

1. *Official Secrets* ©2019. Dir. Gavin Hood. 112 min. Docudrama. Based on *The Spy Who Tried to Stop a War* by M & T Mitchell, w/ Keira Knightley as whistleblower Katherine Gun, and Ralph Fiennes as her lawyer. Matt Smith plays reporter Martin Bright who confirmed the leaked memo. The Security Council never authorized the 2003 Iraq War, but the UKUSA coalition started it anyway. The real Katharine Gun found the film “remarkably accurate.”
2. *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* ©2015. Dir. Alex Gibney. 120 min. Documentary. “Going Clear” is Scientology for getting all the bad stuff (neuroses; aliens) out of a believer by a system of confession/analysis. Leaders have later used this private info to control members. We see archival videos of L. Ron Hubbard, who died in 1986. The use of church assets for private luxury is documented. Former adherents are interviewed. A grandmother described her last heartbreaking contact with her daughter who told her “I have to dissociate from you.” The IRS granted Scientology and all its enterprises tax-free status after being threatened with thousands of pesky lawsuits by scientologists.
3. *Blinded by the Light* ©2019. Dir. Gurinder Chadha. 118 min. Based on the book *Greetings from Burry Park: Race, Religion, Rock N’ Roll* by Sarfraz Manzoor. A feel-good movie by the woman director of *Bend it Like Beckham* about an A-level student in Luton, UK, in 1987 who becomes a Bruce Springsteen fan. Javed has two male friends, one a Sikh, the other English, and he’s close to his sister, but he has a difficult relationship with his father Malik, recently laid off from the Vauxhall plant. Springsteen soundtracks throughout. With Viviek Kalra as Javed and Kulvinder Ghis as Malik.
4. *The Wolf of Wall Street* ©2013. Dir. Martin Scorsese 3 hrs, and *Not* a feel-good movie, but I kept watching. It left me with a lot to think about. Based on Jordan Belfort’s (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) memoir of the same title. It’s billed as a biographical black comedy, but I did not laugh. Starts in 1987. Belfort and his partner, played by Jonah Hill, get rich by high pressure sales tactics, stock manipulation, and lies. I know from Preet Bharaha’s podcasts how the SEC deals with civil securities fraud cases, and the FBI with criminal cases. That’s all in this movie. In 1999 Belfort, then 37, pleaded guilty and served four years in prison. He is now a motivational speaker for salesmen. “Sell me this pen.”
5. *My Name is Pauli Murray* ©2021. Directors Julie Cohen & Betsy West. 123 min. Documentary about P.M. (1910-1985), Civil Rights activist, Ph.D, lawyer, and Episcopalian priest. She was raised in North Carolina by her Aunt Pauline, who called Pauli “my boy-girl,” & gave her unconditional love. Some members of Pauli’s family could have passed for white. In middle age, in NYC, Pauli bonded with a fellow Episcopalian, Irene Barlow. Though they never lived together they stayed together after Pauli moved to a professorship at Brandeis. Irene died when Pauli was 63, which devastated Pauli. I loved the graphics that were interspersed occasionally in this film. There are talking heads, including RBG and Chase Strangio, (who won a Supreme Court case protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination). Pauli taught college in Africa for 18 months. It drove home her American-ness. Pauli had the perspective of an in-between, racially and w.r.t. gender.
6. *Running on Empty* ©1988. Dir. Sidney Lumet. 116 min. With Christine Lahti & Judd Hirsch as the parents of two boys 17 and 10, played by River Phoenix and Jonas Abry. Martha Plimpton plays the 17 yr. old Danny’s girlfriend. She’s the daughter of the high school music teacher who recognizes Danny as Julliard material. The story is loosely modeled on the story of Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn who lived on the run for 17 years after founding the Weather Underground in the sixties. It’s a loving family, but hiding who they really are presents growing problems as the kids get older. E.g. School records are under a string of aliases. The pleasure is akin to that of watching the TV series *The Americans*.
7. *Dirty Dancing* ©1987. Dir. Emile Ardolino. 105 min. Written by Eleanor Bergstein, w/ Patrick Swayze as the dance instructor, and Jennifer Grey as 17-yr-old Frances (called “Baby” by her family), younger daughter of guests at the Catskills resort in 1963. Cynthia Rhodes plays Penny, another dance instructor, who gets “in trouble” and needs \$200 for an abortion, which is botched. Baby brings her father, Dr. Jake Houseman, to the rescue. Melissa Murray, a law professor, mentioned *Dirty Dancing* on a podcast that touched on Roe v. Wade. Melissa’s immigrant parents had not let her watch it in 1987. But then it was screened at Orchestra Camp. Recently Melissa watched it with her own 13-year-old daughter.
