



PAUL GOODMAN CHANGED MY LIFE

a film by Jonathan Lee

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Paul Goodman was once so ubiquitous in the American zeitgeist that he merited a “cameo” in Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall*. Author of legendary bestseller *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), Goodman was also a poet, 1940s out queer (and family man), pacifist, visionary, co-founder of Gestalt therapy—and a moral compass for many in the burgeoning counterculture of the ’60s.

Paul Goodman Changed My Life immerses you in an era of high intellect (that heady, cocktail-glass juncture that *Mad Men* has so effectively exploited) when New York was peaking culturally and artistically; when ideas, and the people who propounded them, seemed to punch in at a higher weight class than they do now. Using a treasure trove of archival multimedia—selections from Goodman’s poetry (read by Garrison Keillor and Edmund White); quotes from Susan Sontag, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Noam Chomsky; plentiful footage of Goodman himself; plus interviews with his family, peers and activists—director/producer Jonathan Lee and producer/editor Kimberly Reed (*Prodigal Sons*) have woven together a rich portrait of an intellectual heavyweight whose ideas are long overdue for rediscovery.

PAUL GOODMAN BIO

Born in New York City in 1911, Paul Goodman labored in obscurity as a writer and freelance intellectual until 1960 when the publication of *Growing Up Absurd* made him famous and a significant moral force of the decade.

SOCIAL CRITIC & PHILOSOPHER OF EDUCATION

Grace Paley says in her interview that Paul Goodman “was not ahead of his time but *in his time*.” A brilliant and imaginative social thinker, Goodman’s “utopian essays and practical proposals” inspired the leaders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Berkeley Free Speech Movement—as they inspired him. His *Compulsory Mis-education* and *Community of Scholars* were important texts for educational reform efforts in the 1960s and beyond.

RETHINKING CITIES

Communitas, co-written with his architect brother Percival Goodman and published in 1947, became a classic in community planning that is still in print and widely used in architecture and community planning courses.

GESTALT THERAPY

Gestalt Therapy (1951), co-authored with Fritz Perls, launched a new school of psychotherapy that now flourishes worldwide—far from the Esalen Institute in California where it first attracted media attention.

GAY LIBERATION PIONEER

Paul Goodman’s unabashed frankness about his bisexuality was costly to his career and reputation: he was never in a closet that he had to come out of—but it won him the admiration of some of the activists who created the modern gay rights movement.

PACIFIST

Goodman’s outspoken support for young Vietnam War draft resisters, along with Grace Paley, Noam Chomsky, Marc Raskin, Mitchell Goodman, and Dr. Benjamin Spock, earned him the FBI classification of “subversive homosexual”—and made him a beacon for young men facing conscription, including his own son.

POET

Some of America’s best-known poets and critics admired Paul Goodman’s poetry: John Ashbery, Adrienne Rich, Hayden Carruth, Susan Sontag. Composer Ned Rorem set many of his poems to music.

And despite the remarkable achievements and unusual life of this 20th century man of letters, Goodman’s work has almost completely disappeared since his death at age 60 in 1972. Most of his books are out-of-print and people under fifty know almost nothing about this man “whose influence, if not name, is all around us,” according to Noam Chomsky.

This documentary introduces the life and work of this exemplary citizen-poet and free spirit as seen through the eyes of some of those who have said, “Paul Goodman changed my life.”

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 1970, I helped organize a teach-in on the Vietnam War at the Choate School. Richard Nixon had sent troops into Cambodia, thereby widening the war he had campaigned on having a “secret plan” to end and hundreds of colleges and some high schools went on strike in protest.

One of the anti-war speakers suggested Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* as a book that could help us make sense of what was happening in our country. I got it, read it and liked it enough that I started reading Paul Goodman's other books and frequent pieces in the *New York Review of Books*.

I'd never read books like his. Goodman was a learned, rational yet passionate writer-thinker-poet who offered support for my feelings that my country was a mess, but that it could be different—and that ideas mattered. His voice radiated not only intellectual authority—which I craved—but his intense yearning for human contact and love, a yearning that echoed my own. He became my hero, an “alternative father/teacher/wise elder.”

I chased after his books, absorbed his ideas and used him as my moral compass. And that was all *before* I learned that he was an out bisexual as well as a married father of three. As a young gay man coming of age during the time of Stonewall, I'd never read anyone write so frankly and unapologetically about being queer as Paul Goodman did in his book *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative* (1970); and that he did not focus one-dimensionally on sexual identity was very important to me because I didn't feel that being gay should limit me to only caring about gay identity and my own distinct tribe. I wanted to be part of what he called “the Grand Community” and he was my proof that it was possible.

