

Anti-Racism Movie Guide

Mi Familia



Overview/Description:

"Mi Familia" is the story of the Sanchez family's experience of life in the United States. Spanning three generations, this film shows the various relationships that each family member has toward their cultural identities and their desire to become "Americans." This film also deals with the systemic oppression that people of color, specifically Mexican Americans, face in the United States. Set in East Los Angeles from 1920 to the present, "Mi Familia" traces the immigration policies, police brutality, and cultural ostracism that mark the experiences of the Sanchez family.

In "Mi Familia", we find a complex understanding of how identity and systemic oppression shape individual and community life. The first generation of the Sanchez family, who immigrate from Mexico, desire both to hold on to their cultural traditions and values, as well as succeed in the American Dream. The second generation, the children of the Sanchez family, find that this ideal is impossible. They are faced with the choice of becoming either Mexican or American (which means Anglo) in their identities, while the outside institutions continue to define them.

Things to think about:

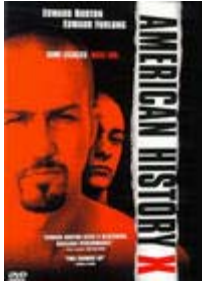
All people who immigrated to the United States faced these issues to a certain degree. While watching this movie, think about your own family's heritage(s) and it's history in America.

Discussion Questions:

- What is your cultural heritage? What does that mean to you? Have members of your own family faced cultural assimilation here in the United States? How did your family deal with that assimilation? What was their means of survival? What did you gain and what did you lose through that means of survival?
- What are some examples of institutional racism in this movie? What are some examples of cultural racism in this movie? How do these examples impact the Sanchez family?
- What do you think are the defining characteristics of Anglo American culture? What part of the Sanchez's family's culture does not fit with American Anglo culture? What part does?
- What makes it difficult for the Sanchez family to assimilate into American Anglo culture? Why do some of the children resist assimilating? What is the experience like for those who do assimilate?



American History X



Description/Overview:

"American History X" is a deeply disturbing and brutally violent film about the white skinhead movement in contemporary United States culture. Not only does this film depict the most disturbing and flagrant aspects of racism, but also shows how close hate movements are to mainstream, middle-class, white Americans. A fictional story told through the eyes of a youth who is being recruited in the white power movement, this film shows how racial hatred is part of American culture. It also shows the means to which white people will go to maintain their privilege, particularly when they feel their institutional and cultural dominance being encroached upon. "American History X" is also an important film because, if examined closely, it shows the interconnection of oppressions. The culture that allows for racial hatred also enforces gender roles and requires violence to enforce all aspects of its hierarchy. The same world-view that allows for the devaluation based on skin color, requires a culture of dominance that permeates all aspects of life.

Caution

This film comes with a serious caution to the facilitator. It is profoundly violent and disturbing. There are a number of scenes that depict gruesome murders, in detail. There is a rape scene. The language is angry and hateful. The whole movie will feel like an assault on your senses. However, it is worth seeing. It is well done and meaningful. The violence is not gratuitous, but rather is used to make the viewer understand a disturbing piece of reality. As Unitarian Universalists, this film asks us to grapple with the theological concepts of hate and evil, as they are embodied in our world today. Please make sure that you provide for the pastoral resources and support necessary to deal with this kind of subject matter.

Things to think about:

As you are watching the movie try to think about institutional racism, how are people of color treated differently? (for example prison, school, etc.)

Discussion Questions:

- How do you feel right now
- What emotions has this film evoked in you?
- Where do you think those feelings have come from?
- What personal experiences have been recalled in you?
- What do you think this film says about racism in the United States today?
- How is racism different today than it was thirty years ago, before the Civil Rights movement?
- Do you think white people have access to more power and privilege than people of color do in the United States? Why do you think that?
- What do you think of affirmative action programs and other efforts to combat institutional racism?
- What and/or who could you relate to in the film?
- What are the attitudes towards women, gay people, poor people, and people with disabilities in this movie?
- How are these attitudes related to attitudes toward people of color in this movie?
- Do you know people with racist views?
- What do you do when you hear racist remarks?
- Are there organized hate groups in your community?
- How does your congregation respond to these groups?
- Do you think we can end racism in America? How?



SLAM



Overview/Description:

"SLAM" portrays the experience of a young African American man caught in the Washington, DC correctional system. Set in a real prison, using real convicts as supporting cast, "SLAM" explores the institutional, cultural and internalized aspects of racism in a current urban African American community. "SLAM" also explores the use of poetry as a way towards liberation through consciousness and community building.

