

POV

Community
Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs

A Film by Grace Lee

Produced by Grace Lee, Caroline Libresco and Austin Wilkin



www.pbs.org/pov

I first met Grace Lee Boggs in 2000 while filming “The Grace Lee Project,” a documentary about the many women who share our common name and the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans. From the moment I met Boggs, I knew I would have to make a longer film just about her. Over the years, I would return to Detroit, hang out in her kitchen and living room and watch her hold in thrall everyone from journalists to renowned activists to high school students. I recognized the same thing in myself that I saw in all of them—eagerness to connect with someone who seemed to embody history itself.

As someone who came of age in the era of identity politics, I would have found it hard to ignore the fascinating details of how this Chinese-American woman became a Black Power activist in Detroit. But Boggs would constantly use our interview sessions to turn the questions back on me. “What do you think about that? How do you feel about what’s happening in Korea? Tell me more about your own story,” she would say as soon as the cameras turned off.

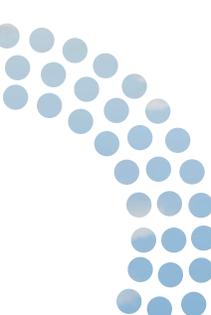
My own identity is more wrapped up in Boggs’s story than she knows. And it’s not because we share the same name. Boggs’s presence—in Detroit, in the world and in my imagination—has helped transform my own thinking about how to tell a story about someone like her. The journey to bring this film to life has been an evolution. It’s not an issue film, nor is it a film about a celebrity or urgent injustice that rallies you to take action or call your representative. It’s about an elderly woman who spends most of her days sitting in her living room, thinking and hatching ideas about the next American revolution. But if you catch wind of some of those ideas, they just might change the world.

Grace Lee

Director, **American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs**



Filmmaker Grace Lee.
Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films





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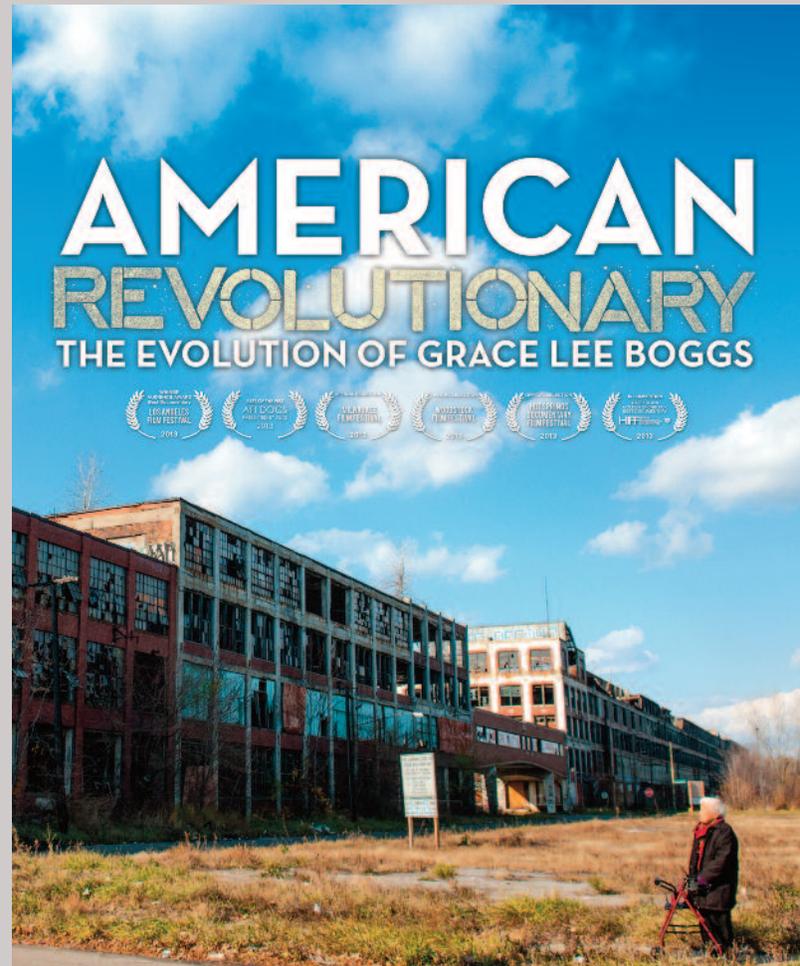
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Grace Lee Boggs, 99, is a Chinese-American philosopher, writer and activist in Detroit with a thick FBI file and a surprising vision of what an American revolution can be. Rooted for 75 years in the labor, civil rights and Black Power movements, she challenges a new generation to throw off old assumptions, think creatively and redefine revolution for our times.

Transcending a mere biographical portrait of this unique woman, **American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs** (82 min.) uses the intersections between Boggs's life and historical events to explore essential questions about political and social change. Are debate and reflection as vital to social transformation as action? What's the difference between protest and revolution? How do we transform ourselves personally and also act as a community? In short, how do we create a world that delivers on the promise of "liberty and justice for all"?

Like the ideas of a scientist, Boggs's ideas evolve as her experiences provide new evidence. Once a faithful student of Karl Marx and a follower of both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., she critically examined revolutionary strategies and rigid interpretations of worker-led socialism as a pathway to a better world. Before the second wave feminist movement took hold, she challenged stereotypes of the subservient Asian woman, while acknowledging that she sometimes willingly took a back seat in political groups and in her marriage.

Above all, Boggs is certain that ideas and people matter, which makes **American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs** an excellent springboard for discussion. As a Chinese American who was the only non-African-American member of the Detroit Black Power movement, Boggs has a multifaceted identity shaped more by the unrelenting pursuit of justice than by any particular ethnic or racial identity. In an age when injustices can seem insurmountable, both Boggs and the film inspire concerned citizens and dreamers of all ages with new thinking to sustain their struggles and engagement.



