



AMERICAN GYPSY

a film by Jasmine Dellal

A STRANGER IN EVERYBODY'S LAND

LITTLE MUST PRODUCTIONS

GRADE LEVEL: High School, College.

SUBJECT AREAS: Social Studies, Sociology, Current Events, U.S. & World History, Behavioral Studies, Race, Civics, Peace & Conflict Resolution, Anthropology, Ethnology, World Civilizations, Cultures, Holocaust Studies, Human Rights, Criminal Justice, Civil Rights, Language Arts, Ethnographic Film, Media Literacy, Film Studies, Romani Studies

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED:

- Viewing time (80 mins) divided as necessary for class schedule
- Post-screening presentations & discussions

GOALS: Over the course of this lesson, students will:

- Use viewing and note-taking skills to interpret the film, text and video clips
- Work in groups to research and develop discussions on varied topics
- Examine Romani history & compare with modern Roma in their broader communities
- Learn to recognize when media presents a subject with prejudice or bias
- Relate the film's issues with current events on TV, the internet, films, fiction or everyday life
- Discuss & Debate the notion of the 'other' & how society functions best with differing cultures

STUDY GUIDE CREDITS:

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Online version available at: www.AmericanGypsy.com

INSIDE:

- ROMANI ROOTS & CULTURE TODAY
- STEREOTYPING & CRIME
- HISTORY - SLAVERY & HOLOCAUST
- CLASS ACTIVITIES & QUESTIONS
- FILMMAKING & STYLE
- DIRECTOR'S NOTES
- REFERENCES & RESOURCES
- GLOSSARY



A STUDY GUIDE FOR
EDUCATORS & STUDENTS

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Introduction:

About the film:

This study guide is designed to be used in conjunction with “American Gypsy: A Stranger in Everybody’s Land,” a film that follows the story of Jimmy Marks, a flamboyant community leader who becomes passionately obsessed with fighting a **civil rights** battle to defend his family, his history and his honor.

There are one million Gypsies, or Rom, in America, people who most Americans know nothing about. Never before has a camera been allowed in to explore their world. Shot over the course of five years, this feature-length documentary tells the tale of one Romani family in the United States that has broken the wall of **secrecy** surrounding their people.

“American Gypsy” is a glimpse of an **immigrant** world that is either on the verge of extinction or at a critical turning point for survival. It is a world that most of us have never had the chance to visit. This documentary is the first to present it on screen.

While some parts of the story may seem unique to the Marks family, there are many areas which are more broadly relevant, not only to all Roma, but to non-Roma as well. The issues of **assimilation**, isolation, scapegoating, **gender**, **education**, and what it means to be an American, all rise to the surface. The viewer becomes more fully aware of the tensions that exist when an ethnic group is not fully integrated into the dominant culture. We also see how a story can change depending on the vantage point and beliefs of both the teller and the listener (or viewer).

Note to educators:

This Study Guide contains topics that give a brief overview of Roma **history** and **customs** to guide students and educators towards a deeper understanding of the issues raised in the film “American Gypsy.” Later in the guide there are suggested discussions, activities, and questions designed to help students realize the differences and similarities between the issues facing the Roma and the issues that other people face in daily life. Additionally, some short exercises will provide teachers with ideas about how to engage students in both the technical and narrative aspects of the film.

A glossary and references are provided at the end.

Culture:

Roma: Roots to Race

The people who are often known as “Gypsies” probably got that name by mistake. People belonging to this population use the name “Roma” (or Rom, or Romani). It was in the 14th century that large groups of foreign nomads started arriving in Europe and many thought that they were migrants from Egypt, so they were called “Gypsies” as an abbreviation (‘gyptians). In fact, the Roma came from the Indian subcontinent, and had no Egyptian blood whatsoever. Still today, most of the world knows this population by its false name “Gypsies.”

There is a common misconception that to be Romani, or “Gypsy”, is to embrace a certain lifestyle. But in fact, the Roma are a distinct ethnicity, sharing a common blood and heritage with its roots in India. The Roma have also at times been viewed as a distinct “race”; this term has sometimes been used for political reasons to support ostracism and persecution of the Roma people, including slavery and genocide (see later sections on pgs 10-13).

Many scholars today agree that the ancestors of the Roma probably left India as part of a mercenary army which traveled through Persia and ended up continuing west. Although the precise timing of the migrations is still contested, it is commonly believed that the Roma first left Northern India sometimes between 800 and 1020 AD. By the 1400’s they had reached most countries in Europe and, at least a century later, Roma began traveling to the Americas. Other theories focus on the Roma’s roles as entertainers or camp followers for the warriors. But whatever their origins, the vast majority of the descendants of those original migrants ultimately supported themselves as artisans or practitioners of other portable trades. It is likely that these first Roma traveled through Persia and continued westward, with some smaller groups staying behind as the Roma passed across the Bosphorus to Constantinople and up into the Balkans. The smaller groups eventually developed into tribes or Romani nations, known as “vitse” – these vitse are usually grouped by sharing a common original trade (e.g. horses, or metalwork), or ancestors who were settled in a common place (e.g. Serbia, or Britain).

The first Roma probably came to America as crewmembers on Columbus’ ships. Since that time, there have been many migrations, including a wave to North and South America after slavery ended in Romania in 1864. Another large wave occurred after the fall of the iron curtain; according to some, this last wave is still in effect today.

A FEW FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH ROMANI ROOTS:

Mother Theresa - Humanitarian
Denny Laine - Musician
Adam Ant - Musician
Yul Brynner - Actor
Charlie Chaplin - Actor
Fairuza Balk - Actress
Michael Caine - Actor
Freddie Prinze - Actor
Tracey Ullman - Actress
Bob Hoskins - Actor
Django Reinhardt - Musician
Gheorghe Zamfir - Musician
Rickie Lee Jones - Musician



Romani Diaspora

Romani people live all around the world, but it is difficult to ascertain precise **population** figures for each country. Partly, this is because many Roma feel safer not being recognized, so they are often reluctant to be exposed by a census and prefer to avoid negative attention by remaining below the radar. Also, sometimes authorities find reasons to falsify their region's Romani population – some underplay the existence of Romani residents to maintain a certain status, others exaggerate the population to receive more minority funding.

Nonetheless, here are some general figures: The largest Romani population by far is estimated to be between 1.8 and 2.5 million in **Romania**, where the Roma were enslaved for 500 years until the 1860's. In **Spain**, where the Roma introduced the music and dance styles that eventually came to be known as Flamenco, there are about 700,000. One of the smallest populations is in **Canada**, where there are an estimated 80,000 Roma. It is generally accepted that approximately one million Roma live in **North America** today; however, the more commonly-used and abridged U.S. Census does not give an option for persons to identify themselves as Roma, and many American Rom, like others, opt not to self-identify.



00:08:19 "the world calls us Gypsies, we call each other Roma..."

More Reading & Stats: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani_people_by_country

VITSE/TRIBES

Here is a list of a few of the names of vitse, or clans/tribes (more details about tribes can be found on the internet).

Aurari: Clan name derived from word for Goldwashers. Also called Zlatari (Romanian).

