



CIFF

FILMSLAM 2019
43RD CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
STUDY GUIDE

FilmSlam

FILMSLAM IS PRESENTED BY

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LONG TIME COMING: A 1955 BASEBALL STORY

USA, 2017, 87 minutes
Jon Strong, Director

SYNOPSIS

In 1955 the southern United States was divided by segregation and brimming with hatred and prejudice. Enter the Pensacola Jaycees All-Stars, the first African-American little league team in Florida. White parents didn't want their kids playing against black kids, and they complained to league leaders. However, the league ruled in favor of the Jaycees: white teams either played them or forfeited. And forfeit is exactly what they did—every team, every game. So, by default, the Jaycees became district champions and headed to Orlando for the state tournament. Once again they met resistance. Despite approving players and parents, the coach for the opposing Orlando Kiwanis wouldn't play the Jaycees and quit. Luckily, the assistant coach stepped up and made history. More than 60 years later, they're reunited in **LONG TIME COMING: A 1955 BASEBALL STORY**—a compelling documentary highlighting the cultural significance of their matchup. Through gripping interviews, the film also reveals their varying perspectives on the racial turmoil of then and now. Featuring appearances from baseball greats including Hank Aaron and Gary Sheffield, this impactful film is a sobering testament to how far we've come in America, but how far we still have to go. — E.F.

FEATURING

The 1955 Pensacola Jaycees – Willie Preyer, Admiral “Spider” LeRoy, Willie Stromas, Cleveland Dailey, Willie V. Robinson, Rev. Freddie Augustine

The 1955 Orlando Kiwanis – Stewart Hall, Jerry Cowart, Bill Hudson, Danny Rivenbark, Gary Fleming, Ron Homan, John Lane

Special Guests – Andrew Young (civil rights leader and United Nations ambassador), Cal Ripken Jr. (former professional baseball player), Davey Johnson (former professional baseball player), Robin Reshard (Pensacola historian), Hank Aaron (former professional baseball player), Gary Sheffield (former professional baseball player), John Rivers (former little league player), Chris Lamb (baseball historian), Lance Van Auken (historian and vice president of Little League International)

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Biography – Jon Strong is a director and editor of both original and advertising-based projects. To date, his most successful work is “The Thank You Project,” which has more than 150 million views online and was featured on the “Today Show.” Strong is in the process of making a documentary (shot in Iraq in March 2017) about the stories of Iraqi and Syrian refugees.

Filmography – LONG TIME COMING (2017).

CURRICULUM LINKS

American History, Social Studies, African American Studies, English Language Arts, Media Studies

CURRICULUM GOALS

- Improve media literacy
- Develop critical thinking skills
- Engage in interdisciplinary learning
- Hone oral and written communication skills
- Foster global awareness and social justice

FILMSLAM VIEWING GUIDE

The Art of Filmmaking

Filmmakers of both narrative and documentary films (of either short or feature length) make numerous artistic decisions throughout the filmmaking process, beginning with the conception of the film, through filming, and finally during distribution and marketing. Understanding film terms and the production process helps viewers to identify and interpret these artistic choices.

Crew: The people who are involved with the production of a film and who do not appear in the film. The following are a few of the numerous people that make up a film crew:

- **Producer:** The person who oversees the entire filmmaking process. The producer finds the script, hires a director, finds financing to make and distribute the film, and markets the film.
- **Director:** The person who supervises the creative aspects of a film and instructs the actors and crew.
- **Screenwriter:** The person who creates the story, action, and dialogue.
- **Cinematographer:** The person who is responsible for the camerawork and lighting.
- **Editor:** The person who selects what he/she considers are the best shots and pieces them together to produce scenes, then larger sequences, and ultimately the film.

