

Films with Social Justice Themes

Films can be an effective way to spark discussion on a variety of social justice themes. The following list of films may be useful in sparking discussion in your classes and small groups. This resource will be updated at regular intervals, and EfJ encourages resource users to contact us with suggestions of additional films to add to the list.

To help participants reflect on films from a Catholic Social Teaching perspective, a worksheet is included on pages 2 and 3 of this resource. It can be used for both personal and group reflection and will be helpful in encouraging discussion on CST principles and justice issues.

Many of the films have an asterisk (*) at the end of the entry. These films and descriptions are taken from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website's annual top ten movie lists, which can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/movies/topten.htm>. Other films were recommended by others or viewed by EfJ staff. However, please note that *every film may not be appropriate for your audience*. You should always watch the film first yourself to make sure that it is appropriate.

Most of the films listed are available at major video stores. We have rated film availability with the following code:

A = Available to rent at most major video stores

B = Available for purchase at www.blockbuster.com or www.amazon.com

C = Only available at specialty video stores

For a few films, website address where the video may be attained is listed in place of the coding.

We hope you enjoy the films!

Application of Catholic Social Teaching to Films

Using the principles of Catholic Social Teaching listed below as your critical analysis lens, reflect on the film and make some notes on how the film treats the CST principles and answer the questions. think of ideas to examine the film in a way which will not only help students better understand the film, but will also allow them to engage in a better understanding of their world as a result.

Catholic Social Teaching

Application to the Text

1. Human Life and Dignity

All human beings are sacred, from the time of conception until natural death, because we are created in God's image.

- a. Do the main characters realize that they and all those they relate to have dignity?
- b. Does the film itself offer any insight into the human dignity of all people?

2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation

Human beings are social. We are called to live in community, and to use our gifts for our own enrichment and for the good of others.

- a. How is the value of community presented in the film?
- b. Do the characters relate to and receive support from a community? How does this help or hinder them?
- c. Does the film in any way give us a deeper understanding of the call to family, community and participation? If so how?

3. Rights and Responsibilities

Human beings have rights in accordance with their dignity as children of God. Each right carries a corresponding responsibility.

- a. Do the characters in the films realize their own and others human rights?
- b. Do the characters in the films recognize their own and others' responsibility toward promoting the human rights of everyone?
- c. What does the film as a whole tell us about human rights and responsibilities?
- d. Does the film in any way give us a deeper understanding of rights and responsibilities? If so how?

4. Option for the Poor and the Vulnerable

As long as serious inequities exist in allocation of power and resources, Christians are called to particular care for those who have less.

- a. How does the film present people in poverty?
- b. Are the characters affected in any way by economic poverty? How do the characters respond to people in poverty?
- c. Does the film in any way give us a deeper understanding of poverty?

5. Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Work is not simply a commodity to be exchanged for a wage. Workers share in God's creative action, and have a right to a living wage.

- a. How is work presented in the film? Is it something that enslaves or supports characters?
- b. How do the characters respond to work and vocation of any kind?
- c. Does the film in any way direct us to reflect on the dignity and rights of workers. If so, how?

6. Solidarity

God's love is not limited by barriers of race, nation or geographical distance. We are all responsible for one another.

- a. Does the film in any way present the idea that human beings need to be in solidarity with one another? If so, how?
- b. Do any of the characters display or offer an example of any kind of solidarity with others? Discuss in detail?
- c. In what ways does the film give us a deeper understanding of solidarity?

7. Care for God's Creation

The universe is created by God, and loaned to us for our prudent use. We are to be good stewards of creation, mindful of generations to follow us.

- a. Does the film in any way promote respect for creation? If so, how?
- b. Do the characters respect or disrespect creation and how does this impact on life and on the lives of their community?
- c. How does the film help us to understand care of God's creation in a deeper way?

Films with Social Justice Themes

Child Solidiers

- **Invisible Children** - Invisible Children is a film documenting the effects of a rebel group in Africa's Northern Uganda, which for the past 17 years has forcefully and brutally abducted children from their homes. The film chronicles three naive journalist's as they discover thousands of children sleeping in the streets. The story unfolds as the filmmakers try and understand why these children run for their lives each night, and who is responsible for this atrocity. (Not rated by the Motion Picture Association of America - NR) **2004** (www.invisiblechildren.com)

Colonialism

- **A Passage to India** — Screen version of the E.M. Forster classic about the cultural barriers in British-ruled India of the 1920s as seen in a story centering on an Englishwoman's charge of being accosted by an Indian man. Though painstakingly crafted by director David Lean and superbly acted by an outstanding cast (Judy Davis, Victor Banerjee, Dame Peggy Ashcroft, James Fox and Alec Guinness), the result is a rather ponderous meditation on the differences between Western rationalism and Eastern mysticism. Dramatically flawed but culturally rich entertainment. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG) **1984*-B**