Kalderash: Clan name derived from the Romanian word calderar (coppersmith). Many emigrated away from Romania after slavery ended in the 19th century. Very numerous today in the USA.

Machwaya (or Machváyá): Balkan Roma population originating in the Serbian province of Matsva. Machwaya and Kalderash are probably the most numerous vitse in the USA today.

Manouches: French Roma, from a Romani word "manús", meaning "person"

Romanichal (or Romnichal, Romnichel): Name for a Roma group who from northern Europe, especially Great Britain.

Sinti (or Senti, Cinti): Name for Roma populations who live mainly in Germany, but with some families now in Belgium, the Netherlands, northern Italy, Poland and Russia.

Ursari: Name for clans who traditionally trained bears. Urs is the Romanian word for a bear.



NATIONAL IDENTITY & FLAG:

The Romani flag and national anthem were created at The World Romani Congress in 1971. Blue represents the sky and the heavens, and symbolizes spiritual values. Green represents the land on which all things grow, and symbolizes earthly values. The red wheel, with the sixteen-spoked "chakra", represents the Indian origin of the Roma, and symbolizes movement and progress. The Romani flag looks similar to the flag of India.

Language:

The Romani language (called “Romanes”, or “Romani” in English) has remained remarkably intact. Despite a thousand years of migration, it still has clear roots in the ancient Indian language Sanskrit. Yet, after centuries spent in contrasting regions and cultures of the world, there are many dialects within the Romani diaspora today. Romani has adapted to include words from each adopted homeland; Armenian, Greek and Farsi were incorporated early on the migration route, and more recent vocabulary comes from Slavic and Romance languages, among others.

In the film, Jimmy counts in Romani with his granddaughter, and the words used for counting to ten are almost identical to those in modern-day Hindi (except 7 & 8 are from Greek). Many American Roma today express concern that younger generations are losing touch with certain Romani traditions, including the language itself, which is gradually being replaced by English in many Roma households.

In some countries, past rulers made it illegal for the Romani language to be spoken. For example, Spanish “gitanos” totally lost their language – although some modern Spanish Roma are now learning it and trying to revive it among the young communities today.



00:08:34 Jimmy counts to his granddaughter in Romani - just like Hindi.

SIMILAR VOCABULARY

HINDI	ROMANI	ENGLISH
Ek	Yek	One
Do	Duy	Two
Teen	Trin	Three
Kar	Ker	To do
Tel	Kil	Oil
Namak	Pon	Salt
Pani	Pani	Water
Kala	Kalo	Black
Kharee	Kin	To buy
Nak	Nak	Nose
Raat	Rat	Night
Kanun	Kanuni	Law

Djelem Djelem – The Romani Anthem

Romanes (Original lyrics)

Djelem, Djelem, longone dromensa,
 Maladilem bakhtale Romensa.
 A, Romale, katar tumen aven,
 E tsarensa, bakhtale dromensa.
 A, Romale,
 A, Chhavale.
 Vi mansa su bari familiya,
 Mudardala e kali legiya;
 Aven mansa sar e lumnyatse Roma
 Kai phutaile e Romane dromensa.
 Ake vriama, usti Rom akana,
 Amen Khudasa misto kai kera.
 A, Romale,
 A, Chhavale.

English

I traveled, traveled long roads,
 Everywhere meeting happy Roma.
 Oh Roma, where do you come from?
 With tents on this happy road?
 Oh Roma,
 Oh my Romani children.
 Once I had a big family,
 But they were killed by the Black Legion;
 Come with me, all Roma of the world,
 Help swell the Romani roads.
 Now is the time, rise up Roma,
 We will triumph through action.
 Oh Roma,
 Oh my Roma children.

Culture & Custom

The survival of customs and culture is indicative of the Roma people's insularity and a sustained, strict and private adherence to the community laws and belief systems. It is certainly unusual for a people without its own country to maintain traditions so wholly as the Roma have managed over such an expanse of time and geography. Perhaps it has always been difficult for immigrant communities to strike a good balance between old and new – even today, one of the hotly debated issues of globalization is about minority cultures: how can we integrate enough to be accepted, but not assimilate so much as to lose our rich heritage?

As Dr. Ian Hancock points out in the film, the continuity of Romani culture is probably partly due to the ritualized importance in most Romani communities of purity and cleanliness, and to the avoidance of contamination by the gadje (non-Romani people). Perhaps it began as a way to keep clean while traveling, or to keep a safe distance from dangerous outsiders, but today Romani laws of cleanliness and separation are very strict and sacred.

From police footage used in the documentary, we witness the Marks family and household being searched after a theft charge is brought against them by the City of Spokane. Following this, we watch as the family processes, recuperates, and responds to this over the course of many years. One of the more devastating consequences of the search itself is the irrefutable burden of marimé, or defilement, which governs the Romani law of pollution and expulsion.

What is Marimé ?

Most Roma believe that there are distinctions between behavior that is pure, vujo or wuzho, and polluted, marimé. Roma culture is organized in part by these cleanliness rituals, and the taboos against pollution dictate the daily lives of many traditional Romani communities. There are various remedies or punishments for a person who has become marimé. Minor offenses, or accidental ones, can be forgiven by those present at the time of the offense. More serious ones, as in the Marks case, must be dealt with by the community and, commonly, by the kris.



Early in my research, I came across the poignant story of Papusza, a Romani poet who lived in Poland in the 20th century. She was a very popular representative of her people, and then her poems were published and garnered great success among the non-Roma. But her own community saw her as a traitor – she had gone too far in showing the culture to outsiders who might use it against them (and they did!). For this offense, Papusza was declared marimé (at a kris) and forever ostracized from the Romani world. One of my favorite ever novels is Zoli (2007), which tells a gripping fictionalized version of Papusza's story. An interview with the author Colum McCann is at: www.colummccann.com/interviews/hayes.htm

What is a Kris?

A kris is a community tribunal to enforce laws and customs. So, in addition to complying with the laws of local governments, most traditional Roma communities use long-established systems of Romani justice to settle disputes. In the Roma view, the Marks family had been polluted because their home and women were searched by the police, and this resulted in an informal court trial called a kris.

A kris is usually held at a neutral location by a kumpania (group of community members), and the plaintiffs and defendants both advocate for themselves. The whole family is welcome to attend, offer support, and act as witnesses. Respected elders are called together to deliver a judgment that all parties must follow. If the defendant is found guilty, penalties can range from the largely-symbolic (like paying all court expenses, including food and drink for the judges) to permanent banishment from the community.



00:19:11 > 00:19:57 "Ian Hancock begins to explain Romani survival through the notion of purity & pollution"

00:23:04 > 00:32:44 "The Marks Family & Romani Justice: Ian Hancock on marime; the kris and its consequences"

00:43:43 > 00:44:17 "Bill Duna speaks of social status between different Romani groups."



00:30:39 > 00:32:44 "Jimmy discusses the decision to ask for a kris and how it affected the family, particularly his father"

Stereotyping

Stereotyping: Why Do We Say “Gypsies Steal”?

