

Ward - 14 pt

**Position Statement to the Board of Governors of the
Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences
for Documentary Branch Status**

Background

Like light and shadow, fiction and nonfiction filmmaking are inseparably entwined. It was the scientific urge to precisely capture the natural world that gave birth to motion pictures. Growing from the simple "actualities" of the Lumiere brothers, documentaries have created our vision of the world over the last one hundred and fifteen years.

The Academy has recognized the unique contributions of documentary filmmaking since 1941. The awards over six decades offer an extraordinary record of our times. Consider just a single example from each decade:

<i>Desert Victory</i>	1943	WWII
<i>The Silent World</i>	1956	Environment
<i>The Anderson Platoon</i>	1967	Vietnam
* <i>Woodstock</i>	1970	Music and Culture
<i>Genocide</i>	1981	Human Rights
<i>Maya Lin</i>	1994	Biography

+ only - may

The artistic, cultural, social and political impact of documentaries is extraordinary. All of us benefit from the clarity of vision, the passion, and the integrity of our documentary heritage.

But documentaries have also made a special contribution to the community of filmmakers at large and to the development of both the art and science of all motion pictures. It's film's wondrous ability to immerse us in "reality" that has inspired artists to create their own worlds on film. Those filmmakers who are concerned with naturalism, with creating a heightened sense of realism, owe a special debt to documentary productions. Particularly since the 1970s, the techniques and formal inventiveness of documentary directors have come to define "reality" as depicted in many of the most acclaimed fictional features. Handheld camerawork, overlapping dialog tracks, the look of fast film and natural lighting pioneered in direct cinema documentaries are now part of every director's available vocabulary.

Many films have built on the prior work of documentaries. The vision of the past in *Zelig*, *Forest Gump* and *JFK* is a function of nonfiction production. Would *Schindler's List* have been possible without *The Sorrow and the Pity*? Or *Reds* without *Seeing Red*? Are the remarkable performances in *Boys Don't Cry* based in part on *The Brandon Teena Story*? Today as never before, documentary concerns and documentary vision are at the heart of the art of motion pictures.

— Gases —

Documentaries and the AMPAS Mission

This past year the Academy has seized the initiative, recognizing with renewed emphasis the importance of documentary production to the Academy's mission. The constituting of a new Documentary Executive Committee by President Robert Rehme comprised entirely of active nonfiction filmmakers was an important first step. The creation of new procedures for the consideration of feature-length documentaries was the first fruit of a revitalized commitment to documentary art. The result is "A Boost for Documentaries That Aim High," as headlined in the Sunday New York Times (3/12/00, see attached).

But ironically, even as the importance of documentaries to both the public and the Academy is more evident than any time in recent memory, the unique perspective of documentary filmmakers remains officially unrepresented in the governing structure of the organization. Not only do Academy Members-At-Large documentarians have no voice on the Board of Governors, but since the last meeting of the Short Film and Feature Animation Branch Executive Committee they are specifically excluded from new membership in that Branch as well. Thus, documentarians' opportunity for representation on the Board will actually become further diminished than before.

Documentary filmmakers have much to contribute not only in issues which directly affect them. Their knowledge, experience and legendary passion will bring fresh energy and unique, invaluable perspectives to the essential work of Academy governance.

Now is a particularly propitious time to recognize the uniquely important contributions of documentary producers and directors to the mission of the Academy. The rationale for creating a Documentary Branch

is evident in Article II of the Bylaws, which states that the purposes of the Academy include:

"...foster[ing] cooperation among the leadership of the motion picture industry for cultural, educational and technological progress."

The documentary has made and continues to make numerous direct and significant contributions to the cultural, educational and technological progress of the industry. Without exaggeration it is fair to state that fact-based productions are among the most important chronicles of the great social and cultural issues of our times. It is risk-taking documentarians who have pushed the boundaries of all filmmaking to new levels of artistic achievement and technical innovation. Documentary productions have played a pioneering role in the development of such production mainstays as fast film stocks, synchronized sound and portable cameras, Dolby, color, widescreen, large screen formats, editing and digital filmmaking.

"...[focussing] public attention upon the highest quality in motion picture production."

Creating a Documentary Branch will publicly confirm to both the rest of the filmmaking community and the public the unparalleled achievements and contributions of documentaries to the overall development of the motion picture form. Furthermore, and not insignificantly in a time when our society particularly recognizes the importance of diversity, the ranks of documentary filmmakers include a higher proportion both of women and minority filmmakers than is commonly found in the fictional film world. Creation of a Documentary Branch would thus present a greater opportunity to hear voices and perspectives that can enrich our common experience.

"... provid[ing] a forum and common meeting ground...."

Some of the most respected members of the Academy ---artists like Michael Apted, Carrol Ballard, Jonathan Demme, Diane Keaton, Spike Lee, Frank Marshall, Shirley Maclaine, Al Pacino, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg and Haskell Wexler -- are also documentary filmmakers. The Academy and all of its members will benefit from the collegial contributions of a fully institutionalized Documentary Branch.

"...foster[ing] educational activities between the public and the industry...ecourag[ing] an appreciation for the motion picture as an art form and a vocation."