Development/Pre-Production: The process of preparing the film concept, assembling the crew, and determining a budget and shooting schedule. The following are terms often associated with this phase of the filmmaking process:

- **Synopsis:** A short description of the film.
- **Screenplay:** A detailed written account of the dialogue and action of a film, often including basic camera directions.
- **Literary Elements:** Films share numerous elements with literature, including plot, characters, setting, point of view, mood, and theme.
- **Genre:** A type or classification of films with identifiable similarities. Comedies, westerns, musicals, horror films, and science fiction films are popular genres.
- **Storyboard:** A series of drawings showing the scenes, shot by shot, and transitions for a film. The storyboard gives a director a clear idea of how the film will look.

Photography: The process of capturing visual images with a camera. The director and cinematographer make artistic choices about the following aspects:

- **Frame:** A single photograph of the larger film strip.
- **Shot:** A unit of film or series of frames over which the camera does not stop filming.
- **Take:** The length (in terms of time) of a single shot.
- **Focus:** The variable degree (from **hard** to **soft**) to which the image is clear and sharp.
- **Camera Angle:** The placement of the camera relative to the subject. When a camera is placed above (looking down upon) the subject, the camera is at a **high angle**. When the camera is placed below (looking upwards at) the subject, the camera is at a **low angle**.
- **Range:** The apparent distance between the camera and the subject, differentiated as **close-up shots** (framing the head from the neck up), **medium shots** (framing the body from the waist up), and **long shots** (framing the entire body).
- **Composition:** The organization of subjects or objects within the frame of the film.

- **Lighting:** The use of natural or artificial illumination and shadows for the purpose of visual clarity and/or mood.
- **Camera Movement:** There are number of common types of camera movements, including **panning** (in which the camera pivots from right to left, or vice versa), **tilting** (in which the camera pivots upwards or downwards), and **tracking** (in which the entire camera moves forwards, backwards, or sideways).

Sound Design: The process, completed during or after filming, of capturing, creating, and interweaving dialogue, sound effects, and music. The following are terms associated with this process:

- **Soundtrack:** The recorded sound of a film, including dialogue, sound effects, and music.
- **Voiceover:** A voice of a narrator, generally not seen but heard on the soundtrack of a film.

Post-Production/Editing: The process, typically after filming has concluded, of combining shots, scenes, and sequences with the soundtrack. The following are terms associated with this phase:

- **Cut:** The distinct, abrupt transition from one frame to another.
- **Fade Out/Fade In:** A technique in which a shot gradually darkens until a new one emerges from the darkness.
- **Dissolve:** A technique in which one image gradually transitions into another image in such a way that the viewer can temporarily see both images at the same time.
- **Flashback:** A sequence of a film that shows events that happened prior to those already shown.
- **Title Sequence:** Written material at the beginning of a film, usually including the names of the people involved in the production of the film (the director, producer, screenwriter, cinematographer, featured actors, etc.) and sometimes called the opening credits or titles.
- **Intertitles:** Text displayed on the screen in between photographed shots or superimposed over a photographed image.

Distribution/Marketing: The process of selling and supplying films to exhibitors, including mainstream theaters, art house theaters, film festivals, television networks, and websites.

A Short History of Filmmaking: Nonfiction Films

Since the advent of motion pictures in the mid-1890s, filmmakers have been creating nonfiction films. Often lasting about a minute, silent nonfiction films were known as “actualities” and could be further classified into two predominant sub-genres: “scenics,” depicting a filmmaker’s travels; and “topicals,” delineating contemporary events. Brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière, early filmmakers and inventors, pioneered this mode, releasing “Workers Leaving the Factory” and “Arrival of a Train” in 1895.

The nonfiction film developed into a feature-length genre, then called a “documentary,” in the 1920s. Filmmaker Robert Flaherty directed the internationally celebrated “Nanook of the North” about an Inuit family in Northern Canada in 1922. Featuring numerous staged reenactments of the family’s daily activities, “Nanook of the North” portrayed Flaherty’s subjective understanding of Inuit life. Among those impressed with Flaherty’s work was British documentarian John Grierson. Throughout the 1930s, Grierson, who mainly garnered financial support from the government and businesses instead of the film industry, lauded the educational function of film and produced a number of noteworthy documentaries, including “Night Mail” in 1936.

