

"Co-Op City"

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW YORK - THE BRONX - 1968 - NIGHT

The Bronx is no longer burning -- it's burnt.

All throughout the South Bronx, nothing but burned out buildings. However, way back in the Northeast...

Co-Op City emerges from the ashes.

MATURE MIKE (V.O.)

You are about to live a story that, for no particular reason, has been kept secret, and for far too long. It takes place in a non-fairy-tale-like kingdom, in The Bronx, few even know exists. How they don't know... Is a mystery to me. Because to this day, forty five years after its creation, "Co-Op City" -- or as my brainiac brother refers to it, "The Socialist Experiment" -- is still the largest housing complex in the entire world.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. MORRIS AVENUE - DAY

GIRLS play Double-Dutch on the sidewalks as BOYS play stickball in the streets.

PARENTS CHEER from their windows.

MATURE MIKE (V.O.)

But our story starts here, on Morris Avenue, a once thriving part of The Bronx.

MOTHER IN WINDOW

Go, Tony. Hit the ball.

Nearby, TEENAGERS unhinge public fire hydrants until water spouts out like geysers.

Everyone rushes over to get sprayed and cool themselves down.

MATURE MIKE (V.O.)

A community of beautiful old five-story buildings with open courtyards and fountains that don't work.

(MORE)

MATURE MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But who cares? It's 1968 and I'm a ten-year-old misfit who worships his father, Johnnie "Hi-Fi". I've always loved that name and looked forward someday to being called "Mikey Hi-Fi". My main obstacle, is my Mother. Go figure. She's the heart and soul of my existence, so I have to listen to her, but she makes it her duty to protect us from... In her words, 'that wanna be wise-guy Father of yours'.

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Y, the mother, a petite lady of Cuban and Puerto Rican parents, HUMS joyfully to LATIN SPIRITUAL MUSIC, as she lights a bundle of incense held up by an old coffee tin.

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - PARENT'S BEDROOM - DAY

YOUNG MIKE, the second child, 10, eyes of an angel and grin of the devil, peeks through window blinds, holding a folded paper-bag.

The coast is clear.

One by one, he turns and opens the many scattered cardboard boxes throughout the room.

MATURE MIKE (V.O.)

I can never resist all the cool stuff Dad brings home for the family that he says, "Fell off a truck." We get so much stuff each week, I'm growing up thinking every truck in The Bronx must be driving around with their back door open. Easy, I'm only ten years old at this point -- give me a break. At least I'm smart enough to not let my Mom know that I'm selling some of dad's goods to teen-age jerk-offs in my neighborhood.

The first box is filled with yellow sweaters. Disappointed, he slams it shut and opens the next. Next, transistor radios.

He opens the last box.

Jackpot! Cigarettes!

He transfers ten cartons into his brown paper bag.

MATURE MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

My hardest trick now is getting out
of the house without my mom seeing
me. If I get caught, it's all over.
She warns me all the time how she'll
kill herself if she ever finds out
I'm veering down the same crooked
path as my father. But I'll take my
chances.

He closes the box and tiptoes out, closing the door behind.

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

Mike tries to hide the stash as he sneaks past a closed door.
At the end of the hall, the door behind him creaks OPEN.
Young Mike disappears.

Out the doorway walks YOUNG LISA, the daughter, 8, soft face,
tough mouth, and too smart for her own good.

Off-screen a DOOR SLAMS.

Y rushes in with incense burning in a can.

Y

Who just left? Where's your brother?

Young Lisa looks at Y and shrugs.

Y shakes her head, frustrated.

EXT. MORRIS AVENUE - CONTINUOUS

Young Mike passes a bunch of NEIGHBORHOOD-KIDS in Yankee
hats, playing stickball.

Amongst them is Young Mike's brother YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR, 12,
the eldest of the bunch, and the perfect kid, whom everyone
looks up to.

Young John Junior spots Mike.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR

(calling out)

Hey, Mikey.

Young Mike pretends not to hear him.

Young John Junior knows Mikes up to no good.

NEIGHBORHOOD-KID #1

Isn't your brother going to play? We
could use another player.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR

Guess not.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Young Mike approaches SEVEN PUNK TEENAGERS on the steps of the local school.

The kids all have on the same denim jackets with cut-off sleeves. They are a local gang, the GOLDEN GUINEAS.

GOLDEN GUINEA 1

Got it?

He holds up the paper bag to them.

YOUNG MIKE

Here's the deal. Cartons are five in the store. I'll sell them to you for three bucks. I got ten. Deal?

GOLDEN GUINEA 2

Deal.

Young Mike's eyes light up as the gang shoves their money toward Young Mike.

He pockets his thirty dollars and runs off in a flash.

