

## **“Third Ward TX”**

transcription

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(PBS TEASER)

Jerome Washington (VOICE OVER)

In my neighborhood it looks like a bomb has been dropped down in there.

Preston Seymore

In Project Row Houses this neighborhood was reborn, it was reborn.

Jesse Lott

The theory was to utilize artist involvement to resolve community dilemma.

Deborah Grotfeldt

The really scary part of it all is that real estate speculation has already begun.

Alvia Wardlaw

Quoting John Biggers “art will save your life.”

(UNDERWRITERS)

(FILM START)

Bert Long

Art is life, life is art. When you go to Italy and you go to those places you walk around, everything is art, it's not separate. You don't go to it, you're in it. You understand? Try escaping it. Whereas here we're growing into that. Our job now is to make it so they can walk around and go through it. And that's what these houses are about, people are looking at themselves really.

Jerome Washington

Third Ward Texas. In my neighborhood where I was raised it looks like a bomb had been dropped down in there. The house I was born in-- torn down. The house that I was raised in for like 14 years is torn down. All the old landmarks are torn down. All the people that lived in there, you know the old people that you knew, dead. People that were born and raised up around here moved south.

Interviewer (Nancy Bless)

So what used to be in all those empty lots over there?

Ernie Atwell

Small houses. Yeah.

Ernie Atwell

My name is Ernie Atwell. I am a resident of Third Ward of the city of Houston. I was born about 10 blocks away from Project Row Houses. I keep telling everybody you all forget the history of Houston. It was founded by a pair of brothers who were real estate developers and they meant that. [laughs] You know, develop whatever you want to develop.

Rick Lowe

Houston has shown over the past ten years that it has little to no regard for the history of its neighborhoods. It poses itself as a town that is open for business; it is very business friendly. And what that means is it puts the goal and objectives of lucrative business above the human value of the neighborhood.

KRIV-TV Fox 26 Houston news Anchor 1: Well there's an effort underway to help save and revitalize a part of the historic Third Ward. It is a campaign pushed by an unlikely group... artists.

Rick Lowe

Ok yeah, we'll do that and we'll check out the bathroom okay, this wall here.

News Reporter Voice-Over: Volunteers are renovating houses. Getting ready to remodel the shotgun house, which was built more than sixty years ago in this Third Ward community. Twenty-two houses are being bought by artists who will help renovate them.

Rick Lowe

One day I drove down the street and I saw these houses. You know, I saw them and it must have been the way the light was hitting the roofs or whatever, but, you know, the rust-color roofs were just beautiful. And immediately I started thinking of John Biggers paintings. John Biggers is an African-American educator, artist and activist whom I've admired greatly. As, you know, John Biggers talks about it, the shotgun house is like, you know, the belly of the mother. It's where we live. It's where we shelter ourselves until we go out into the world.

Alvia Wardlaw

John essentially founded the Art Department at Texas Southern University. Dr. Biggers preached and preached and preached the meaning of this house, the fact that it was on one hand a very humble abode but at the same time it was a temple.

Jesse Lott

The theory was to utilize artist involvement to resolve community dilemma. And the first thing that happened was this old lady that stayed in the back there, she had a little old two-bedroom house she stayed in by herself.

Earnestine Courtney

I said well I'm Miss Courtney. I'm up in here by myself. The good Lord and me.

Jesse Lott

And she watched everything, you know.

Earnestine Courtney

They prostituted over there. Kicked the doors in. Nothing but filth all around in the streets and all that. I couldn't put up with that. And I was not going to put up with it. That's the reason I shot at so many of them. I broke it up.

Jesse Lott

And she said, "If ya'll was going to do something for real you would get in here and clean up this place so these junkies would get out of here." She said that is what you would do if you're going to do something for real. So to me, that was the motivating statement; that is, what is the voice of the community? The voice of the community said, *this* is what we need.

Rick Lowe

There were those tough periods, though. One weekend there would be twenty-five, thirty people and the next weekend you show up and, well, there's me and Jesse or something... But there was still this sense that this thing is going to happen.

