

# network

HUMANITIES

## Featured in This Issue

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Kids to investigate the hidden meanings in everyday places using photography and writing.

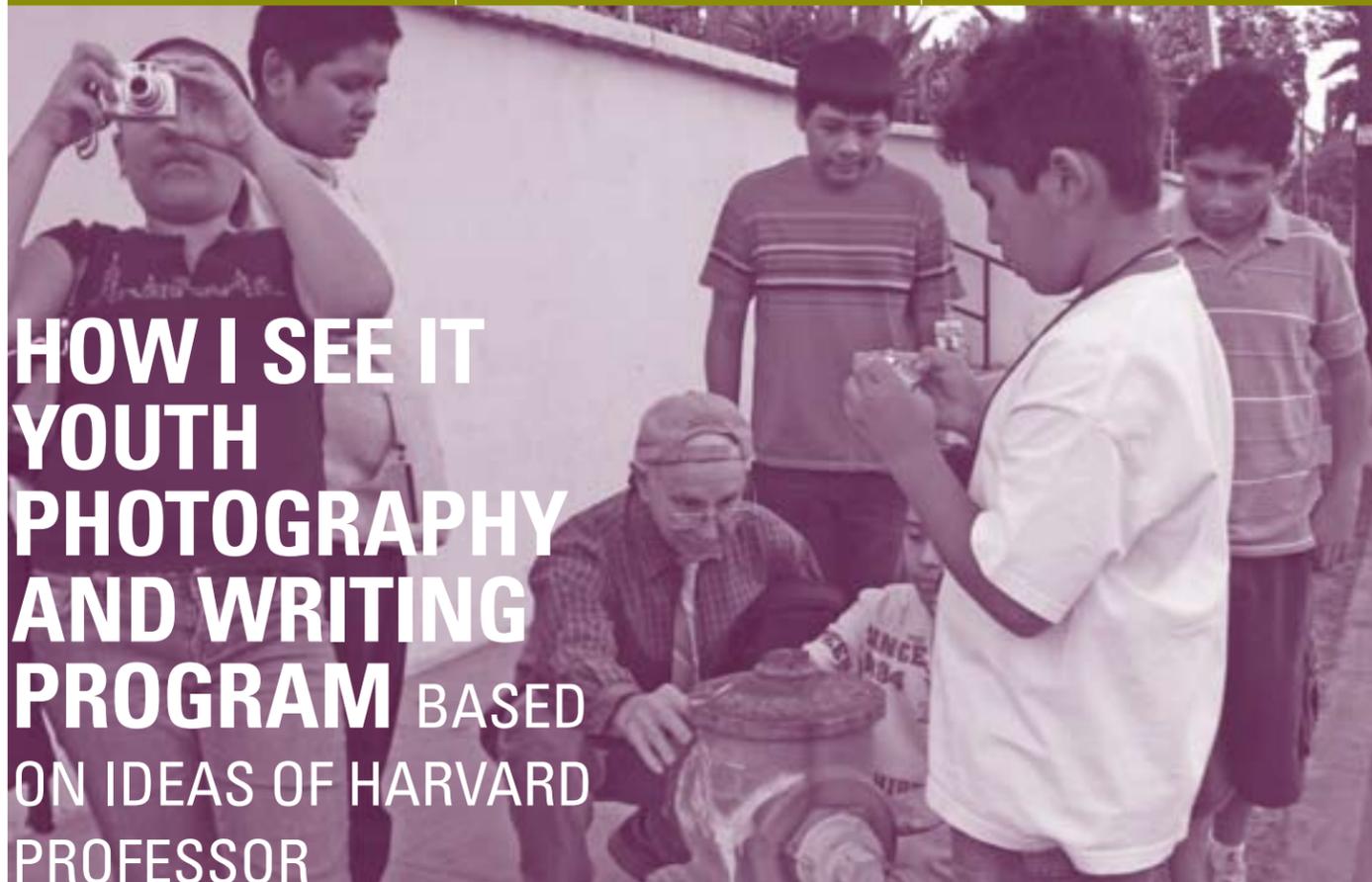
New film projects to document aspects of the state prison system, urban redevelopment and more.

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Four San Francisco young people are writing, directing and editing a narrative film based on real events in their community.

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Award-winning filmmaker Arthur Dong combines his love of Hollywood films and a deep interest in the Chinese American experience in his newest film.



## HOW I SEE IT YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHY AND WRITING PROGRAM BASED ON IDEAS OF HARVARD PROFESSOR

*Jerald Kress, a CCH project consultant for a pilot My Place program at the Bresee Community Center in central Los Angeles, leads a group of middle-school kids as they explore nearby places for hidden meanings. Photo/Felicia Kelley.*

### Ten-week program to take place in 21 libraries this summer and fall

Have you ever seen birds perched on telephone wires and asked yourself how they adapt to city life? Or wondered why the church on the corner looks more like a bank than a place of worship? Or pondered why your city's recycling bins are all painted the color they are? According to John Stilgoe, professor of landscape history at Harvard University, we go through life without really seeing the world around us. Paying attention, he says, can teach us a lot about the past and enrich our lives.

