



Peacemaking Movies and Documentaries for the Classroom

“Cry Freedom.” (1987 - 159 minutes -PG). In a segregated South Africa, black nationalist Steven Biko (Denzel Washington) and white newspaper editor Donald Woods (Kevin Kline) are unlikely friends with a common goal: ending apartheid. When Biko's beliefs land him in prison and he's covertly murdered by South African authorities, Woods rallies to expose the injustice. Based on Woods's books *Biko* and *Asking for Trouble*, the film earned Washington his first Oscar nomination.

“El Norte.” (1983 - 139 minutes - unrated- Spanish with English subtitles). Summary by Ed Cannon at IMBD.com: “Mayan Indian peasants, tired of being thought of as nothing more than “brazos fuertes” (“strong arms”, i.e., manual laborers) and organizing in an effort to improve their lot in life, are discovered by the Guatemalan army. After the army destroys their village and family, a brother and sister, teenagers who just barely escaped the massacre, decide they must flee to “El Norte” (“the North”, i.e., the USA). After receiving clandestine help from friends and humorous advice from a veteran immigrant on strategies for traveling through Mexico, they make their way by truck, bus and other means to Los Angeles, where they try to make a new life as young, uneducated, and illegal immigrants.” Available only on VHS so far.

“Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story.” (1996 - 110 minutes - PG13). Review by Paulist Press: “Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story, is a movie that traces the spiritual journey of Dorothy Day. The founder of The Catholic Worker, Dorothy Day was a great servant of the poor, a battler for justice and a champion of non-violent conflict resolution. Starting from her days as a feisty Marxist journalist and through several affairs and an abortion, she eventually undergoes a religious transformation, which turned her into the American Mother Teresa. The phrase “entertaining angels” comes from the New Testament, Hebrews 13:2, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it,” which expresses Dorothy Day's attitude about hospitality to the poor.”

“Gandhi.” (1982- 190 minutes -PG). Epic and unforgettable, Gandhi swept the 1983 Oscars, winning eight awards, including Best Picture, Best Actor (Ben Kingsley), Best Screenplay and Best Director for Richard Attenborough. The awe-inspiring story of Mahatma Gandhi, the diminutive lawyer who stood up to the British in India and became an international symbol of nonviolence and understanding, brilliantly underscores the difference one individual can make.

“In America.” (2002 - 103 minutes - PG13). Academy Award-winning director Jim Sheridan brings authenticity and grit to this drama about an Irish family starting life anew in early-1980s America. With their two daughters in tow, Johnny (Paddy Considine) and Sarah (Samantha Morton) leave Ireland and head to New York so Johnny can pursue an acting career. Mark Mossa, SJ: “Trying to run away from their grief, they move (illegally) to a junkie-infested apartment building in New York City with their two daughters, Christy and Ariel. Though they struggle with meager jobs and suffocatingly hot weather, a friendship with an artist in an apartment below them becomes a catalyst that allows them to rebuild their family.”

“Hotel Rwanda.” (2005 - 122 minutes- PG13). Amid the holocaust of internecine tribal fighting in Rwanda that sees the wanton and savage butchering of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children, one ordinary man (Don Cheadle) musters the courage to save more than 1,000 helpless refugees by sheltering them in the hotel he manages. Sophie Okonedo, Nick Nolte and Joaquin Phoenix co-star in this powerful film (sort of an African version of Schindler's List) directed by Terry George.

“Iron Jawed Angels.” (2004 - 124 minutes - unrated). From 1912 to 1920, a group of fiery young suffragettes led by Alice Paul (Hilary Swank) and Lucy Burns (Frances O'Connor) band together to wheedle the United States into adapting a Constitutional amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote. Along the way, they incur the wrath of President Woodrow Wilson (Bob Gunton) and anger other suffragette leaders (Anjelica Huston and Lois Smith). Directed by Katja von Garnier.

“The Long Walk Home.” (1990 – 98 minutes - PG). Sissy Spacek stars as Miriam Thompson, a Montgomery, Alabama, housewife who finds herself in the midst a civil rights revolution when she helps her black maid, Odessa (Whoopi Goldberg), during the infamous bus boycott of the 1950s. When Miriam discovers Odessa is forced to walk the 9 miles to her house and back, she volunteers to give Odessa a ride -- much to the dismay of Miriam's husband and social circle. Good for junior high and up.

“Malcolm X.” (1992 - 201 minutes - PG13). Few lives are so ideally suited to a film biography as that of Malcolm X (Denzel Washington, who earned an Oscar nomination for the role). Spike Lee directs this look at the courageous life of a man who began life as a low-level gangster. A stay in prison led to his conversion to Islam; but when he turned against the Nation, he became a murder target.

“Men With Guns.” (1997 - 128 minutes - R- Spanish with English subtitles). A distinguished Latin American doctor (Federico Luppi) is on a quest to locate his former students, whom he trained and deployed throughout the disease-ridden rural regions of their country. Soon, he realizes the depths of despair villagers face, as gun-toting guerrillas ransack the countryside. Stripped of his former idealism, he collects a group of pilgrims in search of a legendary village untouched by men with guns. John Sayles directs.

