RadaFilmGroup

faces of change

Produced and Directed by Michèle Stephenson

Discussion Guide

November 1, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

Ten years ago, we brought five grassroots activists from five different countries together in New York City for an intensive videography workshop. The idea was simple enough. We would brainstorm about what truths they wanted to bring to light about their communities, and then show them how to use video cameras to capture them.

At the time, I had recently transitioned from a career as a human rights lawyer into producing fiction and non-fiction films that explored the complexity of our multicultural world. I was working as the program coordinator for WITNESS, an organization founded by musician Peter Gabriel to get video cameras into the hands of activists. Video cameras were becoming powerful tools in this context, because of their inherent potential to bring an issue formerly isolated within a community to the attention of the entire world.

After the activists returned home and began sending video dispatches from New Orleans, Brazil, Mauritania, India and Bulgaria, we quickly realized that it would also be valuable to tell the story of how the video camera was empowering each individual in their work. To do this, we traveled to all five continents over the course of three years where we filmed Nara, Kathir, Elodia, Mohamed and Ivan as they filmed their communities.

Looking at the film a decade later, I realize that this early experiment in digital video advocacy was at the forefront of the digital media movement that is now in full swing. Back then, cell phones were used only to talk, no one had heard of YouTube, much less a cell phone camera. When we filmed **Faces of Change**, digital video cameras were becoming more affordable, accessible and were transforming into the democratic means of communication and creative expression that they are today.

In **Faces of Change**, we were fortunate to capture moments of personal empowerment experienced by five activists on the cusp of the digital media revolution. Now, in 2011, the year of the Arab Spring and the American Fall, video has become in many ways the key to sharing realities and creating a democratic space that bridges cultures, countries and continents, I invite you to experience the stories of these five extraordinary activists.

Sincerely,

Michèle Stephenson
Producer/Director, **Faces of Change**

Synopsis

Faces of Change features the stories of five activists from around the world who use video to raise awareness about racism in their communities. In preparation for the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in 2001, these activists traveled to New York City to learn to use video cameras and compose their stories. Then, for three years, they used their cameras to explore their respective communities in Brazil, India, Mauritania, Bulgaria, and the United States (New Orleans). The activists walk us through their lives, experiences, and cultures, illustrating the relationships among racism, poverty, and lack of opportunity. Together, their stories convey their hopes and dreams, and underscore the nature of our common humanity.

Subject Areas

This film is ideal for use in classrooms that teach about human rights, political science, ethnic studies, economics, geography, women's studies, history, sociology, international studies, and current events.

How To Use The Film

Faces of Change has a running time of 80 minutes. The film can be shown in its entirety, or used as a series of excerpts for classes and workshops that wish to highlight the stories and themes of particular activists and countries.

Please see **DVD Chapters** on page 15 & 16 of this guide for a more details.

United States

"Why target just African Americans for an area that you know is toxic? Why didn't they say something?"

Elodia Blanco

In the 1970's, the U.S. government built a subdivision on Agriculture Street in New Orleans, Louisiana to encourage homeownership by African Americans. Elodia Blanco bought a home there, believing it would be a great place to raise her family. Over time, Elodia, her 12-year-old daughter, and nearly two-thirds of their neighbors were diagnosed with cancer. Suspecting a link to the location of their homes, Elodia organized her community and lobbied the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to investigate their neighborhood. In its published findings, the EPA reported the presence of more than 151 toxins in the soil, as well as the highest lead and arsenic rate in the country. Residents learned that their subdivision had been built on an area that had been used as a toxic chemical and construction waste landfill by the city for more than 50 years, but no one had informed Elodia and her neighbors of that before they purchased their homes and moved in. Based on the results of its testing, the EPA placed the neighborhood on its Superfund cleanup list in 1994, but no action was taken to relocate the homeowners. The community then took their case to court, where it has been gradually moving its way through the legal system for many years. Elodia and her daughter used their video camera to document their community's frustration with the slow process of the court system, the increasing rates of cancer among their neighbors, and the mobilization of Concerned Citizens of Agriculture Street Landfill as they come together to organize to make their voices heard.

To learn more, visit History of the Agriculture Street Landfill (http://www.bridgethegulfproject.org/node/300).