Disabilities

- **An Infinite Tenderness** — French documentary on the world of a brain-damaged, physically-handicapped child confined to a wheel chair, unable to speak but trying desperately to communicate with his nurse and the other children in the hospital. It chronicles his friendship with another youngster even more crippled than himself, their joy in being together, their little spats and, finally, the termination of their friendship by death. Directed by Pierre Jallaud, it is a remarkable achievement, treating its subject creatively yet with complete integrity. There is no commentary, no dialogue, only the natural sounds of the children and their environment. A-II-adults and adolescents (NR) **1973*-C**

- **Color of Paradise** — Mohammad is a student at a special school for blind children in Tehran; when summer break rolls around, Mohammad is the last student to be picked up by his family. His mother is dead, and his father, who earns a meagre wage working in a charcoal producing plant, sometimes considers abandoning the boy. However, father does eventually arrive, and Mohammad spends the summer with his sisters and grandmother at a farm surrounding by dazzling fields of wild flowers. The summer in the country is a joyous experience for Mohammad, until he discovers his father is giving thoughts to re-marrying, and considers his handicapped son to be a stumbling block in his future matrimonial plans. (PG) **1999-B**

Death Penalty

- **Woman Thou Art Loosed** — redemption tale a la “Dead Man Walking” about a woman searching for hope and meaning in her broken life while awaiting execution for murdering the man who had sexually molested her as a child. A-III (R), **2004*-A**

- **Green Mile, The** — Prison drama set in 1935 Louisiana where a death-row head guard (Tom Hanks) comes to believe in the innocence of a huge, gentle black man (Michael Clarke Duncan) whose miraculous healing powers affect those

around him in startling ways. As adapted by director Frank Darabont from the serialized 1996 Stephen King novel, the movie is unduly long but presents affecting character studies of good and evil men with spiritual undertones and a sobering depiction of capital punishment. Some violence including an horrific electrocution, occasional profanity and intermittent rough language. A-III- adults (R) **1999*-A**

- **Dead Man Walking** — Powerful fact-based dramatization about a Louisiana nun (Susan Saradon) offering spiritual comfort to a hard-bitten prisoner (Sean Penn) condemned to death for the rape and murder of two teenagers, while at the same time attempting to share in the painful loss of the victims' grieving parents. Directed by Tim Robbins, the picture is balanced between the nun's respect for the dignity of every individual, even the despicable killer, and the parents' quest for justice in the state's execution of their children's murderer, leaving viewers at the end to ponder what moral or social purpose is served by capital punishment. Flashbacks to savage crimes, the depiction of an execution, racial slurs and several instances of rough language. A-III-adults (R) **1995*-A**

- **Life, Love, Death** — French director Claude Lelouch examines the apprehension, trial and execution of a murderer (Amidou). The drama indicts capital punishment suggesting that it dehumanizes those who demand it, and especially, those who carry it out. Coldly intellectual, his treatment responsibly distances the viewer from a subject easily sensationalized. A-III-adults (R) **1969*-C**

Drug Trade

- **Maria, Full of Grace** — Maria Alvarez, a teenager living in Bogotá, Colombia, works a dead-end job in a flower exporting plant along with most of the other able-bodied people in her community. She wants to quit, but her family depends on her meager salary. One day, Maria meets a smooth-talking young man named Franklin who offers her a business proposition to make some money and travel. However, she sees and experiences the horrors of the drug smuggling trade first hand and finally makes a life-affirming decision. (R) **2003-A**

Environment

- **Erin Brockovich** — Julia Roberts stars in this true story of Erin Brockovich, a single mother of three who, after losing a personal injury lawsuit, asks her lawyer, Ed Masry, if he can help her find a job. Ed gives her work as a file clerk in his office, and she runs across some information on a little-known case filed against Pacific Gas and Electric. Erin begins digging into the particulars of the case, convinced that the facts simply don't add up, and persuades Ed to allow her to do further research; in time, she discovers a systematic cover-up of the industrial poisoning of a city's water supply, which threatens the health of the entire community. (R) **2000-A**

- **A Civil Action** — John Travolta plays the lead as a civil ligation lawyer and his decade long case against an American corporation in a water pollution dispute brought by citizens of a Massachusetts town where two drinking wells supplying water to the town are found to be contaminated with industrial solvents. Residents soon realize that pollution by local factories are the reason for the unusually high rate of leukemia deaths amongst the town's children. Based on a true story and non-fiction book. (PG13) **1998-A**

