

***Foreclosures. Unemployment. Childhood poverty.  
All these problems have hit American cities hard  
since the Great Recession.***

***Gaining Ground*, a follow-up to the award-winning documentary *Holding Ground* (1996), shows how one diverse Boston neighborhood has managed to stem the tide against enormous odds. Building on a 25-year legacy of innovative community organizing, a new generation of Dudley Street neighborhood leaders has managed to foster hope and create opportunity in challenging times.**

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**NATIONAL COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT COALITION**

**"A powerful portrait of the challenges faced by the residents of Dudley Street..."**

- Mayor Ted Ellis Bluffton, Indiana  
President of the National League of Cities

## Synopsis

### Short Synopsis [90 words]:

In the midst of the economic meltdown, *Gaining Ground* explores the innovative, grassroots organizing efforts of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Boston. DSNI was created 25 years ago when the community had been devastated by bank redlining, arson-for-profit and illegal dumping, and has become one of the preeminent models for community-based change. Over the course of two years, we watch a new generation of leaders working to prevent foreclosures and bring jobs and opportunities for young people to one of the city's most diverse and economically challenged neighborhoods.

### Medium-length Synopsis [249 words]:

Surrounded by foreclosures, how is it possible that so many homeowners in Boston's Dudley Street neighborhood have held on to their homes? This question drew filmmakers Mark Lipman and Leah Mahan back to the neighborhood where they had made *Holding Ground* fifteen years earlier, a film documenting the innovative grassroots organizing efforts of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), one of the preeminent models for comprehensive, long-term urban development.



Begun in 1985 by residents of Boston's most devastated neighborhood, DSNI gained national recognition as they fought to close illegal dumps, gain unprecedented control of land from city hall, and create a comprehensive plan to rebuild their community.

This time around we watch new homeowners move into the neighborhood during the worst housing crisis in generations and learn about the community land trust that has protected the neighborhood from the onslaught of foreclosures that surrounds them. We see teenagers learning to advocate for themselves as they lobby state legislators to restore cuts in youth funding and take on responsibility for running a summer program for at-risk youth. They are mentored by the adults now leading DSNI who were volunteers themselves when *Holding Ground* was made and appeared in the earlier film as teenagers.

A new state-of-the-art community center rises from vacant land with unprecedented minority construction hiring and the promise of new opportunities for local youth. But

DSNI's relationship with the Salvation Army, the center's developer, is challenging and becomes a lesson in managing competing visions and powerful partners.

**Long Synopsis** [385 words]:

Surrounded by foreclosures, how is it possible that so many homeowners in Boston's Dudley Street neighborhood have held on to their homes? This question drew filmmakers Mark Lipman and Leah Mahan back to the neighborhood where they had made  *Holding Ground*  fifteen years earlier, a film documenting the innovative grassroots organizing efforts of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI).



Begun in 1985 by residents of Boston's most devastated neighborhood, DSNI gained national recognition as they fought to close illegal dumps, gain unprecedented control of land from city hall, and create a comprehensive plan to rebuild their community. It has gone on to become one of the preeminent models for comprehensive, long-term urban development in the U.S.

This time around we watch new homeowners move into the neighborhood during the worst housing crisis in generations and learn about the community land trust that has protected the neighborhood from the onslaught of foreclosures that surrounds them. While no homes on the land trust have been lost to foreclosure, the vacant houses surrounding them threaten much of what the residents have accomplished over the past twenty-five years. A foreclosure roundtable that DSNI has created in partnership with other local organizations successfully purchases foreclosed properties and turns them around, but will that be enough?

We see teenagers learning to advocate for themselves as they lobby state legislators to restore cuts in youth funding and take on responsibility for running a summer program for at-risk youth. They are mentored by the adults now leading DSNI, many of whom were teen volunteers themselves when  *Holding Ground*  was made. In footage from the earlier film, we see Carlos Henriquez at age 12 participating in DSNI's Young Architects Program that created models of the community centers envisioned in the neighborhood development plan. Now as chairman of DSNI's board, he is a key negotiator with the Salvation Army, the developer of a \$90 million, state-of-the art community center down the street from DSNI's office.

The community center rises from a vast vacant lot with unprecedented minority construction hiring and the promise of new opportunities for local youth. But the relationship becomes rocky as the Salvation Army fills staff jobs and sets membership rates without sufficient community input. DSNI's relationship with the Salvation Army becomes a hard-earned lesson in managing competing visions and powerful partners.