This summer and fall, more than

300 young Californians, aged 11 to 15, will have a chance to enrich their lives Stilgoe's way in a 10-week photography, research and writing program at 21 California libraries. The program, called How I See It: My Place, is part of the Council's How I See It state-wide campaign to enable young people to share their experiences of living in today's California.

Senior Programs Manager Felicia Kelley, who is developing the library program for the Council, said that Stilgoe came to her attention last summer when she began to think about structuring the library program around the idea of place. "Patricia Hunt, an American studies scholar working

with me on the project, suggested that I read Stilgoe's book 'Outside Lies Magic.' When I read it, I realized instantly that his ideas provided the approach I was looking for.

"Stilgoe sees everyday landscape as a historical record, and he wants to awaken people to the excitement of exploring their surroundings, going outside and observing the everyday world, and asking questions about what they see," Kelley said. "We've taken that idea, expanded on it and made it accessible to kids."

At each library, the young participants will be introduced to Stilgoe's ideas and acquire the basics of photography. Then they will

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## NEWLY FUNDED DOCUMENTARY PROJECTS TO ILLUMINATE CALIFORNIA ISSUES, STORIES

\$399,000 awarded to 12 film projects and one radio documentary

For those interested in the unfolding story of California, the latest crop of Council-supported documentaries will be sure to enlighten. The 12 film projects and one radio project, funded by the Council under the California Documentary Project in January, explore aspects of the state prison system, urban redevelopment, immigration, the fight for gay rights and life for former female gang members, among other topics. The projects, currently in various stages of development, were awarded a total of \$399,000.

"These documentaries will bring wider awareness to a range of important California stories and issues," said the Council's Executive Director Ralph Lewin. "When I look at the range of projects, I'm reminded that 2008 is the 75th anniversary of the Works Progress Administration, which gave us Dorothea Lange's photographs and many other important works. I think that future generations will

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## Ralph Lewin named CCH executive director

Following an extensive nationwide search, the Council is pleased to announce that Ralph Lewin, who came to the Council 15 years ago and was most recently the Council's associate executive director, has been named executive director. Lewin replaces Jim Quay, who

retired in March after 25 years in the Council's top position.

Council Chairman Douglas Greenberg, who led the search committee, said, "Ralph brings to the job an extraordinary degree of proven success in humanities

programming, a deep commitment to California, and a strong forward vision for the Council and for California cultural programming in general. The board is delighted that he has accepted the position."

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The California Council for the Humanities is a state-based affiliate of the National Endowment for the humanities. Humanities Network is published three times a year and mailed to anyone who requests it from the San Francisco office.

# THOUGHTS ON THE HUMANITIES AND DEMOCRACY

By Ralph Lewin, Executive Director



**I WRITE TO YOU** with a great deal of excitement about the future of the California Council for the Humanities. Just a few weeks ago I began my new position as the Council's executive director after a decade as the organization's associate executive director and head of programs. Today, I am extremely grateful to Jim Quay, my predecessor, and to the board, staff, partners, grantees and supporters who have helped make this organization so strong and effective.

It is a privilege, at times a daunting one, to be in the position to carry forward work that seems more vital to me now than at any other point in my lifetime. As we face a historic election in this country, I am struck again by how fundamental the humanities are to a working democracy. And I am reminded of Václav Havel and the words he spoke in his 1990 address to the United States Congress — just one year after he was elected the first president of the Czech Republic:

*The salvation of this human world lies  
nowhere else than in the human heart,  
in the human power to reflect,  
in human modesty  
and in human responsibility.*

The spirit of Havel's words was etched into my thinking long before I knew what the humanities were or before I had heard of the excellent work of the California Council for the Humanities. I was raised on the edge of a sagebrush canyon in San Diego by my mother, who had experienced the terrors of war as a child in Germany, and a father whose grandparents immigrated to Boston to escape anti-semitism in czarist Russia. It was around our dinner table that we discussed history and ideas and how they connected deeply and powerfully with who we were and our place in the world.

I began my work with the Council after having just returned from teaching in Argentina wondering what to do with my life. Shortly after opening the Council's San Diego office, in spring 1992, I remember standing before a group of San Diegans who had come together in a church meeting room to talk about what some called the riots and others called the rebellion that had just taken place in Los Angeles. People were passionate, nervous and fearful about what those events revealed about Southern California and the state of our democracy. The overarching sense from the conversation that evening was that people felt disconnected — from the place where they live, from the people who govern and from one another. I also found Californians who were eager to engage and explore who we have been, our struggles and our triumphs, in an effort to understand who we are becoming and how California holds the promise of something better.

Over the years I have found myself in similar conversations across California with people from places such as the beautiful Hoopa Valley Reservation in the northwest corner of the state, the farmland of the Great Central Valley, the Southern California coast and points in between. All were grappling with the larger ideas of who we are, how we can create a better place to live and how we can understand one another. In this newsletter you will read about some fine examples of humanities programs that continue this conversation, programs that open windows to the past, that provoke people to reflect on the meaning of their lives in all its complexity. These are all programs that take Havel's thoughts to heart, that push us to reflect on how we live as individuals and together. The humanities are powerful.

