HOW TO USE WIDE ANGLE

This WIDE ANGLE education package gives you an exciting way of using public television programs to enrich political science, economics, and journalism courses. It includes VHS tapes from WIDE ANGLE’s first season: Greetings from Grozny (Chechnya), Soul of India, Cause for Murder (Mexico), The Empty ATM (Argentina), and To Have and Have Not (China). We have included brief video segments at the beginning of each tape to provide you with starting points for in-class discussions. Following these clips, there is an uncut broadcast version of the program. Greetings from Grozny, Soul of India, and Cause for Murder are most suited for political science, world events and journalism courses; The Empty ATM and To Have and Have Not have strong economics content as well.

This guide lists program themes and includes brief essays, along with discussion questions that are intended to help you and your students learn more about the meaning of the events examined in each program. Each section of the guide also features descriptions of the segments at the beginning of each videocassette, maps, and key dates.

STRATEGIES FOR USING THE VIDEOS

Media is most effective when used interactively, rather than passively, in class or group discussion. Consider using some of the following strategies when planning lessons or discussions based on WIDE ANGLE:

1. Preview videos to determine suitability for your objectives and your class.
2. Select segments that are directly relevant to your topic and appropriate for your class — you need not use an entire video at one time. A few well-chosen minutes may be more effective in illuminating your topic.
3. Provide a focus for interaction — something specific to do or look or listen for in relation to the chosen segment or presentation. This assures that the group will focus together on the information most relevant to your topic.
4. Don’t be afraid to pause for discussion, or to rewind and replay to underscore or clarify a particular point. This allows video to play a more interactive role in discussion.
5. Consider eliminating sound or picture. Allowing your class to provide their own narration of what they see, or to predict what the content accompanying the narration might be, is especially useful in working with groups whose primary language is not English.

When you’ve decided on the program or segments you’d like to cover with your class, photocopy the corresponding section of the guide to distribute to your class. You might also want to photocopy the resources section on the back cover of this guide.

WHAT IS WIDE ANGLE?

We’re proud to present WIDE ANGLE, the award-winning television documentary series that reports exclusively on the world and our fellow global citizens.

Everyone agrees that Americans need to understand more about the world. WIDE ANGLE has accepted the challenge of reporting on the most important and pressing social, political and economic issues confronting citizens and policymakers around the globe — telling human, accessible stories about people’s lives from Chechnya to China.

During its first season WIDE ANGLE aired ten one-hour films on PBS in primetime from July to September 2002, garnering extraordinary public recognition and uniformly positive reviews.

Our two hosts, foreign policy expert Jamie Rubin and BBC-trained journalist Daljit Dhalival, framed each program with a brief introduction and concluded with a probing interview with one of our nation’s leading policy makers, political thinkers or business leaders. These conversations “connect the dots” between events overseas and our American viewers.

In its first season WIDE ANGLE worked with some of the world’s top producers and partnered with prominent broadcasters, including The New York Times and Granada Factual USA, the BBC, CBC Canada, SBS Australia, France2, and TV2 Denmark. Each film was a U.S. television premiere.

The world has never been closer, and we believe that there has never been a stronger connection between events around the world and the daily domestic interests of Americans.

I hope you enjoy using these programs from Season One of WIDE ANGLE with your students.

Stephen Segaller, Executive Producer, WIDE ANGLE
Russia’s continuing war in Chechnya is many conflicts in one. It is partly the continuation of a historical colonial conflict between Moscow and the Chechens, the most rebellious ethnic group in the Russian Empire, which has continued at intervals for much of the last 200 years. It is also about the legacy of the breakup of the USSR in 1991, when the Soviet monolith split apart, and different peoples bargained for different pieces of it. The Chechens wanted full independence, and Russia wanted to maintain its new territorial integrity.

The issue of independence was the main bone of contention in Russia’s first war in Chechnya between 1994 and 1996. The Russian army lost that war and pulled out, leaving the Chechens to their own devices. Chechnya then spent three years of de facto statehood, which were wracked by violence, crime — in particular mass kidnappings — and a growth in Islamic radicalism. So, when a new conflict started in 1999, this also became a war about Russia’s security fears on its southern flank. In September 2001, President Vladimir Putin called Chechnya his front on the “war on terror,” and many in the West concentrated on this one element of the conflict to the exclusion of the others.

