

## MEDIA RESOURCES FOR MACRO SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### MOVIES AND DOCUMENTARIES

1. **Brooklyn Matters** is a riveting look at how big real estate, politics, community voices, and the desperate need for jobs and housing clash in one of the largest development proposals in the history of New York City. The film poses vital, timely questions that are relevant to cities across the country: What is the proper use of eminent domain? What role does environmental and economic justice play in government-sponsored projects? Who represents the community? Should traffic-intensive projects be approved without mandatory mitigation measures? Should taxpayer money go to acquire private property for a sports area? What and who determines if an area is "blighted?" Does the public have a right to know about the use of public finances in large-scale real estate projects? **Brooklyn Matters** brings a depth of expert commentary to the debate and introduces many important community voices that have struggled to be heard on this project. This film's exploration of the risks that come with a concentration of power is important for anyone concerned with who has a voice and who has a vote in shaping the future of our cities.

<http://www.newday.com/films/brooklynmatters.html>

2. **Bus Riders Union Documentary:** Organizing to fight price increases and to improve public transportation in poor neighborhoods.

In this extraordinary video, Academy Award-winning cinematographer Haskell Wexler records the several-year-long struggle of the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union (BRU) to win better service and to challenge the race and class bias in city spending priorities. At 86 minutes, it's long for classroom use and drags in a few places for many high school students; but what a rich documentary this is. At the outset, Kikanza Ramsey, a young BRU organizer, explains that the union is "a political, social experiment to see if we can build a multiracial, bilingual, gender-balanced mass movement of working class people that is willing to fight for a set of demands that challenges corporate capital." And this is not mere rhetoric. The remainder of the film brings her words to life, revealing the twists and turns, highs and lows of this struggle as seen through the eyes of participants.

We desperately need more classroom resources like this one. First, because in many respects the union is victorious; in the end they win lots more buses — and less polluting ones, at that — to ease overcrowding for their mostly immigrant, poor, people of color, working-class constituency. And students need to learn that struggle matters. But it's how the BRU organizes — especially across lines of race, nationality, and language; with humor; with song; with determination; with an eye on the bigger systemic picture — that will leave a lasting impression. Hope is scarce in some "videos with a conscience;" in *Bus Riders Union* it plays a starring role. [Description by Bill Bigelow, *Rethinking Schools*.]

<http://oldbru.thestrategycenter.org/engli/Resources/resources-BRU-store.htm>

3. **The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler** is a 2009 television film directed by John Kent Harrison. The film is a co-production between United States and Poland companies. The teleplay by Harrison and Lawrence John Spagnola, based on the 2005 biography *The Mother of the Holocaust Children* by Anna Mieszkowska, focuses on Irena Sendler, a Polish social worker who smuggled approximately 2,500 Jewish children to safety during World War II.

[http://www.amazon.com/Courageous-Heart-Irena-Sendler/dp/B003YKYX7Y/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1377719014&sr=1-2&keywords=irene+sendler](http://www.amazon.com/Courageous-Heart-Irena-Sendler/dp/B003YKYX7Y/ref=sr_1_2?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1377719014&sr=1-2&keywords=irene+sendler)

**A DAY'S WORK, A DAY'S PAY** Is a film about welfare recipients in NYC organizing to change the requirement that they do public service work in order to receive benefits. While it is a bit dated it gives an inside view of the hope and the disappointment of community organizing. Students realize that these folks were empowered by their organizing activity and developed far better employment skills through organizing than they would have through 'workfare'. This film breaks through a lot of stereotypes about welfare recipients.

The film follows three welfare recipients in New York City from 1997 to 2000 as they participate in the largest welfare-to-work program in the nation. When forced to work at city jobs for well below the prevailing wage and deprived of the chance to go to school, these individuals decide to fight back, demanding programs that will actually help them move off of welfare and into jobs. **A DAY'S WORK, A DAY'S PAY** traces the personal and political evolution of its three main characters. Juan Galan successfully organizes WEP workers while battling the demons of his own poverty-stricken childhood. Jackie Marte, who drops out of school in order to raise her two children, tries desperately to stay out of workfare, and in the nick of time succeeds in finding a job-training program that allows her to leave welfare for good. Jose Nicolau overcomes his timidity as he learns to organize against workfare, inspiring his peers with impassioned speeches, and testifying to the City Council about sexual harassment of WEP workers. As the film tracks the three-year effort to pass two critical pieces of legislation, viewers will come to understand the real-life impact that social policy has on human beings. They will also comprehend the effort required for poor and working people to transform themselves from victims of the System to fully empowered citizens who take control of their own lives.

