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April 19, 2011

Cousins of Faith

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Abstract

Cousins of Faith By David Micley

Cousins of Faith is an ethnographic documentary juxtaposing and comparing the daily life of an observant Muslim and an observant Jew living in Atlanta. The film covers themes of identity, religion, and family, and addresses how all of these ideas play out in the American context.

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Cousins of Faith Written Report

David Micley

IDS

Part 1

Documentary film is distinct from fiction in that it often involves capturing reality, as opposed to scripted scenes that are repeatedly rehearsed. There is a certain authenticity to documentaries that the staged set of fiction films lack. When we watch documentaries we see interviews with people talking with a tone and manner that is somehow more relatable to our real lives. Just like real life, the language spoken in documentaries is not scripted; the words people use in documentaries are imperfect and at times even jumbled and disorganized. Rather than driving a plot, actions in documentaries are filmed to show and teach viewers something about a particular real-life topic or person. Documentaries can show us places beyond our wildest imaginations, but somehow, still, when we see something on documentary, we envision it as real. We think of documentary films as showing us something that actually happened.

However, documentary, like all forms of film, involves making creative choices, as John Grierson said, documentary filmmaking is the “creative treatment of actuality.” Merely by the fact of filming something the cameraperson makes the choice of what to include in the frame, leaving all that is outside of the frame excluded. Only part of the “reality” is ever seen. In editing, the filmmaker makes even more choices, not only choosing what to include in the film, but also choosing

the sequence of the clips. With these two simple abilities alone, the editor creates a specific meaning to the film based on his/her personal interpretation and perspective.

We often think of interviewed subjects as the truth-tellers in documentaries, but in fact, the power of the editor has the potential to not only interpret, but to go so far as completely twist what a subject really intended to say. For example, if a subject says at two different points of a filmed interview: "I love to go running" as well as "I do not like to eat pizza", the editor can mix up the sentences to create a new one: "I love to eat pizza", which is in fact the opposite of what the subject was initially trying to say. Even without such obvious methods of manipulation, the editor has other tools that give him/her much control in framing the footage. A certain gloomy music in the background can change a happy wedding scene to a scene that arouses suspicion and angst. A scene of a man running in slow motion adds intense drama to an event that in reality could be as mundane as a morning jog. Repeated shots of a person studying could portray the image of a disciplined, hard working student, when perhaps these moments were actually far and few in between. The documentary filmmaker does not just passively observe reality and record what occurs; rather, the filmmaker creatively selects and modifies what is shot to present a certain perspective of reality. Reality is still an important aspect in the documentary- it is the building blocks of the film and a key aspect that distinguishes documentary from fiction. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that a documentary is reality as seen through the filmmaker's eyes, presented through the filmmaker's personal and subjective creative touch.

I will analyze three films by three different filmmakers to explore how different documentary filmmakers have interpreted and exercised their task. The first film I will analyze is *Titicut Follies*, a film in which director Frederick Wiseman observed conditions of life in Bridgewater, a mental institution in Massachusetts. Produced in 1967, *Titicut Follies* was the first of its kind, as Wiseman disregarded conventional notions of censorship for the sake of observing reality as is. He was unafraid to show disturbing images of inmates being physically stripped of their clothing as well as being force fed in uncomfortable ways. Wiseman filmed these disturbing scenes because he wanted to generate social change on a national scale, focusing on the issues of Bridgewater as a reflection of the problems with American mental institutions in general. The very fact that he had an agenda in creating this film should suggest to viewers that Wiseman filmed and edited according to what would best serve his argument, and not just according to what represented reality.

Wiseman thought his argument would be best delivered if he left room for the viewer's interpretation, and thus *Titicut Follies* was produced in an open style, as Wiseman said:

“When the observational technique works, it puts you in the middle of the events and asks you to think through your own relationship to what you're seeing and hearing. The real film takes place where the viewer meets the screen and interprets, in a sense participates in, what they're seeing and hearing.” (Grimshaw and Ravetz 41).