All these are the political roots of the conflict. But like most wars, the one in Chechnya has gotten out of the control of the men who launched it. Somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 civilians have died in nine years of war. So this is also a war of revenge and score settling between pro-Moscow and anti-Moscow Chechens and a criminalized war in which Russian soldiers and their Chechen militant hostage-takers. Since December 2002, Chechnya matters a great deal. The first is that terrorist methods are on the increase, with all the terrifying consequences involved. In October 2002 the whole world watched the theatre siege in Moscow, which ended in the deaths of more than 120 hostages and all the Chechen militant hostage-takers. Since December 2002, Chechnya has seen a spate of suicide bombings. In July 2003 there was one outside Moscow. This kind of terrorism is likely to spread as long as the political causes of the conflict are unresolved.

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openly criticized the first Chechen war, has had its independence clipped. TVS, the station that was most free in the second conflict, was recently shut down.

A Long History of Bloodshed

Chechnya’s bloody history of war with Russia dates back to the 1780s. Long after areas like Georgia and Poland had been incorporated into the empire, the Chechens and their fellow mountain tribesmen were still fighting the Russians. Russia’s most famous writer, Leo Tolstoy, served as an officer in Chechnya in the 1850s and his novella Hadji Murat has many scenes that Russian soldiers or Chechen villagers would recognize today.

Chechen resistance to rule by Moscow continued after the October Revolution of 1917. And in 1944, the Chechens were the second largest group (after the Soviet Germans) to be deported en masse by Stalin from their homeland. Approximately a quarter of the 400,000 Chechens brutally shipped off to Central Asia in cattle trucks died within five years. They lived in exile until 1957, when they were allowed to return to Chechnya.

The “Chechen Revolution” of 1991 was one of many nationalist and anti-Communist movements springing up like wildflowers all over the Soviet Union. But while other ethnic groups either received outright independence — such as the Georgians or the Lithuanians — or made their peace with Moscow — such as the oil-rich region of Tatarstan — the Chechens lived for three years in a strange twilight zone. They were de facto independent of Moscow, but were part of the same economy and were home to the leading black market in the chaotic new post-Communist Russia.

Islam was not a big factor at first. The Chechens were Muslims, but their first leader, Jokhar Dudayev, was a former Soviet airforce general with a Russian wife and no interest in religion. This was much more a struggle about politics, civil rights and money. When President Boris Yeltsin sent in the army in December 1994 to crush Dudayev and the Chechen nationalist movement, everything changed. Ordinary Chechens remembered the history they had been told, picked up weapons and fought back. The bloodiest war in Europe broke out. By the time that war ended in 1996, with a Russian defeat, Chechnya was a different place. Its main cities had been destroyed, tens of thousands of people had died — a whole society had been turned upside down.

During and after that first war, radical Islam began to flourish. Many of the Middle Eastern volunteers who came into Chechnya preached a new fundamentalist Islam that was foreign to Chechen traditions. Several of them were almost certainly linked to al-Qaeda. And in the younger generation, which had just emerged from war, they found thousands of ready recruits.

MUM’S THE WORLD

Why has the West, especially the United States, remained so indifferent to the conflict in Grozny? Its muted response stems, in part, from concern about how Russia’s government will respond. The White House has traded its silence on Chechnya for Russia’s help on fighting terrorism. American and European politicians fear that Chechen independence could destabilize Russia, resulting in its fragmentation and even a takeover by new leaders hostile to Western interests. The United Nations treats the Chechnya war as a domestic or internal matter outside of its jurisdiction. Although a few protests have emanated from the European community, they have been feeble.

KEY DATES

1944 Stalin deportsthe entire Chechen nation to Siberia and Central Asia as suspected German collaborators.

1957 Chechensallowed to return to Chechnya.

1991 Chechnya declares its independence.

1994-96 War with Russia results in de facto independence for Chechnya.

1999 Russia reinvades Chechnya.

Stories in the Program

Greetings from Grozny gives us unforgettable glimpses into the lives of Chechen civilians, refugees and fighters, and is all the more remarkable because almost no independent journalists visit Chechnya any more, save for one or two very brave Russian newspaper reporters.

The figures we see in the film all speak Russian, but they are from very different worlds. All of them, in different ways, are frightened. The Chechen women are desperate at seeing their brother dragged away for possible torture and death. The Russian sapper dreads de-mining the roads, any of which may be booby-trapped and blow him up. The Chechen militant fighter thinks about death every day.

What Future?

