10. Documentarist as . . Promoter

Definition(s):
Documentarist as Promoter = Corporate Sponsorship of documentary film
[Question—how does this differ from government sponsorship of the “Advocate” documentarist?]
[Another point—some of the docs Barnouw places in this category also seem to be “Prosecutor” in tone!]

Key Concepts & Issues:
Sponsorship was rather like an early “corporate responsibility” practice; however, with anonymous sponsorship, the full effect could not be felt
The fall of the newsreel, and—
The rise of films distributed under business-subsidized arrangements
Strange bedfellows—e.g., Old Crow Bourbon’s sponsorship of skiing films
Free content for television (in 1956, 99% of TV stations used corporate-sponsored films)
*Corporate Sponsorship vs. Journalism (e.g., Murrow’s work for CBS)??

Key Documentarists:
Shell film unit—stimulated by the influence of John Grierson (the “Advocate”), this unit was formed in 1934
The company dissociated their film activities from traditional advertising;
policy against “internal reference” to the company or product in films;
e.g., Airport (1935), Powered Flight (1951), History of the Helicopter (1951)
[A repeat from Advocate handout:
Pare Lorentz
Raised in West Virginia, his home life was “saturated in the arts.”
His first film, The Plow that Broke the Plains (1936) was funded by the RA (Resettlement Administration), which wished to expand its purview beyond still photography (e.g., Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Margaret Bourke-White, Ralph Steiner, Paul Strand, Leo Hurwitz, Willard VanDyke). Way over budget, Lorentz and composer Virgil Thomson combined music and images to illuminate a national problem (i.e., the Dust Bowl) “with strong documentation, and with emotional power and beauty” (p. 117). This was followed by the important film The River (1938), with a focus on the Mighty Mississippi.]

Robert Flaherty
His Louisiana Story (1948), funded by Standard Oil of New Jersey, was an expression of Flaherty’s love for the unspoiled wilderness and its life (in the end, the paradise is left as the oil drillers found it, and the Cajun boy and the oil crew are friends). It was Flaherty’s final film. He was
assisted by a young camera operator, Richard (Ricky) Leacock, who would become famous in his own right as a founder of the Direct Cinema movement (Barnouw’s Observer unit #11).

Edward R. Murrow

Famed WWII reporter was highly respected for his integrity
His See It Now TV series began in 1951 on CBS with producer Fred Friendly—sponsored by Alcoa

[The narrative film Good Night, and Good Luck (George Clooney, U.S., 2005) is an excellent “docudrama” treatment of his coverage of Sen. Joseph McCarthy; Clooney played Fred Friendly]

In 1953, See It Now began a series of documentaries on the then-current issue of McCarthyism (see The McCarthy Years in the Edward R. Murrow collection, on OhioLink):

- The Case Against Milo Radulovich, A0589839 (1953)
- Argument at Indianapolis (1953)
- Report on Senator McCarthy (1954)

[Later, the compilation “chronicler/prosecutor” documentary Point of Order! (Emile de Antonio, Daniel Talbot, U.S., 1964) used authentic footage of the 1954 Army-McCarthy hearings, without VO commentary, to provide permanent documentation of this dark era in American history.]

Harvest of Shame (CBS, 1960)—Murrow’s involvement as co-writer (with Friendly) and narrator was just before he left to head the U.S. Information Agency; he became ill and died in 1965. The documentary is a “revealing” look at migrant labor in the U.S. (Can be found online on OhioLink.)