8. *Best Man* ©1997. Dir. Ira Wohl. 90 min. documentary. The story of Wohl’s 1979 movie *Best Boy* (which I saw years ago and still remember as wonderful) about his cousin Philly is recapped. At 70, Philly is thriving in the small Group Home he moved into 20 years earlier. His sister Frances visits him and takes him out. Philly goes to a sheltered workshop every day. Philly flies for the first time, from NYC to California, to Ira’s for Passover. Philly makes his Bar Mitzvah. All his friends we met earlier in the movie attend. There’s dancing at the after-party. I heard that Philly died in 2020 at 92.
9. *Education*. Dir. Steve McQueen ©2020. #5 in *The Small Axe Anthology* of full length features about the West Indian community in London between 1969 and 1982. I lived in London 1973-79. My house guest Phil Tracy and I had already liked #1, *Mangrove*, about a restaurant of that name in Notting Hill. *Mangrove* uses music to provide some upbeat exhilaration in a story otherwise about harassment. In *Education*, Kingsley (the Steve McQueen character—it draws on his own life), who’s dyslexic, learns to read thanks to some activist West Indian women.
10. *A Most Beautiful Thing* ©2020. 95 min. Award-winning documentary by dir. Mary Mazzio, an Olympic rower herself, based on a memoir by Arshay Cooper about a rowing team from the late 1990’s at Manley H.S. on the West side of Chicago. The members had been from rival gangs, yet they bonded and made it to adulthood alive. Twenty years later, 4 of the team got back into shape, and challenged the police to join them in an 8-man shell in a regatta in Lincoln Park, all pulling together. No one from their neighborhood had come to Lincoln Park to see them race in 1998, but now many were cheering them on. With Ashray Cooper, Malcolm Ross, Preston Granberry, and Ray “Pookie” Hawkins as themselves.

11. *Gigi* ©1958. Dir. Vincente Minnelli. Lerner & Loewe. Based on a novella by Colette, with Leslie Caron, Louis Jourdan, Maurice Chevalier, Hermione Gingold, and Eva Gabor. It won Best Picture and 7 other Oscars. The DVD extras commentary by Jeannie Bassinger doubled my appreciation of the film. I loved the drawings behind the credits.
12. *Wings of Hope* ©2000. Dir. Werner Herzog. 60 min. documentary on YouTube. In 1971 an airplane crashed in the Peruvian jungle. All 92 aboard were presumed dead, but a 17-yr.-old German girl, only child of two biologists, was the sole survivor. Her mother was on the flight but not her father. Juliane knew enough to follow flowing water from a spring to a creek to an unnavigable river to a navigable one. She ate nothing for 11 days. Insect eggs had been laid in her wounds which were now full of maggots. She feared they'd eat enough that she'd lose her arm.(She didn't.) She swam whenever she could, taking care to not to step on sting rays. Juliane is a research biologist herself now, devoted to saving a patch of the rain forest. We visit the site of the crash. I like survival stories.
13. *The Constitution*. ©2018 Dir. Rajko Grlic. 93 min. Nebojsa Glogovac plays Vjeko Kralj, a Croatian transvestite professor. Ante Samardzic lives downstairs with his wife Maja, a nurse. Ante is a policeman, not the brightest light. The professor, while in drag, is beaten up by a gang of punks. Maja nurses him and his bedridden amputee father. Maja asks the prof to tutor Ante, who has to pass a test on the Constitution to stay on the police force. The movie confronts prejudice on many fronts, and portrays developing friendships, and mixed motives. Accurately billed as a drama/comedy. Wonderful characters. Set somewhere in the Balkans. Subtitles. Seen with MD and Bob when they visited me.
14. *Birders, The Central Park Effect* ©2012. Dir. Jeffrey Kimball. 60 min. One of the interviewees is Jonathan Franzen. Another is Star Saphir, who personally identified 259 avian species in Central Park while leading bird walks there for 40 years. Another interviewee was Christian Cooper, the black birder whom I recognized from a 2020 incident that went viral: Chris asked a woman to comply with a leashing law and she called 911.