Chechnya is likely to be a very bleak place for many years to come. President Putin has begun what he calls a “political process” there, but most observers have strong reservations about it. A “presidential election” held on October 5, 2003 confirmed as leader Moscow’s chosen Chechen appointee, Akhmad Kadyrov. Mr Putin himself is standing for reelection in March 2004. There is precious little to be optimistic about. There are still 80,000 or so Russian soldiers stationed in Chechnya. Resistance continues, and a couple of dozen soldiers die every month. Suicide bombings are now killing scores of civilians, both Chechen and Russian. The whole region is in ruins and for a decade has not had proper functioning health or educational systems or economy. Tuberculosis and other diseases are rife. But the worst of it is that very few political leaders, either Russian or Western, show signs of wanting to take responsibility for a great tragedy in what is supposed to be a part of Europe.

Thomas de Waal is Caucasus Editor of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in London and co-author with Carlotta Gall of Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus (NYU Press 1998).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Political Science

- The Russians and the Chechen rebels are using violence as a way of advancing their political goals. What do you think of their methods?
- Why is Islamic fundamentalism becoming more attractive to younger Chechen rebels?
- How does Russia’s response to Chechen terrorism compare to recent U.S. anti-terrorism policies both at home and abroad — for example, in Afghanistan, Indonesia and the Philippines?
- What role do you see for the United States and/or the United Nations in this conflict? Do you think the United States has a vital interest in the outcome?
- Can you think of alternative political solutions to this conflict?

Journalism

- What risks do journalists face when reporting on stories in places like Chechnya?
- Who decides the difference between legitimate independence movements fighting unwanted occupiers, and terrorist groups creating havoc to achieve their goals?
- How did the filmmakers use different types of footage (interviews, home movies, archival film) to tell the story?
- How were the filmmakers able to add a sense of intimacy and immediacy to the documentary? Whose stories did you find most compelling and why?
- If you were writing an article about the university in Grozny, what would be the focus of your story? What might you say about the wants and desires of young people living through conflicts such as this one?
The Struggle for National Identity

By Ashutosh Varshney

Imagine two Indians, Vaidya and Bhatt, each representing a contrasting view of India’s national identity. Vaidya’s view is taken from Mahatma Gandhi, unquestionably the father of Indian independence. This view is known as “composite nationalism,” or what we today would call multiculturalism. In contrast, Bhatt’s view focuses on the primacy of Hindus in India and demands that all non-Hindu groups should play a secondary role in national life. They “can stay as a younger brother,” is how Bhatt puts it. This view is called “Hindu nationalism.”

Roughly 82 percent of India is Hindu and the remaining 18 percent, numbering between 190 and 200 million people, belong to a variety of faiths: Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Judaism, etc. At nearly 12.8 percent, and numbering about 130 million, Muslims are the largest minority. Finally, at two percent, and numbering approximately 20 million, Christians are the third largest Indian minority. Hindu nationalism has historically been hostile to these last two religious communities in India.

Gandhian composite nationalism drove India’s freedom movement and is the foundation of modern India’s constitution. Hindu nationalism, a minor force during India’s freedom movement, as well as for four decades after independence, has become a powerful force since the late 1980s. Though it has not been able to defeat the multicultural view of India completely, it has certainly been in ascendance. Hindu nationalists are part of a ruling coalition in the federal government in Delhi. Of the major states in India, only in the state of Gujarat have they been able to run the government entirely on their own in recent times.

What are the basic sources of difference between India’s founding principles and Hindu nationalists? According to composite nationalism, being a good Muslim is perfectly consistent with being a good Indian. Religion (and language) do not define India; India is multicultural and pluralist. Pluralism is embodied in India’s laws (such as protection of minority rights and educational institutions) and in political institutions (such as India’s federal system, which — among other things — allows each Indian state to determine for itself which of the country’s many languages it will use for official business).

The Hindu nationalists argue that emotions and loyalty, not laws and institutions, make a nation. Laws, they say, can always be politically manipulated. One should ground politics explicitly in Hinduism, not in laws and institutions.

But who is a Hindu? Savarkar, the ideological father of Hindu nationalism, gave a definition in Hindutva: “A Hindu means a person who regards this land … from the Indus to the seas as his
fatherland (pitribhumi) as well as his holy land (pasyabhumi).” The definition is thus territorial (land between the Indus and the seas), genealogical (“fatherland”) and religious (“holy land”). Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists can be part of this definition, for they meet all three criteria. All of these religions were born in India. Christians, Jews, Parsis, and Muslims can meet only two, for India is not their holy land.

How can such “non-Hindu” groups be part of India? By cultural (not political) assimilation, say the Hindu nationalists. Parsis and Jews, they argue, are already assimilated, becoming part of the nation’s mainstream. This leaves us with the Christians and Muslims. “They,” wrote Savarkar, “cannot be recognized as Hindus. For though Hindustan (India) to them is the fatherland as to any other Hindu, yet it is not to them a holy land too. Their holy land is far off in Arabia or Palestine …. Their love is divided.”

