

## **Pare Lorentz Film Center - Critics Corner Film Reviews**

### **Fala at Hyde Park #14**

**Rating: Fair**

This film explores FDR and his home at Hyde Park as seen through the eyes of his dog Fala. Elementary school students would definitely enjoy learning about him in this manner. Unfortunately, the sound and picture quality are rather poor - especially by today's standards - so its use in the classroom would be limited.

### **History Channel: FDR Oval Office #16**

**Rating: Very good**

This film introduces the fascinating Oval Office exhibit at the FDR library as well as the amazing holdings of the FDR archives. It is very easy to pause the film for discussion after each of the two sections. Middle and high school students would benefit from learning what the Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum has to offer in terms of resources for research papers.

### **D-Day Minus One #24**

**Rating: Good**

This film is a very good example of how the United States government used propaganda films during World War II. Its appeal stems from the fact that it contains very interesting actual footage shot right there on D-Day. However, the historians in the group felt that greater attention should have been placed on the short comings of the invasion, such as the chaotic parachute drops and the failure of the naval bombardments to properly "soften up" the German defenses.

### **What Makes a Battle #40**

**Rating: Good**

This film is best used as a case study in the use of propaganda. It is a very good example of how the United States government used propaganda films and ethnic prejudice against the Japanese in World War II to whip up public support and to sell war bonds. However, the film shows graphic violence and naked dead bodies and is not suitable for younger audiences.

**Roosevelt Rap #46****Rating: Good**

This film is presented in the form of a short music video and covers FDR's life from birth to death. It includes important references to the contributions of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The film is fast-paced and students should be provided the lyrics to follow along. It was especially popular among the older elementary school and middle school students.

**A Paralyzing Fear The Story of Polio in America #53****Rating: Very Good**

This is a very good documentary about a topic that most kids don't know that much about. It was interesting to learn why polio only became an epidemic in the 20th Century and about how it was finally conquered through public support of the March of Dimes which FDR created. The movie is 90 minutes long, so it would take more than one class to show. It is an interesting slice of American social history and public health history. It also shows how scary it can be to test a new medicine on children. This could also be great for high school health classes.

**Camp Forgotten: The Civilian Conservation Corps #58****Rating: Very Good**

This is a great documentary that gives the audience a window on what life was like in the Civilian Conservation Corps camps for the thousands of young men who joined the CCC. It was especially interesting to see the role that the CCC workers played in fighting forest fires and in reforestation. The film includes interesting social history by explaining how the CCC workers' pay was sent home to their mothers and how that completely changed the family's standard of living. The film also highlighted the role of blacks in the CCC and the system of separate camps for blacks and Native Americans. A special education teacher in the focus group thought that the song on the NRA and the CCC that is sung in the documentary would be great to teach to students in her classes. Since this is a vintage black and white documentary, the sound and picture quality is not what today's student is used to. Most viewers' rated the film very good to excellent for content, but fair to good for picture and sound quality.

**Modern Marvels: Tennessee Valley Authority #94**

**Rating: Very Good**

This film covers the economic, political and social ramifications of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), including the impact of the project later during World War II. The film was quite appealing to middle school students who were fascinated with the actual building of the TVA's many dams. Viewers were impressed with the scope of the TVA project and how much it changed the lives of people in this agricultural region.

**Inauguration 1933 #97**

**Rating: Poor**

This is a silent home movie that was apparently made by a friend of FDR. This film is incoherent. It starts with footage of the inauguration, then it becomes a home movie of some family-perhaps friends of the Roosevelts - on holiday at Mount Whitney. It is difficult to imagine it being of much use in any classroom presentation. The quality of pictures in the film is poor.

**FDR's Secret War # 128**

**Rating: Excellent**

This is a very interesting film that shows a side of the Roosevelt Administration most students have never heard about--how different parts of US intelligence community worked against each other during World War II. Because of these divisions and jealousies, the United States lost important intelligence before Pearl Harbor, D-Day and the "Battle of the Bulge". The film underscores the complexity of trying to gather and make sense of information coming from all corners of the world in the age before computers.