***“An inside view of community organizing at its best...”***

- Barbara Abrash, Director of Public Programs  
Center for Media, Culture and History at NYU

**Llewellyn Smith, Director’s Statement**

I grew up in Boston and spent a lot of my early school days in the Dudley area—summer vacation, bible school, church was there. So was our only neighborhood library and my favorite theater, the Strand, where we watched great cowboy movies. Consulting on  *Holding Ground*  25 years ago opened up for me the story of a vibrant neighborhood that dared to build on and stand for the vision of it’s future that residents had dreamed.  *Gaining*

*Ground*  gave me my first chance to not only produce a film about Boston but tell a story that reached deeper into this special, unique neighborhood that had such a memorable impact on my early life. Most revealing for me was how the life-long commitment of DSNi organizers and community residents across generations was demonstrated again and again— so difficult to capture on film because this kind of work is almost invisible, especially when it’s working. But we certainly tried.



**Purchase**

The film is available through New Day Films as a DVD or stream. DVD extras include subtitles in Spanish, French and Dutch as well as three video modules excerpted from the film to facilitate discussion: Development Without Displacement, Youth Leadership Development and Partnership Challenges.

The National Housing Institute is developing viewers guides for classroom and community use.

To purchase a copy visit: <http://www.newday.com/films/gainingground.html>

## Bios



### **Llew Smith, Producer/Director**

Peabody and Dupont award winner **Llewellyn Smith** is President and founder of **Vital Pictures, inc.** ([www.vitalpix.com](http://www.vitalpix.com)), a Boston-based documentary company dedicated to exploring social justice issues. He is co-executive producer for the PBS series *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?* (2008)—a look at the surprising impact social and economic conditions have in determining our health and longevity. *Unnatural Causes* won the Council On Foundations Henry Hampton

Award, as well as the 2009 Alfred I. duPont Columbia Award, the top broadcast journalism prize in the United States, and the National Academies of Sciences 2009 Communications Award for best science documentary.

As a writer/producer, Llew Smith has contributed to such PBS series as *Eyes On The Prize: America's Civil Rights Years* and the critically acclaimed PBS history series *American Experience*, where as Series Editor he played a key role in origination, development and acquisition of more than 70 programs on American history. Mr. Smith was Project Director for the Peabody and Emmy award-winning series *Africans In America: America's Journey Through Slavery* (1997), and directed the final film in the series *Judgment Day*.

Mr. Smith's film *Jubilee Singers: Sacrifice and Glory* (May, 2001) tells how former slaves from Fisk University preserved slave spirituals in concert performances and shared them with the world in years following the Civil War. The film was produced for *American Experience*.

For the 3-hour PBS series *RACE: The Power Of An Illusion* (2003), Smith produced the program *The House We Live In*. Smith was a producer /director for the 3-hour special *Reconstruction: The Second Civil War* (2004), winner of the Eric Barnouw award for best history documentary. He was also producer/director for the 2-hour NOVA biography of Dr. Percy Julian, the pioneering industrial chemist and civil rights activist, *Forgotten Genius* (broadcast on February 2007). *Forgotten Genius* was recently honored for broadcast excellence by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), won the National Science Writers Award, and was nominated for a Writers Guild award.

Most recently Llew Smith was director-producer for the Vital Pictures documentary *HERSKOVITS AT THE HEART OF BLACKNESS*, which premiered in February 2nd 2010 on the PBS series *Independent Lens*.



**Kelly Thomson, Co-Producer/Editor**

Kelly Thomson joined Vital Pictures in 2006 for their award-winning series *Unnatural Causes* and has been with them ever since. She's spent her spare time over the past several years directing/producing a feature documentary, *Savage Memory*, which premiered at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts in October, 2011 and will begin showing at festivals in April 2012. In addition to the Vital Pictures' productions *Herskovits At the Heart of Blackness* and most recently *Gaining Ground*, Kelly has contributed to independent films and shorts, including *Untamed*, *Hotels 4*, *All Falls Down*, *Milk*, *A Vote for Choice* and *Funeral of the Last Gypsy King*. Kelly is a Boston native, and graduated from New York University.



**Mark Lipman, Executive Producer**

Mark Lipman has worked as a documentary filmmaker for thirty years, exploring a wide range of subjects from domestic violence to human sexuality to affordable housing and community organizing. His films have been broadcast nationally on public television and won numerous awards. His producing credits include *To Have and To Hold* (1981), the first documentary to look at domestic violence through the experiences of men; *Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street* (1996), a film about the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative's successful efforts to revitalize a Boston neighborhood devastated by redlining, arson and illegal dumping; *Father's Day* (2003), an experimental documentary about the death of Mark's father; and *Gaining*

*Ground* (2012), a sequel to *Holding Ground* that explores DSNI's success in preventing foreclosures and fostering youth leadership.