The pre-eminent role of documentary production as both public education and as an art form is unchallenged. Documentarians have won a deservedly esteemed public reputation for social responsibility and artistic integrity. Creation and recognition of a Documentary Branch will thus be a positive step resulting in public approbation and increased prestige for the Academy at large.

By every measure documentary producers and directors are deserving of representation in the formal governing structure of the Academy.

Conclusion

Our collective memory resonates with the brilliance, vision, insight and empathy of risk-taking documentary filmmakers. Audiences around the world remain fascinated with images of our living history. As we rush toward the creation of a global culture, capturing the vitality and variety of human experience remains the unique province of documentary filmmaking. From the awe-inspiring, heroic heights of *Everest* to the equally heroic intimacies of *Breathing Lessons* and *King Gimp*, documentaries entertain us, inspire us, educate and reward us now -- and for generations to come. Documentaries speak for us and to us -- from generation-to-generation. They are the record of where we have been, asking questions that we must answer for ourselves.

Now is the time for the Academy to fully recognize one hundred and fifteen years of documentary accomplishments. The work and success of documentary filmmakers is indispensable to the on-going mission of the organization. ***The matter of inclusion of Academy documentary filmmakers in the governance process of the Academy is one of simple fairness.*** Documentarians deserve a Branch of the Academy recognizing the uniqueness of their contribution to the arts and sciences of motion pictures. The benefits of this investment will accrue to all filmmakers and to the delight of audiences in venues yet to be invented.

Dear Alec,

As you've suggested I've incorporated the highlighted text from the Visual Effects proposal. I've also added a section on box office impact. In the time available I wasn't able to come up with a comprehensive source of theatrical grosses. Baseline.hollywood.com has a good database apparently but there is a \$119 subscription fee.

You still may want to consider where and how to add the material regarding potential members. We are running a little long now. Feel free to wield your blue pencil.

Keep me posted, and let me know how else I can help.

Best,

Mark

Position Statement to the Board of Governors of the
Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences
for Documentary Branch Status

Background

This December marks the 105th anniversary of the first public exhibition of a motion picture to paying audiences. Louis Lumiere's *Arrival of a Train* made viewers gasp in amazement. Growing from the simple "actualities" of the Lumiere Brothers, documentaries have come to define our world. Today the time is right to recognize the singular art and science of documentary films. The benefits of this investment will accrue to all filmmakers and to the delight of audiences in venues yet to be invented.

The Academy has recognized the unique contributions of documentary filmmaking since 1941. The awards over six decades offer an extraordinary record of our times. The range and scope of documentary vision extends from the nearly invisible insect societies of *The Hellstom Chronicle* (Best Documentary 1971) to the unblinking social portraits of Fredrick Wiseman (*High School*), Michael Apted (*7, 14, 28 and 35 Up*) and Barbara Kopple (*Harlan County U.S.A.* Best Documentary 1976). The artistic, cultural, social and political impact of documentaries like *Woodstock* (Best Documentary 1970) and *Hearts and Minds* (Best Documentary 1974) has been extraordinary. All of us benefit from the clarity of vision, the passion, and the integrity of our documentary heritage.

Like light and shadow, fiction and nonfiction filmmaking are inseparable. The documentary art has made a special contribution to the community of filmmakers at large and to the development of both the art and science of all motion pictures. By any measure --- creative, technical or popular --- documentary production has had a profound impact on filmmaking, and its role continues to grow.

Documentary ingenuity has changed the way movies are made. All filmmakers who are concerned with creating a heightened sense of realism owe a special debt to documentary productions. Particularly since the 1970s, the techniques and formal inventiveness of documentary directors have come to define "reality" as depicted in many of the most acclaimed fictional features. Handheld camerawork, overlapping dialog tracks, the look of fast film and natural lighting pioneered in direct cinema documentaries are now part of every director's available vocabulary.

Many films have built on the prior work of documentaries. The vision of

... past in Zelig, Forest Gump and JFK is a function of nonfiction production. Could Schindler's List have been possible without The Sorrow and the Pity? Or Reds without Seeing Red? Are the remarkable performances in Boys Don't Cry based in part on The Brandon Teena Story? Today as never before, documentary concerns and documentary vision are at the heart of the art of motion pictures.

Documentary filmmakers are advancing the art of moviemaking in virtually every type of film. By creating a Documentary Branch, the Academy will acknowledge another important contributor to state-of-the-art filmmaking as it exists today. By granting Branch Status to documentary filmmakers, the Academy will not only fulfill its mandate to recognize a major facet of film production; it will also spotlight the preeminence of documentary filmmakers on the world stage.

Documentaries and the AMPAS Mission

This past year the Academy has seized the initiative, recognizing with renewed emphasis the importance of documentary production to the Academy's mission. President Robert Rehme's constituting of a new Documentary Executive Committee comprised entirely of active nonfiction filmmakers was an important first step. The creation of new procedures for the consideration of feature-length documentaries was the first fruit of a revitalized commitment to documentary art. The result is "A Boost for Documentaries That Aim High," as headlined in the Sunday New York Times (3/12/00, see attached).

