

# THE STORY OF JOHN ROEMER

A STUDY GUIDE TO ACCOMPANY THE FILM

## DIRECTING DISSENT

DIRECTED BY SOPHIE HAMACHER



DIRECTING DISSENT  
A FILM BY SOPHIE HAMACHER

*"Cinema is the true school of life."  
(François Truffaut)*



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## Introduction

Dear teachers,

Young people experience moving images daily. Their immersion in moving image media leads them to perceive and interpret these images intuitively- without questioning their history or the modes of their production. Often, they are not aware of the media product's heritage, and lack the education necessary to analyze, or evaluate its quality and context. Developing and promoting these skills age-appropriately is the responsibility of the educators using films such as *Directing Dissent*.

We should empower students by endowing them with the ability to orient themselves in their pervasive media environment. Comprehensive knowledge of media production and analysis in this context is a key skill. The study of films in the classroom extends the scope of learning and opens up new perspectives not only on the film's content, but on aesthetics, the mechanics of production and distribution, and social and historical context of the film.

*Directing Dissent* is a valuable resource for teaching about democracy, civil rights, civil liberties and protest history. The film not only documents racism and segregation in American history but also explores the challenges of integration and non-violent protest. As the film unfolds, it reveals a key point in American history: that it was the actions of everyday citizens like John Roemer that helped dismantle the structures of discrimination.

*Directing Dissent* offers students a window into the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement and allows them to identify with and relate to one man whose actions helped make America more equal. This introductory guide serves as an example of what the *Directing Dissent* can implement in partnerships with educators and non profit organizations, with the opportunity to develop a full study guide and accompanying teaching materials for classrooms state and nation wide.

The guide is divided into three sections: Pre-Viewing, Viewing, and Post-Viewing. The sections provide short accompanying texts, including excerpts from interviews with the film's protagonist. They also include suggested questions and classroom activities that can aid students in reaching a deeper understanding of the issues examined in the film.

*Directing Dissent* is designed to inspire reflection and discussion across a variety of audiences. We have designed this preliminary guide to be used both as a discussion guide for public screenings, as well as by faculty members of schools and universities who would like to use the film to foster discussion with students.

Sincerely,  
Sophie Hamacher (director) & Johanna Schiller (co-producer)

## About Directing Dissent

Directing Dissent is a film about John Roemer, teacher and social activist, and his lifetime commitment to civil rights.

Roemer's story takes us through heated battles of the Civil Rights Movement and involves dramatic experiences in the fight to desegregate Maryland. As executive director of the Maryland chapter of the ACLU and as a forerunner in the American Friends Service Committee has been described as a cowboy, an intellectual, and even a 'gun toting pacifist'. The film centers around Roemer's decision to pursue social justice largely within the bounds of the law, but also to commit to civil disobedience when necessary to enact change.

Set in Baltimore, a city with a turbulent history of charged race relations, the film traces the protagonist's struggles within the Civil Rights Movement, his embracing of civil disobedience as a means of effecting social change, and the outgrowth of his activism into his role as a high school teacher. His ideology is informed by an unfaltering belief in the principles of non-violence and the power of "a loving disposition". The film is a character study of a loved and respected rebel as well as an exploration of the philosophy behind civil disobedience and the it's contemporary applications and relevance.

### **Film Credits:**

Directing Dissent a film by Sophie Hamacher  
Directed by Sophie Hamacher  
Co-Produced by Johannes Schiller  
Edited by Sebastian Gollek

### **On the Web:**

For more information about DIRECTING DISSENT please  
Visit the website at: [www.directingdissent.com](http://www.directingdissent.com)

## 1. Preparing to use DIRECTING DISSENT in the classroom

### Teaching film and media literacy

A film can be used in the classroom both to develop an understanding of its content as well as to analyze its structure, context, dramaturgy, aesthetics and design elements. Be sure to discuss these aspects with your students. A film's aesthetics have the power to enhance or mold its content - and vice versa. Why a particular camera angle or movement, music, a certain sound and lighting design were chosen is essential to the audience's reading of the film. Understanding not just the film's content, but how the narrative is presented and why, and how decisions have been made in the creation of the film's scenes, will help students come to terms with this very powerful and persuasive medium in order to recognize why and how motion pictures exert such a powerful influence on us.