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Y dusts the furniture but stares intensely at the TV.

ANGLE ON TV

REPORTER (FROM THE TV)

I'm standing in the Baychester section of The Bronx, where families used to come from far and wide to ride rides at the now bankrupt theme park known as Freedomland, USA. Here with me now is the Director of Parks for the City of New York, Robert Moses, who is overseeing the major transformation of the two-hundred plus acres, which is quickly becoming a cooperative housing complex, possibly the largest in the world. Right, Robert?

ANGLE ON Y

Y puts down her duster, turns up the TV, then sits, eyes glued to the TV.

ANGLE ON TV

ROBERT MOSES (FROM THE TV)

That's right, Joe. We're renaming this whole area "Co-Op City", because it's a plan on such a massive scale that it will have everything it needs to make it a completely self-sustaining environment: Thirty-five high rise apartment buildings; seven clusters of townhouses; eight four-story parking-garages; a high school; two middle schools; three elementary schools; a police and fire station; parks; recreational areas; stores; offices; and a power plant. It's the largest attempt by the city to offer real home ownership to people who otherwise might not afford it.

ANGLE ON Y

Y looks around her cramped apartment and sees warped floors and peeling paint.

ANGLE ON TV

REPORTER (FROM THE TV)

Outstanding. And how long before we can start looking to move in?

ROBERT MOSES (FROM THE TV)

Quite soon. As you can see, Section One is nearly completed behind me, and the rest should be done in the months to follow.

ANGLE ON Y

Y postures before the television with hand to her hips with a determined look on her face.

EXT. SOCIAL CLUB - DAY

Mike walks up to a storefront sporting dark tinted-windows with a circular Italian-American sticker above its entrance.

INT. SOCIAL CLUB - BACK ROOM - DAY

The room is dark and smoky, with a small bar, and a television held up high for all the see.

A group of guys stand around and watch the baseball game.

In the middle of the pack is JOHNNY "HI-FI", Y's husband, Italian descent, whose years of hustling have clearly taken its' toll on his face.

JOHNNY HI-FI
(to the TV)
Come'on you bastards!

LOUIE PISS-EYE, who had his eyed burned by a cigar, opens the door to the room.

LOUIE PISS-EYE
Hi-Fi. Your kid's here.

Young Mike's enter.

LOUIE PISS-EYE (CONT'D)
So Mikey, you stayin' out of trouble?

YOUNG MIKE
Yes, sir.

Johnny Hi-Fi waves Young Mike over.

LOUIE PISS-EYE
Good, you go see your pop.

Young Mike comes over and joins in on watching the game.

Johnny Hi-Fi puts his hand on Young Mike's shoulder as they watch.

ANGLE ON TV

A Mets player knocks a grounder to left field and they score.

BACK TO:

The group erupts in CHEERS, except for Johnny Hi-Fi.

JOHNNY HI-FI
Fuckin' god damn it! The Mets. Buncha
Mama Lukes.

He turns to his son.

JOHNNY HI-FI (CONT'D)
So what'ca doin' here, Mikey?

YOUNG MIKE
Nothin'. Mets are good this year,
pop. You shouldn't bet against them.
Seaver already has twelve wins.

JOHNNY HI-FI
Thanks for the tip Jimmy the Greek.

YOUNG MIKE
But, I just wanted to tell you I
took some of the stuff that fell off
the truck.

JOHNNY HI-FI
And what? You here to give me my
cut?

Young Mike nods, pulls out thirty bucks and hands it over.

JOHNNY HI-FI (CONT'D)
Would'ja look at that, better than
the mooks 'round here, I tell ya.

He taps Louie Piss Eye on the arm.

JOHNNY HI-FI (CONT'D)
Do I got a good kid or what?
(beat)
Here you go, son.

Johnny Hi-Fi hands Young Mike a ten. Young Mike grins, ear
to ear.

JOHNNY HI-FI (CONT'D)
But you're gonna get me in trouble,
you need to get home. I'll see you
for dinner.

MIKE
Okay pop. See you later.

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - DINNING ROOM - NIGHT

Y, Johnny Hi-Fi, Young John Junior, Young Mike, and Young
Lisa eat dinner.

Y
Were you watching TV today?

JOHNNY HI-FI
Yeah, those friggin' Mets, buncha
bums.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
But, they won, dad.

JOHNNY HI-FI
Yeah, big deal, it cost me.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
Shouldn't bet against them.

JOHNNY HI-FI
(looking at Mike)
Yeah, that's what I hear!

Young Mike smiles.

Y
Did you know about the housing
development being built were
Freedomland was?

JOHNNY HI-FI
So?

YOUNG LISA
What's Freedomland?

Y
It was an amusement park north of
here. You remember it John, didn't
we take you there?

