

Investigative documentaries

what the public need to know



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An investigative documentary is a form of journalism deeply investigating a single topic of interest, often involving crime, political corruption, or corporate wrongdoing. An investigative journalist/director may spend months or years researching and preparing a documentary. Practitioners sometimes use the terms 'watchdog journalism' or 'accountability reporting'.

Investigative documentaries can be defined as films enquiring intensively into and seeking to expose malpractice, the miscarriage of justice, or other controversial issues.

Investigative documentaries reach larger audiences. They provide opinions, a specific message, as well as facts. The audience also learns something new about an issue and it can motivate people to make a difference. Documentaries are in the business of informative entertainment.

The following directors and their documentaries present their distinctive personal opinions and views. The documentaries present a one-sided version on a subject and emphasise the fact that governments and powerful corporations have something to hide from the public.

View these documentaries and make up your own mind!

Bowling for Columbine / producer and director, Michael Moore.

Bowling for Columbine probes the culture of guns, violence and fear in the United States, taking as a starting point the Columbine High School massacre of 1999. Two senior students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold embarked on a massacre, killing 12 students and one teacher, injuring 21 students, and three people were injured while attempting to escape. The pair then committed suicide. 'This intriguing, maddening, hilarious, and frightening analysis of American gun culture explores and explodes all sorts of theories and myths

en route to a rather nasty conclusion: that our own media - piercing, insistent and exploitative - may be to blame!' (Martin, p.139.)

Awards

- ▶ Anniversary Prize Cannes Film Festival (2002)
- ▶ France's Cesar Award for Best Foreign Film (2002)
- ▶ Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature (2003).

Classification

Parental guidance: suitable for persons of 15 years and over.

Fahrenheit 9/11 / producer and director,

Michael Moore.

Fahrenheit 9/11

examines America in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, particularly the record of the Bush administration and alleged links between the families of George W Bush and Osama bin Laden. The film also covers the causes and aftermath of the September 11 attacks, including the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The film compares the lives of the Iraqis before and after the invasion by the United States military. The film then shifts its focus to director Moore's hometown, Flint, Michigan. The economically hard-hit town's low-income neighbourhoods were the prime target of military recruiters.

Fahrenheit 451 was a book written by Ray Douglas Bradbury about a society

that burned books in order to censor them from the people.

Fahrenheit 9/11 is a film about a society that refuses to show certain newsworthy material in order to



cancel it from the people and instead substitutes its own, self-promoting news in order to manipulate the people.

Classification

Parental guidance: suitable for persons of 15 years and over.

The producer

Michael Moore's birthplace Flint, Michigan has featured in many of the films of this documentary filmmaker who is now widely known as a critic of the neoliberal view of globalisation. Moore has also penned three best-selling books: **Downsize this!** (1996), **Stupid white men** (2001) and **Dude, where's my country?** (2003). He is a self-described liberal who has criticised globalisation, large corporations, assault weapon ownership, the Iraq War, United States President George W Bush and the American health care system in his written and cinematic works. In 2005 *Time* magazine named him one of the world's most influential people.

Supersize Me / producer and director, Morgan Spurlock.

What happens when you eat McDonald's for thirty days, three meals



a day, super-sized when asked, widely sampling selections from the entire menu from Big Mac meals to yogurt parfaits, salads and fish fillets? With a team of highly qualified doctors monitoring his

health every step of the way, director Morgan Spurlock answers this question: your body falls apart.

Over the course of his experiment, Spurlock gained eighteen pounds, became depressed and withdrawn, and suffered from severe headaches, mood swings and disturbing chest palpitations.

All of these shocking changes take place on camera. After thirty days, he goes into liver failure.

Classification

Parental guidance: suitable for persons of 12 years and over.

The producer

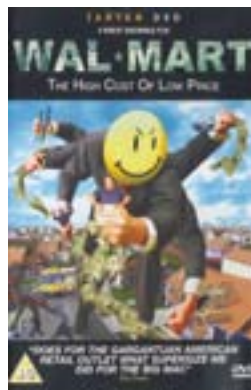
Born and raised in West Virginia, Spurlock is a documentary filmmaker, television producer and screenwriter.

Wal-Mart: the high cost of low price

/ producer and director, Robert Greenwald.

This is a highly critical and engrossing documentary about the American retail giant that has been called 'the world's largest, richest and meanest corporation'.

Mixing statistics and employee testimony, Greenwald details business practices that provoke a gathering outrage: the coerced unpaid overtime, the foreign sweatshop labour, the health-insurance packages that have left thousands of employees to rely on Medicaid, the sucking dry of mom-and-pop stores, the way the company cracks down on union organising activities and women routinely passed over for promotion. The movie lets hard-working middle class Americans speak for themselves, with Wall-Mart managers helping to tell the story.



Classification

Parental guidance: contains reports of racism and violence.

The producer

New York born Greenwald is a film director, film producer, and political activist who has had a varied and interesting career in film and theatre. He directed

The burning bed, the critically-acclaimed television film starring Farrah Fawcett, about domestic abuse and also the musical **Xanadu**, starring Olivia Newton-John.

Most recently he has turned toward making issues-oriented documentary films. He has been honoured for his activism and is also the co-founder (with actor Mike Farrell) of Artists for Winning Without War, whose purpose is to advance progressive causes and voice opposition to the Iraq War.

Sources

Martin, Mick. **DVD & video guide**, 2007.- Ballantine, c2006.
Schultz, Emily. **Michael Moore: a biography**.- ECW Press, 2005.
www.imdb.com
www.rottentomatoes.com
www.wikipedia.org

A selection of these films will be obtainable from SN in the near future. The Library Service also has other books and films by these directors in stock.