Angelbert Metoyer

The houses were all still boarded up. I think Rick had already started bringing artists over. They would all come over, like on the weekends, and clean up a little bit. They would paint pieces onto the doors, and so where the windows were boarded up and the doors were boarded up they had these paintings, these beautiful paintings. Jesse did one, everybody did one, I did one.

Jesse Lott

We called it "The Drive-by," as in...drive-by. "Drive-by" was a very effective term then...It was a twenty-four hour a day exhibition. The important fact is it was stopped from being nothing and converted into something.

An artist is not just a person who makes Art, but you have to have a function. You know, how do you interact with the people that you live with. I see myself as a member of this community actually trying to do something that affects the day-to-day patterns. It's kind of like a preacher. The preacher takes care of the spirit, but somewhere, somebody has got to deal with what's happening up in the mind.

Rick Lowe

Generally, I don't play hold my man, I play outscore my man...

Young Man playing dominoes  
Well, that first game, it seems, was an anomaly.

Rick Lowe

What?

Young Man playing dominoes  
That you won.

Off-screen voice:

Aw come on now.

Rick Lowe

C'mon. Make a believer out of you.

Rick Lowe

I grew up in a very large sharecropping family in Alabama. I was the middle person in a family of twelve. So there's the immediate understanding that it's not all about me, it's about how we get what we need by supporting each other. I was trained as a landscape painter. And the thing about that whole training was that in my mind I was thinking, "Oh well, this Art--you can use it to help change society." But every time I painted those trees and those landscapes I was, like, "This is just not getting it...this is just not getting it." And this student, this high school student came in and he said, "While your work hits on all the issues of low-income communities, people in those communities already know what the issues are. We don't need people to come back and tell us what the issues are, we already know. We see it, we live it. If you're an artist and you're creative why can't you create some kind of solution?"

Floyd Newsum

It's Rick and the people that he's surrounded himself with. No one person can do it all. And Rick embraces the fact that he is only one part of the pie.

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

(murmurs...) Ray and I used to be roommates years ago, photographing here in Houston while we both worked for the Model Cities program at Texas Southern University.

Ray Carrington

Third Ward, Fourth Ward, downtown. Where didn't we walk Earl?

Ray Carrington

What kind of pictures we going to shoot?

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

What kind of pictures are we going to shoot today? Well we are going to have to see what we can find. Just walking. Look. See that sign...

Woman outside store: Hey, Mr. Carrington.

Ray Carrington

Hey, darling, how you doing? What you doing for yourself these days?

Woman

In there working.

Ray Carrington

[laughs] Are you working?

Woman

Yeah.

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

Well, look, I'm going to going to come in some time, I'm going to bring my camera. I don't want to no supper. I'm going to come in, I'm going to sit in the corner and shoot some pictures I don't want any beer. All I want to do is sit in the corner...

Woman

And shoot some pictures...

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

And shoot some pictures

Woman

Just come on my shift. I work Mondays, Wednesdays..

Ray Carrington

Come out into the light. You got to come out into the light.

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

See Ray, I never like to pose anybody.

Ray Carrington

Come, come, come on. There, there, right there. There you go.,

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

Okay, hold it right there. Now, this is...this is magnificent.

Ray Carrington

All of Earl's photographs are like children; he never throws any of them away.

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

These photographs here were made at the Row House Project. I was there prior to the Row Houses project taking off because I photographed in that area quite a bit.

The actual clean up.

There were a lot of community residents who came out from different, various organizations that actually worked on the project.

There were kids that were around.

Ray Carrington

Let me see this. This looks like a kid I know. I know this kid.

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

He's in one of your classes?

Ray Carrington

He's been through Yates, yeah.

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

Okay.

Ray Carrington

Anyone who came to Houston in the '30's and '40's, it was almost understood if you didn't grow up on Dowling Street, you hadn't visited Houston. It was a Mecca, it was the place you needed to come.

Ernie Atwell

Third Ward in my childhood days was darn near, totally, 100 percent, African-American. That meant that people of all income levels lived here. So anybody who lived here who made nothing... who made a million dollars. And that community was very close.