[http://www.newday.com/films/A\\_Days\\_Work.html](http://www.newday.com/films/A_Days_Work.html)

4. **The Democratic Promise:** Famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass wrote, "Power concedes nothing without demand." *The Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky & His Legacy* is the story of ordinary people making demands for the power to govern their own lives. Narrated by Alec Baldwin, the documentary examines both the history of community organizing — through the work of Saul Alinsky — as well as the current state of community organizing, as shown by contemporary organizations in New York and Texas. In a larger sense, the program is about the restoration of American democracy through shared public participation in civil life — a vital antidote to an era of increased citizen alienation and voter apathy.

<http://www.itvs.org/films/democratic-promise>

5. **Earth Keepers** takes viewers to the four corners of the earth with environmental activist Mikael Rioux. The angry young man who staged a sit-in suspended over the Trois-Pistoles River in Canada to save it from being dammed has grown into a young father concerned about the world he will leave to his son.

Mikael meets a man who will become his mentor: eighty-year-old Christian de Laet, a pioneer in the Canadian environmental movement, who suggests that Mikael undertake a global quest to meet key visionaries behind innovative projects with promise for the future of our planet. Mikael discovers seven exceptional men and women who, in addition to their scientific and academic qualifications, each have more than 20 years' experience in putting their theories into practice, finding concrete solutions to environmental and social problems.

Mikael first talks with Canadian ecological designer John Todd, hailed by MIT as one of the top 35 inventors of the 20th century. In Sweden, he meets Karl-Henrik Robèrt and discovers The Natural Step (TSN), a framework developed to help organizations incorporate the cycles of nature into their management practices. In the United States, he encounters Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize winner and founder of the Green Belt Movement. He also seeks out India's Ashok Khosla, president and co-founder with Christian de Laet of Development Alternatives, the largest alternative development NGO in the world; Nancy Jack Todd, co-founder of the avant-garde New Alchemists movement; Marilyn Mehlmann, the driving force behind the Global Action Plan; and the humanist economist Peter Koenig.

Inspired by these visionaries and by his mentor, Mikael returns home with a sense of urgency but also of confidence. He too has become someone who will pass on innovative ideas and clear-eyed hope to future generations.

<http://icarusfilms.com/new2010/ek.html>

6. **The Garden:** The events take place in South LA and illustrate dynamics of organizing in a diverse community. Good film to illustrate the strategy continuum including use of consensus, reeducation, persuasion, and conflict.

The fourteen-acre community garden at 41st and Alameda in South Central Los Angeles is the largest of its kind in the United States. Started as a form of healing after the devastating L.A. riots in 1992, the South Central Farmers have since created a miracle in one of the country's most blighted neighborhoods. Growing their own food. Feeding their families. Creating a community.

But now, bulldozers are poised to level their 14-acre oasis.

The Garden follows the plight of the farmers, from the tilled soil of this urban farm to the polished marble of City Hall. Mostly immigrants from Latin America, from countries where they feared for their lives if they were to speak out, we watch them organize, fight back, and demand answers:

Why was the land sold to a wealthy developer for millions less than fair-market value? Why was the transaction done in a closed-door session of the LA City Council? Why has it never been made public?

And the powers-that-be have the same response: "The garden is wonderful, but there is nothing more we can do."

If everyone told you nothing more could be done, would you give up?

The Garden has the pulse of verité with the narrative pull of fiction, telling the story of the country's largest urban farm, backroom deals, land developers, green politics, money, poverty, power, and racial discord. The film explores and exposes the fault lines in American society and raises crucial and challenging questions about liberty, equality, and justice for the poorest and most vulnerable among us.

<http://www.thegardenmovie.com/>

7. **Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street:** Great for neighborhood empowerment when it's done well and challenges larger structural issues. Revitalization of Boston Neighborhood ridden with violence, fires. Development of a neighborhood CDC instead of the government coming in and giving neighbors no say in their neighborhood.

