems and fast food. It's an examination of the American way of life and how we are eating ourselves to death. Filmmaker Morgan Spurlock hit the road and interviewed experts in 20 US cities. From surgeons general to gym teachers, cooks to kids, lawmakers to legislators, these authorities shared their research, opinions and "gut feelings" of our ever-expanding girth. Finally, Spurlock embarked on a unique experiment in which he personally documents the effects of a fast food diet...on himself.

*Super Size Me* is the eighth highest-grossing documentary of all time, according to BoxOfficeMojo.com, at \$11,536,243. The film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, and Spurlock won the Documentary Directing Award at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, and the Writers Guild of America Documentary Screenwriting Award.

12

## Dont Look Back (1967)



Courtesy of Pennebaker Hepeskus Films

*Dont Look Back* is about the 1960s and the man who got a lot of us through them. Bob Dylan is more than the folk singer lauded by the record industry, more than the song writer whose poetry is the only kind many of us remember, more than the Kerouac-kid who haunts our best writing. He is the force that blew us out of one era and into another. His words are ambiguous, his style constantly changing and his avoidance of publicity obsessive, yet he remains the influential voice of our times. *Dont Look Back* was filmed during a three-week concert tour of England in the Spring of 1965. More than a view of an extraordinary concert tour, *Dont Look Back* is an intimate portrait of one of the most influential songwriters of our times.

Source of synopsis: [www.gh101.com](http://www.gh101.com)

*Dont Look Back* was re-released on DVD through Docurama in February 2007 as a two-disk digitally re-mastered edition, with a new documentary by Pennebaker called *Bob Dylan 65 Revisited*, created from 20 hours of previously unused footage from that fateful tour.

13

## Salesman (1968)



Courtesy of Maysles Films, Inc.

A landmark American documentary, *Salesman* captures in vivid detail the bygone era of the door-to-door salesman. While laboring to sell a gold-embossed version of the Good Book, Paul Brennan and his colleagues target the beleaguered masses—then face the demands of quotas and the frustrations of life on the road. Following Brennan on his daily rounds, the Maysles discover a real-life Willy Loman, walking the line from hype to despair.

Source of synopsis: The Criterion Collection.

*Salesman* was selected for preservation in the Film Registry of the Library of Congress in 1993.

**14**

*Koyaanisqatsi* (1983)



Courtesy [www.koyaanisqatsi.org](http://www.koyaanisqatsi.org)

*Koyaanisqatsi*, Godfrey Reggio's debut as a film director and producer, is the first film of his "Qatsi" trilogy. The title is a Hopi Indian word meaning "life out of balance." Created between 1975 and 1982, the film is an apocalyptic vision of the collision of two different worlds—urban life and technology versus the environment.

Source of synopsis: [www.koyaanisqatsi.org](http://www.koyaanisqatsi.org)

According to an entry in Wikipedia, *Koyaanisqatsi* took about six years to make—three years to shoot the film, and another three years for Philip Glass and Reggio to compose and edit the film in collaboration.

**15**

*Sherman's March* (1986)



Courtesy of First Run Features

"You should use the camera as a way to meet women...." What begins as an attempt to retrace the path taken by General Sherman and his Union soldiers in their devastating sweep through the secessionist South becomes, in the words of Ross McElwee's sister, a brokenhearted filmmaker's clumsy chivalrous quest to find love. In his most celebrated film, McElwee points up the paradox of the inquisitive documentarian: "He's gotten scalded by life, his lover left him, and so he retreats into the mollusk shell of his camera and pokes his head out now and then."

Sources of synopsis: Museum of Modern Art and [www.rossmcelwee.com](http://www.rossmcelwee.com)

*Sherman's March* won the Grand Jury Prize for Best Feature Documentary at the 1986 Sundance Film Festival.

**16**

*Grey Gardens* (1976)



Courtesy of Maysles Films, Inc.

Meet Big and Little Edie Beale—high-society dropouts, mother and daughter, reclusive cousins of Jackie Kennedy Onassis—thriving together amid the decay and disorder of their ramshackle East Hampton mansion. An impossibly intimate portrait and an eerie echo of the Kennedy Camelot, *Grey Gardens* quickly became a cult classic and established Little Edie as a fashion icon and philosopher queen. Thirty years later, Albert Maysles revisited the landmark documentary with a sequel of sorts, *The Beales of Grey Gardens*, culled from hours of never-before-seen footage recently found in the filmmakers' vaults.

Source of synopsis: The Criterion Collection

*Grey Gardens* might be the first documentary to have inspired both a Broadway musical and a feature film. The musical, which ran for nearly a year, garnered three Tony Awards, while a film, starring Jessica Lange and Drew Barrymore as the Beales, is in the works for HBO.