

BILL KAVANAGH (PRODUCER/DIRECTOR)

Prior to Brick by Brick, Bill Kavanagh was the field producer of *Enemies of War* (2001), a PBS documentary on the civil war in El Salvador. Bill made several journeys to El Salvador, interviewed FMLN rebel commanders, officials from the Salvadoran and US governments, human rights workers and ordinary Salvadoran citizens caught in-between. He covered the first elections after the UN-sponsored ceasefire.

Kavanagh also followed the trail of the late Congressman Joe Moakley and his aide, Jim McGovern, who broke the stone wall of silence around the killing of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter by the Salvadoran army in 1989. *Enemies of War* was offered nationally on PBS through Independent Lens.

Brick by Brick by Brick: A Civil Rights Story is Kavanagh's first documentary as producer/director.



BRICK BY BRICK:

a civil rights story

For more information about *Brick by Brick: A Civil Rights Story*, the US v. Yonkers case or to order the DVD please visit:

www.brick-by-brick.com

It should be a sober warning about the present day. America — never mind Yonkers — still grapples with unsettled issues of poverty and race, and until that conundrum is resolved, it will keep reasserting itself in new and troubling ways.

— LAWRENCE DOWNES, *New York Times*

'Brick by Brick: A Civil Rights Story' is a one-hour documentary about a contemporary American battle for civil rights. It follows three families in Yonkers, New York, in the middle of a bitter confrontation about the social realities, politics and law of racial discrimination in their housing policies and schools.

'Brick by Brick' describes how, over forty years, one city created a ghetto through its policies. The film shows the isolation of poor people of color, many dwelling in segregated neighborhoods, dominated by public housing projects, and served by failing schools, while the rest of the city lives in ignorance of their plight.

The primary storytellers are local people, who have personal encounters with housing and educational discrimination. Their conflicts over taking care of their own families while looking for justice and respect make the subject of equal treatment under the law vivid.

Rather than simply describing obstacles to opportunity, the dedicated activism of ordinary people who fight against them is also celebrated in this documentary. 'Brick by Brick' poses questions that all Americans must ask about their own communities.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT—

I began work on Brick by Brick: A Civil Rights Story to unpack the story of why an American city nearly self-destructed in a combustible brew of fear, racism and misunderstanding that erupted during a struggle over fair housing. I hoped that by studying Yonkers, NY's story, the documentary could help illuminate and deconstruct some of the political mechanics of housing discrimination and the often-related educational segregation that follows it.

In the course of my journey, I came to realize that most Americans live in or near cities and towns with segregated neighborhoods and schools, where many poor people of color live, while other parts of their area enjoy better services-- where most citizens fully enjoy the customary protections of local government. Often, this unequal situation is taken for granted, if it's noticed at all by most whites (and is often taken for granted by minority citizens as well).

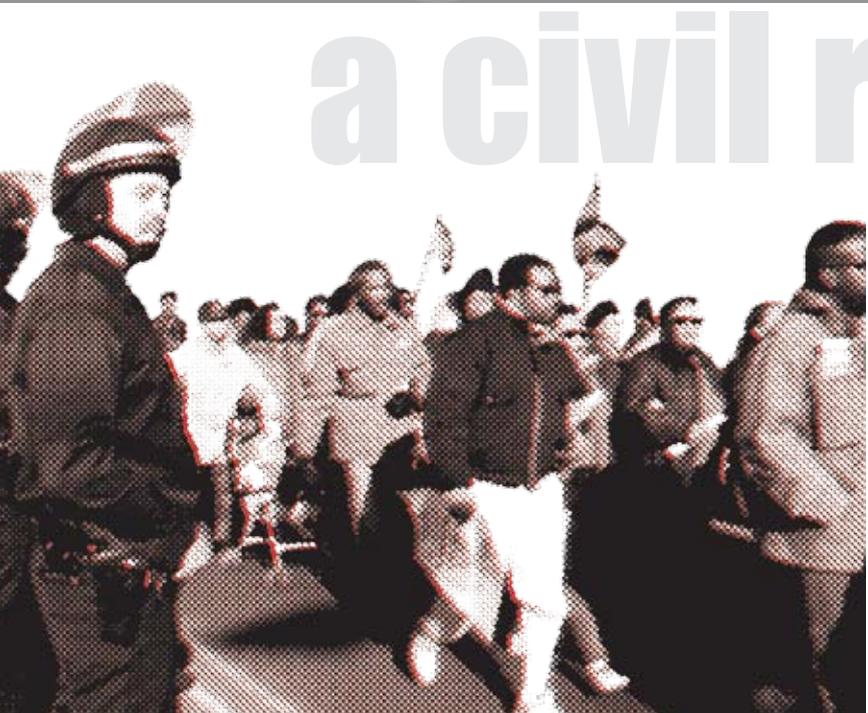
When institutional segregation, fostered by public policies tolerated in many communities, is pointed out, many think, "It's just the way things are." There's sometimes an assumption that segregation is more about ethnic self-selection than about institutional discrimination and conscious public policies. Despite most Americans' sense of fair play, there's little national understanding of the long history and the mechanisms of institutional housing discrimination.

Much of America still suffers from entrenched segregation by race and class. The end of Jim Crow and legal segregation has not yet given way to a fully integrated society. I hope that Brick by Brick: A Civil Rights Story effectively portrays how leadership and policy decisions play a role in this. At the same time, the film portrays the courage and quiet heroism of everyday people who continue the struggle to change segregative housing policies.

Segregated neighborhoods often have worse schools, poorly provided services, fewer successful employment models, less employers, worse health care, and more entrenched poverty. Segregation is a class and racial issue, but we have yet to prioritize it as a major problem, or to realize how to address it. Meanwhile, the national black-white segregation index climbs, becoming higher for our children in 2000 than it was back in 1990.

The experience of making Brick by Brick: A Civil Rights Story makes me certain that we need to put these savage inequalities of our society back onto the front burner of our media. For the most part, housing issues, which disproportionately affect poor Americans, especially Americans of color, weren't even discussed in our electoral and political debate until the mortgage crisis made housing a subject we all face. Now we all must deal with questions of fairness and equity in our national housing policies— and fair housing needs to be a priority as we do.

Brick by Brick: A Civil Rights Story helps to shine a light on this contemporary issue through one city's experience. At the very least, it provides a useful starting point for new conversations about fair housing in every community.



a civil rights story