- **The China Syndrome** — This gripping 1979 drama about the dangers of nuclear power carried an extra jolt when a real-life accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania occurred just weeks after the film opened. Kimberly Wells (Jane Fonda) is a TV reporter trying to advance from fluff pieces to harder news. Wells and cameraman Richard Adams (Michael Douglas, who also produced) are doing a story on energy when they happen to witness a near-meltdown at a local nuclear plant, averted only by quick-thinking engineer Jack Godell (Jack Lemmon). They soon dis-

cover that corporate greed and cost-trimming have led to potentially deadly faults in the plant's construction. (PG) *1979-A*

Genocide

- **Hotel Rwanda** — A powerful fact-based drama about one man's heroism during the dark days of the Rwandan genocide, which celebrates the nobility of the human spirit even in the face of unspeakable evil. A-III (PG-13), *2004*-A*
- **The Killing Fields** — Powerful and visually overwhelming movie about the friendship of an American correspondent (Sam Waterston) and his Cambodian assistant (Haing S. Ngor) set against the background of the fall of Cambodia and the slaughter of millions by the Khmer Rouge. Director Roland Joffe's fact-based drama makes an extraordinary human document in the tragic history of an entire nation. Graphically realistic but not overdone scenes of carnage. A-II-adults and adolescents (R) *1984*-A*

Globalization

- **Life and Debt** - Documentary look at the effects of globalization on Jamaican industry and agriculture. It interviews Jamaican farmers and citizens from all walks of life and gives insight into the problems the debt, especially when linked with trade, caused poor countries and poor people. (NR) *2001* (www.lifeanddebt.org)

HIV/AIDS

- **Philadelphia** — Andrew Beckett, a gay lawyer infected with AIDS, is fired from his conservative law firm in fear that they might contract AIDS from him. After Andrew is fired, in a last attempt for peace, he sues his former law firm with the help of a homophobic lawyer, Joe Miller. During the court battle, Miller sees that Beckett is no different than anyone else on the gritty streets of the city of brotherly love, sheds his homophobia and helps Beckett with his case before AIDS overcomes him. (PG-13) *1993-A*
- **And the Band Played On** — Based on Randy Shilts's documentary book, this film chronicles how, in 1981, researchers begin discerning a mysterious new disease that apparently affects only homosexual males. Working independently (and with marked hostility towards one another), an American and a French research team manage to identify and name the dreaded HIV virus. The long-range effects of AIDS is experienced through the first and second-hand experiences of several unfortunates. (NR) *1993-A*

The Holocaust

- **Secret Lives: Hidden Children** — Uplifting documentary about Jewish children saved from the Nazis by non-Jewish families who, at great personal risk, took them into their own homes. Academy-Award winning filmmaker Aviva Slesin, herself a former hidden child in Lithuania, weaves together haunting archival footage, personal photographs, and interviews with both fellow survivors and the families who harbored them to create a portrait of luminous courage in the face of unfathomable darkness. Some fleeting, violent archival images, as well as some emotionally disturbing content. A-II (NR), *2003*-A*
- **Schindler's List** — Sobering account of an opportunistic German businessman (Liam Neeson) out to make his fortune by exploiting Jewish labor in occupied Poland but the increasing barbarism of Nazi racial policies and the sadistic perversions of the local commandant (Ralph Fiennes) cause him to risk his life trying to save the Jews in his employ. Director

Steven Spielberg restages this Holocaust story on an epic scale that gives horrifying dimension to one man's attempt to save some innocent lives, though providing little insight in the German's moral transformation or the individual lives of his Jewish workers. Realistically graphic treatment of an infamous historical period and its crimes against humanity, a few discreet sexual scenes and occasional rough language. A-III-adults (R) *1993*-A*

- **The Memory of Justice** — Documentary on the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals and whether they established a legal precedent for judging the wartime conduct of all nations. After an extensive examination of the Nuremberg process for trying crimes against humanity, producer-director Marcel Ophuls goes on to ask some uncomfortable questions about offenses committed by the Allies during the World War II and the Occupation, the conduct of the French military during the Algerian War and Americans during the Vietnam War. Ophuls brings patient intelligence and concern for human dignity to a four-and-a-half-hour demonstration of the difficulty but the necessity of establishing accountable standards of international conduct. Unflinching look at death camp atrocities and an unnecessary use of nudity. A-IV-adults with reservations (PG) *1976*-C*

- **Life Is Beautiful** — Bittersweet comic fable in which an Italian Jewish bookseller (Roberto Benigni) uses his imagination to convince his little son that their grim existence in a Nazi concentration camp is just an elaborate contest and that they are sure to win the grand prize. Also co-written and directed by Benigni, the story starts off as a slapstick comedy with the young man courting his future wife, then midway becomes a touchingly human story of a parent's irrepressible determination to protect his child from terror and misery. Subtitles. Theme of genocide. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG-13) *1998*-A*

