THE GARDEN
A FILM BY SCOTT HAMILTON KENNEDY

MARCH 17, 2009
TRIBECA CINEMAS

STUDY GUIDE
ABOUT THE FILM

The fourteen-acre community garden at 41st and Alameda in South Central Los Angeles is the largest of its kind in the United States. Originally created as a form of healing after the devastating L.A. riots in 1992, the community garden is now viewed as (the South Central Farmers have since created) a miracle in one of the country’s most blighted neighborhoods. On what was once cement, the South Central Farmers began growing their own food and feeding their own families. They built a community around a piece of nature in an urban setting. But now, bulldozers are poised to level their 14-acre oasis.

*The Garden* follows the plight of the farmers, from the tilled soil of this urban farm to the polished marble of City Hall. Mostly immigrants from Latin America, from countries where they feared for their lives if they spoke out, we watch the South Central Farmers organize, fight back, and demand answers: Why was the land sold to a wealthy developer for millions less than fair-market value? Why was the transaction done in a closed-door session of the LA City Council? Why has it never been made public?

The people with the power to save the garden all have the same response: “The garden is wonderful, but there is nothing more we can do.”

If everyone told you nothing more could be done, would you give up?

THE MAIN CHARACTERS OF *THE GARDEN*

*Deacon Alexander*, Ex-Black Panther/Activist

*‘Don’ Eddie Luvianos Rumbos*, Farmer

*Jan Perry*, City Councilwoman, 9th District

*Josefina Medina*, Farmer

*Juanita Tate*, Founder, Concerned Citizens of South Central L.A.

*Rufina Juarez*, Farm Leader

*Dan Stormer*, Civil Rights Lawyer

*Tezozomoc*, Farm Leader
Scott’s debut documentary, *OT: Our Town*, was an official selection and won awards at some of the top film festivals in the world. In its theatrical release, *OT* garnered rave reviews, was selected for several ‘Best Of’ lists (including Kenneth Turan’s of the LA Times), and was nominated for Best Documentary by the IFP Independent Spirit Awards.

Currently, Scott is developing a narrative adaptation of *OT: Our Town*. His feature script, *Up River*, an urban adventure movie set on the Los Angeles River, went through the highly competitive IFP/FIND Directors Lab.

**FILMMAKER SCOTT HAMILTON KENNEDY ON MAKING THE GARDEN**

“There are so many reasons I was inspired to pick up my camera and follow this story. The first time I stepped onto the garden at 41st and Alameda, the city of Los Angeles seemed to vanish. Surrounded by varieties of fruits, vegetables and herbs, the smell, the air was different immediately. And the people: warm, humble, generous in spirit and with the bounty of their plots. But there was another characteristic to the farmers that is essential to this story: while most had never done anything political before, they found a way to get organized, ask questions, do research, and not give up without a fair assessment of what happened here. So with the threat of bulldozers only weeks away, my journey with *The Garden* began. At every turn, we were faced with more and more complex questions, like what is the best use of our limited lands, and how do we make sure that all parties are equally represented in that discussion? Do any of us rise to such challenges as ‘Justice for all,’ or are we more often derailed by things like bias, self-interest, greed, and ego? To me it is both simple and wickedly complex, timeless and timely: a fascinating story about the many layers of America. At a moment when economic insecurity abounds—as rising food prices, energy and environmental crisis confront us at seemingly every turn—*The Garden* tells an essential story and serves as a powerful symbol of the larger world around us.”
HOW DID THE COMMUNITY GARDEN COME ABOUT?

Where is South Central?
The area of “South Central” lies directly south of downtown Los Angeles. After WWII, Police, Fire and City Officials coined the term “South Central” because of its southern proximity from downtown LA on Central Avenue. Along with Watts several miles to the south, this corridor was the only district-scale area within the city in which African-Americans could purchase property prior to 1948. While some African-Americans rented and sometimes even owned property in other areas of the city, they were generally confined to single streets or small neighborhoods.

Since the 1950s, the definition of “South Central” has gradually expanded to include all of the areas of the city of Los Angeles (and small unincorporated pockets of Los Angeles County) lying south of the Santa Monica Freeway, east of La Brea Avenue and north of the Century Freeway. Some incorporated cities outside of L.A. city limits lying east of Alameda Street are considered identifiable with South L.A. to some extent by their urban or “inner city” characteristics.