Jerome Washington

You didn't need no fences... you didn't need no keys. You didn't have to worry about anybody breaking into your house 'cause everybody up here knew everybody. Like Richard Pryor says, this is a neighborhood not a residential district. Yeah. What's the old African proverb? "It takes a village to raise a child?" Well this is what they had in here.

Jewell Brown

At the time of being a kid it was just excellent, cause it was so many of us kids. I don't know how much fun it was for our parents but us kids had plenty fun. From street to street, over and over and side to side... just children. [laughs] If a kid misbehaved, well the neighbor could whip you. And then if they told your dad or your mom, Mom might

whip you. If Mom told Dad, then Dad might get your goat, too. It was like a chain reaction for misbehavior.

Earnestine Courtney

We didn't have no telephone, nothing like that. But those old people got that message before you got there. Now how they did that, I don't know. I tried to learn that but I never...[laughs].

Ernie Atwell

The neighborhood has gone down, if you will, in numbers of people, really by two things predominately. One of them was the funding for the freeways. You took out about 30,000 people, right quick. The second decrease in population happened with something called "Integration."

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

When people had a chance to explore and to have a choice of where they wanted to go and what they wanted to do, people began to expand. People began to move out of the tight, close-knit communities. Dowling Street was like a small town within Houston and you know what has happened to small towns in America. Most of them have died. And this is what has happened to our community. Dowling Street has gone the way of small communities in America.

Preston Seymore

When Project Row Houses came here, this neighborhood was reborn, it was reborn. 'Cause all of these houses was drug-infested, and when they took over and did what they did, it just opened up. It was just like a new day.

J. Yolande Daniels

When you open the doors people just come through and I guess they are used to walking through but it is so easy for them to walk through, too, and they just talk to you.

Walter Hood

Their genesis is basically from a bed. A three-by-six frame. Summers I used to spend literally on "Tobacco Road" with my uncles, priming tobacco every summer during my teenage years. What always sort of intrigued me about the little worker-house was its capacity, that, you know...there could be fifteen of us and I always had a bed, always had a place to crash out. I started thinking about just the notion of the capacity of these places. You look around, they weren't single family dwellings, they actually probably had a couple families living here at the time.

Rick Lowe

You know, it just grew way bigger than me. It was way over my head. And with Debbie coming in to help set up the organizational structure--which is something that I never had the opportunity to do-- I needed someone that knew how to do that kind of stuff and she does.

Deborah Grotfeldt

It was very interesting to be coming in here as a white person into a Black community. People began to complain--the Row Houses is bringing too many white people into the Third Ward. Rick took a lot of heat about working with me. That was a real developmental process in the Row Houses for him and certainly for me.

You know we would try to remember to always ask people, so what would you like to see happen here on this sight and what would you like to see happen in this community? Over an over again people in the neighborhood would tell us there were so many single mothers struggling so hard to raise children alone. So as a woman and the mother of a young woman and feeling a lot of empathy-- my mother was a single parent in the 50s when there weren't very many women alone raising children.

So when they said housing, I kind of went-- what about if we begin to investigate housing for single mothers and making a little community within the Row House community within the greater Third Ward community.

Yvonne Morales

Let me run in my house real quick. We are going to go down to the last house. I just got to go get the keys.

I mean we make sure everything is in here.

Okay, that's good to know. Any little thing. Cause I mean we're not going to think of every single thing. Is there something that you think should be in here. Let us know, [laughs] we'll make sure it's in here.

Tereno Molo

The opportunity came up and I was ready. I was very ready. Whatever I needed to do I was like fine, I'll do it. I was like, say no more. If you have a space it's for me. Because I knew I was going to have to stop working for a while and actually really focus on accomplishing my goal in getting my bachelor degree.

Shyriaka Morris

Not in the road. Not in the road!

[Child crying]

Morris

You okay?

Child (Sunanda Morris)

[crying] I fell down!

Morris

When I came down here for my interview they were like we're not finished. I don't care. It's better than where I am, man. We were at my auntie's house, sleeping on the floor. I'm tired of sleeping on the floor. I'm ready to move on. I don't care. When can you move in? I can move in today.

