

50 Years of Civic Life in Rhode Island: A Documentary Film Festival

12:00 pm

Buddy: The Rise and Fall of America's Most Notorious Mayor

2005, 86 minutes

Directed by Cherry Arnold

Grants awarded in 2003 and 2005

Introduction by Cherry Arnold

Vincent Albert "Buddy" Cianci, Jr. was an American politician, attorney, radio talk show host, political commentator, and convicted felon who served as the mayor of Providence from 1975 to 1984 and again from 1991 to 2002. As Mayor, Cianci, who died in 2016, became one of the country's most controversial political figures.

Cherry Arnold's award-winning 2005 documentary, narrated by actor James Woods, paints a complex and compelling portrait of Cianci's contradictions and flaws as well as his audacious style and many contributions to the life of the city and the state. Cianci was the first Italian American to become Mayor of Providence, as well as the first Republican to unseat a Democratic stronghold of more than 30 years. From Cianci's early promise as an attorney prosecuting organized crime to his pivotal role in downtown Providence's "renaissance," the film tracks Cianci's entanglements with the City Council, union skirmishes, personal scandals, and criminal indictments. Arnold's film is a fascinating study of American—and particularly, Rhode Island—local politics.

1:30 pm

Watershed

1983, 21 minutes

Directed by Howard Foster

Grants awarded in 1978 and 1982

Howard Foster's 1983 film *Watershed* tells the story of the construction of the Scituate Reservoir between 1915-1925 to support the water supply of the City of Providence, and the concurrent destruction and submersion of six of Scituate's eight villages. The film features interviews with former Scituate residents who experienced the strong local opposition to the reservoir's creation, and the subsequent dismantling of life in the town, including the closures of mills, schools,

farms, churches, businesses, and homes. The film also includes contemporary underwater footage documenting remaining building and road foundations, a poignant, eerie glimpse into Rhode Island's past.

RI Humanities was also proud to support director Evan Villari's 2023 documentary on the construction of the Scituate Reservoir and ongoing water supply issues, *Blood and Watershed*, which features footage from *Watershed*. *Blood and Watershed* is available for viewing on RI PBS: <https://www.pbs.org/video/blood-and-watershed-kdrzvd/>

3:00 pm

Sachuest Point

1977, 29 minutes

Directed by Lee O. Gardner, Peter O'Neill, and Ruth Whitman

Grant awarded in 1976

Introduction by Peter O'Neill

Sachuest Point explores the civic discourse around the land use and ownership of Sachuest Point, a breathtaking and ecologically significant peninsula on Aquidneck Island in Middletown, R.I., during a pivotal moment in its history. As the U.S. Navy decommissioned its use of 102 acres on the peninsula in 1976, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) was charged with determining its fate: would the land be transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for management as a nature preserve, or would the town of Middletown take ownership for recreation purposes? Filmmakers Gardner, O'Neill, and Whitman document a robust, thoughtful, and sometimes contentious dialogue among military and federal government officials, town officials, and local Rhode Islanders rich with varied, nuanced perspectives.

Ultimately, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service did take control of the land, founding what is now the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge. Many of the civic issues depicted in *Sachuest Point* still resonate in 2023, such as tensions between local and federal government oversight, as well as among competing environmental, recreational, and commercial interests. Some civic issues also go unacknowledged, such as the historic and ongoing Indigenous stewardship of this land, which deserves further investigation.

3:35 pm

Almost Dope: Hip Hop in Rhode Island

2017, 82 minutes

Directed by Ana González and Jeff Matteis

Grants awarded in 2015 and 2016

Introduction by Ana González

In the 2017 feature-length documentary *Almost Dope*, co-directors Ana González and Jeff Matteis chronicle the trajectories of eight different hip hop artists and groups from Rhode Island from the birth of hip hop 50 years ago to the present day. Through interviews, archival research, and oral histories, González and Matteis paint a portrait of a predominantly Black and Brown creative community addressing urgent civic issues, such as systemic racism, oppression, and violence, by amplifying the perspectives of and uplifting their communities. Beyond creating classic party anthems like “Suckers,” Rhode Island’s hip hop artists have organized legendary neighborhood block parties, founded and run stores and community centers, and acted as agents of civic empowerment and pride throughout the state for decades.