As the Council continues to support and create important programs for the people of California, I urge you to support our work in any way you can. If you have any ideas you think the Council should consider, please feel free to contact me.

## SIX JOIN CCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

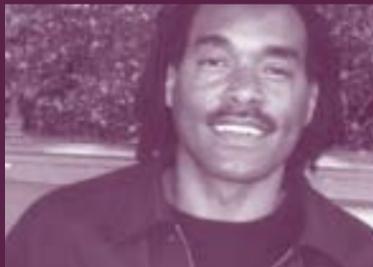
The California Council for the Humanities is pleased to welcome the following distinguished individuals to its Board of Directors.



**CHRIS ABANI** is associate professor of creative writing at UC Riverside and an award-winning novelist and poet. Among his novels are "Song for Night," "The Virgin of Flames" and "Becoming Abigail." Collections of poetry include "Hands Washing Water" and "Dog Woman." Abani is a recipient of the PEN USA Freedom to Write Award and the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award, among other honors.



**LUIS HERRERA** is city librarian of San Francisco. Previously, he served as director of Information Services for the City of Pasadena and deputy director of the San Diego Public Library. He is former president of the Public Library Association and the California Library Association. Herrera holds a bachelor's degree in science from the University of Texas at El Paso and a master's in library science from the University of Arizona.



**CORNELIUS MOORE** is co-director of California Newsreel, director of the Library of African Cinema, and curator of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. He has served as a juror and panelist at film festivals in Toronto, San Francisco, Dallas and Oakland and as a guest lecturer at numerous universities. Moore holds a bachelor of arts in American studies from the University of Pennsylvania.



**JANE PISANO** is president and director of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Previously, she held various posts at the University of Southern California, including senior vice president for external relations and dean of the School of Public Administration. She is president and chairwoman of the Research and Grants Committee of the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation Board of Trustees. Pisano holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Stanford University and a master's and doctorate in international relations from Johns Hopkins University.

*Not pictured:*

**JOAQUIN ALVARADO** is founding director of the Institute for Next Generation Internet at San Francisco State University. He is also an award-winning documentary filmmaker, writer, producer and director. His media-education work began in the 1980s when he developed the first television program in the nation produced by Hispanic youth. He is a founding member of San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom's Digital Media Advisory Council.

**ALEJANDRO MORALES** is a novelist and professor of Spanish and Portuguese and film and media studies at UC Irvine. He has published seven books, his most recent being "The Captain of All These Men of Death." His novels have been published in the United States and Mexico. Morales was born in Monte Bello, Calif. He holds a bachelor's degree from California State University, Los Angeles, and a master's and a doctorate in Spanish from Rutgers University.

## JUNE BOARD MEETING

The next quarterly meeting of the Board of Directors will be held on Thursday, June 12 in San Francisco. The meeting is open to the public. For details, contact the San Francisco office at 414/391-1474 or send an e-mail to Ann Yoshinaga at [ayoshinaga@calhum.org](mailto:ayoshinaga@calhum.org).

## Newly Funded Documentary Projects (continued from page 1)



The Los Angeles Times newsroom in the 1930s during the heyday of the Chandler family reign. The newly funded “The Chandlers and Their Times” will trace the emergence of modern Los Angeles during the era of the Chandlers. Photo courtesy of Huntington Library/Peter Jones Productions.

look back at our current round of documentaries and learn a lot about California at the beginning of the 21st century, the same way we look at artists’ work under the WPA and understand what life was like then.”

The following 13 projects received California Documentary Project support. More information about the projects is available on the Council’s website at [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).

### FILM PRODUCTION AWARDS

“**Inside/Out: Life in a California Prison**” is a documentary about life in Pelican Bay, a maximum-security state prison. The film follows several inmates, prison staff and volunteers, weaving together their individual dramas, including one inmate’s struggle to exit a gang since getting married in prison and the new warden’s efforts to wrest power from the old-school guards. Writer and producer Noel Schwerin said, “Simply put, ‘Inside/Out’ makes visible what should be a

critical part of the corrections debate: What is prison actually like? Who lives and works in prisons? What does prison culture tell us about the human capacity for violence — and for change?” Award: \$60,000.

“**Moments in Time**” chronicles the coming together of a variety of people to create the Point Reyes National Seashore and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in Marin County and to preserve agricultural land for farmers and ranchers. Producer and director Nancy Kelly said, “My hope is that the film will make people more aware of the power of citizen activists to preserve land, open space and agriculture.” Award: \$60,000.

“**Inventing L.A.: The Chandlers and Their Times**” traces the emergence of multiethnic, modern Los Angeles during the single-family reign of four publishers of the Los Angeles Times: Harrison Gray Otis, Harry Chandler, Norman Chandler and Otis Chandler. “One remark-

able story at a time, the film chronicles the ambitious, ruthless, ingenious and often self-serving methods by which each man employed the newspaper to help turn a town of 12,000 residents into a suburban sprawl of 4 million people — and in the process make the Chandlers among the largest landowners in California and the richest families in America,” said producer and director Peter Jones. Award: \$60,000.

