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FILM FOR THOUGHT 2023

"United we stand," our theme for the 2023 Film for Thought (FFT) series, is a phrase so often heard in the United States that the second half of the saying, divided we fall, is frequently left unsaid. It is assumed that's already known. But what remains unknown and what are we, perhaps, not asking when we hear, united we stand? In a society that places a particular emphasis on the freedoms of the individual, what does it mean to stand united?

The FFT films this year invite us to ask questions about community, about unity, about justice, about privileges, about assumptions, about grace. *NO MĀORI ALLOWED & STILL WE RISE* document the societal responses to systemic oppression experienced by a Māori community in New Zealand and the Aboriginal people of Australia. *MUSTACHE* is a coming-of-age story of a boy growing up in Northern California struggling to negotiate the demands of family, community, and individual identity. *JOIN OR DIE* (another phrase deeply rooted in U.S. political history) chronicles the life's work of political scientist and academic, Robert Putnam, who believes Americans joining clubs will strengthen the fabric of our civil society. Each film, in its own way, grapples with what it means to belong to a community.

The essays written by our FFT scholars ask us to deepen our understanding of these films and further push us to consider what it means to be united, particularly when significant parts of our societies have been and continue to be systemically disenfranchised from dominating cultures and narratives.

Why are we united? What are we standing for? Who is standing with us? Who is standing for us? These questions bear particular relevance and urgency when a community faces hardship and trauma—when their very ability to remain a community is threatened. There are many examples of this in current events, but to name a few: land and water rights struggles, labor strikes, climate disasters.

The last hits particularly close to home. More than two months later, the people of Lāhainā, Maui continue to work through the aftermath of the fire that decimated their community. While there have been so many inspiring examples of the ways Lāhainā has stood together as a community and the ways the pae āina of Hawai'i has reached out to support Lāhainā, this tragedy has also highlighted the ways our society has failed to imagine equitable and just structures that allow the land and the people of Hawai'i to thrive.

These four FFT films all suggest that we are better when we imagine better for all of us and when we acknowledge that unity and inclusion are not defined as standing only with those who look, think, and live like us.

Mahalo nui to this year's Film for Thought scholars Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, Joseph Han, and Shannon Pōmaika'i Hennessey. Their thoughtful work roots us in the challenges of what it means to be united and the difficult loving work that entails. We invite you to watch these films, read these reflections, join our FFT discussion events, and talk story about them with community.

LYZ SOTO

HAWAI'I COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIRECTOR OF LITERARY AND CONVERSATION PROGRAMS

Film for Thought 2023 is funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities "United We Stand" Initiative to support programs that foster cross-cultural understanding, communication, and resilience, and counter the hate-based violence destructive to our democracy.

JOIN OR DIE



HAWAI'I PREMIERE
UNITED STATES 2023 | ENGLISH | 101M

19-OCT 5:15PM | KHL

20-OCT 3:00PM | KHL

DISCUSSION WITH REBECCA DAVIS & PETE DAVIS
ONLINE | FREE (DETAILS AT [HIFF.ORG](https://www.hiff.org))

SYNOPSIS

JOIN OR DIE is a film about why you should join a club — and why the fate of America depends on it. In this feature documentary, follow the half-century story of America's civic unraveling through the journey of legendary social scientist Robert Putnam, whose groundbreaking "Bowling Alone" research into America's decades-long decline in community connections could hold the answers to our democracy's present crisis. Flanked by influential fans and scholars — from Hillary Clinton, Pete Buttigieg, and Surgeon General Vivek Murthy to Eddie Glaude Jr., Raj Chetty, and Priya Parker — as well as inspiring groups building community in neighborhoods across the country, join Bob as he explores three urgent civic questions: What makes democracy work? Why is American democracy in crisis? And, most importantly... What can we do about it?