For media pedagogy this means necessarily promoting the personal communicative skills of each student by conveying not only the ability to understand media contents, but also the capacity to engage in an articulate discourse about moving image media. Ultimately teaching media, film and its history, is an intensive enquiry into images; what they mean, what might link them, and what might separate them.

It is helpful to begin with a discussion of the kinds of films students enjoy and why, as well as the variety of purposes for which films are created. It will also be necessary to decide how much of the film to view and to what depth students need the background information. This is an excellent film to use in conjunction with social studies, history or humanities classes.

### **Below are a number of suggested questions to consider before showing the film:**

- To what extent are the topics and issues central to the film relevant to teaching and the classroom?
- What role can film play in bringing social justice and political processes into the classroom?
- For what subjects is the film particularly well suited? Does it connect different subjects and areas of study?
- How do the themes of the film influence the daily lives of students?
- What preparation is necessary? Is it necessary - particularly on films with historical and political issues - to ensure that students are adequately prepared beforehand?

**Film analysis can be roughly divided in four key categories:**

1. **What?**

Content Analysis: action, situations, problems, people, conflicts, emotions

2. **Who?**

Structure analysis: constellation figure, narrative perspective, drama, plot, turning points

3. **Why?**

Statements and impact analysis: ethics, ideology

4. **How?**

film linguistic analysis: aesthetics, types of narrative

Everything you see in a film represents a calculated choice by the director, editor or cinematographer. Since we get most of our information about the world from media, it's important to understand how to make sense of media images.

**Here are some suggested questions:**

1. What are the physical qualities of the motion picture?

Note how camera angles, lighting, music, narration, and/or editing contribute to creating an atmosphere in this film. What is the mood or tone of the film?

2. What effect does the film language have for the construction of cinematic reality?

- camera (shot sizes, camera angles, camera movements, etc.)
- Picture composition and spatial organization of lighting, color design etc.
- Drama and character development
- Editing and assembly
- Sound and music

3. How does this film intend to make you think or feel? How does it make you feel?

4. What is the central message(s) of this documentary?

5. Consider the effectiveness of the film in communicating its message. As a tool of communication, what are its strengths and weaknesses?

6. What information do you gain that would not be conveyed by a written source? Be specific.

7. Documentaries are often criticized for using too many “talking heads,” that is experts on the subject of the film who are shown talking. Different filmmakers have come up with a variety of ways to solve the problem of “talking heads.” How does the filmmaker address that problem in this film?



## 2. PRE-VIEWING – Before seeing the film

### **The Legacy of John Roemer: One person can make a difference**

Directing Dissent is a film about one person making a difference, told by John Roemer through the arc of his life and fifty years of movement history. It's about the dream of building a better and more equal world motivated by the conviction that everyday citizens can bring about positive and powerful social change. Through John's direct experience, we look at the junctions between civil rights and civil liberties, integration, and the peace and justice movements of the 20th and 21st century. John transposes the quality of knowledge that comes from his long experience in the struggle for social and economic justice into a quality of understanding that all could share, especially his students. Through the film we look intensely at a number of issues from the voice, mind, and history of a passionate teacher who made a difference in the world in the hopes of continuing his lesson.

### **Motivate the students' background knowledge before showing the film:**

Some suggestions:

Have a large group or small group discussion of the themes central to the film. Ask what they know already. Ask what they would like to know.

Ask the students to predict from the title what they think the film will be about. Ask them to predict the story line.

Introduce students to the general vocabulary: one way of doing this is to assign a reading activity based on the themes of the film.

Show a scene without the sound. Have students write or discuss a possible dialogue.

## Who is John Roemer? An Introduction

John Roemer was born in Baltimore, MD in 1938. He grew up in a working class family and considered himself to be a conservative Republican until a pivotal political awakening when he was challenged to rewrite the Bill of Rights while attending Princeton in 1956. This was the beginning of an era of organized actions, spontaneous resistance, and cultural upheaval. It was also a time in which the idea of non-violent civil disobedience solidified into a movement.