- **The Pianist** — The true story of Wladyslaw Szpilman who, in the 1930s, was known as the most accomplished piano player in all of Poland, if not Europe. At the outbreak of the Second World War, however, Szpilman becomes subject to the anti-Jewish laws imposed by the conquering Germans. By the start of the 1940s, Szpilman has seen his world go from piano concert halls to the Jewish Ghetto of Warsaw and then must suffer the tragedy of his family deported to a death camp, while Szpilman is conscripted into a forced German Labor Compound. At last deciding to escape, Szpilman goes into hiding as a Jewish refugee where he is witness to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943 and the Warsaw City Revolt in August/October 1944. (R) *2002-A*

Immigrants

- **Spanglish** — James L. Brooks' touching comedy-drama about a non-English-speaking, Mexican single mom who struggles to instill traditional values in her young daughter, while working as a housekeeper for an affluent American family. The movie deals with parenting and cultural assimilation with great profundity under its breezy surface. A-III (PG-13), *2004*-A*

- **In America** — The loosely autobiographical script centers on an Irish family who come to New York City. They soon find that America is not the land of boundless opportunity, however, as they move into a dank, dilapidated apartment building populated by drug dealers, transients, and thugs. Still in grief over the untimely death of their toddler son back in Ireland, the parents find their relationship further strained by the pressures of life in the city. They meet and befriend a black artist whom they help and who helps them in return. (PG13) *2002-A*

- **Bread and Roses** — A young Mexican woman crosses the border into LA to join her sister, who works as a janitor in some of the city's largest corporate offices. Surrounded by the machinations of big business, the sisters seek happiness on a smaller but more human scale as they try to organize a janitorial union. A chance meeting with a passionate American activist leads to a campaign against their employers. The fight threatens their livelihood, family, and risks their expulsion

from the country. (R) *2001-A*

- **El Norte** — Fleeing from terrorists who kill their father and kidnap their mother, two Guatemalan teenagers head towards “El Norte,” meaning the U.S., where they hope to begin a new life free from fear and exploitation. After a journey with further terrors, they reach Los Angeles, get jobs and have a taste of the good life they have dreamed about before one becomes seriously ill and the other is deported as an illegal alien. Director Gregory Nava has made a splendid film about human dignity and the exploitation of undocumented workers, with some good-natured humor keeping matters from getting too solemn. Subtitles aplenty with much of the dialogue in Spanish and Mayan. Several scenes of intense violence. A-III-adults (R) *1984*-B*

- **My Family-Mi Familia** — Mexican-American family saga set in Los Angeles from the 1920s to the 1980s follows the parents and their six children (including Jimmy Smits, Edward James Olmos and Esai Morales) as they endure separations, tragic deaths and brushes with the law, leaving one son embittered while others find solace in their religious faith. Director Gregory Nava’s ambitious, sprawling movie leans towards melodramatic treatment but still emerges as a vibrant account of a Latino family pursuing the American dream. Some violence, fleeting bedroom scenes, brief nudity and recurring rough language. A-III-adults (R) *1995*-A*

Indigenous People

- **Whale Rider** — On the east coast of New Zealand, the Whangara people believe their presence there dates back a thousand years or more to a single ancestor, Paikea, who escaped death when his canoe capsized by riding to shore on the back of a whale. From then on, Whangara chiefs, always the first-born, always male, have been considered Paikea’s direct descendants. Pai, an 11-year-old girl in a patriarchal New Zealand tribe, believes she is destined to be the new chief. But her grandfather Koro is bound by tradition to pick a male leader. Pai loves Koro more than anyone in the world, but she must fight him and a thousand years of tradition to fulfill her destiny. Brief language and a momentary drug reference (PG13) *2002*-A*

- **Smoke Signals** — Engaging story about a pair of 22-year-old Native American men (Adam Beach and Evan Adams) making the journey from the reservation to Phoenix where one is to pick up his estranged father’s ashes from a caring Native woman (Irene Bedard) who explains why the guilt-ridden father left his tribe. Director Chris Eyre explores Indian culture with sly wit and a keen eye for pain and anger, tempered by healing forgiveness. Fleeting violence and an instance of profanity. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG-13) *1998*-A*

- **Rabbit-Proof Fence** — This film is based on real government policy in Australia through most of the 20th century, that half- or quarter-caste indigenous children were to be taken from their families and raised as “white” children in orphanages, where they would be trained to work as domestic servants or laborers. Three half-caste girls in this film were taken from their families and subject to physical and emotional abuse as they were taught to forget their families, their culture, and their lives up to that point and re-invent themselves as members of “white” Australian society. (PG) *2002-A*

Latin America

- **Voces Inocentes** — Set in the mid 1980s El Salvador, in the midst of the country’s civil war, a young boy must decide between enlisting in the army or join up with guerrillas. (NR) *2004-C*

