


THE BRONX

DECADE OF FIRE

A film by Vivian Vázquez Irizarry, Gretchen Hildebran, Julia Steele Allen and Neyda Martinez

COMMUNITY SCREENING GUIDE





Screening Guide

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Letter

from Co-Director Vivian Vázquez Irizarry



Growing up in the South Bronx, I often heard that we, Blacks and Puerto Ricans, did not know how to take care of our neighborhoods. We were blamed for the fires that destroyed our community during the 1970's, told that we were the reason our neighborhoods turned to rubble and ruin.

As an adult, working in youth development in the South Bronx, I, along with my co-worker Julia Steele Allen (who became my co-producer), set out to teach young people Bronx history. We noticed how young people carried the stigma of being from the nation's most notorious "ghetto." They deserved to know the history behind this label, who was responsible, and the incredible legacy of creative resistance that is their true inheritance. Together with filmmaker Gretchen Hildebran, we began to conduct research and talk to community members about their experiences and share memories from my own family.

After years of hearing and seeing outsiders lay claim to our stories, our team decided to make a film about what really happened in the South Bronx. How could 80% of the South Bronx's housing stock burn and be left to rot? How was it that we were written off? What really happened?

Decade of Fire is my story, and a people's history about the policies, practices and attitudes that led to the fires. *Decade of Fire* flips the narrative about why the South Bronx burned. "We didn't burn the Bronx. In fact, we were the ones who saved it."

When South Bronx residents were neglected by the media and at all levels of government, we came together, resisted and stayed. People fought to protect their homes and after many years they succeeded—because of their efforts the City government finally stopped the fires and rebuilt their neighborhoods.

In *Decade of Fire* I share their stories for the sake of people who work for justice today in the Bronx—and beyond. These unsung heroes put everything on the line to keep their blocks and neighborhoods intact. I want to let the world know that the community saved the South Bronx, how they did it, and why it means everything to us today.

Vivian Vázquez Irizarry, Co-Director

Photo credits: Joey Conzo, Rick Irizarry

Film Synopsis

In the 1970s, fires raged throughout the South Bronx. Abandoned by landlords and city officials, nearly a half million people were displaced. Black and Puerto Rican residents were blamed for the devastation, even as they battled daily to save their neighborhoods. Now, Bronx-born filmmaker Vivian Vázquez Irizarry is pursuing the truth: uncovering policies of racism and neglect that still shape our cities, and offering hope to communities on the brink today.



Decade of Fire in the Community 2018-2020



Since the film's premiere at DOC NYC in 2018, our team has personally screened *Decade of Fire* over 120 times, for thousands of people across the country (including Puerto Rico) at film festivals and arthouse cinemas, at colleges and high schools, in parks and community gardens, and specifically through a grassroots screening tour we organized to reach communities of color on the frontlines of the struggle for housing justice across the nation. Each of these

screenings was a partnership with a local organization who would explain the current and historical parallels to the burning of the Bronx in their own community, and engage audiences around campaigns to fight displacement and preserve affordable housing in their own city.

In addition to these screenings, the film had a national public broadcast on PBS' acclaimed Independent Lens documentary series, November 4, 2019. The national TV premiere was accompanied by free online streaming. Combined, the film had nearly 2 million views. The film was also selected to be part of Independent Lens' Indie Pop-Up series and from Oct-Dec 2019, was screened in partnership with local PBS stations as well as libraries and cultural institutions in 30 communities across 25 different states.



This Screening Guide marks a new and important chapter for our film. For the first time, *Decade of Fire* is now available to the general public to buy and own. We encourage people to watch the film with family and community and to create a space to reflect and respond whether in your own living room or in a larger space like a community center or other neighborhood institution. The Guide is intended to facilitate a shared learning experience. To this end, we offer materials, ideas and resources to support you in confidently organizing your screening.

We'd love to stay in touch and hear about how your screening went and any responses from the audience that you'd like to share with us. Please visit our website (www.decadeoffire.com) and fill out the **My Screening** form. You can also find additional resources on the site and contact the filmmakers as needed.

Thank you for planning a screening of our film and creating an opportunity for others to see it. There is power in sharing the experience of watching together, and potential when we connect people to one another, and to neighborhood groups and community organizing struggles happening in our towns and cities today.

Stay, fight and build!