But ironically, even as the importance of documentaries to both the public and the Academy is more evident than at any time in recent memory, the unique perspective of documentary filmmakers remains officially unrepresented in the governing structure of the organization. Not only do Academy Members-At-Large documentarians have no voice on the Board of Governors, but since the last meeting of the Short Film and Feature Animation Branch Executive Committee documentary makers are specifically excluded from new membership in that Branch as well. This has further reduced documentarians' opportunity for representation on the Board.

Documentary filmmakers have much to contribute --- not only to issues which directly affect them. Their knowledge, experience and legendary passion will bring fresh energy and unique, invaluable perspectives to the essential work of Academy governance.

Now is a particularly propitious time to recognize the uniquely important contributions of documentary producers and directors to the mission of the Academy. The rationale for creating a Documentary Branch is evident in Article II of the Bylaws, which states that the purposes of the Academy include:

"...foster[ing] cooperation among the leadership of the motion picture industry for cultural, educational and technological progress."

The documentary has made and continues to make numerous direct and significant contributions to the cultural, educational and technological progress of the industry. Without exaggeration, it is fair to say that fact-based productions are among the most important chronicles of the great social and cultural issues of our times. It is risk-taking documentarians who have pushed the boundaries of all filmmaking to new levels of artistic achievement and technical innovation. Documentary productions have played a pioneering role in the development of such production mainstays as fast film stocks, synchronized sound and portable cameras, Dolby, color, widescreen, large screen formats, editing and digital film making.

"...[focussing] public attention upon the highest quality in motion picture production."

Documentary films present the industry in a positive, innovative light. Creating a Documentary Branch will publicly confirm to both the rest of

... filmmaking community and the public the unparalleled achievements and contributions of documentaries to the overall development of the motion picture form. Furthermore, and not insignificantly in a time when our society particularly recognizes the importance of diversity, the ranks of documentary filmmakers include a higher proportion of both women and minority filmmakers than is commonly found in the fictional film world. Creation of a Documentary Branch would create more opportunities to hear voices and perspectives that can enrich our common experience.

"... provid[ing] a forum and common meeting ground...."

Some of the most respected members of the Academy ---artists like Michael Apted, Carrol Ballard, Jonathan Demme, Diane Keaton, Spike Lee, Frank Marshall, Shirley Maclaine, Al Pacino, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg and Haskell Wexler -- are also documentary filmmakers. The Academy and all of its members will benefit from the collegial contributions of a fully institutionalized Documentary Branch. By recognizing the documentary filmmakers in its ranks, the Academy validates its own evolution and growth..

"...foster[ing] educational activities between the public and the industry...encourag[ing] an appreciation for the motion picture as an art form and a vocation."

The pre-eminent role of documentary production as both public education and as an art form is unchallenged. Documentarians have won a deservedly esteemed public reputation for social responsibility and artistic integrity. Creation and recognition of a Documentary Branch will thus be a positive step resulting in public approbation and increased prestige for the Academy at large.

By every measure documentary producers and directors are deserving of representation in the formal governing structure of the Academy.

Documentary Production and the Film Industry

Documentary productions are economically significant and commercially viable. The public exhibition of documentary films is thriving in a thousand theaters, in more than 200 film festivals, in over 100 museums and science centers, in hundreds of universities and in major international theme parks like EPCOT Center and Futurescope.

Films such as Roger and Me, The Thin Blue Line, Hoop Dreams, Crumb, and The Buena Vista Social Club have delighted audiences and investors alike. Large format films like Thrill Ride and the Mysteries of Egypt have been consistently among the top performers in Variety's "Number of Weeks in Release" chart. To Fly at \$155 million may currently hold the record for top grossing documentary of all times. But Michael Jordan to the Max is making a fast break, scoring a first week's gross of \$578,417 (May 8, 2000).

The fastest growing documentary segment of documentary production ---special format films is growing exponentially. And all forms of documentary production generate 100s of millions of dollars annually creating jobs and enriching our communities.

Conclusion

Our collective memory resonates with the brilliance, vision, insight and empathy of risk-taking documentary filmmakers. Audiences around the world remain fascinated with images of our living history. As we rush toward the creation of a global culture, capturing the vitality and variety of human experience remains the unique province of documentary filmmaking. From the awe-inspiring, heroic heights of Everest to the equally heroic intimacies of Breathing Lessons and King Gimp, documentaries entertain us, inspire us, educate and reward us now -- and for generations to come. Documentaries speak for us and to us -- from generation-to-generation. They are the record of where we have been, asking questions that we must answer for ourselves.

Now is the time for the Academy to fully recognize the distinct expertise of documentary filmmakers. In the century to come, there will likely be no film that is untouched by the power of documentary accomplishments. The work and success of documentary filmmakers is indispensable to the on-going mission of the organization. The matter of inclusion of Academy documentary filmmakers in the governance process of the Academy is one of simple fairness. Documentarians deserve an Academy Branch of their own and the consequent recognition and representation that is inherent with branch status. They have earned it.