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
Yeah, it sucked.

YOUNG MIKE
Did you take me?

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
Yeah, they did, but you were little.

YOUNG MIKE
No, I'd remember.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
Trust me, you went.

YOUNG MIKE
No, I didn't.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
Yes, you did!

YOUNG MIKE
Bite me!

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
I'll give you something to bite.

Johnny Hi-Fi, lightly slaps them upside the head.

JOHNNY HI-FI
 Quit it or you'll both be biting on
 my knuckles. Got it?

They got it, but that doesn't stop them from trying to stare
 each other down.

Y
 Well, I was thinking about looking
 into it.

JOHNNY HI-FI
 Why? You got a map that's gonna
 tell us where the buried treasure
 is?

Y looks down at her plate, deflated.

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - KID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The kid's bedroom is tiny, unfit for three growing children.
 The boys are on one side, while Young Lisa is on the other,
 divided by a curtain.

YOUNG LISA
 Mike, I saw you taking some of Dad's
 stuff.

YOUNG MIKE
 So?

YOUNG LISA
 It's Dad's stuff.

YOUNG MIKE
 So?! Mind your business. It's just
 a bunch of stuff that fell off the
 truck.

YOUNG LISA
 That's just what dad says, and you
 know it's not, stupid.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
 (trying to sleep)
 Shut up. Who cares? Both of you,
 be quiet and go to sleep!

YOUNG LISA
 Shut up, yourself.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
 Fine. Just go to sleep, okay?

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - PARENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Johnny Hi-Fi lays next to Y.

Y

You don't ever think about moving,
do you?

JOHNNY HI-FI

Of course I do. I want what's best,
for all of us. We need a bigger
place. Especially if you know--

He rubs her tummy, hinting.

Y

Oh, no. Three is plenty.

JOHNNY HI-FI

Yeah, but it's always fun to try.

They kiss.

Y

Don't try too hard.

Johnny Hi-Fi glances down toward his crouch.

Y laughs.

Y

Always the charmer.

More kissing, followed by the ruffling of sheets.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MORRIS AVENUE - DAY

Another summer day on the block.

Young Lisa and friends play on the sidewalk, while Young
John Junior and Young Mike play stickball with a bunch of
kids.

Young Mike is at bat.

CATCHER

...That's two!

YOUNG MIKE

Two? Yeah, right.

CATCHER

I said that's strike two!

The catcher throws the ball back to the pitcher.

Young Mike shakes his head in disgust, and gets ready to hit again.

Young John Junior is further down the street in the 'outfield'.

A brand spanking new powder blue CHEVY MALIBU approaches Young John Junior

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR

Car!

The kids part to make room.

The driver rolls up to Young John Junior.

It's Johnny Hi-Fi.

JOHNNY HI-FI

Hey, Johnny Boy! How you like the new car?

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR

Holy shit, what happened?

All the kids run up to the new car.

JOHNNY HI-FI

Hey kids. How yous doin'?!

YOUNG MIKE

Dad, what the hell? Is it ours?

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR

Where did you get the car, pop? What happened?

JOHNNY HI-FI

Get in the house John and you too Mike. I got news.

Young John Junior and Young Mike runs up to the apartment.

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Young John Junior and Young Mike run in, excited.

YOUNG MIKE

Mom, mom, mom! Dad's got a new car!

Y

What? Slow down. Dad has what?

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR
 Dad just pulled up in a new car.
 Look outside. Sumpin' must of
 happened.

They head over to the window to see him parking.

Y's head shifts back in surprise.

Young Lisa, Young John Junior, and Young Mike stand there
 waiting for their dad to open the door.

As he does, he stands there waiting, smiling and loving the
 anticipation.

Y
 Well?

Johnny Hi-Fi holds out his arms.

JOHNNY HI-FI
 I HIT DA NUMBA!

They scream and yell, followed by a big family hug.

Happiness.

Y moves for the kitchen.

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Y rustles through some drawers mumbling in Spanish.

Y
 (relieved, in Spanish)
 Oh, thank god.

YOUNG MIKE
 Way to go, Pop!

Y
 (excited)
 One sec, be right back.

Y pulls out a stack of papers and brochures from a drawer
 and moves into the living room.

INT. MORRIS AVENUE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Y with a small stack of papers in hand.

Y
 We're moving.

JOHNNY HI-FI

What?

Y playfully reaches for his pockets.

Y

Where's the money?

Johnny Hi-Fi playfully swats her hands away.

JOHNNY HI-FI

I got it. I got it. Relax.

Y

You better have not gambled it away already.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR

Take it to the track already, Pop?

JOHNNY HI-FI

Watch it, wise guy.

Y

Is there enough for us to get out of here?

