



**TEACHING THE FILM RFK IN
THE LAND OF APARTHEID:
*A RIPPLE OF HOPE***

A Study Guide

By John F. Suggs

Teaching the Film *RFK in the Land of Apartheid: A Ripple of Hope*

Instructor/Facilitator Guide

The following Instructor/Facilitator Guide is divided into three components aimed at the following Fairfield University audiences:

- Fairfield University's Fall 2010 Convocation "From Activism to Global Citizenship"
- The First Year Experience Fall 2010, which incorporates four key Jesuit values: Care for the Whole Person (*Cura Personalis*), Striving for Excellence (*Magis*), Educating Men and Women for and with Others, and Reflection (Contemplatives in Action)
- Fairfield University's Living and Learning Communities; Student Leadership Groups; Civic, Community, and Religious Groups
- Fairfield University's Core Curriculum, Courses in the World Diversity, Service Learning, International Studies, and Jesuit Humanitarian Action and Network (JUHAN) designation, among others.

The first section provides a brief background of the film and a short description of the film's relevant themes.

The second section supports the Fairfield University's Fall 2010 Convocation "From Activism to Global Citizenship" in general, and specifically the August 30th special screening to the incoming First Year students and their initial FYE group gatherings immediately following the film.

The third and final section contains a series of short stand-alone lessons suitable for group discussions or individual reflection writing that can be utilized in a variety of courses, student groups, and/or Living and Learning Communities.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information about the film (including educational resources and archival materials related to the film), please visit the following site:

<http://rfksafilm.org/index.html>

Contact Person

If you have any questions about the film, please contact John Suggs, assistant director of Fairfield University's Center for Faith and Public Life, Canisius 200, JSuggs@fairfield.edu, (203) 254-4000, ext. 3505.

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BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT THEMES

This new film and its relevant themes highlight the role of students and universities in challenging oppression as it explores the relationship between global conditions of inequality and local commitments to change. It serves as a natural transition from the University's Year of Activism to the Year of Global Citizenship.

- The story interweaves the present with a little known yet dramatic and important visit that Senator Robert Kennedy made to South Africa in June 1966.
- NUSAS, the anti-Apartheid National Union of South African Students, invited Kennedy to deliver the annual Day of Affirmation speech to be held that year at the University of Cape Town, an all-white campus. This annual event formally re-affirmed the South African student organization's commitment to democracy and freedom, regardless of language, race, or religion.
- When it became known that Kennedy had been invited, Ian Robertson, a 21-year-old college senior and president of NUSAS, was officially banned by the government and placed under house arrest; he was confined to his home from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. every day. Because his case received such international notoriety, he was allowed to attend his classes, unlike other students who received a banning order, which effectively ended their college studies. But he was forbidden to participate in any other school event, activity, or gathering involving more than one other person. Friends and the press faced imprisonment if they quoted him. It was, in short, a non-existent existence.
- Kennedy's visit took place during the darkest days of Apartheid. With only a few notable exceptions, all government opposition – across the spectrum of black and white South African political parties, universities, churches, the arts, and the media – had all been shut down.
- While there, Senator Kennedy made a surprise and unannounced visit to Africa's first Noble Peace Prize winner, Chief Albert Lutuli, the president of the African National Congress, who had been banned by the government under the "Suppression of Communism Act" and forced to live in internal exile.
- Senator Kennedy next visited the black township of Soweto and brought the residents public news and greetings from their banned leader, Chief Lutuli.
- Because the Dutch Reformed South African Church supported the Apartheid policies, large numbers of South Africans reported feeling alienated from God. They felt that a God that would support Apartheid did not have anything to do with them. While in Soweto, Kennedy visited a Catholic Church that operated as a sanctuary and meeting place for the opposition.

- Although the South African government ignored him (and provided no security), Kennedy did not berate the Afrikaners as a bunch of incorrigible racists, but engaged them in a dialogue. He visited a men’s residence at Stellenbosch University, one of the premier Afrikaans universities, where he had an interesting exchange of ideas with students and was credited with helping to plant the seeds that would later contribute to the growth of the Afrikaner Reform Movement, Verligte (“enlightened”), at Stellenbosch.
- One of the hallmarks of the visit was Robert Kennedy’s “Ripple of Hope” speech at the University of Cape Town, which is widely considered to be the most important speech he ever gave, and a summation of his deepest-held beliefs and convictions. The speech would become even more universally known and renowned when Senator Edward Kennedy chose to use whole sections of it in his famous eulogy at Robert Kennedy’s funeral in 1968. One paragraph in particular – the “Ripple” paragraph – has become one of the most quoted paragraphs in American politics.