“A minority group has ‘arrived’ only when it has the right to produce some fools and scoundrels without the entire group paying for it.”

– Carl Rowan (author & politician 1925–2000)

After every public screening of this film, someone in the audience asks: “Why do people say that Gypsies are criminals or thieves?” However, maybe the larger question should be: Why is any group stereotyped? Is it always the people in power who create the negative images of minorities? Is there usually some anchor in the truth? And should we look at the reasons for different behavior? Theft is wrong because it deprives someone of what is rightfully theirs – but is there a difference between stealing out of greed, and stealing because your children are starving and it is impossible to get a job when the laws of the land will not employ people from your background? (This was the situation for many Rom when they first came to Europe). Or is it always wrong to take what is not yours, and always right to condemn that? I don’t know the answer to this question, but I think it is worth asking.

It is helpful to try to understand where some of the negative attitudes towards Roma come from, and why they persist. One might blame Hollywood, where Gypsy characters are nearly always thieves even if they are romantic or magical (e.g. the Hunchback of Notre Dame), but movies are only 100 years old and prejudice is in old paintings (e.g. Georges La Tour’s “The Fortune Teller” from 1632) or ancient children’s nursery rhymes (like the one at the beginning of the film). In the following excerpts, the Romani scholar Dr. Ian Hancock further explores this question:



“The manipulation by societies in power of the identities of subordinate groups is achieved in many ways. One such way is through discriminatory legislation, such as that enacted against the Romani people in almost every land, including the United States. Another is through the media representation, both factual and fictional. This last category, the portrayal of Gypsies in poetry, film and novels, is the most effective in establishing such negative feelings because they are absorbed subliminally by children, at a time when they are most susceptible to acquiring society’s attitudes.

“The persistent, relentless portrayal of Roma as rootless, lawless, immoral, childlike thieves, as a people for whom the basic human concepts of truth and beauty, obligation and ownership do not exist, and who are ignorant of danger and never seek warmth or peace or quiet, ... will ensure that anti-Gypsy prejudice will remain firmly a part of Euro-American racist attitudes.

“... A number of authors have claimed that, because of our character as a people, Roma lack certain virtues, and that this is reflected in the Romani language which cannot even express them ... duty, possession, truth, beautiful, read, write, time, danger, warmth and quiet. How negatively must the non-Gypsy world regard our people, to think that we cannot even express such basic human concepts and skills!”

IAN HANCOCK – THE PARIAH SYNDROME



DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

This is a clapping game that I played as a child in England.



*My mother said
I never should
Play with the Gypsies in the woods
If I did, she would say
Naughty little girl to disobey.
Your hair won't curl, your teeth won't shine
Naughty little girl, you shan't be mine.*

**DIRECTOR'S NOTE:**

When I first started researching this film, I had separate research files for "history" and "persecution", but I soon discovered that almost everything I wanted to file under "history" also included persecution. That was a sad realization. Roma were enslaved for 500 years; forced to leave their homes and not allowed to settle elsewhere; banned from certain jobs and not allowed to put their children into schools; Nazis targeted Roma during the Holocaust; and even today some countries force Romani children into special classes for the disabled and forcibly sterilize Romani women so that they cannot have more children.

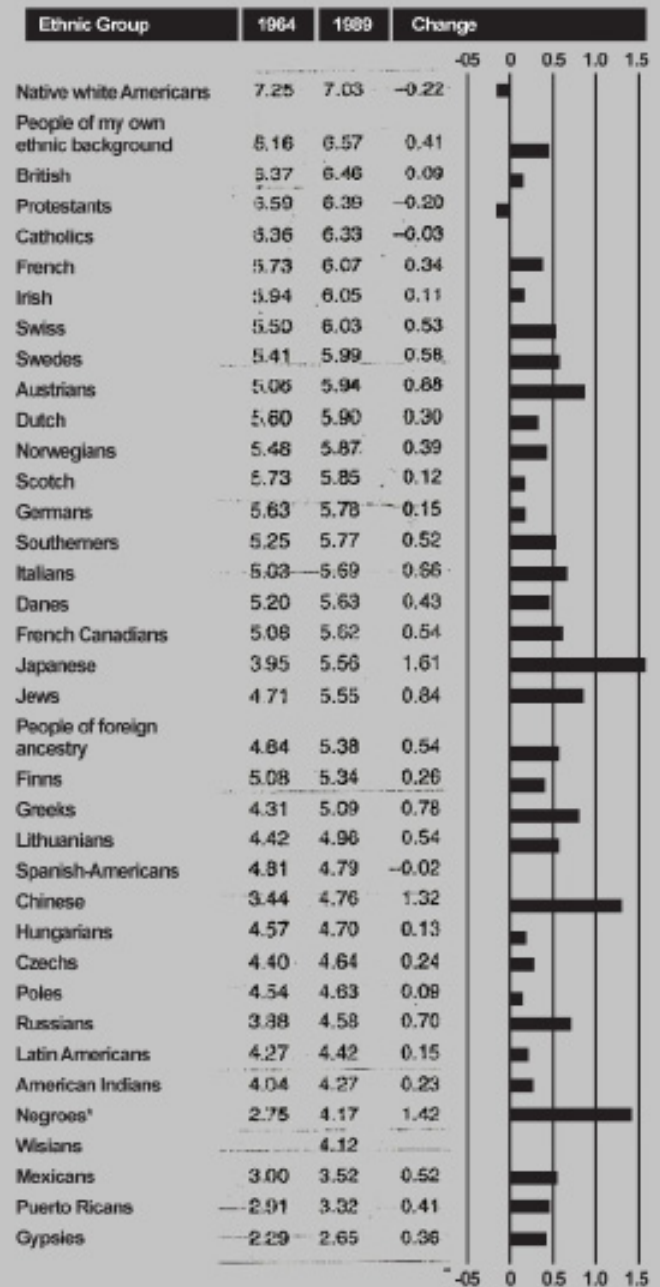
But nowadays, more Romani rights groups than ever before are coming forward and making substantial, if slow going, progress. With school bussing programs in Bulgaria and laws against racial stereotyping in parts of Eastern Europe, there is an ever-growing global awareness of the Roma population, and of its conditions both past and present in various regions of the world. In 2005 the Decade of Roma Inclusion was launched to unite European governments and international bodies (e.g. United Nations, World Bank, OSI) with Roma organizations to fight prejudice against Roma, particularly in housing, education and health care.

Public Opinion:

In January 1992, the New York Times published an American poll that surveyed public opinions of 58 different racial and social groups over a 25-year period. "Gypsies" were consistently ranked at the very bottom – even lower than a fictitious group of Wisians!

It is interesting to think why people have such strong negative opinions when, in reality, most non-Romani Americans have probably never met a real "Gypsy."

NYT POLL ARTICLE: www.nytimes.com/1992/01/08/us/study-points-to-increase-in-tolerance-of-ethnicity.html

The Change In "Social Standing"

*Blacks were referred to as Negroes by the National Opinion Research Center in the 1989 survey to conform with the wording in the 1964 survey.

Source: National Opinion Research Center. The 1989 survey included 1,037 adults.