- **Men with Guns** — Powerful drama of a troubled Latin American country where an idealistic physician (Federico Luppi) sets out to visit the novice doctors he had trained to care for the rural poor, but he despairs after finding they have been killed or driven off by soldiers or guerrillas, though his selfless example comes to inspire others. Writer-director John Sayles explores the spiritual strengths and human weaknesses of people struggling to survive the calamities of civil war. Subtitles. Brief violence and occasional rough language. A-III-adults (R) **1998*-B**

- **Romero** - During the war in El Salvador in the 1980s, Archbishop Romero is at first apathetic to the plight of the Salvadoran poor, but as he becomes more exposed to the suffering of the people, he becomes a voice for them and demands justice and equality for the people from both the government and the Catholic church.(PG -13). **1989-A**

- **Under Fire** — American photojournalist (Nick Nolte) covering the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua loses his sense of detachment at seeing the brutality of the Somoza regime and agrees to fake a story suggested by his lover and fellow journalist (Joanna Cassidy). Directed by Ron Shelton and Clayton Frohman, the powerful and extremely entertaining film conveys the feel of guerrilla warfare, especially in an urban environment, with uncanny force. Violence and rough language. A-III-adults (R) **1983*-A**

Nonviolence

- **Peace One Day** - This documentary about a British film director's (Jeremy Gilley) quest to start a United Nations International Day of Peace in order to have a day of global ceasefire and non-violence. He documented his journey, talking to many famous leaders from around the world and after many years of let downs he finally had the day approved as September 21st. (NR) **2004-B**

- **Kundun** — Dramatization of the early life of Tibet's 14th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Thuthob Tsarong) whose faith in non-violence is put to the test when Red China occupies his country in 1950, his appeals to the West go unanswered and the growing repression of his people force him into exile in 1959 at age 24. Director Martin Scorsese provides an evocative picture of an ancient people whose mountainous isolation protects them from the changing world outside until suddenly invaded by a 20th-century army, but the result succeeds more as spectacle than as human drama, political history or spiritual experience. Scenes of violence in a meaningful context. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG-13) **1997*-A**

- **Gandhi** - Superb portrait of India's great political and spiritual leader comes to life in Ben Kingsley's authoritative yet sensitive performance. Director Richard Attenborough's epic-scale production re-creates Gandhi's life and times, especially his use of non-violence and hunger strikes to bring together the diverse peoples of India and unify them as a nation. Though its scenes of violence are not for children, the movie's vision of justice and peace is for everyone else, especially young people. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG) **1982-A**

Nuclear Disarmament

- **Testament** — A family in a small American community attempts to cope with the aftermath of a nuclear war in this grim but extraordinary movie about a mother (Jane Alexander) who tries to make life go on for her three children after her husband (William Devane) perishes in the nuclear strike. Director Lynne Littman spares the audience most of the more horrific results of nuclear disaster, but what it shows and what it implies are unsettling enough. The subject matter and a restrained bedroom scene are more suited for adults and older adolescents. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG) **1983*-B**

- **The China Syndrome** — Director James Bridges' prophetic drama deals suspensefully with nuclear safety issues in a

movie featuring Jack Lemmon as a plant executive and Jane Fonda as a TV news reporter whose consciences won't let them conceal the imminent danger of a nuclear meltdown at a power plant. Thoughtful entertainment. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG) **1979*-B**

- **All Quiet on the Western Front** — Based on the classic novel, Richard Thomas stars as Paul Baumer, a teen who, at the urging of zealously patriotic teacher Kantorek (Donald Pleasence) enthusiastically enlists to fight for Germany in WWI, accompanied by several school chums. After training at the hands of the sadistic Corporal Himmelstoss (Ian Holm), Paul and his friends head for the front. There, they discover that war is a bloody, deadly business. (NR) **1979-A**

- **The War Game** — British docudrama about the effects of nuclear warfare on a civilian population features non-professionals in realistically simulated scenes. Produced, written and directed by Peter Watkins, the movie gets considerable shock value from its hypothetical events but in making the unthinkable appear possible, it raises important questions of public concern. A-III-adults (NR) **1967-A**

- **Dr. Strangelove** - A black comedy with a serious message. U.S. Air Force Colonel Jack Ripper goes completely mad and sends his bomber wing to destroy the U.S.S.R. The U.S. president meets with his advisors, where the Soviet ambassador tells him that if the U.S.S.R. is hit by nuclear weapons, it will trigger a “Doomsday Machine” which will destroy all plant and animal life on Earth. Peter Sellers portrays the three men who might avert this tragedy: British Group Captain Lionel Mandrake, the only person with access to the demented Gen. Ripper; U.S. President Merkin Muffley, whose best attempts to divert disaster depend on placating a drunken Soviet Premier and the former Nazi genius Dr. Strangelove, who concludes that “such a device would not be a practical deterrent for reasons which at this moment must be all too obvious”. Will the bombers be stopped in time, or will General Jack Ripper succeed in destroying the world? (PG) **1964-A**