### **John Roemer:**

*'In 1960, when I graduated from Princeton I went to Harvard Graduate School of Education. In '61 I came back to Baltimore. I had no experience with black people. There where no black people at Princeton, I never met any at Harvard. The only black people I knew were the occasional maids my parents had. I went to a completely segregated high school throughout my career in Towson. I didn't live near any neighborhood where black people lived. But when I came back from Harvard to Baltimore the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing and it caught my attention. I joined the NAACP. I occasionally sent them money for legal fights. But I was... I wanted to be more active than that. And for someone like me, who likes to get into peoples faces, who likes to argue and strut and do all that, it seemed to me that non-violent demonstrations, sit-ins seemed to be perfect.'*

Soon after his initial return to Baltimore, Roemer became the Vice Chairman of CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) and began working to abolish segregation in Maryland. He was involved in three major civil rights victories: the integration of local restaurants in Carroll County Maryland (1962), the integration of Gwynn Oak Amusement Park (1963), and the integration of the Ocean and boardwalk in Ocean City Maryland (1963).

### **John Roemer:**

*'If kids today are thinking: what do I do about poverty or bad education or continuing vestiges of segregation or war, where is a big group that's going get this all together? Well, there is no big group. There are probably just a couple of people sitting around a table, plotting some mayhem and fun. [With CORE] we were able, those few people, reaching out to other people, where able to change in Baltimore and Maryland the system of segregation that existed perpetually. So I think you can have a big impact with only a few people and that's an encouraging thing.'*

After the legislative victories in the Civil Rights Movement, Roemer shifted his energies to the Anti-War Movement. A pivotal moment in that struggle, and a key sequence in the film, occurred when Norman Morrison, a close friend of Roemer's, set himself on fire in front of the Pentagon in 1965 in protest of the Vietnam war.

While some perceive Morrison's act as one of self-inflicted violence or nihilism, Roemer saw it as a heroic gesture of ultimate pacifism and "total witness", stating "*the tragic mistake would be to understand and treasure his memory without changing our lives.*"

Roemer's unfaltering belief in the system of civil liberties, and his cantankerously optimistic spirit, were antithetical to this position of fundamental hopelessness toward the possibility of speaking to power. Roemer did renew his efforts towards radical social change, but now chose different means: in 1970 he became executive director of the Maryland American Civil Liberties Union.

During his tenure, the ACLU undertook many cases to protect the rights of communists, Black Panthers, pornographers, homosexuals, pacifists, prisoners and mental patients. John said: "*what [the ACLU] does is simply bring cases under the United States constitution, defending peoples constitutional rights.*" The ACLU advances civil liberties and civil rights by activities that include litigation, education and lobbying. In his last ACLU newsletter Roemer wrote:

*'Civil liberties permits you to fight and run away, and live to fight another day. The rich and powerful would control any means of power or any process – but they can be made less vicious and less successful because the power of the state is controlled by the concept of personal freedom and due process. The cost of other ways cannot be justified. The Quakers have a saying, "There is no way to peace; peace is the way." So I believe that there is no way to civil liberties. Civil liberties is the way.'*

After 15 years at the helm of Maryland's ACLU, Roemer's primary activity again became teaching high school.

*'My approach to teaching has always been, the idea that there is a certain fundamental moral and philosophical convictions that all Americans should share in some general sense. They have to do with regard to civil liberties, individualism, belief in some forms of equality or equity, some notion of empathy for other people and these can be interpreted in different ways, but these are the fundamental moral values. And what an educator does is to try to get kids to think about the various way that these things can applied in concrete cases.'*

Through his teaching Roemer challenges students to consider complex moral issues from a variety of perspectives, thus deepening their understanding of the ramifications of dissent, and of democracy. As we see in compelling footage of John at work in the classroom, one observes, time and again, the moment when students become critical thinkers.