Film Credits:

Grace Lee
Producer/Director

Caroline Libresco
Producer

Austin Wilkin
Producer

Joan Huang
Executive Producer

Kim Roberts
Editor

Eurie Chung
Associate Producer

Jerry A. Henry
Cinematographer

Quyen Tran
*Cinematographer
and Still Photographer*

Vivek Maddala
Composer

Pete Horner
*Sound Design
and Re-recording Mixer*



American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to Detroit, African or Asian Americans, social change and political protest in the United States, civil and women’s rights and revolutionaries and radicals, including *Revolution ’67*; *William Kunstler: Disturbing the Universe*; *A Panther in Africa*; *Chisholm ’72: Unbought and Unbossed*; *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision*; *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*; *Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai*; *Women, War and Peace*; *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front*; *Detropia*; *Roger and Me*; *The Betrayal (Nerakhoon)*; and *Better This World*.
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section
- Civic, fraternal and community groups, including labor unions
- High school students, youth groups and clubs
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries.

American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1960s | Labor |
| Activism | Labor unions |
| African Americans | Leadership |
| Aging | Marxism |
| Asian Americans | Organizational dynamics |
| Biography | Peace studies |
| Black Power | Philosophy |
| Grace Lee Boggs | Political science |
| Civil rights | Racial identity |
| Communism | Radicals and revolutionaries |
| Detroit | Social change |
| Education | Social justice |
| Environment/ecology | Socialism |
| Feminism | Theories of social change/revolution |
| Grassroots organizing | U.S. history |
| Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel | Violence and nonviolence |
| Human rights | Women’s studies |
| Identity politics | Youth and youth programs |
| Malcom X | |
| Martin Luther King, Jr. | |





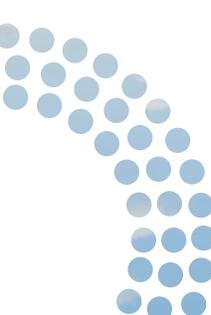
This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively. Indeed, for Grace Lee Boggs, “conversation” itself is critical to revolution and transformation.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pov.org/engage



Grace Lee Boggs.
Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films





Grace Lee Boggs.

Photo courtesy of Quyen Tran

Grace Lee Boggs

Our challenge, as we enter the new millennium, is to deepen the commonalities and the bonds between these tens of millions, while at the same time continuing to address the issues within our local communities by two-sided struggles that not only say “No” to the existing power structure but also empower our constituencies to embrace the power within each of us to create the world anew.

— Grace Lee Boggs, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*

Grace Lee Boggs is an activist, speaker and writer with a thick FBI file and a firm conviction in the power of constant and incisive reflection and dialogue. Boggs was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1915, the daughter of Chinese immigrant parents. She grew up in New York City and earned her B.A. from Barnard College and her Ph.D. in philosophy from Bryn Mawr College. In 1953, she moved to Detroit, where she married James Boggs. Grace has authored six books, including her autobiography, *Living for Change: An Autobiography*, and, in 2011, *The Next American*

Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century. She has also earned a number of honorary doctorates and lifetime achievement awards and has a place in both the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame and the National Women’s Hall of Fame. Boggs lives in Detroit and continues to be an indomitable and inspiring force as a writer, speaker and community activist.

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<http://cargocollective.com/diydetroit/THE-JAMES-GRACE-LEE-BOGGS-SCHOOL>

The James and Grace Lee Boggs School.
<http://boggschool.org/grace-and-jimmy>



James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

James Boggs

I never ceased to envy and marvel at the fluency with which Jimmy wrote and the speed with which his pen would travel from the left side of the page to the right... His passion for writing, I am convinced, played an important role in his development as a leader and a revolutionary theoretician.

— Grace Lee Boggs,
Living for Change: An Autobiography

James "Jimmy" Boggs was born in Marion Junction, Alabama in 1919. Though he never lost his thick Alabama accent, James Boggs spent his adult life in Detroit, where he was an autoworker, activist, and author. James Boggs was an influential part of the far left and radical sides of the civil rights movement, and much of his impact was made through the power of his writing. James Boggs was best known for his book, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*, published in 1963. Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs lived together in Detroit until his death in 1993.

Together, Grace and James were part of nearly every major social movement in the United States, from Black Power and civil rights, to labor, feminism, en-

vironmentalism, the Asian-American movement and more. In 1992, Grace and James helped found Detroit Summer, a community-based multicultural youth program. In 2013, one of its participants, Julia Putnam, helped create a community-based charter school inspired by Grace and James' philosophy on education and named it the James and Grace Lee Boggs School. The Boggs Center, a center for leadership development in Detroit, was also founded and named in their honor.

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American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs Press Kit.
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The James and Grace Lee Boggs School.
<http://boggsschool.org/grace-and-jimmy>



Grace Lee Boggs at Barnard College.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

Chinese Immigration and Discrimination

When I was growing up, Asians were so few and far between, as to be almost invisible. And so the idea of an Asian-American movement or an Asian-American thrust in this country was unthinkable.

— Grace Lee Boggs

At the turn of the 19th century, Grace's father, Chin Dong Goon, left his home in the Guangdong Province of China and joined the ranks of more than 100,000 Chinese immigrants seeking opportunity in the United States. They quickly became targets of ethnic antagonism—blamed for low wages and job scarcity and prevented from seeking employment or exercising civil rights. In 1882, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned Chinese immigration and barred those of Chinese ancestry from gaining U.S. citizenship. This drove many to self-employment, most commonly in the form of restaurants and laundromats, which did not require fluency in English and were suitable for large families to manage. Remarkably, Grace's father was able to establish both a home for his family and success for his business during an era when Chinese, Japanese and

South Asian immigrants were heavily restricted by law. Located in Times Square, Chin Lee's and Chin's, both owned and managed by Grace's father, were a major part of the dining and entertainment scene. Chin Lee's brought Chinese food and culture to Americans who had almost no other means of accessing cultures other than their own prior to World War II.

In New York City in the 1920s, Grace and her family were the only Chinese family living in her neighborhood, and she often encountered inquiries from neighbors about her nationality, as they assumed she was not American. The political climate of Chinese exclusion in the United States, compounded by early experiences with racial and gendered discrimination, played a major role in shaping Grace's social consciousness. As Grace was growing up, the conversation around civil rights did not yet include Asian Americans, who remained a largely marginalized group. Chinese Americans did not gain the right to vote until the suffrage movement in 1923, and



Grace Lee Boggs.