“**Metropolis in the Making**,” produced and directed by Clement Barclay, examines redevelopment in Los Angeles by documenting the 20-year battle over the historic Ambassador Hotel, for decades a mecca for Hollywood legends, heads of state and other famous personalities, and the site of Robert F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1968. Award: \$59,000.

“**Forget Me Not**,” produced and directed by Andy Abrahams, tells the story of the AIDS Memorial Grove in San Francisco’s Golden

Gate Park, from its beginnings as a landscape grove maintained by volunteers to its position today as a nationally designated memorial site. Also featured are stories of individuals who have lost their lives to AIDS and their loved ones who survived them. Award: \$60,000

### FILM RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AWARDS (\$10,000 EACH)

“**Birth of a Movement: Behind the Velvet Curtain (The Hidden History of the U.S. Supreme Court and Gay Rights)**” examines how the highest court in the land has struggled with the contentious issue of human rights for gays and lesbians. Beth Pielert, project director.

“**Filipinos: Forgotten Heroes of the UFW**” explores the forgotten role of Filipinos in the early farmworker movement. Marissa Alroy, project director and producer.

“**Homegirls**” follows several former female gang members in Los Angeles as they try to turn their lives around. Isabel Vega, producer and director.

“**Jack London: Twentieth-Century Man**” looks at the life and work of Jack London. Christopher Million, director.

“**Lost Treasure Hunt**” uses a combination of animation and documentary-style filmmaking to enliven California history for young people between the ages of 6 and 12. Matthew G. Davis, producer and director.

“**¿Mas Bebés?**” reveals the true story of the forced sterilization of Mexican American women in the 1960s and 1970s and the ensuing fight for justice. Renee Tajima-Peña, producer and director.

“**Preaching Revolution**” explores a segment of the Christian evangelical movement that embraces issues of poverty, race, global justice and

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## Ralph Lewin (continued from page 1)

Lewin has held increasingly responsible positions at the Council and was most recently in charge of overseeing the Council’s California Stories initiative and all programming efforts. In his early Council years, he opened the Council’s San Diego office and directed the award-winning cultural program Searching for San Diego, which used history, literature and film to enable diverse groups of San Diego residents to explore their connection to the world around them. More recently, he directed the highly successful statewide California Stories: Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* campaign, which brought tens of

thousands of Californians together to read John Steinbeck’s novel and share their own California stories.

“I am deeply honored to have been appointed to this position,” Lewin said. “I firmly believe that the humanities — the knowledge of history and ideas, critical thinking and the life of the mind — are fundamental to a strong democracy. In the time ahead our shared work in bringing the humanities to the public will be more vital than ever.”

Lewin is active in several California nonprofit organizations. He served as an advisor to Poets and Writers, co-chair for the Northern California Grantmakers Briefings Committee,

and a board member of the California Studies Association. He has also served as a consultant to the California Civil Liberties Education Fund and the California Trust for Cultural and Historic Preservation. He is a three-time recipient of the international Idea Prize from the Koerber Foundation of Germany for his work in developing cultural programs that foster greater understanding among residents in various California communities.

Lewin holds a master’s degree in international relations from San Francisco State and a bachelor’s in political science and another in Germanic literature and languages from the University of California,

Santa Barbara. He studied for a year at Georg-August University in Goettingen, Germany, and spent a semester at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He was a guest scholar at the Institute for International Relations in Potsdam, Germany, and, following his studies, he lectured for a semester at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Lewin is a lifelong California resident. Born in San Francisco and raised in San Diego, he now lives in San Francisco with his wife, Caitlin Mohan, a teacher and writer, and his two young sons, Sam and Leo.

## Newly Funded Projects

(continued from page 3)



Writer Jack London aboard his boat "The Roamer." The film project "Jack London: Twentieth-Century Man," recently funded by the Council under the California Documentary Project, will look at the life and work of the author of "Call of the Wild" and other books. Photo courtesy of the Huntington Library.

the environment. Katie Galloway and Po Kutchins, producers and directors. (This is Galloway and Kutchins' second California Documentary Project award. Their award-winning film "Prison Town, USA," about the effect of the prison system on the town of Susanville, Calif., also received California Documentary Project funding.)

### RADIO PRODUCTION AWARD

**"Calexico: California Borderlands"** features the stories of people affected by immigration every day — those who live or work on the California-Mexico border. "As the nation's most highly trafficked point of crossing, the California-Mexico border is the site of intense cross-cultural interaction and a microcosm of national conflicts over immigration," said Peter Laufer, project director and radio journalist. Award: \$30,000.

The Council has supported almost 50 documentaries since the California Documentary Project was launched in 2001 as part of California Stories, a multiyear initiative designed to connect Californians and foster understanding by uncovering personal and community stories that tell the story of today's California.

Included in the roster of California Documentary Project films are **"Juvies,"** director Leslie Neal's look at the juvenile justice system; **"Romantico,"** Mark Becker's feature-length portrait of an itinerant Mexican musician and his struggles to support himself and his family in San Francisco and Mexico; and **"California and the American Dream,"** a four-part PBS series, directed by Paul Espinosa, about issues of social justice, economic equity and environmental sustainability in the Golden State.