Mark has produced media for non-profit organizations throughout New England including the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum where he documented the creation of new artwork by internationally renowned artists-in-residence. As a freelance editor, he has worked for the NOVA series at WGBH/Boston and for many other Boston-area companies. After moving to San Francisco in 2004 and forming Open Studio Productions with Helen Cohen, Mark edited *Alaska Far Away*, a feature documentary about a controversial New Deal program that relocated 200 destitute farm families into the wilds of Alaska. He has taught editing and production classes to young people and adults in Massachusetts, Maine, Indiana and California.



Since 1981 Mark has been an active member of New Day Films, a national cooperative of social issue filmmakers who collaborate in the distribution of their films, serving several times as its chief financial officer and a member of its steering committee.

Mark holds a BA in psychology from Harvard University and an MFA in film and video from the Massachusetts College of Art.



### **Leah Mahan**

Leah Mahan is an independent documentary filmmaker whose work has been nominated by the Directors Guild of America for Outstanding Directorial Achievement. She has been a fellow at the Sundance Institute Documentary Editing and Story Lab and the Producers Institute for New Media Technologies.

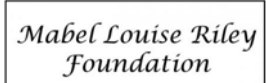
Leah's film SWEET OLD SONG (2002) was featured on the PBS series P.O.V. and was chosen by film critic Roger Ebert for his Overlooked Film Festival. The film tells the story of Howard "Louie Blueie" Armstrong, an old-time string band musician who undertakes a bittersweet journey with the woman he loves.

Leah is currently making COME HELL OR HIGH WATER: The Battle for Turkey Creek, about a group of determined Mississippians who struggle to save their endangered Gulf Coast community in the face of rampant development, industrial pollution and disaster. She worked with Gulf Coast NGOs to develop a related community journalism project titled BRIDGE THE GULF, which was presented at the 2011 Media That Matters conference and has drawn the attention of MSNBC, the BBC and The Daily Show with John Stewart.

Leah began her career as a research assistant for filmmaker Henry Hampton on the groundbreaking PBS series on the civil rights movement EYES ON THE PRIZE. Her work has been supported by the Sundance Institute Documentary Fund, Independent Television Service, Ford Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Chicken and Egg Pictures and the Fledgling Fund. She holds a BA in anthropology from Cornell University and an MFA in Cinema from San Francisco State University. She lives in the Bay Area with her husband and their two children.

## Credits

<b>Executive Producers</b>	Mark Lipman & Leah Mahan
<b>Director</b>	Llewellyn Smith
<b>Producers</b>	Llewellyn Smith & Christine Herbes-Sommers
<b>Co-Producer</b>	Kelly Thomson
<b>Editors</b>	Randall MacLowry Kelly Thomson
<b>Coordinating Producer</b>	Wendy Riseborough
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Dakin Henderson
<b>Additional Camera</b>	Jim Billipp Austin de Besche Tom Fahey Lucas Frank Dillard Morrison London Parker-McWhorter Kelly Thomson Cory Tomascoff
<b>Field Photography</b>	Lolita Parker, Jr.
<b>Original Music by</b>	OBT Music
<b>Production Sound</b>	Richard Allen Clint Bramesco G. John Garrett Lucia Nhamo
<b>Associate Producer</b>	Lucia Nhamo
<b>Assistant Editor</b>	Dakin Henderson
<b>Color &amp; HD Mastering</b>	Francis McDonnell
<b>Post Facility</b>	Modulus
<b>Sound Mixer &amp; Engineer</b>	Damon Addleman
<b>Fiscal Sponsor</b>	Filmmakers Collaborative
<b>Transcription</b>	Leslie Strain
<b>Community Engagement</b>	Active Voice
<b>Funders</b>	Ford Foundation Barr Foundation Mabel Louise Riley Foundation





## Production Stills - Captions



### 1. GG\_Dennis Street Park Water Fountain

Youth enjoy the newly renovated Dennis Street Park spray pool, Roxbury, MA.

Credit: Bob Hass



### 2. GG\_Neighborhood Youth

The 2010 Multicultural Festival Planning Committee gathers after a wonderful summer festival

Credit: Ros Everdell



### 3. GG\_CommunityScapes

Dudley Street teens participating in CommunityScapes, a youth-led employment program that builds leadership while maintaining open spaces in the neighborhood.

Credit: Jason Webb



#### **4. GG\_Alicia Moultry**

Alicia Moultry, Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative youth employment coordinator, celebrates her graduation from the Boston College School of Social Work while raising her three siblings.

Credit: DSNI



#### **5. GG\_Garden**

A community greenhouse is part of DSNI's strategy for increasing access to healthy food.

Credit: DSNI