The *Decade of Fire* team

Goals & Audience

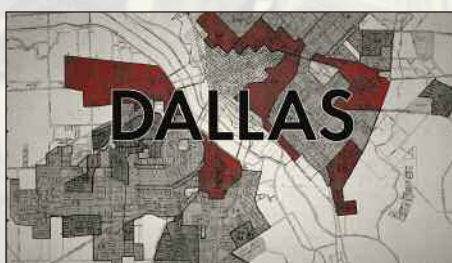
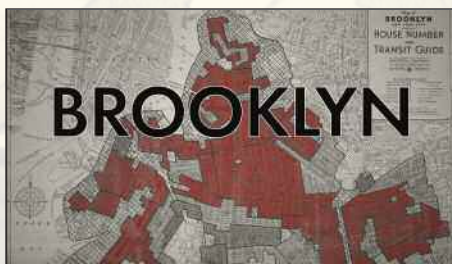
What Are My Goals?

What are your goals for this screening? Will this be an intimate viewing of the film with family and friends? Are you part of an organization, college class or group and aiming to use the film to discuss issues affecting you/your city today? Is there a particular action or commitment you are hoping the film might inspire as a result of having screened and discussed it together?

Knowing your goals informs the location, timing, duration and structure of your event.

Some important additional questions:

- Will my screening be public or private?
- Will it be free or will there be a cost or donation?
- Will it be a partnership or benefit for an organization?
- Do I have, or can I raise any funds, to cover refreshments or rent a space so more people can attend?



Neighborhoods redlined by the Federal Housing Administration, 1930's

Who is My Audience?

If you are planning an event for your own friends, family and close community members the question of audience should be a fairly straightforward one to answer. But if you are open to expanding beyond your immediate circle, here are some potential people/ groups who could be interested in the film's story and may want to attend:

- Community organizers and activists working on housing justice, including advocates and attorneys, neighborhood associations and tenant organizations
- Latinx and Black-led organizations working on related social, racial, and economic justice fronts
- Cultural workers, filmmakers, artists and storytellers
- Local elected or appointed officials, city planning personnel, Faith communities
- High school educators and students
- College students, particularly those focused on urban planning, history, policy, architecture, urban studies and filmmaking

The Importance of Partners

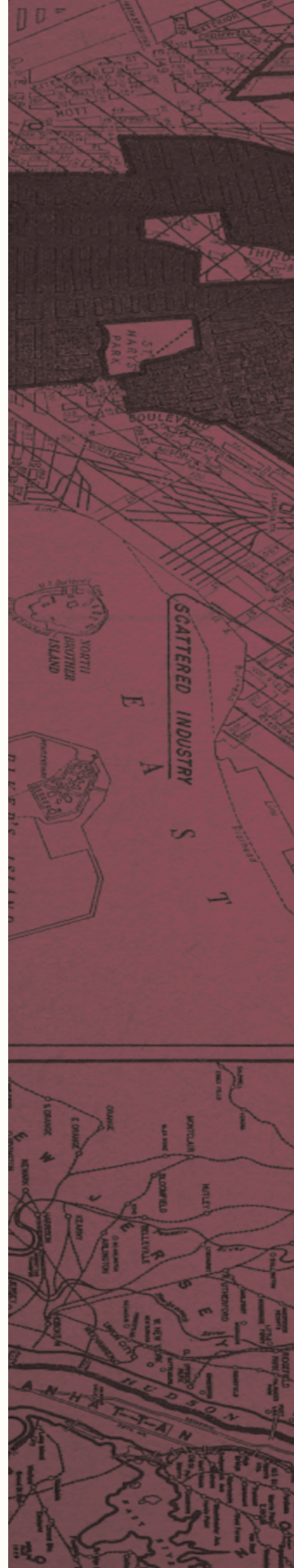
Partnering with an organization or multiple organizations can be a powerful way to expand your reach and audience, as well as sharing the workload of planning and outreach for the event. It is also a way to center the voices of people most impacted.

Individuals from the above list will be more likely to attend a screening if they are invited by a familiar organization, trusted individual or network. A partner may also offer different ideas of where the screening should be held to make it more accessible. They will add depth and expertise to the dialogue and may shape the outcome in terms of having concrete ways audience members can plug in to work in the area.

If you do not know any local organizations or are having trouble figuring out how to reach out to them, you can contact Julia at decadeoffire@gmail.com for support.



Photo credit: Rick Irizarry



Spreading the Word

In the heat of event planning, getting the word out is a step that's often overlooked, but you're not going to have a successful conversation without an audience! Here are a few easy things you can do to help draw in a crowd:

Equip your Partners: Participating people and organizations are your #1 resource in spreading the word, so make things as easy as possible for them. Build a toolkit with copy-and-paste language about the event for them to share on social media. If they have a newsletter, ask for inclusion. If they have a Facebook page, make them co-hosts of your event. (Go to “the Resources” section of this Guide for *Decade of Fire* social media materials!)

