John Grierson
- Influenced by the Russians
- A socialist not a communist
- Son of a school master/teacher
- Extremely opinionated
- Came to U.S. in 1924 to study public opinion and power of media (Rockefeller grant)

Grierson vs. Flaherty

Flaherty
Concerned about individual (a hero)
Man vs. nature
Pessimistic about change but optimistic about individual human beings
Lived with subjects/really knew them
Shot lots of footage/created film on editing bench
Grierson vs. Flaherty

Grierson

Working man as hero
Change can occur & make things better
Need focus on the masses rather than individual
Documentaries with a social purpose - a point of view to change viewer
Reliance on script and preproduction

Grierson

\- Wanted to make film a social force
\- Emphasis on power of media to persuade, educate, change
\- Doc. a force for change not an art or entertainment

Grierson's Film Units

EMB (Empire Marketing Board) 1928-1933

G.P.O (Gov’t Post Office) 1933-1939
Grierson’s Films

- More of a producer than director
- Drifters (1929)
- Granton Trawler (1934)
- Nightmail (1936)
- By 1933 staff had grown from 2 to 30 employees.
- Trained almost all of the British documentary movement in period

Song of Ceylon

Made by E.M.B. for Tea Propaganda Board in 1935
Producer: Grierson
Director: Basil Wright
Four parts:
- The Buddha -- religion
- The Virgin Island -- land, people
- The Voices of Commerce
- The Apparel of God

Nightmail (1936)

Made for G.P.O.
Dir: Basil Wright, Harry Watt
Narration by Poet Laureate: W.H. Auden
Grierson’s Proteges

- Basil Wright
- Harry Watt
- Edgar Anstey
- Paul Rotha
- John Taylor
- Humphrey Jennings
- and many, many others

Grierson’s Impact

- Trained countless filmmakers
- In 1939 headed the National Film Board of Canada -- spreading influence across the Atlantic
- Wrote and lectured extensively
- The first clear, coherent definition of the documentary and what it should be used for (i.e. social change)

American Documentary

- The Roosevelt Administration began a film effort under the Resettlement Administration - 1935
- Money came from W.P.A.
- Rexford Tugwell appointed head
- R.A. later declared unconstitutional -- moved into Agriculture Department
- Objective: knowledge cures poverty
Enter Pare Lorentz

- Film critic fired by W.R. Hearst
- Approached Tugwell with idea based on magazine article by Archibald MacLeish -- History of great plains exploitation

The Plow That Broke the Plains (1935)

- Lorentz had no production background
- Gathered his crew from the FILM AND PHOTO LEAGUE in N.Y.:
  - Ralph Steiner, Paul Strand, Leo Hurwitz
- Worked from outline only and tiny $6,000 budget -- lots of in-fighting

Lorentz’s Problems

- Couldn’t get stock footage from Hollywood - feared gov’t filmmaking
  - Director King Vidor to rescue
- Couldn’t get theatres to show it.
  - Eventually premiered at Arthur Mayer’s Rialto Theatre in N.Y.
- 3,000 indep. theatres showed it (out of 14,000 in U.S.)
Good News/Bad News

- “Plow” received good reviews
- Linked with democratic party and attacked as socialistic
- Lorentz so exhausted he went to Tugwell to give resignation
- Pointed at map --- and began work on **THE RIVER** (1937)

The River (1937)

- Different cinematographers -- who shot lots more film: Willard Van Dyke, Floyd Cozby, Horace and Stacey Woodward
- 1937 floods occurred during shooting and they had to go back & shoot more
- Roosevelt saw it, loved it, and he convinced Paramount to distribute the film nationwide.

U.S. Film Service (1938)

- Established under the National Emergency Council
- Lorentz as head --- but he was a terrible manager.
- A few films:
  - **The Land** (Flaherty)
  - **Power and the Land** (Ivens)
  - **Fight for Life** (Lorentz)
Attacks on Lorentz and U.S. Film Service
- Films criticized as socialistic
- Inevitably linked to New Deal
- House Committee on Appropriations killed funding in 1941.

Gov’t Filmmaking in U.S.
1. Should the government make films?
2. What kind?
3. Who pays?
4. Biggest problem --- how to get them shown.