Poverty

- **The Motorcycle Diaries** — A young Ernesto “Che” Guevara is a 23-year-old medical student in 1952 traveling across South America on a motorcycle with his friend Alberto Granado. As they embark on their journey, both young men come of age and find their individual world views broadened as they see poverty, disrespect for human dignity and suffering in greater ways than they ever expected. (R) **2003-A**

- **Kes** — British movie set in a small, drab Yorkshire coal mining town tells the story of a lonely, sullen boy (David Bradley) whose life is momentarily given meaning by his experience in raising and training a baby kestrel, a European falcon. Directed by Ken Loach, the movie is a compassionate study of the blighted conditions and brutalizing life of this youth which in its final scenes indicates the possibility of his rising above his environment. Fine experience for adults and older adolescents. A-III-adults (PG) **1970*-C**

- **The Bicycle Thief** — Antonio, an unemployed man, finds a coveted job that requires a bicycle. When it is stolen on his first day of work, Antonio and his young son Bruno begin a frantic search, learning valuable lessons along the way. The movie focuses on both the relationship between the father and the son and the larger framework of poverty and unemployment in postwar Italy. (NR) **1948-A**

Prison System

- **Shawshank Redemption** — Andy Dufresne is a young and successful banker whose life changes drastically when he is convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of his wife and her lover. Set in the 1940's, the film shows how Andy, with the help of his friend Red, the prison entrepreneur, turns out to be a most unconventional prisoner. (R)

1994-A

- **The Ox** — Fact-based Swedish period piece begins in 1868 when a young man (Stellan Skarsgard) is sentenced to life imprisonment for slaughtering his employer's ox to feed his starving family but the village vicar (Max Von Sydow) perseveres in a years-long effort to get him released and restored to his tormented wife (Ewa Froling). Director Sven Nykvist's drama of justice and compassion captures the diverse humanity of its characters with spare dialogue, expert acting and achingly beautiful images. Subtitles. Minor violence and an implied sexual encounter. A-III-adults (NR) *1992*-B*
- **The Birdman of Alcatraz** — A superb performance by Bert Lancaster, who plays the character of a withdrawn prison inmate who regains his own sense of dignity by his work with and study of human birds. Based on a true story, this film shows that human dignity can flourish under the most oppressive conditions. (NR) *1962-A*

Racism/Discrimination

- **Remember the Titans** — Uplifting drama set in 1971 about the desegregation of two powerhouse high school football teams that learn to overcome racism and go on to victory under the leadership of their African-American coach (Denzel Washington). Aside from occasionally faltering with emotional manipulation, director Boaz Yakin's heartwarming, fact-based saga shows the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, fear and societal prejudices. Racism theme and fleeting crass language. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG) *2000*-A*
- **Earth** — The story is set in 1947 in Lahore, where Hindu, Sikh, Parsee, and Muslim share a peaceful co-existence until the partitioning of India and Pakistan occurs. Events are seen from the point of view of eight-year-old Lenny, a girl from an affluent Parsee family. Lenny's nanny, Shantya, is involved with the Muslim Masseur. When a train of Muslims arrives at the local depot and all the passengers are found murdered, the various sects turn against each other, and the city is soon aflame. (NR) *1998-C*
- **Once Upon a Time...When We Were Colored** — Growing up in rural Mississippi after World War II, a black youth is nourished by the love and support of an extended family and, despite all the injustices of a segregated society, never loses pride in his race or hope in the American dream of equality. Director Tim Reid gets fine performances from a seasoned cast (headed by Al Freeman, Jr.) in depicting a closely-knit black community taking care of its own in the face of social exclusion and economic exploitation just before the struggle for civil rights becomes a national issue in the 1960s. Racial tensions, some stylized violence and sexual references including a childbirth scene. A-II- adults and adolescents (PG) *1996*-A*
- **Hoop Dreams** — The documentary follows two young boys trying to take their basketball game from the inner-city streets of Chicago to the NBA. Tackling issues of racism, politics, and the dangerous power of hope, the film stands out as a complex and astute examination of the African-American experience. (PG13) *1994-A*
- **A Long Walk Home** — When Rosa Parks sparks the great Bus Boycott in Birmingham, AL, Miriam Thompson (Sissy Spacek), a well-to-do white woman, is upset to have to drive to the black section of town to pick up her maid Odessa Cotter (Whoopi Goldberg) and bring her to work. Outside of her own social circle, Miriam realizes for the first time just how privileged, sheltered and self-centered her life has been and eventually makes a life-changing decision. (PG) *1989-A*

