Teaching *The Levees*
MAP OF THE NEW ORLEANS LEVEE SYSTEM

LAST LINE OF DEFENSE: HOPING THE LEVEES HOLD

Army Corps of Engineers officials say hurricane levees in the New Orleans area will protect residents from a Category 3 hurricane meaning rapidly over the area. But computer models indicate even weaker storms could find chinks in that armor.

BARRIERS OF EARTH AND CONCRETE

Levees and floodwalls that protect against flooding from both the Mississippi River and hurricanes are built by the Army Corps of Engineers and are maintained by local levee districts. The corps and the local districts work to build and maintain floodwalls, levees, and other erosion controls with construction money from the federal government.

LEVEE HOT SPOTS AROUND NEW ORLEANS:

1. ST. CHARLES PARISH

Construction of a new drainage structure west of Lake Pontchartrain has been slowed by opponents in an effort to rework the levees to protect the East Bank. Some fear levees could become a target for hurricanes.

2. ST. JUDE LEVEE

The 30-mile levee system surrounding St. Jude Levee is failing. The corps has requested more money to complete the project.

3. NEW ORLEANS TO HATTON LEVEE

New Orleans is building levees around the city to protect against hurricanes.

4. WEST BANK

The corps is working to protect against flooding from the Mississippi River.

5. JEFFERSON-ORLEANS PARISH

The corps is building levees around the city to protect against hurricanes.

6. EASTERN NEW ORLEANS AND ST. BERNARD PARISH

The corps is building levees around the city to protect against hurricanes.

HISTORY LEVEE

1. HISTORY AVE LEVEE

A computer model indicates a storm surge could overwhelm the levee system. The model is based on hurricane models that have shown the levee system could fail.

2. LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN LEVEE

The corps is working to protect against flooding from the Mississippi River.

3. EAST BANK LEVEE

The corps is working to protect against flooding from the Mississippi River.

4. SUGAR LOAF LEVEE

The corps is working to protect against flooding from the Mississippi River.

5. EAST NEW ORLEANS LEVEE

The corps is working to protect against flooding from the Mississippi River.

6. ST. BERNARD PARISH LEVEE

The corps is working to protect against flooding from the Mississippi River.

Times-Picayune staff graphic by Emmett Mayer III; staff photos by Ellis Lucia, Alex Brandon, and Devaunshi Mahadevia
Teaching *The Levees*
A Curriculum for Democratic Dialogue and Civic Engagement

MARGARET SMITH CROCCO, Editor
This work is dedicated to the residents of the Gulf States, who survived the ravages of Hurricane Katrina by helping one another, and to those who died so tragically.

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Dear Reader,

The devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans engendered collective soul-searching and reflection by many institutions and communities across America on issues of poverty, race, class and democracy. These issues are all powerfully addressed in Spike Lee’s masterful documentary, “When the Leveses Broke.” The four-hour film presents a compelling record of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. It also documents the failure of public officials and organizations to provide victims of the storm with proper assistance.

For decades, the Rockefeller Foundation has supported individuals and institutions devoted to policies that reduce urban poverty and improve access to quality housing, schools and employment in the U.S. Since the Foundation is focused on ways to curb growing inequality and vulnerability, we welcomed the opportunity to provide some funding for Spike Lee’s film.

We are now delighted to extend our involvement by underwriting the creation of “Teaching The Levees,” a curriculum and teaching tool which is being distributed along with the film to schools, libraries and community centers throughout the country. It’s important that we continue the crucial conversation started by the disaster.

Ultimately, the New Orleans experience in the wake of Hurricane Katrina should be a prism to explore our expectations of government and our mutual obligations to each other as citizens. We hope that “Teaching The Levees” will help in that process.

With best wishes,

Judith Rodin

JR/dxd
Dear Educator,

Enclosed you will find “Teaching The Levees: A Curriculum for Democratic Dialogue and Civic Engagement.”