This forms the basis for Hindu nationalism’s adversarial relationship with India’s Christians and Muslims. Of the two, ultimately, Muslims have been designated as the principal adversary of Hindu nationalism — partly because of their numbers, and partly because a Muslim homeland in the form of Pakistan, after all, did partition India in 1947.

According to the Hindu nationalist ideology, to become part of the Indian nation, Muslims must: accept the centrality of Hinduism to Indian civilization; remorsefully accept that Muslim rulers of India between the years 1000 and 1757 destroyed pillars of Hindu civilization, especially Hindu temples; not claim special privileges such as maintenance of religious personal laws (These are special laws that govern minorities in such noncriminal matters as marriage, divorce and inheritance.); and not demand special state grants for their educational institutions.

In India, scholars have repeatedly told us, Islam developed two broad forms: syncretistic and exclusivist. The former has a doctrine adapted to local culture, while the latter attempts to exclude all ideas that were not part of original Islamic doctrine. In India, syncretistic Islam integrated into the preexisting Indian culture long ago. Syncretistic Islam has produced some of the pillars of Indian culture, music, poetry, and literature. Indian Muslims of various hues have also fought wars against India.

The political and ideological battle of the Hindu nationalists should be against Islamic fundamentalism and Muslim separatism, not against everybody who professes faith in Islam. By generating an anti-Muslim discourse, the Hindu nationalists risk embittering all of the country’s 120 to 130 million Muslims permanently, including those with syncretistic attitudes toward the majority Hindu culture.

The battle between Bhatt and Vaidya is a battle for the essence, peace and dignity of India. Hindu nationalists have still to convince a majority, or plurality, of Indian voters — including Hindu voters — that they should shed their multicultural moorings. On the basis of electoral statistics, scholars of Indian politics continue to believe that the odds of a multicultural India disappearing are very low. India’s democracy, in short, is the best bulwark against the spread of Hindu nationalism as an ideology.

Ashutosh Varshney is the director of the Center for South Asian Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he is also a professor of political science. “The Struggle for National Identity” originally appeared on the WIDE ANGLE Web site, and draws from the author’s book, Ethnopolitical Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India. His writing has also appeared in The Financial Times, The Washington Post and Newsweek.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Political Science and Economics

- How does the situation in India compare to other nationalist conflicts between religious or ethnic groups around the world? Consider Ireland, Israel, Rwanda, or the former Yugoslavian confederation for comparison.
- What were the likely political considerations that influenced New Delhi’s response to the Gujarat riots?
- How should the local government have responded to the riots in Gujarat? Was there anything they could have done to prevent them?
- What should the Indian government do to show that justice is being carried out?
- Do you feel that Gandhi’s vision of a humanistic, secular India can ever be realized? Why or why not?

Journalism

- Before and after Soul of India was broadcast on public television, it was criticized by Hindu nationalist groups as “anti-Hindu propaganda.” From what you’ve seen, did WIDE ANGLE’s journalists present a balanced picture of the conflict in Gujarat? Cite specific examples to support your argument.
- To what extent should journalists take the concerns and sensitivities of different groups into account when reporting on stories such as this?
- What techniques did the producers use to tell the story? What different types of footage were included?
- Does this program offer any hope that India can have a more peaceful future?
At the turn of the century, Mexico embarked on a historic and peaceful political transition by ending seven consecutive decades of authoritarian rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and by electing its first opposition president, Vicente Fox.

Mr. Fox, a son of ranchers and a former Coca-Cola marketing executive, promised a country still romantic about its revolutionary roots nothing less than a social upheaval. He pledged to eradicate the corruption, repression and impunity that had sustained the PRI.

Before the end of Mr. Fox’s first year in office, his promises were put to the test by the violent deaths of two crusading lawyers. Councilwoman Maria de los Angeles Tames, who represented a heavily populated suburb of Mexico City, was gunned down in September 2001 in front of her home in Atizapan de Zaragoza. Prosecutors alleged that Ms. Tames, who was 27 at the time of her death, had been shot after uncovering corruption by the Atizapan government.

A month later, one of Mexico’s most prominent human rights lawyers was found shot at point-blank range in her office near the center of the capital. Digna Ochoa, a former nun, had been the recipient of international honors for work that often pitted her against ruthless powers in the police and armed forces.

The deaths harkened Mexico back to the rule of the PRI, which had been marred by a litany of unresolved political killings — including the massacre of some 100 students and the disappearances of hundreds of suspected guerillas during the so-called Dirty War of the 1970s. The PRI had risen to power from the ashes of the Mexican Revolution in 1929. It held onto power through a vast system of political patronage to its supporters and repression against its opponents. Presidents were made by fraudulent elections, and ruled like kings.