The California Documentary Project offers production grants and research and development grants for radio, film and video projects. Guidelines for the next round of funding will be posted on the Council's website in May 2008. The California Documentary Project is supported through a partnership with the Skirball Foundation.

## How I See It: My Place (continued from page 1)

venture into their neighborhoods and begin to identify and photograph traces of history and other aspects of their everyday landscape they find interesting. The kids' discoveries and questions will become subjects for their research back at the library, which in turn will lead to their writing about what they've discovered. "What we're trying to do is integrate photography, research and writing, so that each activity feeds off the other," Kelley said.

"The program is really about tapping into young people's natural curiosity so they want to learn more about their communities. We hope this experience will help them develop skills and interests that will last a lifetime. And, of course, we hope the program will show them what great resources libraries are."

The My Place program will culminate with an exhibit of the kids' photographs and writings at each of the libraries. In conjunction with the exhibits, each library will hold a public forum to give the young participants an opportunity to share with the public what they've learned. "We hope that these events will generate discussion and reflection about the changes that have taken place in so many of these communities over the years and inspire people to begin thinking about how they can make their communities better," Kelley said.

For people who won't have a chance to attend the exhibits, the

Council is planning to create an online version for the Council's website.

For the past sixth months, Kelley and Jerold Kress, a photographer and documentary filmmaker who is the project's technical advisor,

windows into the past for these kids and represent for them completely new ways of seeing the world."

The Council will provide the participating libraries with everything they need to conduct the

"The program is really about tapping into young people's natural curiosity so they want to learn more about their communities. We hope this experience will help them develop skills and interests that will last a lifetime. And, of course, we hope the program will show them what great resources libraries are."

have been testing out their ideas with a group of middle-school kids in an after-school photography class at the P.F. Bresee Community Center in central Los Angeles. Kelley and Kress are adjusting their approach as they go along, but so far they are pleased with the progress they see.

"The Bresee kids have found a variety of interesting, mysterious and perplexing things to photograph and write about," Kelley said, "including a palm tree swallowing up a no-parking sign, red car tracks that proved to be the remnants of a mass transit system abandoned years ago, and a 1906 synagogue that had been converted into a Korean evangelical church, one of the many signs of the changing demographics of the area. These discoveries are

program, including a program guide, ideas for public programming events, digital equipment and materials, and a \$1,000 cash grant. In May, all the librarians involved will attend a two-day orientation session.

The project is supported by the California State Library and is being conducted in cooperation with Califa, a membership-based California library network and service consortium. It is an offshoot of an earlier pilot program involving libraries in providing documentary projects for youth.

For more information about the program, contact Felicia Kelley at [fkelly@calhum.org](mailto:fkelly@calhum.org). The participating libraries are listed on the Council's website at [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).

## DISCOVERING THE UNEXPECTED IN EVERYDAY PLACES

Excerpts from "Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places," the book by Harvard Professor John R. Stilgoe that inspired the upcoming How I See It: My Place library program.

"Get out now. Not just outside, but beyond the trap of the programmed electronic age so gently closing around so many people.... Go outside, move deliberately, then relax, slow down, look around. Do not jog. Do not run. Forget about blood pressure and arthritis, cardiovascular rejuvenation and weight reduction. Instead pay attention to everything that abuts the rural road, the city street, the suburban boulevard. Walk. Stroll. Saunter. Ride a bike, and coast along a lot. Explore."

"So why not look at every pole along a short residential street, along a half-mile of rural road? Why not explore by looking upward, just for a few minutes? Most people, especially those walking or running or bicycling for physical exercise, tend to look where they are going. The explorer looks ahead too, of course, but also sideways and backward, assimilating a wide field of landscape indeed. But explorers who discover so much in the 360-degree circle they scan know too how much lies downward, often almost under their feet, and they scrutinize everything from pavement types to wildflowers. And the canniest explorers look up too, up at clouds and sky and birds, up at airplanes, up at utility poles, and in looking up they descry something of the complexity of the high. They spot advertising blimps and kites long snared in trees; they marvel at the television antennae lingering from decades ago and notice the decrepitude of so many domestic and industrial chimney tops."

Photo/Jack Detsch.

# YOUTHS' FILM "A CHOICE OF WEAPONS" TACKLES THE IMPACT OF REDEVELOPMENT ON A SAN FRANCISCO COMMUNITY

## Dramatic 60-minute film based on real events



Cast and crew of "A Choice of Weapons" do a read-through of the script before shooting the film. Photo/Debra Koffler.

Up two flights of stairs in a rundown building on Mission Street in San Francisco, four inner-city youths are auditioning actors for parts in a dramatic film they are writing, directing and editing themselves. Young filmmaker Ruben Palomares, age 19, videotapes the young actors as each in turn reads a scene from the script the four young filmmakers have written entirely from scratch. With him in the small room are his three filmmaking partners: 22-year-old Brian McArthur, the director, who reads with each actor; Jessica Gonzales, age 20, the assistant director, who intently takes notes on each performance; and Krista Kim, also 20, the producer, who has made all the arrangements for the audition, including posting casting notices on MySpace and Craigslist. When all the actors finish reading, the four filmmakers discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each person's performance and quickly come to an agreement on their top choices for parts in the 60-minute film, which the four will begin shooting in a few weeks.