Photo courtesy of Quyen Tran

their right to U.S. citizenship was not fully granted until the Immigration Act was passed in 1965. Life for Chinese-Americans began to change when China became a U.S. ally in World War II and they were more openly embraced in the work force and society. A growing culture of civil rights activism in the 1960s and 1970s created an opportunity for concentrated action around equality for Asian Americans in what became the Asian-American movement.

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Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

The Black Power Movement

To build the Black Power movement people coming from different backgrounds and with differing points of view had to work together, for the most part ignoring or smoothing over differences because of our sense of urgency and also because we could feel our humanities stretching as we organized for a common cause.

— Grace Lee Boggs

Grace Lee Boggs's first venture into activism came in the 1940s, when she was working at the University of Chicago's philosophy library and was offered a room in the basement of a house infested with rats. Boggs joined forces with the South Side Tenants Organization to protest housing conditions in the neighborhood, and her work with the organization brought her first interaction with the black community. With World War II as a backdrop, Grace's experience with the South Side Tenants Organization, along with her exposure to the South Side of Chicago (a historic black community) and, most significantly, the 1941 March on Washington Movement, strongly influenced her

emergence as an activist in the 1940s and her involvement in the Black Power movement.

Grace Lee Boggs was a major player in the advancement of Black Power ideas. The nationwide Black Power movement gained momentum from the frustrations of young black Americans in the late 1960s, and Black Power soon became known across the country as a movement advocating racial independence and solidarity within the black community. Though Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X's philosophies and strategies in the movement differed, Grace was drawn to their shared conviction that ideological and social transformation are critical components of social change.



A protest march.

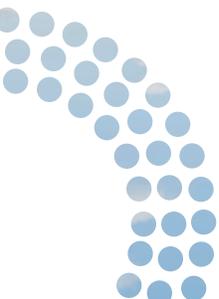
Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

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Detroit.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

Detroit

*My ideas were beginning to come from reality and not just from books...Detroit had become my home, the place and the city for which I felt responsible. Armed with the ideas in *The American Revolution*, I was ready for action.*

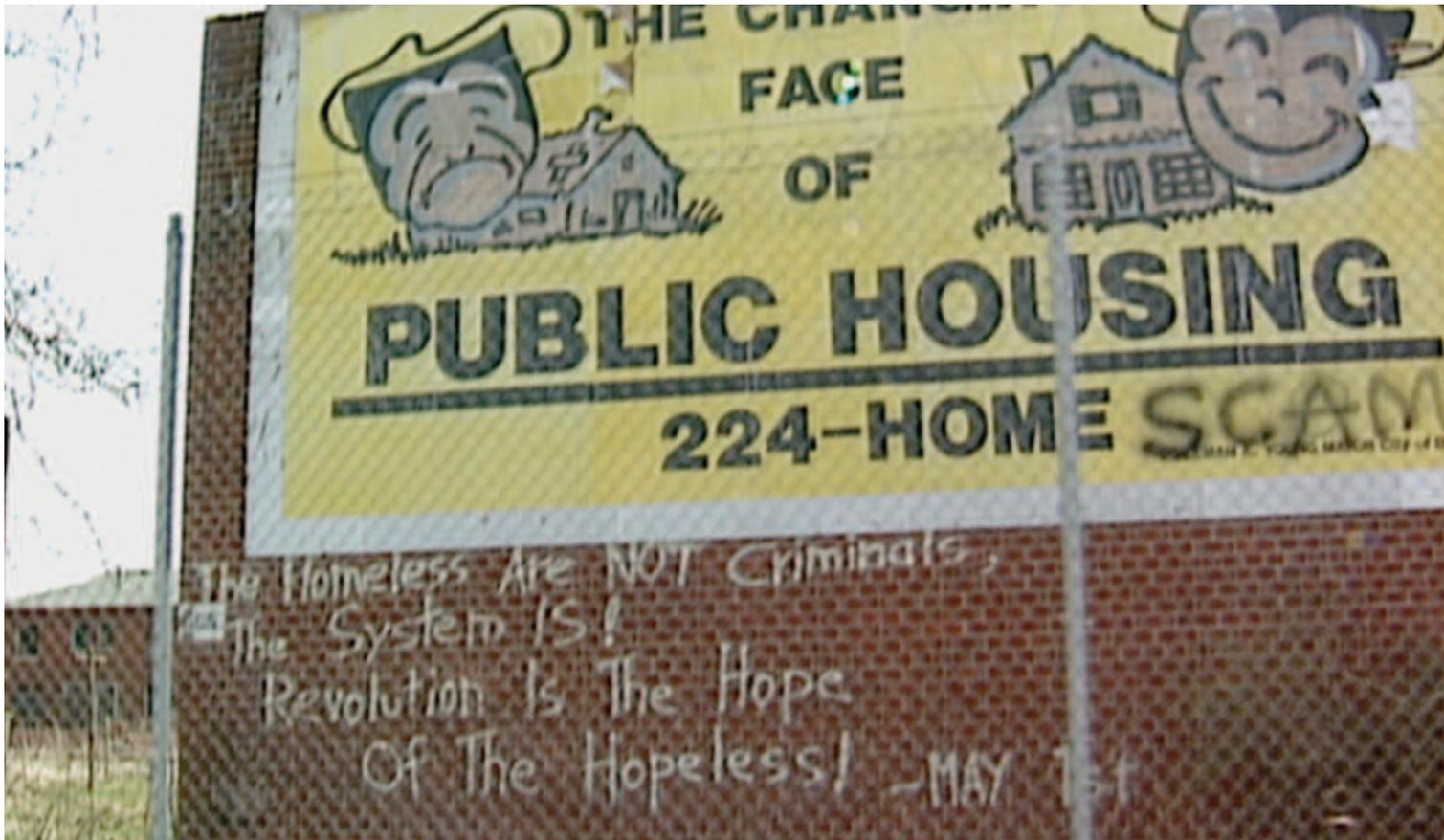
— Grace Lee Boggs

Civil Rights and Race Relations

Grace Lee Boggs moved to Detroit in 1953, when the city was on the verge of a great demographic transformation. From 1915 to 1970, more than 6 million African Americans moved from mostly rural areas in the south to industrial cities in the north. Termed the “Great Migration,” this massive relocation saw a 40 percent population increase in cities like Detroit, New York, Chicago and Cleveland. In response, a number of black families—usually the first or second to move into all-white neighborhoods—quickly became targets in racially-motivated attacks that included breaking windows, burning crosses and vandalizing

homes. The city’s population peaked at nearly 2 million in the early 1950s, but by mid-decade the population began to decline due to “white flight”—white Detroiters leaving the city, many moving to Detroit’s suburbs. This trend continued during the following decades, resulting in Detroit becoming a black majority city by 1980.