That was when I was in my early twenties. In my mid-thirties, I was overtaken one day while at my desk at work with an unexpected urge to write about Paul Goodman. I needed to “get him out of my system” and reflect on what my Goodman infatuation had been about. I wrote, or should say, gushed out a 10-page letter and sent it off to historian-social critic Christopher Lasch, a Goodman admirer, for his feedback.

Lasch encouraged me to pursue my interest in writing about Goodman, so I did. Soon I met his literary executor, Taylor Stoehr, who knew more about Goodman than anyone in the world since he'd been working on a biography for years. He told me that again and again people he interviewed for the book—hundreds—would say to him, “You know, Paul Goodman changed my life.” Taylor paused, and then said, “That could make a fascinating documentary film: to ask some of these individuals how Paul Goodman changed their lives and how that influence played out ten, twenty, even thirty years later.”

I left my first meeting with Taylor in 1988 and thought to myself “I am going to make that film.” I had no training in filmmaking and, being 34, wasn't about to go to film school. So I kept the idea in the “to do some day” part of my brain for the future.

In 2003, when I was 50, I turned my attention to making this film. I went back to Taylor Stoehr and he gave me the names of about ten people from various walks of life who'd been deeply influenced by Paul Goodman, and put me in touch with his widow Sally and his two daughters, Susie and Daisy.

Doing these interviews opened up a fascinating window on the world of 1950s–1970s America. Goodman was a seminal thinker in the late 1950s when he was writing his future bestseller about disaffected youth, and he became a one-person brain trust for the early New Left. His wide-ranging

interests—educational reform, anti-war pacifism, sexual freedom, poetry, psychology, and community planning—made for a very diverse group of subjects to interview.

Speaking with his family and a few longtime friends, what began to emerge was a complex picture of a man of genius whose open bisexual life (in the 1940s!) made for a complicated domestic situation not without its price for his wife and children. Here was a brilliant man who always felt “on the outs,” against the grain, and who yearned desperately for “contact”: a key term in *Gestalt Therapy*, the founding text of this school of therapy that he co-authored in 1951 with Fritz Perls.

Because Goodman was so perceptive and because he had so many unacceptable impulses, he felt he never could fit in. Instead he discovered his vocation as a social critic and public intellectual, beholden to no one. In fact, no sooner did a group embrace him than he began to criticize their shortcomings and blind spots. Not an easy mentor, to say the least!

I am convinced that Paul Goodman’s ideas are as relevant today as when he first advanced them. I hope *Paul Goodman Changed My Life* excites the idealism and curiosity of young people who face a world at least as complicated and threatened as the one Paul Goodman worked so hard to change.

My film can help restore a missing piece of an exceptional moment in our history. The broken threads of tradition and experience need to be rewoven so we are not continually losing our past and starting over. And so young people can connect to a rich cultural, social, political, and moral legacy that is theirs to inherit and to use.

Paul Goodman always wanted to be useful, to be used. My film can, as Adrienne Rich wrote me about her hopes for the film, “bring Paul Goodman back into the conversation.” It will be a richer conversation—*that’s* for sure.

—Jonathan Lee

FILM INTERVIEWEES

Epi Bohdi was Mathew Goodman's girlfriend at Cornell University.

Noam Chomsky is a world renowned linguist, intellectual and political activist. He is an Institute Professor and Professor Emeritus in the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy at MIT.

Jason Epstein, former editorial director of Random House, was Paul Goodman's editor on *Growing Up Absurd*.

Zeke Finkelstein is a writer and English teacher at City College NY.

Richard Flacks, a sociologist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, was one of the founders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

Frieda Gardner, a long-time friend of the Goodmans, is a poet and peace activist in Minneapolis.

Geoff Gardner is a writer and English professor who knew Paul Goodman for many years.

Daisy Goodman, the youngest child of Paul and Sally, lives and works in Farmington, Maine, as a nurse and midwife.

Naomi Goodman was married to Goodman's older brother Percival, and was a past president of the Jewish Peace Fellowship and a published poet.

Sally Goodman was Paul Goodman's second common-law wife. For much of their thirty years together, she supported their family by working as a secretary at the Magnum Photo Agency.

