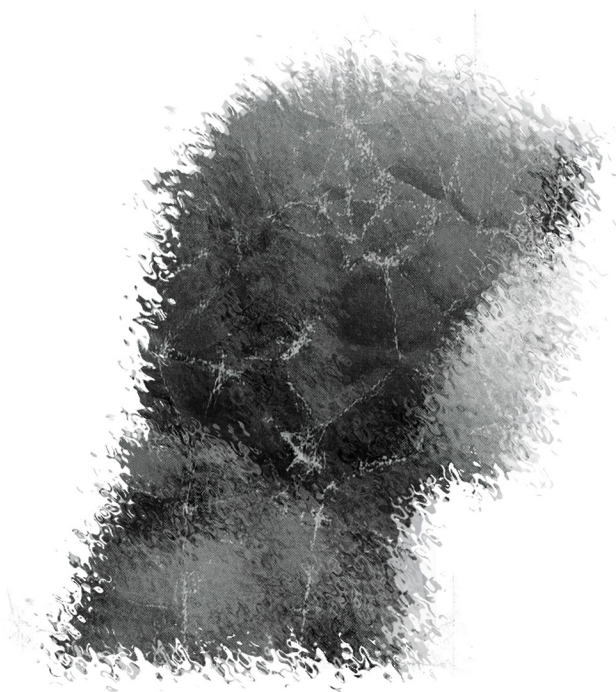


Hawai'i Council for the Humanities & Hawaii International Film Festival Present...



FILM FOR THOUGHT BRIDGING CULTURES

- American Revolutionary:
The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs
- Koran by Heart
- The Loving Story

FILM FOR THOUGHT BRIDGING CULTURES

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BRIDGING CULTURES A WORLD OF IDEAS

BOB BUSS *Executive Director, Hawai'i Council for the Humanities*

"What has always interested me about history is trying to understand how people see their own world. If you can understand how someone sees the world differently from you, then you learn something about your world." The spirit of these words by historian Drew Gilpin Faust is both liberating and revealing, if we can be open to the heart of the humanities as empathy, whether cultural, historical or moral.

Bridging Cultures, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has supported several programs, including Muslim Journeys, which features the documentary *Koran by Heart*, and *Created Equal: America's Civil Rights Struggle*, which includes *The Loving Story*. Both documentaries are featured in this year's Film for Thought. The third documentary, *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*, also employs the power of the humanities to promote understanding and mutual respect for people with diverse histories, cultures, and perspectives.

The vitality of our twenty-first century democracy, which is not at all guaranteed, depends on this sincere commitment to understand the historical and cultural forces that have shaped and continue to shape our world. If we close ourselves to such investigation, surely the rapidity of global change will leave us in the dust . . . or perhaps even cast us into "the dustbin of history," to quote two leaders of the previous century—Leon Trotsky in 1917 and President Ronald Reagan in 1982.

Former NEH Chairman Jim Leach has noted, "The sharing of language, philosophy, literature and art—the history of peoples—is the most profound bridge between societies and across cultures." If these three documentaries fail to bridge for us the divides between the worlds they represent, we will surely be the less for it. As John Donne said, "because I am involved in mankind," we must recognize that "No Man is an Island." x

FILM FOR THOUGHT 2013

CRAIG HOWES *Film for Thought Humanities Coordinator*

The three selections for this year's Film for Thought series explore how people who are quite literally extraordinary navigate some profoundly longstanding and entrenched religious, political, legal, and cultural values, and in the process, force them to respond, and sometimes even change.

I mean extraordinary in both senses. The subjects of these documentaries are all outsiders, and judged accordingly by the institutions they encounter. But the subjects are also committed, brave individuals who stand up before, and sometimes against, authority. (All three films could be titled *Grace Under Pressure*.) Faced with such formidable challenges, the subjects also turn to their families, their friends, and their comrades for strength and support.

In *Koran by Heart*, all three of the featured young competitors have memorized the *Koran* in Arabic. But one comes from Tajikistan, another from the Maldives, and the third from Senegal, and issues of literacy, language comprehension, parentage, and gender profoundly affect the significance of the children's performances, and their success in this highly traditional competition.