Keep it Fresh: Make sure you're telling your network about the event at least once a week in the month leading up to it, but avoid repeating the same information each time. Highlight different participants in each post, use multiple images for your flyer, or bring in relevant local news stories to show the urgency of your conversation. Consider planning this out in advance so you don't need to worry about writing each post immediately before it needs to go out.

Consider your Audience: We've learned over our national tour that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to event promotion. You know your audience best so shape your strategy to what will appeal to them. Consider adjusting the film synopsis with key buzzwords, post when you know they're online, and tell them why they want to be there.

Don't forget the Basics: While most of the above relates to social media outreach, there are other effective ways to outreach for your event:

- Print and copy physical fliers and put them up at high traffic spots in your neighborhood or wherever you are trying to build your audience from (bookstores, coffee shops, campus bulletin boards, bus stops, community/ recreation centers, cultural/ event spaces, bars, etc etc etc...!)
- Make a phone tree and have people call or text their networks.
- Look into weekly calendar listings in your free, local newspapers and online calendars. Local radio stations also sometimes do community calendar listings/ plugs.



Event Structure Considerations

The structure of your event should take into account your goals and audience, as well as your own capacity as the event's organizer. Ideally time is budgeted for reflections, responses and dialogue amongst the event participants. The timing for this should not feel rushed or overly long. While each event is distinct and unique, we have learned that a program can take anywhere from 90 minutes to 3 - 4 hours. This includes time for a welcome and informal networking, the film screening, post-discussion and reception.

Some tips and best practices:

- Have a sign in sheet! (Name, Phone, Email) This will allow for follow up and give you the opportunity to engage with people beyond this singular event.
- It works well to have a brief introduction welcoming people, saying why you've brought the film here/ to them, explaining the flow of the event including timing and encouraging people to stay for the discussion, letting them know who the speakers will be (if there are any) and the partnering organization/s (if they want to introduce themselves), thanking anyone who needs to be thanked, and covering any logistical needs (bathroom, food, etc).
- It works better to have the main content/ speaking take place after everyone has watched the film when there is more openness, interest and sense of connection in the room. If there is a direct ask for participation or support, wait until this time when you will likely be more successful than at the start of the event.
- Be conscious of diversity and inclusion both in terms of who is dominating the conversation and who you have invited to be speakers. As a film about a community of color, told from the perspective of people who experienced the fires first-hand, priority should be given to directly-affected and people of color as speakers and in audience participation.
- Strong facilitation or in the case of a panel, an informed and skilled moderator, has made for the most successful events in our experience. Because people will likely be agitated or emotional after watching the film, there is a tendency to become long winded, telling personal stories and reflections. And while it is important that there is space for these voices, it is also important that there is enough time for others to speak, so a facilitator who can respectfully keep the conversation on track is a great asset.
- Evaluate how the event went with partners, volunteers, friends who helped organize it, or anyone else involved. This doesn't need to be immediately after the event but should happen within 1-2 days, while it is still fresh on peoples' minds. It is an important step in order to maintain the relationships, build towards future collaboration and improve upon the planning process or outcome, for next time.



Sample Structure, Topics & Discussion Questions



Screening events have followed various dialogue structures including:

- Traditional panel model featuring local speakers
- Q&A with speakers where audience members either stay seated and have a microphone passed between them, or line up at stationary microphones
- Facilitated small group discussions and break out groups along topic area or organizing campaign
- “Family style dinner” where post-screening conversations happen around tables, sharing food
- Combination of the above



On the following page is a sample program structure we shared with our organizational partners which they could draw from if they chose to.



Photo credits: Rick Irizarry



Decade of Fire

SAMPLE PROGRAM

Community Screening Events

SAMPLE PROGRAM FLOW

5PM: Set-up begins

NOTE: be sure to give yourself enough time to check the film equipment, image and sound. It's best if you have checked your equipment before the day of the event so you can replace/ troubleshoot as needed. Also consider room and chair set-up, so if people enter late they don't disrupt the audience or pass by the screen.

6:30PM: Doors Open

6:30PM-7:00pm: Arrival & Mingle (Refreshments if providing)

- Circulate sign-in sheets
- Distribute any related issue literature to read
- Distribute translation equipment (if using)
- Establish childcare (if having)
- Recommended: pre-show music playing

7:00pm: Program Starts

- Welcome! Why are we here? Set the stage for dialogue that will follow by introducing the film's subject and why it is being screened in this place at this time
- Partner organization introduce itself and brief description of work in community
- Explain the event plan (film, then dialogue, etc... "Please stay for the entire event..")
- Venue logistics (bathroom, etc.), turn off your phones...
- A mention that the dialogue will be recorded/ streamed (if it is) and how to opt-out if you don't want to be filmed
- Ask people not to record or livestream the film while it is playing, but provide hashtags for live instagram or tweeting

7:10pm-8:25pm: Film Screening

NOTE: Best to move directly into the program after film is done otherwise people will take the opportunity to leave! Transition seamlessly into the next section and expect people to use the bathroom as needed vs. offering a break for this.