print not likely
members

DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER MEMBERS

as of 5/4/00

W - Winner

N - Nominee

700 C CAT

David Adams 1-N	Leon Gast (NY) 1-W
Michael J. Ahnemann 1-N	Karen Goodman (NY) 2-N
Robert Amram 2-W	Lee Grant (NY)
Kary Antholis (NJ) 1-W	Walon Green 1-W
Michael Apted	Charles E. Guggenheim (DC) 4-W & 8-N
John Avildsen 1-N	William Guttentag (SF) 1-W & 3-N
John Bailey	Taylor Hackford
Richard Barclay (NY) 1-W	Jack Haley, Jr.
Anne Belle (NY) 1-N	Mark J. Harris 1-W
Brigitte Berman (Can) 1-W	Michael Hausman (NY)
Charles Bernstein	Robert Hillmann (SF) 1-N
Jon Blair (UK) 1-W	Deborah Hoffmann (SF) 1-N
Les Blank (SF)	Mike Hoover (WY) 1-W
Jeff Blyth	Lawrence Hott (MA) 2-N
Jon Boorstin 1-N	Eugene S. Jones 1-N
Charles D. Braverman	John C. Joseph 1-W
Ken Burns (NH) 2-N	Milton Justice (NY) 1-W
Benjamin P. Burt (SF) 1-N	Diane Keaton
William Cartwright, Sr.	Sarah Kernochan (NY) 1-W
George V. Casey 4-N	Barbara Kopple (NY) 2-W
Deborah Chasnoff (SF) 1-W	Julian Krainin (NY) 1-W & 1-N
Richard Chew	Ellen Kuras (NY)
Arthur Cohn - 3W & 1-N	Peter W. Ladue (MA) 1-W
William D. Couturie 1-W & 1-N	Alan Landsburg 1-N
Mel Damski 1-N	Larry M. Lansburgh (OR) 2-W & 1-N
Allen Daviau	Margaret Lazarus (MA) 1-W
Jonathan Demme (NY)	Spike Lee (NY) 1-N
Pen Densham 2-N	Robin Lehman (NY) 2-W
Deborah Dickson (NY) 2-N	Malcolm Leo
Vince DiPersio 3-N	Murray Lerner (NY) 1-W & 1-N
Arthur Dong 1-N	Allie Light (SF) 1-W
Robert P. Epstein (SF) 2-W	Lynne Littman 1-W
Joseph Feury (NY) 1-W	Warren L. Lockhart 1-W
Connie Field (SF) 1-N	Alec Lorimore 1-N
Marshall Flaum 2-N	Evan A. Lottman (NY)
Maria Florio 1-W	Marcel Lozinski (Poland) 1-N
William Friedkin	Greg MacGillivray 1-N
Jeffrey Friedman (SF)	Frank W. Marshall

Sue Marx (MI) 1-W
 Kieth Merrill (OR) 1-W & 1-N
 Allan Miller (NY) 1-W & 1-N
 Richard Miner (WA)
 Freida Lee Mock 1-W & 3-N
 James Moll 1-W
 Errol Morris (MA)
 Victoria Mudd 1-W
 Tom Neff 1-N
 Paul Novros 1-N
 Al Pacino (NY)
 Richard Pearce
 Edmund F. Penney 1-N
 Dale M. Pollock
 Steven B. Post
 Harry Rasky (Can) 1-N
 Alan Raymond (NY) 1-W & 1-N
 Susan Raymond (NY) 1-W & 1-N
 Frances Reid (SF) 1-N
 Robert Richter (NY) 2-N
 Bob Rogers 1-N
 Nina Rosenblum (NY) 1-N
 De Witt L. Sage, Jr. (CT) 1-W & 2-N
 Terry B. Sanders 2-W & 3-N
 Irving Saraf (SF) 1-W
 Paul Seydor 1-N
 John Schlesinger
 Bert Schneider 1-W
 Arnold Schwartzman 1-W
 Martin Scorsese (NY)
 Joan Keller Selznick 1-W & 1-N

Ben Alvin Shedd (NJ) 1-W
 Walter Shenson
 David H. Shepard
 Marjorie Anne Short (MA) 1-N
 Bayley Silleck (NY) 1-N
 Kirk Simon (NY) 2-N
 Susanne Simpson (MA) 2-N
 Aviva Slesin (NY) 1-W
 Andrew Solt
 Penelope Spheeris
 Steven Spielberg
 Buddy Squires (MA) 1-N
 George Stevens, Jr. (DC) 1-N
 Mel Stuart 1-N
 Jonathan T. Taplin
 E. Francis Thompson (NY) 1-W & 1-N
 Susan Todd (NY) 1-N
 Barbara Trent (NC) 1-W
 Vivienne Verdon-Roe (SF) 1-W & 1-N
 Peter Werner
 Haskell Wexler
 Frederick Wiseman (MA)
 Ira Wohl 1-W
 David L. Wolper 1-N
 Chuck Workman 1-W
 Donald Wrye 2-N
 Renner Wunderlich (MA) 1-W
 Gerardine Wurzburg (DC) 1-W
 Andrew Young (NY) 1-N
 Robert Young
 Jessica Yu 1-W

All members

Nominated & for how many awards
 # won. & how many awards

likely members

how many won - how many awards
 " " have won - how many awards

S T E V E N S P I E L B E R G

June 10, 1999

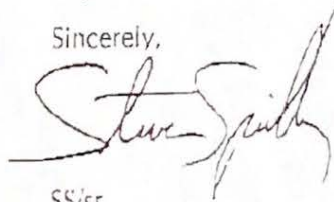
The Board of Governors
Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences
8949 Wilshire Boulevard
Beverly Hills, CA 90211

Dear Members of the Board of Governors,

As you may know, I have long been an ardent admirer and supporter of both feature and short documentary films, having Executive Produced this year's Oscar winner, *THE LAST DAYS*, through the Shoah Foundation. I understand the Board of Governors will be meeting in mid-June to consider reinstating the separate Oscar for Documentary Short Films.