Morris

Here, try it again slower. Get back on.

Morris

I was just overwhelmed with the culture and the whole community environment that was here. When I first met Rick I just sat down and talked with him and he asked me about my art and he asked me what motivated me to be an artist. He was like, "I have a job for you." I'm like, "What is it?" He said, "I want you to open up a gallery." I was like, "Wow, yes, I'll do it, I'll do it!" I didn't ask him how much he was paying me or if he was going to supply me the material to change it around, whatever, I didn't care. I really wanted to have my own gallery someday. This is exactly what I want to do. This is the first step of me having my open business but under the shelter of Project Row. I mean I really can't say why he picked me, but I'm just happy that he did.

Rick Lowe

[calls to a young man in the distance] Jordan! [the young man in the distance replies-inaudible] What?

I think I bonded closer to Jesse and Rick than any person. Actually, my first show was with Project Row House was in high school which Rick and Jesse and Burt and those guys put together for me. To like get money for me to get to college, they did that. The Heimbinders bought one, I think Rick got one.

[Mother's Talking] Mother 1

Look at your baby...She's rocking down! She's gotten big.

Mother 2

She's gotten very big.

Mother 1 (o.c.)

Look at Momo. You're doing good, Momo!

"Momo"

Okay. Thank you.

Preston Seymore

When Project Row Houses first started here, peoples living in the neighborhood just seen it, walked by and go. And that was it. They didn't have too much to say or do with

Project Row Houses. Little by little we started getting kids to come into the program and the peoples opened their eyes and they seen that this was a great place.

[Man and children singing, demonstrating Capoeira. Children playing in the yard.]

Tall Boy (Denny)

Art classes, martial arts, drill teams.

Boy in Red Shirt (Harold)

We do all kinds of things...

[Two Boys talk over each other]

Tall Boy(Denny) (at same time)  
"Art Moves"...

Boy in Red Shirt (Harold)  
(at same time)  
Then we finish. "Art Moves"..

Tall Boy(Denny)  
We go all sorts of places...

Boy in Red Shirt (Harold)  
...All sorts of places.

Garrison (o.c.)

How long have you guys been doing this?

Boy in Red Shirt(Harold)

Me and him?

Tall Boy (Denny)

I've been in the Row Houses (Boy in Red Shirt repeats immediately "...been in the Row Houses...") for five years. They been like two, three years

Boy in Red Shirt (Harold)

Naw. I've been here a long time. Me and Denny.

New Boy

I've been here....

Boy in Red Shirt (Harold)

Bri...!

New Boy

I've been here...

Boy in Red Shirt (Harold)

You just came to....thing. He's been here until, with all of us...he'll, he'll have been..

New Boy

Six days.

Boy in Red Shirt (Harold)

Yeah, me too.

Veralisa Hunter

I really believe that it's impossible to have balance as a single parent because if you are working you know eight, ten hours a day, that's going to take away from the time you have with the children. And you've got all the chores, you got to cook, you got to clean. It's impossible to do everything. And, you know, I'm a divorced mom with two children, with cancer, trying to survive.

That's one thing I do like about Row Houses. They are not locked, they don't have this boxed mindset—"these are the rules and that's it." But because they have compassion for the single mother... Having my own space is really important to me. Having my art around me is important to me. These walls are orange because it's a color that represents life.

Veralisa Hunter (brushing her daughter's hair)

Get all the tangles out.

Veralisa Hunter

I want to have something cheerful and bright and lively with a sense of humor to it and that's what these walls represent to me. Just because you are poor doesn't mean that you can't have beauty around you.

Veralisa Hunter (to her daughter)

Remember my friend Marsha?....

Veralisa Hunter

So this is giving me a sense of autonomy that is just healing for me. Its healing for me. It's allowed me to keep a little bit of my dignity, too, I think.

Larry Davis

The location is three minutes from downtown, three minutes from the museums, you know, five minutes from the medical center. I mean, because of the cost of land we are going to be able to go in there and start in the 150's, building townhomes. And we're not just talking about townhomes, we are talking 2,000 square feet-townhomes with two-story spaces, two-car garages which is the best, because 25 percent of our buyers are single women.