Susan Goodman, Paul Goodman's first child, is a psychologist in New York City.

Jacqueline Gourevitch, a New York City painter, studied with Paul Goodman at Black Mountain College during the summer of 1950.

Allen Graubard, author of *Free the Children*, is an assistant to the Chancellor at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell.

Neil Heims is a writer and editor who lives in Paris.

Judith Malina is an actress, writer, and co-founder, with her late husband Julian Beck, of the Living Theatre.

Deborah Meier is the founder of Central Park East School in East Harlem, the Mission Hill School in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and a MacArthur Fellow.

Ed Nevis was, along with his wife Sonia, a co-director of the Gestalt International Study Center in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, and a trainee of Paul Goodman, Fritz and Lora Perls, and Isador From, the founders of Gestalt Therapy.

Grace Paley is best known for her short stories and peace activism, which included many acts of civil disobedience.

Tom Rodd, a convicted Vietnam draft resister who did time in prison, is a lawyer who clerks for a justice on the West Virginia Supreme Court.

Ned Rorem is a Pulitzer-prize winning composer who is also well known for his intimate diaries that he began in the 1960s and continued into the early 21st century.

Michael Rossman was a leader in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, and is a writer and a public school science teacher in Berkeley, California.

Taylor Stoehr, a retired English professor from the University of Massachusetts in Boston, was a close friend and literary executor of Paul Goodman.

Jeri Surratt, originally from a small Texas town, is a poet and an advisor to non-profits who resides in New York City.

Nicholas von Hoffman, a former student of Paul Goodman at the Manumit School in Pawling, New York, is a writer who lives in Tenant's Harbor, Maine.

Michael Walzer is a well-known political philosopher, member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and the senior editor of *Dissent*.

Burton Weiss, an independent book-dealer in Berkeley, California, was Mathew Goodman's best friend at Cornell University and a draft resister.

Gordon Wheeler is a psychotherapist, writer and president of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California.

Vera Williams is an alumna of Black Mountain College, where she studied with Paul Goodman; and a well-known children's book illustrator.

WRITERS AND THINKERS ON PAUL GOODMAN

“Any page by Paul Goodman will give you not only originality and brilliance but wisdom, that is, something to think about. He is our peculiar, urban, twentieth-century Thoreau, the quintessential American mind of our time.” —**Hayden Carruth**

“Paul Goodman was not ahead of his time but *in* his time.” —**Grace Paley**

“Paul Goodman’s voice is the real thing. There has not been such a convincing, genuine, singular voice in our language since D. H. Lawrence. Paul Goodman’s voice touched everything he wrote about with intensity, interest, and his own terribly appealing sureness and awkwardness.” —**Susan Sontag**

“I suspect he’s forgotten as a person, but his influence is all around us.” —**Noam Chomsky**

“I have long been disappointed by how quickly Paul Goodman’s work has been forgotten. I hope your film will change this.” —**John Ashbery**

“He craved something to praise, anything to praise. He said that poetry *was* praise, and he always wanted to praise things. But he was always complaining!” —**Geoffrey Gardner**

“Kids are *still* growing up absurd.” —**Michael Walzer**

“He was both Rousseau and Burke at the same time, in the same body. And one has to be that to live in this world. If you’re one or the other, it’s hopeless. He had wonderful expectations in human nature and also a very keen idea of its limits, albeit at the same time. It takes a genius to bring those together on one body. But that’s what he was and that’s why he was interesting.” —**Jason Epstein**

“I always read his poetry, finding it original, expressive and enduring, concerned with the largest and smallest matters, finding the right note or style for the whole range. It certainly seems to me time to bring Goodman back into the conversation.” —**Adrienne Rich**

“But if he was that rare thing among radicals today, an educated poet, who will yet bring up the poetry? A disconcerting number of fans, even among his friends, did not realize he wrote poems. Yet his poetry is not the same as his other works. It rises higher and will be viewed as individual long after his thrilling but didactic ideas, pragmatic and doctrinaire, have been absorbed, as they will be, into our anonymous common culture.” —**Ned Rorem**

“Paul Goodman argued for the way that gay life broke down social and racial barriers, even the barriers between generations. Even, in his case, the barrier between straight and gay, for finally he was a bisexual—that most dreaded sort of interstitial being. Goodman was both a utopian and a very practical person. He always thought in terms of concrete situations and problems of problem-solving. But he was the opposite of a cold technocrat. He was a visionary who believed that there were people of good will and intelligence out there.” —**Edmund White**

“What a superb film. I cannot remember a better documentary evocation of the life of a writer or thinker. It’s all there—every aspect of his life, with no sanitizing, no censoring, no trying to fit him into a preexisting heroic mold, as biographical films too often do. And such a nice mix of film, photos, music, voices. Obviously the work of some years.” —**Adam Hochschild**

QUOTES FROM GOODMAN'S WRITING

From *Growing Up Absurd*

But it is hard to grow up in a society in which one's important problems are treated as nonexistent. It is impossible to belong to it, it is hard to fight to change it.