I write to the Board to express my wholehearted endorsement of continuing to recognize Documentary Short Films with an individual Academy Award. Lumping all lengths of documentaries together into a single category serves neither well and effectively eliminates Documentary Shorts from the consideration they deserve. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



SS/sr



April 1, 1999

Robert Rehme
Bruce Davis
Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
FAX: 310 859 9619

Dear Bob and Bruce:

I'm being bombarded with calls - as you may be - from members who deplore the loss of the Short Documentary Oscar. Some of their reasons may be ill-informed, but some are valid and worth exploring, so I figured I'd get my own ideas in as well.

As you know I've been disappointed in the number and quality of the entrants for this award recently, and often felt the Short Documentary award was no longer as meaningful as it once might have been. But I frankly never expected the award to be totally eliminated and I hope the Academy can find another way of solving the problem. After some thought, my recommendation would be for the Governors to reconsider eliminating this category but also reexamine the way these films qualify for eligibility.

The short documentary is still an important category, and is alive and well in the filmmaking community, especially for filmmakers without vast resources. Just having the award seems to open up significant production opportunities, and brings Academy consideration for many worthy but unknown filmmakers, especially women and minorities. And, for whatever it's worth, from Walt Disney to Lynne Littman to Jessica Yu (whose "dress cost more than the film") to this year's charming winner, it's usually a lovely moment in the show.

I know the argument that this is often a television genre, and I believe that the fairly strict rules of theatrical eligibility should continue. But the proper approach for me would be to make the Short Documentary award even more of a theatrical award than before by allowing film festival qualification, exactly as in Live Action Shorts. As someone who is involved in many festivals, I can say confidently that there are very good short documentaries being shown, and in theaters - on film festival screens. Many just don't get into our awards process.

As we accepted IMAX, we should be open to changing theatrical venues. The many festivals, old and new, all have legitimate theatrical screens. Like the Live Action Shorts, they may be the only screens these films see, but that shouldn't disqualify them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chuck Workman".

Chuck Workman

195 S. BEVERLY DRIVE BEVERLY HILLS, CA 90212 • (310) 271-0964

WALON GREEN
WARNER BROS. STUDIOS
4000 WARNER BLVD., 140-209
BURBANK, CA 91522
(818) 954-3376

June 11, 1999

Board of Governors
The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences
8949 Wilshire Blvd.
Beverly Hills, CA 90211

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It has recently come to my attention that the Academy is questioning the validity of the Documentary Short Award. I've carefully read both sides of the argument and there's only one solution that comes to mind and it is as follows:

If the purpose of the Oscars is in fact the same as that of the Golden Globes, then sure, why not get rid of it. If the whole point of the event comes down to a ploy for television ratings, including haute couture, small waists, big breasts, tight butts, Joan River's endless commentary, and an inside look into Tom Cruise's hair, what's the point of the Documentary Short Award or the Documentary Long Form Award anyway?

If ratings and money from advertisers is what the tradition of the Oscars has become - why not cut out a few more unnecessary presentations? Do we really need a prime-time Oscar presentation for film editing? If we cut out the sound editing, art direction and writing, we can add more interpretive dance.

Am I just disillusioned, or living in a dream? I always thought the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences was just that - an organization created for the promotion, protection and perseverance of the exceptional art form that is cinema.

At the end of the day, whatever will be will be. But, for now, wouldn't you rather be responsible for an award ceremony that acknowledges brilliance, vision, insight, empathy and taking chances - not to mention awarding delightful people like Keiko Ibi, who may very well have served as the redemption from the interpretive dance? Hopefully it's not about selling out. If it is, why even go inside the Pavilion? We could just spend 4 1/2 hours on the red carpet assessing cleavage.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. Sometimes we all stray from our moral center, but as long as we return, the world will continue to be a decent place.

Best Wishes,


Walon Green

cc: Friends of The Short Film



April 21, 1999

President Robert Rehme
The Board of Governors
Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences
8949 Wilshire Boulevard
Beverly Hills, California 90211

Dear Robert and Members of the Board of Governors,

Please allow me to express my support for the Academy reinstating the Oscar category for Documentary Short Films.

By combining the Documentary Short category with the Documentary Feature category, I believe the Academy would remove an important voice among filmmakers. Short documentaries serve society as a form of airing social issues. They serve filmmaking by providing a format for experimentation.

One of the Academy's roles is to encourage and expand the film form, and I believe the removal of a separate category for short documentaries jeopardizes that role. Shorter films deserve the same recognition as feature-length films. Each is a unique art form. I hope the Board will reverse their decision and vote to reinstate the Oscar for Best Achievement in Documentary Short Subject.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "George Lucas", written over a horizontal line.

