

## DOCUMENTARY HIGHLIGHTS LITERACY CRISIS IN THE BRONX

Bronx native and filmmaker Gregory Hernandez brings us face-to-face with the literacy crisis, known as the “Silent Epidemic” that decimating parts of The Bronx, through intimate stories from Teachers, Students, Parents, Activists, Literacy Education Experts, Librarians, and Bookstore owners



BRONX, NEW YORK; April 25, 2022 –

Filmmaker & Business Owner, Gregory

Hernandez (SIDE HUSTLE; LEAKY

THOUGHTS) has directed and produced his

first documentary feature, “**1.5 Million**” which will premiere on Saturday

May 21, at the AMC Bay Plaza Cinema 13, located in Co-op City, Bronx. This

is one of only two movie theaters located within the entire borough. **1.5**

**Million** explores the political and economic forces that have brought about

this literacy crisis in The Bronx, specifically, District 7 which is located in

the south Bronx.

With a lack of school libraries, classroom libraries, books within the

community, bookstores, robust marketing by the NYPL in The Bronx and

decades of divestment to education, a literacy crisis has come to fruition in The Bronx. Born from the stereotypes that people in The Bronx do not read and are only known for having interests in sneaker and liquor stores; it is not by coincidence that access to literature has a profound effect on the culture of reading. As of 2016, **only 56%** of high school graduates in The Bronx are college ready. Poverty is a major factor, with 40% of children in the South Bronx living below the poverty line. A child raised in poverty is 13 times less likely to finish high school on time, if at all.

**70 percent** of third grade students in The South Bronx are unable to read at their grade level. The New York City Department of Education has found that children who fail to meet the third grade benchmark are more likely to drop out of high school and remain in poverty. The South Bronx has **the poorest congressional districts** in the nation and has the most unemployed, according to a 2016 report by South Bronx Rising Together (SBRT)

“Poverty impedes children’s education before they reach the classroom,” said Dr. Neuman, Professor of Childhood and Literacy Education at New

York University. “The literacy crisis should definitely be on the national agenda, it must also be on New York’s agenda.”

“Silent Epidemic, as it’s sometimes called for Adult illiteracy has consequences across the board.” said Anthony Tassi, CEO of Literacy Partners

“I didn’t step foot inside of an independent bookstore until I decided to open one,” said Noelle Santos, founder/owner of The Lit Bar, an independent bookstore and wine bar which opened in The Bronx in 2019, nearly three years after Barnes & Noble closed its doors at the Bay Plaza Mall, in Co-op City.

“How do you convince a bookstore to come to The Bronx, when the stereotype is people may not want to learn and may not want to spend money on a book,” said Stephen Kaufman, Former State Assemblymember, who was instrumental in bringing Barnes & Noble to his district in The Bronx, in 1999.

The title of the film is derived from the estimated population total of the Bronx as of 2019, which is **1.5 Million**. At the time of filming, there were no bookstores in operation in The Bronx, making it the only borough within New York City to have this dubious honor.

Filmed over four years, **1.5 Million** brings us The Bronx from 1997 when the borough had only two bookstores, to 2019 when the borough was without a single chain or independent bookstore, until the opening of The Lit Bar. Since then, more bookstore ventures have launched. In addition to bookstores, The Bronx went from having only two little free libraries in 2018 to over twenty-five in operation as of 2022. The NYPL has increased its marketing and accessibility initiative by re-launching its Book Mobile program in 2019.

Viewers are encouraged to join the conversation:

**#onepointfivemilliondocumentary**

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