With unemployment and racial tensions at a high, Detroit became a site of social unrest and the location of a number of major civil rights actions in the 1960s and 1970s. On June 23, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led a quarter of a million people in a peaceful march for civil rights down Detroit’s Woodward Avenue. Grace Lee Boggs was one of the organizers of the landmark event, in which King delivered an early version of his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, and the march provided momentum for another large demonstration by the black civil rights movement. Two months later, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom changed the nation, as more than 200,000 demonstrators joined King in the na-



Detroit.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

tion's capital, where he delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

In 1967, one of the most violent rebellions in history broke out in Detroit. The inflammatory event was said to be a police raid of an illegal bar, but the roots of the 1967 rebellion reached further into the tense social, economic and racial climate of Detroit in the 1960s, characterized by police abuse, lack of affordable housing, urban renewal projects, economic inequality and rapid demographic change. The rebellion lasted four days and left 43 people dead, 1,189 injured and more than 7,000 arrested. A total of \$2 million in property damage left the city's businesses and buildings in tatters. As police and military troops sought to regain control of the city, violence escalated. Within 48 hours, the National Guard mobilized, followed by the 82nd Airborne Division on the fourth day. Detroit was forever changed by the rebellion.

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Growth and Decline of the Auto Industry

In the early 1900s, Detroit was known as “America’s Motor City” and was a symbol of economic promise and success. Detroit served as home to automobile pioneer Henry Ford, and Ford and other automakers fueled a booming industry that drew workers from around the world. Ford attracted labor from Scotland and England, the rural Midwest, Mexico and Lebanon, as well as African Americans from the South, making Detroit one of the most racially and ethnically diverse cities in the United States. By 1940, Ford was one of the largest private employers of African Americans in the country. By the 1950s, one in every six employed Americans was working for the auto industry, and Detroit was at the center of the industry’s boom. However, the city’s greatest economic asset became its downfall when automation was introduced to the factory line after World War II. Detroit’s economic foundation crumbled as auto magnates produced more cars and trucks with fewer workers, and factories were decentralized and spread across the suburbs and overseas. More than 130,000 jobs were lost from the late 1940s to the late 1960s.

Grace Lee Boggs walking through Detroit.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

Suburbanization, deindustrialization and white flight caused Detroit’s population and tax base to plummet. Detroit struggled to recover over the decades, and in 2013 it became the largest American city ever to file for bankruptcy. By that time the city’s population, which peaked at nearly 2 million in 1950, had shrunk to just 700,000, leaving buildings, homes, streets and businesses abandoned. Today, there are 78,000 abandoned buildings in the city, but artists, entrepreneurs and community groups are slowly but surely revitalizing and redefining its empty spaces.

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Grace Lee Boggs.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

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Philosophy in Action

The study of Hegel had helped me to see my own struggles as an integral part of the evolution of the human race. Inside my mind and heart the materialist concept of revolution as chiefly a redistribution of goods, property and power was being enriched by a moral and spiritual dimension.

— Grace Lee Boggs,
Living for Change: An Autobiography

At 16, Grace Lee Boggs enrolled at Barnard College, one of only three students of color in her class. She majored in philosophy and continued on to graduate school at Bryn Mawr College. As an undergraduate, Boggs was introduced to the Hegelian school of German philosophy that shaped and challenged her revolutionary ideas and actions.



Grace Lee Boggs, James Boggs and friends at a house in Maine.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a renowned 19th-century German philosopher, is one of Boggs's biggest influences. Hegel's philosophies were largely formed by what he witnessed during the French Revolution. Unlike previous philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant, who believed in static ideas and models of philosophy, Hegel maintained that evolution, progress and the constant questioning of one's ideas are essential to human development. Hegel believed that the ideological struggles between people give way to progress of the human spirit—and the evolution of ideas. This process is called “dialectical thinking,” and it is this philosophy that informed Boggs's fierce devotion to conversations—and the core idea that revolution is an evolving phenomenon.

Karl Marx, who both admired Hegel and questioned his process of dialectical thinking, would later maintain that reality is determined by economics and the state. Marx believed in the power of the masses to overturn existing societal structures. He used his critiques of Hegel to formulate his ideas on communism, a political ideology based on the abolition of class and private property.

Source:

Boggs, Grace Lee. *Living for Change: An Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.



A march in Detroit.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

C.L.R. James

I have always cherished the years [C.L.R. James and I] worked together because it was during this period that my concept of revolution as a great leap forward in the evolution of the human race began to take shape.

— Grace Lee Boggs,
Living for Change: An Autobiography

C.L.R. James was born in 1901 in Tunapuna, Trinidad. A writer, philosopher and revolutionary activist, James was a lifelong Marxist and played an influential role in the Pan-African movement, which addressed the African diaspora and called for the union of all African nations. James believed that the impact of the independent struggle of African Americans would extend to workers and minority groups, and indeed, the African American movement for civil rights ultimately was a catalyst for change that crossed lines of both race and class. In 1938, James moved from England to the United States, where he was introduced to Grace Lee Boggs while passing through Chicago. When they met, James caught Boggs's attention because he was carrying a book by Marx in one hand and a book by

Hegel in the other. Boggs and James hit it off immediately. Together with Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James and Grace Lee Boggs ran the Johnson-Forest Tendency, a group based on the philosophies of Marx, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky. The group produced books and pamphlets covering a wide range of issues and revolutionary ideas. Boggs and James worked together for 20 years, until evolutions in their philosophies caused them to part ways.