- **Cry Freedom** — The story of Steve Biko (Denzel Washington), the black South African leader who died in 1977 from police mistreatment, is linked to that of Donald Woods (Kevin Kline), a local white editor who had to escape from his native land to reveal the truth of what had occurred. Director Richard Attenborough’s large scale dramatization re-creates an authentic sense of the enormity of South Africa’s racist policy of apartheid and effectively conveys the need for social and political change in that tragic land. Menacing atmosphere and some stylized violence. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG) **1987*-A**

- **To Kill a Mockingbird** - Through the eyes of “Scout,” a feisty six-year-old tomboy, the movie carries us on an odyssey through the fires of prejudice and injustice in 1932 Alabama. Gregory Peck gives a stirring and Oscar-winning performance as a Southern who believes in the dignity of all people. (NR) **1962-A**

Refugees

- **In This World** - The story of two Afghan refugees’ journeys through Asia, in search of a better life in the West. This film functions like a documentary, but certain parts of the story were pre-determined, in order to provide safety to the crew that filmed it. (R) **2002-A**

- **Seoul Train** - The film is the gripping documentary exposé into the life and death of North Koreans as they try to escape their homeland and China. Seoul Train also delves into the complex geopolitics behind this growing and potentially explosive humanitarian crisis. By combining vérité footage, personal stories and interviews with experts and government officials, Seoul Train depicts the flouting of international laws by major countries. (NR) **2004** (www.seoultrain.com)

Slavery

- **Amistad** — Historical dramatization of the legal battle over the fate of 53 Africans who massacre the crew of a Spanish slave ship, then are captured by an American naval vessel and put on trial for murder and piracy in a case that ultimately reaches the Supreme Court where former president John Quincy Adams (Anthony Hopkins) defends their right to freedom. Director Steven Spielberg’s ambitious attempt to reexamine the contradictions of a society which proclaimed the equality of all and yet accepted slavery succeeds in dramatizing the obvious injustices done the enslaved Africans (led by Djimon Hounsou), but the legal and political issues argued in the lengthy case are treated in stiff historical tableaux which fail to touch the human dimension of what is involved. Some gory violence, brutalizing conditions of slavery and brief frontal nudity. A-III-adults (R) **1997*-A**

- **Beloved** — This is an intense drama about the effects of slavery - the psychological as well as physical sufferings. film is based on Tony Morrison’s fact-based novel. In 1873, middle-aged Sethe (Oprah Winfrey) lives near Cincinnati with her teenage daughter, Denver (Kimberly Elise). She gets a surprise visit from her old friend Paul D, with whom she was formerly a slave, which brings back many memories from the past. When a feral, insect-covered, stuttering teenager (Thandie Newton) turns up at Sethe’s house, she is nursed back to health by Denver and called “Beloved.” Violent flashbacks begin to explore shocking episodes from Sethe’s past. (R) **1998-A**

Street Children

- **Pixote** — Harrowing and poignant Brazilian drama about a gang of nomad boys in Rio and the terrible things they do to survive. Directed by Hector Babenco, this powerful movie is definitely not for the faint of heart or weak of stomach because it involves sordid violence and graphic sexuality. A-IV-adults with reservations (NR) **1981*-B**

Worker's Rights

- **The Take** - In suburban Buenos Aires, thirty unemployed auto-parts workers walk into their idle factory, roll out sleeping mats and refuse to leave. All they want is to re-start the silent machines. But this simple act - the take - has the power to turn the globalization debate on its head. Armed only with slingshots and an abiding faith in shop-floor democracy, the workers face off against the bosses, bankers and a whole system that sees their beloved factories as nothing more than scrap metal for sale. With *The Take*, director Avi Lewis, one of Canada's most outspoken journalists, and writer Naomi Klein, author of the international bestseller *No Logo*, champion a radical economic manifesto for the 21st century. (NR) **2004** (www.nfb.ca/webextension/thetake)
- **Germinal** - Evocative French adaptation of Emile Zola's novel about the inhuman working conditions of 19th-century coal miners who decide on a strike (led by Gerard Depardieu) when their meager wages are cut, but with hunger, soldiers and scab labor undercutting their resolve, some return to work only to be trapped when the mine is flooded by an anarchist (Laurent Terzieff). Director Claude Berri's sprawling, large-scale production dramatically re-creates the historical period, portraying its oppressive social injustices from the perspective of an impoverished worker's family and their struggle for elemental human rights and some modest measure of human dignity. Subtitles. Restrained depiction of labor violence, including soldiers firing on civilians and the castration of a dead body, casual sexual relationships and brief nudity. A-III-adults (R) **1994*-B**
- **Man of Iron** — Polish production directed by Andrzej Wajda presents a powerful account of the confrontation between Solidarity labor union and Poland's Communist regime at the Gdansk shipyards which ended in Solidarity's victory in August 1980. Though the mix of real characters and documentary footage with a fictional story line isn't as smooth as it might be, the result is a dramatic and courageous movie in its own right, one that will have a continuing significance for those concerned about human rights. A-II-adults and adolescents (PG) **1981*-B**
- **Norma Rae** — Inspiring drama with Sally Field in the title role as an Alabama textile worker recruited by a tenacious labor organizer (Ron Liebman) to help rally her exploited co-workers into forming a union in the face of tough tactics by an unenlightened management. Director Martin Ritt's dramatic expose of injustices in the workplace gives viewers some characters and a cause to cheer about. Absorbing, thoughtful entertainment but there are some frank references to sexual misconduct. A-III-adults (PG) **1979*-A**
- **The Tree of Wooden Clogs** — Quiet, richly textured Italian drama about the lives of four peasant families who work as tenant farmers on a Lombardy estate at the end of the last century. Beginning with the fall harvest and ending with the spring planting, the movie depicts the everyday life of rural people who endure with human dignity in spite of the oppressive system which exploits their labor. Written, photographed and directed by Ermanno Olmi, this is a loving portrait of ordinary life in an age of social injustice. Some tense scenes. A-II-adults and adolescents — (Not rated by the Motion Picture Association of America) **1979*-B**

