



Trouble the Water

2009 Youth Education & Study Guide

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The San Francisco Film Society Youth Education Program is made possible by the generous support of:

William Randolph Hearst Foundation
Tin Man Fund
Nellie Wong Magic of Movies Education Fund

*TROUBLE THE WATER***Film Synopsis**

Winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, this astonishingly powerful documentary is at once horrifying and exhilarating. Directed and produced by *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Bowling for Columbine* producers Tia Lessin and Carl Deal, *Trouble the Water* takes you inside Hurricane Katrina in a way never before seen on screen. The film opens the day before the storm makes landfall—just blocks away from the French Quarter but far from the New Orleans that most tourists knew. Kimberly Rivers Roberts, an aspiring rap artist, is turning her new video camera on herself and her 9th Ward neighbors trapped in the city. “It’s going to be a day to remember,” Kim declares. As the hurricane begins to rage and the floodwaters fill their world and the screen, Kim and her husband Scott continue to film their harrowing retreat to higher ground and the dramatic rescues of friends and neighbors. Lessin and Deal document the couple’s return to New Orleans, the devastation of their neighborhood and the appalling repeated failures of government. Weaving an insider’s view of Katrina with a mix of verité and in-your-face filmmaking, *Trouble the Water* is a redemptive tale of self-described street hustlers who become heroes – two unforgettable people who survive the storm and then seize a chance for a new beginning.

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CLASSROOM USE

In order to enrich the students' experience and take full advantage of the learning opportunities in this film, we recommend both pre- and post-viewing activities. Below are some questions addressing the major issues raised in the film: the role of government, the role of media/news, social and civic responsibility, the race issue, and the problem of poverty in the United States.

Grade Levels

This film is recommended for high school and advanced/mature middle school students.

Subject Areas

Social Studies/Government

Media Studies

Language Arts

Pre-Viewing Questions

1. What is the role of government in society?
2. To what extent is government responsible for the well-being of its citizens? Where does government responsibility end and where does personal responsibility take over?
3. Does the role of government change in the face of a disaster, natural or otherwise?
4. What is the role of the media?
5. To whom is media primarily responsible? Whose interests does media serve?
6. Should newscasters be subjective? Is it possible to be objective?
7. What is the role of a documentary filmmaker? To what extent are they simply documenting?
8. Is there inequality in the United States? If so, where does it come from?
9. Are the issues of race and poverty interrelated? Can you talk about one without addressing the other?

Post-Viewing Questions

Civic and Social Responsibility...

1. After viewing the film, to what extent is the government responsible for the losses of Hurricane Katrina?
2. After Mayor Ray Nagin issued a mandatory evacuation of the city, should the city have provided organized transportation?
3. Why didn't Kimberly and Scott initially leave their home? Could they have done more to protect themselves?
4. Leading up to the hurricane, should the government have done more for Kimberly, Scott, and the rest of New Orleans?
5. What was the government's response to incarcerated individuals in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina? Being in prison, have these people sacrificed certain rights that the rest of us enjoy? Are their needs for water and food less important than those who are not imprisoned?
6. After viewing the film, what social guarantees should all citizens expect from the government? What is the relationship between individual and government responsibility?
7. Surrounding Hurricane Katrina, what obligations did the citizens have to look after their own safety? To what extent are people responsible for their own well-

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being?

Race and Class...

1. Do you think the government would have done more if the people in jeopardy were primarily white?
2. 77% of Whites believe the government response would have been the same if the victims were primarily White, while only 27% of Blacks agree. What is the reason for this breakdown? Does this point to a greater disparity in views on race in America?
3. In his September 7th article from the Chicago Tribune, Clarence Page proposes that Katrina did not raise issues of race, but rather issues of poverty. What is his reasoning for this? Is this an issue of race, or is it about class?
4. At one point in the film, Kimberly says "If you don't have money, if you don't have status, you don't have a government." What does she mean by this? Do you agree with this assessment?
5. What does Kimberly say regarding the choices and opportunities she's had in life? Do you believe she has the same opportunities as someone from a more wealthy background? As a low-income African American, does she have the same opportunities as a low-income Caucasian?
6. What can be done to close the disparity between social classes? Between different races?