The landmark election in 2000 that brought President Fox to power was considered the most transparent political contest in modern Mexican history. The peaceful transition that followed won Mexico international legitimacy as a true democracy, raising expectations that important changes were on the way. Justice for all was a public priority.

In response to that call, President Fox appointed a corruption czar to audit every government agency. The president also appointed a special prosecutor to investigate the most heinous atrocities of the past regime. And after years of resistance by past governments, Mexico, under President Fox, adopted several important international human rights treaties.

Still, after three years of transition, Mexicans have begun to
express disappointment in President Fox’s initiatives, saying that they have been crippled by his government’s inexperience and inaction. The investigations into past abuses, considered Mr. Fox’s most important human rights effort, have been blocked by limited cooperation from the military and limited resources. Inquiries into scandals by high-powered public officials, accused of illegally using tens of millions of dollars of public funds for political campaigns, have flopped. Meanwhile indigenous peasants accused of petty crimes are held in jails for months, simply because they do not have enough money to pay fines as low as $10.

Justice remains a distant dream.

The investigations into the deaths of Ms. Tames and Ms. Ochoa have highlighted both the progress and the pitfalls in the Mexican judicial system since Mexico’s shift toward democracy. In the murder of Ms. Tames, state prosecutors moved swiftly to arrest the mayor of Atizapan, Antonio Dominguez Zambrano, who was accused of running a multimillion dollar operation that controlled the suburb like the mob. Mr. Dominguez was a member of Mr. Fox’s National Action Party (PAN), and his arrest revealed that corruption and brutality had spread beyond the PRI into the country’s political culture. Meanwhile the case of Ms. Ochoa, who was 37 when she died, remains shrouded by public disbelief. Three special prosecutors were assigned to investigate her death. All three ended their investigations with findings that Ms. Ochoa had committed suicide.

Ms. Tames and Ms. Ochoa had fought for justice from opposite ends of Mexican society. Ms. Tames, petite, but hard-charging, came from the sprawling suburb of Atizapan, population one million and growing. She was born into the area’s vibrant middle class to parents who considered themselves foot soldiers in President Fox’s effort to defeat the PRI. Ms. Tames followed in their footsteps. She was elected councilwoman on the same day that President Fox was elected president. But her political honeymoon was cut short when after just a few months in office, she began to discover that leaders of her own PAN were running the local government with the same kickbacks and bribes as the PRI.

Ms. Tames told her parents that she would not rest until she saw Mayor Dominguez and his pack of thieves in jail. Pedro Tames, the young lawyer’s father, said he warned his daughter that she was playing with fire.

On September 5, 2001, as Ms. Tames returned home from work, she was shot five times and bled to death in her mother’s arms. A month later, Mexico’s international human rights community was shocked by the death of Digna Ochoa. Like Ms. Tames, Ms. Ochoa was also petite and relentless. But unlike the Atizapan attorney, Ms. Ochoa had come from a very humble beginning.

The daughter of a sugar mill worker from the gulf coast state of Veracruz, Ms. Ochoa first fought for justice as a teenager. In 1980 she and her 12 brothers and sisters organized protests after their father, a union organizer, was arrested on dubious murder charges. They won his release after 13 months.

She beat the economic odds to finish law school, and then dedicated her career to helping poor, indigenous people like her father. Her most prominent clients were Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera, peasant activists who clashed with the military, local political bosses and at least one U.S. corporation in the state of Guerrero after leading a movement against illegal logging in the mountains there. The men were arrested by soldiers, forced to sign false confessions claiming responsibility for illegal weapons sales and sentenced to prison.

Her work won Ms. Ochoa international acclaim, but at home, she told her friends and colleagues, she was hounded by death threats. In 1999, Ms. Ochoa reported that she had been bound and interrogated for several hours by strangers who invaded her home.

In the fall of 2001, more than a year after Mr. Fox’s election, Ms. Ochoa told a few friends and relatives that the threats against her had begun again, and she had purchased a gun for self protection. The last threat was dated October 16.

Three days later, Ms. Ochoa was found dead with her gun set beneath her body.

Two weeks after her death, President Fox ordered Mr. Cabrera and Mr. Montiel released from prison.

The deaths of the two young attorneys shattered the euphoria of Mexico’s transition to democracy, waking the nation up to the obvious reality that its most serious problems had not vanished after a free and fair election. President Fox, as the leader of the country’s first years of transition, has expressed commitment to change, or El Cambio. His words, however, have not generally been matched by deeds.