My strategem in this book is a simple one. I assume that the young *really* need a more worthwhile world in order to grow up at all, and I confront this real need with the world that they have been getting. This is the source of their problems. *Our* problem is to remedy the disproportion. We can. Our inheritance, our immense productivity, has been pre-empted and parceled out in a kind of domainal system; but this grandiose and seemingly impregnable feudalism is vulnerable to an earnest attack. One has the persistent thought that if ten thousand people in all walks of life will stand up on their two feet and talk out and insist, we shall get back our country.

In truancy, the burden of proof lies on the schools, which are demonstrably stupefying to many children, whose truancy is therefore a kind of self-preservation. Naturally, these kids get nothing from hanging around the streets either. *The solution is hard but simple: decide that the kids are in the right and make good education at whatever cost.*

From *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*

Modern science and modern cities need not work out as they do with us. Our problems are not technological and sociological; they are moral and political.

It is true that I don't know much, but it is false that I write about many subjects. I have only one, the human beings I know in their man-made scene. I do not observe that people are in fact sub-divided in ways to be conveniently treated by the "wide variety" of separate disciplines.

Our simple-minded proposals make people feel foolish and timid; our plea for community wakes up sleeping dogs and rebellious hopes; we mention ancient wisdom that everybody believes but has agreed to regard as irrelevant; and all this among people who *in fact* have little control of the means of production or power, but are nicely habituated to the complicated procedures of the moment and get satisfaction by identifying with them.

We propose banning private cars from Manhattan. Permitted motor vehicles would be buses, small taxis, vehicles for essential services (doctor, police, sanitation, vans, etc.), and the trucking used in light industry. Present congestion and parking are unworkable, and other proposed solutions are uneconomic, disruptive, unhealthy, nonurban, or impractical.

THE FILMMAKERS

JONATHAN LEE (DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER)

Jonathan Lee served as producer of the *Fear of Disclosure Project*, a series of videos that explore the act of revealing that one is HIV+ or has AIDS, which began with a video by the late Phil Zwickler and David Wojnarowicz. Under Lee's direction, the project produced and distributed *(In)Visible Women*, by Ellen Spiro and Marina Alvarez; *Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien (No Regret)*, by Marlon T. Riggs; and *Out in Silence & Not a Simple Story*, by Christine Choy. From 1995–2003, Lee was the founder/ director of the Maine Speakout Project, a statewide organization that trained and deployed volunteer speakers to share their personal experiences as sexual minority Mainers with mainstream groups throughout the state. In 2003, Lee returned to New York City to begin working on ***Paul Goodman Changed My Life***. He is presently developing a non-profit retreat center, The Machiah Center, for activists and scholars, in New Gloucester, Maine.

KIMBERLY REED (PRODUCER AND EDITOR)

Kimberly Reed is a filmmaker living in New York City. Her work has landed her on many annual "best of" lists, such as *Filmmaker Magazine's* "25 New Faces of Independent Film," *The Advocate's* "Five to Watch," and *OUT Magazine's* "Out 100." She was named Towleroad's "#1 Best LGBT Character of the Film Year" for 2010. She has been awarded writing Fellowships at the Yaddo Artists' Community and the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. Kimberly Reed directed and produced *Prodigal Sons*, a "whiplash doc that heralds an exciting talent." *Prodigal Sons*, a co-production with BBC Storyville and Sundance Channel, premiered at the prestigious Telluride Film Festival. The film has gone on to be shown around the world in theaters, festivals, and on television, ending up on Best of the Year lists at *indieWIRE* and the *Village Voice*, and garnering more than a dozen Audience and Jury Awards, including the International Film Critics' FIPRESCI Prize. Her work has been featured on *Oprah*, CNN, NPR, *Details* and The Moth Radio Hour. Reed is a summa cum laude graduate of UC Berkeley and a Montana native.