War/Peace

- **Fog of War** — Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara is the sole focus of the film, which analyzes not only McNamara's controversial decisions during the first half of the Vietnam War, but also his childhood upbringing, his education at Berkley and Harvard, his involvement in World War II, and his later years as president of the World Bank. Culling footage from almost 20 hours of interviews with the Secretary, the film details key moments from McNamara's career, including the 1945 bombing of Tokyo, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and President Kennedy's suggestions to the Secretary that the U.S. remove itself from Vietnam. Throughout the film, the 85-year-old McNamara expounds his philosophies on

Sources: Top ten movie lists by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at <http://www.usccb.org/movies/top10.htm> and the All Movie Guide at <http://www.allmovie.com>



international conflict, and shows regret and pride in equal measure for, respectively, his mistakes and accomplishments. (PG13) **2002-A**

- **Three Kings** — In 1991, as the Gulf War winds to a close, three American servicemen find themselves happy to have achieved victory but wondering about the ultimate importance of what they've done (especially since Saddam Hussein is still in power). They end up on a search for god, but the deeper they journey into Iraq, the more they see of the consequences of America's policies in the Middle East. Although President George Bush and the American military urged Iraqi citizens to rise up against Saddam Hussein, and pledged their support to a people's movement against the leader, Iraqis found that when they took to the streets against Saddam, the United States did not back them up, and the loss of Iraqi lives was fearsome. The three become torn between their desire to grab the fortune they came for and the demands of their conscience to help the people they came to liberate. (R) **1999-A**

- **The Thin Red Line** (20th Century Fox) — Eloquent meditation on the insanity of warfare takes place as World War II American soldiers (notably Sean Penn, Ben Chaplin, Nick Nolte and Jim Caviezel) battle the Japanese forces entrenched on Guadalcanal while reflecting on what brought each to this once-peaceful tropical paradise. Based on the James Jones novel, director Terrence Malick's lengthy philosophical drama views war as a desecration to all living things be they human, animal or vegetable. Graphic battlefield violence, fleeting nudity and recurring rough language and profanity. A-III-adults (R) **1998*-A**

- **Seven Years in Tibet** — A famed Austrian mountain climber leaves behind his wife and infant son to head a Himalayan expedition in 1939, only to fall into the hands of Allied forces as a prisoner of war. He and a fellow escapee make their way to the Forbidden City in Tibet, befriend the Western culture-obsessed teenage Dalai Lama and wait out the looming crisis in China. (PG13) **1997-A**

- **Born on the Fourth of July** - The biography of Ron Kovic. Paralyzed in the Vietnam war, he becomes an anti-war and pro-human rights political activist after feeling betrayed by the country he fought for. (R) **1989-A**

- **Black and White in Color** — Extremely subtle and probing French comedy set in West Africa at the start of World War I, it tells the story of what happens when a small French settlement decides to attack a nearby German post. In looking at the human factors that lead to war, director Jean-Jacques Annaud avoids sentiment entirely, spares no one in this cast of characters and delivers an outrageous challenging and extremely funny anti-war film. Wartime violence and brief, incidental nudity. A-III-adults (PG) **1977*-A**

- **The Battle of Algiers** — The 1954-58 Algerian struggle for independence from French rule is re-created in this French production directed by Gillo Pontecorvo. Sympathetic to the rebels, yet compromising neither the facts nor the personalities involved, the film's documentary-like authenticity is achieved without resort to actual newsreel footage. It is a remarkable look at the process of revolutionary terror and counter-terror that victimizes ordinary citizens on both sides. A-II-adults and adolescents (NR) **1967*-A**