And so it will likely take years, some analysts say decades, before Mexico’s military becomes fully subordinate to civilian powers; before elected officials are required to serve the public over their political parties; before police stop taking bribes for traffic tickets; and indigenous men and women enjoy equal opportunities for jobs and education.

Ms. Tames and Ms. Ochoa seemed to understand that reality all too well.

“I started my career in law with the illusion that I could help people, thinking that all it took was to know the law to achieve this goal,” Ms. Ochoa once said. “Later I learned that due to rampant corruption and impunity in Mexico, it was not enough to be innocent, to be right and to have the law on your side. But it was necessary to fight the system. This is what the judicial system that defends very specific political and economic interests.”

Ginger Thompson is the Mexico City Bureau Chief for The New York Times. In 2000, she was a member of the reporting team that wrote the Pulitzer Prize-winning series, “How Race Is Lived in America.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Political Science and Economics

- How does a one-party government corrupt a society?
- What political and business interests did Digna Ochoa and Marigeli Tames challenge? Why would the local police and the regional government support these interests even in the face of a possible scandal?
- What forms does corruption take on a local level? On a national level?
- How did international organizations like Amnesty International and the Sierra Club support Digna Ochoa and help make people aware of her work? What interests do these international groups have in supporting efforts such as Ochoa’s?
- What is the relationship between civil government and the military in Mexico? Do local civil agencies have autonomy from the military? How can governments develop safeguards to both control and support the military?

Journalism

- What risks do interviewees face when they appear in a documentary like this?
- How did the filmmakers create a sense of intimacy and immediacy in the documentary?
- How did the documentary show that there are sometimes connections between international businesses and local corruption?
- What role, if any, did journalism play in the lives of Tames and Ochoa?
- Based on what you’ve seen in the documentary, do you think justice is possible in these cases? To what extent do you think journalists should have a role in trying to achieve justice?
The Empty ATM

Argentina was trapped in a financial crisis, which some fear would trigger an economic and political meltdown throughout Latin America. The Empty ATM reveals how Argentines are coping with severe banking disruption and a shrunken economy, including the explosive growth of "barter clubs" that challenge the very need for traditional monetary currency.

After the documentary, program host Jamie Rubin interviews Joseph E. Stiglitz, winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize for Economics.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Argentina is trapped in a financial crisis, which some fear could trigger an economic and political meltdown throughout Latin America. The Empty ATM reveals how Argentines are coping with their shattered economy, including the explosive growth of “barter clubs” that challenge the very need for traditional monetary currency.

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PROGRAM THEMES

THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC POLICIES: Argentina was once one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but in 2001 its fiscal policies led to a financial crisis and widespread unemployment. While some citizens participate in angry protests at banks, others are involved in a barter system that is creating new economic opportunities.

THE HUMAN FACE OF CHANGE: The crisis in Argentina is dramatized by the reality TV program, Human Resources, created by producers who were themselves unemployed. In the program, two unemployed women compete for a job as a sales clerk.

THE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION: The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had a role in Argentina’s economic problems and set conditions for debt repayment that made the country’s economic problems worse.

For more about The Empty ATM on the Web, go to www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/shows/argentina/index.html

ARGENTINA, SHORTCHANGED

Why the Nation that Followed the Rules Fell to Pieces

By Joseph E. Stiglitz

Argentina is a familiar refrain: Another Latin American republic, this time Argentina, can’t get its act together. A profligate government and its populist policies have brought the country to ruin. Americans can smugly feel they are immune from such Latin ways.

Bewildered Latin Americans, however, see Argentina very differently. What happened, they ask, to this poster child of neoliberalism and the notion that free markets would ensure prosperity? This was the country that did everything right. How could it have fallen so far?

There is some truth in both views, but ultimately, the one that’s been popularized in America is, I think, misguided.

The crisis that had been brewing in Argentina for several years finally burst out in December 2001. As the official unemployment rate approached 20 percent, with real joblessness substantially higher, workers had had enough. Street demonstrations overturned a democratically elected government. The country could not meet its debt payments. It had no choice but to default, and the economic regime, with the Argentine peso fixed in value to the dollar, had to crumble. Since then, the economy has gone from bad to worse.

Argentina would have been better off if there were less corruption in political life and if it had not run deficits; after all, you can’t have a debt crisis if you have no debt.