Media Literacy...

1. Does this film have an agenda? If so, what is it?
2. What did you take away from the film? Does this correspond to what the filmmakers were trying to say?
3. What is the representation of African/Americans in this documentary? How is it different/similar from the images that you're used to seeing?
4. What is the representation of Whites in this film? How is it different/similar from images you are used to seeing?
5. Did the filmmakers present an objective view of the events? Give one example from the film to support your claim? Is it possible to present a completely objective point of view?
6. How did the filmmakers frame the footage of woman working the tourism office (i.e. what footage precedes and follows it)? How does this affect the viewer?
7. What was the use of music in the film? How did it affect your perceptions of the subject matter?
8. How did the news media shape the public's view of Katrina? Did the role of the media change in the aftermath of the hurricane?

Personal Reflection...

1. What is your personal background? How does it affect your viewing of the film?
2. Was Hurricane Katrina a tragedy because of the natural disaster itself or because of the human failure surrounding it?
3. What would you do as the victim of a natural disaster? Would you feel compelled to help those less fortunate than you? Or would you primarily look after yourself?

*TROUBLE THE WATER***Tavis Smiley interviews Dr. Michael Eric Dyson about his book, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*, February 8, 2006, PBS**

Tavis: Michael Eric Dyson is a professor of humanities at the University Of Pennsylvania, and author of a number of notable books on African American and American culture. His most recent text aimed at issues surrounding Hurricane Katrina. The book is called "Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster." He joins us tonight from the city of brotherly love and sisterly affection, Philadelphia. Professor Dyson, nice to have you on, sir.

Michael Eric Dyson: Brother Smiley, always a blessing to be here.

Tavis: Glad to have you here. Let me start with the funeral services yesterday for Coretta Scott King. As I intimated earlier, race and class came up yesterday, and one really shouldn't be surprised that they in fact did come up. You were at the funeral yesterday, so you were there. You were there when former President Jimmy Carter had these words to say:

The struggle for equality is not over. We have only to recall the color of the faces in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi, those most devastated by Katrina, to know that there are not yet equal opportunities for all Americans. Close quote. President Carter uttered those words, and the place erupted in applause and a standing ovation with President Bush, no less, sitting on the stage. Take me back to that moment, since you were there.

Dyson: Oh, it was riveting. Earlier, of course, Reverend Joseph Lowery had already roused the element, so to speak, by, I Mr. Bush's face, in poem form nonetheless, suggesting that weapons of mass destruction were not found. So that already had incited the crowd and instigated them to even greater fury in a positive sense when Mr. Carter stepped to the podium and talked about the color of the faces there.

It was extraordinary, because after all, this is Coretta Scott King. The woman who partnered with Martin Luther King Jr. to oppose not only White supremacy, social injustice in broad stroke, but economic inequality in particular, and the class warfare that we see going on in our nation today. So, the poor and the vulnerable and the dispossessed are those for those whom she spoke.

And those to whom she spoke, and regularly represented. So when Mr. Carter spoke about his fellow Atlantan, his fellow Georgian, he did a brilliant and powerful thing at a funeral that was not only a representation of the life of Coretta Scott King, but the legacy of Coretta Scott King. And certainly, it extends at the heart of Katrina.

Tavis: Let me ask whether or not you think that a service like that, a moment like that, can penetrate the heart, the mind, and the soul of a president who might not have heretofore understood the plight of Black people. But against the backdrop of this towering figure, Coretta Scott King, perhaps he left there, even though he got dissed in the process, perhaps he left there with this conscience pricked.

Dyson: No doubt. And having his conscience pricked is something that would be significant. His father had already defended him, in part. It was one of the more humorous exchanges during the service, where President George H.W. Bush, the former President, the 41st, as they call him, stood up and defended his son by saying Lowery used to come to the White House, it was 23 Lowery, about 21 Lowery and three George Bush.

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But he said, keep your day job. You're not going to displace Maya Angelou as a poet. So, he showed some pep in his step and some zing in his sting, so to speak. But I think, Tavis, that perhaps it was the occasion, rousing in its element, somber, not somber in the negative sense, but the dignity and grace that Mrs. Coretta Scott King deployed and employed during her life certainly was manifest there.

