PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL

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AMC 19TH STREET EAST
FOLLOWED BY A Q&A WITH DIRECTOR GINI RETICKER AND PRODUCER ABBY DISNEY

STUDY GUIDE
**ABOUT THE FILM**

*Pray the Devil Back to Hell* is the extraordinary story of a small band of Liberian women who came together in the midst of a bloody civil war, took on the violent war-lords and corrupt Charles Taylor regime, and won a long-awaited peace for their shattered country in 2003.

As the rebel noose tightened upon Monrovia, and peace talks faced collapse, the women of Liberia—Christian and Muslims united—formed a thin but unshakable white line between the opposing forces, and successfully demanded an end to the fighting; armed only with white T-shirts and the courage of their convictions.

In one remarkable scene, the women barricaded the site of stalled peace talks in Ghana, and announced they would not move until a deal was done. Faced with eviction, they invoked the most powerful weapon in their arsenal—threatening to remove their clothes. It worked.

The women of Liberia are living proof that moral courage and non-violent resistance can succeed, even where the best efforts of traditional diplomacy have failed.

Their demonstrations culminated in the exile of Charles Taylor and the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa’s first female head of state, and marked the vanguard of a new wave of women taking control of their political destiny around the world.

This remarkable chapter of world history was on its way to being lost forever. The Liberian war and peace movement were largely ignored as the international press focused on Iraq. Moreover, the women’s own modesty helped obscure this great accomplishment.

*Pray the Devil Back to Hell* reconstructs the moment through interviews, archival footage and striking images of contemporary Liberia. It is compelling testimony to the potential of women worldwide to alter the history of nations.
ABOUT THE FILMMAKER:

Gini Reticker is the Oscar-nominated director of Asylum, a short about a Ghanaian woman who fled from female genital mutilation. She produced and directed the Emmy Award-winning Ladies First (for PBS’s Wide Angle), focusing on the role of women in rebuilding Rwanda. She directed The Class of 2006, about the first 50 women in Morocco to graduate from an imam academy in Rabat; A Decade Under the Influence, winner of an award from the National Board of Review; Out of the Darkness: Women and Depression, winner of both an Emmy and a Gracie Award; and Blazes of Light, which received a Gracie Award and an Emmy nomination. Reticker earlier edited films like Roger & Me, The Awful Truth: The Romantic Comedy, and Fire From the Mountain.

ABOUT THE PRODUCER:

Abigail E. Disney (Producer) is the Founder and the President of the Daphne Foundation, a progressive, social change foundation that makes grants to grassroots, community-based organizations working with low-income communities in New York City. Since 1991, the Daphne Foundation has made millions of dollars in grants in areas ranging from women’s rights to AIDS advocacy, children’s health, labor conditions, religion, and environmentalism. The Foundation provides ongoing general operating support to its grantees, along with grants for technical assistance, infrastructure improvement and resource development.

ABOUT MAKING PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL:

“When Abby Disney first approached me to direct Pray the Devil Back to Hell, I had some trepidation. All the stories coming out of Liberia had been so bleak, the violence against women appalling, the forced conscription of child soldiers heartwrenching. I wondered if I could immerse myself in that material for the length of time it takes to make a documentary. And then, we met Leymah Gbowee, one of the main characters portrayed in the film. All of my trepidation turned instantly into unfettered enthusiasm. I couldn’t believe how fortunate I was to be able to tell the extraordinary story of these women who had joined together to bring peace to their devastated country. Their remarkable accomplishment had been virtually ignored by the press and was on its way to being forgotten. Being part of ensuring that their story shines has been an absolute.”

— Gini Reticker
**ABOUT THE WOMEN FROM THE FILM:**

**Leymah Gbowee** was a 17-year-old girl when the war first came to Monrovia. As she says, she turned, “from a child into an adult in a matter of hours.” As the war dragged on Leymah had difficulty focusing on anything but her thwarted opportunities to go to college, and out of bitterness she dodged any political or social involvement. But as time wore on she came to see that it would be up to the citizens of Liberia, especially its women, to bring the country back from the insanity of civil war. She trained as a trauma counselor and worked with the ex-child soldiers of Taylor’s army. The more she worked with them the more she came to see that they were too were victims. Leymah joined the Woman in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and quickly rose to leadership thanks to her leadership and organizing skills. She brought all the women of the Christian Churches together into a group called the Christian Women’s Initiative and began issuing a series of calls for peace. Soon she formed a coalition with the women in the Muslim organizations in Monrovia and eventually Liberian Mass Action for Peace came into being.