But the real question is, did those large deficits, corruption and public mismanagement cause the Argentine crisis? Many American economists suggest that the crisis would have been averted had Argentina followed the advice of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) religiously, especially by cutting back on expenditures (including at the provincial level) ruthlessly. Many Latin Americans, however, think that the full IMF plan would have led to an even worse crisis — sooner. I think it is the Latins who are right.

Like most economists outside the IMF, I believe that in an economic downturn, cutting expenditures simply makes matters worse: tax revenues, employment and confidence in the economy also decline. Yet the IMF said make cuts, and Argentina complied, trimming expenditures at the federal level (except interest) by 10 percent between 1999 and 2001.

Not surprisingly, the cuts exacerbated the downturn; had they been as ruthless as the IMF wanted, the economic collapse would have been even faster. And the calamity that followed the political unease would almost surely have been every bit as bad.

A closer look at its budget also shows how grossly unfair is the picture of Argentine profligacy. The official numbers reveal a deficit of less than three percent of gross domestic product. But even that...
figure is misleading because of Argentina’s decision to privatize its social security system. Had Argentina not privatized, its 2001 budget would have shown a surplus.

If budget profligacy or corruption were not the problem, what was? To understand what happened in Argentina, we need to look to the economic reforms that nearly all of Latin America undertook in the 1980s. Countries emerging from years of poverty and dictatorship were told that democracy and the markets would bring unprecedented prosperity. And in some countries, such as Mexico, the rich few have benefited.

More broadly, though, economic performance has been dismal, with growth little more than half of what it was in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s. Disillusionment with “reform” — neo-liberal style — has set in. Argentina’s experience is being read. This is what happens to the A-plus student of the IMF. The disaster comes not from not listening to the IMF, but rather from listening.

That Argentina has moved to the bottom of the class has much to do with the exchange rate system. A decade ago, it had hyperinflation, which is always disastrous. Pegging the currency to the dollar — one peso equaled $1, no matter what the rate of inflation or the economic conditions — acted, almost miraculously, to cure this problem. The IMF supported the policy. It stabilized the currency and was supposed to discipline the government, which couldn’t spend beyond its means by printing money. It could only spend beyond its means by borrowing. And to borrow, presumably, it would have to follow good economic policies. A magic formula seemed to have been found to tame the seemingly incorrigible politicians.

There was only one problem: It was a system doomed to failure. Fixed exchange rates have never worked. Typically, failures are not usually the result of mistakes made by the country, but of shocks from beyond their borders, about which they can do little.

Had most of Argentina’s trade been with the United States, pegging the peso to the dollar might have made sense. But much of Argentina’s trade was with Europe and Brazil. The strong (most would say, overvalued) dollar has meant enormous American trade deficits. But with the Argentine peso pegged to the dollar, an overvalued dollar means an overvalued peso. And while the United States has been able to sustain trade deficits, Argentina could not. Whenever you have a massive trade deficit, you have to borrow from abroad to finance it. Although the United States is now the world’s largest debtor country, outsiders are still willing to lend us money. They were willing to lend to Argentina, too, when it had the IMF stamp of approval. But eventually they realized the risk.

The risks were brought home by the global financial crisis of 1997–1998 when, suddenly, the interest rates that Argentina paid to its foreign and domestic creditors soared. As the Asian financial crisis led to crises in Russia, and then Brazil, Argentina suffered more and more. Interest rates soared, and with the collapse of the

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**KEY DATES**

- 1946 Lt. Gen Juan Perón elected president of Argentina.
- 1952 Eva Perón, the president’s popular wife, dies.
- 1955 Perón forced to resign, moves to Spain.
- 1973 Perón returns to Argentina and is reelected president.
- 1974 Perón dies; his third wife (and vice-president) Isabel Perón takes over the presidency.
- 1976 Military coup; Argentina’s “dirty war” begins, with disappearances and torture carried out by the military regime.
- 1982 Argentina invades the Falkland Islands; the British retake them, culminating in the defeat of the military regime and leading to the restoration of civilian rule.
- 1991 After several years of hyperinflation, the value of Argentina’s peso is pegged to the dollar.
- 1998 August 1998 Argentina has its worst recession in a decade; unemployment hits 15 percent.
- 2001 December 2001 Argentina defaults on $155 billion of debt. President de la Rua resigns.
- 2004 May 2004 Nestor Kirchner takes office as Argentina’s sixth president in 18 months.
Modernization and Moral Issues in China
By Dorothy J. Solinger

China’s modernization, urbanization and its startlingly successful movement away from a planned, state-led economy to one run by the rules of the free market are exciting developments. Streets in the largest and wealthiest Chinese cities could almost be mistaken for somewhere in the United States or Western Europe. In only about 20 years’ time, the big cities and the eastern part of the country have undergone earth-shaking transformations. Cell phones, skyscrapers and e-mail are as common now in these areas as they are in New York or Los Angeles.