“It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

IMPORTANCE TO OUR STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITY

This film is important and timely because it deals squarely with the central issues of global citizenship and social justice. This film is about more than Robert Kennedy's historic visit to South Africa. It is a doorway to a number of important true stories and lessons that help illuminate four central Jesuit values: Care for the Whole Person (Cura Personalis), Striving for Excellence (Magis), Educating Men and Women for and with Others, and Reflection (Contemplatives in Action).

These lessons include:

- the connections between the fight against racism in the United States and South Africa via the American Civil Rights movement and the Anti-Apartheid movement
- the untold story of Chief Albert Lutuli
- the story of NUSAS, the courageous non-racial student organization and its individual student leaders
- the vital role that engagement and dialogue play in responding to difficult and destructive public policies
- examples of ordinary people who found ways to stand up to an unjust system and, in so doing, helped bring about a peaceful transition in South Africa
- the power of an idea

Through these multiple true stories that unfold on the screen and through the power of Kennedy's words the film lays out a road map for how we, both as individuals and as a university, might accept and enact our roles and responsibilities as global citizens. For the vision of global citizenship is what Senator Kennedy addressed in his Ripple of Hope speech. He said:

“If we would lead outside our borders, if we would help those who need our assistance, if we would meet our responsibilities to mankind, we must first, all of us, demolish the borders which history has erected between men within our own nations - barriers of race and religion, social class and ignorance.

Our answer is the world's hope; it is to rely on youth. The cruelties and obstacles of this swiftly changing planet will not yield to obsolete dogmas and outworn slogans. It cannot be moved by those who cling to a present which is already dying, who prefer the illusion of security to the excitement and danger which comes with even the most peaceful progress.

This world demands the qualities of youth; not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love of ease. It is a revolutionary world we live in, and thus, as I have said in Latin America and Asia, in Europe and in the United States, it is young people who must take the lead. Thus you, and your young compatriots everywhere, have had thrust upon you a greater burden of responsibility than any generation that has ever lived.”

Suggested Questions
for Small Group Discussions of
RFK in the Land of Apartheid: A Ripple of Hope

First Year Experience Discussion

Following the First Year Students Screening of the Film.

August 30, 2010

CAs and FYMs: Start by introducing yourselves and asking each person in the room to introduce themselves. Tell them that in the last 15 minutes of the session you will briefly go over some housekeeping matters, such as the date/time/location of when and where the group will next meet, what the FYE requirements are, and any other questions that they may have. But for today, the primary purpose of the gathering is to have a discussion about the film they just saw.

Guiding Questions:

1. What did they think of the film?
2. What surprised or disturbed you? Why?

Play the one-minute clip of people reading the Ripple of Hope Speech

3. The movie makes reference several times to a specific section from Senator Kennedy's speech, quoting the lines:

"It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

4. What does this quotation mean to you today as you begin a new part of your journey here at Fairfield University?
5. What examples from your own life experience might be considered "ripples of hope"?

When photographer Peter Magubane describes being beaten by the police and then forced to take out and expose the film he had just shot, he said: "The most painful thing was not my fractured nose but losing those historical images that I knew that I could never get again."

- *What in your life have you valued as much as Peter Magubane valued those photographs? Why?*
- *How might you take full advantage of the opportunities at Fairfield University in finding something over the next four years that you will value as much as Peter Magubane valued those photographs?*

Instructors'/Facilitators' Discussion Questions Targeting:

**Fairfield University's Living and Learning Communities,
Student Leadership Groups, Civic, Community, and Religious
Groups**

**Fairfield University's Core Curriculum, Courses in the World
Diversity, Service Learning, International Studies, and Jesuit
Humanitarian Action and Network (JUHAN) designation,
among others.**

I. “NOT A TRUE REPRESENTATION OF THE COUNTRY OF SOUTH AFRICA”

The audience to whom Senator Kennedy gave his famous Day of Affirmation “Ripple of Hope” speech to at the University of Cape Town was described in the film as being “not a true representation of the country of South Africa.” Nevertheless, that campus community – largely through its chapter of the student-led organization NUSAS – did find an effective way to have a significant impact way beyond their campus gates to help influence and shape the Common Good.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- *Why was the audience “not a true representation of the country of South Africa?”*
- *How do you define the Common Good and what is its place in your life?*
- *How might you and your peers come together to help shape the Common Good here at Fairfield University and beyond as global citizens?*
- *Are you aware of any student-led/run organizations that currently exist on our campus or elsewhere that function as a platform for student activism?*