William Williams

In some ways this part of the Third Ward has been blessed by not being as close to downtown, let's say, as Fourth Ward and Freedman's town are where the force of development has moved so rapidly they've lost all their infrastructure before they had a chance to save them and get people in the homes.

Stephen R. Williams

Fourth Ward is just gone, I happened to go down there and I'm like, "Damn!" I went down Gray Street and it was gone! If people maybe had a part of the vision, to see what the, maybe what the future.... maybe look at some of the blue prints to see what's gong to happen... because its just gone.

William Williams

Third Ward's been a little bit isolated. While that hurts at some level, in terms of development, it probably helped us save the sense of the neighborhood and the character that exists here.

Cleveland "The Flower Man" Turner

...And these here are my herbs, here.

Bless (o.c.)

Oh, basil, yeah..

I cook with that, that's really good. Sometimes when I have a bad taste in my mouth I just come out here and get me a leaf. It's really good.

This is my life-saver you know, I did this when I first came off skid row you know. I had seven years...seventeen years of skid row life. Yeah, so this is my life here and this is what I made out of my life when I got my life straightened out.

I had a vision, right down there at St. Joseph hospital about a week before I got out of the hospital. A vision, you know, and there was a big pretty thing, you know, came up out of the ground with all kind of flowers... so pretty and high as it got, the beauteous it got.

And I tried to make that here, you know. And I'm still working on it and I never get through with it.

And you see it just put up out of, I call it junk, when I'm talking. Picked up out of the ditches and bring it here and know how to put it and paint it up a little bit, you know. Just take nothing and make something out of it.

Alvia Wardlaw

What I love about that place is that it does involve the people that live there. It's not a set apart space. Rick found some of those same creative people that John Biggers talks about, you know, around the corner from Project Row Houses.

Woman 1

That was nicely executed.

Woman 2

Yeah, point her out to me later on. I want to know who she is.

Woman 1

Of course we know who that is right there.

Woman 2

Is that Delveon?

Woman 1

That's Terence.

Woman 2

How 'bout that. Isn't that interesting.

(Excited kids talking.)

Preston Seymore

Is everybody ready? Y'all not ready. Ya'll been doing this for 25 years and you're still not ready. Pease Park. You all ain't never been to Pease Park?

Jonah Broussard

At the time when I was with Brother Seymore then, before he got the job at the Project Row House. He really wasn't doing anything. It was like a day-to-day thing. He had no goal. He stayed locked up. And the only thing that brought him back was his daughter. She couldn't understand why she hadn't seen her father. He could have been with her and he chose the wrong way to go. And I think that was his turn around right there.

Seymore

That's my son. That's Preston. And that's his, these are his two boys. That's Jeremiah and that's Jaylin. Grandpa's big boy.

Broussard

And then when he learned about the Row House, this brought a new atmosphere in his life.

Seymore

Good food, now it's back to work. Time to go back to work.

Broussard

And Rick kind of liked him a lot, you know. Rick just kind of like created a position for him.

Seymore

When I was first offered the job at Project Row Houses, I was undecided because I didn't know whether I could do this. You know, I said, "What can I offer?" And I slept on it and overnight it came to me. You was raised here. This is where you live. So I knew then that I had a lot to offer these kids around here in this neighborhood. These are inner city kids and most of the kids come from broken homes like I did. And that's why I am able to relate with these kids so much. When I pick them up I treat them with respect and treat them just exactly like they are mine.

Seymore

Hey, it's all in the timing. Time yourself, time the rope

Seymore

Everybody know the blue van. They know that's the Project Row House van. Everybody at school know me as "Brother Seymore." It was a name the kids gave me. They gave me that name, "Brother Seymore."

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

This a yearly tradition. For the last twenty, twenty-five years I have been doing this. Every year.

Hudnall

The beauty for me in the neighborhoods is how people make an effort to survive and how they make adjustments and how they tend to make them work. And this is the reason why I try to photograph the inhabitants...is just trying preserve a part of the community through its people.

