

## Berkeleyside

# ‘Welcome to the neighborhood’: New film shines light on a changing Berkeley

A film about legendary Berkeley activist Mable Howard and her daughter, noted artist Mildred Howard, tells a bigger Berkeley story.

By [Tracey Taylor](#) March 21, 2018, 9:00 a.m.

Eight years ago, Pam Uzzell took this reporter on a walking tour of her Berkeley neighborhood. She talked about the documentary she wanted to make about the Lorin District and how it was changing demographically, economically and culturally. The more she talked to her friends and neighbors over the following months, however, the more she realized the complexity inherent in telling the story accurately. She couldn't find her way in. The filmmaker embarked on another project based in Arkansas, and it is only now, eight years after that stroll through streets she knew so well, that her documentary rooted in South Berkeley is being released.

### **BERKELEYSIDE MEMBER OFFER!**

Berkeleyside is sponsoring a special screening of *Welcome to the Neighborhood* on April 16, at 7 p.m. at the New Parkway Theater in Oakland. The event includes a post-screening Q&A moderated by Berkeleyside, ‘Creating Coalitions to Effect Political Change,’ featuring Loni Hancock, Carole Kennerly, Ying Lee and Roberta Brooks. We have five pairs of tickets to give to the first five Berkeleyside members who email [editors@berkeleyside.com](mailto:editors@berkeleyside.com) with subject heading “Welcome”!

The story she tells is more of a personal one, however, as Uzzell found compelling subjects in two women: activist and South Berkeley icon Mable Howard, who died in 1994, and her daughter, the noted artist Mildred Howard.

Mable Howard, known to most as Mama Howard, came with her husband and children to San Francisco during World War II to work in the shipyards of Hunters Point. They put down roots in what was then the predominantly African-American area of South Berkeley, and Howard spearheaded many significant political and community projects. Most notably, her lawsuit against BART in 1968 was a major factor in forcing the transit district to underground the trains that traveled through her neighborhood, preventing the division of the black and white sections of town by a set of tracks.

“It’s terrible that she’s not that well remembered in Berkeley,” said Uzzell recently. “She was so influential and should be part of Berkeley lore.” (There is an apartment complex for seniors on Alcatraz Avenue named after the elder Howard).

The 26-minute documentary, *Welcome to the Neighborhood*, also tells Mildred Howard’s story. The internationally renowned artist, whose home for nearly seven decades was a live-work space off Adeline Street, was forced out of Berkeley recently when her landlord raised her rent by 50%. The artist’s large-scale installations have been mounted at SITE San Diego and at the National Museum of Women in the Arts and the New Museum in New York, among other places. Closer to home, she has been commissioned for public installations by the City of Oakland, the San Francisco Arts Commission and International Airport, and the San Jose Museum of Art.

**Watch the trailer for *Welcome to the Neighborhood*.**

Uzzell wraps conversations with many key players into the documentary, including Ron Dellums, Loni Hancock, Carole Kennerly, Max Anderson, Carl Anthony, Jeff Chang, Margy Wilkinson, Willie Phillips, and Roberta Brooks.

The film received its most significant funding from the Berkeley Film Foundation which supports filmmakers who live or work in Richmond, El Cerrito, Albany, Berkeley, Emeryville and Oakland.

“We support many people, including students, who are making films locally,” said BFF program director David Bergad, who points out that funding for films in the Bay Area seems to be getting more difficult. “The piece of the pie has shrunk. The San Francisco Foundation doesn’t have a documentary grant program anymore, for example,” he said.

The BFF awarded 22 grants totaling \$193,000 last year in the East Bay, the largest annual amount to date, and has put a total of more than \$1.2 million towards 120 film projects since the foundation’s founding in 2009. The 2018 Berkeley Film Foundation grant cycle begins on April 2.

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Mildred Howard and artwork at Hunters Point



Mildred Howard

Uzzell still needs more help with the final part of releasing the film and is in the process of raising \$8,000 for licensing fees and closed captions for *Welcome to the Neighborhood*. ([See details.](#))

Uzzell sees the short film as the story of an African-American family that illuminates “both [the] personal power to create possibilities in adversity and the broader issue of gentrification and a housing crisis that threatens a community’s diversity.”

As Uzzell writes in a statement released with the documentary: “Ultimately [Mildred] will survive the upheaval. The question is, will Berkeley? Nearly fifty years after Mable Howard’s lawsuit against BART, the Howards’ neighborhood has become one of the “hottest” areas for new home buyers due, in part, to its proximity to BART. Home and rental prices have soared beyond the means of most, including many African Americans still reeling from the 2008 financial meltdown. The response of many in South Berkeley has become increasingly fierce, resulting in grass-roots demands that the city prioritizes affordable housing to prevent the further shrinking of the African American population in the city.”