

VPM presents a BELLTOWER PICTURES production

# HEARD

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Stories of surviving & thriving  
in an American housing project

[BelltowerPictures.com/Heard](http://BelltowerPictures.com/Heard)

**"Stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity."**

**Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TEDGlobal 2009**

# About HEARD

News coverage offers steady, lurid stories of violence, gangs and drugs in public housing. But to many Americans, public housing and urban poverty are "issues" that remain out of sight and out of mind. In this film, these issues take on human faces. We'll get to know current and former residents of the projects and hear them tell their own compelling stories. We'll see how they're surviving and thriving in spite of... and often because of the challenges they've had to overcome.



## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What are some of the myths that you've heard about public housing residents?
- What are some of the themes explored in HEARD?
- What unexpected stories did you see?
- Which scenes most stood out to you? Why?

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF U.S. PUBLIC HOUSING

Until recently, public housing was the largest housing subsidy program in the country serving approximately 1.1 million residents.

- **1935** 1st federal public housing project was built in Atlanta, Georgia
- **1937** Housing Act of 1937 creates the federal public housing
- **1970s** Public housing expanded for decades until the 1970s when President Nixon placed a moratorium on housing spending.
- **1992** \$600 million Hope VI urban renewal program was created which demolished distressed units and replaced them with mixed-income housing

## RACIAL REALITIES OF PUBLIC HOUSING TODAY

When the first public housing project was created in Atlanta in 1935, hundreds of black families were evicted to create a 604-unit, whites-only neighborhood. In the decades following, the federal government directly and indirectly supported public housing segregation.

With desegregation, there was still a disparity between the amenities available to white public residents and those available to black residents well into the 1980s.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Within the past decade, the public housing demographics have shifted:

- 45% of the residents are Black
- 21% of the residents are White
- 32% of the residents are Hispanic
- 2 % include other ethnicities

## WHY IS PUBLIC HOUSING IN DISREPAIR?

There has been a steady decrease in federal funding of public housing since the 1970s. Federal subsidies instead shifted to housing vouchers. With fewer dollars dedicated to maintenance and improvements, many public housing units fell into disrepair.

## DO WE REPLACE HOUSING PROJECTS WITH MIXED-INCOME HOUSING?

To address the condition of “severely distressed public housing”, the Hope VI program was created. Hope VI demolishes housing projects and replaces them with mixed-income developments.

While the program eliminates high concentrations of poverty, critics of the program say that it also breaks up low-income communities. During construction, residents are relocated with the promise of being able to return to the new development. Many are not able to afford the higher rents in mixed-incoming housing and are permanently displaced.

## ARTICLES, BOOKS AND DOCUMENTARIES

### Articles

- [“Public Housing History”, National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2019](#)
- [“Housing Spotlight”, National Low Income Housing Coalition Newsletter, November 2012](#)
- [“History Lesson for Today’s Housing Policy”, Joint Center Housing Studies Harvard University](#)

### Books

- “The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America” by Richard Rothstein
- “Writing Our Way Out: Memoirs from Jail” by David Coogan


### Documentaries

- [“Chocolate City”](#)
- ["East Lake Meadows"](#)
- [The Pruitt Igoe Myth](#)

## NONPROFITS IN THE RICHMOND, VA AREA

Below is a list of nonprofits who provide services to public housing communities. This is not an exhaustive list of the resources that are available.

- [Better Housing Coalition](#)
- [Circles RVA](#)
- [Communities in Schools](#)
- [HOME, Housing Opportunities Made Equal](#)
- [Legal Aid Justice Center](#)
- [Maggie Walker Community Land Trust](#)
- [Neighborhood Housing Services of Richmond, Inc.](#)
- [Partnership for Housing Affordability](#)
- [Peter Paul Development Center](#)
- [Project: Homes](#)
- [Rebuilding Together Richmond](#)
- [Richmond City Young Life](#)
- [Richmond Cycling Corps](#)
- [Richmond Cycling Corps' Legacy Academy](#)
- [Richmond Habitat for Humanity](#)
- [Step](#)
- [Virginia Local Initiatives Support Corporation \(LISC\)](#)



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