**Holding Ground** is at once a cautionary tale of urban policies gone wrong and a message of hope for all American cities. In 1985, African-American, Latino, Cape Verdean, and European-American residents in Roxbury, MA united to revitalize their community. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative went on to gain national recognition as residents fought to close down illegal dumps, gain unprecedented control of land from City Hall and create a comprehensive plan to rebuild the fabric of their community. Through the voices of committed residents, activists and city officials, this moving documentary shows how a Boston neighborhood was able to create and carry out its own agenda for change.

[http://www.newday.com/films/Holding\\_Ground.html](http://www.newday.com/films/Holding_Ground.html)

8. **The Last of the Mohicans:** Presents the original and still influential American archetype, from which all follows except where those values have been perverted. Great discussion vehicle.

[http://www.amazon.com/The-Last-Mohicans-Daniel-Day-Lewis/dp/B000A2WP7O/ref=tmm\\_dvd\\_title\\_0](http://www.amazon.com/The-Last-Mohicans-Daniel-Day-Lewis/dp/B000A2WP7O/ref=tmm_dvd_title_0)

9. **Living Broke in Boom Times:** The epic movement of poor Americans organizing to end poverty as documented in a decade-long journey by the filmmakers. Living Broke in Boom Times has condensed three groundbreaking documentary films spanning a decade into segments of ideal length for classroom use, with new wrap-around commentary from key activists who led the movement. Cheri Honkala, Willie Baptist and Liz Theoharis discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the organizing, and the lessons learned from hard-won experience.

[http://www.newday.com/search\\_results.html?keyword=living+broke+in+boom+times&x=42&y=12](http://www.newday.com/search_results.html?keyword=living+broke+in+boom+times&x=42&y=12)

10. **Made in L.A.:** Pay and benefits for factory workers and their fight against the international store Forever 21.

**Made in L.A.** traces the moving transformation of three Latina garment workers on the fault lines of global economic change who decide they must resist. Through a groundbreaking law suit and consumer boycott, they fight to establish an important legal and moral precedent holding an American retailer liable for the labor conditions under which its products are manufactured. But more than this, **Made in LA** provides an insider's view into both the struggles of recent immigrants and into the organizing process itself: the enthusiasm, discouragement, hard-won victories and ultimate self-empowerment.

<http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0210>

11. **Mann v. Ford:** Environmental justice.

Directed and produced by Maro Chermayeff and Micah Fink and produced by Jamie Redford, **MANN v. FORD** follows the Ramapough Indians and their legal team, led by feisty and charming female attorney Vicki Gilliam of The Cochran Firm as they take on Ford and the EPA, battling to secure a healthy future for their children.

Between 1967 and 1971, Ford's assembly plant in Mahwah, NJ (the country's largest auto factory when it was opened in 1955) dumped "paint sludge" and other industrial waste in the Ramapough Mountain Indians' backyard. The Ramapo and their legal counsel maintain that the result was a deadly mix of toxic chemicals, including PCBs, Freon, heavy metals, lead and arsenic that saturated the soil and traveled through the air when the highly combustible chemicals ignited and burned.

Living in the midst of the landfill, the Ramapough children covered themselves with the colorful paint, forming and even eating sweet-tasting rainbow-colored sludge "pies." The immediate effects for many included rashes, bleeding from the nose, eyes and throat, and severe headaches. It wasn't until the children in this tight-knit and isolated community attended school with kids from neighboring communities that residents began to notice that their health problems were abnormal. Today, almost every home has someone who died from cancer, and diabetes, kidney stones, miscarriage, asthma, gastrointestinal disease and skin disorders are an everyday part of life.

<http://www.amazon.com/Mann-Ford-Mar-Chermayeff-Micah/dp/B0062RY3L2>

12. **The Milagro Beanfield War:** Illustrates very well the encroachment of big business on the lives and livelihoods of rural persons.

*The Milagro Beanfield War* is a loose and whimsical fable about community pride and social activism in the face of modern progress. Sonia Braga (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*) plays a local mechanic in a small New Mexico town who takes up the challenge of rallying support for a local farmer who uses water owned by a real estate developer to grow beans in his field. Everything escalates to a showdown between the townspeople and the developers, with unexpected results. The strongest aspect of the film is the way it doesn't take itself too seriously, with Redford adopting a leisurely tone and allowing his fine cast (including Ruben Blades as the pragmatic town sheriff and Christopher Walken as a nasty state police officer) to deliver finely nuanced performances that touch on themes of faith and perseverance without seeming heavy-handed. *The Milagro Beanfield War* is an overlooked gem. --Robert Lane

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Milagro-Beanfield-Ruben-Blades/dp/B0007QJ210>

13. **MILK:** Great movie based on the life and political campaign of Harvey Milk, appropriately titled MILK. Great example of community organizing. It does have some sexual scenes involving Harvey and his partners so you might need to offer a disclaimer or view it first and develop your own opinion.