Criminalization & Scapegoating

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

—Nelson Mandela

An old-fashioned Romani attitude was that it doesn't matter if outsiders think that we are bad and dirty because at least that will keep them away from us, and then we are safer. But maybe the privacy, or secrecy, of the Romani culture leaves too much to the imagination, which helps sustain negative stereotypes and prevent Romani issues from being taken seriously. This explains (though certainly does not excuse) the extensive false accounts of Gypsy life and custom.

One view is that many of us are put off by differences in others. So when people maintain cultural or religious restrictions we feel distanced. This can feed into anti-gypsyism, anti-semitism, anti-islam and the like.

It is also suggested that Roma are an easy target for scapegoating because there is no Romani country, no military, no obvious political or economic strength. This is well illustrated in a paper on "The Romanian Gypsy Problem," written by Sam Beck in 1985:

"Romania's German-speaking population has received support from the West German state. Magyars are supported by the Hungarian state, and Jews by Israel. Groups such as the Gypsies do not have such an advantage. Lacking a protective state, they have no one to turn to when discrimination is inflicted upon them as a group. Unlike ethnic groups represented by states, Gypsies are not recognized as having a history that could legitimize them."



00:16:07 -> "Nobody wants to hear the truth": Grover talks about his experience of prejudice at the gas station experience



DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

"A STRANGER IN EVERYBODY'S LAND"

I chose this quote as a subtitle for the film because the Roma have always been outsiders in any country that I've visited. Jimmy Marks appears to be the most "American" of Americans, wearing a Stetson hat and cowboy boots, and yet he is still seen as an outsider by his community. Popular phrases reflect these attitudes toward the Roma: to be "gypped" is to be cheated; a "gypsy cab" is a cab that is not aligned with any group. When I was making this film, many people joked with me, "Don't get your camera stolen by the Gypsies!"

While making this film, I met a Frenchman who told me that as a teenager, he and his friends would wait until the Gypsies came to their small town; then these boys would go around the town stealing things, because they knew that the Gypsies would be blamed. This is a perfect illustration of scapegoating in its most basic form.

In the film, Jimmy's father Grover states that there's no point fighting the stereotypes because people believe what they want to believe. While this may be true to a point, I believe that, through education and understanding, this can be changed. This film is a part of that effort.



History



00:39:21 - slavery, emancipation, & Vlach arrival to America

Slavery:

As previously noted, Roma enslavement in Romania lasted until 1864, but Romani slavery was not limited to the Balkans. Western European nations were also using the Roma as an unpaid work force, sending them to India, Africa and the Americas just because they were Gypsies. However, the enslavement of the Roma in Romania was the most brutal, and lasted for the longest period of time (five centuries from the 1300's to the 1800's).

In his book, *We Are The Romani People*, Hancock reviews the evolution and timeline of this era of slavery:

"Partly because of the draining effects of the Crusades in early centuries, Balkan society at the time of the arrival of the first Romanies was technologically backward and mainly agricultural but, as its peasant economy gradually shifted to a market-based one, it came to depend more and more upon the artisan skills that the Romanies were bringing with them. ...

"Romanies, who at first had found work with the feudal landlords, became associated with particular estates and by the early 1300s were being included in parcels of property given as gifts or as payment by one owner to another, as well as to the monasteries; the earliest written evidence of this refers to such tributes being made even before 1350. But slavery as we think of it today, called *robie* in Romanian, emerged later out of increasingly strict measures taken by landowners, the aristocracy of the monasteries to prevent their Romani labor force from leaving the principalities, which is what was beginning to happen because of the greater and greater demands being placed upon them as a work force. Those who owned slaves were protected by legislation...that gave them complete control over every aspect of their lives.

"The Romanies' status as slaves, and as foreigners and non-Muslims, gave them scant legal redress. According to the Islamic world-view of the occupying Ottomans, it was entirely acceptable to treat any conquered, non-Muslim population as property, and by the 1500s the word *tigan* had come specifically to mean "Romani slave"...

"In the sixteenth century, a Romani child could be purchased for the equivalent of 48 cents (32p). By the nineteenth century, slaves were sold by weight, at the rate of one gold piece per pound. Punishments for the slaves included flogging, the *falague* (shredding the soles of the feet with a whip), cutting off the lips, burning with lye, being thrown naked into the snow, hanging over smoking fires and wearing a three-cornered spiked iron collar called a *cangue*...

"By the middle of the nineteenth century, economic and social changes were beginning to affect the principalities. The more efficient use of farm machinery introduced by the Industrial Revolution, both in America and in southeastern Europe, was making the ownership, care and feeding of slaves a liability rather than an asset, and movements calling for abolition in the West, brought into Romania by students returning from the Sorbonne University in France, were a cause for self-examination. Moldavia and Wallachia were keen to be regarded as a part of the new, forward looking Europe, and took France as its model; slavery was being seen more and more as inhumane, primitive and old fashioned...

One estimate lists the number of slaves at about 600,000 at the time of their emancipation...However, following their liberation nothing was done to educate or reorient the freed slaves and bring them into society; instead, it was their former owners who were paid by the government for their loss."



• Poster advertising a slave auction in Wallachia in 1852. It reads "For sale: a prime lot of Gypsy slaves, for sale by auction at the Monastery of St. Elias, May 8th, 1852. Consisting of eighteen men, ten boys, seven women and three girls, in fine condition."

The Holocaust:

The Romani word for the Nazi Holocaust is “Porrajmos” (pronounced “paw-rye-moss”) which means “Devouring.”

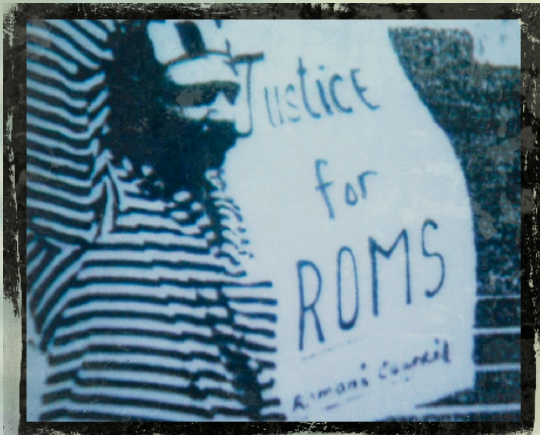
We shall probably never know the precise number of Roma who perished during World War 2 – estimates range from four hundred thousand to 1.5 million.

An unfortunate ‘numbers game’ seems to have developed among chronicles of the era – where some (not all!) Jewish scholars downplay the murder of other victims so as to feature only Jewish deaths. This is not helped by the traditional approach of some Roma who try not to remember the bad times – better to leave sadness behind and forget it, in case you drag past suffering into the future. But most modern Romani scholars do not want Roma excluded from the History books, lest history repeat itself.

Historical documents show the ‘Final Solution of the Gypsy Problem’ was ordered by Himmler, Eichmann, Hitler and others. A large percentage of Europe’s Gypsies were killed. In a letter between two famous Jewish Holocaust survivors, Simon Wiesenthal wrote to Elie Wiesel in 1984: “The Gypsies had been murdered in a proportion similar to the Jews: about 80% of them in the area of the countries which were occupied by the Nazis.”