**Presidential Limousines #65**

**Rating: Fair**

This film tells the history of presidential travel by car. There is a lot of vintage footage that is not of the best quality, but younger viewers will be fascinated with the cars and the presidents who rode in them.

**FDR: The Juggler #69**

**Rating: Excellent!**

This film shows FDR's complex juggling of conflicting interests in the run up to World War II and his masterful strategic management of the war itself. Interestingly the film includes an interview with FDR's cardiologist that brought out new information on FDR's health. Overall, this is a great film to show in either world history classes or American history classes for middle and high school students.

**The Hidden Army: Women in World War II #86**

**Rating: Fair**

This film serves as an example of war time propaganda and focuses on the role of middle class women in the war effort. Oddly, the film is narrated by a fictional defeated Hitler, there is also a section called Women In Defense which was written to rally women to defense work. The Historians felt that neither film gave a particularly balanced account of women in the war.

**FDR's First Inaugural Speech, March 4, 1933 #137**

**Rating: Good**

This is actually an audio recording of FDR's famous first inaugural speech in which he told the nervous American public that , "There is nothing to fear but fear itself." The focus group did not have the transcript, but there is one available. Teachers felt that a good way to make the speech come alive for today's students would be to have the class pretend that they were listening to the original radio broadcast of FDR giving the speech. However, they were concerned that modern students, accustomed to today's "sound bites" might have problems staying focused if listening to the whole 20 minute recording.

**The Century: Civilians at War #150****Rating: Very Good**

This film explores the courage and strength that were required of civilians who, according to the narration, made up nearly half the 50 million dead in World War II. The film has some very disturbing images of bombing, starvation and extermination. Because of the graphic images which includes footage of the Warsaw Ghetto and the collection of skeletal corpses in the streets, a concentration camp scene of nude people standing in line as they awaited execution, and images of civilians jumping off cliffs in Saipan to their "sublime deaths", the film is not recommended for younger audiences and should be previewed before showing.

**New Deal for the Dust Bowl #153****Rating: Excellent!**

This film includes archival film footage from the Dust Bowl period as well as the interviews with people who lived through it and will help students really picture the enormity of this environmental disaster. It is more than just a history documentary. Since the movie shows how "progress" can unexpectedly lead to environmental disasters, it could even be used for science classes. As FDR says in the movie, what the country needs is "a plan of cooperating with nature, not bucking nature." This movie is great for middle and high school. A lot of information is packed into 20 minutes, and the graphs, charts, maps and images make it easy to understand!

**Brother Can You Spare a Dime? #169****Rating: Fair**

This film features amazing Depression era footage from newsreels and from popular Hollywood films of the period. Unfortunately, there is no narration, so it may be difficult to follow. Teachers will find great images to accompany their own classroom lectures on the Depression.

### **The Homes of FDR #170**

**Rating: Very Good**

This film is actually three interconnecting films that illuminate many features of FDR's personal development and growth such as his boyhood and relationship with his parents as well as his struggle to overcome polio. The film brings FDR alive in a moving way and provides real insight into the boy and the man behind the famous historic figure. High school and college students will find this film compelling, but younger students in the test audience were mixed in their reactions to the film. This may be due to the fact that younger students were not able to appreciate the subtle and complex analysis provided by the film.

### **Dust Bowl Descent #178**

**Rating: Good**

This film contains fabulous Farm Security Administration photos of the dust storms with voice over interviews of the people in the photos 40 years after the storms and is a really great tool for helping kids visualize what the Dust Bowl meant for the people who lived through it. There is also an interview with Farm Security Administration photographer Arthur Rothstein, but the digital image on the dvd breaks up during the interview. Teachers of younger students should know that there is a scene in which a woman is breast feeding her baby and also a lady who refers to herself as a "retired whore from Wichita."

### **Nuremberg (1945) #179**

**Rating: Good**

This movie was made by Pare Lorentz himself for the US Government and contains graphic footage from the German concentration camps. It was made to show to the people of Germany right after the war. The original German language opening titles are on the dvd, but this version is dubbed in English. This movie is not for children. Even high school teachers will want to preview it before showing it to their classes because it shows skeletal naked victims as survivors, as victims of medical experiments and on line for the gas chambers. There is a scene where naked corpses are being thrown into a mass grave. The film would have warranted a rating of excellent were it not for the fact that the sound was only fair due to hissing and the archival film footage was a bit blurry.

