

News and Reviews

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Pandemic: Facing AIDS

>> Directed by Rory Kennedy.
2003. 113 minutes.

P*pandemic: Facing AIDS*, a five-part HBO series-turned-feature film by filmmaker Rory Kennedy and narrated by Elton John and Danny Glover (the feature film version), is a very emotional and intimate look at HIV and AIDS around the world.

Review

Kennedy decided on the project after making a documentary about AIDS in Africa, a project which profoundly affected her view of the AIDS crisis. Garnering support from the MAC AIDS Foundation, the Elton John AIDS Foundation, the AOL Time Warner Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Pfizer Foundation, Kennedy's documentary grew into a full-fledged campaign to raise awareness and combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. Viewers interested in learning more about the film project and finding information on additional resources for the classroom can visit the production company's website at www.moxiefirecracker.com.

In the documentary, Kennedy travels to Brazil, Uganda, Russia, Thailand, and India, in each country profiling a unique story of an HIV-infected person or family. The film presents a very thorough and unvarnished view of HIV, showing real people struggling with, and succumbing to, the ravages of the disease. Kennedy's film serves as an excellent tool for promoting cultural awareness by focusing on a disease that transcends cultural boundaries but whose treatment and prevention can be profoundly influenced by the local culture. Viewers of all backgrounds are sure to connect with the powerful personal stories shown in the film.

In Thailand, viewers see the story of Lek, a former Thai sex worker in the final stages of AIDS. The segment begins with Lek far from her village, in one of the very few AIDS hospices in Thailand. Although hundreds are waiting for a



Devastated by AIDS: Nagaraj and Bhanu and their daughter are featured in the film.

bed in this monk-run hospice, with patients dying every day, the turnover is also high. Lek initially fears that her disease might bring shame upon her family but finally resolves to visit her parents and her son to say good-bye. Upon returning to the hospice, she learns that her family wants her to come home to die with them and not among strangers. Her homecoming is both beautiful and sad. The film shows her last few weeks as her health fails and ends with her death in her home village. The story graphically reveals the terrible and slow demise of Thai HIV/AIDS infected patients with access to little or no healthcare. The images of death and dying are prominent and difficult to watch, and the dialogue between Lek and her family, which helplessly watches and cares for her during her final weeks, is heartwrenching. Yet her story realistically captures the brutal nature of the disease, especially when it is left untreated.

In India, the film features a couple, Nagaraj and his wife Bhanu. Shortly after they are married, Nagaraj learns that he is infected with HIV, likely from unprotected sex with a prostitute. Tests reveal that his wife, Bhanu, is HIV negative so the couple initially abstains from sex immediately following

Nagaraj's diagnosis. However, the pressure to have children in Indian society is so overwhelming that the couple eventually decides to conceive a child in spite of Nagaraj's HIV status. Shortly thereafter, Bhanu learns that she is pregnant, but she also discovers that she has now contracted the virus. The documentary follows the couple as they take preventative measures to lower the risk of transmission to their child. Their segment ends with the birth of their baby girl, who appears to be HIV negative. According to an update on the HBO program website [which is no longer available], the baby has repeatedly tested negative for HIV, suggesting that she does not have the virus. But sadly, we learn that Nagaraj has succumbed to the disease since the filming.

While the remaining segments are not focused on Asia, they contrast how HIV/AIDS is dealt with in other countries. In Brazil, HIV patients have free access to medicine, which has significantly slowed the disease's progression there. In Russia, anti-retroviral medicine is also widely available. On the other end of the spectrum, the segment on Uganda, where basic HIV/AIDS testing and treatment is severely limited, shows how the AIDS epidemic is spiraling out of control. The tragic result is an entire generation of

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Asian Educational Media Service

The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. AEMS offers information about where to find audio-visual media resources for teaching and learning about Asia, and advice about which ones may best suit your needs. In addition to *AEMS News and Reviews*, published quarterly, services include a free call-in/write-in service and a Web site. To add your name to our mailing list, request additional copies of the newsletter to use in workshops or to share with your colleagues, or ask for help in locating resources, please contact us.