**Etweda “Sugars” Cooper** is one of the doyennes of the Liberian women’s movement and is known for speaking out. In 1994, during one of the darkest hours of the civil war in Liberia, she and other women -- tired of being victimized and frustrated at the stalemate in the peace process -- founded the Liberia Women Initiative to advocate for disarmament and free and fair elections, and also to bring pressure to bear on stakeholders for the inclusion of women in negotiating a settlement of the Liberian conflict. Throughout 14 years of civil war she used mass action including picketing, sit ins and marches involving grassroots and professional women and their groups to attract world attention to the plight of women and children and to urge the international community to take action to end the war.

**Asatu Bah Kenneth**, has been a police officer for 25 years—since before the war began. As the president of the Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association, Asatu was invited to the first meeting of WIPNET and then to the launch of the Christian Women’s Initiative. She was so moved by what she heard that she stood up and pledged to mobilize the Muslim women of Liberia to help bring peace to Liberia. And she did, creating the Liberian Muslim Women’s Organization, Liberian Mass Action for Peace came into being when the two organizations joined. It was the first time Christian and Muslim women had worked together in Liberia. Her nickname is the “stabilizer” because she doesn’t take sides. Today she is Liberia’s Deputy Chief of Police, (the Chief of Police is also a woman) and is focused on bringing more women into the security sector. She is proud that her profession allows her to be part of the international peace-building community.

**Etty Weah**, was one of the hundreds of ordinary women who became involved with WIPNET and the Liberian Mass Action for Peace. She was one of the many women who wore white and sat on the field day in and day out. Rain or shine. Bullets or no bullets. Before the war, she used to sell food in front of her house in one of the suburbs of Monrovia. As a regular church goer she responded to a call from the Christian Women’s Initiative to become involved in Liberian Mass Action for Peace, and got to know Leymah. She was moved to attend the meeting because she deemed all Liberian women to be victims and thought there was strength in numbers if their voices were to ever be heard. As the war drew closer to Monrovia, and as the mother of two boys, she also feared for all the children who would be conscripted.

**Vaiba Flomo** was working with the Lutheran church’s trauma healing program when Leymah came to intern with the program and the two quickly became good friends. Vaiba, haunted by the constant reminders of war -- children dying from hunger or being abandoned because their parents couldn’t feed them -- began to press Leymah to mobilize the women of Liberia, because as she says there’s not a single woman in Liberia who will tell you that she doesn’t have pain from the crisis. Together with Leymah they worked to bring the Christian and Muslim women’s groups together. Where there was some initial reluctance to engage with the other faith, Vaiba developed the message: “Can the bullet pick and choose? Does the bullet know Christian from Muslim?” Reluctance faded into action, and the women began their campaign.

**Janet Johnson Bryant** was a journalist. Much of the time she worked for the Catholic radio station, Radio Veritas in Monrovia. Her beat was the Executive Mansion, occupied by Charles Taylor, who had a virtual stranglehold over the media. Journalists were often openly bribed during press conferences. She also hosted a radio show about women’s issues. Janet met the women of WIPNET when she reported on them for a story. She soon became part of their outreach and advocacy program. Like Asatu, she used her position to garner important, strategic information that benefited WIPNET. In particular, Janet helped launch the Liberian Mass Action for Peace. Together with Leymah, Sugars and Asatu she helped draft the first press release calling for an immediate ceasefire and for all warring factions to sit down at the peace table. Janet then broadcast the message announcing the first meeting of the women in the field opposite Taylor’s house – hundreds of women showed up and stayed. She now lives in Lowell, MA.

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Liberia (officially the Republic of Liberia) is a country on the west coast of Africa, bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Atlantic Ocean. The name Liberia comes from “liberty” or “Land of the Free”, because the country was colonized by freed African American slaves in 1822. African-Americans gradually migrated to the colony and became known as Americo-Liberians, where many present day Liberians trace their ancestry. In 1847, the Americo-Liberian settlers declared the independence of the Republic of Liberia. Since 1989, Liberia has been in a state of flux witnessing two civil wars, the First Liberian Civil War (1989–1996), and the Second Liberian Civil War (1999–2003), displacing hundreds of thousands of people and devastating the country’s economy. More than 200,000 people are estimated to have been killed in the civil wars.

THE RULE OF CHARLES TAYLOR

Charles Taylor served as President of Liberia from 1997 to 2003. He was Africa’s most prominent warlord during the First Liberian Civil War in the early 1990s, and was elected president at the end of that conflict. His dysfunctional government and brutal regime lead to a new rebellion in 1999. Taylor ruthlessly violated human rights by using child soldiers and endorsing brutal treatment of civilians (including torture, murder, and rape). He is accused of funding Sierra Leone’s former rebels, the Revolutionary United Front, by selling diamonds on their behalf and buying weapons for them. He was subsequently forced into exile, and is now in detention in the International Criminal Court, and is being charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity.