And I think and hope by the rousing response and the applause of the audience that Mr. Bush, the present President, certainly felt the fact that these African-American people whose backs were against the wall, who identified with their poor brothers and sisters, are the ones he now has to listen to.

Not simply \$120 billion more for the war, but thinking about more resources that FEMA could direct toward those vulnerable. So, my answer to that question is yes. We're going to give him the benefit of the doubt, until he proves that he is totally tone deaf and incapable of understanding the politics of compassion, we'll suggest that that was a moment of possible penetration of the husk of Mr. Bush's own understanding of what happened during Hurricane Katrina.

Tavis: Does that mean, then, that in the pages of "Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster," one would not get the impression that Professor Dyson believes that just in the aftermath of Katrina that the President is already tone deaf?

Dyson: Well, there's no question about that. The reason we say we hope it can be a possible moment of transformation is that the present moment, and the past, certainly didn't indicate that Mr. Bush was broadly sensitive or deeply understanding of that condition of those poor people. In my book, I address the Kanye West famous, to some infamous, statement that George Bush doesn't care about Black people.

First of all, I use it to say he's not speaking about, and certainly I'm not speaking, about George Bush the individual. Not the person. Not the private person. But the public persona, the institutional identity of the face of the American government, and the representative of democracy of our culture. In that sense, we're speaking about George Bush, the President.

And care, Tavis, is not measured in terms of personal sentiments of compassion. They are measured by if you are willing in politics to deliver resources in a timely fashion to vulnerable communities who are under need and crisis. And in that sense, George Bush, the face of the government, did not care deliver resources in a timely fashion to vulnerable communities that were disadvantaged in a way that helped them.

So, yes, I believe that he has not been open, and certainly has been tone deaf. But hopefully, the funeral of Coretta Scott King presents an opportunity for him to think even more deeply and more richly about this situation.

Tavis: The other back drop, Michael, it seems to me, against which this conversation is held tonight is that yesterday, the money that FEMA had put up heretofore to keep people in hotel rooms, evacuees out of Hurricane Katrina, out of New Orleans specifically, that money ran out yesterday. So as of yesterday, officially, occupants in about 4,500, almost 5,000 hotel rooms emptied out yesterday because the FEMA commitment to put them up is now over and done. What say you about that reality?

Dyson: Well, FEMA has been a fickle, futile, feeble. They've been furious. If I could think of some more Fs that I could say on air, I'd probably say those, too.

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Tavis: (laugh) Stop while you ahead with those F words.

Dyson: Yes, sir. (unintelligible) stop right there.

Tavis: (laugh) Yeah.

Dyson: So, the reality is that FEMA, Tavis, has been atrocious. One of the stories about FEMA, to be sure, is the ineptitude, the inexperience, and the ignorance that besieged them. The top heads of FEMA, not only Mr. Brown, who was the head of the International Arabian Horse Association for a while before coming to FEMA.

Not Joseph Alba or his predecessor, who came from the Bush campaign in 2000, had no experience at all in federal emergency management, and in terms of disaster mitigation. Other top leaders had little or no experience as well. This is why George Bush's dulcet phrase uttered at the 2000 Republican Convention in Philadelphia come from behind to bite him in the hind parts.

That is, the soft bigotry of low expectations. What we saw in that, and continue to see in FEMA, is the manifestation of giving your homeboys, your cronies, a job just because you're paying them back politically. Furthermore, what we see is the manifestation of a political philosophy that says that limited government is the best.

We know the Bush administration is heir to Ronald Reagan's belief in the eighties that the government is the enemy of the people. So the irony is, and the paradox that is punishing, is that if you're at the helm of the government, but you believe the government should be limited and is of little use to the people because you've shredded the safety net, then you're a dangerous person to be there.

And I think this manifests itself with FEMA's inability to understand first of all these people have been made vulnerable by an act of nature extended by an unnatural disaster called poverty, race, and class. And the inability of the administration to understand they must gird up their loins and speak, Tavis, to the brilliant speech that Mr. Bush gave in the aftermath of Katrina, when he stood in New Orleans and talked about the structural inequalities and the persistent poverty that this nation must somehow resolve.

