

career during the pre-Code era is discussed in another chapter, as is the filming of the biopic *Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933), a film that resonated so deeply with the Swedish actress that she was willing to undergo plastic surgery to embody the monarch as accurately as possible. After experiencing years of fatigue due to depression and her ovarian inflammation, Garbo retired from the film industry in 1942 at age thirty-six. In part 5, “Celebrity,” comprising the book’s remaining three chapters, Banner interweaves discussions of Garbo’s friendships and love affairs with figures such as Salka Viertel and George Schlee with descriptions of her relocation to New York, physical decline, and spiritual pursuits before her death in April 1990.

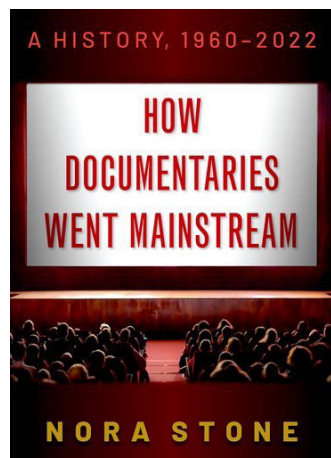
Banner’s biography provides a comprehensive introduction to the forces that shaped Garbo’s working environment and celebrity, making this a recommended text for anyone who seeks to learn more about a woman whose power to fascinate has never dimmed. Of all Garbo biographies, Banner’s may possess the most pedagogical promise, as it provides thorough yet accessible context for students new to the history of classical Hollywood while also suggesting diverse avenues for further research.

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BOOK DATA Lois W. Banner, *Ideal Beauty: The Life and Times of Greta Garbo*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 2023. \$34.95 cloth. 286 pages.

DEVIN THOMAS

How Documentaries Went Mainstream: A History, 1960–2022, by Nora Stone



Documentary comes into the world torn between its virtue as a public service and its value as commodity. This tension is central to Nora Stone’s meticulously researched book *How Documentaries Went Mainstream: A History, 1960–2022*, which charts documentary’s progression from Hollywood’s margins to the bread and

butter of online streaming platforms. In this refreshing addition to the history of nonfiction film, Stone foregrounds

distribution and circulation as the locus of documentary’s influence, tracing evolutions in infrastructure, film culture, and market machinations to explain the genre’s commercial transformation.

The book progresses chronologically, with each chapter focusing on a different era in the development and proliferation of documentary film and its distribution networks. Stone draws on a wealth of sources such as archival documents, trade journals, popular media, and interviews with filmmakers and distributors to paint a detailed picture of documentary as industry. She emphasizes the role of “the documentary ecosystem”—an infrastructure network that spans theatrical distribution, public television, cable television, film festivals, nonprofits, government granting agencies, home video, and streaming services (7). She supplements this attention to distribution and circulation with key cinematic case studies. In this way, *How Documentaries Went Mainstream* exposes the ways these transmedia relationships have helped shape the content, structure, and commercialization of documentary films from 1960 to today.

Chapter 1 opens in the postwar period, an age of precarity for documentary. Frustrated by the constraints of journalistic television, the pioneers of Direct Cinema desired to make films that pushed the boundaries of nonfiction storytelling but were met with rejection from Hollywood and network television. To find their audience, filmmakers had to be innovative in both style and distribution strategy. Stone lays out the different circulation methods and cinephile communities that allowed documentary to blossom despite industry antagonism. Societies like Cinema 16, journals such as *Film Culture*, and the creation of filmmaker collectives all laid the groundwork for documentary circulation. By the end of the 1960s, the breakout success of two self-financed and independently distributed films, *Dont Look Back* (D. A. Pennebaker, 1967) and *The Endless Summer* (Bruce Brown, 1966), proved the commercial viability of documentary. These films about popular music and youth culture, respectively, hit on a formula for success: a built-in fan base ripe with potential for cross-industry partnerships.