The Nobel Prize winning German author Gunther Grass stated in 1997:

“Roma were like no other people, except the Jews: victims of continuous persecution and marginalization and, in Germany, of systematic eradication. This injustice continues today. Even the recognition of Roma and Sinti as victims of the betraying racist policy of Nazi times is very hesitant... the Gypsies have been shamelessly neglected. ... They’re still victims, because they haven’t got a state to support them, they’re badly organized and don’t get a lot of help. They are held responsible for virtually anything, including our stupid superstitions. To us Gypsies are pretty mainly in operettas, and those of us who are slightly more artistically discerning go back to Brahms’s songs or Lenau’s poems. But as soon as Gypsies come near us a pathetic insecurity returns and reflects itself in distance and disapproval.”



Despite the available records of Romani slavery and the Roma experience in the Holocaust, the two subjects are rarely taught in the classroom and are both a long way from achieving proper acknowledgement by governments and other international bodies.

Dr. Ian Hancock quoted many sources in this detailed description of the social and political climate that preceded, and, in many ways, determined the Romani experience in the Holocaust:

“When the Nazis came to power in 1933, German laws against Romanies had already been in effect for hundreds of years. The persecution of the Romani people began almost as soon as they first arrived in German-speaking lands because as outsiders, they were, without knowing it, breaking the Hanseatic laws which made it a punishable offense not to have a permanent home or job, and not to be on the taxpayer’s register. They were also accused of being spies for the Muslims, whom few Germans had ever met, but about whom they had heard

many frightening stories; it was not illegal to murder a Romani and there were sometimes 'Gypsy hunts' in which Romanies were tracked down and killed like wild animals; forests were set on fire to drive out any Romanies who might have been hiding there.

"By the nineteenth century, scholars in Germany and elsewhere in Europe were writing about Romanies and Jews as being inferior beings and "the excrement of humanity"; even Darwin, writing in 1871, singled out our two populations as not being "culturally advanced" like other "territorially settled" peoples...

"During the 1920s, the legal oppression of Romanies in Germany intensified, despite the official statutes of the Weimar Republic that said that all its citizens were equal; in 1925 a conference on the 'The Gypsy Question' was held which resulted in the creation of laws requiring unemployed Romanies to be sent to work camps "for reasons of public security", and for all Romanies to be registered with the police. After 1927 everyone, even Romani children, had to carry identification cards bearing their fingerprints and photographs. In 1929, The central Office for the Fight Against the Gypsies in Germany was established in Munich, and in 1933, just ten days before the Nazis came to power, government officials in Burgenland, Austria, called for the withdrawal of all civil rights from the Romani people.

"In September 1935, Romanies became subject to the restrictions of the Nuremberg Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour, which forbade intermarriage between Germans and 'non-Aryans', specifically Jews, Romanies and people of African descent. In 1937, the National Citizenship law relegated Romanies and Jews to the status of second-class citizens, depriving them of their civil rights. In the same year, Heinrich Himmler issued a decree entitled "The Struggle Against the Gypsy Plague" which reiterated that Romanies of mixed blood were the most likely to engage in criminal activity, and which required that all information on Romanies be sent from the regional police departments to the Reich Central Office.

"In 1939 Johannes Behrendt of the Office of Racial Hygiene issued a brief stating that "[a]ll Gypsies should be treated as hereditarily sick; the only solution is elimination. The aim should therefore be the elimination without hesitation of this defective element in the population". In January 1940 the first mass genocidal action of the Holocaust took place when 250 Romani children from Brno were murdered in Buchenwald, where they were used as guinea-pigs to test the efficacy of the Zyklon-B cyanide gas crystals that were later used in the gas chambers (Proester, 1940). In June 1940 Hitler ordered the extermination of all Jews, Romanies and communist political functionaries in the entire Soviet Union. "

IAN HANCOCK – WE ARE THE ROMANI PEOPLE

Negative attitudes toward the Roma people persist even today, but there are also many efforts by Roma and concerned non-Roma who realize that this must change. Movements are now in effect to raise global awareness of the Romani people, the history and culture. More information and suggestions for getting involved are available at the end of this study guide.

Director's Notes

DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

My grandmother was from a Polish Jewish family, most of whom were killed in the Holocaust many decades before I was born. I felt a very eerie link to them - my family - when I visited the former concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which is now a museum. I think I now understand why Jewish Holocaust survivors say that we must tell everyone this sad history, so that it cannot be forgotten and allowed to happen again.

At Auschwitz, I visited Barrack 13 which is a haunting museum to Roma who killed in the Porrajmos. I particularly remember the image of a professional German lightweight boxer who was later gassed in the camps for being Romani. While making this film, I also visited the Romani section of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

My own opinion is that we cannot say that some Holocaust victims are "more victim" than others. We have room to remember them all - and to object to all future genocides.



FOR THE CLASSROOM

Activities & Topics:

For Educators:

The following section offers ideas for various class assignments and activities related to specific scenes and issues raised by the film. Each “Topic” begins with a broad theme, and then introduces issues and scenarios which serve to link students’ lives and concerns with the scenes and issues from the film. A series of discussion questions and activities is provided for each topic.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

BEFORE THE FILM –

Use different written and spoken formats for students to answer: What is a “Gypsy”? Do you know any Gypsies? Is “Gypsy” a race or a lifestyle?

AFTER FILM –

- **Group Discussions:** Class divides into groups, with each group given a topic and related questions. Each group presents their answers to the class, with subsequent discussion.
- **Map Creation:** Make a map showing the migration of Roma across the world, out of India, through the Middle East and Europe, and across to the Americas. With a bit of online research and looking at the maps in the film, students can add approximate dates and population statistics.
- **Role Playing:** Class divides into groups, with each group representing a different ethnic group. Students then answer the questions from one or more of the suggested topic areas in the following pages, from the viewpoint of that particular ethnic group.
- **Make Your Case:** Students are assigned to be judge, attorneys, plaintiffs, defendants, and jury (the rest of the class). A case is formulated and a trial is held, based on a scenario from one of the topics.

EXAMPLE: *The Question of Gender:* A marriage has been arranged and the couple does not agree with it. The defendants (the parents) and the plaintiffs (the couple) must address all the questions under the topic area to make their cases. The jury then votes on the verdict.

- **Research Paper and/or Discussion:** Students compare and contrast their own family’s ethnic background with that of the Roma, highlighting relevant immigration histories, comparing customs and cultures, and discussing the differences and similarities between the two using the topics provided.

Topic: Insularity or Assimilation?

Some people say that by remaining secret and separate, Roma have found protection from having to deal with outsiders – who are usually unfriendly anyway, and who are sometimes dangerous.

Others say that, by keeping quiet and distant from the rest of society, Roma have allowed unfair and inaccurate stereotypes to go unchecked. An example of this is in Hollywood, where the movie industry is responsible for falsely mythologizing Gypsy characters for nearly a century.