In addition to these feature-length documentaries, newsreels, which often preceded the screenings of Hollywood narrative films, kept viewers informed about current events prior to the

invention and popularization of television. During World War II, the American government depended upon newsreels and documentaries to explain America's role in the war and to build morale. Academy Award®-winning directors, including Frank Capra, John Ford, and William Wyler, contributed to the war effort by filming educational, and largely propagandistic, documentaries.

Following the war, new technologies transformed the style of documentaries in the 1950s and 1960s. Lighter, more portable camera and sound equipment allowed filmmakers to capture events as they happened. While some filmmakers strove for a more personal documentary style during this period, a movement known as Direct Cinema (related to the French *cinéma vérité* movement) aimed for immediacy, truth, and objectivity through techniques that called for the least amount of interference with their subjects. The “rockumentary” genre developed from this movement. D.A. Pennebaker, who directed “Don’t Look Back” (1967) about a Bob Dylan tour, and David and Albert Maysles, who along with Charlotte Zwerin directed “Gimme Shelter” (1970) about a Rolling Stones festival, were key figures in the Direct Cinema movement.

As filmmakers began to question their ability to achieve pure objectivity, the “synthetic” documentary emerged in the 1970s and continues to be a common style of documentary to this day. Filmmakers of synthetic documentary combine the observational methods of Direct Cinema with interviews, archival footage, intertitles, and music. In the 1990s, independent production companies found a growing audience for documentary films at film festivals, in art house theaters, and on cable television. The documentaries of Michael Moore (“Roger and Me” [1989], “Bowling for Columbine” [2002], “Fahrenheit 9/11” [2004]) and family-friendly nature documentaries like Luc Jacquet’s “March of the Penguins” (2005), among others, demonstrated the appeal of the mode amongst mainstream theater audiences, as well. Viewers’ familiarity with the conventions of documentaries allowed the “mockumentary,” or documentary parody—exemplified in the films of Christopher Guest (“Waiting for Guffman” [1996], “Best in Show” [2000]) and several comedic television series (“The Office” [2005-2013] and “Parks and Recreation” [2009-2015])—to take shape as a significant genre of contemporary popular culture. Today, crowd-sourcing websites, like Kickstarter and Indiegogo, enable young filmmakers to secure funding for their projects outside of studio support and thus have ushered in a new crop of innovative, socially significant documentaries.

Sources and Suggestions for Further Reading: Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010); David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010); Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

Assess the students' experiences viewing documentary films. Which documentaries have they seen? Discuss how documentary films differ from and are similar to fiction/narrative films. In your discussion, consider film scholar Bill Nichols's definition of documentary film: "Documentary film speaks about situations and events involving real people (social actors) who present themselves to us as themselves in stories that convey a plausible proposal about, or perspective on, the lives, situations, and events portrayed. The distinct point of view of the filmmaker shapes this story into a way of seeing the historical world directly rather than into a fictional allegory."

Screen the entire film or key scenes from one or more of the documentaries listed in the short history above. Research the historical context of the film's production and how changes in the film industry, film technology, and larger artistic movements affected its subject matter and style.

In preparation for the screening of *LONG TIME COMING*, review the history of the civil rights movement and race relations in America at the time when the Pensacola Jaycees and the Orlando Kiwanis faced each other on the baseball field in the summer of 1955. Also consider how the city of Cleveland factors into this history by reviewing the entries "[African Americans](#)" and "[Ethnic and Race Relations](#)" included in Case Western Reserve University's Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, among other resources.

MAKING THE MOST OF POST-SCREENING Q&As

FilmSlam offers a unique opportunity for teachers and students to interact with filmmakers and/or local experts on the subject of the films screened. While teachers and students should feel comfortable asking any question inspired by their viewing of the films, the following questions (and many others) may help viewers understand the production process, how the subject of the film is important to their local community, and/or how they can get involved in local organizations.