George Lucas

TO: Arnold and Freida
FR: Alec
RE: Branch Proposal
DT: 5/12/00

As I discussed with Freida, attached is a slightly revamped version of Mark Freeman's draft. I've reformatted it for easy reading, as well as making a few wording and punctuation changes -- but it's largely as he wrote it. Here are a few thoughts on how it could be improved:

1) List of documentary examples by decade. Are these in fact the most prestigious titles to promote our cause? — mainstream STARS *Woodstock* *Souris*

#'s
2) We need to include a section on the vitality of documentary films in theatrical exhibition today. Though I still believe we shouldn't get into a strictly box office discussion, it's important to say the docs are alive and well in regular movie houses, art houses, museums, large format theatres et al. List some relatively recent large format and non-large format titles which have achieved strong exposure: *Thin Blue Line*, *Hoop Dreams*, *Return With Honor*, *Roger and Me*, *Buena Vista Social Club*, *Burden of Dreams*, come to mind in regular format. In large format *Everest*, *Amazon*, *Mysteries of Egypt*, *Blue Planet*, *The Dream is Alive*, *Rolling Stones At The Max*, *The Living Sea*, *To Fly*. The ASI Report will be helpful here, but we need numbers on *Buena Vista Social Club* and others as well.

3) We need to discuss another numbers game: member numbers. I count 56 documentarian Members-At-Large, 43 from the Shorts Branch, and 9 possible/likely crossovers from other branches, for a total of 120 Documentary Branch members. This compares favorably with the 134 Visual Effects had when they started out in '94. Furthermore, it can be argued that documentarians are historically underrepresented in the ranks for a couple of reasons. First, until 8 or 9 years ago (says Freida, we must check this out) there was no automatic mechanism for considering Doc nominees and winners for membership. Furthermore, as the Doc Exec Committee has until this year been comprised largely of non-documentarians, there was arguably a less pro-active effort made to reach out to qualified documentary filmmakers for membership. A Branch would facilitate identifying outstanding candidates within the documentary community. By comparison, since its inception in '94 Visual Effects membership has shot up to 198 as of this year! ✓

I'm sure there are other improvements worth considering, but I've just run out of time if I'm to FAX this off before the weekend.

Talk to you both soon,

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

SPECIAL MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

DOCUMENTARIANS

From Academy Bylaws:

Article III, Section 1(a). Membership shall be by invitation of the Board of Governors. Invitations to active membership shall be limited to those persons employed by motion picture producing companies, or credited with screen achievements, or who have otherwise achieved distinction in their respective fields of endeavor within the industry and who, in the opinion of the Board, are qualified for membership.

To be considered for invitation to Academy membership in the Members-at-Large category, a documentarian must:

- (a) have a minimum of two director and/or producer credits on theatrical documentary films (one of which must have been within the last five years) of a caliber which, in the opinion of the executive committee, reflect the high standards of the Academy,
- and/or**
- (b) have director and/or producer screen credit on a picture nominated for an Academy Documentary Award,
- or**
- (c) have, in the judgment of the Documentary Executive Committee, otherwise achieved unique distinction, earned special merit or made an outstanding contribution to documentary filmmaking.

Proposals must be accompanied by a letter from each sponsor which addresses, as specifically as possible, how the candidate meets one or another of the requirements above.

3. Membership Requirements

The committee has voted to define Members-At-Large membership requirements for Documentarians. Suggestions were: two distinguished credits with one credit within the last 5 years. Define director and producer credit on film. New wording pending until next meeting. Motion made by Frieda, seconded by Victoria - unanimous.

4. Branch Status

The committee discussed a petition to propose a Documentary Branch to the Board of Governors. The following comments were made: Arnold - one concern was are there enough documentarians to warrant a branch? Bruce replied that there is no minimum number of members for any branch. Arnold - felt it important to get representation on the board. Frieda - representation gives them voice, presently there is no one to represent their interest. Bruce expressed that the board was too cumbersome and has become too large making it difficult to function efficiently. Bruce stated that Documentaries were clearly a distinct craft. A motion was made by Frieda to endorse a Documentary Branch with three governors, seconded by Victoria - the vote was unanimous. Alec volunteered to construct the letter to General Membership.

5. Home Videos - No action was taken.

6. New Business - Bruce passed out a letter from Charles Bernstein regarding the Documentary Film Award Finalists. Due to the time factor of the meeting, the letter was tabled until the next meeting. The next meeting will be scheduled in April.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:10 P.M.

April 27, 1999

To: Friends and Supporters of Short Documentary Films

From: The Governors of the Short Films and Feature Animation Branch

Re: The Oscar for Documentary Short Subject: A Summary of our Position

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Thank you for your good instincts and for your courage in supporting documentary short films. Unfortunately, much of the drive to eliminate the Oscar for Documentary Short Subject is based on inaccurate and incomplete factual information. Because you made the decision to lend your name to this worthy cause, we thought you might appreciate a summary of current facts about the theatrical viability of documentary short films.

We all know that the Academy has a history of eliminating award categories that have become obsolete, irrelevant or inactive. Is this fair? Of course it is. No one argues about eliminating the Oscar for Best Achievement in (Silent Film) Title Writing. But Documentary Short Subjects are not obsolete nor irrelevant nor inactive. In fact, we believe that they are part of a thriving world of commercially viable films, providing a rich theatrical experience for millions of families and moviegoers worldwide.