Fully committed to implementing this idea in *Titicut Follies*, Wiseman cuts into scenes after they start and away before they are finished, forcing the viewer to construct the full picture. Wiseman's technique is to remove context, intentionally filming situations that are difficult to view and understand, without offering any explanation (Grimshaw and Ravetz 45). Wiseman admits that editing, a task he completes himself, plays the most important role in constructing the film's argument, and that the shots have "no meaning except insofar as you impose a form on them." (Grant and Sloniowski 240). An illustration of the power of editing, the only time we see a scene outside Bridgewater is at a funeral in a graveyard, suggesting that only through death can the inmates leave Bridgewater. Yet, Wiseman claims that he never forces a perspective on the audience. Without a voice over or clear narrative structure guiding the film, this point has its merit, but his editing style still provides a guiding interpretation.

An example of Wiseman guiding the viewer is when the film jumps into an argument between Vladimir and Dr. Ross, in which Vladimir is trying to convince the doctor that he is mentally fit to return to the real world. Vladimir's sentences and thoughts are complete, and even more so, his arguments are convincing. Vladimir explains that he was moved to the mental hospital from prison to undergo a short observation. His original diagnosis was healthy, but the institution decided to extend the period of observation, and over this time he started to lose his sanity. Vladimir insists that he's mentally stable, and argues that the only thing getting in the way of his sanity is the insane environment of the hospital, which he admits, is causing him to lose his nerves. For Vladimir, rather than providing a cure, the

institution's treatment has been the disease, and for the sake of his mental health, he begs to leave Bridgewater and return to prison.

In watching the scene described above, the viewer's sympathy is immediately allied with Vladimir. Vladimir's argument appears to be reasonable and fair. However, at no point do we hear the full story of why Vladimir was taken to the institution to begin with- this is not included in the film. Perhaps he committed some awful act that made him unfit for prison life, and if the viewer were to know about it his/her perspective could completely change. By not telling us the other side of the story, Wiseman guides the viewer to support Vladimir's argument.

As mentioned above, Wiseman filmed and edited with an open observational style. While there certainly are some positive aspects to this style of film, such as offering viewers a chance to interpret things for themselves, leaving the film too open has some very limiting qualities as well. Wiseman made *Titicut Follies* with the intention of changing the American mental institution, yet with no context provided, many questions are left begging to be asked. Who are the characters being filmed? What type of specific treatment are they undergoing? What is their exact history? How do other institutions compare to Bridgewater? As shocking as this film is, sufficient background information is not provided on the inmates, Bridgewater, and the American mental institution in general. This film certainly is effective at shocking and upsetting the viewer, but without a fuller context provided, the emotions evoked in viewers are based more on disturbing scenes than on a deeper understanding of the under workings of the Bridgewater institution.

Another film I will analyze is Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure*, a documentary that investigates the acts of torture and humiliation that occurred at a military prison in Abu Ghraib, Iraq. These incidents of torture were already infamously known from a series of photos widely printed and discussed in the media. The photos, which reveal abominable acts committed by American soldiers, are the central focus of the film, as director Errol Morris seeks to "uncover what happened outside the frame." (Dargis) The most upsetting aspect of watching the film is simply hearing about and seeing images of the acts of torture committed at Abu Ghraib. One image shows a prisoner naked, his arms tied to the bed, with a pair of women's underwear covering his head. Another photo reveals a man standing on a box with a sheet covering his body and head and wires attached to his fingers. A soldier being interviewed tells us how the prisoner under the sheet was told there was electricity running through the wire that would electrocute him if he were to fall off the box. In fact, there actually was not any electricity running through the wires but the mere possibility kept the prisoner awake and deprived him of sleep. A video shows a lineup of detainees who are ordered to masturbate in front of the soldiers. Other images show detainees that are forced to form a human pyramid and hold each other in compromising positions all while nude. Finally, we hear about a "ghost detainee" (a detainee who is not registered) whose body was kept in the shower room under bags of ice. He was killed in an interrogation session. After a few days the ice melted, the body started to smell, and the soldiers had to find a way to inconspicuously remove his body. They put the body on a stretcher and stuck an IV into the dead arm to create the image that he was being carried out for medical care.

The soldiers didn't know what happened to him after that because of his unregistered status as a "ghost detainee." Errol Morris's objective in producing *Standard Operating Procedure* is to investigate and expose the stories behind these acts.