This package is produced in cooperation with HBO and with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. It includes a DVD of the Spike Lee documentary and a curriculum developed by faculty, students, staff, and alumni of Teachers College, Columbia University. The curriculum explores the profound issues of citizenship, race, democracy, and equality raised by the film and by the disaster caused when the levees were breached after Hurricane Katrina. The curriculum invites participants from all points of view to move beyond Katrina and New Orleans to ask: What kind of country do we want to be?

This valuable teaching tool can be used to stimulate profound and searching discussions of topics that we too often evade in everyday life. It enables participants to both draw upon and stand apart from their gut emotional responses as they develop an understanding of both the complexity of the Katrina crisis and the myriad social, economic, and governmental issues it raises. Perhaps most importantly, we believe it will prompt both young people and adults to engage with each other as they confront a chapter in American history to which, if nothing else, no one can remain indifferent.

We hope you find “Teaching The Levees” as useful and powerful to teach as we at Teachers College did to create and develop. We would greatly welcome your comments, insights, and reflections about using it, as well as those of your students.

With great admiration for your difficult but invaluable work,

Susan H. Fuhrman
President
Teachers College, Columbia University
“levee”: an embankment designed to prevent the flooding of a river

Side view of the thickness of the Industrial Canal levee wall where it broke in the Lower Ninth Ward, October 24, 2005
Introduction
Margaret Smith Crocco

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, Elie Wiesel concluded his remarks by referring to suffering people everywhere in the world:

*What all these victims need above all is to know that they are not alone; that we are not forgetting them, that when their voices are stifled we shall lend them ours, that while their freedom depends on ours, the quality of our freedom depends on theirs.*

The miseries experienced by citizens of the Gulf States as a result of Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005, were felt widely, both inside and outside the United States. The catastrophic breaching of the levees resulted in seventeen hundred people dead or missing in New Orleans. It is now understood that the extent of this loss had a great deal to do with human failure.1 The recognition that the chief victims of this disaster were our most vulnerable “neighbors” has challenged our sense of who we are as a nation.

In this curriculum project, educators from Teachers College, Columbia University, hope to encourage democratic dialogues and civic engagement about the issues raised by the events associated with Hurricane Katrina, as so artfully illuminated by Spike Lee’s film, *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*. In February 2007, *When the Levees Broke* won the George Polk Award for television documentary, one of the most prestigious awards given in journalism. We are honored to be associated with this magnificent film and its courageous effort to write the history of this tragic event.

In the spirit of the film, the authors of this curriculum are animated by a collective conviction that, as Americans and human beings, we must address the issues of race and class unveiled in the aftermath of this storm. We must consider more effective ways to make our poor, aged, and disenfranchised citizens less vulnerable to calamity while recognizing that we are all vulnerable. First and foremost, “we the people” must understand better what we can and should expect—or not—from our government, our neighbors, and ourselves in dealing with the countless modern threats to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The historical essay and curriculum units that comprise this book are designed to stimulate serious deliberation about the meaning of Hurricane Katrina and the breach of the levees. Discussions of race and class are often avoided in American schools, colleges, and communities. With this curriculum, we hope to stimulate dialogue about these tough issues by posing the questions: Who are we as a country? What kind of country do we want to be?

**Goals of the Curriculum**

The goals of the curriculum are:

- Students will understand the many dimensions of governmental, communal, and personal responsibility implicated in situations of disaster.
- Students will develop a sense of empathy with victims of Hurricane Katrina, recognizing that all Americans are vulnerable to disasters of one form or another.
- Students will develop skills related to the process of democratic dialogue about controversial issues, especially race and class, as well as the ability to articulate judgments about where they stand based on evidence.
- Students will use their new knowledge and skills to get involved in their communities to improve the common good.