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For more information, contact:

Asian Educational Media Service
Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue, MC-025
Urbana, IL 61801

Telephone: 1-888-828-AEMS (1-888-828-2367)
or 217-265-0642
Fax: 217-265-0641
E-mail: aems@uiuc.edu
Web: www.aems.uiuc.edu

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Staff

Program Director/Editor: Jenny C. Huang

Assistant Program Coordinator: Susan Norris

Graduate Student Assistant: Rebecca Nickerson

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What's New?

From the Editor

By the time you read this, it will have been more than seven months since I took over the directorship of AEMS and the editorial duties of this newsletter. Much has changed since the beginning of this year, but my enthusiasm for the program remains true.

AEMS provides wonderful resources to the community of Asia scholars, stu-

dents, and educators, and it is rewarding to work towards improving our services to meet those needs. Since our last issue, I have had more time to consider and implement new projects; some of these ideas can be found in this issue of *News and Reviews*. Others can be seen on our website. More are still to come. While it might take some time before we will be able to move at full-speed, I hope that you will continue to give us feedback about how we are doing. It's always nice to know when there's interest and excitement about our services; the knowledge fuels us to make greater efforts.

—Jenny C. Huang



AEMS staff (from left): Jenny Huang, Susan Norris, and Rebecca Nickerson.

From the New Assistant Program Coordinator

My name is Susan Norris, and I am very pleased to be joining the AEMS program as the assistant program coordinator. My educational background includes a Master of Arts (MA) from Northern Illinois University in Political Science with a concentration in Southeast Asian studies. I also have my Master of Library Science (MLS) from UIUC. I had the opportunity to travel in Thailand, Vietnam, and Burma in 1998 and 2000, and I have focused my studies primarily on these three countries. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any thoughts or concerns about my role here at AEMS.

—Susan Norris

Asian Educational Media Service / Education About Asia

Special Media Section: Spring 2006

The Asian Educational Media Service and *Education About Asia* are pleased to announce that we will again be collaborating on an expanded media review section in *EAA's* Spring 2006 issue. Jenny Huang, program director of AEMS, will be editing this section, which will address the use of feature films, documentaries, CD-ROMs, videos, and DVDs in teaching about Asia. We are looking for reviews of these materials with an emphasis upon classroom use.

We welcome manuscripts on all areas of Asia and on a wide variety of topics. Reviews should run approximately 350 words (one and a half double-spaced manuscript pages); essays should run about 1,000 words (four double-spaced manuscript pages). If you would like to discuss a topic or film for review, or have other questions, please contact Jenny Huang by phone or email. Please send one copy of your submission(s) by e-mail attachment to BOTH of the following people by no later than December 12, 2005. ♦

Jenny Huang, Program Director
Asian Educational Media Service
Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue, MC 025
Urbana, IL 61801
Tel: 217-265-0642 or 888-828-AEMS
Fax: 217-265-0641
E-mail: huangj@uiuc.edu
Web: www.aems.uiuc.edu

Andrea S. Green, Publications Coordinator
Education About Asia
302 Pfeiffer Stagmaier Hall, Dept. 4154
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
615 McCallie Avenue
Chattanooga, TN 37403
Phone: 423-425-2118
Fax: 423-425-5380
E-mail: edast@utc.edu

Nuclear Nightmare: Understanding North Korea

>> Produced by The Discovery Channel. 2003. 50 minutes.

As one of the remaining communist states, North Korea (officially called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or DPRK) is noted for its dissonance with the rest of the world. While it is known that the North Korean government and its leaders have consolidated their powers through effective exploitation of cultural beliefs and limited access to outside information, the strength of their control over the population in the midst of poverty and famine continues to mystify the global community. Since 2002, when President Bush identified North Korea as a part of the "axis of evil" in his State of the Union address, the country's leader, Kim Jung Il, has kept North Korea in news headlines. Today, this "hermit

kingdom" ranks fifth in the world's military power and boasts of its increasing nuclear capabilities.

So this year, I decided to incorporate a documentary program called *Nuclear Nightmare: Understanding North Korea* into my high school United States History classes. A joint production of The New York Times and The Discovery Channel, *Nuclear Nightmare* provided students with an absorbing introduction to the currently unresolved North Korean nuclear crisis. The documentary, combined with discussions based on recent newspaper articles about North Korea, gave them a framework for evaluating U.S. foreign



policy during the Clinton and Bush administrations. It also created a classroom opportunity for serious

reflection about East Asia and served as a powerful reminder of how the past continues to play a central role in the complicated dynamics of international relations in the region. As a follow-up, students were assigned to formulate a foreign policy towards North Korea for the Bush administration. This lesson was one of the most successful assignments of the entire school year. Students were fascinated by the film and wanted to learn more not only about Korea, but also about East Asia.