OTHERS WHO HAVE FOSTERED CHANGE PEACEFULLY

The women of the Liberian peace movement won a long-awaited peace for their shattered country. Throughout history, and across the world, countless others have dedicated their lives to changing the world though peaceful means. Here are a few profiles of prolific leaders who have fostered change peacefully:

DALAI LAMA

Jetsun Jamphel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso

Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso is the fourteenth and current Dalai Lama. He is the political and spiritual leader of Tibetans worldwide. He is influential as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, the world’s most well-known Buddhist monk, and leader of the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India. On November 17, 1950, at the age of fifteen, he was enthroned as Tibet’s Dalai Lama, thus becoming Tibet’s most important political ruler. This occurred only one month after the People’s Liberation Army’s invasion of Tibet. Buddhist monk, humanitarian, spiritual teacher and exiled leader of Tibet for his example of compassion and forgiveness following the massacre of his people and culture by the occupying army of China, he was awarded the Courage of Conscience award March 24, 1991. On December 10, 1989 the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

ADOLFO PEREZ ESQUIVEL

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel was the recipient of the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize. He is noted for leading protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas and for alleging that the Argentinean police are forming children into paramilitary squads, an operation he compares to the creation of Nazi Germany’s Hitler Youth. In the 1960s, Pérez Esquivel began working with popularly based Latin American Christian pacifist groups. In 1974 he decided to relinquish his teaching as he was chosen as coordinator general for a network of Latin America-based communities promoting liberation of the poor through non-violent means. In 1980 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in the defense of human rights.
DESMOND TUTU
SOUTH AFRICA

Desmond Tutu is a South African cleric and activist who rose to worldwide fame during the 1980s as an opponent of apartheid. Tutu was elected and ordained the first black South African Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, and primate of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (now the Anglican Church of Southern Africa). He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, the Albert Schweitzer Prize for Humanitarianism, and the Magubela prize for liberty in 1986. He is committed to stopping global AIDS and has served as the honorary chairman for the Global AIDS Alliance. In February 2007 he was awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, President of India. Tutu is widely regarded as “South Africa’s moral conscience”

NELSON MANDELA
SOUTH AFRICA

Through his 27 years in prison Nelson Mandela became the most widely known figure in the struggle against apartheid. Among opponents of apartheid in South Africa and internationally, he became a cultural icon of freedom and equality. Following his release from prison in 1990, his switch to a policy of reconciliation and negotiation helped lead the transition to a multi-racial democracy in South Africa. Since the end of apartheid, has been widely praised, even among white South Africans and former opponents. He became the first president of post-apartheid South Africa and won a Nobel Peace Prize for his work.

MOTHER TERESA
INDIA

Mother Teresa, a humanitarian and advocate for the poor and helpless, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. For over forty years, she ministered to the needs of the poor, sick, orphaned and dying of Calcutta, India. By 1996, she was operating 517 missions in more than 100 countries. Over the years, Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity grew from twelve to thousands serving the “poorest of the poor” in 450 centers around the world. The first Missionaries of Charity home in the United States was established in the South Bronx, New York; by 1984 the order operated nineteen establishments throughout the country.

MAHATMA GANDHI
INDIA

Gandhi pioneered the resistance of tyranny through mass civil disobedience, firmly founded upon total non-violence, which led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom for civil rights and freedom across the world. Gandhi led nationwide campaigns for the alleviation of poverty, for the liberation of women, for brotherhood amongst differing religions and ethnicities, for an end to caste discrimination, and for the economic self-sufficiency of his country, but above all for the independence of India from foreign domination.
What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa
by Meredith Turshen and Clotilde Twagiramariya
This is the first book to describe and analyze the experience of women in African civil wars. A mixture of reportage, testimony and scholarship, the book includes contributions from women in Chad, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa and Sudan. The political context of these conflicts is outlined in an introduction to each chapter. The book profiles women's responses to war, as combatants as well as victims, and describes the groups women organize in the aftermath.

Gandhi and King: The Power of Nonviolent Resistance
by Michael J. Nojeim
This book presents a comparative analysis of their legacies that demonstrates how powerful peace and love can be, even in the face of hate-filled oppression, aggression, and violence. No two individuals had a greater impact on the 20th century's monumental struggles for freedom, justice, and peace.