In enacting these goals, we aim to be provocative, asking readers to consider launching their use of the curriculum with discussion of the following statement:

*In sum, Katrina provides an unprecedented opportunity to communicate that “racism” is not just a matter of the psychology of hatred but is instead also a matter of the racial structure of political and economic inclusion and exclusion. This is one lesson from Katrina that social science should help communicate.* (Gilman, 2005)

---

In considering racism, we acknowledge that Spike Lee has his own strong views about the subject. Readers should be aware that the commercial version of Lee’s film, available in DVD form from HBO, includes a director’s commentary providing insights into Lee’s perspective on individuals featured in the film and the ways in which his perspective shaped the film. As any director does, Spike Lee uses a variety of techniques to get his point across. Discussion leaders should explore these techniques with students and other users of this curriculum to reveal how the subject of Katrina and the levees is “framed” by Spike Lee in the film. Many Web sites, including those of NPR, HBO, BBC, and USA Today, contain interviews with Spike Lee that may be instructive in this regard.

As citizens, we all have a perspective on why events unfolded as they did, who should be held responsible for what occurred, what needs to be done to remedy the situation, and how citizens might be better prepared for times of crisis. The great contribution of Spike Lee’s film lies in raising issues that must not be avoided—in schools and colleges, libraries, churches, and community groups: the meaning of racism, the increasing social class stratification of American society, and personal, communal, and governmental responsibility for social welfare. Encouraging democratic dialogue about these matters and responding to this deliberation with civic engagement are the central purposes of this curriculum.

Democratic Dialogues

Democratic dialogues are structured discussions designed to tackle tough issues. Over the last twenty years, a growing body of literature has emerged about the meaning and utility of these dialogues, especially in emergent democracies around the world. Even established democracies demand regular refreshment in the form of deep, honest, and soul-searching conversations about their problems and their possibilities as nations (Rodin & Steinberg, 2003). We hope this curriculum provokes those who use it to have such dialogues, to take positions, to critique their positions in light of evidence and competing perspectives, and to listen respectfully to opposing viewpoints. Democratic dialogues ideally empower participants to determine their own futures by encouraging them to take action to address social, communal, and personal challenges.

A good democratic dialogue should make room for diversity of opinion. At the conclusion, participants should leave feeling that they better understand the issues, better understand the points of view of those with whom they disagree, and, perhaps most importantly, can better articulate their own viewpoint. There is no need for a group to reach consensus about what should be done, but participants should understand the importance of continuing the conversation and acknowledging the values they share with other members of the group.

The climate fostered in the settings in which such dialogues take place is crucial to improving the prospects for discussion, whether it occurs in a classroom, library, or town hall. In this spirit, we offer a few guidelines for holding democratic dialogues:

1. Clarify what the issue is and why it matters.
2. Be clear about the purpose of the discussion itself. Explain what you expect participants to gain from the process.
3. If available, point to examples of constructive conversations that lead to a course of action most people could accept.
4. If available, give examples of destructive conversations that contribute to anger, distrust, and polarization. (Check talk shows from across the political spectrum for examples of both 3 and 4.)
5. Ask one student to be an observer. He or she will not participate in the discussion, but will be responsible for summarizing it at its conclusion. This individual might also be expected to comment on the way in which the discussion proceeded—the extent to which people listened to each other, or how broad the participation was, for example.
6. Establish ground rules. Ideally these might be generated by the group itself. Examples of ground rules others have found useful include:
   a. Listen to what others are saying; be prepared to restate their point of view and its rationale, even (especially) when you do not agree with it.
b. Do not interrupt and do not allow “sidebar” conversations when a fellow participant is talking.

c. Do not monopolize the discussion. Take responsibility for making sure that you understand everyone’s point of view.

d. Do not personalize the discussion. You can disagree strongly with a person’s point of view without belittling the person. Never ridicule or attack a participant personally.

e. Take responsibility for any point of view that you express. Use “I” statements. Do not substitute “some people think” or “everyone knows” for what you think.

f. Do not be defensive when your opinion is challenged. Even if you do not change your mind, challenges will help you clarify what you think both for yourself and for others.

g. If you make a factual claim, be prepared to cite your sources of information.

h. Ask questions. Maybe someone else has information that would be helpful to you, and good questions often produce more progress than answers.

i. Admit confusion. You won’t be the only one.

j. Restate other people’s viewpoints. People are more flexible when they know they have been understood. It will also assure that your contribution to the discussion is relevant.