The documentary begins by telling the story of the current North Korean leader Kim Jung Il and how he holds the world captive by "what many see as a cunning strategy of extortion by threatening to develop an arsenal of nuclear weapons." In less than an hour's time the viewer is presented with an overview of the history of the Korean peninsula from the beginning of the 20th century to the present crisis and covers events such as the Japanese occupation of Korea, the division of the country by the United States, the Korean War, and Kim Il Sung's role in founding the North Korean state. The program shows how Kim Il Sung secured his position as the "Great Leader" of North Korea and later passed on this power to his son, the quixotic Kim Jung Il.

Commentaries from numerous highly respected Korean experts, such as Selig Harrison, author of *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (Princeton University Press, 2002), and Donald Gregg, former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, provide considerable depth and credibility to the program as they describe Kim Jung Il's authoritative grip on his country, revealing the tragic plight of the North Korean people. There is a particularly poignant moment when an escapee (a former prison guard) shares his experiences of life in North Korea and the loss of his father, who was accused of speaking critically of the regime. The audience becomes aware of the increasing number of attempts to escape by North Koreans. Although defectors take great risks to escape to China, they are often captured by the Chinese military and returned to North Korean prison camps to face torture and death.

Another segment of *Nuclear Nightmare* follows the events of the Clinton administration and the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL

AEMS Program Activities and Service Upgrades

in focus

The **Asian Education Media Service (AEMS)** is pleased to announce that we have

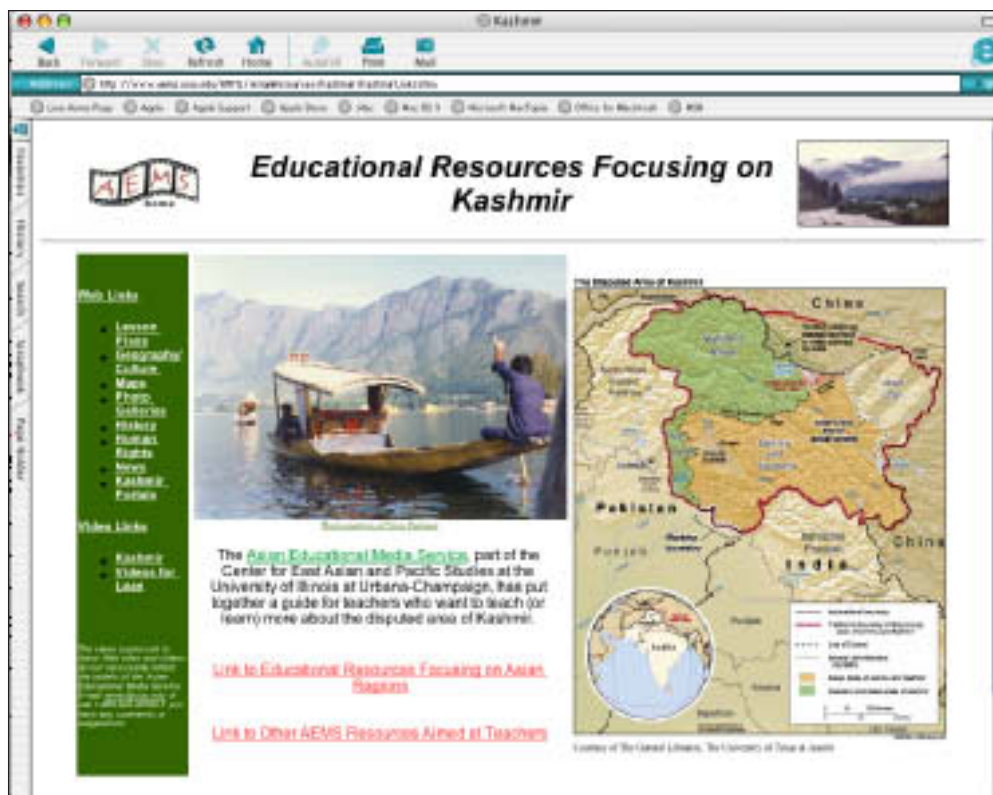
made a number of exciting changes to our program offerings and we invite everyone to take advantage of these service upgrades as the new academic year begins. Users will notice these updates most significantly on our website, but in addition to revamping the website for greater user-friendliness, we have also implemented considerable changes to our local resource library and we plan to introduce a number of other new services over the course of the coming semesters. We have worked hard all summer to make these upgrades and hope that you will take the time to read about these changes, try them out, and give us feedback!