DIRECTORS

Rebecca Davis, Pete Davis

PRODUCERS

Rebecca Davis, Pete Davis

CINEMATOGRAPHERS

Ronan Killeen, Allie Humenuk, Alyssa Brocato, E.J. Enríquez, Erik Ljung, Keith Walker, Nathan Golon, Umit Gulsen, Alvin Mcbean, Christoph Gelfand, Edward Martinez, Jenna Rosher, Kyle I. Kelley, Stefan Wiesen

THOUGHTS

JOIN OR DIE traces social scientist Robert D. Putnam's life work in studying the decline of civic engagement in the United States over the last half-century. The film offers Putnam an opportunity to reflect on two of his highly influential works, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) and *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1994), which name social capital as an essential element for a thriving democracy. As well, the documentary features commentary by high-profile politicians, academics, and columnists (including Hillary Clinton, Pete Buttigieg, Priya Parker, Hahrie Han, Glen Loury, and David Brooks to name a few) on the impact of Putnam's work and the challenges facing civic engagement today. Peppered throughout the documentary are brief vignettes of everyday U.S. citizens participating in civic activities: A Black woman organizing a monthly cycling day in Atlanta, Georgia; A white woman and her work with a local religious organization; A Pakistani man finding belonging in a local chapter of the Odd Fellows Lodge in Waxahachie, Texas; An Indigenous-Zapotec woman describing the creation of Cielo, a women-led organization supporting and advocating for the rights of Indigenous immigrants in Los Angeles, California. Ultimately, JOIN OR DIE leaves the viewer with a poignant demand: Participate in civic life again and join a club today, lest we see the death of democracy as we know it.

As much as the film calls for communities nationwide to come together to socialize and advance their interests, it falls short of naming the long-term challenges of sustaining civic projects and the practices needed to address these issues. In its attempt to offer an all-encompassing national narrative of civic engagement, it leaves more questions than answers: How will the response to JOIN OR DIE differ as it is viewed across the U.S., especially in marginalized communities forced into civic engagement to advocate for the protection of their lands and communities, as well as their equal treatment under the law? Is this a film about cultivating civic engagement across differences? Is it a celebration of a political scientist's illustrious career? Is it both? Perhaps, like other films of broad scope, the questions that viewers are left with are the point since questions are often seeds of change—powerful tools for challenging the status quo and founding movements that can reshape a nation.

As a 32-year-old, I have spent more than half my life engaging in civic organizing centering Native Hawaiian communities on Hawai'i Island, O'ahu, and Colorado. My earliest experiences stem from my upbringing in the working class Hawaiian Home Land community of Keaukaha in Hilo, Hawai'i.

In my late teens, I did my best to stay involved in community affairs and served as the president of our school's Student Council and Interact Club. I also joined a group called Independent Leaders of Aloha United, who helped me to produce a small community publication that spoke of our community's founding history (which, unsurprisingly, was rooted in civic organizing!). When I think back to my time as an 'ōpio (young person), I think of my kūpuna (elders) and kumu (teachers) constantly reminded me and my peers of our future kuleana (right, responsibility) to lead our community and to build on the foundation they would leave behind. I still carry this sense of obligation and commitment to Keaukaha and continue to figure out how I can support my beloved community, even though I no longer live in the community.

These experiences and many others over the years have taught me a lot about the challenges of sustained community organizing in the 21st century, especially in these times of intense political polarization and climate catastrophe. One of those challenges includes having effective leadership that is experienced in communicating across differences and transparent in their decision-making processes. Another is the enduring challenge of succession planning while demonstrating to young people the value of civic organizations in advocating for and bringing together our communities. And these challenges merely touch on complex social and societal processes of deep-rooted community organizing. Yet, I offer them here to begin naming some impediments to sustained civic engagement we face today. In watching JOIN OR DIE, I invite viewers to do the same and to actively consider the lessons that might be gleaned from the film as we continue struggling to create a multiracial and multicultural democracy that is truly by and for the people.

HALENA KAPUNI-REYNOLDS

ASSOCIATE CURATOR OF NATIVE HAWAIIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

Halena Kapuni-Reynolds (Kanaka 'Ōiwi) was born in Hilo and raised in the Hawaiian Home Land community of Keaukaha and the rainforest of 'Ōla'a on Hawai'i Island. Over the years, Halena has volunteered to serve on the advisory and executive boards of various Hawaiian and Hawai'i-based organizations, including the Pi'ilani Hawaiian Civic Club of Colorado, the Keaukaha Community Association, the Hawai'i Museums Association, and the East Hawai'i Cultural Center.