I wanted to marry a Dalit of the lowest status, even a tribal person.

India

"I was born in a Dalit community. We were not considered human beings."

- Kathir Raj

Historically, the Hindu caste system – or the division of society into social groups – has regulated the social and economic life of the people in India. The rights of each individual caste are determined by birth. At the bottom of the caste system are the Dalits, or "untouchables," who are considered "unclean" and thus not eligible for certain categories of jobs, are paid lower wages, are typically denied access to public services like education and health care, and could face discrimination to prevent their participation in the political process. As a child, Vincent "Kathir" Raj saw his grandfather work for no pay, be prevented from using a glass in a restaurant, and get spat upon and beaten for being a Dalit. Kathir was able to escape the traditional life of a Dalit, but remains concerned about discrimination that targets the Dalit people. He returned to his roots with his camera to document human rights violations, and to show the culture of his people.

To learn more about the Dalit people, visit the International Dalit Solidarity Network (http://idsn.org).

Bulgaria

"The only way to make them respect the Roma is through education. So I fought to be educated."

Ivan Ivanov

She said, "Don't ask me because I can't read. I'm first grade."

Roma – also known derisively as "gypsies" – are an ethnic group with origins in India but who now live primarily in Central and Eastern Europe. Treated as outcasts, Roma typically live on the margins of society in isolated squatter communities. Roma people are often stereotyped as lazy and untrustworthy, have limited access to education and employment, and are typically prevented from sharing public facilities with other Europeans. Ivan Ivanov, a Roma, was able to avoid some of these disadvantages, get an education, and become a physician. He later decided that he could better help his people by going back to school to become a lawyer. Despite his education and professional experience, Ivan is still the target of discrimination from landlords, employers, and even patients who refused to be treated by him when he was working as a doctor. Once, he was also assumed to be a thief on a public tram because of his race. Ivan used his camera to document the poor living conditions and ongoing discrimination against Roma people. In 2005, a dozen European countries declared 2005-2015 to be the "Decade of Roma Inclusion." Each country has developed a national Decade Action Plan that specifies the goals and indicators for their work. Ivan supported these efforts in 2007 by recommending strategies for Roma integration.

For updates on this initiative, please visit Decade of Roma Inclusion (http://www.romadecade.org).

Later, she married a man who was also a slave.

Mauritania

"A slave is a piece of property. He really has no future."

Mohamed Ould Bourbosse

Mauritania is a country in West Africa with a population that can roughly be categorized into three societies – Arabs, Black Africans, and a separate class of slaves called Haratin (usually darker-skinned than their Arab masters). Slavery was officially outlawed in 1981, and was made a punishable criminal offense in 2007, but the government has failed to enforce the law. In fact, until a coup in 2005, the official position of the Mauritanian government was that slavery did not exist in their country. While slavery is now more openly acknowledged and discussed, little has been done to prosecute slaveholders for human rights abuses or to help the generally uneducated slave population integrate into the rest of society. Although numbers are difficult to establish, the Mauritanian advocacy group, SOS Slavery, estimates that about 20 percent of the population remains enslaved. Mohamed Ould Bourbosse, the grandson of a slave, is an active member of "El Hor," an underground movement committed to the emancipation and equality of slaves. Mohamed used his camera to illustrate the problem of slavery in his country and to raise international awareness of the practice at the United Nations World Conference on Racism.

For details on slavery in Mauritania that were observed by a United Nations Special Rapporteur in 2008, please read the Report on Discrimination in Mauritania (www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/47fe2ee02.pdf).

Brazil

"When a black girl gets pregnant, she is massacred by society. She loses her rights."