The audition is just one part of a filmmaking project funded by the Council as part of its statewide How I See It: Youth Digital Filmmakers program, which is enabling young people in eight locations in California to make films about what matters in their lives and communities. Other projects are in Oakland, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Concord, Fresno, Lodi and Siskiyou County. "Although the topics of the films will be different, all will focus on the broad theme of connections or disconnections," said CCH Programs Manager Raeshma Razvi, who is managing the program for the Council.

The San Francisco effort, the only one of the eight projects creating a dramatic film (the others are documentaries), is sponsored by Conscious Youth Media Crew (CYMC), a nonprofit organization that trains inner-city youth to create films and other media that reflect their experience and promote social change.

CYMC Executive Director Debra Koffler, who is directing the project, said that the \$30,000 Youth Digital Filmmakers grant made it possible for the four young

people to create a longer film than CYMC groups typically make. "We already had a curriculum for producing a five- to 10-minute film, so we were able to expand on that," she said. Working on the project with Koffler is local filmmaker Samm Styles, who has several films under his belt, including "Black August," about the life and death of Black Panther and prison rights advocate George Jackson. Also involved is the project's humanities scholar, Nancy Mirabal, a professor of La Raza Studies at San Francisco State University. Mirabal conducted a workshop on oral history methods for the group and talked to the young filmmakers about how to think about gender and race issues when writing their script.

The youths' film, titled "A Choice of Weapons," tells the story of a young street hustler named D'Angelo — about the same age as the filmmakers — and his struggles to find a sense of purpose. The action takes place in Bayview-Hunters Point, a predominantly low-income area in the southeast part of San Francisco currently undergoing major redevelopment. Although the area has sprawling views of San Francisco Bay and the city's skyline, it contains some of the most environmentally hazardous land in the city, a legacy of various industrial uses and U.S. Navy activity at Hunters Point Shipyard, where new houses are being built. According to a recent public health report, residents of the area suffer more from asthma and other diseases such as cancer than do residents in any other part of the city. "The group chose the area because the problems there — gun violence, turf wars, poverty, affordable housing, environmental hazards, health issues — resonated with their own lives," Koffler said.

The film's story line arose from group brainstorming sessions around the idea of community. "For the kids, what came out of those meetings was a strong sense of feeling disconnected from their communities and particularly disconnected from older people, and the feeling that many kids they know feel their lives have no purpose," Koffler said. "Ruben,

Kim, Brian and Jessica took that latter idea and decided to create a film about a character who starts out without a sense of purpose and who gradually through the film discovers something in his community to care about and fight for."

With that skeleton of an idea in mind, the four began to conduct research on Bayview-Hunters Point because they wanted their film to reflect real events. They watched a video about the area's history and learned about a group of five women, the so-called Big Five, who fought for affordable housing there during the 1960s and '70s. They learned about the Lennar Corp., the Fortune 500 company cleaning up and redeveloping the area, and how it had allowed toxic dust to escape from construction sites, exposing neighbors and schoolchildren to potentially harmful airborne asbestos fibers. They found out about weekly town hall meetings at Grace Tabernacle Community Church, where community leaders such as Rev. Christopher Muhammed, Espanola Jackson and Bishop Ernest Jackson, the church's pastor, were leading a community fight for environmental and economic justice.

Much of what the group learned they were able to incorporate into the film script they had begun writing. They decided that the main character, D'Angelo, would take a job cleaning up toxic dust with the Lennar Corp, and get involved in residents' fight for affordable housing and a cleaner environment. They also decided that D'Angelo would begin to turn his life around when he elects to finish a documentary film started by his older brother — gunned down at the beginning of the film — about the Big Five's affordable housing fight in the '60s and '70s.

In addition to gathering material for their film, the four young filmmakers were getting involved in Bayview-Hunters Point issues themselves. They attended Grace Tabernacle's town hall meetings, talked to area leaders and collected signatures for a June 2008 San Francisco ballot measure requiring that half of the new homes built as part of the Bayview-Hunters Point redevelopment be sold and rented at below-market rates.

The four filmmakers meet twice a week at CYMC offices on Mission Street to work on their film. They are still polishing their screenplay, but they have already scouted and found locations for shooting the film, and cast most of the film's 23 roles. They see their film as a way to contribute to the neighborhood's fight over toxic pollution and affordable housing. "Our main character is handling the issues that people in Bayview are facing every day," said McArthur, the film's director.

"People don't know the full extent of what is happening in the area," he added. "And many don't want to pay

## Up close with the young filmmakers



"When you grow up with nothing, it makes you bitter, and it takes a lot of work to change. This film will show

a side of kids who want to work for something better. If this program was not here, I don't know where I'd be — a whole lot of kids are like that."

Jessica Gonzales, age 20



"Our script didn't start out being about asbestos or redevelopment. It is based on what's really happening in

the neighborhood. In writing the script, I thought about my own reaction to how deadly asbestos is and then tried to think how the character would react. And when we went to the minister's town hall meeting, we talked to a lot of people, and then went back and turned those stories into dialogue."