Things to think about:

Think about the way the prisoners are treated, and the way they treat each other, why do you think this is? (Keep in mind that most of the actors in the prison are actual inmates) Also think about the power that words and poetry have.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some examples of institutional racism in this movie? What are some examples of cultural racism in this movie? What are some examples of internalized racism in this movie? How do these examples impact Ray, Lauren, and the communities that they live in?
- In the Civil Rights Movement, white people and African Americans often worked together on systemic issues such as segregation and voting rights. In the Black Power Movement, however, African Americans often asked for a separate space, so that they could work on issues that dealt with internalized racism and rebuilding their communities. How do you feel about this need for people of color to have a separate space to work on internalized issues? How can white people support people of color in their community building? Do white people need to get together and talk about their own issues around racism?
- What implications does this movie have for white anti-racists? Where are the places in this film in which white people who want to make change have the most power to do so? What things could your congregation do to support Ray, Lauren and their community? How would you go about doing this?
- What power did poetry have in the movie, and how did it help Ray through the experience he lived through? How has art helped you survive through difficult times? Can you relate Ray's use of poetry to other situations you've been involved in or know about?

Smoke Signals



Overview/Description:

Smoke Signals, written by Coeur D'Alene Sherman Alexie, directed by Cheyenne/Arapaho Chris Eyre and starring American Indians, is structured as a picturesque "road movie." Based on Alexie's short story collection The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, "Smoke Signals" depicts a journey from the Coeur D'Alene reservation in Idaho to Phoenix by two teen-aged Indians, Victor Joseph (Adam Beach) and Thomas Builds-the-Fire (Evan Adams). Victor's father, Arnold (Gary Farmer) has just died and Victor is sent to return his ashes to the reservation. Thomas, whom Victor regards as something of a pest, pleads to be taken along.

Their relation to each other and to Victor's dead father supplies the central dramatic impulse for the film.

Much of the film's power has to do with its honesty, both in the way the characters are depicted and also in its use of on-location filming at the Coeur D'Alene reservation which, like most reservations, is literally in the middle of nowhere. It is a mixture of rugged mountainous landscape with meager ramshackle housing and tacky general stores run by whites. Director Chris Eyre has found a way to capture both aspects of the reservation, so the audience understands both the lingering attraction of the reservation and what drives its inhabitants to desperation.

Things to think about:

Think about the troubles that Victor and Thomas have travelling across the country, why is this? Would you have this same problems?

Discussion Questions:

- "Smoke Signals" is the first commercially successful film in which the writer, director, actors and crew are almost exclusively Native American persons. Why do you think this is important to the Native American community?
- Discuss how the representations of Indian people in Smoke Signals differs from "Hollywood" style movies, include the old "Cowboys and Indians" western genre as well as more contemporary films such as "Dances with Wolves" and "Geronimo" in your analysis.
- Arnold (Victor's dad) goes through a process of "disappearing" in which he slowly disappears from his family, his community, and eventually from the world. Discuss this "disappearing" and how it relates to the invisibility of Indian people in contemporary society.
- Storytelling plays an important role in Native American communities, also to the film's plot. What is the importance of story telling in "Smoke Signals"?
- Discuss the relationship between Victor and Thomas as it relates to Thomas's role as the film's primary storyteller.
- How does their relationship illustrate the tension between Native American traditional cultural values and contemporary realities?
- The reality of Indian people in contemporary U.S. society is part of the consciousness of the characters in "Smoke Signals". For example, Victor and Thomas refer to the U.S. as a foreign country, Arnold and Victor's basketball game against the Jesuits is described as the first time the Indians won since Columbus, etc. Discuss the interactions Victor and Thomas have with members of the dominant society (the White couple in the car accident, and the police officer). What stereotypes are operating?
- What expectations do the various characters have based on the way Indian people are stereotyped?
- What do you make of the soliloquy at the end of the movie? What are the sins of our fathers that must be forgiven?

- Where did you see the U.S. government as an occupying force?
- What did they mean by practice vanishing?
- How do Victor and Thomas treat their parents?
- What did Thomas mean when he said they plea bargain it down to being an Indian in the 20th century? What do you think was meant by "The Cowboys always win?"
- What would you have done if you overhear the two guys on the bus kick out Victor and Thomas from their seats.
- How do Victor and Thomas deal with their environment?

Observations for you to think about:

- Seeing U.S. as a foreign country
- Basketball game, Jesuits against the Indians, Indians won for the first time since Columbus
- Indians are invisible in U.S. society, use of culture as a way to destroy communities, cultural annihilation
- In order for Anglos to become "American" Indians had to disappear, one way or another
- Perception in Southwest that there was no one living on the land before the Anglos arrived; myths about Basque Shepherds being first inhabitants
- Alcoholism in Native American communities is related to racism; alcohol introduced to Native communities as a way to destroy them as an intentional strategy
- Added stereotype around Indian gaming
- Importance of the community
- Jimmy Carter took that away Gymnasts have a lot in common with the Indians.