NOTE: Depending on the size of your space, it's best to use a microphone to hold the attention of the crowd because people will begin to talk amongst themselves directly after film.

NOTE: Panelists (if there will be a panel) move to the front of the room simultaneously while exercise below is happening.

8:25pm-8:30pm: Optional Exercise – Pair Share

Please turn to the person next to you and respond briefly to the film by answering one of the following questions (sample questions to choose from or create your own!):

- What did you learn that you didn't already know? What did you see that was familiar?
- What did you think about the Bronx before you saw the film? Why did you think this?
- How do you think the film is relevant today?
- Why do you think the filmmakers wanted to tell this story?

8:30-8:45pm: Audience Reactions

We have noticed that people want to react to the film before moving into current day/ issues. If skipping above exercise, make room for people to respond/ react to what they've just seen somewhere within your program.

NOTE: To avoid long speeches from audience members or panelists, facilitator(s) should remind people we want to hear from as many as we can, etc. Consider having a visible timekeeper.

8:45pm-9:05pm: Panel

Sample Questions for Panelists:

- What happened in our neighborhood during the same period? What did it look like around here then? What did people believe was the reason for this?
- How did the national policies and political trends discussed in the film (redlining, urban renewal, white flight/ suburbanization...) set the stage for what we are seeing in the city today?
- Organizing saved the Bronx but we never hear that story. What is the power in telling our own stories? What stories have not been told about us/ our neighborhood or city?
- What organizing is happening to save our city/ neighborhood now? What are the forces we are fighting? What will happen if we do not organize?

9:05pm-9:25pm: Facilitated Q&A with Panelists or Among Audience

9:25 pm-9:30pm: Collective Group Action/ Ask from Partner Organization

- Postcards or other sign-up/ action
- Announce any upcoming meetings/ events & other ways to see the film in the future
- For additional film resources or to join the film's community sign up at www.decadeoffire.com

Goodnight!

9:30pm-10pm: CLEAN UP



If you are not planning to have speakers or a formal panel, you could opt to pose discussion questions to the audience directly, based on themes from the film.

Group Discussion Questions (examples):

- **The struggle to preserve affordable housing in your city today**
 - Who here feels like they pay too much rent?
 - How familiar are we with the laws protecting tenants in our city?
 - How is your neighborhood changing? How do you feel about it?
- **Redlining, Urban Renewal, Benign Neglect, White Flight (see “Definition of Terms” in “Resources” section of this guide for more info on these)**
 - Had you heard of these policies/ political trends before watching the film?
 - Does anyone know how these policies played out in our city?
 - How do you imagine they affect us today?
- **Stereotypes and media bias**
 - How are neighborhoods in our community portrayed in the local news or national media?
 - What effects do these representations have on us or the people who live there?
- **Racism and classism**
 - If the Bronx had still been integrated, like it was at the start of the film, would it have burned? What might have happened instead?
 - The film shows how the South Bronx was turned into a “ghetto” by policies like redlining and urban renewal, and how this was happening in cities all over the nation. But “newspapers didn’t want to talk about policy...they just wanted to talk about us” Vivian says in the film, explaining that her community was blamed for the deterioration of the neighborhood. What did you believe about “ghettos” and why they exist before watching this film? Where did your ideas come from?
- **Neighborhood revitalization: for who?**
 - “Developers want to carve up the Bronx all over again...The same people who were redlined for years are now being displaced,” Vivian says in the film. What types of housing development projects are planned for our area?
 - How can we make neighborhood planning more democratic?

• **Collective resilience, community and belonging**

- What was it like watching the images of people taking over their own buildings?
- What are examples of activism in our city today?
- “Nobody was coming for us” Vivian says in the film, explaining how people began to rebuild their buildings, take over their parks, and start the “Sweat Equity” movement without City support. A similar sentiment has been expressed today given the lack of federal response to disasters like Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, and the COVID-19 crisis. What are parallels you see between this time in the South Bronx and communities creating their own solutions/ support networks now?

Other Activities

• **Walking Tour:**

This is an engaging way to make history come alive and share with people layers of their own city/ neighborhoods they may not have been aware of.

- Our New Orleans partner organized a walking tour of urban renewal sites that destroyed historically black neighborhoods, inviting the entire audience at the screening to participate the morning after.

• **Photo Exhibit:**

Gathering historical photos from the same period of your city/neighborhood and displaying them in the space can be a meaningful and illuminating way to draw parallels between the film’s story and that of your city.