Bert Long

We grew up in these homes, right, and even though it's an art show place, an art gallery. But it's like you are walking into a home. You are walking in to yourself.

Jimmy Kuehnle

Yeah, but you got to get somebody in there to see where you are. So somebody run in. You can run it. Just you and then we got to stay here because he's just going to see the sidewalk.

Boy in Exhibition

Look at A.J.!

[People walking around the exhibits talking to each other.]

Bert Long

Right now, you have a total stretch of the whole artistic spectrum, I guess you would say. What we would call some things that are very, very elitist and very, very pristine...and then you have some real funky stuff, right? And then right here is my brother's house, Donnel Long, and he doesn't exhibit anywhere. He just sits at his house and he makes this stuff. I knew if Rick saw it he would say, "Yeah, do a house," and he did. And he has a house, "Allah's House."

Donnel Long

My name is Donnel Long and I ended up being a postman for the US Postal Service. And I stayed there for about 20 years. My brother, his name is Bert Long, he's an artist here in Houston Texas. And he's helped me along the way and inspired me I should say.

Bert Long

Congratulations, it's wonderful. You did a great job

Donnel Long

Okay, alright.

Donnel Long

And there was a big question about who and where and what I might end up doing. My father, he was killed on his job, he fell off in a barrel of steel. He was somewhat like a chemist for the hardening of steel. He slipped and he fell and left my mother with three kids and one to be born. I used to climb these two big trees and I used to be out there praying. And I used to climb these trees because I was afraid didn't have no father and I was so lost and afraid. Finally, I had a little more hope. And I ended up being a better person by having the faith and hope that I did have someone that really cared about me.

Rick Lowe

There are people here in this neighborhood whose income is somewhere around \$500 a month or so, maybe a little bit more. And it's difficult for them to find a place to rent for less than \$250 a month. But even if they are paying \$250 in rent, that's half their income.

Deborah Grotfeldt

The really scary part of it all is the more we do, brings more attention to the Third Ward, which has the cheapest land prices now in the city. Real estate speculation has already begun...

Ernie Atwell

There are concerns that Perry, or someone like .. you know Big Pockets Full of Money... can come in and do on this side of 288 what Perry has done on that side. I don't think that the reprieve from the Third Ward, in that sense, will last much longer.

Larry Davis

When I started my practice here what I didn't want to do was just build "McMansions," as we call them. Or build French chateaus, because I felt that I didn't go to architecture school for five years just to bring a little bit of France to Houston. But we chose to fine-tune our designs and then continue building in the inner city. My main thing is to try to bring innovative, creative housing for a price that can be affordable. To some it's not affordable at all and we're not going to joke about this. But to other people it is affordable.

Rick Lowe

"Affordable housing" is a very loose term. "Low income" is somewhat loose too but it is much more focused than "affordable" because, you know, a million dollar home is affordable to somebody. But low income in our community, low income are people that are earning \$12,000 a year or less.

Deborah Grotfeldt

And that is the average median, \$13.5... And that's for a family of four.

Gaye Lord Gill

Downtown is limited. And with more people coming into Houston we have to have more downtown. So where else are they, you know, this is the most logical place for them to go.

Garrison (o.c.)

But what's going to happen to the people who are here now?

Gaye Lord Gill

Well, they're going to have to move. They're going to have to go somewhere else, unless they just don't sell out.

Alvia Wardlaw

I have very... I'm still growing up in Third Ward. I have never left Third Ward. Seeing people in the neighborhood... A community is a place where you know people. You don't want to just go home and close your door. Before you get to your door, there's someone out in the yard that you want to speak to about something that happened.

A community is a place that has certain signposts that are just familiar and comforting. And no matter where you are in the world, no matter how wonderful that experience is that you've had somewhere else in the world, you still want to get home to that signpost. To that that thing or those things that let you know that you are home.

Steven R. Williams

Development has to happen. It has to happen. It's inevitable. Some things get lost. Old antiques, homes, but everything changes.