What inspired the filmmaker to make a film on this subject?

What does the filmmaker hope audiences will take away from the film? (After the Q&A, consider if the filmmaker's answer aligns with or differs from your reaction to the film.)

How did the filmmaker get funding for the film?

How did the filmmaker assemble the production team? How big was the production team?

How long did the film take to produce?

Where else has or will this film be screened?

How or why is the subject of this film important to the students' local community?

How can students get involved?

POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

Reflect on a childhood experience that continues to have an impact on you today. What have you learned from this experience? How do you apply what you learned on a day-to-day basis? Who else was involved? Given the opportunity to reflect on this experience with the other people involved, what would you say or ask? Write a journal entry in response to these questions.

Research another trailblazing athlete who helped diversify and integrate American sports. Write a 500-word news article detailing the athlete's accomplishments, and share your findings in a short presentation to the class.

PROMPTS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Interpreting Film Content, Characters, and Themes

At the beginning of the film, former Pensacola Jaycee Willie Preyer wonders about the "significance" of the 1955 game in a discussion with former Orlando Kiwanis player Stewart Hall. Preyer says that playing a white team, in particular, "didn't really mean anything...because what we wanted to do was play against the best. You guys were the best." Why do you think Preyer feels that way?

Compare and contrast how the white players and the black players describe childhood in the 1950s. Then discuss how their lives are similar and/or different today.

How was your childhood similar to and/or different from childhood in the 1950s, as recalled by the men in the film?

How do the former players describe the role of baseball in their lives?

What does this film convey about memory and nostalgia? How do memories influence the current lives of the men in the film?

Discuss historian Chris Lamb's analogy, "You can't get your hand around all the racism in America...but you can get your hand around baseball."

Consider why the statue honoring fallen Confederate soldiers in Pensacola upsets Willie Preyer. What does it represent to him?

How do the former Orlando Kiwanis players describe their views on race and racism?

Why might the Pensacola Jaycees have been more nervous than their opponents in 1955?

After the Pensacola Jaycees lost the 1955 game against the Orlando Kiwanis, how did they continue to prove themselves as winners?

A number of the former little leaguers express feelings of hopelessness with respect to healing racial tensions in America. How does this film counter their hopelessness? What does the film suggest we might do to overcome prejudices?

What impact has the military had on the lives of the men in the film?

What is significant about the former Pensacola Jaycees' conversation with the group of kids at the end of the film?

Interpreting Film Style*

Documentarians have a number of tools for presenting information: interviews or “talking heads” (testimonials of witnesses or experts); observational footage (images of events as they happen); reenactments or staged events; archival footage (images initially created by someone else); **intertitles**; **voiceovers**; and graphics (maps, charts, or diagrams). Which of these tools does the filmmaker employ? What role does archival footage play in this film? Which events might be staged in this film? Which do you think are most effective at conveying the film’s message?

Consider the structure of the film. How does the filmmaker piece together the tools listed above to present a compelling documentary? How are the players introduced? How does the filmmaker transition between the different informational tools? How do these choices affect your interpretation of the film?

Recall the **range of shots** and **camera angles** the filmmaker uses. When does the filmmaker use **close-up** shots, **medium** shots, or **long** shots? What impact do framing and camera angles have on your understanding of the players’ experiences?

The film opens with a series of **close-up** to **medium shots** featuring the materials, equipment, and spaces associated with the sport of baseball. While the viewer can hear the sounds of people cheering and the crack of a baseball bat, people are noticeably absent from these images. Why do you think the filmmaker chose to open the film in this way? What do these images convey about baseball? How does this opening draw you into the film?

How does the montage (a portion of the film that conveys a topic or shows the passage of time through a quick succession of shots) of archival images from the 1950s to the present day function in the film? What does the montage convey about race in America over the past 60 years?

*Definitions for terms in **bold** can be found in the FilmSlam Viewing Guide.