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Documenting success
Film spotlights resurrection of Dudley St. area
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One of the most desolate **neighborhoods** in the city, ravaged by arson, drug-dealing, illegal trash-dumping and official neglect, is saved by a group of dedicated **neighborhood** residents.

Sound like an episode of "Touched by an Angel?"

It's "Holding Ground: The Rebirth of **Dudley Street**," a documentary premiering tonight on WGBH (Ch.2) at 10 that chronicles the struggle of **neighborhood** activists to take back their **streets** against seemingly impossible odds.

Filmmakers Leah Mahan and Mark Lipman spent seven years making the documentary, sifting through 120 hours of video and 20 hours of archival film to create a one-hour testament to the courage and the determination of these Roxbury-Dorchester residents and the organization they formed, the **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative**.

Another title for "Holding Ground" could well have been "When Smart Outsiders Do Stupid Things." As the special shows, well-meaning members of the Boston-based Mabel Louise Riley Foundation formed a group in 1985 to save the **neighborhood** - without including a single **neighborhood** resident! "It was a rather incredible mistake," acknowledged one trustee. (To its credit, the foundation bankrolled part of this documentary.)

"You always have people from downtown or somewhere else coming and telling you what you need in your **neighborhood**," said Che Madyun, who founded the **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative** in response to that ill-fated intervention. The group's first mission: to shame the city into halting the illegal dumping that was not only an eyesore but also a health hazard.

"There's nothing that says because you don't make a whole lot of money that you should live in filth," Madyun said.

When former Mayor Ray Flynn and his team stepped in with an upscale plan for urban renewal - or as one resident calls it, a plan for "Negro removal" - the **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative** countered by hiring its own urban planners. In 1988, the group won an unprecedented victory by convincing the city to give it eminent domain authority to purchase some of the 130 vacant lots along Blue Hill Avenue and **Dudley Street**.

The film ends with the rise of a new generation of **neighborhood** activists and the creation of Winthrop Estates, the first new affordable housing in the area. The film's parting visual, a panoramic shot of vacant lots that fades into rows of bright, clean homes, shows how much the group has accomplished.

Lipman and Mahan worked on the second part of "Eyes on the Prize" and Mahan just finished another documentary, "Women of Strength: Four Stories from the Welfare Debate"; they hope "Holding Ground" will help combat the stereotypes so prevalent about residents of low-income **neighborhoods**.

"If you care about what's going on in America's cities, there are lessons in what DSNI has done that can be applied broadly," Lipman said. "If there's one message here, it's that there's really hope for America's cities, and it really is to be found in residents and communities organizing to bring back their own **neighborhoods**."

PBS' "Holding Ground: The Rebirth of **Dudley Street**" airs tonight at 10on WGBH (Ch.2), and repeats Sunday at 4 p.m. and May 21 at 8 p.m. on WGBX (Ch.44).

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