Brian McArthur, age 22



"When I found out about the asbestos problem, I thought it was really messed up that San Francisco would let

this happen to its residents. Little kids can be affected by breathing asbestos dust, and it won't show up for 20 years. It opened my eyes to the real issues of what life is like."

Krista Kim, age 20



"I'm the cameraman for the film, and I've learned a lot about why shadows are important and how to master

color. I like learning about the history of the area, and I hope that people who see the film will go home and stand up and be involved in their community."

Ruben Palomares, age 19

Photos/Kevin Chan and Debra Koffler.

attention to it because they're only interested in the short term. I hope our film will raise awareness about what's going on and that young people who see it will be inspired to be part of solving the problems instead of being blind to them." Palomares, the cameraman for the film, echoed McArthur's words. "I hope that people who see the film will stand up and be involved in their communities." Added Kim, "I want viewers to realize that this film shows real life. What is happening in Bayview isn't fake like a Hollywood movie. It really shows what happens to a lot of people."

The public will have a chance to see "A Choice of Weapons" and meet the young filmmakers at community screenings in mid-June at San Francisco State University. Exact dates and times will be posted on the CCH website once they become available.



## AWARD-WINNING DIRECTOR ARTHUR DONG TALKS ABOUT MAKING HIS NEWEST FILM, "HOLLYWOOD CHINESE"

In his latest film, award-winning director Arthur Dong offers up a fascinating look at a little-known chapter in American film history — the portrayal of Chinese and Chinese Americans in Hollywood feature films. Called “Hollywood Chinese,” the California Documentary Project film, which Dong produced, directed, wrote and edited, contains a dazzling array of film clips and more than a dozen interviews with some of the industry’s most accomplished Chinese and Chinese American artists, including Ang Lee, Nancy Kwan, Wayne Wang, Joan Chen, B.D. Wong, Justin Lin, Lisa Lu, David Henry Hwang and Amy Tan. And while exposing the stereotypes, contradictions and ironies that have pervaded the American film industry, the film also celebrates the contributions of a number of remarkable artists and the many dozens of films they have given us. It’s a film for anyone who loves Hollywood movies.

Recently Humanities Network caught up with the celebrated director and asked him to talk about his new film.

**CCH: WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR “HOLLYWOOD CHINESE”?**

**A.D.:** Movies have always been a part of my life. As a kid in San Francisco’s Chinatown, I went to the movies every week. My parents worked, and we didn’t have babysitters, so movies were my playground. First it was Chinese-language movies, but later as a teenager I saw a lot of classic Hollywood films at now-defunct revival houses. And very early in life I wanted to be a film historian. I loved going into an archive and asking the clerk for a stack of titles. It’s the way I experienced history. I was fascinated that you could watch a film made before you were born — and see and hear and almost smell the characters. That fascination has not left me at all. So “Hollywood Chinese” is a natural outcome of my love of film and film history and my deep interest in the Chinese American experience. In a way, you could say I’ve spent my whole life preparing for this film.

**CCH: WHAT WERE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES OF MAKING THE FILM?**

**A.D.:** I watched over 300 films, and the challenge was to create a cohesive, compelling 90 minutes given all the information I had. What I decided to do was to structure the film around the personal stories of the people I interviewed. It was a way to draw audiences into the story. That’s why I opened the film with a montage of my interviewees talking about what movies meant to them. I would ask them things like, What is it you feel when you’re in a dark theater watching a movie? What happens to you? I wanted an emotional response so that viewers would feel there were real people on the screen. There are many themes in the film — the economics of Hollywood filmmaking, the historical attitudes toward Chinese people, how Chinese American actors navigate the industry — but the glue that holds it together is my interviewees’ personal stories.

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## WHERE TO SEE "HOLLYWOOD CHINESE"

You can catch "Hollywood Chinese" at the following venues in the days and months ahead:

### San Francisco

April 11–17, 2008

Filmmaker in person:

April 11 at 7:30 and 10:00 pm

Sundance Kabuki Cinemas

### Oakland

April 11–17, 2008

Filmmaker in person:

April 12 at 7:15 pm

Grand Lake Theater

### Pasadena

May 16–22, 2008

Laemmle's One Colorado Theaters

### Los Angeles

May 15–22, 2008

The Egyptian Theater

In connection with the screening of the film at L.A.'s historic Egyptian Theater, American Cinematheque, housed in the theater, is presenting a Hollywood Chinese film series curated by Arthur Dong. The series, which runs from May 15 to May 22, will feature Dong's new documentary and a selection of films featuring Chinese and Chinese American artists. Included will be the earliest-known Asian American film, newly discovered and restored, called "The

Curse of Quon Gwon," directed by Oakland filmmaker Marion Wong and made in 1916. There will also be special nights devoted to Nancy Kwan, who starred in "The World of Suzie Wong" and "Flower Drum Song," and to Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu movies. The film series will be a first for Hollywood and is sure to generate spirited discussions and debates. Special guests and speakers will accompany each program.

For up-to-date details on the series, visit the filmmaker's website at [www.deepfocusproductions.com](http://www.deepfocusproductions.com).