1. What are the benefits of maintaining the secrecy or insularity of your culture and heritage? Versus: What would be the benefit of sharing or exposing that culture to the outside world?
2. Regarding the Roma American community specifically, what can be gained by this exposure? What can be lost?
3. Do you feel that your family is safer if your neighbors are like you culturally? Why (or why not)?
4. If you have classmates who are from different backgrounds to yours, do you want them to know about your traditions (Christmas, Chanukah, Eid, Chinese New Year, etc), or do you feel more comfortable keeping your differences private?
5. What balance should there be between adopting modern practices and preserving traditional culture? Can traditional cultures be maintained in the face of factors like new technology and economic demands? (An example: American Romani teenagers today often use Internet chat rooms to meet other Romani teens, so that they can make suggestions to their parents when it comes for time for their arranged marriage.)



00:13:21 - 00:15:57 - The Director's interview of the grandmother (Lippy); Lippy makes her point about insularity.

00:23:25 - 00:24:49 - Letter-to-the-Editor is read about the Roma experience at Expo '74, when they are derided by a number of fairgoers.

Topic: What's in a Name? Stereotypes & Labels

As you might observe, the terms 'Gypsy' and 'Roma' are sometimes used interchangeably. One reason for the continued use of the word 'Gypsy' in reference to the Roma might be the fact that a much larger number of people recognize the term and its meaning, as compared to those who know and use the word 'Roma'.

1. What is the significance of a name or a label? Why does it matter what we call people? Can you list some positive and negative labels for your own group (ethnic, gender, social), e.g. jocks, geeks, chicks, etc.
2. How do "labels" (i.e., what we call people versus how people choose to define themselves) affect people's perception of each other? How does this affect power/control over others?
3. When a shift in an ethnic "label" is necessary, what might be the most effective ways to initiate it? (e.g. switching from "Gypsy" to Rom or Romani, from "Indian" to Native American, etc.)
4. Can you think of other ethnic groups that have had to fight for the right to define themselves?
5. If this film were called "American Rom", would it be more respectful? Would viewers be as likely to watch it? If you were naming your own film or book about the Romani people, what would you call it? (How about a name for a film about your own ethnic/social group, or that of a friend?)

Topic: Criminalization & Scapegoatism

As we saw in the film, the Spokane police department was using a profile booklet of the “Gypsy” criminal, isolating key traits and activities to watch out for in Roma communities. Topics included in the table of contents were “Gypsy Characteristics”, “Why Gypsies Steal” and “Gypsy Values”. Similar to the literature cited by Dr. Hancock, each of these sections was presented as factual research provided for the purpose of gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the Roma people, their foreign beliefs and behaviors.

1. Can you think of any other people who are historically criminalized? Who are they, and do they have anything in common with the Roma? What leads to their racial or ethnic profiling?
2. If the criminal profile of the Gypsy is based on past criminal behavior over the course of several years, in the same community, does that make it a fair and useful list? Why or why not?

Some students complain that they are labeled by the behavior of a family member – if your older sister gets great grades then the bar is set higher for you, or if your older brother caused problems then the teacher is ready to punish you quickly too. Is this profiling comparable to what happens with Roma in the eyes of society and the justice system?

3. What role does perception play in the criminalization of a group? Who does it benefit?

4. As shown in the film, many traditional Roma communities participate in the internal judicial system called Kris. To a large degree, this system helps to govern the Roma way of life. What aspects of the kris remind you of the US legal court system? What aspects are distinctly different? How might these variants affect the Roma community’s identity?

5. On the one hand, we have the majority of the population thinking that Gypsies are a thieving lot. On the other hand, we have some Romani groups thinking that non-Gypsies are unclean and polluting. Is there a reverse racism going on here too?

We say it is racism or discrimination when a stronger group of people has prejudices about a weaker group of people. Is it the same when the positions are reversed?

Topic: Education

It is shown in the film that many, though certainly not all, traditional Romani families do not encourage, or do not even allow, their children to continue school education beyond a certain age.

1. What do you think might be some of the reasons for a traditional Romani tendency to avoid school education? How do you think this would affect future generations of Roma? What might be some positive effects? What might be some negative effects?

2. How would you describe your background, ethnically speaking? How does your ethnic background view formal education?

3. How do the views of some Roma on formal education conflict with the values of many American families? Have you ever dreamed of not going to school? How about your grandparents or other ancestors, did they all go to school?

4. What are three things you learned from this film that you didn’t know before watching it?

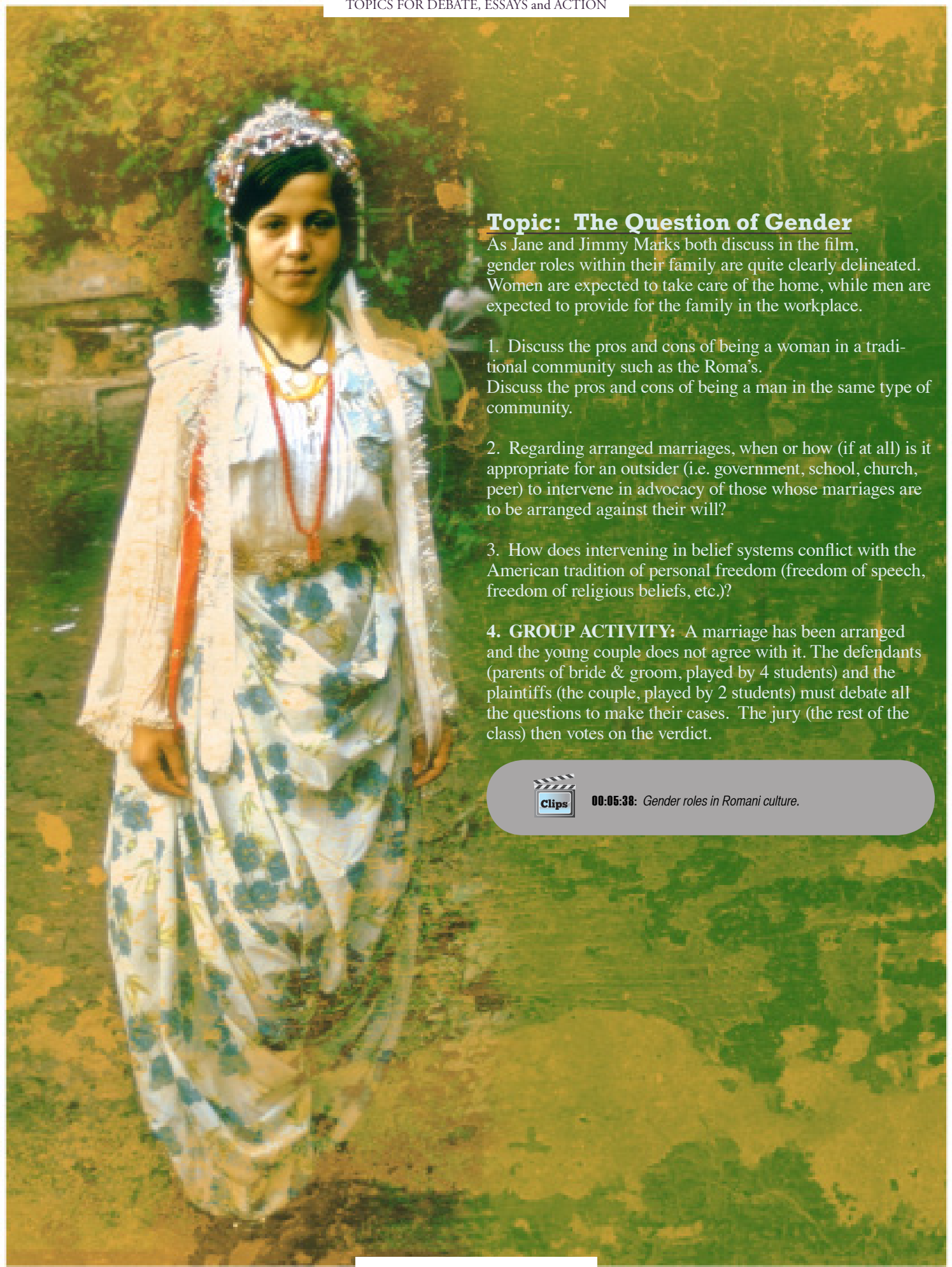
5. Are there things that you do outside school which feel like part of your education?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE: “Gypsies: the Usual Suspects.” Becerra, Hector. Los Angeles Times, 30 January 2006. <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/30/local/me-gypsy30>