That was a beautiful, uplifting, edifying speech that has since fallen on deaf ears in the administration. And certainly, FEMA's failure to provide for those folk is a manifestation of the collapse, the tragic collapse, of the Bush administration's commitment to those people who were the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Tavis: You covered these issues in depth. I don't have time to go as in depth as I'd like. But let me put it this way. You talk about the government's response, or lack thereof, so you got a critical critique of government. You talk about the media and the word refugee and the picture of the Black folk in the water and White folk in the water.

And the Black folk were looting food and the White folk were finding food. So you talk about government, you talk about media, and the third area that really concerns me is the American people. If government doesn't get it, the media doesn't get it, that's one thing. But you expect the American people to get it. That Pugh Research Center poll that found that Black folk and White folk differed greatly on two central questions.

Black folk thought that the response, or lack thereof, pointed up another example of racial inequality in America. White folk didn't see it that way. Black folk said the response would have

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been faster had the victims been White. White folk didn't see it that way. So, what say you, then, about the fact that after all has been said and done, in many respects, more has been said than done with regard to us as Americans getting it.

Dyson: Oh, absolutely, Tavis. That's a brilliant point, because ironically and tragically enough, in the beginning of the twenty first century, we still occupy two parallel, though widely and vastly different universes of perception around race, as African-American people, generally speaking, and European-American White brothers and sisters, generally speaking.

The reality is, we looking at the same thing, but we ain't seeing the same picture. As the bible said, some heard thunder, some heard the voice of God. And depending upon where you're standing and where you are, you interpret the sounds differently. And African-American people who have been rendered vulnerable historically, exiled, forced into migrations that have instigated, of course, extraordinary developments in our culture.

But also mark the way in which we have been constantly a pilgrim people on the path toward expanding opportunity, but also forced there because of the inability of the government and the people of America and our citizens to understand our plight. That poll suggests that we still occupy two different world views, perspectives, outlooks.

What the Germans would call (speaks in German) . Let's throw everything we can at it. Two different perspectives generated out of the cultures that have produced us. And Tavis, this is why, when we talk about race in this country, it's not simply racial intent that is important. It's also racial consequence.

It was Senator Obama who said look, when he looked at Hurricane Katrina, he didn't see active malice. He saw passive indifference. I would simply add that those are flip sides of the same coin. Active malice is the cell phone with the ring volume at high. Passive indifference is the cell phone with the ring volume on vibrate. But guess what, Tavis?

At the end of the day, you're still getting a message transmitted or a message communicated. Whether it's ringing loudly, or whether it's on vibrate. That's what we're dealing in this country. The difference between racist intent and racial consequence.

Tavis: I'm about to lose this feed, and none of our message will be transmitted if I keep going. So that said, let me thank Michael Eric Dyson for the new book, "Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster." As always, Professor, nice to have you on. All the best to you.

Dyson: Mr. Smiley, it's always a blessing.

Tavis: Up next on this program, from the new Pink Panther film, actor Jean Reno. Stay with us.

*TROUBLE THE WATER***Why New Orleans is in deep water**

Molly Ivins, Creators Syndicate

Published September 1, 2005

AUSTIN, Texas -- Like many of you who love New Orleans, I find myself taking short mental walks there today, turning a familiar corner, glimpsing a favorite scene, square or vista. And worrying about the beloved friends and the city, and how they are now.

To use a fine Southern word, it's tacky to start playing the blame game before the dead are even counted. It is not too soon, however, to make a point that needs to be hammered home again and again, and that is that government policies have real consequences in people's lives.

This is not "just politics" or blaming for political advantage. This is about the real consequences of what governments do and do not do about their responsibilities. And about who winds up paying the price for those policies.

This is a column for everyone in the path of Hurricane Katrina who ever said, "I'm sorry, I'm just not interested in politics," or, "There's nothing I can do about it," or, "Eh, they're all crooks anyway."

Nothing to do with me, nothing to do with my life, nothing I can do about any of it. Look around you this morning. I suppose the National Rifle Association would argue, "Government policies don't kill people, hurricanes kill people." Actually, hurricanes plus government policies kill people.