When a famous person, like the nation's first openly gay male city supervisor, inspires an acclaimed book (*The Mayor of Castro Street*) and Oscar-winning documentary (*The Times of Harvey Milk*), a biopic can seem superfluous at best. Taking over from Oliver Stone and Bryan Singer, Gus Van Sant, whose previous picture was the more experimental *Paranoid Park*, directs with such grace, he renders the concern moot. Unlike Randy Shilts' biography, which begins at the beginning, Dustin Lance Black's script starts in 1972, just as Milk (Sean Penn, in a finely-wrought performance) and his boyfriend, Scott (James Franco, equally good), move from New

York to San Francisco. Milk opens a camera shop on the Castro that becomes a safe haven for victims of discrimination, convincing him to enter politics. With each race he runs, Harvey's relationship with Scott unravels further. Finally, he wins, and the real battle begins as Milk takes on Proposition 6, which denies equal rights to homosexuals. He does what he can to rally politicians, like George Moscone (Victor Garber) and Dan White (Josh Brolin). While the mayor is willing, the conservative board member has reservations, and after Milk fails to back one of White's pet projects, the die is cast, leading to the murder of two beloved figures. If Van Sant's film captures Harvey in all his complexities (he was, for instance, a very funny man), *Milk* also serves as an enticement to grass-roots activism, showing how one regular guy elevated everyone around him, notably Cleve Jones (Emile Hirsch), the ex-street hustler who created the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial. Released in the wake of Proposition 8, California's anti-gay marriage amendment, *Milk* is inspirational in the best way: one person can and did make a difference, but the struggle is far from over. --*Kathleen C. Fennessy*  
<http://www.amazon.com/Milk-Sean-Penn/dp/B001QUF3SW>

14. **The Powerbroker: Whitney Young's Fight for Civil Rights**

The Powerbroker follows Whitney Young's journey from segregated Kentucky to the national campaign for equal rights. During the turbulent 60s, he was a diplomat between those in power and those striving for change. Young had the difficult tasks of calming the fears of white allies, relieving the doubts of fellow civil rights leaders, and responding to attacks from the militant black power movement. This complex tale explores the public and private trials of the man at the center of the storm.

<http://powerbrokerfilm.com/>

15. **The Price of Renewal:** Great for conversation about the good intention of community development, but what happens when it goes bad.

What are the challenges in crafting a vibrant urban village from an ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse population? This perceptive documentary examines complex issues of community development, philanthropy and civic engagement by chronicling the long-term redevelopment of an older, deteriorating neighborhood called City Heights, often referred to as the Ellis Island of San Diego. The film probes both the potential and the pitfalls of public/private partnerships in addressing the problems of inner city decay, as well as the thorny questions raised by the gentrification of multicultural urban neighborhoods.

Thirty years of non-European immigration to City Heights was spurred by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which replaced preferences based on national origin with priorities favoring family reunification. The result in City Heights is a rich mix of cultural values and people, including immigrants from Mexico and Latin America and refugees from Southeast Asia and East Africa. Profound redevelopment plans placed this poor and largely powerless community in an unlikely partnership with businessman and philanthropist Sol Price (the founder of the Price Club and widely recognized as the "father" of the discount warehouse industry) and William Jones, an African-American real estate developer who was the youngest person ever elected to the San Diego City Council.

*The Price of Renewal* demonstrates how urban redevelopment is a double-edged sword as it explores what is gained and what is lost as the community develops and improves itself. It was directed by award-winning filmmaker Paul Espinosa.

<http://www.californiadreamseries.org/por.htm>

16. **Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai** tells the dramatic story of Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai whose simple act of planting trees grew into a nationwide movement to safeguard the environment, protect human rights, and defend democracy—a movement for which this charismatic woman became an iconic inspiration.

*Taking Root* is the most comprehensive, in-depth film about Wangari Maathai available. It was made in close collaboration with her during the last decade of her life.