At times in the film, the US soldiers are painted as monsters with no capacity for compassion. In response to the allegations of torture one of the soldiers says: "We didn't kill them, we just did what we were told to soften them up for interrogation." (*Standard Operating Procedure*). It is hard to accept this when we hear later in the film about how some detainees who were known to possess no knowledge of military intelligence value were also tortured. One of the soldiers fondly smiles and comments "no joke" (*Standard Operating Procedure*) when talking about forcing the detainees to line up and masturbate. The soldier who became famous for the picture of giving the thumbs up next to a dead prisoner tries to explain herself by claiming that the thumbs up is an automatic reaction that she does in every picture. This reason fails to convince, and often enough, the soldiers seem to embody the monstrous image the media has portrayed of them.

Yet, Morris is careful to show that there is a human side to these soldiers after all. The soldiers often talk about how they were under immense pressure to commit these acts by a staff sergeant named Charles Graner (whom the government did not allow to be interviewed in this film). The women were placed in an especially vulnerable position as they emphasized that the army is a man's world and one either has to act like a man or be controlled by a man in order to survive. Love letters between a particular soldier and her lover back home show us her

sentimental side. One of the soldiers convicted came across in the interview as a genuinely nice guy that took the pictures simply because he was ordered to and did not want anyone to be mad at him. The constant shelling of Abu Ghraib and overall state of war had a detrimental and permanent effect on the soldiers, as one of them said: "I was not the same person that I was there that I am sitting here. War ruins soldiers." (Standard Operating Procedure). This final statement suggests that perhaps these soldiers were not inherently monsters, but rather, were placed in monstrous circumstances that brought out the worst in them.

Still, Morris attempts to offer as much of an understanding as possible, and he uses a variety of film techniques to achieve this. Interviews play one of the key roles in the film's investigation. Morris uses an interview style of situating the interviewee up close to the camera with a black background creating an interrogation like atmosphere. There are frequent cuts in the middle of the interview, with the faces of the interviewee being repositioned in between shots, never fully allowing the viewer to feel centered and in place. It should be noted that some of the interviewees were paid to cooperate, and although this doesn't discount everything that is said, the interviews certainly should be taken with a grain of salt. (Dargis) Yet, Morris does an effective job at making the interviewees seem believable, as he allows them to talk for extensive periods without interruption, and their disturbing stories come across as believable. Morris frequently films their speechless faces, as his "favorite point of view is the stare." (Dargis). The stare allows us to see the interviewees as whole, rounded people, and complex emotions are expressed in these moments of silence.

Complimenting the interviews, Morris makes extensive use of reenactment scenes as a way to further draw in the audience. The reenactments bring the content of the interviews into full Hollywood form. A soldier talks about a nightmare he had of an exploding helicopter and suddenly the movie cuts to a clip of a helicopter exploding. An interviewee talks about shaving one of the detainee's eyebrows and we are taken to a zoomed in video of an eyebrow being shaved. Morris creates these costly reenactments in an effort to bring his film into mainstream attention, fighting the tendency for documentaries to be pushed to the margins of popular culture. (Dargis). While there surely is something exciting and captivating about the blockbuster style of the reenactments, Morris uses them too frequently and this takes away from the integrity and content of the film.

By far the central focus of this film is the photos. At times it feels as if we are watching a horror family slide show, as pictures continuously roll on the screen with the audio from the interviews and accompanying gloomy music in the background. When video clips are displayed they are often viewed in a small and blurry mini-screen, a sign of their lack of importance, while pictures consistently take up the full focus of the screen. Image serves as a powerful form of evidence, as they provide a certain uncontestable witness to the events that occurred. Yet, Morris is certainly aware of the limitations of images: "for him the photographs function as both an expose and a cover-up because while they revealed the horror, they also "convinced journalists and readers they had seen *everything*." (Dargis). One of the central messages of the film is that photographs can conceal just as much as they can reveal. While Morris clearly aims to reveal a greater understanding of Abu Ghraib through

showing even more pictures than revealed in the media and contextualizing them in the interviews, he is aware of the limitations of this project and pictures in general, symbolized by a clip towards the end of the film of thousands of pictures being shredded.