Larry Davis

Definitely who we are building for are young professionals and empty-nesters. Because we have a lot of people who are in the 50's, 60's, whose kids now have gone off and they are selling their homes in the burbs and they're moving into town. And it is opening a whole new life and experience for them.

Garrison (o.c.)

And what do you think of these lofts?

Ronda Randle

Oh, I think the lofts are great. Just kind of bringing a contemporary feeling to the Third Ward area where most of all it's just been more of the older homes in the area. So just bringing more of a contemporary feeling.

Garrison(o.c.)

How long have you been in your house?

Belle Watson

Oh numerous of years.

Garrison(o.c.)

So your neighbor used to have a house like yours, I guess?

Belle Watson

Well, before it was a house and then came an apartment, then after the apartment was abanished the lot was vacant for numerous of years. And then all of a sudden, here some the devil! This monster of a building. It holds heat...you can't hardly stand it. You walk down my driveway you feel like you're walking into a furnace.

Garrison(o.c.)

Well, what's going to happen to the rest of the neighborhood? Do you think that more people will sell?

Belle Watson

Well, they pretend that they're not going to sell, but you'll never know. I know I'll never sell.

Rick Lowe

Of course we're supposed to believe that the Market will set the stage for what needs to happen in the community. Well, we found that's not necessarily the case. I mean the Market has a certain slant that it is interested in and unless you force the issue of low income housing, it just won't happen.

Rick Lowe

'Cause we are trying to do another housing project. Can I show you something that we are trying to do?

bell hooks

Oh yeah, I would love to.

Rick Lowe

Lets walk through and we can go down to the office. This is the corner store. This is now...

bell hooks

Like a meeting place!

Rick Lowe

Meeting place, yep. This is our plan. This is our big plan. This land over here is extremely expensive. We are still relatively inexpensive. We're in the process of strategizing and figuring out how to conquer this area (laughs), I mean, how to really set up some barriers to big developers so they don't just come in and take it over.

Rick Lowe (to John Guess, Realtor)

So this is the deal. We came up with numbers on everything. The back-taxes on this property. This whole strip..

Deborah Grotfeldt

We know that we need to get the land purchased yesterday. Every bit of it that we want and need. At the same time if the economy tanks, and Houston is already over-built, we could end up sitting on a lot of land and not be able to finance the development of it.

Rick Lowe

So this is the deal. To go and talk to these people who own this property that has the back taxes and to convince them, we are wedged in here. If they agree to sell it to use we will buy these two lots from you and assume your back taxes.

Grotfeldt

So we designated these thirty-five blocks because we could see we could really control what could happen in this thirty-five block area.

John Cash

How much is the taxes?

Rick Lowe

Uh, 10,000.

John Cash

Okay.

Rick Lowe

Is it one property or two?

John Cash

I think its two lots.

Rick Lowe

Let me see.

John Cash

You should have a lot behind unless its just one big lot.

Rick Lowe

Lot 8 Block 37 let's see what the size of it is.

John Cash

Let's go over there and I'll show it to you and if you are interested I am going to call him and bring him back over here.

Rick Lowe

Okay, that's great.

John Cash

And then ya'll would have to draw up something.

Rick Lowe

Yeah we would just have to do the contract...

Rick Lowe

Yeah things are kind of shifting for us. We're trying to figure it out.

Larry Tory

This area right here is zoned residential. But just over the fence they zoned that commercial because there used to be a railroad track here before they put in the freeway. And now they are building up behind us and before you know it, they are going to take all that we worked for. All that we've kept, all that our families have passed down to our children trying to hold on to it. We'll have nothing!

Why should I sell what's mine and then look at trying to rebuild or sell or purchase another property? I mean when what we have is already paid for... all of the neighbors here in these homes are free and clear.. and it's going to be going for a song. With the development they have here, the property taxes are going up such to where we can't hold on to it.

Alvia Wardlaw

I see it everywhere. It's happening in Baltimore, its happening in Chicago, you know, it's happening in Atlanta, Cincinnati. It's happening everywhere. And you see all-Black communities being kind of squeezed and altered and changed.