MUSTACHE



HAWAI'I PREMIERE

UNITED STATES 2023 | ENGLISH, URDU W/ENGLISH SUBTITLES | 83M

16-OCT 8:00PM | KHL

18-OCT 2:45PM | KHL

28-OCT 6:00PM | WAI (KAUA'I)

DISCUSSION WITH IMRAN KHAN

16-NOV 8:00 PM | KHL | POST-SCREENING CONVERSATION

SYNOPSIS

It's the mid-90's in Northern California and 13-year-old Pakistani American Ilyas (Atharva Verma) is facing a major crisis — his parents yanked him out of his comfortable Islamic private school and now he has to face life at public school. Ilyas' fears about joining public school are made worse by insecurities due to his inescapable, prepubescent MUSTACHE. While he hatches a hilarious plan to return to his old school, Ilyas finds a meaningful outlet in his new school's theater program and forges friendships with non-Muslim kids that accept him — but Ilyas must also learn to accept himself. MUSTACHE makes for an outstanding directorial feature debut from Imran Khan, which hugely benefits from Verma's charming and endearing performance. Easily relatable, laugh-out-loud funny and downright delightful, the film wowed SXSW audiences, where it world premiered, and they responded with their ballots, awarding it the Audience Award for Best Narrative Feature.

DIRECTOR	Imran J. Khan
SCREENWRITER	Imran J. Khan
PRODUCERS	Christina Won, Jessica Sittig
CAST	Atharva Verma, Alicia Silverstone, Rizwan Manji, Meesha Shafi, Ayana Manji, Hasan Minhaj, Mojean Sadr, Shaheryar Rana, Melody Cao, Krishna Manivannan
CINEMATOGRAPHER	David Robert Jones

THOUGHTS

A feature debut and homage to coming-of-age films, nineties nostalgia, and awkward teenage transitions, *MUSTACHE*, written and directed by Imran J. Khan, won the Audience Award at SXSW and poses to be a new classic. The film begins with 13-year-old Ilyas's (Atharv Verma) voiceover, as he contemplates the multiverse and whether there's a place for him. Where mainstream narratives are overcrowded with pre-existing intellectual property, superheroes and white characters alike, Khan centers a Pakistani American community of Northern California with tenderness and humor, tackling familiar tropes like teenage angst and rebellion with the specificity of autobiography, thus channeling an intimate and inspired vision of growing up Muslim in the 90s.

Ilyas narrates how he's stuck in the "complex lattice of rules" governing his life, as he reflects on his Muslim upbringing that will have him choose obedience over self-interest, when he's forced to keep his prominent mustache having grown much too soon for his liking. It makes him the subject of ridicule at Cordoba, his private Islamic school, which he is soon pushed to leave for a public high school after an altercation results in his losing the scholarship that made his attendance possible.

Ilyas's mustache represents his insecurity, self-loathing, and the dissonance he experiences—being caught between the boy he is and the man he's supposed to become. A recurring motif in the film: the sudden zip and wail of an electric shaver, followed by extreme close-ups of facial hair, and a montage of images mapping the emotional chaos of his mind. The drone of the razor follows Ilyas like a horror villain might, except he's being haunted by choices that seem unavailable to him.

For most of the film, he orchestrates a plot to return to Cordoba with the help of Yasmeen (Ayana Manji), his childhood friend whom he consults over Instant Messenger. Ilyas's move to public high school becomes an analogue to the story of immigration. Once having believed Cordoba would always be home, Ilyas now wonders if he needs to leave home to flourish. Wishing to return to the comfort of his community, Ilyas plays on his parents' fears as he performs being a Bad Muslim, leading to a humorous scene where he pretends to eat a Big Mac. In his new environment, Ilyas becomes the perpetual outcast: the film observes his marginalization, as Ilyas remains muted and invisible, and his hopes for assimilation, as Ilyas fixates on his classmate Liz (Melody Cao), suggesting that romantic love could be the answer to his search for belonging.

After stumbling upon a theater class during his free period and joining the group, Ilyas soon taps into the lesson that his body is a tool of expression to be embraced. He need not suppress his feelings or avoid the spotlight out of shame and fear. In acting, he's found his superpower and a way to travel the multiverse, ultimately finding a home and story within, waiting to be told. Where Ilyas's mother, Asiya (Meesha Shafi), gave up painting to raise her children, as the evidence of her art remains on their home's walls, Khan, through Ilyas, shows us how their lives and community are worthy of art, in all their awkwardness and glory. Having once taken his mother's art for granted, Ilyas becomes emboldened by her example.

Like Ilyas's daring, culminating performance in front of his entire community, this film is full of heart—coursing through its design, it's palpable that it's been made with tremendous love. No matter who we think we are or should be, the film reminds us that we're all a little strange, sharing the same fear of ridicule or rejection. *MUSTACHE* shows us how our communities should welcome and celebrate its differences, and how inclusivity starts with an open mind. Who knows, even when things get awkward, there might be room for us to be taken by surprise and find joy in the unexpected. Before we brave the stage and take our place, the search for acceptance must first come from within before we can wear it proudly on our faces.

