

**STUDENT – Eunice Levis**

This essay was written by Eunice Levis as a response to screening “The Uprising of ‘34” during George Stoney and David Bagnall’s fall 2011 Documentary Tradition course at New York University, Tisch School of the Arts. It is an example of how media can be used to inform and influence a person’s thinking.

*The Documentary Tradition Part 1 – H72.1400*

*Journal Entry #13*

*Director – George Stoney, Judith Helfand, and Susanne Rostock*

*Film – “The Uprising of ‘34”*

*I viewed “The Uprising of ‘34” prior to this week’s class screening as research for my term paper. When I viewed the film I concentrated almost exclusively on the planning and execution of the protest. As my paper focused on elements of the story in the protest, I didn’t think very critically of the result of the protest. Also, since viewing the film on my own I’ve found out that my next door neighbor’s mother worked in a textile mill for 14 years during that tumultuous time. Her mother’s experience and feelings about the strike harshly contrast the sentiments other workers expressed in the film. I thought it would be great to view the film with her and interview her before and after. Prior to viewing “The Uprising of ‘34” she shared her memories of her mother’s disdain of the uprising and hatred of the unions.*

*My neighbor Maryann Boyle was born in Saxapahaw, North Carolina. Her mother was the daughter of Irish immigrants and followed in the profession of her parents, aunts and uncles – she also expected her children to follow in her footsteps. She worked as a spinner at the Alamance Cotton Mill near Saxapahaw, outside of Greensboro. Working at the mills was a way of life for the Boyle’s and pretty much identified who they were as new Americans. The Boyle’s were content. Maryann stressed that the strike didn’t represent the sentiments of everyone in the textile industry, some mill owners were “very decent, very good people” the hours and conditions that they worked under were “part of the trade and couldn’t be remedied at that time”.*

*Maryann recalls her parents and uncles venomously discussing the strike years later – she explains:*

*“this is not my wording so please do not get offended, it’s the only way I could answer your question. My parents would say the white protesters were acting like niggers; picketing and hollering like uneducated animals. They felt the strike didn’t correspond to their ideals and so they resented being lumped into a category they didn’t feel they belonged to.”*

*During the strike the Boyles continued to work as they had in the past.*

*According to Maryann a consequence of so many whites being on strike was the “inclusion of blacks and laid off mill workers from the nearby Carter Fabrics corporations on the mill floor”. Maryann recalls her mother talking about “teaching Negroes how to load the spinners” and how it “slowed down production because the frames had to be reduced or the speed would overwhelm them”.*

*After the strike there were many layoffs, hour reductions and eventually mill closures as the mill owners began looking into manufacturing overseas “without having the headache of unions and American Presidents trying to be heroes.”*

*Maryann’s personal memories of the mill worker community and lifestyle end at about age 9. This is when her father’s position was eliminated from the work roster, the following year her mother’s was removed as well. The family moved up north with a distant relative who lived in Brooklyn, NY and worked as a milliner– her parents worked as Milliners until the 1970s.*

*At this point I thought it would be a good idea to view “The Uprising of ‘34” I hoped the film would give her a different perspective on the reasons behind the strike and help her process why it was necessary and why although her family suffered a consequence in the fight for worker rights, it was not in vain.*

*After viewing the film and stopping twice for Maryann to compose herself, I let her sit and collect her thoughts. I could see she was processing the information and I didn’t want to disturb that process. She watched as I shut down my laptop and placed it in my bag and said:*

*“Perhaps my parents were cowards”.*

*I asked why she would make that conclusion,*

*“because they were satisfied, they didn’t fight for their rights. If the things that were said in this film are true then it makes me feel sad because all this time I secretly sided with them. As an adult I never joined unions, I was never attracted to any sort of activism, I just felt it was a waste of time. I see now it’s probably because that’s what I come from – from a place and family that require little to be happy and remain quiet even when they are unhappy. Maybe that’s why even after the strike ended and things fell apart. Even the brave mill workers who rose against those in power just simply gave up.”*

*I encouraged her to consider the message of the film; the strike ultimately became many things for many different people, and eventually turned into a symbol of American freedom, strength and hope. The strike didn’t result in significant changes for the textile mill worker in the 1930s but it certainly left a blueprint for future uprisings.*

*I think she was happy with my conclusion.*