- Naracirlene dos Anjos Rodrigues

According to the 2010 Brazilian Census, about half of the people in Brazil describe themselves as "black," or "brown" (i.e., a combination of indigenous Brazilian, African, and European backgrounds). These groups make up the majority of Brazil's poor. In addition, the Health Ministry reports that one-fifth of all births in Brazil are to mothers aged 10-19. As a teenager, Naracirlene dos Anjos Rodrigues moved to Rio de Janiero to pursue her dream of becoming a famous actress. While in Rio, Nara became pregnant unexpectedly and returned home, where she was told that her life would likely now consist of having a number of children out of wedlock with different fathers. She believes that when single black girls get pregnant, society marginalizes them and denies them the opportunities to succeed. To illustrate this issue, she used her video camera to tell the story of Marilha, a pregnant 14-year-old who reminds Nara of herself because she had also been completely unprepared for pregnancy. As we follow what happens to Marilha, Nara wonders how black girls can find the way out of a cycle of early pregnancy and limited opportunities for which she thinks they sometimes seem destined.

For more data on teen pregnancy in Brazil, see the study, Increasing Adolescent and Youth Activity in Brazil (http://www.abep.nepo.unicamp.br/docs/PopPobreza/BerquoelzaeCavenaghiSuzana.pdf).

Discussion Questions

The following questions are provided to stimulate reflection and understanding of the themes in the film. Rather than trying to ask all of the questions, it is recommended that a selection be used to meet your specific curricular goals.

General

- Two weeks from now, what will you most remember from the film? Why?

- What do the stories of these activists have in common? What makes each unique?

- Who in the film did you relate to the most? Why?

Video Advocacy

- What motivates each activist to use a video camera to tell stories about their communities?

- How can documenting discrimination on video lead to meaningful change?

- Each activist used video to make you more aware of people who are marginalized in their society. Who is left out or ignored in your school or neighborhood? Why? What can you do to involve them in your community?

- Nara says that when she filmed the dancers, it seemed to boost their self-esteem and help them to feel their best. How can boosting the confidence of these girls help Nara achieve her goals as an activist?

- Nara films a 14-year-old girl named Marilha before and after she has a baby. What is your reaction to her story? Does your awareness of her situation prompt you to want to help her? How can powerful video storytelling engage others to support your cause?

- Mohamed used his camera to document slavery in his country at great risk to himself and others. What responsibility does he have to ensure the safety, security, and consent of those being filmed?

Race and Identity

- Does race affect your life? If so, in what ways?

- In your area, who is considered "different?" What characterizes them as different? How do you and others respond to their differences?

- Kathir films a 12-year-old boy named Raman as he combs his hair, prays, and picks paper out of a trash pile to earn money so he can buy food for his family. What do these images tell us about Raman? How does this information compare with the idea that Dalits are "un clean" and "untouchable?" How has caste exclusion and discrimina tion limited Raman's opportunities and personal development? How has discrimination limited the potential of different groups in your community? What steps can be taken to reverse these situations?

- Both Kathir and Ivan's parents believed their sons would have better lives if they could be educated in more tolerant communities away from the neighborhoods where so many of their people live. How does the segregation of people like the Dalit and Roma perpetuate prejudice and injustice?

- A Bulgarian teacher tells Ivan that, "Roma children are much less interested in education" than Bulgarian children. What role does edu cation play in people's perceptions of different races? How does ed ucation affect the opportunities available to those who are oppressed because of their race?

- Ivan says he has been driven throughout his life to prove that he is not an inferior person, that he is as smart as others. How do you think your life would be different if you looked like someone of a dif ferent race?

- Ivan describes a time when he was on a tram and a woman's purse was missing. He says that everyone looked at him like he was the thief because he was the one with the darkest skin. What was illogi cal about suspecting Ivan as a thief in this situation? What racial stereotypes led people to look at Ivan as the likely person who took the woman's purse? In your view, how do such stereotypes affect the people who believe them? How do stereotypes affect the lives of the people they describe?

Race and Identity (continued)

- Mohamed explains that in his country, both slave and master believe that slavery is a part of religion and that God has defined their roles in society. Hindu beliefs are also at the core of the caste system in India that discriminates against the Dalit people. Do you believe that religion can be used as a tool of oppression? Why or why not? Provide specific examples to support your response.

- When pursuing her dream of becoming an actor, Nara says that she did not understand why all of the parts she tried to get were always given to women with white skin. How is beauty defined in the media you consume?

- Do you think people of different races are presented as equally beautiful? Why or why not?

- In the film, Elodia says, "It doesn't matter how educated you are, if you are a person of color, or your beliefs or your religion or your faith is different, you are going to be discriminated against." Do you agree or disagree with her viewpoint? Explain.