- Our Houston partner displayed photos from the historically black neighborhood (and revived old theater) where the screening was taking place.

• **Live Music/ Performance:**

Some partners have opted to pair the film with live performance such as an excerpt from a related play, a spoken word piece, or a local band or musician playing music as people enter.

- Pregones Theater in the Bronx screened excerpts of the film and then shared a few monologues from a musical they are developing based on the same period in the South Bronx.
- Defend PR, our partner for the tour we did across Puerto Rico had local, live music before every screening. The music ranged from traditional Puerto Rican folk music, to hip hop to punk, all depending on the environment where the screening was taking place and the audience.

Where To Find the Film

Find all streaming information and DVD sales links [on the film’s website](#). Spanish subtitles and closed captioning are available!



RESOURCES

Definition of Terms

(Written and compiled for the Indie Pop-Up Engagement Guide)

- **Redlining** began in the 1930s and 40s during the era of the New Deal. Federal housing agencies designated neighborhoods with a certain percentage of Black and immigrant residents as “declining.” Federal agencies like the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation literally took maps and drew red lines around “undesirable” neighborhoods. Banks and government agencies refused services, such as mortgage loans or fire insurance, to residents inside the redlined neighborhoods. At its height, redlining was widespread, affecting a diverse array of cities in almost every state—from large metropolises such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit to medium-sized cities such as Sioux City, Iowa and Amarillo, Texas. For a map of redlined neighborhoods, visit here: <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/>.
- **When the Fair Housing Act** passed in 1968 as part of the Civil Rights Bill, it outlawed housing discrimination from then on. However, it did not remedy past housing discrimination, leaving many neighborhoods in a perpetual state of segregation still seen today across urban, suburban, and rural areas. (Rothstein, 2017)



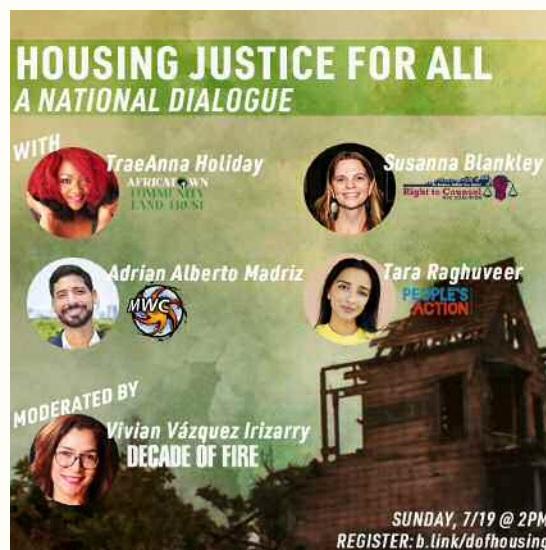
- Without investment in redlined neighborhoods, conditions deteriorated for those that lived there. White families could move out to the suburbs with the assistance of federally subsidized loans in a phenomenon known as **White flight**. But residents of color that wanted to move out of deteriorating neighborhoods were outright denied mortgage loans and public subsidies based on their race. (Rothstein, 2017) Discriminatory government housing policies contributed to the **wealth disparity** among racial groups seen today.

For example, the median White American family has twelve times the wealth that their Black counterparts have. (da Costa, 2019) When families of color were prevented from owning homes, they had less wealth to pass on to their children and grandchildren, while White families profited from early home ownership.

- **Urban Renewal** was a federally funded program started in the 1950s that affected more than 600 cities of all sizes across the country—from Fairbanks, Alaska to Wilmington, Delaware. (Digital Scholarship Lab, 2019) For a map of Urban Renewal projects, visit here: <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/renewal/#view=0/0/1&viz=cartogram>. Its aim was to clear out “slums” and relocate families into better housing conditions. However, city governments often opted to replace torn-down housing with commercial buildings, forcing the displaced to find housing in new neighborhoods. In many cities, the majority of those displaced were people of color, and because redlining barred them from housing in many neighborhoods, their housing options were limited. As shown in the film, the razing of neighborhoods throughout Manhattan to make way for new development displaced 100,000 people, many of which moved to the Bronx, and the influx of people further strained the neighborhood’s infrastructure. (Zipp, 2010)
- **Budget cuts** typically occur when a government is bringing in less revenue from taxes than it has budgeted for services. To balance the budget, government officials can raise taxes or borrow money to increase revenue, or they can reduce costs by cutting services. Groups that have been historically under-represented in government, such as Black and immigrant communities, often bear the brunt of budget cuts. In 1975 in the wake of a national recession, New York City faced bankruptcy. City finances were taken over by a non-elected state body comprised primarily of bankers that chose to slash city services in already resource-starved neighborhoods like the South Bronx.