Larry Davis

I don't think that we can be, as a developer, condemned or rewarded. It's a difficult situation that has gone on and things, because of us, they're changing, whether it be for the better or the worse, I don't know. But I don't think that, unless you are doing like a Project Row House... You know, I think you do have to have a reality check and say, "If we didn't come in it's not going to change." It's going to stay the same because no one is really helping these people. And that's sort of a sad thing that goes on. And the question is, where do they go? Maybe they go to suburbia, I don't know where they go. (laughs) You know, it's very difficult to see because, again, the values, where all the blight... people moved away from town in the '70's. It's been a big resurgence of people moving back into town. And as long as people are moving back into town it is going to be supply and demand.

Alvia Wardlaw

The lift of spirit that one receives in moving through beautiful spaces or experiencing something challenging... Looking at someone else take you seriously, which is what many of the artists who come to Row Houses do, they look around and use their lens to look at the people right there. And I think that gives the men and women and children in that community a sense of who they are; a sense of great power. Quoting John Biggers, "Art will save your life."

Preston Seymore

This is going to be the kitchen area here. This will be a living room. You're going to have a bedroom to the left and a bedroom to the right. And a restroom straight ahead here.

The peoples that own this property here, they were supposed to been selling to Project Row House so Project Row House could build some affordable houses for people around here who wanted to move into a house. You could buy it or either you could rent it.

William Williams

Rick and the other people on the board of Project Row Houses have been trying to get involved with rental housing at some level but more importantly in the end it is getting people prepared for home ownership. Cause they realize if they are truly successful in the neighborhood the neighborhood will gentrify. So the important thing is to get people at the higher level of home ownership in the neighborhood and a lot of people take stock in the neighborhood and become invested in this community and I don't, then I guess it would be great if it gentrified with the people that live here.

Rick Lowe

I didn't know that we were going to be doing something that was that had the kind of scope that it has now. You know, in fact early on, you know we were just looking at it as a temporary kind of guerilla style art project. I don't feel threaten by the development you, because I think that we're live participants and it's not like one day we are going to wake up and this place is going to be completely different we would have participated in its development and growth.

Cleveland "The Flower Man" Turner: [laughs]

Veralisa Hunter

My life does not look the same since I entered Third Ward at all. It looks completely different. Health-wise I've been doing very good. I've been doing very good; still in remission. Third Ward is definitely where I found one of the better pieces of myself.

Shyriaka Morris

I can see a lot of progress from when I first moved into the YMRP. I feel like I am more confident and a lot of things have been happening for me. A lot of positive things. I am doing the Saturday art class at Caprecio park.

Morris

So Art class is not boring?

Boy with pink casts

Not too much.

Morris

Alright.

Morris

(o.c.) I have about five kids, sometimes eight.

They giving me an award for real? But how did they decide on me? Wow, I'm getting an award for... new emerging artist award. It's called National Black Arts Festival. And they have a big ball and people go up and get their awards and stuff.

Morris

I'm kind of excited about this year because, I mean, everything that I could just even ask for...

Graduation Announcer

Terena Yvonne Molo.

Terena Molo

Yeee! I got my degree!

Floyd Newsum

If Rick didn't have the people around him...the art community, the pastors from churches and other community leaders, it would not be successful. Because no one person can do it all.

Rick Lowe

I think you'll...no matter what happens in this neighborhood you are still going to feel the presence of what Project Row Houses meant and what it's been doing.

Bert Long

It's a wonderful opportunity to reach people who, maybe, never would go to the Museum of Fine Arts but they'll pass along here and they'll do like when I was doing my house... They pass along so many times that they say, "You mind if I stop in and look?" you know?

Garrison(o.c.)

Do you feel sad about leaving?

Shyriaka Morris

No, 'cause I have to open up that house for another young mother to have the same experience that I did. So I feel proud that I can move on out of my house and let the next young mother move in here...start her life.

Shyriaka Morris

Ready? Set? Go!

OVER CREDITS

Jerome Washington

Man, you could sleep so good on a rainy day or a rainy night with that rain falling on that tin roof. I mean it was, like...it was like a symphony. I mean it was...it was...like music to your ears.