- After Elodia learned that her house had been built on a toxic dump, she says she felt betrayed by her government because she had not been informed of the danger. Do you think people or institutions today should be held accountable for past discrimination? Why or why not?

- What scenes in the film illustrate the connections among poverty, lack of social opportunity, and racism?

- What changes would you recommend in the communities shown in the film in order to achieve greater equality among races?

How can those you teach become 'faces of change?' Have them consider the following ideas:

Become a video advocate

Select an issue of concern in your community. Then, use a camcorder or cameraphone to tell the true story of someone affected by that issue and encourage viewers to take specific steps to help bring about positive change. Information on creating advocacy videos is provided in the Related Resources section of this guide. For additional ideas and inspiration, please explore the following video-based campaign examples:

Video Advocate Workshop Graduate Videos
http://www.accountabilityproject.org/article.php?list=type&type=126
This collection of advocacy videos support various campaigns in Asia related to human rights and the environment.

How U.S. Students Are Creating History on the Hill and Making "Never Again" a Reality
http://hub.witness.org/en/blog/making-never-again-reality-how-us-students-are-creatin-history-hill
This student-driven campaign used video to bring constituents into the offices of every U.S. Senator to advocate for comprehensive genocide prevention legislation. In addition, a "core" video provided background on the issue of genocide and a policy blueprint developed by the Genocide Prevention Task Force.

Help the causes featured in Faces of Change

Research organizations working to help the marginalized communities shown in film. Then, support their efforts by raising and donating funds, building awareness about the causes via social media, writing letters of support, signing petitions, or otherwise getting involved. Such organizations typically have a page on their Websites that describe the best ways for you to help.

Combat racism in your community with education

Invite guests to speak on racism and human rights at your school. Establish a club that promotes harmony and respect for cultural differences. Share articles and videos online that demonstrate racial fairness and equality. Arrange a screening of **Faces of Change** or another documentary that addresses racism and then facilitate a discussion afterwards. Research details of civil and human rights struggles throughout history and create an in-person or online exhibit to share what you have learned. Organize anti-racism activities and workshops, using ideas from a guide such as "The Kit: A Manual By Youth to Combat Racism Through Education" (http://www.unac.org/yfar/The_KIT.pdf).

Be a good example

Speak out against stereotypical remarks or jokes that target people or groups. Participate in cultural festivals, visit museums with art from different cultures, and otherwise celebrate cultures different from your own. Sit next to someone new in the cafeteria. Volunteer to mentor younger students who have experienced discrimination. Introduce yourself to new students or neighbors.

Faces of Change

http://facesofchangedoc.com/
The official film Website provides a trailer, information on the filmmaker and activists, including updates on what the activists are doing now.

Video Advocacy

DigiActiv.org: Designing an Advocacy Video
http://www.digiactive.org/2008/03/16/strategy-designing-an-advocacy-video-for-your-cause/
This guide provides a series of video clips that illustrate various strategies for creating an advocacy video.

The Power of Video Advocacy: An Interview with the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
http://blog.soros.org/2010/05/the-power-of-video-advocacy-an-interview-with-the-hungarian-civil-liberties-union/
This interview with an experienced video advocate explains how he creates, distributes, and assesses the impact of his videos.

WITNESS Video Advocacy Training Guide
http://witnesstraining.wordpress.com/
WITNESS is an organization that uses video to open the eyes of the world to human rights violations. This Website includes tips, techniques, and best practices for video advocacy work, from the nuts and bolts of video production to making appropriate decisions about the safety, security, and consent of those being filmed.

Understanding Race

Democracy and Diversity
http://education.washington.edu/cme/DemDiv.pdf
This report from The Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington presents a set of principles, concepts and guidelines that educators can use in citizen education programs to help students balance diversity and unity as they become stronger citizens in a global context.

Race – Are We So Different?
http://understandingrace.org/home.html
This project from the American Anthropological Association uses history, science, and lived experiences to explain differences among people and reveal the reality – and unreality – of race. The site includes activities that explore race, a timeline, classroom resources, and more.

