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# A Force More Powerful

A new documentary film tells the story of 'people power' in the 20th century.

**T**he story of how ordinary men and women used nonviolent action to defeat tyranny in the 20th century has finally been told in a powerful, feature-length documentary film. "A Force More Powerful," directed by award-winning filmmaker **Steve York**, analyzes three case studies of how political activists used nonviolent resistance as a strategic tool in their struggles against oppressors.

The U.S. Institute of Peace provided a grant to fund preliminary research for the documentary.

Narrated by actor Ben Kingsley, the film focuses on three nonviolent political campaigns, the first led by Gandhi against the British in India in the early 1900s; the second led by the Rev. James Lawson to desegregate lunch counters in Nashville, Tenn., in 1959; and the third led by Mkhuseleli Jack against white South African businesses in the Eastern Cape region in 1985–86.

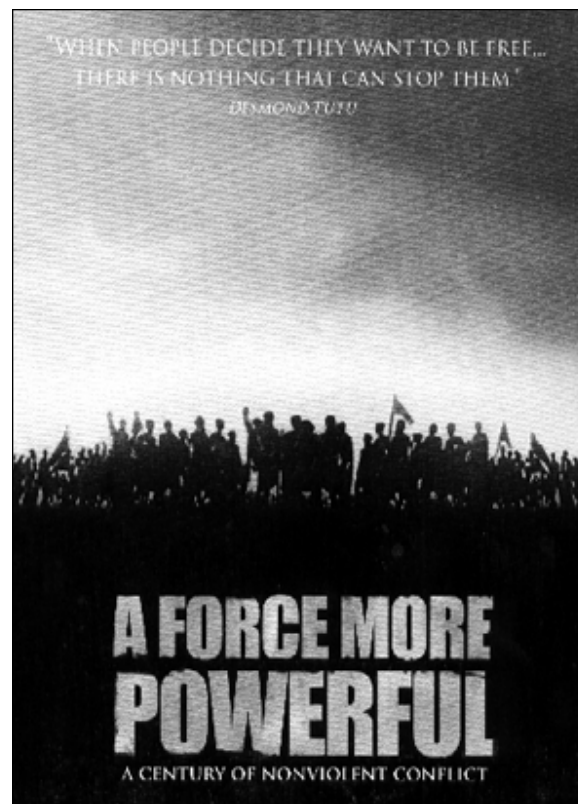
Although the stories may be familiar to some audiences, "this

film provides a different view," York says. "We really have broken new ground." Combining extraordinary archival footage and recent interviews with participants, the film is a heartening, passionate tribute to human courage and determination.

"The documentary—and the accompanying educational materials and book—will likely serve as an inspiring 'how-to-do-it' manual for people around the world struggling for human rights and freedom against oppressive regimes," notes Institute president **Richard H. Solomon**. He spoke at the film's premiere at the International Trade Center, Ronald Reagan Building, in Washington, D.C., in December 1999. Co-hosts of the screening included the Institute of Peace, Albert Einstein Institution, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and WETA-TV in Washington, D.C.

In September, PBS will broadcast the television version of "A Force More Powerful" in two 90-

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PBS will broadcast "A Force More Powerful" nationwide on two consecutive Mondays, September 18 (Part I) and September 25 (Part II) at 9 p.m.

## Film

Continued from page 1

Left to right:  
Steve York,  
Richard  
Solomon, Peter  
Ackerman, and  
Bernard  
LaFayette at the  
New York pre-  
miere of the  
film in Novem-  
ber 1999

minute segments. The first segment will be a shortened version of the film, while the second will focus on three additional case studies: the Danish resistance to Nazi occupation, the Polish Solidarity movement, and the Chilean opposition to Augusto Pinochet.

The film was produced by York and **Peter Ackerman**, in partnership with WETA, and was inspired by a book co-authored by Ackerman, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* (1994). The book outlines a series of principles that determine why nonviolent movements succeed or fail and provides six comprehensive case studies. Ackerman and **Jack DuVall**, executive producer of the film, have written another book on the subject, a companion volume to the PBS documentary



series, entitled *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Non-Violent Conflict*, which will be published by St. Martin's Press in the fall.