More recently, many local governments experienced budget shortfalls during the Great Recession. A few dozen—including Detroit, Michigan; Stockton, California; Jefferson County, Alabama; and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania—filed for bankruptcy. New York’s response has served as a blueprint for other bankruptcies, such as in Detroit and in Puerto Rico, which is currently facing a severe budget crisis. (Flood, 2011)

- Since the Great Recession ended, rent costs and home prices have risen at an unprecedented pace making **housing affordability** a nationwide concern. More than 11 million rental households in the U.S. are spending more than half of their income on their housing (the recommended amount is no more than 30 percent). (NLIHC, 2019) Nearly two-thirds of renters nationwide say they cannot currently afford to buy a home; meanwhile, home prices are only rising—at twice the rate of wage growth. (Sisson, 2019) People in Hawaii, the District of Columbia, California, Maryland, and New York face some of the highest housing costs. The affordable housing crisis is fueling the problem of **homelessness** in the U.S. Studies show a correlation between areas with higher median rent and home prices and the number of people living on the streets or in shelters. (Khouri, 2018)
- The demand for housing has led to developers to invest in neighborhoods historically populated by Black and immigrant communities. However, developers looking to turn the most profit typically opt to build luxury condos as opposed to low and middle-income housing, pushing prices up across the neighborhood. It gradually becomes unaffordable for families that have lived there for generations to stay. **Gentrification** occurs when new residents move into a neighborhood thereby changing its character and demographics. Since 2000, a pattern of gentrification has emerged in cities across the country, now affecting one in every six predominantly African-American census tracts. (Badger, 2019)
- **Community organizing** occurs when citizens in a community band together to address a shared problem. Activists in the film organized their neighbors in the Bronx to fix up abandoned buildings, pool their resources to buy and manage abandoned buildings through **tenant-run cooperatives**, and lobby elected officials to invest in fire prevention. In the Bronx, **music, art, and culture** were important tools that community organizers used to revitalize, unify, and beautify the neighborhood. Hip hop culture, including graffiti art and DJing, grew out of the Bronx during this period, giving birth to celebrated artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five.



Virtual housing justice event hosted by *Decade of Fire* team to mark the film's digital release, August 2020

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Photo credit: Rick Irizarry

FILM WEBSITE, LINKS & SOCIAL MEDIA ASSETS

WEBSITE: www.decadeoffire.com

EMAIL: decadeoffire@gmail.com

LINKS:

Facebook: [/decadeoffire](https://www.facebook.com/decadeoffire)

Twitter: [@decadeoffire](https://twitter.com/decadeoffire)

Instagram: [@decadeoffire](https://www.instagram.com/decadeoffire)

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/327874555>

TEMPLATES:

[Promotional Flyer Template](#)

[Social Media Graphics and Sample Posts](#)

Use the tag #StayFightBuild when you post!



Filmmaker Bios



Vivian Vázquez Irizarry **Director/Producer**

Vivian is currently the director of community-school partnerships at the New Settlement Community Campus. She ran educational and youth leadership development programs at the Coro Foundation, and Bronxworks (formerly Citizens Advice Bureau). Vázquez Irizarry managed educational youth development models in GED completion and college access programs across New York City at the Youth Development Institute. She is a former member of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, and 52 People for Progress, a community organization that saved her childhood playground and revitalized the South Bronx for the last 35 years. In her capacity as the film's director and central character, she has traveled across the country, connecting the story of the South Bronx to students, activists, and community members in the struggle for housing justice everywhere today.



Gretchen Hildebran **Director/Producer**

Gretchen is a documentary filmmaker and editor whose work lives at the intersection of politics, policy and human experience. Credits include: WORTH SAVING (2004), which was presented in HBO's Frame by Frame showcase; OUT IN THE HEARTLAND (2005) which explored anti-gay legislation in Kentucky. A 2005 graduate of Stanford's documentary program, Gretchen shot Ramona Diaz's THE LEARNING (2011) and has edited for the History Channel, PBS and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as on independent documentaries. Gretchen has also made a series of short documentaries used to educate communities across the country about life-saving interventions such as needle exchange and overdose prevention.