## Civil Liberties 101

*'I have come to see even civil liberties, not as an individual matter, but as the kind of thing we owe each other. Freedom of speech is not just about my right to say what's on my mind, it's about me defending your right to do that. It's the way in which we connect with each other. It's the way we avoid coercing or killing each other. And our substitute for the weakness of loving one another is to insist that we at least grant each other certain rights. The right to due process, the right to freedom of speech, the right to freedom of belief, the right to privacy and a bunch of other constitutional rights – that's our way of loving each other not our way of being free but our way of being connected to each other and non-coercive to each other.'* (John Roemer)

What are civil liberties?

Civil liberties, broadly defined, are the rights guaranteed to citizens or residents of a territory as a matter of law. They differ from “human rights”, which are universal rights to which all individuals are entitled regardless to where they live. Civil liberties can be thought of as rights that a government is contractually obligated to uphold, often through a constitutional bill of rights. In the United States, such rights are mandated through the United States Constitution, particularly the Bill of Rights.

The phrase “civil liberties” comes from the Latin *civis* (“citizen” or “city-dweller”) and *liber* (“free” or “unrestricted”). The term “civil liberty” is said to have originated in a speech by Pennsylvania politician, James Wilson, in 1788, advocating the ratification of the United States Constitution, but the formal concept is said to originate in the Magna Carta’s declaration of rights in 13th Century England. In his 1788 speech Wilson states:

*'We have remarked, that civil government is necessary to the perfection of society. We now remark that civil liberty is necessary to the perfection of civil government. Civil liberty is natural liberty itself, divested only of that part, which, placed in the government, produces more good and happiness to the community than if it had remained in the individual. Hence it follows, that civil liberty, while it resigns a part of natural liberty, retains the free and generous exercise of all the human faculties, so far as it is compatible with the public welfare.'*

(<http://civilliberty.about.com/od/thebasics/g/Definition-Civil-Liberties.htm>)

In the context of the contemporary United States, the terms civil liberties generally refers to the rights of individuals defined in the Bill of Rights, and protected by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Examples of Civil Liberties include the freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, the right to assembly, the freedom of association, the right to due process, to a trial, to own property, and to privacy. The protection of these rights was extended by the passage of the Fourteenth amendment of the United States Constitution, which guaranteed protection of the right to Due Process and Equal Protection of the law.

In the United States the preeminent protectors of and advocates for Civil Liberties is the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

The following links provide a history of the ACLU's sometimes controversial efforts to protect and expand civil liberties.

<http://aclu.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000299>

<http://www.aclu.org/organization-news-and-highlights/aclu-history-aclu-and-bill-rights>

## Civil Rights 101

*“The most important piece of modern civil rights legislation, at least for the humble, was the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Attempts by reformers to force the application of the Bill of Rights through the Fourteenth Amendment was limited by the fact that the Fourteenth Amendment only applied to actions of governments, not the actions of private individuals, even when that action had broad public application such as the refusal to sell basic human necessities such as a place to dine or sleep. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 also declared a strong legislative program against discrimination in public schools and colleges. The legislative program was of great importance in desegregating public schools.” (Democracy In America)*

The legal information website FindLaw describes civil rights as traditionally revolving around “the basic right to be free from unequal treatment based on certain protected characteristics (race, gender, disability, etc.) in settings such as employment and housing” based on certain legally defined characteristics, while “Civil liberties” concern basic rights and freedoms that are guaranteed -- either explicitly identified in the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, or interpreted through the years by courts and lawmakers’ The term “civil rights” refers to statutory and court-mandated protections from discrimination and other forms of unequal treatment on the basis of national origin, race, gender and other protected characteristics. Civil rights also include freedom from cruel or otherwise excessive force by police officers or other government agents.

Historically, the “Civil Rights Movement” referred to efforts toward achieving true equality for African-Americans in all facets of society, but today the term “civil rights” is also used to describe the advancement of equality for all people regardless of race, sex, age, disability, national origin, religion, or certain other characteristics. Most of the civil rights enjoyed by Americans were achieved only after long and hard-fought struggles in the courts and elsewhere.