### The Film

"Bringing these stories to the screen has been more rewarding than anything I've ever done," York says. Before deciding to make the film, he first had to determine how much archival footage was available. While he knew there was a lot on Gandhi, he wasn't sure about other cases of nonviolent resistance. Eventually, he and his researchers pulled together material from some 50 archives. The biggest surprise came when they uncovered extensive archival footage of the Nashville sit-ins. "It was stunning to find it," he says. "Everyone thought they knew that story. When a WETA executive saw the first edit, he said it was as if he was learning about it for the first time."

The film shows Lawson teaching students how to engage in nonviolent protest, and anti-Apartheid activist Jack persuading angry youth to forgo violence. York interviews some of the participants, including U.S. Represen-

tative John Lewis (D-Ga.??), who was a college student at the time of the Nashville sit-ins. Still, most of the participants were not then, and are not now, public figures.

"They're thoughtful people who stepped forward when they believed they had ideas that could make a difference," York says. "Spending time with people like them is much better than talking to people who are powerful in any conventional sense. When I'm in the presence of James Lawson, Diane Nash, John Lewis, and Mkhushi Jack, I'm reminded that ideas matter, that human intelligence and ingenuity can prevail."

In the film, Archbishop Desmond Tutu says, "We must remember we have been given a wonderful cause, the cause of freedom. . . . When people decide they want to be free, once they have made up their minds to that, there is nothing that will stop them."

The PBS series will be distributed to schools and libraries and will be available for home use.

### Nonviolent Action as Strategy

"The purpose of this movie is to show that the underdog has a viable strategy that is nonviolent,



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including strikes, boycotts, and other forms of non-cooperation capable of putting enormous pressure on the invader, the authoritarian, and the tyrant,” says Ackerman. “We hope after seeing this film, that people around the world will come to understand that there exists ‘a force more powerful’ [than violence] to rectify injustice and reduce the horrors of war.”

The film and books seek to develop a more precise understanding of how nonviolent political conflict actually works. Nonviolent action has often been viewed as an expression of goodness or heroism—something not easily subject to explanation or development, Ackerman explains. But this approach doesn’t make a lot of sense, given the number of countries that have become democratic in the last 30 years through nonviolent resistance—Poland in 1981, the Philippines in 1986, Chile in 1988, and Czechoslovakia in 1989. “We have looked at nonviolent action as purposeful, strategic behavior,” Ackerman says.

While Gandhi had a long-held spiritual commitment to nonviolence, that commitment also developed a strategic dimension, Ackerman notes. “Most cases of nonviolent struggle have been undertaken by people who had no viable military options to defend their freedom and their lives,” he stresses. Viewing and analyzing nonviolent actions as part of a political strategy can help activists improve their efficiency and effectiveness. “There is a long tradition of discourse on the conduct of war,” Ackerman concludes. “It seems reasonable and even imperative to apply the same logic and methods to nonviolent resistance.”

## \$1.5 Million Donated to Building Campaign

A private family foundation is helping the Institute advance its architectural planning for a permanent headquarters near the National Mall.



A private family foundation has made a contribution of \$1.5 million to the U.S. Institute of Peace’s Capital Campaign to build a permanent headquarters. The Institute’s new home will be located at the northwest corner of the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

“We are truly grateful for this generous and far-sighted gift,” says Institute president **Richard H. Solomon**. “The donation represents a strong vote of confidence in our building project.” The foundation wishes to remain anonymous.

In its new headquarters facility, the Institute will create a research and training center in support of the nation’s commitment to the nonviolent management of international conflict. The center will be constructed on a three-acre site at 23rd Street and Constitution Avenue NW, within view of the nation’s most important war memorials.

The donation will be used to advance the architectural design phase of the building project. A planning assessment of the Institute’s future space needs and program plans for the new facility is currently underway. This preliminary evaluation is examining the size of the building that can be constructed as well as such issues as traffic patterns and parking arrangements.