Julia Steele Allen

Producer/Impact Producer

Julia is an award-winning multi-disciplinary artist and community organizer from New York City. She worked as an educational justice organizer in the South Bronx for many years (where she met Vivian!), and has worked on large-scale activist convenings such as the first Critical Resistance conference in 1998 and the first US Social Forum in 2007. From 2014-2017, she co-wrote, produced, and performed “Mariposa & the Saint: From Solitary Confinement, A Play Through Letters,” performing over seventy times across ten states for thousands of people including judges, wardens, and legislators as part of the growing movement to end solitary confinement in this country. She is also part of the queer country band, My Gay Banjo. www.juliastealeallen.com



Neyda Martinez

Producer

[Neyda Martinez](#) is an Associate Professor of Media Management at The New School. For over 6 years, she was the lead communications strategist at public television’s [AMERICA REFRAMED](#) and was part of a core team charged with building the documentary series’ national profile. For 7 years, Neyda worked at POV supporting campaigns of over 65 acclaimed films. She earned an MPA from Columbia University in 2008. She was Director of National Engagement for PBS’ documentary, [LATINO AMERICANS](#) and she produced the documentary film [LUCKY](#). As a consultant, she’s served Hachette Book Group USA, NYC’s Mayor’s Office of Adult Education, and WNYC and NPR’s “The Takeaway.” She is on the board of directors of The Association of American Cultures, Women Make Movies and Bronx-based dance company, Papatian. Prior board service includes Third World Newsreel and NALIP/National Association of Latino Independent Producers.



Photo credit: Rick Irizarry

Highlights

from Press Coverage of Film

(a full press list is available at <http://decadeoffire.com/press/>):

PRESS EXCERPTS:

“(An) insightful look back at a time when one of the United States’ major cities allowed a once-vibrant neighborhood to fall into neglect and disrepair, ... Decade of Fire offers a moving portrait of what life was like under these conditions, and how people survived.”

- Christopher Llewellyn Reed, *Hammer to Nail*

“The well-paced, tightly constructed, often crushingly emotional documentary is stirring and compelling throughout, illuminating both a dark chapter of New York City history and an all-too-common example of the extent to which inner-city people can be unjustly victimized by those in power.”

- Nick Rocco Scalia, *Film Threat*

“Decade of Fire is a call to arms, a family memoir, and a history lesson. More importantly, perhaps, it’s a love letter to the Bronx and its inhabitants.”

- Manuel Betancourt, *Remezcla*

“(co-director Vazquez’s) stake in the issues at hand is part of what makes “Decades of Fire” valuable. This is a filmmaker with skin in the game, close to the flames.”

- Ben Kenigsberg, *New York Times*

The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/movies/decade-of-fire-review.html>

NY Daily News: <https://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/ny-decade-of-fire-pbs-20191101-6ye5yfjy6rbovfkhbpcfwopbi-story.html>

Democracy Now: <https://youtu.be/x3Tj0AQu0o>

NPR’s Latino Usa: <https://www.latinousa.org/2019/02/06/decadeoffire/>

Hollywood Reporter: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/decade-fire-1206934>

Film Threat: <https://filmthreat.com/reviews/decade-of-fire/>

Jacobin: <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/08/decade-of-fire-film-south-bronx-nyc>

AWARDS:

Winner, Best Documentary Director: 2019 Newark International FF

Audience Award, Best Documentary: 2019 Chicago Latino FF

Winner, New York Showcase: 2019 Harlem International FF

REMI Winner: 2019 Houston Worldfest

Best Documentary Honorable Mention: 2019

Boston Latino International FF

Best Documentary, 2019 Baltimore Black Film Festival

Additional Project Elements

High School Curriculum

Bronx educators have developed a high school curriculum to accompany the film. It is project-based and meets ELA Common Core State Standards. Drawing inspiration from Vivian’s decision to challenge the existing story about her community, and to rewrite the narrative of who is to blame for the fires that destroyed her neighborhood, the curriculum centers on the question: “How are community narratives shaped, interrupted and reimagined?” Using their phones and computers to record and create podcasts, students are tasked with re-imagining or interrupting an existing narrative about themselves, their place or their people as the culminating activity of the 6-lesson unit.

The curriculum is available to download in its entirety or as individual lesson plans, on the *Decade of Fire* website: decadeoffire.com/get-involved/

Short Film Modules

The *Decade of Fire* team is creating 3 short films (10-15 min.) that connect the story of the South Bronx with contemporary case studies in communities around the country. The topics were voted on by our organizational partners for urgency, relevance and interest. They are:

- **Module 1:** “[Defending Your Block: How to Stay, Fight and Build](#)” As seen in *Decade of Fire*, while everything around it burned down, Hetty Fox’s beloved Lyman Place remained intact. How did she do it? This short film delves deeper into the practice Hetty described as “Block Defense,” and relates it to two different communities who have successfully held their ground against the aggressive real estate development, displacement and gentrification happening around them in the cities of Pittsburgh and Los Angeles.



