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submitted by Jesse K-S

United South End Settlements Honors Mel King

by Jesse Kirdahy-Scalia (Staff), Feb-06-09 [South End](#)



BOSTON/South End - Community members joined Boston congresspersons, intellectuals, artists and activists to honor South End community organizer, activist and professor Mel King Thursday night at United South End Settlements. King, who is most recognized for his successful effort to prevent the Copley Square Development from displacing South End residents, presented a video reading of his latest book of poetry, titled *Streets*, and engages audience members by encouraging them to share stories of their childhood streets and neighborhoods.

[View more photos from Thursday's evening.](#)

Boston poet laureate Sam Cornish recounted King's contributions to the South End's communities and described King's work as laying a foundation of social justice on which future African American Bostonians would build: "As both Bostonians and African Americans, many of us could not be who we are, where we are and what we are without the work of Mel King. [...] He has been a significant voice in local politics, as well as a unifying voice in Boston's communities—and especially communities of color. For me, personally, as a 25-year citizen of Boston, and a Boston voter, Mel King represents a reassuring and solid social presence."

King addressed the audience and introduced his book of poetry, *Streets*, which he said he has been working on "since 1928." He described a year 2000 trip with college students from around the United States to Cairo, Mumbai and Rio, where his travel group witnessed the urban poor living in flimsy cardboard houses on the streets. In contrast to their material circumstances, King said, the members of those communities developed rich social relationships. He urged the audience to "understand the difference between a house and a home," and drew a parallel to Boston's South End communities.

King introduced local artist Billy Nuñez (Biz20), whose illustrations for *Streets* were exhibited at USES Thursday night, and then presented a video reading of the complete book with Biz' illustrations. After the presentation, local residents came to the front of the room and reminisced on their own experiences growing up in "the real South End," a melting pot that produced "real Bostonians." Many described how the neighborhood changed as it became gentrified, but as one member noted, "No many how many [outsiders] moved in, the face of the neighborhood, the soul of the neighborhood never changed."

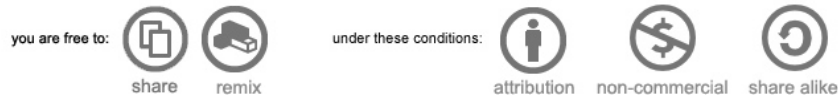
Streets is available on the [Sweeties Books site](#), where viewers can see a preview of the book. Biz20's art can be [seen on his site](#).

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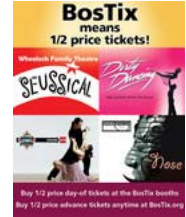
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