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Selected People Featured in **American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs**



Grace Lee Boggs



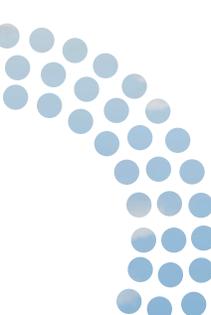
James Boggs



Grace Lee

Activists and Journalists

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Bill Ayers | Amy Goodman | Julia Putnam |
| Angela Davis | Shea Howell | Ron Scott |
| Ossie Davis | Scott Kurashige | Stephen Ward |
| Ruby Dee | Bill Moyers | C.L.R. James |
| Rich Feldman | Freddy Payne | |
| Danny Glover | Lyman Payne | |



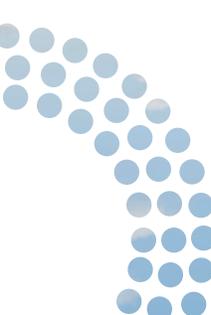
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- If you could ask Grace Lee Boggs a single question, what would you ask her and why?
- What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?
- What do you think Grace Lee Boggs means when she asks, “What time is it on the clock of the world?”



Grace Lee Boggs in her home.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films





March in Detroit in 1990.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

Activism

As evidenced in the film, Grace Lee Boggs has devoted much of her life to taking action around issues that are important to her. What issues are you passionate about? Where would you like to see change? Are taking any action to bring it about? What are your sources of hope and inspiration?

What has Boggs done and what does she continue to do that makes her an “activist”? What did you learn about activism from her example?

Boggs describes her “aha moment” as being involved in efforts that spurred Franklin Delano Roosevelt to end racially based job discrimination in World War II defense plants: “I found out that if you mobilize a mass action, you can change the world. And I thought to myself, boy, if a movement can achieve that, that’s what I want to do with my life.” Have you had an “aha moment” that spurred you to become an activist? What inspired you?

How was Boggs’s approach to activism shaped by the time and place in which she came of age? Which of the various forms of activism in which she has been involved remain effective in the digital world, and which need to be adapted in light of new technologies and new ways to network?

During a gathering at a friend’s home in Maine, the value that Boggs places on conversation as a form of activism is challenged: “Talk is cheap... You’re saying that we can talk about what’s important in a revolutionary movement but we don’t have to act like it.” What do you think? Is talk a form of activism? A component of activism? A precursor to action? None, some, or all of the above?

Boggs says, “The Montgomery bus boycott was about not only transforming the system but an example of how we ourselves change in the process of changing the system.” What do you think she means?



Danny Glover and Grace Lee Boggs.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

Boggs notes that she has been able to stay involved “because I stayed in one place for the last 55 years.” What did you learn from the film about community connections and collective action? What is the importance of being grounded in community, even in the digital age?

For youth audiences: What kind of activism do your peers engage in? How about young adults around the world? How would you evaluate their efforts?

Leadership

Grace Lee Boggs is in demand as a speaker across the country and people of all ages visit her home frequently to discuss ideas. Why do you think so many people are drawn to Boggs and her ideas? Why do her ideas seem to inspire so many people?

Shea Howell acknowledges, “Grace was hard on people. There’s no question about it.” How does personality affect activism? In your experience, what personality types make good activists or good leaders and why?

Boggs says, “One of the difficulties when you’re coming out of oppression and out of a bitter past is that you get a concept of the messiah and you expect too much from your leaders. And I think we have to get to that point that we are the leaders we’ve been looking for.” Can you think of an example when people have relied too much on their leaders and not enough on themselves? What was the result? What would the implications be for your life and work if you thought of yourself as a leader?

Activist Ron Scott recalls the reaction to Coleman Young’s mayoral victory: “Somebody comes in and he says, ‘Free at last! Free at last! White folks can kiss our ass.’ I started to cry. I cried because I said these folks really think this means freedom. And that’s when I knew that we were in for a rough ride.” Why was Scott concerned? Why did African Americans want to elect people who looked like them? Why was the actual election of black officials not enough to achieve the goals of the Black Power movement?



Image from a protest during the Depression.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

Boggs acknowledges growing up “in a male-oriented movement. I subordinated myself very consciously. Then what I was noticing was that there were a lot of women around, and I felt that if I didn’t begin struggling with Jimmy, I would give them the completely wrong impression.” What responsibility do leaders have to model their political goals in their personal lives?

Activist Rich Feldman says, “As Detroit Summer was emerging and they were doing murals and they were doing gardens, the question I was always asking was, ‘What does this have to do with the movement?’ They’re nice projects. I think what I’ve begun to understand is that individuals who experience and get involved in those projects become leaders, become thinkers, become compassionate people that see themselves as makers of history.” How do projects like community gardens, murals, or Back Alley Bikes help people see themselves as change agents and leaders?

For youth audiences: Who are the young leaders that are emerging for your generation? What kinds of insights and experiences can young people bring to conversations and actions related to social change?

Revolution

What are the goals of the revolution that Grace Lee Boggs has been waging? How have goals and tactics shifted over the years?

Boggs says she doesn’t know “why people are so interested now.” Why do you think her ideas have gained popularity at this moment in time?

Why do you think that the filmmaker chose the title **American Revolutionary**? What are all its possible meanings?

Ossie Davis, describing Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs, says, “Nobody in the whole wide world has...is more dedicated to the promise and the challenge of America.” What are that “promise” and that “challenge”?

According to the filmmaker, for Grace Lee Boggs, “conversation is where you try to honestly confront the limits of your own ideas in order to come to a new understanding,” and such conversation is essential to revolution. What do you



think? What are the functions of conversation, reflection and ideas in societal transformation?

Boggs notes, “People thought of revolutions chiefly in terms of taking state power, but we’ve had revolutions and we’ve seen how the states which they have created have turned out to be like replicas of the states which they opposed.” Can you think of any examples? How does this observation relate to her conclusion that people also have to “change ourselves in order the change the world” and that revolution is not just about “oppressed versus the oppressor”?

When Boggs speaks of revolution being, in part, a transformation of ourselves, how does her vision differ from that of the self-help movement or the conservative political notion of individual responsibility (i.e., you’re on your own)?

Boggs remarks, “I think we are in a time of great hope and great danger.” What are the sources of hope? What are the looming dangers?

Boggs says, “A rebellion is an outburst of anger, but it’s not revolution. Revolution is evolution toward something much grander in terms of what it means to be a human being.” What do you think she means?