- **Module 2:** (Title TBD!) Fiscal Control Boards – NYC, Detroit and Puerto Rico
The non-elected fiscal control board (known as “Big MAC”) which took over New York City’s finances in 1975, chose to make drastic cuts to all city services and slashed fire protection in the already burning Bronx, further exacerbating the devastation. Big MAC became a blueprint for the fiscal control boards that have since taken over cities such as Detroit and now Puerto Rico, in the form of PROMESA. Through the voices of activists today, the film investigates, exposes and explains how these boards operate, what their impact has been, and chronicles the resistance afoot in Puerto Rico and Detroit today.
- **Module 3:** (Title TBD!) Rand Corporation and the Rise of Algorithms in Governance
In the late 1960’s the Rand Corporation was hired by the New York City government to trim the city’s budget, with a focus on the fire department. Using computer generated algorithms they provided justification to close a dozen South Bronx firehouses - one of the central reasons for why 80% of the South Bronx burned down. Today, Rand is considered a “grandfather” of the automated decision-making movement, which has now entered every aspect of our lives: determining services across the spectrum of policing and parole, foster care, healthcare, housing and more.

Our goal is to make these short films accessible online to empower activists, students and everyone else looking for strategies of resistance with historical context and contemporary examples to draw from.

The first module was released by City Limits on Feb 13th 2020:

<https://citylimits.org/2020/02/13/film-offers-instruction-on-self-defense-against-urban-displacement/>



Photo credit: Ramón Andino Rodríguez

Resource List

Tenant Rights Hotline (sliding-scale membership):

<http://www.tenantstogether.org/tenant-rights-hotline>

“Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America” is a digital archive of redlined maps drawn by the federal government.

<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/>

“Renewing Inequality: Family Displacements through Urban Renewal, 1950-1966” maps those neighborhoods that were affected by federal Urban Renewal programs.

<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/renewal/#view=0/0/1&viz=cartogram>

“Segregated by Design” is a short film narrated by Richard Rothstien, author of the book *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*.

<https://www.segregatedbydesign.com/>

Where We Call Home is a 2019 public radio series on housing affordability in the U.S. produced by WBUR’s On Point.

<https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/tag/where-we-call-home>

The Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University tracks housing availability nationwide.

<https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/research/interactive-maps>

The Urban Displacement Project (UDP) is a research and action initiative of UC Berkeley

<https://www.urbandisplacement.org/>

The National Low Income Housing Coalition advocates for affordable housing in communities nationwide through its network of affiliates.

<https://nlihc.org/>

A National Homes Guarantee - national campaign and pledge politicians can take

<https://homesguarantee.com/>

(People’s Action)

Homes For All - List of Housing Justice organizations by state

<https://homesforall.org/our-partners/>

(Right to the City)

Right to Counsel Coalition NYC shares information about their campaign victory that guarantees free legal representation for those facing evictions, as well as info on how to organize a rent strike and other resources

<https://www.righttocounselnyc.org/>

CASA (Community Action for Safe Apartments) is the organization featured in the film fighting the rezoning of Jerome Avenue. They do incredible organizing in the Southwest Bronx!

<https://nsacasa.wordpress.com/>



Resource List

The companion site created by Independent Lens for *Decade of Fire* with additional content to support Indie Lens Pop-Up screenings and the PBS broadcast
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/decade-of-fire/>

Books that informed our film or inspired us along the way!

[A Plague On Your Houses](#)

Deborah Wallace and Rodrick Wallace

[The Fires](#)

Joe Flood

[The Bronx](#)

Evelyn Gonzalez

[The Death and Life of Great American Cities](#)

Jane Jacobs

[The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York](#)

Robert Caro

[Root Shock: How Tearing Up Cities Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It](#)

Mindy Fullilove, MD

[Ferguson Is America: Roots of Rebellion](#)

Jamala Rogers

[Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt](#)

Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco

[Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City,](#)

Matthew Desmond

[Can't Stop, Won't Stop](#)

Jeff Chang

[The Creative Destruction of New York City: Engineering the City for the Elite](#)

Alessandro Busa

[We Took the Streets: Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords](#)

Miguel "Mickey" Melendez

[The Color of Law](#)

Richard Rothstein

[The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration](#)

Isabel Wilkerson

[Fear City](#)

Kim Phillips-Fein

Other Credits:

Graphic Design by David Tecson

Illustrations by Liz Daggar

Social Media Graphics by Noah Koch

Content developed and written by Julia Steele Allen with input from *Decade of Fire* team

Screening Guide Graphic Design & Layout by [YUCA](#)

YUCA is an arts educational program based in the South Bronx. It exists because all teenagers deserve to fulfill their creative potential and have the opportunity to address community issues that matter to them. Learn more at yucaarts.org.