One of the main reasons New Orleans is so vulnerable to hurricanes is the gradual disappearance of the wetlands on the Gulf Coast that once stood as a natural buffer between the city and storms coming in from the water. The disappearance of those wetlands does not have the name of a political party or a particular administration attached to it. No one wants to play, "The Democrats did it," or, "It's all Reagan's fault." Many environmentalists will tell you more than a century's interference with the natural flow of the Mississippi is the root cause of the problem, cutting off the movement of alluvial soil to the river's delta.

But in addition to long-range consequences of long-term policies like letting the Corps of Engineers try to build a better river than God, there are real short-term consequences, as well. It is a fact that the Clinton administration set some tough policies on wetlands, and it is a fact that the Bush administration repealed those policies--ordering federal agencies to stop protecting as many as 20 million acres of wetlands.

Last year, four environmental groups cooperated on a joint report showing the Bush administration's policies had allowed developers to drain thousands of acres of wetlands.

Does this mean we should blame President Bush for the fact that New Orleans is underwater? No, but it means we can blame Bush when a Category 3 or Category 2 hurricane puts New Orleans under. At this point, it is a matter of making a bad situation worse, of failing to observe the First Rule of Holes (when you're in one, stop digging).

Had a storm the size of Katrina just had the grace to hold off for a while, it's quite likely no one would even remember what the Bush administration did two months ago. The national press corps has the attention span of a gnat, and trying to get anyone in Washington to remember longer than a year ago is like asking them what happened in Iznik, Turkey, in A.D. 325.

Just plain political bad luck that, in June, Bush took his little ax and chopped \$71.2 million from

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the budget of the New Orleans Corps of Engineers, a 44 percent reduction. As was reported in New Orleans CityBusiness at the time, that meant "major hurricane and flood projects will not be awarded to local engineering firms. Also, a study to determine ways to protect the region from a Category 5 hurricane has been shelved for now."

The commander of the corps' New Orleans district also immediately instituted a hiring freeze and canceled the annual corps picnic.

Our friends at the Center for American Progress note the Office of Technology Assessment used to produce forward-thinking plans such as "Floods: A National Policy Concern" and "A Framework for Flood Hazards Management." Unfortunately, the office was targeted by Newt Gingrich and the Republican right, and gutted years ago.

In fact, there is now a governmentwide movement away from basing policy on science, expertise and professionalism, and in favor of choices based on ideology. If you're wondering what the ideological position on flood management might be, look at the pictures of New Orleans--it seems to consist of gutting the programs that do anything.

Unfortunately, the war in Iraq is directly related to the devastation left by the hurricane. About 35 percent of Louisiana's National Guard is now serving in Iraq, where four out of every 10 soldiers are guardsmen. Recruiting for the Guard is also down significantly because people are afraid of being sent to Iraq if they join, leaving the Guard even more short-handed.

The Louisiana National Guard also notes that dozens of its high-water vehicles, Humvees, refuelers and generators have also been sent abroad.

(I hate to be picky, but why do they need high-water vehicles in Iraq?)

This, in turn, goes back to the original policy decision to go into Iraq without enough soldiers and the subsequent failure to admit that mistake and to rectify it by instituting a draft.

The levees of New Orleans, two of which are now broken and flooding the city, were also victims of Iraq war spending. Walter Maestri, emergency management chief for Jefferson Parish, said on June 8, 2004, "It appears that the money has been moved in the president's budget to handle homeland security and the war in Iraq."

This, friends, is why we need to pay attention to government policies, not political personalities, and to know whereon we vote. It is about our lives.

*TROUBLE THE WATER***Viewpoint: Has Katrina saved US media?**

By Matt Wells, Los Angeles, September 5, 2005 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4214516.stm>.

As President Bush scurries back to the Gulf Coast, it is clear that this is the greatest challenge to politics-as-usual in America since the fall of Richard Nixon in the 1970s. Then as now, good reporting lies at the heart of what is changing. But unlike Watergate, "Katrinagate" was public service journalism ruthlessly exposing the truth on a live and continuous basis.

