

JNST 000L

Documentary & Controversy

Professor Kelly Hankin

T/Th 11:00am-12:20pm

As a form that purports to “speak the truth,” documentary film is often the subject of great debate and controversy, posing dilemmas for how audiences and scholars understand this important visual medium. The goal of this class will be to investigate these debates and controversies. Classes will be organized around the central questions and concerns that inform the public and academic discourses on documentary film, including:

- ❖ **Documentary as “Truth”:** Why do we believe documentary footage? How do we know a documentary is a documentary? What makes it “Real”?
- ❖ **Documentary Ethics:** What are the ethical questions involved in filming “real” images and people? What is “informed consent” and what does this mean for documentary practitioners, subjects, and audiences?
- ❖ **Mixed Modes of Documentary:** What makes a documentary different from fiction? Are experimental documentaries fiction or documentary?
- ❖ **Documentary as Evidence:** How does documentary footage work as “evidence” to legitimize, punish, and manipulate the public?

In addition to these topics, students will also learn how to think and write about the aesthetics of film, learn the meaning of important film terminology, and learn how to engage with contemporary film criticism.

While this course is not geared towards documentary production, as a Johnston class, students will be able to pursue documentary projects if they want.