II. *“I REFER, OF COURSE, TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.”*

In the introduction of his speech in Cape Town, the audience first believes that he is speaking about South Africa when Senator Kennedy is actually talking about the history of North America and the United States.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- *Why did he start his speech this way?*
- *What was your reaction when you realized that Senator Kennedy was describing the United States rather than South Africa?*
- *How do you think those in his audience felt upon hearing it?*

III. BANNED IN SOUTH AFRICA

To be banned in South Africa meant a non-existent existence. It was described as being the “living dead.” In the film, we see Chief Lutuli answering a reporter’s question about whether he was ever tempted to go into exile and live abroad because of his banning. Chief Lutuli had ample opportunity to go into exile, especially when he was briefly allowed to leave the country in order to receive the Noble Peace Prize. He replied: “Personally, I have never been tempted to go live abroad. I feel that I must struggle to gain my freedom. And I feel that Africa is my continent and that I must free Africa.”

Ian Robertson, the 21-year-old college senior and president of NUSAS, who invited Senator Kennedy, was also officially banned by the government. In the film, he appears sad as he comments that he ultimately decided to go into exile abroad as a result of his banning.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- *Why do you think that Chief Lutuli was so clear and comfortable, at peace even, with his decision not to go into exile?*
- *Compare Chief Lutuli’s decision to not go into exile and live abroad with Ian Robertson’s decision. Who do you think made the right decision? Was there, in fact, a right or wrong decision?*
- *What do you think you would have done if you were attending Robertson’s school at that time? Would you have spoken out considering the risks or would you have kept your head down and quietly gone about your studies?*
- *What, if any, connections do you imagine might exist between those who chose to “keep their head down” and those, including his own mother, that Peter Sullivan, the newspaper editor, said told him that “they just did not know what was going on?”*

IV. “ALLOWED TO BREAK THE LAW FOUR TIMES A DAY...”

When journalist and editor Peter Sullivan describes how his editor told him that he was “allowed to break the law four times a day but not more than that” in covering anti-Apartheid efforts, he explains the various ways that he got around the government’s censorship of his coverage. He said that hearing the Ripple of Hope statement “made a huge difference in my life. I then realized that any little thing that I did would make a difference.”

1. What does the “Ripple of Hope” quotation mean to you?
2. What examples from your own life experience might be considered “ripples of hope”?
3. Ralph Waldo Emerson shared this insight in 1837 to the students at Cambridge:

“They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for their career, do not yet see, that, if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him.”

How would you reconcile Emerson’s quote with the lived experiences of Chief Lutuli, Juby Mayet, Peter Magubane, the students of NUSAS, and the countless others who worked in the daily struggle to free South Africa under Apartheid?

V. *“THE CROWD REACHES OUT”*

Throughout his trip in South Africa, Senator Kennedy willingly took real physical risks in making himself accessible to many different people. Recall the moment when the lei was suddenly draped over his head by an excited student standing behind him at the airport reception. It happened in just a blink of an eye and was obviously completely unexpected. The lei could have just as easily been a weapon or something else that could have hurt him or sparked a panic within the crowd.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- *How important do you think it was that Senator Kennedy made himself so accessible to his supporters and critics alike in South Africa?*
- *What impact do you think the resulting experiences of the crowds had on him personally?*
- *What impact do you think such experiences had on those with whom he came into contact?*
- *What lessons might we draw from this about how we evaluate and manage risks as we seek to be “agents of change,” i.e. “men and women for and with others,” in our own lives?*

VI. “WE STAND FOR HUMAN DIGNITY”

Senator Kennedy challenged people to continually look at what was actually being done in the name of a larger public policy – which, in South Africa’s case, included a national public policy of containment of the Soviet Union or anti-Communism. The South African government sought to use their anti-Communism position to effectively shield them from any strong condemnation or challenges by the United States government for their Apartheid policies. Recall that Senator Kennedy said to the Afrikaner students:

“Is that *all* that we believe in, anti-Communism? Is that all that we stand for in our own countries and our own hearts?... I think that we stand for something positive. ... We stand for human freedom. We stand for human dignity. We stand for ending discrimination and ending hunger.... That is why I think that we have attracted other people, those who have difficult times in their own lives ... not just because we are anti-Communist but because we stand for something.”