Instead of secretive "Deep Throat" meetings in car-parks, cameras captured the immediate reality of what was happening at the New Orleans Convention Center, making a mockery of the stalling and excuses being put forward by those in power. Amidst the horror, American broadcast journalism just might have grown its spine back, thanks to Katrina.

National politics reporters and anchors here come largely from the same race and class as the people they are supposed to be holding to account. They live in the same suburbs, go to the same parties, and they are in debt to the same huge business interests. Giant corporations own the networks, and Washington politicians rely on them and their executives to fund their re-election campaigns across the 50 states.

It is a perfect recipe for a timid and self-censoring journalistic culture that is no match for the masterfully aggressive spin-surgeons of the Bush administration.

'Lies or ignorance'

But last week the complacency stopped, and the moral indignation against inadequate government began to flow, from slick anchors who spend most of their time glued to desks in New York and Washington.

The most spectacular example came last Friday night on Fox News, the cable network that has become the darling of the Republican heartland. This highly successful Murdoch-owned station sets itself up in opposition to the "mainstream liberal media elite".

But with the sick and the dying forced to sit in their own excrement behind him in New Orleans, its early-evening anchor Shepard Smith declared civil war against the studio-driven notion that the biggest problem was still stopping the looters.

On other networks like NBC, CNN and ABC it was the authority figures, who are so used to an easy ride at press conferences, that felt the full force of reporters finally determined to ditch the deference. As the heads of the Homeland Security department and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Fema) appeared for network interviews, their defensive remarks about where aid was arriving to, and when, were exposed immediately as either downright lies or breath-taking ignorance.

And you did not need a degree in journalism to know it either. Just watching TV for the previous few hours would have sufficed.

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Iraq concern

When the back-slapping president told the Fema boss on Friday morning that he was doing "a heck of a job" and spent most of his first live news conference in the stricken area praising all the politicians and chiefs who had failed so clearly, it beggared belief.

The president looked affronted when a reporter covering his Mississippi walkabout had the temerity to suggest that having a third of the National Guard from the affected states on duty in Iraq might be a factor. It is something I suspect he is going to have to get used to from now on: the list of follow-up questions is too long to ignore or bury.

And it is not only on TV and radio where the gloves have come off. The most artful supporter of the administration on the staff of the New York Times, columnist David Brooks, has also had enough. He and others are calling the debacle the "anti 9-11": "The first rule of the social fabric - that in times of crisis you protect the vulnerable - was trampled," he wrote on Sunday.

"Leaving the poor in New Orleans was the moral equivalent of leaving the injured on the battlefield."

Media emboldened

It is way too early to tell whether this really will become "Katrinagate" for President Bush, but how he and his huge retinue of politically-appointed bureaucrats react in the weeks ahead will be decisive. Government has been thrown into disrepute, and many Americans have realised, for the first time, that the collapsed, rotten flood defences of New Orleans are a symbol of failed infrastructure across the nation.

Blaming the state and city officials, as the president is already trying to do over Katrina, will not wash. Beyond the immediate challenge of re-housing the evacuees and getting 200,000-plus children into new schools, there will have to be a Katrina Commission, that a newly-emboldened media will scrutinise obsessively.

The dithering and incompetence that will be exposed will not spare the commander-in-chief, or the sunny, faith-based propaganda that he was still spouting as he left New Orleans airport last Friday, saying it was all going to turn out fine. People were still trapped, hungry and dying on his watch, less than a mile away.

Black America will not forget the government failures, nor will the Gulf Coast region. Tens of thousands of voters whose lives have been so devastated will cast their mid-term ballots in Texas next year - the president's adopted home state.

The final word belongs to the historic newspaper at the centre of the hurricane - The New Orleans Times-Picayune. At the weekend, this now-homeless institution published an open letter: "We're angry, Mr President, and we'll be angry long after our beloved city and surrounding parishes have been pumped dry. Our people deserved rescuing. Many who could have been, were not. That's to the government's shame."