In *The Loving Story*, a young couple's desire to live in their home community close to their families leads them first into exile, and then into the spotlight, as the legal test case for one of the United States' longest-standing, disgraceful, and thorniest issues. Here, the Lovings' wish to be left alone becomes a matter of national significance. The lives of all of us have ultimately been affected by the Lovings' need to be a family in Virginia.

In *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*, an East Coast Chinese-American woman over the course of a long life becomes a central figure in Detroit African-American community's history of labor activism, civil rights advocacy, and stands against institutional injustice. For Grace Lee Boggs, compromise, dialectic, confrontation, and rebellion are all necessary components of civil life.

All three of the filmmakers ask the same questions. How did their subjects end up in these totally unexpected, yet highly visible places? And what allowed them to survive, and even thrive, in such antagonistic, frequently openly hostile settings?

You'll find the answers these three films provide nuanced, thought-provoking, and inspiring. x



AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY: THE EVOLUTION OF GRACE LEE BOGGS

Director ——— Grace Lee

Producer ——— Caroline Libresco . Austin Wilkin

Cinematographer Jerry A. Henry . Quyen Tran

FRIDAY OCT. 11 **6:45 PM DOL**
SUNDAY OCT. 13 **11:00 AM DOL**

SYNOPSIS

AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY: THE EVOLUTION OF GRACE LEE BOGGS plunges us into Boggs's lifetime of vital thinking and action, traversing the major U.S. social movements of the last century: from labor to civil rights, to Black Power, feminism, the Asian American and environmental justice movements and beyond. Angela Davis, Bill Moyers, Bill Ayers, Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis, Danny Glover, Boggs's late husband James and a host of Detroit comrades across three generations help shape this uniquely American story. As she wrestles with a Detroit in ongoing transition, contradictions of violence and non-violence, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, the 1967 rebellions, and non-linear notions of time and history, Boggs emerges with an approach that is radical in its simplicity and clarity: revolution is not an act of aggression or merely a protest. Revolution, Boggs says, is about something deeper within the human experience - the ability to transform oneself to transform the world.

Produced and directed by Grace Lee (THE GRACE LEE PROJECT), AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY has been 12 years in the making. In an age when seemingly insurmountable injustices and contradictions face us, AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY inspires concerned citizens and dreamers of all ages with new thinking to sustain their struggle and engagement.

HAWAII PREMIERE

United States 2013

ENGLISH 82M

THOUGHTS

CHARLES LAWRENCE

Professor of Law

**William S. Richardson School of Law
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

MARI MATSUDA

Professor of Law

**William S. Richardson School of Law
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

These people who are in Western civilization, who have grown up in it, but made to feel and themselves feeling that they are outside, have a unique insight into their society.

C.L.R. James, 1984*

We meet this practicing Hegelian in scene one: a frail Popo bends over her walker and drags down a deserted street, pausing before the bombed-out hulk of an abandoned factory. Gravity pulling her body earthward is palpable as she speaks of epochs. Epochs? What Chinese grandma uses words like that? As the film unfolds, the movement of centuries is reflected in both her genealogy and her politics, and unless you are a stone, you will fall in love with the complicated, mischievous, whip-smart, and truly grace-full Grace Lee Boggs.

Who is this little Asian woman who calls Motown home? How does an Ivy-League-educated daughter of Chinese immigrants come to make the African American community the center of her life? Why does a Marxist see black liberation as central to revolution? Grace marries Jimmy Boggs, a black autoworker, organizer, and self-taught political theorist, but their marriage is not what determines her. Grace chooses the Black community, and they choose her.

"We don't think of Grace as Asian. We just think of her as Grace," says a community leader. He's not post-racial. He means, "She's one of us." Grace helps organize the 1963 Grassroots Leadership Conference, sharing a dais with Malcolm X. Leaders of the black-nationalist Revolutionary Action Movement live in her basement. Ron Karenga calls her "Sister Boggs." Ossie Davis, Danny Glover, and Bob Moses come to her kitchen to listen and argue. "Everybody in the movement has been to this house," Grace says.