JOHNNY HI-FI

Easily.

Y

Good, cause I wanna move to Co-Op City.

JOHNNY HI-FI

What? Hold on! Co-Op City?

Y whips out all the brochures she has been storing and shoves them into their faces.

Y

Look.

(beat)

They have their own schools, their own markets. Police. Parks. Fire Department. Everything!

(beat)

And, we own it. It's a city within the city!

The kids see the passion in their mom's eyes.

On the brochures words like "Paradise", "New World", and "Utopia" appear.

Y (CONT'D)

I picked up after seeing it on t.v.
We're going, goddamn it! It'll be
good for all of us. They can't keep
living in the same room.

JOHNNY HI-FI

I'll think about it. Can't we find
a place 'round here? How 'bout Pelham
Parkway?

Johnny Hi-Fi walks over to the window and looks down proudly
at his new car.

Y is disgruntled, but lets it go.

Y comes over and puts her arm around him. They kiss, deeply.
She looks down at the car too.

Her expression changes and she SMACKS him across the back of
his head.

JOHNNY HI-FI (CONT'D)

Ouch. Madonna, honey.

Y

You haven't had the car for more
than a few hours and it already has
a ticket!

The car is parked in front of a fire hydrant.

SUPERIMPOSE:

"Based on a true story."

EXT. SOUTH BRONX - BOTANICA - DAY

LINDA (22), Y's niece, stands in front of an occult herbal
shop with a brown paper bag and a large burlap sack with
several holes in it. CLUCKING sounds emanate from inside
the sack.

INT. JOHNNY HI-FI'S CAR - DAY

Y drive's through the South Bronx with Linda riding shotgun.
The economic problems of this borough are in full bloom.

INT. FAMILY'S APARTMENT - DAY (A SERIES OF SHOTS)

-- Y and Linda enter the new Co-op City apartment. Hardwood
floors, freshly painted walls, and brand new appliances
sparkle in this place. They have the burlap sack, rug,
incense sticks, and a hand drum in hand. Something from
inside the burlap sack moves restlessly.

-- Linda takes out a few wooden cups and places them around the room. She carefully places incense in the cup and lights them in ceremonial fashion.

-- Y lays out the rug at the entrance. She takes out some chalk and draws a sun-like image around the rug.

-- Y and Linda squat down on the rug and face each other. Linda picks up the drum and starts a slow rhythmic beat.

-- Y closes her eyes and hums. Linda joins in, as the beat increases in frequency. Their bodies shake and rhythmically as they hum together.

-- Y, eyes wide open, chants and prays out loud. She then produces a wooden cutting board from the brown paper bag followed by a large knife.

-- Linda produces, what appears to be a vile of holy water from the same brown paper bag and hands it to Y.

-- Linda opens the burlap sack and removes a chicken placing it on the wooden cutting board--breast bone up.

-- The chicken struggles to free itself.

-- Y pours holy water over the chicken while holding the knife high above her head. Her arm swings down O.S. onto the prey. The CLUCKING stops.

-- Both women, still in squatting position, hug warmly above the sacrifice.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JOHNNY HI-FI'S CAR - DAY

On a dreary, drizzling day, the family moves into Co-Op City. The car is filled and the kids are packed in a bit too tight.

INT. JOHNNY HI-FI'S CAR - DAY

The family looks up at these brand new towers of concrete. The parks are pristine, the grass looks as though not a foot has ever stepped on it.

The playgrounds are empty, waiting to be used.

There are flags and "Grand Opening" banners in front of the stores.

The strip malls still have some stores that are not filled in.

Then, the car travels past a large electrical power plant, the electrical HUM is deafening.

JOHNNY HI-FI

Where the hell are we going? I thought that was Co-Op?

Y

That was section one through four. We're in section five.

YOUNG JOHN JUNIOR

This place is huge.

YOUNG LISA

Sure is.

Suddenly, the concrete runs out and they drive onto a muddy road, entering the last phase of Co-Op City.

The children's expression changes from excitement to confusion, as the world changes from a newly built finished paradise, to a raw industrial wasteland.

These other buildings, all of which are built on top of concrete columns, stick out of the mud, like a stone tablet rising from the grave.

Construction vehicles are scattered throughout.

Random piles of construction debris on fire adds to this half-finished war zone.

JOHNNY HI-FI

(sarcastic)

Oh, this is frickin' beautiful.

Y

Shut up, please.

EXT. FAMILY'S BUILDING - DRIVEWAY - DAY

The driveway is filled with cars, many families are moving in at the same time.

SUPERIMPOSE:

"1971"

Johnny Hi-Fi's car pulls up with the family onboard. Johnny Hi-Fi is driving. Y sits shotgun.

Y

Okay, we're here!