A third and final film I'd like to explore is *Sicko*, a Michael Moore production that examines the symptoms in the American health care system, an institution plagued by its own sort of affliction. Moore uses a wide range of evidence, including personal stories, policy analysis, and comparisons to other countries, in his plea for the establishment of universal health care in the United States. The institution vs. the little guy is a central theme permeating throughout *Sicko*, as the film opens with a short news excerpt of George Bush giving a speech followed by a clip of a man working with a saw in his garage who is introduced as Adam. George Bush is seen through the formal lens of the media while Adam is captured in the casual setting of his own backyard, a clear indication of whom Moore is siding with and how he aims to portray these two types of subjects quite differently. Moore's production company, Dog Eat Dog, is symbolized by a small, happy dog squaring up to a large, angry dog, followed by the small dog swallowing the large dog in one bite. When Moore discusses healthcare and government institutions, he films shots of large and seemingly powerful office buildings. When he discusses the plight of the American people, he cuts to interviews and close ups of individuals. From the start of the film until the end, it is clear that Michael Moore's sympathy rests with the little guy in his battle against the big institution.

Yet, Moore wants to show that the little guy often includes those that might not consider themselves so little. The beginning of the movie is appropriately about the story of Adam, a man who after an accident working with his saw had to sacrifice one of his fingers because he did not have health insurance. While concerned with Adam's situation and the other 50 million uninsured Americans, Moore is quick to tell the viewer that the focus of this movie is not on the uninsured, but rather on those Americans that *do* have insurance. Shortly after, we hear the story of an elderly man who has to do dirty janitorial work in a supermarket just to keep his health care. We are then taken to a scene in his comfortable dining room, which is covered in delicious looking food and fancy china and we wonder why a seemingly middle-class elderly man still has to do such dirty work to keep his insurance. Moore doesn't mention how the health care institution effects the poor until the middle of the film because he wants to show that the issue is relevant to almost everyone and not just the marginalized of society. Indeed, the concerns Moore raises are likely to be supported by anyone that has had to deal extensively with the health care system, equally reaching those from the politically left and right. (Ebert).

What makes Moore so effective at reaching audiences from across the political spectrum is his use of the personal story. He received over 25,000 stories from frustrated Americans, and by telling a series of health care horror tales one at a time he makes his appeal compelling. One of the first stories told is of Larry and Donna, a successful middle-class couple who raised six kids that all went to the University of Chicago. Their life turned upside down when Larry had a heart attack

and Donna got cancer. Even though they were insured, they had to sell their house and move in with one of their kids to cover the health care costs. Moore shoots a series of scenes of people crying, an emotional pulling tactic frequently applied in *Sicko*, to expose the real life sadness of this upsetting drama. Some of the stories told are just plain shocking, like the tale of a woman who was knocked unconscious, taken away by an ambulance, and was later told by her insurance company that they wouldn't cover the cost of the ambulance because she didn't get preapproval for the ambulance service. The obvious and appropriate problem she raises is that prior to the ambulance ride there was no way for her to get approval because she was unconscious. In *Sicko*, shocking, upsetting, and perplexing stories like these add up to create a pile of evidence so overwhelming that the health care issue can't be ignored.

The ultimate purpose of *Sicko* is to bring about a change in our health care system, which on some level, it already has achieved. Towards the beginning of the movie we hear about a deaf girl whose insurance company approved a claim for a hearing aid, but only in her left ear. Her father, aware of the production of *Sicko*, told the insurance company that he was going to write to Michael Moore telling him about this incident. Shortly thereafter the insurance company called back telling the father that they revisited the claim and decided to approve hearing aids for both of the girl's ears. Seeing such immediate, concrete change offers inspiration and hope that this movie can really make a difference.

Yet, the problems in American health care are great and *Sicko* does not provide a detailed alternative policy analysis that offers a solution for how to create

a system of universal health care (Scott). The central focus on the film repeatedly returns to a critique of the current health care model as opposed to a suggestion of how to fix it. Still, Moore offers a compelling and moving argument that boils down to the philosophical and ethical imperative that just as a country provides its citizens with universal education, police protection, and fire-protection services, so too should it provide its people with universal health care. Like any good Hollywood story, Moore sets up his documentary as a battle between the powerful bad guy and the underdog good guy. While the healthcare problem is certainly more complicated than that, this manner of framing reality is effective at moving Moore's audience to be frustrated with the status quo of the American health care system.

