Susan Sarandon is famous as being an Academy Award–winning actress who appears in mainstream films with popular as well as urgent social themes. She has interwoven her commercial films with leftist political activism for a wide variety of social and political causes, including the anti-war and peace movements, prison reform, and various environmental issues. Her latest venture is to take a high profile role in the protest against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. She has appeared in or worked on almost 100 films.

Sarandon began her film career in 1970, receiving popular recognition for her portrayal of the ingénue in the 1975 film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The film’s theme of lost innocence mirrored that of the American public, still reeling from disgraced President Nixon’s 1974 resignation, which begins the film.

In 1978, *Pretty Baby* gave her the opportunity to portray the life of a brothel worker. Sarandon received her first Academy Award nomination in 1980 for *Atlantic City*, in which she played a poverty-stricken food worker with a complicated marriage and family situation. *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987) was a popular film about women’s friendship and its odd results, while *Bull Durham* (1988) cemented Sarandon’s fame. In 1992, *Thelma and Louise* earned Sarandon her second Academy Award nomination for her portrayal of one of a pair of doomed women fleeing abusive males, as well as the legal system that strips women of their rights. Her third Academy Award nomination was for *Lorenzo’s Oil*, on the search for a cure for adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD).

Sarandon received her fourth Academy Award nomination for her role of the attorney in the 1994 film *The Client*, an examination of media’s influence on children, and the resulting legal issues. After being nominated for four Academy Awards, Sarandon was voted Best Actress for the 1996 film *Dead Man Walking*, in which she portrays a Roman Catholic nun, Sister Helen Prejean, who met with convicted killer Patrick Sonnier in the months before his execution.

Besides mainstream Hollywood films, Sarandon also has lent her talents as actress and narrator of many documentaries regarding social issues. A partial list includes *Wilderness: The Last Stand* (1993), which depicts the destruction of the remaining virgin forests and the resulting environmental devastation; *Ghosts of Attica* (2001) not only examines the 1971 four-day Attica prison riot, which resulted in the deaths of 29 inmates and 10 guards, but also considers how the guards and inmates themselves tried to prevent the riot; in *This Is What Democracy Looks Like* (2000), Sarandon narrates the story of the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization; *Burma: The Unseen Terror*, also referred to as *Burma: Anatomy of Terror*, is a 2003 film that chronicles the 1988 nationwide demonstration against a despotic regime, which resulted in the deaths of an estimated 30,000 people, and the flight of 40,000; also in 2003, with narrator Martin Sheen, Sarandon provided voiceover for *Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion*, which details the 50-year occupation of Tibet by China, as well as the 1987 riots.

Presently, Sarandon is heavily involved in the anti-war movement, specifically against the 2002 U.S. invasion of Iraq. She has spoken at many protests and demonstrations. She also is calling for monitoring of elections.

Sarandon is also preparing a movie in which she will play Cindy Sheehan, anti-war activist and the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq, who is famous for her protest outside of President George W. Bush's home in Crawford, Texas, and her arrest during Bush's second inaugural address.

See also
Film; Prejean, Sister Helen; Sheehan, Cindy

Further Readings

Teresa Knudsen