These guidelines will be critical to optimal use of the material contained in the curriculum. We need to warn users that this is a difficult film to watch. Its content can be gut-wrenching; some of the language may be considered offensive, and surely the scenes of dead bodies are very upsetting. Any of these aspects of the film, however, might be used as “teachable moments” by educators. The film is rated as suitable for age 14 and up, so we advise against using the film with anyone under that age.

In general, we trust that those who use this film will do so responsibly, in line with the nature of the audience or class watching it. Above all, we must stress the following point:

No one should show this film without screening the selection to be shown beforehand!

Structure of the Curriculum

Although we believe that every American should watch this film in its entirety, we recognize this may not be possible given its 4-hour length. In the front of this book we have included a Viewing Guide, with a list of all characters in the film, the opening and closing scenes for each chapter, and two timelines—one a fine-grained day-by-day and hour-by-hour review of the events associated with Katrina and the breaching of the levees, and the other focused on placing Katrina within the context of American history, 1993–2007.

Individual lessons are keyed to particular parts of the film. Given the film’s rating and subject matter, we have geared the curriculum toward upper high school, college, and adult users.

The curriculum is divided into five components aimed at these audiences:

- Media Literacy Unit, suitable for high school and college students
- Adult-Oriented Unit, suitable for community, civic, and religious groups
- College-Oriented Unit
- High School Civics and Economics Units
- High School Geography and History Units

These distinctions are by no means hard and fast. Nor do these subject areas or target audiences exhaust the possibilities for the curriculum. We can imagine countless other groups and settings in which the curriculum might be of use, from students of religious studies or environmental studies to those in social work or urban planning. Users should review all components of the curriculum before selecting the parts they will use with their groups. We acknowledge that the lessons demand a high reading level. Educators/facilitators should adjust the materials as necessary to encourage use across a wide range of reading levels.

Overall, we encourage educators/facilitators to approach these materials with a sense of “instructional flexibility,” feeling free to modify what is laid out here. It may be the case that rearranging, mixing, and/or simplifying works best for some users. For example, educators could paraphrase the primary sources to make them comprehensible to those with lower-level reading skills. Likewise, the guiding and essential questions that launch each lesson can be simplified.

The varying lesson plan formats employed for each section of the curriculum reflect our desire to tailor lessons to the conventions associated with each target audience. For example, with the high school–oriented units (civics, economics, geography, and history), we cite appropriate content-area curriculum standards. For adult learners, the programs assume a time frame of between one and two hours for discussion. We use different language (e.g., guiding vs. essential questions; educators vs. facilitators) to reflect the different settings in which the materials will be used.

Our lessons ask lots of questions since our goal is deliberation about issues. We have selected excerpts that are particularly incisive in getting to the heart of the issues presented. Teachers may find other resources that complement those presented here. Feel free to augment or substitute other perspectives alongside those we include. The goal is to provide for a variety of perspectives on all the issues raised. In some cases,
this was difficult due to an inability to get permission to use some news sources or other publications.

Most lessons conclude with a “Taking Action” component. These ideas are just a starting place. Certainly, democratic dialogues are themselves a form of civic engagement. Above all, we believe that getting involved in efforts toward the common good is more important than the particular forms such activities take.

We encourage users of the curriculum to do so in concert with our Web site: www.teachingthelevees.org, where the entire curriculum can be found (making connection to the many URLs found here considerably easier). Additional resources can also be found there, including professional development materials related to talking about race in the classroom, discussing controversial issues, preparing one’s family for a disaster, and other topics.