My film, *Cousins of Faith*, is an ethnographic documentary that follows an observant Muslim and an observant Muslim living in Atlanta, and it too is a "creative treatment of actuality." In total, I filmed over 15 hours of footage of the subjects, and in order to boil that down to a 35-minute film, I've had to make some serious, and often difficult, creative choices. From the time I was searching for prospective subjects to the final days of editing, I have been making almost all of my production decisions not just in order to film and capture reality, but with an overarching goal in mind: to compare and juxtapose how the Jewish and Muslim religion, culture, and tradition play out in an American, and largely secular, context. To do this, I had to be careful to choose subjects that could be effective ambassadors for their religion. Of course, not any one single person can represent an entire religion, but ultimately, for some viewers this film might be their first opportunity to learn about a religious

Jew and/or a religious Muslim on such an intimate level. I wanted to be sure that such viewers would see both of these religions in a positive light so I had to choose subjects that could powerfully articulate the beauty of their perspective religions.

But more than that, I've made editing decisions that were influenced by my overarching goal. I filmed a wide range of interesting footage from both of the subjects' lives, and much of the footage that I chose to edit into the final cut was based on whether or not it would support my argument that American Muslims and American Jews have much in common. While the film contains a significant amount of footage that shows key differences between the Muslim and Jewish subjects, the key and critical moments of the film come at the points where the Muslim and Jew are juxtaposed and it is clear that they share deep-rooted concerns, values, beliefs, and even practices. For example, at one point in the film the Muslim subject talks about how Allah is the cause of everything, and in Islam they refer to Allah as the "source". Immediately after this clip, I edited in a clip of the Jewish subject saying that the term "source" is another way to describe G-d. This sequence was deliberately placed in that order to show that not only do Jews and Muslims share a belief in one G-d, but they even use the same type of language to describe G-d. Another example of editing done with the intention of supporting my argument is during the washing sequence, where we see hands being washed while the Muslim subject provides a voice over that describes the ritual of washing one's hands before praying. In the middle of the clip, the camera view rises to reveal that the hands being washed actually belong to the Jewish subject and not the Muslim. The clear message of this editing decision is to show that there is so much in common

between Jewish and Muslim rituals that the Muslim describing his washing ritual fits quite perfectly with a visual display of the Jewish subject performing his washing ritual.

As director, cameraman, and editor, I got a first hand experience to understand how much documentary film is in fact a “creative treatment of actuality.” From the footage I shot, to the questions I asked, to the clips I edited, every aspect of the creation of this film was influenced by my personal vision. Of course, that does not mean I could create something out of thin air. The spontaneous acts that occurred while the camera was rolling and the responses the subjects chose to answer to my questions were elements out of my control. All the key parts and pieces of this film are taken from the unpredictable lives of both subjects. Yet, if someone else had produced this film, even if someone else merely edited the same footage, it would surely be quite different, as any creation is influenced by the creator’s personal perspective. Ultimately, the final cut of *Cousins of Faith* represents a synthesis of the subjects’ reality and my personal vision and signature.

While I find it difficult to compare my film making style to any particular filmmaker that I studied, I certainly can attribute a range of the techniques I applied to several filmmakers. *Nobody’s Business*, by Alan Berliner, influenced my decision to place a strong emphasis on the interview. The main focus of *Nobody’s Business* is a son interviewing his father, and it is remarkable how much depth of content is contained in this simple interview format. Through this interview, we learn a lot

about the father's life, but also from observing the way the father speaks to his son, we learn a tremendous amount about their relationship and both of their personalities. I make extensive use of interviews in my film to play the dual role of teaching us about the subjects' lives as well as to help reveal their characters. More than anything else, the unique power of documentary film is in the visual, and interviews allow viewers to hear what a subject says as well as observe how they say it. Facial expressions, pauses, inflections of tone and voice are all essential elements in revealing the subjects character on a deeper level. I use interviews frequently to achieve this end.