## INTERESTED IN WATCHING OTHER ARTHUR DONG FILMS?

Arthur Dong's trilogy of films on America's attitudes toward homosexuals, "Stories From the War on Homosexuality," is now available in one DVD package from [www.deepfocusproductions.com](http://www.deepfocusproductions.com). The three films are "Coming Out Under Fire," about the "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gays in the military; "Family Fundamentals," about three conservative Christian families whose children have "become homosexual"; and "Licensed to Kill," about people who have murdered gay men. Included are two hours of previously unreleased footage and viewer guides for each title. The films are also available separately.



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### CCH: WHAT SURPRISED YOU MOST ABOUT MAKING THE FILM?

**A.D.:** One of the most surprising things was the way people responded to being interviewed. No one said, I'm a star, and you only have 20 minutes to get my story. Each and every person opened up to me and seemed to enjoy having a conversation about a topic they hadn't been asked about in depth before. They wanted to continue talking after the interview time was up. Another thing was the way my interviewees were able to put some of my ideas into context. They became my academics on screen, but they were very human.

### CCH: DO YOU HAVE ANY SPECIAL INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES?

**A.D.:** In the beginning as a filmmaker, I had certain set questions because I would want a certain story. Now I give myself the freedom to go along with the person being interviewed and just let things happen. It's been the best thing for my work. For example, director Justin Lin made a comment in the film that moviegoers in Asia were more interested in seeing American films with "exotic white people" in them rather than films with Asian American actors. That was an

angle I hadn't thought about before — the global influence of Hollywood. It added a different layer of understanding to the film. But it wouldn't have come up if I had stuck to my agenda, which didn't include talking about foreign markets for films. What I always hope for when I'm interviewing is that moment I didn't plan for because that moment is usually spontaneous and authentic. When I'm in the editing room, I see it as my job to look for those moments.

### CCH: YOUR FILM CELEBRATES ASIAN AMERICANS IN HOLLYWOOD FILMS BUT ALSO TRACES THE STEREOTYPIC WAYS ASIANS HAVE SO OFTEN BEEN PORTRAYED. HOW MUCH PROGRESS HAS HOLLYWOOD, AND THE MEDIA IN GENERAL, MADE IN THIS AREA?

**A.D.:** I know some people wonder why there should be a film about Asians in Hollywood films. What's the big deal? Yes, things are better, but there's so much more that needs to be done, and I hope this film will push things along. Before it was the Tong Wars caricature of Chinese being mysterious or smoking opium or killing each other in gang wars. When you watch TV shows, you still see gangsters or drug lords in Chinatown as part of the

story. And when you talk to Chinese American actors, they tell you that those are still the roles they get called for. Or, more so now, for the role of a doctor or an engineer or a TV anchor person, which happens a lot to women actors. What's happened is that new stereotypes have taken over the old ones. Some people are telling complex stories with three-dimensional people — Wayne Wang and Justin Lin, among them — but on the whole that's not happening. Instead we see a narrow interpretation of the Chinese American experience.

### CCH: WHAT'S YOUR NEXT PROJECT?

**A.D.:** Typically when I make a film, I spend a year or more trying to get the film out there. And that's what I'm doing with "Hollywood Chinese." Usually I have a project ready to go after that, but right now I'm enjoying being a father. I have a 3-year-old boy, and I want to focus on raising my kid. But that probably won't last for long because I love making films.

For more about Arthur Dong and "Hollywood Chinese," visit the filmmaker's website at [www.deepfocusproductions.com](http://www.deepfocusproductions.com).

**Opposite page:** Filmmaker Arthur Dong with actress Louise Rainer, who won an Oscar for her portrayal of a Chinese peasant in the 1943 film "The Good Earth." Rainer talks about that experience in "Hollywood Chinese," Dong's new California Documentary Project film that examines the portrayal of Chinese Americans in Hollywood feature films. Photo/Allan Barrett.

**Above left:** Violet Wong starred in "The Curse of Quon Gwon," the earliest-known Chinese American film. Made by Oakland filmmaker Marion Wong in 1916, "Curse" featured Wong's sister, Violet, and other family members. Arthur Dong discovered two reels of the landmark film while researching his new documentary, "Hollywood Chinese." Photo courtesy of Deep Focus Productions.

**Middle:** Roland Winters played Charlie Chan, the fictional Chinese American detective, in the "Chinese Ring." The Charlie Chan character appeared in more than three dozen films from the silent era to the late 1940s. Photo courtesy of Deep Focus Productions.

**Right:** Filmmaker Justin Lin, director of "Finishing the Game: The Search for a New Bruce Lee" and "The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift," is featured in Arthur Dong's documentary "Hollywood Chinese." Photo/Arthur Dong.

## Who We Are

The mission of the California Council for the Humanities is to foster understanding between people and encourage their engagement in community life through the public use of the humanities.

The Council is an independent, not-for-profit state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities supported through a public-private partnership that includes funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, private foundations and corporations. The Council also receives essential support from individuals.

To learn more about the Council and how you can participate in its programs, please visit us online at [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).

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