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Propaganda for Patriotism Example

Documentary is a unique form of expression, one that aims towards a group of people, appeals to an even more specific subgroup of that people, meanwhile captures the attention of mass audiences despite the filmmakers concern of their viewing. A propaganda documentary influences viewers in a precise way that convinces them to react based on subjective content. Michael Moore's film, Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004) takes on the roots and effects of the Bush administration, the Iraq War, and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks from a liberal perspective. Moore's film was distributed internationally, made for the American people, but supports the left-view American view. Leni Riefenstahl's motion picture Triumph of the Will (1935) was exposed to Nazi Germany, appealed to join young well-able men to join the Nazi army, and ultimately fed the idolization of Adolf Hitler. Moore and Riefenstahl have incredibly divergent party allegiances, these documentary filmmakers use opposing cinematic strategies to appeal to the individual citizen's best interests, but ultimately ignite a sense of patriotism in their citizens.

Commonly characterized as the sophisticated and intellectual film genre, the informative undertone of documentary filmmaking--no matter how artistically decorated--should raise suspicions as to why this specific

documentary has been made. Leni Riefenstahl was commissioned by the Nazi Germany government to create *Triumph of the Will* during a time where Nazi leaders were concerned for the public image of Nazism and Adolf Hitler. The film was intended to show Adolf Hitler as a heroic figure and savior to Germany during this time period. *Triumph of the Will* was deemed a commercial production to distance the Nazi party's involvement in the project, the Nuremberg rally was used to project an invincible Nazi government and military to deject their enemies and ignite supporters of Nazism.

Riefenstahl refrained from common documentary contrasting to explicitly show more and more shots of the flourishing Nazi Germany, in particular during the annual Nuremberg rally in 1934, instead she built powerful image upon powerful image. This film, being a government sponsored film in support of the present regime, did not seek to provoke empathy as do some documentaries, Hitler and the Nazi soldiers were portrayed to be flawless characters. Everything about this film's production and execution centers around power and wealth. The streams of crowds, affluent city, Christian church, multiple cameras in rally, etc. This film had a singular message, which was for everyone to know the wealth, power, and success of Nazi Germany, it was a vision of what every German citizen should make of the Nazi regime.

The film techniques such as tracking shots, low angle shots, and aerial shots used were not unique to cinema at the time but the film's complex production and use of scope uniquely reflected the unyielding superiority of Nazi's agenda for power and wealth. The Nuremberg Rally was filmed with numerous cameras planted throughout the parade, emphasizing the scope of massively well-organized crowds of either soldiers or supporters. This film is indulgent in order and mass, and its excessive budget was a reflection of Nazi Germany's flourishing economy.

In film critic and theoretician Bill Nichols' classic text, *"Introduction to Documentary"* (2001), Nichols would categorize *Triumph of the Will* documentary mode to be observational within his establishment of six different types of documentary modes. Observational documentary is aimed towards depicting reality as it is, or what the filmmaker wants to portray as everyday life reality. The mode revolves around the fact that the filmmaker is not intrusive on the subjects, however Riefenstahl presents this documentary as an observational documentary, but

in reality much of the film was curated. The lack of narration supported the Nazi party's goal to distance their direct touch on the filmmaking process in order for it to appear to be a more legitimate representation of them. This detachment of filmmaker and film allowed the viewers to feel less instructed, but more able to develop their own conclusions on the Nazi regime based on what they saw. As mentioned prior, Nazis were not in the best place during the time this film was made, a handful of their leaders were assassinated and the concentration camps were just being developed. The lack of expository elements allowed the Nazi's to represent themselves in a better light without context as to what is actually going on within the party.

This serves as true in the sense that Riefenstahl did obtain her footage in the direct cinema style of filmmaking, despite claiming the film was cinema verite. She didn't incorporate narration of the images she was recording, the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic parade music is foggy. The shots of Hitler's arrival to Nuremberg, the city's famous annual rally, and the prospering infrastructure of Nazi Germany seem to be conveniently acquired with a simple camera present. In reality, these scenes were embellished as much as Riefenstahl could manage, for example the seemingly invigorating moment Hitler arrived off the plane was actually a moment curated for the film. In *Triumph of the Will*, patriotism and nationalism was developed in its viewers through an observational lense that anonymously presented the magnitude of control the Nazi regime had, making any of the wavering or untrustworthy German army members feel threatened by the numbers and fierce leadership. The lack of self reflexivity of the filmmaker, legitimizes the visuals of Nazi Germany and the power and order they seemed to have possessed amongst their people. The indirect address of Riefenstahl's subjects and prolonged takes lead the audience to join her as the "fly on the wall."

Another political propaganda film not directly hailed for its advanced cinematic elements but the complexity in which cinema was used to document is Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The film is the highest grossing documentary of all time, Moore delves into the early years of the Bush Administration and the US government's suspicious behaviors within the War on Terror and rationalizations of the Iraq War. *Triumph of the Will* was a film generated in the midst of hope that the Nazi regime would continue to flourish into the future and it was commissioned by the government in support of the regime. In contrast to *Fahrenheit 9/11*, where Moore is speaking against his

government and wants the audience to reflect on past events in question to how power and wealth was being played out. However, Moore is still engaging in film propaganda and the criticism lies in the favor of the left-view politics and parties, but isn't explicitly trying to empower us but rather inform us.

It is important to refer to Bill Nichol's establishment of documentary modes to understand how these films differ in execution and impact. Michael Moore engages in a performative mode in his film, which combines numerous different filmmaking styles and modes to best nourish the subject matter and provoke a conclusive and relatively emotional reaction to what the viewer is seeing. *Fahrenheit 9/11* contains first-hand accounts of politicians, citizens, victims, and Moore himself in relation to the political and historical problems of the US government. The emphasis on personal experience is pivotal to a performative documentary, in comparison to *Triumph of the Will*, where citizen individuality was not celebrated yet still attracted patriotism and nationalism. While this documentary is performative, it includes reflexivity and expository choices. Moore's subjective, personal understandings of what is happening in the grand scale of American politics is a powerful tool for viewers to engage in postmodernism rhetoric on what is really happening in America, without the in depth logistical context.

The use of compilation is rampant in this *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore has derived archived footage of key moments in US government decision making and utilized it for evidence and ironic punch lines. As in expository documentary, Moore enlists himself as the film's "Voice of God," being the authority narrator, navigating the audience members throughout the film, another element in which the viewer hands their trust to him, Moore's famous approach to simplifying his rhetoric is with humor and sarcasm, most often towards the country's elites, but nonetheless is it taken as a trustworthy voice to left-wing supporters. The editing revolves around the verbal continuity of Moore's "storytelling" and builds the viewer's investment in a resolution to the recent corruption in the presidential administration.

Reflexivity is also a present mode in the film, Moore is frequently in front of the camera demonstrating his own investigative nature in find the missing parts of his knowledge and conclusion to the film's subjects, meanwhile taking us on a journey that will ultimately end the film. The film is not reflexive in the sense that Moore

demonstrates the organization of the production, but we follow him as he creates the film's footage.

In conclusion, both films are propaganda films, but they are using the opposite cinematic techniques to invoke an ultimate sentiment of invigorated patriotism towards the filmmaker's favored political party leaving the individual (in the party's favor) a more fierce and polarized citizen. One film is looking to expand the government's longevity, and reflect this in the film's complex production, hoping solidify the party's advancement. The other film criticizes a government administration's actions, weakening their front, analyzing the past.