Searching for the 4th Nail is a new film by a Romani man from New York who sets out to discover the reasons why his family didn’t keep him in school after the age of 10. At the end of the film, he decides to fight his Roma community in order to keep his own children in school.

For more info: www.searchingforthe4thnail.com



**Topic: The Question of Gender**

As Jane and Jimmy Marks both discuss in the film, gender roles within their family are quite clearly delineated. Women are expected to take care of the home, while men are expected to provide for the family in the workplace.

1. Discuss the pros and cons of being a woman in a traditional community such as the Roma's. Discuss the pros and cons of being a man in the same type of community.
2. Regarding arranged marriages, when or how (if at all) is it appropriate for an outsider (i.e. government, school, church, peer) to intervene in advocacy of those whose marriages are to be arranged against their will?
3. How does intervening in belief systems conflict with the American tradition of personal freedom (freedom of speech, freedom of religious beliefs, etc.)?
4. **GROUP ACTIVITY:** A marriage has been arranged and the young couple does not agree with it. The defendants (parents of bride & groom, played by 4 students) and the plaintiffs (the couple, played by 2 students) must debate all the questions to make their cases. The jury (the rest of the class) then votes on the verdict.



00:05:38: *Gender roles in Romani culture.*

Filmmaking and style



About Filmmaking & Style”

Analyzing a film can be a challenge for students who are not familiar with the vocabulary used to discuss the moving image. There are many aspects of a film to consider. The following information should help familiarize students and educators with film aesthetics and technique, and deepen understanding of the film’s structure and meaning, with a focus on documentaries.

Point of View & Narration: Some people say that documentaries are objective because they are telling the truth, but every storyteller is choosing what parts of a story to tell, and every filmmaker is choosing what parts of footage to show. For example, *American Gypsy* was edited from about 100 hours of raw footage to a final film of 80 minutes (or a shorter television version). So a lot of subjective choices were made about the best way to tell you this story.

Narration is another important part of documentary storytelling. Many traditional news documentaries use a third person narrator to tell a story and its facts, this is known as “Voice of God” narration because the viewer tends to feel that the narrator has absolute authority and knowledge about the subject. *Cinéma Vérité* documentaries usually have no narration and arrange the footage to speak for itself. First person narration is often used in films about the filmmaker’s own life – although in “*American Gypsy*” the filmmaker speaks in the first person about her own experience of someone else’s life. The aim was to give viewers the honest feeling of what it was like to be there meeting the people in the film and experiencing their lives. Does this Point of View work for you when you watch this film?



Think of a film that you saw recently: What point of view did the filmmaker have? Can you tell what his/her opinions are about the topic of the film? Many films try to keep the filmmaker “invisible”, so if you think there was no point of view then think about it more carefully – remember that all films are made by filmmakers, and they are just humans with opinions, like the rest of us.

Editing: When talking about editing, we are referring to the techniques by which individual shots are chosen, arranged and paced. The types of shots used (long shot, medium shot, close-up) help focus our attention or create dramatic content. The order and placement of shots is what builds the meaning in a scene. Likewise, the length of shots and the pacing of cuts can have a very profound effect on our senses. Very short shots, like those found in many music videos can be energetic or frantic, whereas longer shots like those in some documentaries may slow down the rhythm of a scene, making it feel more like everyday life. One style of documentary filmmaking that influenced “American Gypsy” is called “cinéma vérité” which is when a scene is shot and edited to feel like you are watching it like a fly on the wall, without using editing to interfere too much with the pace of real life. This style tries to create the feeling of being in a situation in real time, as well as conveying information to move along the story plot.

Documentaries, more than fiction, are often shaped in the editing room. You are filming reality, which often doesn’t follow a script prepared before shooting, so you can end up with many hours of video or film and many different directions that the story can take.

Narrative Structure: It’s important to pay attention to the beginnings and endings of films because they contain important clues to the arc of the story. In general, we can get a sense of a film’s storyline, by asking the following questions: Why does the film begin the way it does? Why does the film conclude with a particular scene or feeling? What is the significance of the final action? Also keep in mind that conflict is the most crucial element of a traditional three-act dramatic structure. Although this classical structure is seen as a fiction style, many documentaries today also use the three or four act structure for storytelling. ‘Act One’ often introduces a conflict, ‘Act Two’ elaborates on it, and ‘Act Three’ resolves it..

Stories may revolve around the actions of a single protagonist, or a group of people, e.g. Jimmy Marks may be the main character in this film, but it is also a film about his whole community, and about the situation of Romani people in general.

Music and Sound: Music may also have a great effect on dramatic content. Fast paced music can make a scene happy or energetic, while slower music can make us feel thoughtful or calm. Natural ambient sounds from the environment are also very important, as they can give us many clues about what is going on in a scene. Sound effects such as a gunshot or police siren can heighten drama. Sound can also be used to suggest off-screen space, as we are hearing action that takes place out of the camera’s frame. The sounds of a city - horns or traffic rumble can enhance our understanding of a character’s surroundings, and hence his or her reactions and state of mind. Some films choose to use only the music or sounds which characters in the film would be likely to hear themselves. All the music score and other off-camera audio elements in “American Gypsy” are taken from recordings of Gypsy music – even if they are just small background ambiances. Some of that music is from places that the people in the film would probably not normally ever hear themselves – it is just the director’s choice.

*"They came first for the Communists, but I did not speak up because I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the Jews, but I did not speak up because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the trade unionists, but I did not speak up because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Catholics, but I did not speak up because I was a Protestant.
Then they came for me, and by then there was nobody left to speak up."*

— Pastor Martin Niemöller

Take Action!

Now more than ever, there are many opportunities for people to learn more and to get involved. Here are some ideas of things you can do to help, & links to sites that provide useful information for anyone who is interested in learning more.