JOSEPH HAN

FICTION FACULTY, ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY LOS ANGELES MFA

Joseph Han is the author of Nuclear Family, named a New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice and a best book of the year by NPR and Time Magazine. He is a 2022 National Book Foundation '5 Under 35' honoree and an Affiliate Faculty in Fiction at the Antioch University Los Angeles low-residency MFA program.

NO MĀORI ALLOWED



UNITED STATES PREMIERE
NEW ZEALAND 2022 | ENGLISH | 45M

14-OCT 5:45PM | KHL
17-OCT 3:30PM | KHL

DISCUSSION WITH CORINNA HUNZIKER + JOHN HARVEY
ONLINE | FREE (DETAILS AT [HIFF.ORG](https://www.hiff.org))

PLAYS WITH: STILL WE RISE (SEE NEXT PAGE)

SYNOPSIS

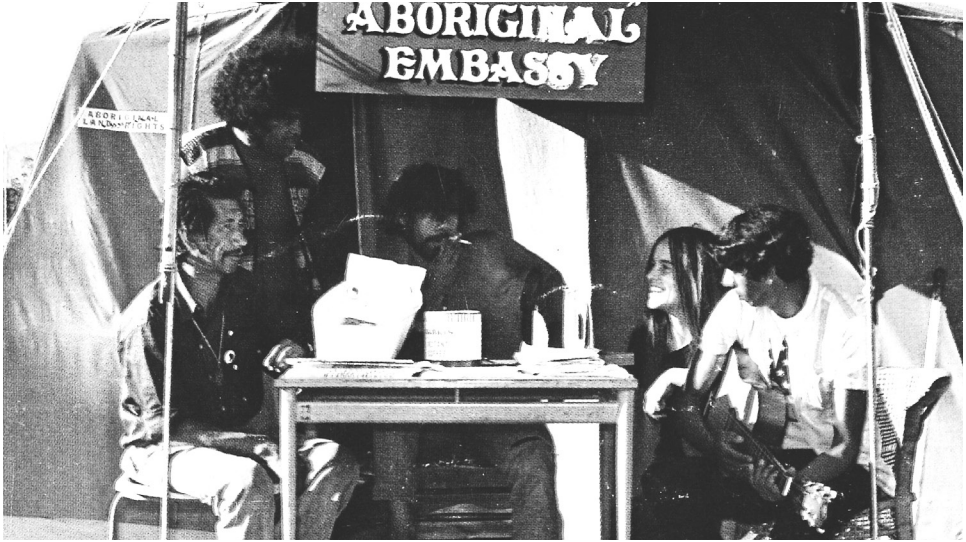
Many Pakeha (Europeans) in Aotearoa/New Zealand have long prided themselves on the country's supposed positive history of race relations. They cite the Treaty of Waitangi signed by Māori chiefs and European colonists as a rare and positive step in the global history of colonization. They look back on the intervening years as times where Māori and Pakeha forged friendly and equitable relationships. The Treaty showed that Pakeha were willing to try a collaborative approach with tangata whenua, however the interpretation of that document is still fought over to this day.

As they say 'History is written by the victors' and in New Zealand's case the colonizers controlled the historic narrative, that is up until now. In this searing documentary by first-time director Corinna Hunziker, the small town of Pukekohe reels after a school teacher unearths stories of segregation and racist abuse. NO MĀORI ALLOWED is a film that shocked many people in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and stirred debate about the country's white-washed past and its story of sovereignty.

DIRECTOR	Corinna Hunziker
PRODUCERS	Reikura Kahi, Megan Jones
CINEMATOGRAPHER	Dominic Fryer



STILL WE RISE



HAWAI'I PREMIERE
AUSTRALIA 2023 | ENGLISH | 57M

14-OCT 5:45PM | KHL
17-OCT 3:30PM | KHL

DISCUSSION WITH CORINNA HUNZIKER + JOHN HARVEY
ONLINE | FREE (DETAILS AT HIFF.ORG)

PLAYS WITH: NO MĀORI ALLOWED (SEE PAGE 10)

SYNOPSIS

In 1972, the planting of a beach umbrella by young Aboriginal activists in the lawns opposite Parliament House sparked passion across the country. Sitting strong and proud on Ngunnawal country, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy soon became a marker for justice, uniting people across the nation in the fight for land rights. Revisiting hours of images and footage from the archives through a First Nations lens, STILL WE RISE is a bold dive into a year of incendiary protest and revolutionary change for First Nations people.