While some have benefited and even become rich in China, we should not lose sight of the big moral questions raised by the country’s leap into the 21st century. Just what proportion of the nation’s population is enjoying the benefits of this huge shift? If prosperity in some parts of China depends in part on the deprivation of the poor, are the costs worth the achievements? What are the tradeoffs—the plusses and minuses of China’s rise?

A Look Back in Time
To think about these questions, we need some background. After the fall of the last Chinese dynasty in 1911, the country saw nearly four decades of warfare, internal disruption, foreign occupation, and the rise of two political parties that competed to rule the country, culminating in a civil war won by the Communists in 1949 and capped by their revolutionary overturning of Chinese society.

Throughout the 1950s, the Party ensured, through sometimes violent mass movements, that all wealth and property were turned over to the new government and redistributed as its leaders saw fit. An egalitarian ethos reigned, and, while Party officials definitely lived better than other people, in general people in the same region lived better than other people, in general people in the same region. An egalitarian ethos reigned, and, while Party officials definitely lived better than other people, in general people in the same region lived better than other people. Still, three enormous differences divided the populace: First, the cities were favored by disproportionate state investment, more plentiful goods, a higher level of education, and better health care. Almost all adults in the cities were employed, usually in factories that saw to their — and their family’s— basic needs, and that meted out wages according to seniority. In the countryside, farmers were organized into collective farms in the early 1950s, only to see that land merged into larger and larger collective units throughout the decade. Though the communes were later broken down into smaller units, the dominant idea in running the country for over two decades was to force the rural people to grow enough
Contesting Citizenship in Urban China, 2000

Do you think China is better off today, with all the reforms that have taken place? What do you think China's government is doing right? Do you think China is making progress in terms of social and economic equality? What are some of the challenges that China faces today?

How many occupations do you recall seeing in China before the reforms began? Have there been any changes in the types of jobs available today? What do you think the future holds for China's labor market?

What does Han Dong Fang's interview and his book, *To Have and Have Not*, say about the challenges faced by migrant workers in China? How do you think the government makes it possible for migrant workers to find work in the cities? What are some of the problems that migrant workers face when they try to make a living in the cities?

For China, do the benefits of WTO membership outweigh the negatives? Why? 

Why do you think the government makes it difficult for the children of migrant workers to get an education? What do you think about the idea of making China's cities more welcoming for migrant workers?

China and Global Issues

Finally, two of China's near-term outcomes should especially attract our attention: the issue of China's participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO), which it joined in late 2001, and of its progress toward democratization. Entry into the WTO has meant that because of the Organization's rules against tariffs and subsidies, Western goods will be able to enter China much more cheaply than before. The downside of this, though, is that the much more competitive foreign products are likely to drive many Chinese firms and farmers out of business, and this will probably mean even higher numbers of rural migrants squeezing into the cities and even greater proportions of urban workers losing their jobs. Already, perhaps 60 million workers have been laid off, amounting to one third of the former urban work force.

The other question is whether the introduction of foreign products — along with the swiftly expanding numbers of Internet users — will together usher alien ideas and philosophies into the country. The answer is this that has already been happening. But the leaders who run the Communist Party, though definitely open to new concepts, remain essentially authoritarian and are not likely to give up the ship without a fight.


**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Political Science and Economics**

- How many occupations do you recall seeing in the film, and what do you imagine are their rankings in terms of social prestige in China today? In actual human worth? If you see a discrepancy between prestige and actual worth or value, why do you think this is?
- For China, do the benefits of WTO membership outweigh the negatives? Why?
- Why do you think the government makes it difficult for the children of migrant workers to get an education there?
- Do you think free markets will lead to democratization in China?
- Do you think a Western-style electoral system might bring about a change for the better in economic conditions in China? Has globalization had a similar effect in the West?
- Do you think China is better off today, with all of the consequences of market reforms, than it was before they opened up their markets to foreign trade and switched to a market-oriented economy?

**Journalism**

- How did the program's producers use personal stories to show the impact of recent economic changes in China?
- What opportunities are women shown to have (or lack) in some of the stories?
- What does Han Dong Fang's interview and his book, *Hong Kong-based radio program show you about freedom of speech and journalism in China?*
- Charlene Barshisley says that the increased use of the Internet and China's openness to foreign trade will begin opening up its political system and lead to its improving its human rights record. Do you agree or disagree? Cite examples from the program that support your argument.