What You Can Do:

- Write an editorial for your local or school newspaper — ask them to publish more about your Romani neighbors, not just Gypsy stereotypes.
- If there is a Holocaust class in your school, check if Roma are included in the history. If not, ask why not?
- Next time you hear a racist slur about Gypsies, speak up. If you read it in the newspaper, write and explain why it is offensive or ignorant to talk about Gypsies as stereotypes, rather than real people.
- Avoid racist words like "gypped"
- Watch more films about Roma. Or show this film to friends and family & discuss it with them.
- Get Informed. Just by knowing more, you decrease the world's ignorance about Roma...

For more information:

- Decade of Roma Inclusion:** www.romadecade.org
- European Roma Policy Coalition:** <http://webhost.ppt.eu/romapolicy>
- Contact Point For Roma And Sinti Issues - Osce Office For Democratic Institutions And Human Rights:** www.osce.org/odihr/44247
- Council Of Europe Development Bank:** www.coebank.org
- Council Of Europe Roma And Travellers Division:** www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default_EN.asp
- Dosta! Campaign:** www.dosta.org
- EU Agency For Fundamental Rights (Formerly European Monitoring Centre On Racism And Xenophobia):** http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/home/home_en.htm
- European Commission:** http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm
- European Roma And Travellers Forum:** www.ertf.org
- European Roma Information Office:** <http://erionet.org/site>
- European Roma Rights Centre:** www.errc.org
- European Union:** <http://europa.eu>
- Open Society Institute - Roma Initiatives Office:** www.soros.org/initiatives/roma
- Roma Education Fund:** <http://romaeducationfund.hu>
- UN-Habitat:** www.unhabitat.org
- UNHCR - UN Refugee Agency:** www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):** www.unicef.org
- United Nations Development Programme:** www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1936

Glossary:

A more comprehensive glossary can be found at:
<http://reocities.com/Paris/5121/glossary.htm>

- **Bias:** An unfair preference for or dislike of something.
- **Discrimination:** Unfair treatment of one person or group, usually because of prejudice about race, ethnic group, age group, religion, sexuality or gender.
- **Gadjo/i/e, Gajo:** (male/female/plural) The Romani word for a non-Roma person.
- **Gitano, Gitan:** Spanish and French words for “Gypsy”, deriving from “Egyptien” and “Egiptano”
- **Gypsy:** Most commonly understood label for Romani people. It is disliked by many, partly due to derogatory connotations and partly because it is a misnomer: “Gypsy” is abbreviated from Egyptian (‘gyptian) because of a mistaken belief that the Roma came from Egypt or a part of Europe once known as ‘Little Egypt’ (comparable to naming Native Americans “Indians”). The word “Gypsy” (sometimes spelled “gipsy”) is like “gitan” in French, or “gitano” in Spanish.
- **Kumpanía:** Romani word meaning a group of Roma travelling or living together in a territory in an economic and residential association.
- **Machváya/Machwaya:** A Roma clan originating in the Balkans.
- **Porrajmos/porraimos:** Romani word for the Nazi Holocaust. Literally means “Devouring.”
- **Persecute:** 1. To harass or punish in a manner designed to injure, grieve, or afflict; specifically: to cause to suffer because of belief 2. To annoy with persistent or urgent approaches (as attacks...)
- **Pogrom:** An organized massacre of helpless people.
- **Prejudice:** 1. A pre-formed opinion, usually an unfavorable one, based on insufficient knowledge, irrational feelings, or inaccurate stereotypes. 2. An unfounded hatred, fear, or mistrust of a person or group, especially one of a particular religion, ethnicity, nationality, or social status.
- **Profiling:** Racial profiling, also known as racial stereotyping, is the inclusion of racial or ethnic characteristics in determining whether a person is likely to commit a particular type of crime. In the United States in the 1990s, the practice became controversial among the general public as the potential for abuse by law enforcement came to light.
- **Rom (also Rrom):** Romani person or people (singular or plural noun). e.g. “He is a Rom”, “200 Rom came to the wedding”; collective noun, e.g. “The Rom hailed from India”.
- **Roma:** Plural of Rom
- **Romanes/Romani:** Romani language
- **Romani:** The adjective used to describe the Rom people. Sometimes also used as a noun.
- **Romní:** A Romani woman
- **Stereotype:** Something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment

References & Resources:

Culture:

- Patrin Web Journal: <http://www.reocities.com/~patrin/patrin.htm>
- Gypsy Lore Society: www.gypsylloresociety.org
- Toronto Roma Community Centre: www.romatoronto.org
- A long list of resources, articles, books, films on Roma: <http://netmation.org/www/i140119d.htm>

Current Events:

- Decade of Roma Inclusion: www.romadecade.org
- European Union Roma Policy Coalition: <http://webhost.ppt.eu/romapolicy/>

Education:

- Monitoring Education for Roma, Open Society Institute, New York: www.soros.org/initiatives/esp/articles_publications/publications
- Ronald Lee, Romano Kopachi “Roma and Education”: <http://kopachi.com/articles>
- BBC News, 2007, Roma ‘Segregation’: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7093737.stm>

Famous Roma figures throughout history:

- The Rromani Connection: <http://www.rromaniconnect.org/Famousromanies.html>
- Im ninalu.net: www.imninalu.net/famousGypsies.htm

Holocaust:

- We Are The Romani People. Ian Hancock, University of Hertfordshire Press, UK, 2002.
- Patrin, O Porrajmos (many links/articles): <http://reocities.com/Paris/5121/holocaust.htm>
- Porraimos: Europe’s Gypsies in the Holocaust. Documentary, Alexandra Isles, 2002. Cinema Guild
- The Rromani Connection: www.rromaniconnect.org/Romasintiholocaust.html
- Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum website – Sinti and Roma: http://en.auschwitz.org/h/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=11&Itemid=3

Language:

- Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies (Romanies). Donald Kenrick, Toronto. Scarecrow Press, 2007.
- Patrin Glossary: <http://www.reocities.com/~patrin/glossary.htm>

Origins and Diaspora:

- The Pariah Syndrome, Ian Hancock, Ch.1: <http://www.reocities.com/~patrin/pariah-contents.htm>
- The Rromani Connection: <http://www.rromaniconnect.org/Romanihistory.html>

Racial Profiling:

- Los Angeles Times, Gypsies: the Usual Suspects, Hector Becerra, 2006, A1: <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/30/local/me-gypsy30>
- Ian Hancock, Gypsy Mafia, Romani Saints: Racial Profiling of Romani Americans, 2007. Romani Archives & Documentation Center: www.radoc.net/radoc.php?doc=art_f_bias_profiling&lang
- Ian Hancock, Duty and Beauty, Possession and Truth, pub. Garland 1996 in Gypsies: A Book of Interdisciplinary Readings. Ed. Diane Tong: <http://kopachi.com/articles/the-claim-of-lexical-impovertism-as-control-by-ian-hancock/>

Slavery:

- We Are The Romani People. Ian Hancock, University of Hertfordshire Press, UK, 2002.
- Pariah Syndrome, Ian Hancock, 1987: <http://www.reocities.com/~patrin/pariah-contents.htm>