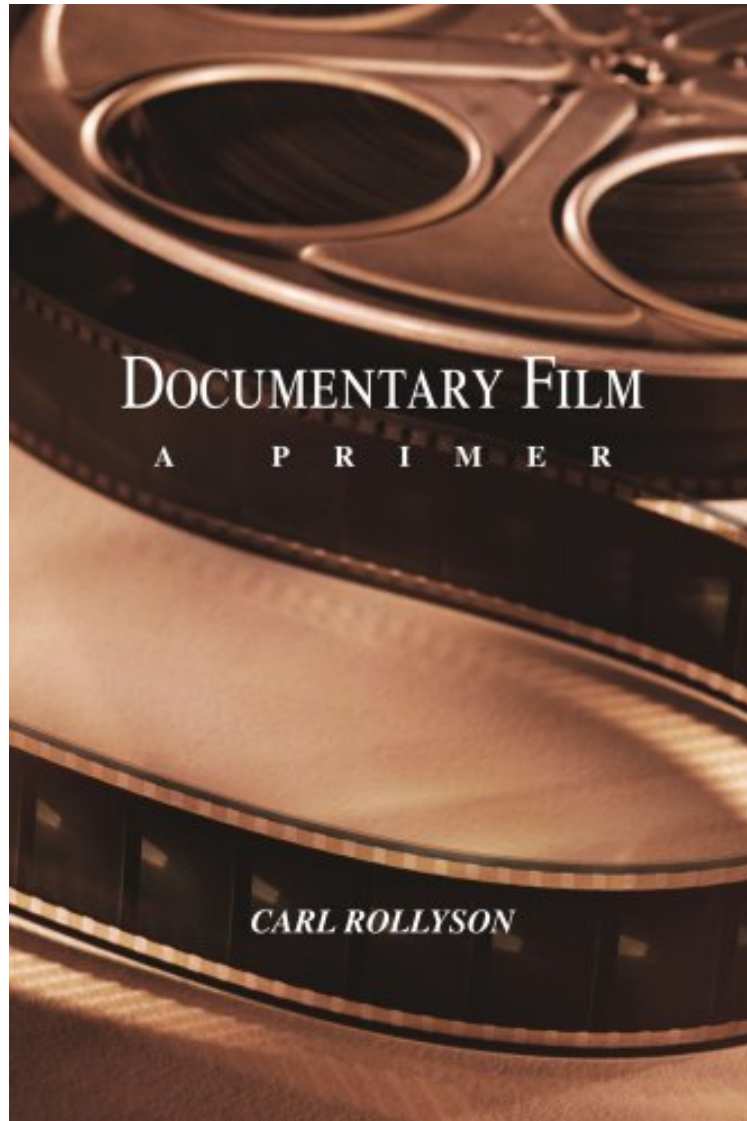


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## Documentary Film: A Primer

*Carl Rollyson*

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**Carl Rollyson : Documentary Film: A Primer** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Documentary Film: A Primer:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Another short and useful book from RollysonBy Teacher of TeachersIt so happens that I ordered both this and Rollyson's "Reading Biography" for an interdisciplinary course. One segment of the term covers how to think critically about documentary film, and this book is perfect for my very capable but non-specialist students. The book focuses on a case study (here, Jill Craigie) but includes broader material

(particularly in the first chapter and the five examples of film reviews). I happen to think this is the perfect balance and would like to see more books (on a variety of disciplines) follow Rollyson's lead.

*Documentary Film: A Primer* provides a succinct introduction to the nature of the documentary, drawing on examples from the work of Robert Flaherty, Dziga Vertov, Leni Riefenstahl, Woody Allen, Warren Beatty, Spalding Gray, Cindy Sherman, Susan Sontag, and others. The documentaries discussed cover a range of subjects including the Russian Revolution, the Holocaust, and the worlds of fashion and sports. This incisive foray into the essentials of documentary is then buttressed by an in depth discussion of the career of Jill Craigie, a British director/writer who brought to the cinema an uncompromising socialist and feminist perspective during the Second World War. How Craigie got her films produced by a major studio, and why her work could not be replicated in postwar Britain, reveal not only the way documentaries are made but also why they remain a controversial and problematic genre. A selection of Rollyson's reviews of contemporary documentaries provides a model for discussing the genre. Students and fans of documentaries will find his list of classic documentaries on VHS and DVD and his excerpts from other critics of the genre of special interest. His topics for discussion section make this book a valuable resource for teachers as well.

**About the Author** Carl Rollyson's film criticism has appeared in *Magill's Cinema Annual*, *Video Hound*, his biographies of Marilyn Monroe, Lillian Hellman, and Susan Sontag, and in the forthcoming *To Be A Woman: The Life of Jill Craigie*. He teaches classes in documentary film at Baruch College, The City University of New York.