The new multiple-language international edition DVDs of *Taking Root* were inspired by Wangari's intention to support communities around the world who are dealing with deforestation and connected issues.

<http://takingrootfilm.com/purchase-home-use.htm>

17. **Tent City, USA:** Documentary that addresses community organizing in a homeless community in Nashville. It also gets into grassroots organizing and the work they do to get representation at the municipal level.

Due primarily to the economic recession, a growing number of people are finding themselves in a position they never imagined: homeless. Nashville, TN is home to a fast rising tent city population. With a shelter system that cannot support even 1 out of 5 of the city's homeless population, most people have nowhere to go. Nearly 100 homeless individuals have come together to form Nashville's Tent City, which is located under a bridge close to the city's center. **Tent City, U.S.A.** explores this community, which is self-sustained and self-governed. The camp has its own council, composed of eight camp residents who meet once a week to discuss residents' issues. For the first time in Nashville history, the municipally run Homeless Commission has opened one seat on its Council to a resident of Tent City. Four people from Tent City have decided to run for the position and one elected resident will have the opportunity to spearhead the search for new land for a transitional camp for the homeless, a new Tent City.

<http://www.dvdsnapshot.com/2012/06/tent-city-usa/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0vps63twU>

18. **Third Ward TX:** Fighting gentrification, the story of how Project Row Houses used the tools of design, art and architecture to transform two blocks of "shotgun" houses reminiscent of New Orleans and other Black communities across the South into exhibition space, classrooms, gardens, and residential space. But their success in reducing crime, and making their "campus" a magnet for art enthusiasts, families, and local residents, also attracts deep-pocket real estate developers.

Project Row Houses was a successful public art program founded by local artists in inner-city Houston. Starting from boarding up abandoned houses and creating a "drive-by" exhibit to providing free refurbished houses for single mothers in college and an after-school programs for local kids, they had helped to revive their section of Third Ward, a historically African-American neighborhood.

**THIRD WARD TX** is the story of how Project Row Houses used the tools of design, art and architecture to transform two blocks of "shotgun" houses reminiscent of New Orleans and other Black communities across the South into exhibition space, classrooms, gardens, and residential space. But their success in reducing crime, and making their "campus" a magnet for art enthusiasts, families, and local residents, also attracts deep-pocket real estate developers.

Their bold response is to include community planning and new housing as a part of their art practice. If they can shape an area in Third Ward for the residents, there's a chance they can keep the neighborhood intact.

<http://www.newday.com/films/ThirdWardTX.html>

19. **A Village Called Versailles:** Documentary about a Vietnamese community in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

A VILLAGE CALLED VERSAILLES is an Emmy®-nominated documentary about Versailles, an isolated community in eastern New Orleans that has been settled by Vietnamese "boat people" since the late 1970s. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Vietnamese American residents in Versailles impressively rise to the challenges by returning and rebuilding before any other flooded neighborhood in New Orleans, only to have their homes

threatened by a new government-imposed toxic landfill just two miles away. A VILLAGE CALLED VERSAILLES recounts the empowering story of how this group of people, who has already suffered so much in their lifetime, turns a devastating disaster into a catalyst for change and a chance for a better future.

Recommended by educators as an excellent teaching tool for courses in:

Asian American Studies  
Ethnic Studies  
American Studies  
Geography  
Sociology  
Urban Studies  
Urban Planning  
History  
Anthropology  
Environmental Justice

<http://www.newday.com/films/avillagecalledversailles.html>

#### **WEBSITES FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- Database for Social Justice Films  
<http://www.filmsforaction.org/walloffilms/>
- Bill Moyer has a whole series of interviews with community workers. They are all good and can be used as clips in a wide variety of ways, but I strongly encourage these two because they show issues that are often dealt with at the micro level (housing and diabetes, HIV/AIDS, etc) that have larger society roots and require macro level interventions.  
<http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/05012009/watch2.html>
- CCISCO Youth Organizing- And the Youth Shall Lead Them  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoZ2dfDI5-Y>
- Gang and Street Violence and Community Organizing  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/interrupters/>
- Cesar Chavez and Farmers Union  
<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/fightfields/sale.html>
- Sociedad Latina Youth Organizing  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7y4fY2oa\\_Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7y4fY2oa_Q)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9AppRkVvjo>
- NJ Community Mapping  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvU8om42e1Y>
- Youth Organizing  
<http://www.pbs.org/programs/not-in-our-town/>