15. *Herself* ©2020. Dir. Phyllida Lloyd. 97 min. Based on a story by Clare Dunne, who stars as Sandra, a mother of two young daughters who has left her abusive husband and is facing homelessness in Dublin. A physician, Peggy, who had been a friend of Sandra's mother, offers Sandra a plot of land and a loan to build a DIY house. Peggy is played by Harriet Walter, Liz Langdon's step-sister. Liz and I were colleagues at Applied Computing and Software in London 1976-79.
16. *Never Look Away* ©2018. Dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. 3 hrs. Loosely inspired by a magazine feature about the prominent artist Gerhard Richter, though the artist in the film who defects to West Germany the day before the Berlin Wall goes up is called Kurt, played by Tom Schilling. His gynecologist father-in-law (Sebastian Koch) had supervised a Nazi hospital, then he adopted the DDR's philosophy, and finally he succeeded in West Germany. By the end of the film the ex-Nazi is worried about exposure. His son-in-law's art, wordlessly unmasking him, is as far as the movie takes that. The movie grapples with the purpose of art. Decadent Art as defined by the Nazis, Socialist realism, and total artistic freedom, all present challenges to an artist. Abortion figures in the movie as an evil, the woman having no control. I liked Kurt's mother-in-law for keeping mum about Kurt. Why did Kurt make signage freehand rather than with stencils? "Because I can." Why did the P.O.W. save the Commissar's wife? "Because I can." That *is* a reason people do things.
17. *Twyla Moves* ©2021. Dir. Steve Cantor. 90. min. A PBS American Masters documentary. At 80, Twyla Tharp is still dancing, I liked the way she appreciated individuality, and encouraged and guided the young dancers she was choreographing on Zoom. We meet her son Jesse and learn a bit about her childhood and his. She draws on many musical genres.
18. *The Trial of the Chicago 7* ©2020. Dir. Aaron Sorkin. 129 min. Netflix. I didn't pay much attention at the time, but now I'm filled in. I remember watching on TV with Dad the riots in Chicago live that summer of 1968. Now I find the grandstanding that some of the 7 did in court annoying. I can't justify some of Judge Hoffman's behavior, but I see parallels with a teacher trying to control an unruly class. Frank Langella (Gabriel in *The Americans*) plays Judge Julius Hoffman, Sacha Baron Cohen plays Abbie Hoffman, and Eddie Redmayne plays Tom Hayden.
19. *Ethel and Ernest* ©2016. Dir. Ruiger Mainwood. 90 min. Based faithfully on the wonderful graphic book by Raymond Briggs about his parents' marriage. In the course of it he conveys a ground's-eye view of London's history 1928-1971. Sir Raymond Briggs (1934--), children's book author and illustrator, gave the film a big thumbs up on the DVD extras.
20. *First Man* ©2018. Dir. Damien Chazelle. 141 min. Ryan Gosling plays Neil Armstrong, who took one great step for mankind July 16, 1969. Claire Foy plays his wife. Covers from the death of the Armstrongs' toddler to Neil's applying to be an astronaut, and eight years of his doing the job. I liked the human elements more than the space suit scenes.
21. *Nomadland* ©2020. Dir. Chloe Zhao. 108 min. Book by Jessica Bruder. It won Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actress (Frances McDormand). No one could accuse Fern of not having lived right, or not working hard. Yet here she is living out of her RV. David Straithairn is in it. His character finally finds a home with his adult son's family.
22. *The Damned United* ©2009. Dir. Tom Hooper. 97 min. Docudrama based on the book by David Peace. w/ Michael Sheen as Brian Clough (1935-2004). It wasn't so much a sports story as a rivalry-between-managers story. Timothy Spall plays Clough's indispensable assistant. Colm Meaney plays Don Revie who had managed Leeds to many championships. Clough thought Leeds played dirty. I enjoyed the glimpses of Clough's family life. I watched all the DVD extras
23. *Time* ©2020. Dir. Garrett Bradley (a woman). 81 min. Won best documentary at Sundance. Sibil and Robert Richardson, black parents of several boys (and expecting twins), robbed a bank; Desperate people do desperate things. Sibil got 12 years, Robert got 60. Sibil's mother stepped into the breach. Later, Sibil took videos to keep Robert in the loop. The family visited and phoned him often. Sibil hired whatever lawyers she could afford, We meet one of their fine adult sons.