Boggs tells the story of how she initially came into contact with the black community at a meeting of people protesting rat-infested housing, including her own living quarters. Prior to that, she was “aware that people were suffering, but it was more a statistical thing.” Contact humanized the issues for her. With whom do you share common cause and what can you do or have you done to make that human connection?

Boggs says that she went to Detroit because that’s “where the workers are.” Where are the workers today?

Scott Kurashige introduces Detroit, saying, “You’ll see it’s about rebuilding a new way of life for people who’ve been completely left behind by a capitalist system, which has gone elsewhere looking for profits.” What have been the benefits and drawbacks of a capitalist economy for Detroit’s black population? How has capitalism both disenfranchised and empowered the African American community?

In the 1940s, Grace Lee Boggs was an ardent devotee of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The filmmaker says, “This is the period of Grace’s life that’s the hardest for someone in my generation to understand.” Why do you think that’s the case?

Boggs says, “The generation of radicals who were left-wingers had been silenced by McCarthyism.

There was always an atmosphere of fear. And we didn’t begin to free ourselves from that underground mentality until the mid-’50s and when we decided that we were makers of the American revolution, and that we were Americans.” How did radicals like Boggs embody the ideals of American democracy and how was their work changed by their own recognition that they were acting as patriots?

Commenting on the economic pressures that “forced” Detroit’s first black mayor, Coleman Young, to go back to business as usual, Boggs says, “That’s how history changes you. How hard it is to become part of the new and not get stuck with the old. And how powerful that tendency is to keep you boxed into the past.” What is the appeal of the status quo?

The film ends with Boggs saying, “So many institutions of our society need reinventing. The time has come for a new dream. That’s what being a revolutionary is. I don’t know what the next American revolution is going to be like, but you might be able to imagine it if your imagination were rich enough.” What does the revolution look like in your imagination?

The Role of Violence

Why does Grace Lee Boggs call the 1967 violence in Detroit a “rebellion” and not a “riot”? Why is the choice of words important?

James Boggs looked around and saw people who look like him being killed every day and asked “How many more?” For a time, he and Grace saw violence as an inevitable response to the violence that was already being done to people in their community. What do you think? Is it inevitable for state violence to be met with street violence? Is street violence an effective response?

Reflecting on the election of Coleman Young as Detroit’s first black mayor, Boggs says, “The readiness of people to accept a black mayor, I think, was tied very much to the recognition that a white mayor would no longer be able to maintain law and order.” If that’s true, did Young’s election validate the position of the leaders who advocated for violence as a strategy to achieve social change?

Describe the difference between Martin Luther King, Jr.’s and Malcolm X’s approaches to resisting oppression. For Boggs, what was the initial attraction to Malcolm X’s black nationalism over King’s nonviolent resistance? What eventually led to her shift away from that position?

In historical footage, Martin Luther King, Jr. says, “There’s a



Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs.

Photo courtesy of LeeLee Films

great deal of difference between non-resistance to evil and nonviolent resistance.” How would you describe that difference?

In the 1960s, Grace Lee Boggs saw that violence in Detroit initially galvanized the community, but she also saw where the violence led: “For a few days there was a lot of brotherhood, but after that we all got more scared of each other. As a result of the rebellions, looting and crime began to seem normal and natural.” She goes on to say that it was a “turning point in my life and it forced us to begin thinking, ‘What does a revolution mean?’” What was her answer to that question? What is your answer?

Grace and James were not in Detroit during the violence, but were blamed anyway. Grace even accepts a degree of re-

sponsibility, saying, “I did feel that if it had not been for the active organizing, the theorizing that we did, that it would not have taken the shape that it did.” In your view, should theorists or activists be held responsible for events that they inspire in which they do not actually participate?

For young audiences: Who can you think of from recent times who has used nonviolence or violence to achieve his or her goals? What do you think of their methods?



Grace Lee Boggs.

Photo courtesy of Quyen Tran

Grappling with Ideas

Of all the different leaders and thinkers in the film (Grace Lee Boggs, James Boggs, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and so on) whose world view best reflects your own?

As a student of Hegel, Grace Lee Boggs believes that every idea contains its opposite and only by struggling through the contradictions can you get closer to the truth. How has she applied this dialectical thinking to her own philosophy and activism?

One lesson that Boggs takes from Hegel is to recognize that because reality constantly changes, ideas have to change. She concludes that we are held back because “Most people think of ideas as fixed. Ideas have their power because they are not fixed. Once they become fixed, they’re already dead.” What’s your reaction to that assertion? Do some of your cherished ideas feel fixed? What would it be like to allow yourself to question them?

In historical footage, James Boggs says, “Let’s view the question of change that has to take place in a society, not as something that just somebody ought to do

just because they don’t like what’s going on, but because what is going on is making us less of a human being every day.” How does racism or discrimination make everyone “less of a human being”?

What did you learn from the film (and from Grace) about how to grapple with racism and sexism?

Grace critiques current constructions of education focused on preparing students to “compete on the world market” and argues that this is “what kids are rejecting.... So we’ve got to think about what is education for?” What do you see as the purpose of education, and how would you construct an educational system that would achieve those goals?

Reflecting on how new technologies are changing the workplace, Grace asks, “What would human beings do when they were not needed for work and for labor to produce?” How would you answer that question?



Grace says, “With people of color becoming the new American majority... how are we going to create a new vision for this country? A vision of a new kind of human being is what is demanded at this moment. So that’s your challenge.” In thinking about how to meet that challenge, what attributes, skills, or knowledge would human beings need in this new scenario that they don’t have now?

Grace says to a group of young people, “You don’t choose the times you live in. But you do choose who you want to be, and you do choose how you want to think.” What choices have you made about how you want to think?

Black Power

Ron Scott says, “I don’t know how to say this, but folks didn’t really think about Grace as a Chinese American. She was Grace, you know. She was just one of us.” Why is he hesitant about making this comment? How might it be interpreted as erasing difference—the opposite of the Black Power message?

In your view, how was it possible for separatist black nationalists to accept Grace Lee Boggs as one of their own? How and why might acceptance have been more complicated if Boggs had been white instead of Chinese?

Boggs says that the Black Power movement was about something deeper than rights. What do you think she means?