Today's documentaries are nothing like the old-style documentaries and educational short subjects the Academy recognized in the 1940s. Those days and those pictures are gone. But in their place a new style of documentary short film has exploded into the public theatrical arena. Documentaries today come in new packages, play in new theatrical venues and formats, and thrive on new business models. And their numbers are growing. 1998 was a record year, and the number of new, high-budget, short documentary theatrical releases for 1999 should break that record by more than 50%. And where does one see this incredible proliferation of excellent documentary shorts? The answer: everywhere we love to take our children and grandchildren on Sunday afternoons.

They are playing in theaters at museums and other cultural institutions, like the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum, the National Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art, and the JFK Museum Theater. They are in theme park theaters, like those at Disney's Epcot Center and the Universal Studios in Florida. They are playing in theaters at world fairs and expositions, as well as in new special format theaters, which are mushrooming all over the globe. Many special format theaters, like IMAX, are being built in mainstream, multi-screen cinema complexes right alongside theaters showing conventional feature films. Short documentaries are also playing at national visitor centers, such as the National D-Day Museum, the Navy Memorial Theater, and the Ellis Island Theater. All of these venues show film-based documentaries to sold-out audiences who happily pay for the privilege.

And it's not just about special format films. Did you know that Robert Redford and General Cinema Theaters recently announced plans to build Sundance Cinema Centers, a national chain of year-round, 35mm, multi-screen theaters devoted exclusively to independent films, including screens dedicated solely to documentary shorts and features? This is part of a growing trend, not the lonely exception. Cinema circuits and booking cooperatives throughout the US (such as Landmark Theaters, Pacific Film Archives, Laemmle Theaters, Paulson Theater Services) are programming between 25 and 40 short films per screen on hundreds of screens every year.

In addition, more than 1,000 independent theaters -- theaters like the Film Forum, Rafael Film Center, Coolidge Corner, the Mayan Theater, the Zeitgeist, the Carolina Theater -- include documentary, live-action and animated shorts as part of their regular programming, with runs ranging from one week to six months or longer. And programs of short films, including short documentaries, are consistently among the most popular events at film festivals (like Aspen, Sundance, the Palm Springs Film Festival and hundred of others world-wide), as well as at art house and independent theaters chains across the country.

All of these short documentaries in all of these venues generate hundreds of millions of box office dollars every single year. That's commercial viability, wouldn't you agree?

While short documentaries are indeed being produced in record numbers, they are not being made for television. Why? Because television, except for the "magazine" shows produced specifically for news series like 20/20, rarely plays documentary shorts. What you see on TV (on PBS, The Discovery Channel, The History Channel, etc.) are generally hour-long programs or more. Most television-based documentary programs require a minimum of 52 minutes, and by definition, only films under 40 minutes in length are considered Documentary Short Subjects. Despite the fact that no film today is produced without some financial dependence on ancillary rights such as television, home video, and other non-theatrical distribution, one survey found that less than 18% of Documentary Short Subjects nominated for an Oscar had any television co-financing at all.

Here's the bottom line with respect to television: the rules for submitting any documentary for Academy consideration, long or short, require that the picture be released first theatrically. Period. That is our protection against the intrusion of television programming into the process. And if a mere seven-day theatrical art house run in Manhattan or L.A. County seems a bit thin as a qualifying criterion, may we suggest that many wonderful films listed on our annual Reminders List of qualified features, including many foreign films, often receive only a week or two of similar distribution for their entire US run. Would anyone vote to eliminate the Oscar for Best Foreign Film based on the limited theatrical release of a few of the foreign entries? Of course not.

As for the decline in the number of documentary shorts being offered for Academy consideration, the Academy itself has changed the rules, making it harder for some of the best and most successful documentary short films to qualify for Oscar consideration. For example, AMPAS recognized festivals are today an important means of qualifying short live action and animation films. This process of qualifying only first prize winners for consideration, although not the sole source for qualifying, brought more than 100 live action and 50 animation short films to the preliminary review committee in 1998. Reinstating film festival winners for Academy consideration in the Short Documentary Category, plus a few other rule adjustments, will help guarantee that the best of the hundreds of documentary shorts produced independently each year qualify for Academy consideration.

There have also been questions about the quality of documentary short subjects in recent years. Here is the simple truth: the majority of the committee members who actually screen them believe the overall quality of Documentary Short Subjects remains very high. Naturally, there will always be differences of opinion in matters of taste. Art, by nature, is subjective. But if it's true that the issue of quality should be decided by industry professionals who actually see the films, then we don't have a problem. On the other hand, there is no question that the nominating procedures for Documentary Short Subject could benefit from review and improvement.

When considering a rules change, like a change in nominating procedure, it is only fair that due process, consensus, and respect for those affected by the change be applied in every Oscar category. The rule change that redefined the maximum length of a short subject as 40 minutes, for example, was overwhelmingly approved by the Short Film and Feature Animation Branch and the Documentary Executive Committee before being approved by the Academy's Board of Governors. This was done because we all recognized that short films, like feature films, were simply becoming longer. Due process was also followed for black-and-white cinematography, which used to have its own Oscar until the Cinematographers Branch formally requested elimination of the category.