As mentioned before, an overarching goal behind making this film was to show the similarities between Jewish and Muslim culture, religion, and tradition. Indeed, there is an element of advocacy to this film, as I hope that this film will help create better relations between Jews and Muslims in this country. Too often in America, Jewish-Muslim relations are framed in the antagonistic context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite the fact that Jews and Muslims have much in common and their history goes back way further than the creation of the modern State of Israel. I watched *Sicko*, by Michael Moore, and *Standard Operating Procedure*, by Errol Morris, in order to better understand how to make an effective advocacy film. While these two advocacy films are different in many ways, I noticed that they both finish with a reference to a website, recommending audiences who are interested in learning more about the subject to follow the link for information on how to get involved. While this is a small detail to the film, I think it is key to achieving effective advocacy work. A website at the end of the film provides viewers

with a concrete way to get involved in a subject they recently learned about. I applied this technique to my film as well, and in the finishing credits there is a reference to a website for those interested in getting involved in building positive relationships between Jews and Muslims. It is a simple effort that has the potential to go a long way.

Lastly, Michael Moore's *Sicko* influenced my decision to conduct interviews in a range of locations. Throughout *Sicko*, Moore interviews the same subjects in many locations, such as the home, the street, and the workplace. I thought this was an interesting way to keep the film engaged, show a range of locations, and produce a feeling of being on the go, so I decided to apply this technique to my film as well. My film is about the daily life of a religious Muslim and a religious Jew, and it was essential that I captured the diversity of settings that make up their daily life. I conducted interviews at home, as well as in the car, and various locations at work. A diversity of interview settings not only keeps the film interesting, but the subjects talk in different ways and reveal different aspects of their personality depending on the location of the shoot.

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Part 2

There are many reasons that I decided to make a film. At first, when I chose to major in Inter-Disciplinary Studies in Society and Culture it was a matter of pure personal interest. Since I have written many papers throughout my college career and have never made a film before, I thought it would be an interesting and novel experience to produce a documentary for my senior project. Indeed it has been a fascinating process. But more than that, I wanted to create a documentary because film is a medium of communication that is easily available to many people. In our fast-paced, demanding world, many people don't have the patience, interest, or time to read lengthy papers and books about every subject of their interest. However, watching a film is a short-term commitment and film is a medium that can be accessed by a wide audience quite easily. With the explosion of the Internet, and

especially “YouTube”, one can make a film on any subject and reach thousands of people instantly. The fact that my film would be able to reach a wide and diverse audience from not just America, but all over the world, was certainly an appealing factor in my decision.

However, more than that, film’s power is anchored in its ability to show instead of tell. As mentioned before, the most powerful tool in film is the visual. Words of course play a key role as well, but it is the visual that makes film distinct and unique from other forms of communication. The visual offers an opportunity for the viewers to watch something and interpret it for themselves. Film takes viewers inside a world often otherwise inaccessible to them and allows them to witness and watch a life play out. For the purpose of my documentary, I am trying to improve understanding of what it means to be a religious Jew and a religious Muslim and I felt as if words would not be able to do the job on their own. People have to see the subjects and what they do to really get a grasp on their every day lives.

There is a saying that words only provide 55% of communication. This means that the other 45% of communication is based on tone, inflection, and body language. Documentary, a visual medium, is unique in its ability to fully communicate a message with words as well as body language. Because my film is not just about understanding a topic, but rather understanding particular people, it is key that the audience can observe the subjects’ non-verbal communication. Furthermore, one of the most important parts of religious life is worship, and only through film can we truly get a full picture of what worship looks like. Two critical

scenes in the film are when the subjects are praying and the full gravity of these moments could only be properly captured by film.

Over the course of the production of my film I had serious ethical questions to consider. Because my film is an ethnography that seeks to understand the subjects on a deep level, I had to be careful not to invade the privacy of the subjects' lives. Throughout the process, I made it clear to the subject that if they ever felt uncomfortable with me filming they should feel free to request of me to shut the camera off. Not only did I film the subjects, but I also filmed the people they work with as well as their families. At all times, I had to make sure that people in the shot were comfortable being filmed.