Boggs explains that the movement wasn’t about blacks wanting to be white. What’s the difference between wanting to be the same and wanting to be equal? What’s revolutionary about demanding equality and also demanding that you retain your own culture?

Boggs observes, “The word ‘power’ strikes white people as something dangerous, threatening.” Why were so many whites scared by the combination of the words “black” and “power”?

Shea Howell explains, “What a lot of people don’t realize is that the call of Black Power was to the country. It wasn’t just to African Americans.” Why would the goals of the Black Power movement benefit everyone, and not just African Americans? What changes did it require of people who belonged to the racial majority and how did those compare to what it asked of African Americans and other minorities?

Consider how each of these aspects of life in Detroit contributed to the rise of black nationalism:

- white flight, resulting in a predominantly African American city that was not run by African Americans
- neglect of African American neighborhoods in terms of distribution of city resources and services
- the construction of freeways in the 1950s
- the absence of African Americans on Detroit’s police force
- police brutality and harassment of African Americans

Renowned activist Angela Davis says, “Grace has made more contributions to the black struggle than most black people have.” Despite that, Boggs and her husband were often relegated to the background at large public events. Boggs explains, “Many people in the black movement were afraid that if they didn’t purge themselves of left-wing elements, that the movement would be destroyed.” In your view, does it ultimately strengthen or weaken a movement when leaders disavow or marginalize radical elements of their organization(s)? Whose interests were served by the purge of leftist elements from African American movements?

Identity

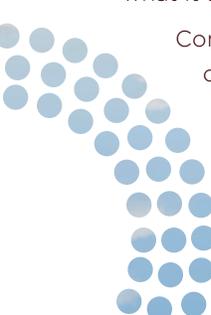
What adjectives would you use to describe Grace Lee Boggs? How does your list compare or contrast with stereotyped portraits that you have seen of Asian Americans?

Boggs says, “I think that if we stick to those categories of race and class and gender, we are stuck.” What do you think?

Boggs says, “I didn’t think [of] myself so much as Chinese American, I didn’t think [of] myself so much as a woman because the Chinese-American movement hadn’t emerged, and the women’s movement hadn’t emerged.” How do political movements influence our perceptions of ourselves? What facets of your identity have been shaped by the political and social movements that surround(ed) you?

The filmmaker questions Boggs’s seemingly unshakable confidence and absence of regret because, “self-transformation should require an internal struggle.” In these scenes, Boggs doesn’t seem to be particularly self-aware, especially for someone who values reflection. Why do you suppose that is?

Grace Lee Boggs recalls that she and her husband, James Boggs, “never really discussed personal things too much.” Why do you think that was, especially given that they were so invested in conversations about political ideas?





Grace Lee interviews Grace Lee Boggs at her home.

Photo courtesy of Quyen Tran

Boggs says, “I was a Chinese American living in an African American community and saw myself as a part of and apart from the community.” How is it possible to be both “a part of and apart from” a community? Have you experienced anything similar? What does that feel like?

Boggs surmises that, in a sense, because she decided not to have children, she “lived more the life of a man than of a woman.” In your view, what defines “manhood” and “womanhood” and what role does childbearing play?

Scott Kurashige says he has struggled to figure out where Asians fit into “a world that’s mostly white and black.” Given the legacy of slavery, where do you think people who are neither black nor white fit into America’s racialized social structure? How would society (or your life) change if race was no longer a defining category?

Kurashige observes that, “When we think about Grace in the 20th century, she is very much an outsider. In the 21st century, she represents the uniting of people from different races and different backgrounds in a way that is now defining America.” How do you think this demo-

graphic shift will change the United States and American politics?

Aging

Grace Lee Boggs makes several observations about aging:

- “You know, it’s amazing to me when I think of how as you grow older, at least for me, just exactly what I look like doesn’t matter that much to me anymore.”
- “Oh, dear, it takes so much effort just to get around.”
- On not regretting her decision not to attend President Obama’s inauguration: “I’d be thinking about different things. When you get old... I’d be thinking of where the toilets are.”

In what ways does Boggs find aging to be limiting? In what ways does she find it liberating?



Boggs reflects, “On the one hand, I have endured. And on the other hand, I have changed. I can remember swearing when I was young that I would not change, because if I changed, I would betray the revolution. And as I’ve grown older, I’ve understood that I should change and... and changing is really more honorable than not changing.” What did aging have to do with a willingness to be less politically rigid? What other insights has Boggs gained as she has aged? What did you learn from her observations?

The filmmaker says, “Every time I visit Detroit, I wonder if this will be my last conversation with Grace.” How do you think that changes the way she sees and hears Boggs?

Boggs says, “The day after Jimmy died, I got up in the morning and, uh, I decided to have some oatmeal for breakfast and that I would do that from now on... that I would just establish a routine. One gets used to living alone. I wish Jimmy were here. He would love to be here. But he isn’t. So life continues to be very challenging.” She also says, “I don’t think that enough has been written by women who are on their own after 40 years of close relationships to people... I’ve thought about what it is like to live longer than anybody else. Longer than your siblings. You’d be amazed how alone you feel in the world. I have been very conscious that I’m in the process of dying. To me, that’s not a terrible thing. So I see this as a period of transition... that I can make a transition by the things that I choose to engage in.” What do you learn from Boggs’s experience about loss and transition?

“Time is irreversible... What’s very hard for older people to understand... it’s like someone said, ‘You can’t practice being president.’ You can’t practice being old. And aging is not for sissies. You don’t know how much... how much pride, how much responsibility, how much fear are tied up in that.” What do you think surprises Boggs about aging? What challenges does the older Boggs face that she didn’t face as a young person? How does her experience compare to yours or to that of people you know?

History

James Boggs recalls that racism existed among even those in the poorest circumstances who were hopping freight trains. He says, “But you couldn’t hobo in the same car. You couldn’t ride in the same god dang car. They would whoop your butt from here to here. You know what I mean? And not only that, they’d whoop the white for riding with you!”

What did you learn from the film about the history of racial discrimination in the United States?