## Civil Rights Timeline:

- 1857**      **Dred Scott v. Sanford (Denial of Basic Rights to Blacks)**  
A major precursor to the Civil War, this controversial U.S. Supreme Court decision denied citizenship and basic rights to all blacks -- whether slave or free.
- 1863**      **Emancipation Proclamation**  
President Abraham Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation," takes effect, proclaiming freedom from slavery for African-Americans.
- 1865**      **13th Amendment Passes** - The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is passed, abolishing slavery in the United States.
- 1868**      **14th Amendment Passes** - The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is passed, guaranteeing due process and equal protection rights to all citizens.
- 1870**      **15th Amendment Passes** - The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is passed, guaranteeing the right to vote for all U.S. citizens.
- 1893**      **Colorado Becomes First State to Grant Women the Right to Vote**
- 1896**      **Plessy v. Ferguson (Approval of "Separate but Equal" Facilities)**  
The U.S. Supreme Court "separate but equal" decision in Plessy v. Ferguson approved laws requiring racial segregation, as long as those laws did not allow for separate accommodations and facilities for blacks that were inferior to those for whites.
- 1909**      **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Founded**
- 1920**      **19th Amendment Passes** - The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is passed, granting women the right to vote.  
**American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Founded**
- 1942**      **Roosevelt Issues Order Relocating Japanese-Americans**  
On February 19, 1942 (shortly after the U.S. entered World War II) President F.D. Roosevelt issued an executive order designating much of the west coast a "military area", and requiring relocation of most Japanese-Americans from certain west coast states. Many of the more than 100,000 persons who were relocated were forced to live in "interment" or "relocation" camps.
- 1954**      **Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (De-Segregation in Education).** The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas ended legal racial segregation in public schools.
- 1955**      **Montgomery Bus Boycotts**  
African-American woman Rosa Parks's arrest after her refusal to move to the back of a bus (as required under city law in Montgomery, Alabama) triggers a citywide boycott of the bus system. Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka II, Kansas (De-Segregation in Education). The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas II implements the anti-segregation provisions that had been mandated in Brown I, and orders that states comply with "all deliberate speed."
- 1960**      **Greensboro, NC Lunch Counter Sit-Ins**  
In protest of local restaurants that refuse to serve African-American customers, a series of sit-ins is staged at lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina.
- 1962**      **Bailey v. Patterson (De-Segregation in Transportation)**  
The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Bailey v. Patterson declares that segregation in transportation facilities is unconstitutional.



- 1963**      **Martin Luther King, Jr.: “I Have a Dream”**  
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers the historic “I Have a Dream” speech in front of hundreds of thousands of participants in the “March on Washington.”
- Equal Pay Act**  
Passing Congress in 1963, the Equal Pay Act is a federal law requiring that employers pay all employees equally for equal work, regardless of whether the employees are male or female.
- 1964**      **Civil Rights Act of 1964**  
The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passes Congress, prohibiting discrimination in a number of settings: Title I prohibits discrimination in voting; Title II: public accommodations; Title III: Public Facilities; Title IV: Public Education; Title VI: Federally-Assisted Programs; Title VII: Employment. The Act also establishes the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).
- 1965**      **Voting Rights Act of 1965**  
Signed into law in 1965, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits the denial or restriction of the right to vote, and forbids discriminatory voting practices nationwide.
- Malcolm X Assassinated in New York City**
- Watts Riots in Los Angeles**  
Beginning as a community-wide reaction to the arrest of three African-Americans in central Los Angeles, the Watts Riots continue for six days, and are viewed by some as purposeless criminal behavior. Others viewed the riots as a necessary uprising by African-Americans as a reaction to oppression, and consider the Watts Riots a key precursor to the “Black Power” movement of the late 1960’s.
- 1967**      **Loving v. Virginia (Inter-Racial Marriage)**  
The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Loving v. Virginia declares that laws prohibiting inter-racial marriage are unconstitutional.
- 1968**      **Martin Luther King, Jr. Assassinated in Memphis**
- 1971**      **Equal Rights Amendment Passes in Congress**  
The proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was intended to explicitly guarantee equality to all persons, regardless of gender. After passing in Congress, the amendment did not receive enough votes for ratification by the individual states, and was never signed into law.
- 1978**      **Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (Affirmative Action)**  
The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Regents of the University of California v. Bakke holds that college admission standards giving preferential consideration to minority applicants are constitutional.
- Pregnancy Discrimination Act Signed**  
The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 prohibits employment discrimination against female workers who are (or intend to become) pregnant -- including discrimination in hiring, failure to promote, and wrongful termination.
- 1990**      **Americans with Disabilities Act**  
Signed into law in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects persons with disabilities from discrimination in many aspects of life, including employment, education, and access to public accommodations.
- 1993**      **Family and Medical Leave Act**  
The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), passed in 1993, gives employees the right to take time off from work in order to care for a newborn (or recently adopted) child, or to look after an ill family member.
- 2003**      **Lawrence v. Texas (Rights of Same-Sex Couples)**  
The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Lawrence v. Texas declares unconstitutional a Texas statute that criminalizes same-sex sexual activity.