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Our society is becoming increasingly inundated with various forms of media that communicate with us on a multi-sensory level, affecting the way we think, feel, and behave. As such, it is more important than ever to be able to critically engage with the mediated messages we receive on a daily basis in order to foster successful students, responsible citizens, and conscientious consumers. Media literacy education provides the tools to analyze media, allowing us to understand not only what information is being communicated, but why and how it is being communicated. By transforming the process of media consumption into an active and critical process, people gain greater awareness of the potential for misrepresentation and manipulation, and understand the role of media in constructing views of reality.

HOW TO READ MEDIA

1. Recognize the media with which you are engaging...

As technology continues to progress, so will the media to which we are exposed, both in the sheer quantity and also in the sophistication with which it transmits messages. Just in the last twenty years, the media field has increased exponentially with the advent of the internet. In order to read media, one must first acknowledge its pervasive presence.

2. Recognize that all media is constructed by someone...

For every media message, there is someone who produced it. Often this is more complicated than one person. Take, for example, the film "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe." The director of the film is Andrew Adamson, and there are four listed screenwriters, and still hundreds more people who participated in the film's making, from actors to special effects artists. Also, the film is based off of a novel by C.S. Lewis, and it was financed by Walt Disney Pictures and Walden Media.

3. Recognize that all media is constructed for someone...

For every media message, there is an intended audience, and recognizing this allows us to better read the message itself. Sometimes the audience is readily apparent, as with children's television shows, but it can also be less obvious. A political candidate's speech on healthcare reform can be geared towards the elderly, or by changing a word here and a word there, the same speech can be aimed at uninsured young adults.

4. Decipher the codes of a given media to read the message...

Each form of media has its own language it uses to produce its message. In film, this is the composition of a shot, how a sequence is edited, the sound design, and so on. In magazines, it's the layout of a page, the graphics and text being used, etc. In order to understand media, one must be able to read these

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codes and from them, obtain a meaning, whether subversive or overt. A billboard for an ipod, for example, uses bright colors and dancing silhouettes to produce the message that people with ipods have a lot of fun, so you should buy an ipod if you want to have fun.

5. Recognize the reasoning for a given message...

After a message is read, it is important to analyze the media-maker's reason for producing their message. For example, you might watch a Fox news piece which criticizes a democratic politician. You would then ask yourself "why did fox news make this piece?" This would lead you to the reasoning that fox news, owned by the notoriously conservative Rupert Murdoch, has a political agenda of criticizing liberalism and promoting conservatives. Oftentimes, the financial producer of a message (in this case, Rupert Murdoch), will determine the meaning of a message.

6. Acknowledge how your personal background and viewpoints affect your reading of a message...

For any interaction with media, there are two parties- the media itself and whoever is reading it. In order to gain a comprehensive view of a message, it is imperative that one takes into account their specific background, and how that might affect their reception of a message. Someone who grew up in a small, Midwestern, Christian town, for example, would have a very different reading of "The Passion of the Christ" than someone who grew up in an urban, Jewish household. Acknowledging these differences is very important to a thorough reading of a message.

7. Reading the greater message...

With all these facts, we are able to look at the message on a grander scale. This means asking a number of important questions that extend beyond the message itself: What are the effects of this message? What is left out of the message? Who benefits from this message, and who loses out? How has this message shaped the media itself?

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Katrina By the Numbers

Post-Katrina Views of Bush				
<i>In handling relief efforts,</i>				
<i>President Bush...</i>	%			
<i>Did all he could</i>	28			
<i>Could have done more</i>	67			
<i>Don't know</i>	5			
	100			
<i>Bush job as president</i>	%	%	%	%
<i>Approve</i>	50	43	44	40
<i>Disapprove</i>	43	50	48	52
<i>Don't know</i>	7	7	8	8
	100	100	100	100
<i>Priority for Bush</i>				
<i>Domestic policy</i>	40	--	--	56
<i>War on terrorism</i>	44	--	--	25
<i>Both/Neither (vol.)</i>	14	--	--	13
<i>Don't know</i>	2	--	--	6
	100			100