How is South Central Changing?
The demography of South Los Angeles has been changing since the late 1980s, when Hispanic immigrants from Mexico and Central America arrived in number to buy or rent apartments and homes, some of which were vacated by African-American renters. In the 2000 census, the designate area of South L.A. had a population of 520,461; (and 55%) of the residents were Latino, while 41% were African American. A large percentage of small stores and shops are owned by Asian-American immigrants, especially Koreans and Indians. Filipinos have also been part of the area and American Indians are a sizable percentage of apartment rental tenants. Prior to the 1990s, the area was predominantly black (80% in 1980). The chief reasons for the population shifts were people moving away from crime and gang violence, and people coming in through immigration. African-Americans remain predominant in certain areas of South Los Angeles. Together these areas have a population of 114,785 and are roughly 72% African-American making it the largest African-American neighborhood in the Western United States.

SOME FACTS TO HELP BETTER UNDERSTAND SOUTH CENTRAL

It is important to know that South Central, Los Angeles is a place that is rapidly transforming in many different ways. Findings from a recent study will give you a good idea of the different ethnic and socioeconomic changes taking place in South Central (now called South, LA).

- In 2003, city officials sought to lessen the negative associations connected to South-Central Lost Angeles by changing its name to South Los Angeles (the name of South-Central Los Angeles), but that alteration may have contributed to a loss of a historical identity, a (the) 2008 report suggests.
- In 1990, 47% of South L.A. residents were Latino and another 47% were African American. By 2006, the mix had changed to 62% Latino and 31% black, 3% white, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander and 2% other. Forty percent of the people living in South L.A. are foreign born.
- About 30% of South L.A.’s residents live in poverty, about the same proportion as in 1990 and about twice the rate recorded in the county overall.
- In South L.A., fewer residents have skills, high school diplomas and college degrees than in other parts of the county. Unemployment is higher and workers earn less.
- Over the years, a negative perception of the area has been fueled by its reputation for occasional unrest, urban decline, crime, unemployment and welfare dependency.

FOR DISCUSSION - SOUTH CENTRAL L.A.

- Do you think that changing the name of South-Central to South Los Angeles changes the way people view the area?
- The maps show that as many black residents leave South Central, many Latino citizens are moving in. What does that mean for the community? Why do you think this is happening?
The community garden was started in response to the L.A. race riots in 1992, but what started those race riots?

While driving down the 210 freeway in Los Angeles with two friends, Rodney King was detected speeding by the California Highway Patrol. Fearing that his probation for a robbery offense would be revoked because of the traffic violation, King led the police on a high-speed chase. By the time he was caught and ordered to exit his vehicle, several L.A.P.D. squad cars had arrived on the scene. A struggle ensued, and some of the officers quickly decided that King was resisting arrest. After all that failed to subdue him, the officers, including Laurence Powell, beat him mercilessly with their batons. The incident was videotaped by a man who lived nearby, and it didn’t take long for the tape to send shockwaves around the world and enrage the already frustrated Los Angeles African American community, who felt that racial profiling and abuse by the police had long gone unchecked and unpunished.

Once the four officers accused in the beating were acquitted a year later by a predominantly white jury in the majority white suburb of Simi Valley, all that rage turned into the worst single episode of urban unrest in American history. On April 29, 1992, the riots erupted. Before they were quelled a few days later, 53 people were dead and $1 billion worth of property was damaged. In the midst of the harrowing violence, King nervously uttered the phrase that would forever be synonymous with him and the riot: “Can we all just get along?”

FOR DISCUSSION: THE L.A. RIOTS

- What long term effects to the race riots have on the community of South Central, Los Angeles?
- Why did the case end the way it did? Why did people react so strongly to the verdict?
- Do you think that people expected the trial to cause such a stir?

SOME TERMS TO HELP YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND THE GARDEN

Injunction - a judicial process or order requiring the person or persons to whom it is directed to do a particular act or to refrain from doing a particular act.

Deposition - a statement under oath, taken down in writing, to be used in court in place of the spoken testimony of the witness.

Appeal - to apply for review of a case or particular issue to a higher tribunal.

Trial Court - the first court before which the facts of a case are decided.
FURTHER READING:

**SEEDFOLKS by Joanna Coulter**
Wasting not a single word, Fleischman unfolds a story of a blighted neighborhood transformed when a young girl plants a few lima beans in an abandoned lot. Slowly, one by one, neighbors are touched and stirred to action as they see tendrils poke through the dirt. Hispanics, Haitians, Koreans, young, and old begin to turn the littered lot into a garden for the whole community.