## Working for Change: Nonviolence

In the late 1950's and early 60's CORE was one of the most respected civil rights organizations in the country. Their strategies of nonviolent resistance were effective in drawing attention to the disparity between America's promises of equality and the reality of life under Jim Crow.

Nonviolent direct action was one of CORE's main tactics in confronting racial segregation in the United States.

*'Frustrated by the lack of progress in race relations and outraged by the hostility and violence black soldiers faced as they returned from the war, some civil rights leaders felt there was a need to move the struggle for equality from the courtroom to the streets.'*

Activists like Reverend Martin Luther King, James Farmer, John Roemer and many others were influenced by the writings of nineteenth-century American writer Henry David Thoreau and his ideas about civil disobedience. They were also influenced and inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent struggle for Indian independence and his notion of 'satyagraha' meaning 'insistence of truth' or 'truth force' implying the opposite of passive resistance and an insistence on patience and compassion.

Instead of using weapons or violence, Gandhi instigated the use of nonviolent tactics like marches, hunger strikes and boycotts.

In an interview John Roemer says:

*'When those kids in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960 or 61 went on the first modern sit-in demonstrations at lunch counters that caught the eye of the media – somehow or other that really touched a cord among many people in 1960/61 and there were follow up demonstrations all over the country. And that's the beginning of the modern era of civil rights demonstrations.'*

## Anti- War Movement

The civil rights and Vietnam era are often represented in feature films, but the actual facts and issues of the period are often glossed over. This film is important as a time capsule, a reminder of a time period, but no less important are the continued reverberations of that time on the present day. The anti-Vietnam war movement, for example, was directly responsible for such current US government policies as the cancellation of the draft and the prohibition on showing graphic images of wartime activities by media outlets. During the Vietnam War American television networks showed brutally realistic images of a kind never seen before. Audiences watched the fighting on television, for 20 years, seeing images of burning villages and wounded soldiers every evening at dinner.

The mounting protest against the escalation of the Vietnam War fueled and refocused John Roemer. As he had been successful in mobilizing people to create a more equitable society at home, he now turned his attention to Vietnam. As the escalation of violence continued he not only began to question basic Cold War assumptions about battling communism around the globe but also began counseling young men about conscientious objection to an unjust war.

*'In the anti-war movement it was frustrating because we were up against a different enemy trying to use the same kind of tactics. How do you compel the united states military to stop doing what it is doing? Today, how do you stop them from doing absurdities in Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. Nobody has figured that out and I think that kind of frustration is what Norman expressed. When you face terrible evils where innocent civilians are dying, in wars of dubious value, what do you do? If you are deeply committed descent human being? Most of us just go to sleep, we just put it out of our minds, in our day to day business.'*

*'How do you grab peoples attention in a deeply authentic way about a problem, about an issue which exposes real cruelty I think that's the fundamental problem for activists today and always has been.'*

### 3. VIEWING

Show clips or the entire film (either straight through or in parts), try giving the students a specific task while watching the film.



