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For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/athomeinutopia

**“AT HOME IN UTOPIA,” CHRONICLE OF A RADICAL COOPERATIVE HOUSING EXPERIMENT
IN THE BRONX, TO AIR ON PBS’S INDEPENDENT LENS
ON TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2009, AT 10 PM**

*A home of one’s own is the American dream. But what happens
when the dreamers are immigrants, factory workers and Communists?*

(*San Francisco, CA*)—In the 1920s, believing they could create a radical new American dream committed to equality, justice and beauty, a group of Jewish garment workers left the tenements behind to build cooperative apartment complexes in the green, spacious borough of the Bronx. Then the Great Depression challenged everything. A film by Michal Goldman with Ellen Brodsky, narrated by Linda Lavin, **AT HOME IN UTOPIA** will air nationally on the Emmy® Award–winning PBS series Independent Lens on Tuesday, April 28, 2009, at 10 PM (check local listings).

AT HOME IN UTOPIA focuses on the United Workers Cooperative Colony—aka the Coops—the most grassroots and member-driven of the labor housing cooperatives, where many of the residents were Communists or sympathetic to the communist movement. They became part of a movement that was strong enough to get 24 states to enact emergency legislation against mortgage foreclosures. In a time of economic ruin, they saw an opportunity to change America into a place they would want to call home.



Scenes from AT HOME IN UTOPIA, coming to Independent Lens April 2009.

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In the 1930s, they opted to bring their passion for racial justice home by racially integrating their own housing cooperative, with unexpected consequences. An epic tale of the struggle for equity and justice across two generations, the film tracks the rise and fall of the Coops from the 1920s into the 1950s, illuminating the passions that bound them together and those that tore them apart. Along the way, **AT HOME IN UTOPIA** bears witness to lives lived with courage across the barriers of race and ethnicity, foreshadowing the struggles and triumphs of the 1960s and today. As we once again face times of financial uncertainty and upheaval, **AT HOME IN UTOPIA** is a thought-provoking look at one group's struggle to create an equitable community.

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the companion website for **AT HOME IN UTOPIA** at pbs.org/independentlens/athomeinutopia. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

Key Credits

Producer/Writer/Editor: Michal Goldman

Co-Producer: Ellen Brodsky

Story Consultant: Andrew Hazelton

Narrator: Linda Lavin

Director of Photography: Boyd Estus

Original Music: John Kusiak

Consulting Editor: Peter Rhodes

About the Major On-Camera Speaking Participants

Harriette Nesin Bressack grew up in the Coops under the influence of her flamboyant father, a union organizer and founding member of the Communist Party.

Daniel Libeskind, an architect of international repute, moved into the Amalgamated Cooperative Houses as an adolescent when his family came to America as survivors of the Holocaust.

Julius ("Julie") Lugovoy became a chemist, getting his advanced degrees thanks to the GI Bill. He grew up in the Coops, which hired his father as its gardener during the Great Depression.

Mary Jones Oliver moved into the Coops with her husband and twin daughters in 1934 as the Coops were beginning to racially integrate. After her husband's death, she worked as a fine seamstress and fashion designer. Well into her 90s during the filming of **AT HOME IN UTOPIA**, she is interviewed with her daughters, *Janet Jones Laidman*, a music educator, and *Joyce Jones Sykes*, a former actress who now works with cancer patients.

Boris Ourlicht and his family were among the earliest residents in the Coops. Boris joined the Communist Party as a young man, married a black woman he met in the Coops, went to the Midwest as an industrial "colonizer" for the party in the late 1940s, where he worked in steel for more than a decade before he left the party and became an industrial art teacher. His sisters, *Leah Ourlicht Campanella* and *Shulamit Ourlicht Miller*, and mother, *Rose Ourlicht*, a Polish immigrant, also appear in the film.

MaryLouise Patterson, a pediatrician, is the daughter of Louise Thompson Patterson and William Patterson, important figures in the Communist Party; William was a lawyer for the Scottsboro Boys.

Paul “Pete” Rosenblum was born in 1927, the same year the Coops was built, where his family was among the earliest residents. After graduation from Cornell University’s School of Industrial Relations, he went into heavy industry in the South as a member of the Communist Party. He was arrested and briefly detained for his political work. Back in New York, he married Doris Rosenblum, a brilliant organizer, earned a Ph.D. in African studies and worked as a typesetter for *The New York Times*.

Bernie Shuldiner worked at the Brooklyn Navy Yard during World War II, where he organized a union of machinist apprentices before joining the Navy. On his return to civilian life, he took a job as the Communist Party’s section leader for the Coops neighborhood, in which capacity he focused on the issue of racial integration. After years of devotion to the party, he left it in 1956, convinced that it was unreformable. Aware that he needed to financially support his family, he became a social worker. When interviewed for the film, he was in the process of organizing services for the elderly in the Florida retirement community where he and Norma wintered. He died in 2006.

Norma Dubitsky Shuldiner, whose mother organized and ran the Coops library and whose father helped start the Coops *shuleh* (Yiddish after-school program) was probably the first “Rosie the Riveter” to go to work in the Brooklyn Navy Yard during World War II. In the early years of her marriage, she moved back to the Coops, started a cooperative nursery school and went on to specialize in early childhood education.

Amy Galstuck Swerdlow, whose father, a devout Communist, was for a time on the Coops Board of Directors, rebelled early on against the doctrinaire quality of those politics, going on to become a prominent spokeswoman for Women Strike for Peace. After raising her children, she became a professor of history and women’s studies at Sarah Lawrence College.

Yok Ziebel’s family came to America from Russia through Palestine. They were given an apartment in the Coops rent-free during the Great Depression because Yok’s father was a functionary for the Communist Party, organizing unions. Believing in his parents’ ideals, Yok also worked in unions most of his life. He is interviewed with his wife, *Bebe Ziebel*, a school teacher who grew up near the Coops.

About the Filmmakers

Producer/writer/director **Michal Goldman**’s documentaries look at how people define and express the urgent issues of their times through the way they live their lives. She produces, writes and edits her films, which include *A Jumpin’ Night in the Garden of Eden*, the first film to document the revival of klezmer music; *Umm Kulthum, a Voice Like Egypt*, about the diva of Arabic song and her country; *Epiphany in Progress*, about the first year in an inner-city Episcopal school; and **AT HOME IN UTOPIA**.

Her work has won an Academy Award and the Golden Plaque for Documentary – History/Biography (Chicago Film Festival). She was the recipient of the first Promoting Tolerance Award from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. She is founder and president emerita of the Filmmakers Collaborative and founder of the Boston Jewish Film Festival.

Ellen Brodsky (co-producer) began filmmaking in 1995 after a 10-year career in education and public health. Her credits include co-directing, with Dunya Alwan, the award-winning short *Dental Farmer*. For the Massachusetts Department of Education, Brodsky directed *Health Is Academic*, a 15-minute short about school health programs introduced by the U.S. Surgeon General. She has also produced short films about day care and public education. In 2008, she worked as the media consultant for the Moving Image Fund of the LEF Foundation. Outside of film, Brodsky has led a national training center on HIV prevention for the Centers for Disease Control, directed sexuality education programs in more than 40 school districts, taught English in the Congo, and worked as a teaching fellow at Harvard University for classes on sexuality and positive psychology.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities and moments in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen. Further information about the series is available at pbs.org/independentlens.

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