Fifty years on, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy is the oldest continuing protest occupation site in the world and the fight for land justice continues. Much like how 1968 was a significant year for the civil rights movement in America, STILL WE RISE celebrates the young articulate feisty activists who fought so hard to inspire the generations to come.

DIRECTOR John Harvey

PRODUCER Anna Grieve



THOUGHTS

For Indigenous people living under settler colonialism, the themes of *NO MĀORI ALLOWED* (2022) and *STILL WE RISE* (2022) feel more than familiar. In the former, director Corinna Hunziker (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahu) interviews Māori elders and community members to confront—some for the first time publicly—the acute racial segregation that pervaded Pukekohe, a small township in Aotearoa (New Zealand) during the mid-twentieth century. In the latter, director John Harvey (Saibai Islander) examines the 1972 establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in front of the Australian Parliament House as a form of resistance to centuries of colonization, a reflection the violence of the white supremacist police state when the Tent Embassy is repeatedly dismantled, and an inspiration for other land rights struggles across the country.

Both films skillfully address overlapping themes of colonialism, racism, state violence, historical denial, and Indigenous resistance and agency. The recognition of these similar struggles across contexts can offer invaluable solidarity between Aboriginal, Māori and even other Indigenous communities. However, it is also critical to acknowledge their distinctions and inevitable divergences. Whereas *STILL WE RISE* emphasizes the increasing influence of extractive capitalism in the mid-twentieth century, *NO MĀORI ALLOWED* only gestures to the agricultural industry for context. While the former referred generally to the oppression of Black Australia, the latter highlighted the specificities of racial discrimination in Pukekohe.

Beyond content, both directors also attended to form, using features of Indigenous storytelling. Composed almost entirely of archival footage from movements in the 1970s, interspersed with footage from past decades to situate the present struggle, *STILL WE RISE* is far from the typical documentary format with interviews and chronological narration. Instead, as with most Indigenous stories, the film's timeline is not linear, and Harvey shows rather than tells the viewer the violence of colonization and racism, accompanied by engaging graphics and often haunting audio overlays.

In contrast, *NO MĀORI ALLOWED* has a more classic, interview-based documentary format. However, as characteristic of Indigenous storytelling, a considerable portion of the documentary interrogates the authority of the

author, or the positionalities and ethical obligations of each actor in this project. Repeatedly, the film asks, “Who has the right to tell this story?” Is it Robert Bartholomew, the American historian whose 2020 book (on which this documentary is partially based) was published without permission of the Pukekohe elders? Is it Catherine Tamihere, a young Māori teacher who recently moved to Pukekohe and urges elders to share their stories as a means of healing? Or is it Pare Rauwhero, a Māori elder who maintains only mana whenua, those from Pukekohe, had the right to speak on it? In so generously addressing these questions of authority, Hunziker encourages viewers to consider their kuleana (right, privilege, responsibility) in relation to community, and especially to sensitive histories.

Through Indigenous storytelling, Harvey and Hunziker not only bear witness to the violence of colonialism and racism, but also insist on centering Indigenous resistance, agency, and perhaps most critically, hope. STILL WE RISE illuminates the foundations of resistance that persist to this day, as the Aboriginal Tent Embassy still stands. NO MĀORI ALLOWED asserts agency of a different kind: elders sharing their stories on their own terms, highlighting their dignity when outsiders might only see victimization. As a Kanaka Maoli scholar, films like these remind me how you tell a story matters. When a story centers recordings of the persistent and intelligent voices of young Aboriginal activists, what can I feel but pride? When a story thoughtfully and reflexively chronicles Māori elders through their trauma to a space of healing, what can I feel but hope? Indeed, these directors demonstrate that beyond familiar narratives of our pain, stories of pride and hope are ours, too.

SHANNON PŌMAIKA'I HENNESSY

PHD STUDENT IN INDIGENOUS POLITICS, UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA

Shannon Pōmaika'i Hennessey is an Indigenous Politics PhD student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa from Niu Valley, O'ahu. She is interested in cultivating and recognizing Indigenous resurgence, strengthening Hawaiian identities, highlighting Indigenous women, confronting class discrepancies in Hawai'i, and fostering Oceanic solidarities.





UNITED
WE STAND



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