Liberia: The Heart of Darkness
by Gabriel I.H. Williams
Accounts of Liberia's Civil war and its destabilizing effects in South Africa.

FURTHER READING:

Lysistrata
by Aristophanes
Lysistrata, which loosely translated to “she who disbands armies”, is a Greek comedy, written in 411 BC. Led by the title character, Lysistrata, the story’s female characters barricade the public funds building and withhold sex from their husbands to end the Peloponnesian War and secure peace. In doing so, Lysistrata engages the support of women from Sparta, Boeotia, and Corinth. All of the other women are first against Lysistrata’s suggestion to withhold sex.

Iron Ladies of Liberia (2007):
A look at the achievements and struggles of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first woman elected as President of the African nation of Liberia.

Ghandi (1982):
Biography of Mahatma Gandhi, the lawyer who became the famed leader of the Indian revolts against the British through his philosophy of non-violent protest.

Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion (2002):
A film about the state of Chinese occupied Tibet and its history of oppression and resistance.

FURTHER WATCHING:

In addition to using their bodies as a force to physically blockade exits, how do the women use their sexuality as a form of leverage?

How were children manipulated and used as soldiers in Liberia?

In a state of absolute hopelessness, a group of women sat in groups wearing white t-shirts, and commanded a massive political shift—what does this make you feel that you are capable of?

What did the women's white t-shirts come to signify in Monrovia?

A memorable quote from the movie is, “does the bullet know Christian from Muslim?” How does this speak to religious differences? Can you think of other historical instances were people with cultural or religious differences found a common group in order to fight for the greater good?

Much of Pray the Devil Back to Hell is composed of archival footage—as a teenager living in New York City, what was your reaction to seeing real wartime footage of the raging and brutal violence that was documented in Liberia?

How has nonviolent resistance been used in the United States to force social and political changes?
TAKE ACTION:

- Start a Human Rights Club and raise awareness!
- Revive your voice! Sign the petition to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Just go online and join the cause: http://www.youthforhumanrights.org/getactive/petition.html
- If you are old enough to vote, do so! Policymakers are debating, writing, and signing the laws and codes that we all live by. Make sure that you are an informed voter!
- Let people know how you feel about the mistreatment of others in your community, your country or the world. You can form facebook groups, write letters to newspapers or elected representatives, or blog your opinions!
- **Teach a class***
  - Choose an issue that affects your community and that you care about.
  - Make a list of people you want to invite to the classes. Invite individuals affected by the issue as well as those who are knowledgeable about the issue. Don’t forget to get parental consent for the participants.
  - Choose a comfortable and convenient location to host your classes.
  - Do your research. Consult with knowledgeable adults and experts, hold discussions, and learn everything you can about the issue you have chosen, including causes and solutions.
  - Prepare materials for the class and then conduct the classes.
  - Follow up. Ask participants for advice on how to improve the class, invite new participants and guest speakers, and continue to educate others!

* from www.unicef.org/voy

ORGANIZATIONS TO CONSIDER

- **Global Youth Connect**
  GYC’s mission is to build and support a community of youth who are actively promoting and protecting human rights, and to educate and inspire the next generation to work for peaceful change. www.globalyouthconnect.org

- **Youth for Human Rights International**
  Youth for Human Rights International (YHRI) is an independent non-profit corporation headquartered in Los Angeles, with the purpose to educate people in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights so they become valuable advocates for tolerance and peace. www.youthforhumanrights.org

- **Human Rights Watch**
  Human Rights Watch stands with victims and activists to prevent discrimination, uphold political freedom, protect people from inhumane conduct in wartime, and bring offenders to justice. It was started in 1978 by Helsinki Watch to monitor the Soviet Union and ensure their compliance with the landmark Helsinki Accords. The main headquarters is now in New York. www.hrw.org

- **Mobilization for Global Justice**
  Non-hierarchical nonviolent organization of individuals and organizations that promotes the arts, conducts workshops, facilitates nonviolent direct actions, educates, organizes campaigns, empowers, and aims to rip injustice from its roots. www.globalizethis.org

- **UNICEF Voices of Youth**
  The mission of UNICEF Voices of Youth is to offer all children and adolescents, including the hard-to-reach, a safe and supportive global cyberspace within which they can explore, discuss and partner on issues related to human rights and social change, as well as develop their awareness, leadership, community building, and critical thinking skills through active and substantive participation with their peers and with decision makers globally. http://www.unicef.org/voy/

- **Youth Venture**
  Youth Venture was launched with the vision that everyone in society could take initiative and address social needs, rather than looking to the elite few who lead today. Youth Venture helps teams of people start new youth-led organizations. www.genv.net