ROBERT HAWK (CO-PRODUCER)

Robert Hawk, longtime advisor to filmmakers and film festivals, has had his own business, ICI (Independent Consultation for Independents) for over 18 years, and been a part of the independent film scene for almost 30 years. Producer credits include Kimberly Reed's *Prodigal Sons* and Dan Geller and Dayna Goldfine's *Ballets Russes*. Starting with his involvement in documentary as a researcher on Rob Epstein's Oscar-winning *The Times Of Harvey Milk*, as well as *The Celluloid Closet*, he has been credited with discovering and/or nurturing the talents of such filmmakers as Epstein, Geller & Goldfine, Nathaniel Kahn (*My Architect*), Kevin Smith (beginning with *Clerks*), Edward Burns (*The Brothers McMullen*) and David Siegel and Scott McGehee (*Deep End; Bee Season*). He has consulted on films as varied as Moises Kaufman's *Laramie Project*, Terry George's *Some Mother's Son*, and Tim Blake Nelson's *Eye Of God*. He has also consulted on hundreds of documentaries, including Oscar winners and nominees such as *Common Threads: Tales From The Quilt*, *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter*, *In the Shadow of the Stars*, *Regret To Inform* and *Troublesome Creek*.

Hawk has been on the Advisory Selection Committee of the Sundance Film Festival, and has served on numerous juries at festivals both domestic and foreign. He has been an advisory board member for AIFA (American Independents and Features Abroad), the Berlin International Film Festival and First Look (Tribeca Film Center/Eastman Kodak), the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival and numerous other festivals. He has curated special film series for, among others, MoMA, the Kennedy Center, San Francisco's M.H. de Young Museum, the International Documentary Congress in Los Angeles, and the

Melbourne and Sundance Film Festivals. Hawk founded San Francisco's Film Arts Festival, a showcase for independent filmmakers of Northern California, and was its director for eight years. Before his involvement in film, Hawk was a production stage manager in the theater. www.filmhawk.com

BENJAMIN SHAPIRO (CINEMATOGRAPHER)

Ben Shapiro is a shooter and producer/director whose projects and collaborations have received many awards including the Peabody, Dupont, American Film Institute, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, as well as three Emmys. He has worked on documentary projects for HBO, National Geographic, PBS, Channel 4 (UK), WNET, KCET, among others. These productions have aired from Australia to Europe, and have screened at MoMA and other institutions in the U.S. and Europe.

ISRAEL EHRISMAN (CO-PRODUCER)

Israel Ehrisman was Associate Producer on Kimberly Reed's *Prodigal Sons*. He also co-produced Michael Aker's *Phoenix*, a re-imagining of Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura*, and is set to produce *A House Divided*, a courtroom drama set in the Civil War. He has also been the Director of Logistics for the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, and has worked at NewFest, the North Carolina Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, and the Sundance Film Festival.

MIRIAM CUTLER (COMPOSER)

Composer Miriam Cutler has an extensive background in scoring for independent film & TV projects, as well as two circuses. Her passion for documentary film has led to a focus in non-fiction with credits including award winning and festival favorites: *One Lucky Elephant*, *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, *Thin*, *Chris and Don: A Love Story*, *China Blue*, *Absolute Wilson*, *Lost in La Mancha*, *Scouts Honor*, *Pandemic: Facing Aids*, *Licensed To Kill*, and others. Miriam has served as lab advisor for the Sundance Institute Documentary Composers Lab, as well as on documentary juries for the Sundance Film Festival, Independent Spirit Awards, International Documentary Association Awards, and American Film Institute's Film Festival Awards and is a Society of Composers and Lyricists Board member. She has also co-produced live jazz albums on PolyGram/Verve for Joe Williams (two Grammy nominees), Nina Simone, Shirley Horn, and Marlena Shaw as well as independently released albums of her own songs and soundtracks.

JONATHAN OPPENHEIM (CONSULTING EDITOR)

Jonathan Oppenheim has edited many award-winning feature films, including *The Oath*, *Phyllis and Harold*, *Arguing the World* and *Paris is Burning*.

PAUL GOODMAN CHANGED MY LIFE

CREDITS

Produced and Directed by JONATHAN LEE

Produced and Edited by KIMBERLY REED

Director of Photography BENJAMIN SHAPIRO

Original Music by MIRIAM CUTLER

Co-Produced by ROBERT HAWK and ISRAEL EHRISMAN

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