Another serious ethical question that my film raised is how I ultimately chose to edit the footage I shot. As the filmmaker, I was in a position where I could edit the footage to make the subjects' lives seem quite different than they actually are. I had to make sure that I wouldn't hurt their reputation or present them in a negative light through my editing decisions. Throughout the editing process, I have kept this in mind, and have made it my top priority to paint the subjects in a positive light.

Part 3

The process of filmmaking was exciting, novel, and most importantly, highly educational. From the moment I studied various filmmakers with Professor Grimshaw, through when I started learning how to edit Final Cut Pro with Mr. Steve

Bransford, to my final days in front of the computer editing footage on my own, I feel like I have constantly been learning new and valuable skills. From a purely technical point, I have learned how to be proficient in Final Cut Pro, a professional editing software. Final Cut Pro is an incredibly powerful program that has the ability to focus and edit every aspect of each frame. Learning the program and actually applying these skills to my day-to-day editing work has been tremendously rewarding.

On another technical note, I have enjoyed the process of learning how to film. At first I was hoping to bring on board a camera person for each shoot, and while I did receive many e-mails from film students eager to help out, I quickly realized that I would have to do the filming myself because all of the students had class schedules that conflicted with the unpredictable schedules of shoots. Subjects often waited until the last minute to text me about a shoot opportunity and I would not have time to wait until other students were available to help. The camera work certainly is far from perfect and I have much to learn in terms of keeping a steady hand as well as not overusing the zoom. Still, I enjoyed the experience of getting to actually film the footage myself. Looking at live events through the lens of a camera framed life in a way different than I am used to seeing it. Having the camera in my hands also allowed me to make the choices of what to focus in on, which was a critical step in shaping the final product.

On the structural side, I learned a lot from my screening sessions with Professor Grimshaw and Mr. Bransford. Both of them were kind enough to watch my film multiple times as I developed new edits. Each screening was a new

opportunity for me to learn about how to continuously shape and mold the film. A key concept that Professor Grimshaw taught me is the importance of creating a scene with a beginning, middle, and end. This emphasis on scene structure certainly helped form my editing decisions. Also Professor Grimshaw and Mr. Bransford taught me about the value of showing over telling. While words certainly play an important role in my film, Professor Grimshaw and Mr. Bransford helped me understand that pure action shots have the power to implicitly tell more than any words could say. I am very grateful to Professor Grimshaw and Mr. Bransford for giving so much of their time to mentor me as my film developed.

I spent a significant amount of time conducting interviews and I learned a tremendous amount by this process. Some interview sessions went up to two hours, and I started to see that it was important to adapt and improvise with what the subjects were saying rather than stick to any concrete plan that I had in advance. Often the subjects would respond with an answer that would lead to a tangent discussion more interesting than the questions I had originally planned. Also, I learned that in order to get honest and open responses from the subject it was important not just to ask the subjects the right questions but also to establish an atmosphere in which the subjects felt comfortable that they could trust me. At times, the subjects would open up to me in ways that I could never have expected, and I built deep relationships with the subjects from these conversations.

Shooting the action shots was always an interesting experience because I never knew what to expect. I always had to be on my toes and ready for something interesting to happen because if I was not paying close attention I could miss it and

the action would never happen again. This part of shooting was the most challenging because I had to be on my feet, holding a camera, and engaged with the subject all at the same time. Following the subjects around took me to places and encounters beyond anything I could have imagined and the whole experience was nothing short of an adventure.

All in all, this was without a doubt the most exciting project I have done in my college career. I learned new skills, developed close relationships with the subjects, and explored interesting places and ideas. I am very satisfied with the final outcome and I am thoroughly looking forward to the debut screening. Perhaps the one drawback of working on a documentary is that it has literally taken up my life for the past few months. Although I have had no class, this has been the busiest academic semester of my life. In total, I have spent several hundred hours on the production of this film. Because I am making this movie by myself I spend a significant time alone and the work can get quite lonely. Yet, I have already had the opportunity to share my film with a number of friends and there is something very invigorating and rewarding about having other people watch this project that I've worked so hard on. I think all the hard work will pay off and am looking forward to sharing this project with a full audience in White Hall 208 on April 14 at 7 PM. Beyond that, I am excited to spread the film after the debut screening so that it can serve as a piece of interesting academic work that will be viewed by others beyond Emory and Atlanta.