“Rabbit-Proof Fence.” (2002 – 93 minutes - PG). Australia's aboriginal integration program of the 1930s broke countless hearts -- among them, those of young Molly (Evelyn Sampi), Gracie (Laura Monaghan) and Daisy (Tiana Sansbury), who were torn from their families and placed in an abusive orphanage. Without food or water, the girls resolve to make the 1,500-mile trek home. New York Times critic Steven Holden says: “Its portrait of people who see themselves as decent, self-righteously trying to eradicate another culture, has the impact of a swift, hard slap in the face.”

“Romero.” (1989 - 102 minutes - PG13). Archbishop Oscar Romero (Raul Julia) stands between 1980s El Salvador's ruling military elite and a band of Marxist guerillas as a man with simple demands: freedom and justice for all people. He braces for violence from both factions with quiet resolve, but in a tragic twist, Romero's words fall short of delivering true change during his lifetime. The film, based on real events, was shot on location in Mexico.

"To Kill a Mockingbird." (1962 – 130 minutes - NR). Southern comforts abound in this zesty adaptation of Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. Gregory Peck won an Oscar for his role as Atticus Finch, a widowed lawyer who takes on the task of defending an innocent black man (Brock Peters) against rape charges, only to wind up in a maelstrom of hate and prejudice that threatens to invade the lives of his children.

DOCUMENTARIES

"Amandla! A Evolution in 4-Part Harmony." (2003 - 103 minutes - PG13). The struggle to eradicate apartheid in South Africa has been chronicled over time, but no one has addressed the vital role music plays in this challenge. This documentary by Lee Hirsch recounts a fascinating and little-known part of South Africa's political history through archival footage, interviews and, of course, several mesmerizing musical performances.

A Day's Work A Day's Pay (2001 – 57 minutes) follows three welfare recipients in NYC from 1997 to 2000 as they participate in the largest welfare to work program in the nation. When forced to work at city jobs for low wages and deprived of the chance to go to school, they decide to fight back and demand programs that will help them get off welfare and into real jobs.

"4 Little Girls." (1997 - 102 minutes - NR). Director Spike Lee uses this feature-length documentary to tell the story of the 1963 bombing of an Alabama African-American church -- an event that took the lives of four young girls and became a pivotal moment in the civil rights struggle. Lee's film examines the crime and its perpetrators as well as the four young victims (as described by friends and families). It also includes interviews with noted civil rights activists and journalists.

A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict (2000 - 180 minutes - unrated). This tells one of humanity's most important and least understood stories - how, during a century of extreme violence, millions chose to battle brutality and oppression with nonviolent weapons - and won. Video of struggles in India, Nashville, South Africa, Poland, Denmark and Chile illustrate the power and potential of nonviolent struggle.

"The Hidden Face of Globalization." (2003 - 34 minutes - unrated). Filmed in Bangladesh in the summer of 2003, this film documents not only the lives and working conditions of the Bangladeshi factory workers producing apparel for well-known US companies like Walt Disney Company, but discusses the economic conditions of corporate globalization that led to the situation. Available for \$20 from National Labor Committee, www.nlcnet.org

"The Lost Boys of Sudan." (2003 – 87 minutes - unrated). This award-winning documentary follows two Sudanese refugees throughout their intense journey from their native Africa to the United States. As orphans living in the middle of a brutal civil war, Peter and Santino dealt with dangers like lion attacks and gunfire from militia. But even more daunting are the challenges they face in suburbia after they're chosen to start a new life in America.

“Supersize Me.” (2004 - 98 minutes - PG13). Two out of three Americans are overweight or obese, but where does personal responsibility end and corporate responsibility take over? On the heels of recent lawsuits against McDonald's, director Morgan Spurlock takes a hilarious and often terrifying look at the effects of fast food on the human body. Spurlock spends a month of eating nothing but McDonald's food, ordering everything on the menu at least once and "super-sizing" his order if asked. Consumerism gone nuts.

“Prison Ball.” (2004 - unrated). This movie tells the story of a basketball tournament involving inmates in four Louisiana prisons. It includes a powerful critique of the criminal justice system – especially mandatory minimum sentencing for drug-related offenses - and it also addresses the impact of incarceration on the families (especially the children) of prison inmates. For more information, check out www.prisonballthemovie.com.

“Slavery and the Making of America.” (2004 - 240 minutes - notrated). Morgan Freeman narrates this four-part series that chronicles American slavery from its 1619 inception to the realities of emancipation. The series emphasizes the economic importance of slavery, examines how slaves from various cultures dealt with their environments, and uncovers the horrors that slaves experienced during the Civil War. Expert scholars offer fresh perspectives, and re-creations depict the true stories of individual slaves.

When Did I See You Hungry? (2003 - 37 minutes - unrated). From the producer: This short film by documentary filmmaker and award-winning author Gerard Thomas Straub is a photographic meditation on the plight of the poor and our responsibility to help. The film features more than 250 powerful and poignant black and white photographs from Mr. Straub's new book, *When Did I See You Hungry?* Straub spent months living among the poor in the impoverished sections of 29 cities in nine nations: India, Brazil, Kenya, Jamaica, the Philippines, Mexico, Italy, Canada and the United States. His photographs document the life of the poorest of the poor in a startling and disquieting series of intensely personal, black-and-white photographs. Straub uses the camera as an instrument of contemplation, and his photographs, with wordless gentleness, allow us to see more closely things we know about but are not attentive to. More than just capturing the agony of life in the slums, these photographs reveal the hidden humanity of the poor, their spirit of joy and their will to survive. \$29.95 from www.sandamianofoundation.org