"In the Black movement we called it an uprising." Grace corrects Bill Moyers when he asks about the 1967 Detroit "riot." She uses "we" to identify with black liberation. She does not claim cultural blackness or experiential blackness. She chooses black as her explicitly-left political position, understanding class and race together as structures and ideologies of domination. She chooses the black movement as the position from which to dismantle those structures.

While Grace is unapologetically revolutionary, she defies the callous "crack a few eggs" stereotype imagined by red-baiters. "The aftermath of the Detroit

uprising forced us to begin thinking, what does revolution mean?" We see the scenes of burning and looting, of young men armed, and we hear Grace say, "After that we all got more scared of each other." Grace and Jimmy Boggs believed the violence was inevitable, cathartic, justified, even healing, but rebellion was not revolution. Grace speaks admiringly of how audiences would squirm as Malcolm challenged them to rise up and end conciliation with white supremacy, but when she and Angela Davis speak to an audience of young people, she says that only non-violent resistance can achieve true revolution, "because it respects the capacity for people to change."

"We must combine Malcolm's militancy with King's nonviolence," she says. Militant uprising and humanist non-violence are not an opposition but a dialectic, one that Malcolm and Martin, at their most radical, deployed with visionary power. Grace's facility with structural thinkers like Marx and Hegel shows in her analysis of Detroit's epochs, and fuels biting thesis/antithesis arguments at her dinner table. She came to a thriving industrial city where, she thought, workers would gain consciousness and bring about revolution. Now she works with teens planting vegetables and re-habbing bicycles on land lying fallow midst post-industrial decay. Grace Lee Boggs lived to see what Marx could not predict. Ever the dialectical thinker, she struggles her way to a new vision: putting the neighbor back in the hood, one garden at a time.

In Hawai'i, the vision of sustainability is realized one lo'i at a time, while big questions of native sovereignty, response to global warming, and economic inequality remain unresolved. Are community gardens and bike co-ops an adequate response? Grace is a revolutionary, not a do-gooder. Teaching kids from the projects to put hand to dirt is not about self-improvement or self-help. It's the new mass organizing for revolutionary change, creating a healthier, collective way to thrive, while developing the intelligence and the power to re-structure society. Youngsters in Detroit work the gardens all week, then they visit Grace. She listens, argues, schools them about epochs, and sends them home with a stack of reading. Grow kalo; study political economy.

A little old Chinese lady rocking dialectical materialism is no surprise to those of us who grew up in Hawai'i watching, among others, Ah Quon McElrath, Patsy Mink, Jean King, Setsu Okubo, Rachel Saiki, Aiko Reinecke--a long list of left Asian women born in the first half of the last century who believed that the health of a community was determined by the lives of ordinary working people. Asian, woman, radical? Got plenty! Welcome to HIFF, Grace Lee Boggs.×

**Thanks to Karen Ishizuka for calling our attention to this quotation in her great article on yet another Asian woman radical, Kazu Iijima, in Amerasia 35:2 (2009): 24-48.*



THURSDAY OCT. 17 6:00 PM DOL

KORAN BY HEART

DIRECTOR ——— Greg Barker

PRODUCER ——— Julie Goldman . John Battsek . Greg Barker
Chetin Chabuk . Christopher Buchanan

CINEMATOGRAPHER Frank-Peter Lehmann

SYNOPSIS

Every year, 110 young Koran reciters are chosen from over seventy countries to travel to the heart of Egypt to compete in one of Islam's most prestigious contests, The International Holy Koran Competition, where memorization and recitation of the Koran is put to test. Throughout the documentary, Greg Barker follows the emotional journeys and experiences of three Muslim 10-year old competitors: the bright Rofdha from Maldives, who is one of the few girls; Djamil from Senegal, who is sent to represent an entire nation and left to travel alone; and Nabiollah of Tajikistan, who is remarked as a blessed genius reciter. We are offered a glimpse into each individual child's life, as they experience an array of emotions and pressures brought on by family, community and religious expectations. While at the same time, each child's future and education is in constant question as they are caught between fundamentalist and moderate visions of Islam. *-Erin Lau*

HAWAII PREMIERE

Afganistan . Australia . Egypt . Maldives Senegal
Tajikistan . United Kingdom . United States 2013