### **The Sights and Sounds of the FSA #183**

**Rating: Good**

This film contains impressive images of terrible poverty, the Dust Bowl, and the government migrant camps during the Great Depression. Students at all grade levels commented on these images recorded by the Farm Security Administration photographers as well as on the sound recordings of government camp songs of the period. However, although high school students heartily recommended this film for history classes as well as for English classes reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, middle school students found the narration tedious. Even so, they felt that the images really helped them understand the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl better.

**Red Tailed Angels #184**

**Rating: Good**

This film examines racism in World War II through the story of the Tuskegee Airmen. Older students liked this film because it tells an inspiring story of heroism and courage in spite of segregation. However, middle school students were disappointed that there was not a lot of action in this movie and did not have the patience to focus on the interviews and narration in this documentary when shown in its entirety.

**Eleanor Roosevelt: First Lady of the World #188**

**Rating: Good**

This film is a clear, concise biography of Eleanor Roosevelt and includes rarely-seen footage of the New York settlement houses and her speeches to the United Nations General Assembly. It was inspiring to hear Mrs. Roosevelt's own voice. This will bring her to life for students today. The whole film is only 25 minutes so it could be easily shown in a middle school, high school or college class. Students as young as fifth grade may also like this film.

**Castle Films Doolittle Raid Over Tokyo #227**

**Rating: Very Good**

This film contains archival film footage of the preparations for the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo mission and of the actual planes taking off from the aircraft carrier. Students enjoyed this film and teachers felt it would be appropriate to show to either an American History class or a Global History class. The one part of the film that got mixed reviews was the interview at the end. Teachers liked it because it explained the strategy behind the Doolittle mission, but the students were more interested in the naval footage.

**Paramount News Special #272**

**Rating: Fair**

This film was essentially footage of FDR giving a speech to Congress. The middle school students in the group had trouble following the speech and the older students all said they would have preferred to just read the speech in a book. So probably the only way this film would be useful would be if a person were looking specifically for film footage of this speech for research purposes.

**Chasing History Home—Eleanor Roosevelt #299**

**Rating: Excellent**

This film teaches us about Eleanor Roosevelt through her home life. It was very well received by all members of the focus group. They particularly liked the fact that it focused on Eleanor herself not FDR. The group enthusiastically recommended the film for both middle and high school American History classes as a way to introduce students to Mrs. Roosevelt as a person.

**Castle Films Europe's Total War #245**

**Rating: Very Good**

This film is a news parade of 1940, and was especially interesting as that is not a year that is usually a focus for World War II documentaries in the United States. Since the focus of the film was the war in Europe, for example, the invasion of Norway, the bombing of London, some felt this movie would be better to show in a Global History class than in a US history class. The Historians felt the film was useful in showing that WWII did not just pop into being on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 as we are often lead to believe.

**Castle Films Japanese Bomb Pearl Harbor #261**

**Rating: Good**

This film shows actual footage of the bombing of the USS Arizona with a clear sequence of events. The students were impressed by the fact that this is actual footage of the attack filmed as it happened. The commentary really shows the mindset of the times with references to "Jap treachery" and "Jap submarines".

**Eleanor Roosevelt and the Red Cross #304**

**Rating: Poor**

This film contains some interesting footage of Eleanor Roosevelt visiting wounded troops during a Red Cross trip during World War II, but it is raw, silent footage. This would not be at all something to show an average class.

**Eleanor Roosevelt Speech Human Rights #309**

**Rating: Fair**

This film is of Mrs. Roosevelt's Human Rights Day television speech not likely to have been seen by many viewers since its original broadcast. Though it is an important topic, neither the speech, nor Mrs. Roosevelt's presentation was able to hold the interest of the students for more than a few seconds.

**Four Photographers Four Visions #315**

**Rating: Very Good**

This film shows how four different Farm Security Administration photographers approached the task of photographing American life during the Great Depression. It was very interesting to see the contrasting approaches to the subject matter and this could be used to demonstrate to students how the same information is interpreted presented differently. Everyone who saw this movie thought it would be great for a photography class.