---

**THE FUTURE IS OURS: A HANDBOOK FOR STUDENT ACTIVISTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY by John W. Bartlett**
The Future Is Ours: A Handbook for Student Activists in the 21st Century brings together a dozen young activists to offer their experience and advice to young people who want to change the world. Realistic and hopeful, the authors speak with wisdom born of their own experience, offering nuts-and-bolts advice and resources to young organizers.

---

**TWILIGHT: LOS ANGELES, 1992 by Anna Deavere Smith**
The work consists of a series of monologues, the words of real persons interpreted by Smith in her dual role as playwright-performer. The monologues are edited redactions made up from interviews that Smith conducted in the aftermath of the events that seriously divided the Los Angeles community in the wake of the Rodney G. King beating on the night of March 3, 1991.
IN THE CLASSROOM

FURTHER WATCHING:

WELCOME TO EDEN (2009)
‘Welcome to Eden’ is a feature-length documentary about the struggle of the poor people of South Central Los Angeles and some dedicated activists to stop the unlawful eviction of the farmers from the largest and most productive urban farm in America.

KNOWLEDGE IS THE BEGINNING (2005)
Knowledge is the Beginning is the story of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, where young Arabs and Jews perform and live side by side. It is a film about what music can do; the way it can transcend cultural barriers, bring people together, defeat prejudice and overcome religious and political differences. It also demonstrates the problems that crop up occasionally and how music can help people from different points of view find common ground.

The story of California’s first openly gay elected official, Harvey Milk, a San Francisco supervisor who was assassinated along with Mayor George Moscone by San Francisco Supervisor Dan White.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

• What were the South Central farmers really fighting for? Were they fighting for land or for their rights?
• At the end of the film Rufina remarks that the farmers can always grow plants again. Is this true? If they must grow plants in another location would things still be the same? What is the impact of having to move?
• Make a list of reasons why you believe The Garden should be maintained? Do you think the South Central Farmers have reasons similar to yours?
• How do you define activism? Do you think that the South Central Farmers can be considered community activists?
• What do you think Mr. Horowitz would argue is his reason for closing the Garden?
• Would you have fought on behalf of the farmers or the California government?
• What do you think would happen if the farmers didn’t fight for the Garden? Would the results have been different? Would they have been the same?
• What role did race play in the film? Do you think race affected the final outcome? In general, does race play a role in this type of political process?
• Who do you really think is really responsible for destroying The South Central Farmer’s garden?
FOCUS ON YOUR COMMUNITY AND TAKE ACTION

The South Central farmers decided to use the farm unite their community by promoting teamwork, and positive values. Consider ways to take action in your own community that might make it a better place for all races, religions and social classes:

**Write!** Create list of some issues that you think could be improved in your community. Consider the proper local organization or group that might have your goals in mind. Write letters to members of your community asking for their involvement.

**Organize!** In the film the South Central Farmers go to city hall to make their issues known to the local government. Try and find ways you can take your interests to people who may be able to help you create change.

**Research!** Search the internet, your community board, or your school for opportunities to join groups that might interest you. Look into some specific programs that may fit your interests or needs. How might that organization help you to achieve your long term goals? Talk to your teachers and peers about where you might find further resources or information about youth activism opportunity.

ONLINE RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUTH ACTIVISM

http://www.whatakidscando.org/
Using the Internet, print, and broadcast media, WKCD presses a dual message before the broadest audience possible: the power of what young people can accomplish when given the opportunities and supports they need and what they can contribute when others take their voices and ideas seriously. WKCD is most concerned about youth marginalized by poverty, race, and language.

http://www.youthnoise.com/
YN is a social networking site for people under the age of 27 who like to connect with others about important issues than Paris Hilton’s wardrobe and who want to get engaged within a cause. Find a cause, join the discussion and get involved. Whatever your cause-- from human rights and education to clean water and sports for social good-- promote it here.

http://www.freechild.org/
Freechild has worked for almost eight years to promote the idea that when youth are engaged in meaningful ways throughout society, their knowledge, action and wisdom can make the world more democratic, more peaceful and engaging for everyone. By working with adults as allies, young people learn, teach and lead democracy throughout society!

http://www.greenthumbnyc.org/
To learn more about community gardens here in New York.