**Some suggestions:**

Give students a set of questions about the content: characters, plot, specific bits of dialog, etc (Be sure to go over the questions before viewing so students understand what they're looking for.)

Try having students revise and expand their predictions (from pre-viewing) as they acquire more information. Take notes.

**Suggested Questions:**

1. How would you describe the philosophy of nonviolence?
2. What conditions do you think are necessary for a strategy of nonviolent direct action to have an impact?
3. Why do you think CORE members felt that adopting the philosophy of nonviolence was the best way to bring about change? What other approaches were available?
4. What is the relationship between nonviolent direct action and the law?
5. Thoreau and Gandhi, writers and activists whose ideas inspired the African American freedom struggle in the United States, believed that there are times for civil disobedience—when behaving justly requires people to break the law. John Roemer also says this at one point in the film. Can a democracy survive when people choose which laws to follow and which laws not to follow?
6. For many nonviolent activists, nonviolence was not simply a technique to use in the civil rights struggle; it was a way of life. What is the difference? What do you think they meant by this?
7. Some of the black-and-white footage is from an interview with James Farmer. When you listened to the people speak in the historical footage, what did you hear? What words or phrases stick out to you?
8. Why do you think activists like John decided to focus their desegregation efforts on restaurants and amusement parks? Why were they important? What did they represent?
9. Why do you think John began to focus his efforts on draft counseling when he became involved in the anti-war movement? Do you think his tactic had an impact?
10. What is the difference between civil liberties and civil rights?
11. Why was Martin Luther King's "Against Vietnam" speech so powerful? How did it merge the two movements?
12. When John became the director of the Maryland chapter of the ACLU how was he able to enforce change? Why was it such an important step in his life?
13. What is significant about John's teaching style? Do you think as a teacher he is the greatest activist?
14. What lessons might people trying to address issues of injustice today learn from the film *Directing Dissent*?
15. What does the story of John Roemer suggest about the role of citizens in shaping democracy?

## 4. POST-VIEWING - After seeing the film

The big picture. Relate the film to the students' own lives and/or the world in general. Ask the group to brainstorm a list of civil rights issues currently in the media (consider all media such as music, reality TV, newspapers, books, websites, etc.). With this list of issues in mind, have the students suggest how the media today could be used to raise awareness about current civil rights issues

### **Writing activities:**

Review the film. (As models, give them reviews of other movies that have appeared in newspapers and magazines.)

Choose a marginal character in the film. Compare that character's life/actions/ideals with your own.

Make a mind map of what you see as the most important themes of the film and how they might connect to your own life

### **Class or small group discussion ideas:**

Talk about John Roemer as a character. If you were to describe him what words would you use? Can you identify with him? Do you find him admirable? How would the movie have been different if he had taken different actions?

Is there a teacher or role model that has inspired you in your life and how?

Is there a cause that you feel particularly strongly about? How would you explain why you care? How do you think you could make a difference?

## 5. Resources for Teachers

### **Bibliographic Introduction to learning about film and film analysis**

Annotated lists of ideas on teaching film are available from sources such as the following:

**Reel Conversations:** Reading Films with Young Adults, by Alan B. Teasley and Ann Wilder.

**Reading in the Dark:** Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom by John Golden.

**Understanding Movies** by Louis Giannetti and Jim Leach.

**Nonfiction Film Theory and Criticism** ed. by Richard Meran Barsam 1976

**Documentary Film Classics** by William Rothman 1997

**Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV** ed. by Alan Rosenthal 1990

**Picturing Culture:** Explorations of Film and Anthropology by Jay Ruby 2000

### **WEBSITES**

<http://www.us.imdb.com>

<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/teaching-topics/film-in-the-classroom/#>

<http://www.learner.org/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/teachers/guides.html>

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<http://www.teachersdomain.org/special/frriders/>

<http://edsitement.neh.gov/>

<http://www.facinghistory.org/>

<http://www.usccr.gov/>-The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

<http://www.aclu.org/>- The American Civil Liberties Union

# DIRECTING DISSENT

A FILM BY SOPHIE HAMACHER