Katrina Through the Prism of Race			
<i>Gov't response if most victims had been white?</i>	Total %	White %	Black %
<i>Faster</i>	26	17	66
<i>The same</i>	68	77	27
<i>Don't know</i>	6	6	7
	100	100	100
<i>Shows racial inequality still a major problem?</i>			
<i>Yes</i>	38	32	71
<i>No</i>	50	56	22
<i>Don't know</i>	12	12	7
	100	100	100
<i>Number of cases</i>	(1,000)	(712)	(211)
<i>In order to gain enough interviews to report on this group accurately, the survey includes an oversample of African Americans. For all results based on the total population, statistical adjustments (weighting) are used to ensure that the correct national racial and ethnic characteristics are met.</i>			

From <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=255>

Population of New Orleans in 2000

- 67% African American/Black
- 28% White
- 3% Latino/Hispanic
- 2% Asian

From www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000html

Katrina Fatalities

- Total Records: 1889
- Number of Missing: 595
- Number of Deceased: 1294

Breakdown of Race

- African American: 830
- Caucasian: 553
- Hispanic: 36
- Native American: 6
- Asian / Pacific Islander: 14
- No Race Specified: 445

From <http://www.katrinelist.columbia.edu/stats.php>

Financial Impact

- Cost to Repair Levees: \$10 billion
- Economic Losses: \$150 billion

TROUBLE THE WATER

About the Subjects

Kimberly and her husband Scott were born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, and are featured in *Trouble the Water*. Just 24 hours before Hurricane Katrina flooded her city, Kimberly recorded a day in the life of her neighborhood on her hi-8 camcorder, and continued to tape through the storm until a lack of electrical power forced her to stop.

Before the storm, Kimberly was working on her music career in the 9th Ward and, using the MC name Black Kold Madina, had recorded an underground demo album called *Tryed and True*. She believed all her music was lost in the storm, until she discovered that one of her relatives in Memphis had the only existing copy.

Kimberly's husband, Scott Roberts, grew up streetwise in New Orleans and worked odd jobs through most of his adult life. He has overcome many of life's challenges and is now working in the construction industry, a profession he started post-Katrina when he found an employer who, according to him, "gave me a chance that I didn't have pre-Katrina."

Kimberly and Scott recently started an independent record company, Born Hustler Records.

Filmmaker Biographies

TIA LESSIN (Director/ Producer)

Tia Lessin is director and producer of *Trouble the Water*. Tia was a producer of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, winner of the Palme d'Or, and the Academy Award-winning *Bowling for Columbine*.

Her other film credits include line producer on Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* and coordinating producer on Michael Moore's *The Big One*. She began her film career working on Charles Guggenheim's Oscar-nominated *Shadows of Hate*.

Tia was awarded the Women of Worth "Vision" Award by L'Oréal Paris and Women in Film for *Trouble the Water*. In television, Tia won the Sidney Hillman award for producing and directing *Behind the Labels* and her work as producer of the series *The Awful Truth* earned her two Emmy nominations, one arrest and a lifetime ban from Disneyland.

Tia is a Sundance Institute Fellow and an Open Society Institute Katrina Media Fellow.

CARL DEAL (Director/ Producer)

Carl Deal is director and producer of *Trouble the Water*. He was the Archival Producer for *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Bowling for Columbine*, and John Pilger's *The War on Democracy*, and has contributed to many other documentaries on television and in the cinema, including the 2006 Sundance favorites, *God Grew Tired of Us* and *My Kid Could Paint That*. He previously worked as an international news producer and has reported from natural disasters and conflict zones throughout the U.S., Latin America, and in Iraq.

TROUBLE THE WATER

Carl graduated from Columbia University's School of Journalism, which awarded him the Sander Social Justice Prize. He has authored investigative reports for Greenpeace, Amnesty International and Public Citizen.

Carl is a Sundance Institute Fellow and received the 2005 FOCAL International/ Associated Press Library Award for best use of footage in a feature film. He was a juror in the US feature documentary competition at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival.

TROUBLE THE WATER

Further Readings

ON HURRICANE KATRINA

<http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/>

<http://www.teachingthelevees.org/>

<http://www.nola.com/katrina/>

<http://www.katrinaaction.org/>

ON MEDIA COVERAGE OF HURRICANE KATRINA

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/blog/2005/09/09/BL2005090900567.html>

http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2005/09/09/ktr_aft.html

http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Dynes_Rodriguez/