In chapters 2 and 3, Stone dissects the documentary ecosystems of the 1980s through the lens of two key distribution channels: independent cinema and public television. In chapter 2, Stone argues that documentary was central to the 1980s American independent-film market. Increased demand for documentaries and the emergence of more small distribution companies set the groundwork for the commercial acquisition of documentary films and paved

the way for bigger hits to come. Meanwhile, in the realm of public television—before Ken Burns became a household name—documentarians struggled to gain a foothold on local stations. Chapter 3 recounts the advocacy battles that led to the creation of *POV* (PBS, 1988–) and the establishment of public television as a reliable platform for the funding and distribution of documentary films.

By the beginning of the 1990s, the unprecedented box-office success of a few standout documentaries such as *Roger and Me* (Michael Moore, 1989) meant that more distribution companies wanted to acquire nonfiction films. But the growth of documentary’s popularity and infrastructure did not benefit everyone. Chapter 4 delves into inequities in documentary distribution, the emergence of HBO as a major player on the nonfiction stage, and how changes to the Academy’s qualifying rules fomented market stratification. While a few films earned critical acclaim and audience attention, most documentaries struggled to find distribution outside New York City and Los Angeles. HBO, which had begun producing its own nonfiction content in the 1980s, more than doubled its documentary productions in 1996. HBO used documentary as a cost-effective way to expand original programming while boosting its brand with the prestige and buzz of award-winning films. The combined interests of theatrical distributors and TV executives catalyzed documentary’s shift in status from journalistic television to independent cinema.

The early aughts saw a meteoric rise in the success and visibility of documentary with the emergence of what Stone fittingly dubs the “docubuster” (116). Films like *March of the Penguins* (Luc Jacquet, 2005) and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, 2004) each grossed over \$100 million worldwide. But Stone does not interpret this windfall as an expression of consumer freedom. Instead, chapter 5 argues that the docubuster emerged out of a robust and stable documentary market built up over decades of innovation and struggle. The 2000s also ushered in two strong ancillary markets for nonfiction films: cable television and DVDs. Following HBO’s lead, more cable networks started to acquire and produce documentaries. The creation of Netflix and the increased ease of online shopping also incentivized the expansion of documentary in the home-video market. To meet this increased demand for high-quality nonfiction films, film festivals emerged as quasi-industrial players, taking on new roles as nonprofit granting agencies and educational resources. With the rise of the Internet and the growing success of independent films at the box office, documentaries become a low-risk investment perfect for online experiments in distribution.

In chapter 6, Stone’s strongest arguments cohere in an examination of the new driving forces behind today’s documentary market: streaming-video giants and private investment. The true-crime glut in the late 2010s is just one example of the way streamers like Netflix have reshaped documentary content, format, production, and acquisition. Competition between streamers and the push for exclusive content have created such a demand for bingeable documentary series that create buzz and expand subscription enrollment that even big production companies like Imagine Entertainment have pivoted to nonfiction.

However, Netflix’s growing power and influence as a primary release window comes at a cost. By selling to Netflix, filmmakers must shape their work around commercial demands and lose any opportunity to recoup their budget from theatrical or ancillary markets. Streaming forecloses all other revenue streams, concentrating even more power in the hands of a few multinational technology companies. Private investment, argues Stone, provides some balance to the power of streaming giants, and the stability of the documentary market has attracted investors who previously would not have taken on the risk. But these avenues don’t guarantee commercial success or social impact.

Fifty years ago, documentary filmmakers had to fight for airtime on public television and pioneer their way onto the big screen. Now, more documentaries are being made and consumed than ever before, but the wealth is not spread evenly. While a select few are allocated large budgets and achieve commercial success, most documentarians remain on the margins of the entertainment industry, forced to work second jobs to make ends meet. The Internet, which has reshaped documentary production since the start of the new millennium, did not become a bastion for media democratization, but instead concentrated power in a handful of global technology giants who control access to streaming services and drive trends in production and acquisition. Political, personal, and experimental documentaries must fend for themselves, relying on limited grassroots funding and circulation. Stone ends her book at a crossroads, gesturing on the one hand toward growing labor movements, and on the other toward increasing industry consolidation. The future of documentary film remains in the balance.

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BOOK DATA Nora Stone, *How Documentaries Went Mainstream: A History, 1960–2022*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2023. \$125.00 cloth; \$34.95 paper. 234/240 pages.