ARABIC . ENGLISH . TAJIK . WOLOF W/ ENGLISH SUBTITLES **77M**



THOUGHTS

TAMARA ALBERTINI

Professor of Philosophy

**Director of the Undergraduate Certificate of Islamic Studies
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

You may not be a Muslim and yet *Koran by Heart* (a documentary movie originally broadcast on HBO on August 1, 2011) will strike a chord with you. The documentary follows the stories of three Muslim children, two boys and a girl. They are about ten years old and were accepted for the most important competition in the Islamic world: the prestigious qur'anic recitation contest held annually in Cairo during the Ramadan (fasting) period, the month in which Islam's holy scripture was originally revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. The three protagonists are Nabiollah from Tajikistan, the Maldivian girl Rifdha, and Djamil from Senegal. Nabiollah has never learned to read and write, and yet he "reads" the pages of the Qur'an as they appear before his inner eye. Rifdha is a child prodigy who has mastered the alphabet from when she was one and half, and she is an excellent math and science student. Her dream is to become a marine biologist. Djamil, finally, is the obedient son of an Imam who will continue reciting in tears even when all is lost.

The significance of the qur'anic recitation competition is to some extent comparable to the Spelling Bee in the U.S., except that Cairo's event is international. Another marked difference is that American culture sees no value in memorized knowledge, taking it to be lacking in originality, creativity, and novelty. By contrast, the Islamic world has great respect for individuals who learn poetry or scripture by heart. The rendition of the Qur'an, in particular, bestows great honor upon reciters and their families. Such reciters are called huffaz (plural of hafiz). A hafiz is he who has committed to memory the Qur'an's 6,236 verses, and also masters one of the recitative conventions (tajwid), taking into account proper rhythm, pronunciation, and articulation. The euphonic chant, however, is not learned by heart, but spontaneously generated in the act of recitation. The respect accorded a hafiz is not only based on the performance but also on the transformational dimension of the recitation. The understanding is that the qur'anic reciter relives Muhammad's prophetic revelation, and is therefore spiritually purified by the experience. Thus the teacher who coaches Djamil, the young competitor from Senegal, emphasizes: "People are bombing and killing each other. But if all Muslims understood the Koran there would be peace on earth. . . . Return to the Koran. Learn it and apply it." Purification is expected even if the reciter should not understand scriptural Arabic verbatim!

Very few girls are represented at the contest. According to Dr. Salem Abdel-Galil, the deputy minister of religious affairs and organizer of the contest, not all scholars approve of their presence. The deputy minister states, however, that men and women are equal. After all, 'Aisha, the Prophet's favorite wife, used to teach the early Islamic community by reciting flawlessly. And yet, Rifdha's performance is most inconveniently scheduled at 2:30 a.m. It may be a coincidence, and yet the viewer cannot help but think that although girls were allowed to participate, the organizers did not think it appropriate if a girl won the competition. Predictably, Rifdha, who needs to perform in the middle of the night, makes a mistake in her recitation and ends up "only" second.

At times, the camera appears to be eavesdropping on conversations that are not related to the competition; comments are made about the more recent changes in contemporary Islam. Thus the organizer of the competition declares that the Egyptian Salafiyya commands financial means important enough to marginalize the voices of moderate scholars. One of the Egyptian judges remarks that the muezzin at the mosque near his hotel follows the Saudi style of recitation, making him feel he is not at home. The former president of the Maldives points out how fellow citizens returning from more conservative Muslim countries have changed the once mellow religious culture of the island. No moderate Muslim seems to know how to turn the tides.

Three journeys, each unique and endearing. Nabiollah will finally learn how to read and write. Djamil returns to his family and understands that he will follow in his father's footsteps to become an Imam himself. And Rifdha? It has never been her wish to excel as a reciter. She was merely trying to fulfill her father's expectation. Will she have a chance to become a scientific explorer? We may never find out, but her recitation will resonate with viewers for many years to come.*



TUESDAY OCT. 15 **5:45 PM DOL**
 SUNDAY OCT. 27 **4:00 PM HILO**

THE LOVING STORY

DIRECTOR — Nancy Buirski
SCREENWRITER — Susie Ruth Powell
PRODUCER — Nancy Buirski • Patrica Romeu
 Elisabeth Haviland James
CINEMATOGRAPHER Steve Milligan