What did you learn from the film about:

- Marxism in the United States
- McCarthyism and U.S. government response to dissent
- The Black Power movement/black nationalism
- FBI surveillance of activists
- Migration of African Americans from the South to northern cities like Detroit and Chicago
- The labor movement
- The civil rights movement
- The women’s rights movement
- The Asian-American movement
- Detroit—freeways, white flight, auto companies

Boggs shares that in the 1940s her “party name” was Ria Stone, recalling, “Oh, in those days, if you were in a left-wing organization, you gave yourself a party name, an underground name.” If the U.S. Constitution protects free speech, why did members of left-wing organizations need underground names?

Detroit Summer participant Julia Putnam says, “I’m living in Detroit now, and I don’t want to feel inferior all the time because Detroit isn’t the city that it used to be.” How can the past become a source of rich inspiration rather than a yoke holding back younger generations of activists?

Boggs muses, “I’m very conscious of that sense of time. How long will I live? How long should I live? At the same time, I’m very conscious of what time it is on the clock of the world... As I have grown older, I think more in terms of centuries, whereas eight or nine years ago, I was only talking about decades. And it’s so obvious that we are coming to a huge turning point.” Looking through Boggs’s lens, what do you think is about to change?

Additional media literacy questions are available at:
www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php

Considering the Wisdom of Grace Lee Boggs

Use these quotes from Grace Lee Boggs as prompts for discussion, writing or brainstorming.

“You make your path by walking.”

“Creativity is the key to human liberation.”

“I’ve always thought of the negative as an opportunity to create a positive.”

“You begin with a protest, but you have to move on from there. Just being angry, just being resentful, just being outraged does not constitute revolution.”

“Why is non-violence such an important—not just tactic, not just strategy—but an important philosophy? Because it respects the capacity of human beings to grow.”

“People talk about the light bulb going on? I think that the light bulb goes on very often in conversations that people have, and we don’t pay attention to it because it’s so much a part of life.”

“There are times when expanding our imaginations is what is required. The radical movement has overemphasized the role of activism and underestimated the role of reflection.”

“Trying one thing after another and trying to learn from everything that I try—that’s the only way. The illusion that there’s a quick answer leads to burnout.”

“Evolution is not linear. Times interact.”

“History is a story not only of the past, but of the future.”

“It’s hard when you’re young to understand how reality is constantly changing, because it hasn’t changed that much during your lifetime.”

“I can remember swearing when I was young that I would not change, because if I changed, I would betray the revolution. And as I’ve grown older, I’ve understood that I should change and... and changing is really more honorable than not changing.”

“When young people can see themselves making a difference, they also become different. That has to be an integral part of the process of revolution.”

“You don’t choose the times you live in. But you do choose who you want to be, and you do choose how you want to think.”

“I’m very conscious of what time it is on the clock of the world.”



Grace Lee Boggs and Director Grace Lee.

Photo courtesy of Quyen Tran

Taking Action

- Take a Grace Lee Boggs quote from the film and make a poster of it that shows why you find it thought-provoking or inspiring. Display your art (either online or in the community or both) and invite people to add their own insights and comments.
- As you view the film, make a list of all the different types of activism in which Grace Lee Boggs engages (e.g., reading circles, writing and distributing pamphlets, organizing marches, creating a community garden). Pick one that makes sense for you and your community and start doing it where you live.
- Celebrate Black History Month, Independence Day or the anniversary of a significant local civil rights event with a screening and follow-up discussion on the role of reflection or dialectic thinking in sparking political change.
- Find veteran social justice activists in your community. Record and share their stories with youth in your community. Use the stories to spark discussions about ways that young people could improve their neighborhoods or their cities and take the lead in creating the community they envision for themselves and the next generation.
- Form a study circle to read and discuss books by Grace Lee Boggs and James “Jimmy” Boggs. Perfect the art of conversation!
- Take an intractable social issue and think about how Grace Lee Boggs might approach it. How would she use imagination, creativity and commitment to move the dial?

AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY: THE EVOLUTION OF GRACE LEE BOGGS

<http://americanrevolutionaryfilm.com>

The film's official website provides information about the film and filmmakers, as well as the Boggs Fellows.

Original Online Content on POV

To enhance the broadcast, POV has produced an interactive website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. POV's website for **American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs**—www.pbs.org/pov/americanrevolutionary—offers a broad range of exclusive online content to enhance the PBS broadcast. Watch the full film online for free for a limited time following the broadcast (July 1, 2014 to July 30, 2014), watch an extended interview with filmmaker Grace Lee, learn more about the life and work of Grace Lee Boggs and download a discussion guide and other viewing resources.

What's Your POV?

Share your thoughts about **American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs** by posting a comment at www.pbs.org/pov/americanrevolutionary

THE WORK OF GRACE LEE BOGGS**JAMES AND GRACE LEE BOGGS CENTER
TO NURTURE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

<http://boggscenter.org>

Created to honor the work of James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs, the center focuses on leadership development. Its website includes updates on Grace's work, writing from others featured in the film (including Shea Howell) and links to articles that people at the center are reading as they engage in the kind of dialectic thinking that Grace embraces.

BILL MOYERS JOURNAL: GRACE LEE BOGGS

<http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/06152007/profile2.html>

The site includes transcript and video of Bill Moyers' interview with Grace Lee Boggs, as well as links to her work and the websites of related organizations.

BOOKS

Boggs, Grace Lee. *Living for Change: An Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

Boggs, Grace Lee, with Scott Kurashige. *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism For the 21st Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Boggs, James. *The American Revolution: Pages From a Negro Worker's Notebook*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963.

Boggs, James, and Grace Lee Boggs. *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974.

Ward, Stephen M., ed. *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011.

SPEECHES

For context for Grace Lee Boggs's work in Detroit in the 1960s, see these two speeches:

Social Justice Speeches. "The Ballot or the Bullet by Malcolm X."

http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm_x_ballot.html

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle. "Speech at the Great March on Detroit."

http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_speech_at_the_great_march_on_detroit

For additional background, see the sources cited in the Background Information section of this guide and the POV website.

HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order **American Revolutionary** for educational use, go to gooddocs.net.



POV



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POV Digital www.pbs.org/pov

POV's award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, as well as listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The POV Blog is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

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Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the Wyncote Foundation, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee, The Educational Foundation of America and public television viewers. Special support provided by The Fledgling Fund. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

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Front cover: Grace Lee Boggs.
Photo courtesy of Quyen Tran



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