Website: www.aems.uiuc.edu

Asian Regional Resources. We have updated all links and added a number of new links to our Asian Regional Resources pages. Many of you have come to rely on these country pages for lesson plans and other materials that can be used in the classroom, and now you will find up-to-date information on each region's geography, culture, and current events. Our goal is not only to continually update the content but also to add new information. As you browse through and use these resources, we hope that you will not hesitate to let us know if you have any questions or suggestions.

Online Database. Currently, we are in the final phase of project completion but later this fall users will be able to enjoy an upgraded online database with enhanced search capabilities. Instead of specifying the search criteria for various fields (the current search tool requires that users specify region, media type, subject, audience, and title keywords), users will be able to do a "simple search" and sort the results in a number of ways. We expect that the revised tool will simplify the search process and give users more efficient access to information.

New Global Issues and Current Events Section. To aid educators and students in learning more about topics that appear in news headlines, we have introduced a new section entitled "Global Issues and Current Events," which will include updated information, links, and other resources concerning contemporary issues related to Asia, as well as topics relevant to the global community. This fall, the section will contain resources that address the 60th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, and the 2005 World Expo that is currently taking place in Aichi, Japan.



AEMS News and Reviews Online Archive

Our quarterly newsletter continues to enjoy a wide readership and we appreciate the positive comments we receive regarding its content and usefulness for teaching. Although many of our subscribers have kept the paper copies for future reference, we know that some of you prefer to access the electronic copies available on our program website. In order to help readers locate specific issues and articles more efficiently, we have introduced two new features to the *AEMS News and Reviews* archive section. For each current issue, users can now use an online table of contents to jump directly to the article of choice. In addition, back issues have been reorganized so that the most recent issues are listed first. We expect that this will make it much easier for users to navigate the archive and to access relevant information more quickly.

Local Resource Library

For local users who have access to our media library resources, we have taken steps to expand and diversify our video and DVD collection. We have purchased a number of popular feature films from Asia that are available on DVD and are suitable for introducing important issues to classroom discussions. Some of those films include *The Story*

of the Weeping Camel (Mongolia), *Vertical Ray of the Sun* (Vietnam), *What Time Is It There?* (Taiwan), and *The Way Home* (South Korea), as well as a selection of now-classic *anime* (animation) films from famed Japanese animator Miyazaki Hayao, such as *Castle in the Sky* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*. Of course, our library will continue to hold copies of all materials reviewed in *AEMS News and Reviews* as well as films featured in our local Asian film festival each year. We encourage local users to visit our library and take advantage of these new and existing titles. (For information on our service area and borrowing guidelines, please visit the "Local Media Library" section on our website.)

Other Changes to Come

We hope that you have enjoyed reading about some of the exciting program developments here at AEMS. In addition to these summer projects, we are also considering other areas for development—ideas such as creating new feature film teachers' guides, co-sponsoring outreach workshops, and participating in various regional educational conferences. As we continue to explore new ways to provide better resources for learning and teaching about Asia, we hope that you will support this effort by utilizing our new tools and giving us your valuable input so that AEMS will continue to be a useful service to everyone. ♦

Asian Educational Media Service
Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue, MC-025
Urbana, Illinois 61801

www.aems.uiuc.edu

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Guide to Distributors

>> A list of distributors mentioned in this issue of *AEMS News and Reviews*

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19547. Tel: 800-543-3764 or 610-779-8226. Fax:
610-370-1978. E-mail: video@bullfrogfilms.com.
Web site: www.bullfrogfilms.com.

Discovery Channel Video, P.O. Box 788,
Florence, KY 41022-0788. Tel: 1-800-627-9399.
Fax: 859-342-0633. Web site: <http://shopping.discovery.com>.

Tamar Gordon, P.O. Box 187, Sand Lake, NY
12153. Tel: 518-674-8662. Fax: 518-674-2377.
E-mail: gordot@rpi.edu.