SYNOPSIS

A racially charged criminal trial and a heart-rending love story converge in this definitive documentary about Mildred and Richard Loving. The marriage of Mildred (who was part-black and part-Native American) and Richard (who was white) was declared illegal in 1958 by their home state of Virginia. They refused to leave one another and, with the help of the ACLU, relentlessly pursued their right to happiness. Their case made it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court where, in 1967, it struck down laws against interracial marriage in this country once and for all. With luminous, newly discovered 16mm footage of the Lovings and their lawyers, first-person testimony and rare documentary photographs, this film takes us behind the scenes of the legal challenges and the emotional turmoil of the landmark case. THE LOVING STORY recreates a seminal moment in history and reflects a timely message of marriage equality in a personal, human love story.

THE LOVING STORY is part of Created Equal, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, facilitated locally by the Hawai'i Council for the Humanities. **-Sundance**

HAWAII PREMIERE

United States 2011

ENGLISH 77M



THOUGHTS

JACK TAYLOR

Assistant Professor

Department of English

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

"Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay, and red. And he placed them on separate continents and but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix." So begins Nancy Buirski's *The Loving Story*, which originally aired during Black History Month on Valentine's Day, 2012. These words from judge Leon M. Bazile's verdict capture some of the finer points *The Loving Story* wants to address. This simple story highlights how complicated issues such as racism, supported by firm religious conviction, disrupt the most intimate spheres of life.

The film chronicles the marriage of Richard (a white man) and Mildred Loving (a part black and part Native American female), a crime that would lead to the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), which overturned the laws of sixteen of the forty-one colonies and states that at various times in America's history had declared it illegal for whites and people of color to marry. The civil-rights law was a deathblow to Jim-Crow policy, as the film demonstrates that segregation—at its core—was grounded in fear of interracial marriage and offspring.

The Lovings were not activists in the traditional sense of the term. In fact, the film shows that Mrs. Loving was not even aware that interracial marriages were illegal in Virginia—and twenty-three other states at the time as well—due to the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 when she married Richard in the District of Columbia in June of 1958. Upon returning to Virginia, the Lovings were arrested and charged with the crime of miscegenation—a felony crime demanding a punishment of one to five years in prison. The punishment was eventually suspended, but they were instructed by the sheriff to leave the state.

The Lovings spend the next nine years in exile in Washington D.C., desperately wanting to return to their home in rural Central Point, Virginia. City life is a struggle for the Lovings. In 1963, after many complaints to her cousin, Mildred's cousin instructs her to contact Robert Kennedy, then attorney general. Mildred writes Kennedy, asking if the civil rights bills currently being discussed in congress would absolve their problems. After telling her there was nothing he could do, Robert Kennedy in turn instructs her to contact the American Civil Liberties Union. Not long after, they receive a letter from an ACLU lawyer, Bernard S. Cohen, saying it would take the case.

After their initial appeal to the Supreme Court of Virginia is struck down, the Lovings appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States. The Court unanimously votes in their favor in June of 1967, a full nine years after their initial arrest, on the grounds that anti-miscegenation laws violated Due Process and Equal Protection provided by the Fourteenth Amendment. The Lovings were reluctant and perhaps unintentional heroes of the civil rights movement. Mrs. Loving at one point states "I wasn't involved in the civil rights movement," and that she only knew about the movement by watching the news. As she puts it, she and Richard were simply trying to get back to Virginia, where they had a plot of land passed down from Richard's family. The Lovings' struggle to go home is a crucial aspect of Buirski's film, as it demonstrates the more subtle ways justice is produced and injustice is addressed.

The care the topic is given is commendable, as Buirski allows the Lovings' voices to be heard, rather than narrating the film herself. By drawing on a great deal of original black and white interview footage and a remarkable array of photographs highlighting the Lovings' everyday living situation, the film comes to life to demonstrate that what may appear to be a small act of resistance to a perceived injustice can in fact produce monumental changes. The story is more than just a narrative demonstrating how ubiquitous racism manifests itself in law. It is a story of how justice surfaces despite overwhelming odds. It is the story of love's endurance in the face of racism.*

[illegible]

Special Thanks

BOB BUSS & HAWAII COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