Unfortunately, however, this was not the case for the category of Documentary Short Subject. Despite the fact that the Documentary Executive Committee voted overwhelmingly in October, 1998, to retain the separate Oscar for Short Documentary Subject, the Academy Rules Committee recommended that the Board of Governors combine the documentary categories. This recommendation was not based on the decision of the very members, such as the Academy's documentarians, who were most affected and most knowledgeable. This is simply not the fair and proper way to proceed.

One final point. The Academy's mandate, adopted in 1933, is "to advance the arts and sciences of motion pictures and to foster cooperation among the creative leadership of the industry for cultural, educational and technological progress." Since short films have historically lead the field for innovative technical achievement and brilliance in furthering the art and sciences of motion pictures (synchronized sound, color, 3-D, widescreen and large screen formats, the use of digital technology, to list a few), the Academy -- according to its own mandate -- should continue to support this richly creative and often surprising film form.

And there you have it. A not-so-short way of saying that short documentaries are an important and vital part of our Academy and deserve consideration as such. Like the short story compared to the novel, short films are art forms different from their feature-length brethren. They should not be lumped together into a single category any more than Best Actor and Best Actress or Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor should all be combined. And we all know that, in reality, combining the categories effectively eliminates the Oscar for Documentary Short Subject.

All facts and finer points aside, the Oscar for Best Documentary Short Subject often provides us with the most touching, human moments in an exceedingly long Oscar telecast. Remember Jessica Yu's amusingly exaggerated ad lib about her dress costing more than her Oscar-winning film? Or this year's charming winner, Keiko Ibi, who said,

Thank you. Who would have thought a girl from Japan can make a movie about Jewish senior citizens and actually receive this award? ... I would also like to thank the Academy for recognizing the short documentary film, and I hope that you will continue to do so.

And so do we. We greatly appreciate your time and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carl Bell, June Foray, Bill Littlejohn
Governors of the Short Films and Feature Animation Branch

Outline: The Need for a Documentary Branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences:

- I. The history of the relationship between the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Documentary form.
 - A. The first Awards for documentary given just after WWII as fitting recognition by the industry for the work that its members had done to support the war effort.
 1. List films and their social importance.
 2. Cite individuals and their position within Hollywood.
 - a. Find historical quotes and citations.
 - B. It took that time of crisis for the industry to recognize what had always been an important part of filmmaking; the documentary.
 1. What was it about that moment in time that made the Academy members pay attention, and how does that relate to its mission statement? (It would be great to see the minutes of the meetings in which the awards were first discussed and decided. These should be open for perusal by all members.)
 2. Although some of this motivation is undoubtedly political, there must also be artistic and technical rationale.
 - C. A chronology of some of the most important titles and names to be associated with documentary nominations over the past 54 years.
 1. Highlight the recognizable names involved in any production capacity, including narrators, several of whom have been members of actors' branch.
 - a. A few supportive statements by key individuals.
 2. Emphasize the distribution of certain nominated documentaries by major studios, especially Disney nature-related films.
 - D. The creative forces that were encouraged by the Academy's recognition of documentary films and the benefits that resulting creativity has had for the entire industry.

1. Mention of individuals and important companies that have significant involvement with both documentaries and AMPAS.
 - a. Particularly note the relationship between ASC members who started in documentaries. *Haskell WEXLER -*

II. The artistic and technological history of the documentary form.

A. The earliest beginnings of actualities.

1. Since it is an Academy that very much includes the sciences of film, the fact that earliest films were almost all documents is important.
2. The impetus to record reality as a natural phenomenon of all human communication extending from simple record-making to highest art.
 - a. How this has carried through in all arts and particularly media arts.
 - b. The role that the Academy plays in validating product which is often not considered "art." How all forms of expression, including motion pictures, evolve to the status of art and the role of institutions such as AMPAS in that process.

B. Brief mention of the important individuals (not necessarily AMPAS members, but important in film history in general) who have contributed to the documentary form or had their career enhanced by it.

C. A discussion of the technological advancements that were initiated and/or refined by documentary.

1. Camera/Lighting: both technologically and artistically.
2. Sound.
3. Editing.
4. Willingness to experiment.

III. The current state of the art of the documentary as it relates to today's entertainment industry especially the economic viability of documentaries seen in theaters and other public venues.

- A. Theatrical exhibition—materials from the independent study on retaining short form docs.
- B. Festivals-ditto but updated.
- C. The major cross-over of individual artists and craftspeople between fiction and documentary work.
 - 1. Publicity and marketing as part of the documentary world and the film world.
 - 2. Ancillary industries involved in documentary—labs, film suppliers, etc.
- D. Where we are technologically in film's development and the roles that documentaries play in pushing the envelope of technology.

IV. What is a documentary, does anyone have a definition, and what is the role of AMPAS in helping to create that definition? Modern audiences can usually distinguish the difference between a theatrical fiction feature and a sit-com. Modern audiences can also usually distinguish the difference between a documentary and reality-based video. But the distinctions continue to blur. By giving awards for short and feature documentaries the Academy contributes significantly to the definition of the form. Should there not be a specific branch of the Academy to thoughtfully consider and comment upon this terribly important question?

V. Summarization of how the stated mission of the Academy relates to the documentary.

- A. Restate the mission as it applies to documentary and documentarians.