Race – The Power of an Illusion
http://www.pbs.org/race/
This companion site to a three-part documentary challenges people's ideas about race with interactive activities, background readings, and discussion questions.

Report of the World Conference on Racism
http://www.un.org/WCAR/coverage.htm
This report from the 2001 conference featured in **Faces of Change** affirms that racism continues to be a major global issue, cites the causes and forms of contemporary racism, and outlines various remedies and measures of prevention.

How To Buy The Film

To purchase or rent **Faces of Change** for educational use, please go to:

http://www.newday.com/films/facesofchange.html

Or purchase or or rent a license to stream **Faces of Change** in its entirety online at:

http://www.newdaydigital.com/Faces-of-Change.html

Overview

Meet the activists, video advocacy, UN Conference on Racism (Chapter 1, 2, 17, 18)
Brazil: Racism and teen pregnancy (Chapter 3, 9, 15)
United States: Environmental racism (Chapter 4, 10, 16)
Mauritania: Modern slavery (Chapter 5, 11, 17)
India: Dalits and the caste system (Chapter 6, 8, 12, 14)
Bulgaria: Romas and cultural prejudice (Chapter 7, 13)

Chapter 1: "Intro" (1:30)
The five activists profiled in Faces of Change share their thoughts on racism.

Chapter 2: "NYC Video Workshop" (1:33)
Filmmaker Michèle Stephenson holds a video workshop to instruct the activists on how to use video to document their work.

Chapter 3: "Nara's Brazil" (3:44)
Nara talks about encountering racism as an aspiring actress and becoming a mother at a young age. She films Marilha, a 14-year old Afro-Brazilian girl who is pregnant.

Chapter 4: "Elodia's Community" (2:22)
Elodia walks through her neighborhood in New Orleans and reveals the impact of environmental racism on her community.

Chapter 5: "Mauritanian-style Slavery" (4:34)
Mohamed talks about his work opposing modern slavery in Mauritania – a practice that is officially denied by the government.

Chapter 6: "Kathir Learns Dalit Drums" (5:27)
Kathir films his family members and other Dalits who drum at an upper-caste funeral. He explains why the custom of Dalit drumming is considered degrading.

Chapter 7: "The Plight of the Roma" (6:25)
Ivan films the impact of segregated education on Roma children and recounts his own experiences with prejudice in his personal and professional life.

Chapter 8: "Kathir's Family Passes" (5:04)
Kathir talks with his family about their decision to keep their caste secret from him as a child. He films Dalit children who must work collecting rubbish.

Chapter 9: "Teresina's Legend" (6:30)

Nara meets Marilha's baby and shares her own experience mentoring Afro-Brazilian teenage girls in a dance group.

Chapter 10: "Living Above Toxic Waste" (2:35)

Elodia's neighbors gather in her home to talk about the extent of their health problems; Elodia expresses her disappointment with the government's response.

Chapter 11: "Slavery Is Deeply Rooted" (3:12)

Mohamed takes great risks to film proof of slavery in Mauritania through testimonials from enslaved people and those who enslave them.

Chapter 12: "Kathir Helps Community" (2:40)

Kathir films testimonials from Dalit people who have experienced violence because of their caste.

Chapter 13: "Ivan's Family Struggles" (5:19)

Ivan documents internalized anti-Roma prejudice within his own family. Later he confronts a Roma girl begging in the city center.

Chapter 14: "Dalit Ideology" (1:14)

Kathir and his upper-caste wife disagree on the importance of caste.

Chapter 15: "Marilha's Baby" (3:19)

Nara returns to visit Marilha and her baby and learns tragic news.

Chapter 16: "Let's organize" (3:19)

Elodia convenes a meeting of the Concerned Citizens of Agriculture Street Landfill and talks about the goals for her upcoming trip to South Africa.

Chapter 17: "Travel to South Africa" (10:00)

The five activists travel to the U.N. World Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. Mohamed confronts the official delegation from Mauritania about their denial of slavery. Nara connects with Afro-Brazilian leaders. Elodia explores environmental racism in South Africa. Kathir films Dalits who recast drumming in a positive light.

Chapter 18: "Back Home" (9:54)

Nara, Elodia, Mohamed, Kathir and Ivan return home and share their plans for the future.