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- *Substitute the term “anti-terrorism” for the term “anti-Communism.” Now, what is your reaction to his statement? Do you agree with Senator Kennedy or disagree? Explain why.*

VII. *“LOOK, YOU REALLY HAVE TO DO BETTER”*

Adam Walinsky, Senator Kennedy’s speechwriter and policy analyst who accompanied him on his trip to South Africa, notes that in South Africa as well as in Latin America, Cuba, Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere, Senator Kennedy was constantly struggling with a very real and critical dilemma: How does a leader successfully strike a balance between what one has to do, or thinks one has to do, in order to defend and protect their own country and doing the right thing towards another country and its people? Senator Kennedy believed that even if one adopts a position that expediency, or survival, may sometimes require one to make alliances with governments, businesses, and/or organizations that do terrible things to their own people or to others that such a decision doesn’t in any way end the moral necessity to keep questioning. As Walinsky said: “Are we really making the right choice? Do we really have to support this particular country? Is this country really helping us? Or is that just something that we’re telling ourselves?” And that, at a minimum, “you have an obligation to go to them and say ‘look, you really have to do better.’”

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- *What should one do when the “Common Good” for one country comes only at the expense of the “Common Good” of another?*
- *Does one’s “national citizenship” duties and responsibilities supersede one’s “global citizenship” duties and responsibilities? Why?*
- *What might be some of the risks in attempting to tell an ally or business partner – “look, you really have to do better?”*
- *Can you imagine any potential scenario here at the University where you might find yourself in just such a situation in attempting to tell an ally or business partner – “look, you really have to do better”?*
- *Have individuals share some of their real life examples and discuss as a group.*

VIII. ***“IF WE WOULD LEAD OUTSIDE OUR BORDERS”***

Kennedy’s words and actions while in South Africa offer us a very specific road map for how we, both as individuals and as a university, might accept and enact our roles and responsibilities as global citizens. He offers us his recommendation when he said:

“If we would lead outside our borders, if we would help those who need our assistance, if we would meet our responsibilities to mankind, we must first, all of us, demolish the borders which history has erected between men within our own nations - barriers of race and religion, social class and ignorance.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- ***What does he mean by this?***
- ***What is he encouraging us to do?***
- ***How might this inform our University’s discussion about global citizenship?***

IX. “WE WALKED AROUND OUTSIDE FOR A WHILE AND TALKED ABOUT IT”

Within just a few short hours after Senator Kennedy finished his Day of Affirmation “Ripple of Hope” speech, his aide Adam Walinsky received a call informing him that James Meredith, a national black Civil Rights leader in the U.S., had been shot walking in a Freedom March in Mississippi. In an interview with the filmmakers, Walinsky said:

“At first we thought he [James Meredith] was killed. As it turned out he was only wounded, but we thought he was killed. And I went and told...the Senator that this had happened. We walked around outside for a while and talked about it. It was a moment of, obviously, enormous irony and a great reminder, if we needed one, that conditions in the United States were far from perfect and a reminder that merely announcing wonderful moral principles is a long way from the reality of human life. So it was quite somber....a very powerful event that evening....a reminder.”

- *Imagine that you were there with Walinsky and Senator Kennedy. What would you say to the two of them? Walinsky called it “a reminder” – a reminder of what?*
- *How do you think supporters of the South African government responded to the news of James Meredith’s shooting coming as it does so closely on the heels of Senator Kennedy’s Day of Affirmation “Ripple of Hope” speech?*

X. “RECLASSIFIED”

As a young widow, Juby Mayet, the journalist, describes the indignity of having to have her very race and ethnic identity denied and officially “reclassified” in order to be able to stay and raise her children in her own home.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- *When she speaks about it in the film almost four decades later, what do you think she feels about the event?*
- *What role do you suspect resilience and perseverance has played in her life?*
- *What do you imagine the uncertainty of the resolution of her staying in her own home had on her children - coming as it did on the heels of their fathers’ death? How would you feel if they were your parents?*

X. “...SENDS FORTH A TINY RIPPLE OF HOPE”

The movie makes reference several times to a specific section from Senator Kennedy’s speech, quoting the lines:

“It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Play the one-minute clip of people reading the Ripple of Hope speech

- What does this quotation mean to you today here at Fairfield University?
- What examples from your own life experience might be considered “ripples of hope”?

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