

Key Moments In Vérité History

- 1919
Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov issues a manifesto calling for a new style of cinematographic reportage that documents real life. However, the technology to make his vision real won't come into being for several decades.
- 1922
Robert Flaherty combines observational filming with dramatic story to make *Nanook of the North*, the first documentary about real life.
- 1935
Fourteen-year-old Richard Leacock shoots *Canary Island Bananas*, about life on his father's plantation. Flaherty sees it, and tells Leacock they will someday work together.
- 1946
Robert Drew is the subject of a *Life* story about jet pilots, and comes up with the idea of making photojournalistic motion pictures. *Life* hires him as a writer.
- 1953
National Film Board of Canada filmmaker Wolf Koenig is given a copy of photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson's book *The Decisive Moment for Christmas*. The book inspired Koenig to launch the *Candid Eye* series.
- 1954
Leacock shoots *Jazz Dance*, experimenting with several cameras to give the illusion of mobile synchronized sound.
- 1955
The first Free Cinema program is screened, launching this short-lived (1956-58) British movement against old-style documentaries and commercial cinema.
- 1958
The NFB's Unit B begins production of *Candid Eye* — 13 half-hour films, many of which demonstrate the new ideas of what will come to be called *cinéma vérité*, or direct cinema.
- Michel Brault and Gilles Groulx shoot *Les Raquetteurs*, a proto-*vérité* film with some footage in synch.
- Stefan Kudelski invents the Nagra III portable tape recorder, which will become the workhorse of *vérité* production.
- 1959
Brault screens *Les Raquetteurs* at a Flaherty seminar in California, where he meets Jean Rouch. Rouch invites him to shoot his next film, *Chronique d'un été*.
- 1960
Rouch releases *Chronique d'un été*. In honour of Dziga Vertov, he names this new style of filmmaking *cinéma vérité* — a direct translation of Vertov's term, *Kino Pravda*.
- Leacock and Donn Pennebaker use parts from a Bulova watch to modify and synchronize a 16mm Auricon camera and Nagra tape recorder. They use this system to shoot *Primary*.
- 1962
Albert Maysles leaves Drew Associates to form a company with his brother, David. Their greatest *vérité* film will be the feature *Salesman*.
- 1963
Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault make the feature *Pour la suite du monde* — the

NFB's most ambitious foray into direct cinema.

Leacock and Pennebaker leave Drew Associates to form their own company and continue making vérité films. Their best-known release is the seminal Bob Dylan rockumentary *Don't Look Back*.

John F. Kennedy, subject of *Primary and Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment*, is assassinated. The cinéma vérité movement loses its most prominent proponent.

1964

Debut of *This Hour Has Seven Days*, ground-breaking current affairs show produced by Doug Leiterman and Patrick Watson, that will air many vérité segments, including Beryl Fox's powerful *The Mills of the Gods*.

1967

Jean-Pierre Beauviala invents the lightweight, highly portable crystal synch sound-recording system.

Fred Wiseman makes *Titicut Follies*, a portrait of life in a Massachusetts institution for the criminally insane. The film will be banned for 25 years, on the charge that it violates the privacy of the subjects.

Allan King films *Warrendale* at a school for disturbed children. Both the CBC (which commissioned it) and BBC refuse to show the explosive film.

1976

Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, USA* wins an Oscar® for best feature-length documentary.

1981

MTV launches, bringing the shaky hand-held camera style to a whole new generation of viewers.

1982

Claude Lanzmann releases *Shoah*, his nine-and-a-half-hour oral history of the Holocaust.

Sony's Betacam — a single-unit inch broadcast-use camera — hits the market.

1984

Release of *This is Spinal Tap*, a hilarious vérité-style "mockumentary" about a fictional heavy metal band.

1990

America's Funniest Home Videos premieres on ABC-TV — the first of what will become a torrent of reality-based shows.

1999

The Blair Witch Project, a faux vérité documentary, grosses over \$100 million US.