Acknowledgments

In thanking those who have made this project possible, first and foremost we wish to thank Spike Lee for caring so much about his fellow citizens that he would create this extraordinary testament to their courage. We also wish to thank the Rockefeller Foundation, in particular Judith Rodin, Darren Walker, and Joan Shigekawa, for their financial and intellectual support of this project. We thank HBO for making the documentary possible, in particular, Sheila Nevins, Jackie Glover, and Sandra Scott. We are grateful to Susan H. Fuhrman, the President of Teachers College, Columbia University, for her inspiration and ongoing support. We thank our partners at Teachers College Press, especially Carole Saltz, Leyli Shayegan, and Peter Sieger, and the terrific crew at the EdLab of Gottesman Libraries: Gary Natriello, Anthony Cocciolo, Hui Soo Chae, and Brian Hughes. A big debt of gratitude goes to Kathleen Morin for her exhaustive work in reviewing the curriculum and offering helpful suggestions for improvement, not all of which we were able to implement due to time and other constraints. I would also like to thank Craig Truglia, my research assistant, who helped with the Viewing Guide, timelines, and a host of other tasks.

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The AUTHORS who wrote the historical essay and created the curriculum are also an amazing group. They worked under an impossibly short timeline to produce an incredible curriculum. They are (in alphabetical order):

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Sylvia Frey, African American history expert from Tulane University and member of the UNESCO taskforce on the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., University Professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard University and Director of the W. E. B. Du Bois Research Institute.

The corpse of a man is reverently laid out on his front porch with a blanket held down by slate and an epitaph on a poster board, September 5, 2005

Barry Guillot, Destrehan, Louisiana, science teacher and author of Web-published materials on erosion of the wetlands in the Gulf Coast region.

Diana Hess, Associate Professor of Social Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and expert on teaching controversial issues and democratic dialogues.

Gloria Ladson-Billings, Professor of Education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and past president of the American Educational Research Association.

Victoria J. Marsick, Co-Director of the J. M. Huber Institute for Learning in Organizations and Professor of Adult & Organizational Learning at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Brenda Square, Director of Archives and Library at the Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

Gregory A. Thomas, Deputy Director of Planning and Response in the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and author of Freedom From Fear.

In conclusion, we hope that the “Teaching The Levees” curriculum will get wide and long-lasting use in schools, colleges, and community groups across the country. Defending “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” means caring about our neighbors as well as ourselves. If we take one lesson away from the tragedy of August 29, 2005, it is that we must educate ourselves about the risks and responsibilities we all face. We should come to understand that our democracy depends on making this country a place that cares about and defends the freedom and safety of all its citizens, including its most vulnerable.

Works Cited


Hurricane Katrina Timelines


2005

Wednesday, August 24, 2005
- Storm begins forming in the central Bahamas.
- Wal-Mart Corporation in Arkansas begins readying supplies in anticipation of the storm.

Thursday, August 25, 2005
- Storm becomes a Category 1 hurricane named Katrina.
- Katrina hits Florida, kills 18 people, and causes $600 million in property damage.
- Hurricane loses strength passing over land, but begins re-energizing when it passes over warm Gulf of Mexico waters.

Friday, August 26, 2005
- Katrina becomes a Category 2 hurricane.
- Scientific community does not know where hurricane will strike until about 5:00 p.m., when they estimate that Mississippi or Louisiana will likely be hit. Local, state, and federal governments are notified. Storm is expected to hit in three days.
- Governor Kathleen Blanco of Louisiana and Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi declare civil emergencies.
- Red Cross and Salvation Army begin relief efforts.
- At 11:00 p.m., National Hurricane Center predicts hurricane will hit Buras, Louisiana.

Saturday, August 27, 2005
- Katrina becomes a Category 3 hurricane.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) contacts Governor Blanco to begin coordinating relief efforts. Because FEMA does not possess certain equipment such as vehicles and helicopters, it relies on the cooperation of state and local authorities.
- Jefferson and other parishes south of New Orleans advise their populations to evacuate.
- Mayor Ray Nagin of New Orleans asks people to evacuate the city and designates the Superdome as a shelter of last resort. About 100,000 people do not evacuate.
- Governor Blanco gives President Bush permission to call a federal state of emergency. The president complies.
- Scientists expect Katrina to go to Category 4 or 5 by the time it hits land.

Sunday, August 28, 2005
- Katrina goes to Category 4 early in the morning, and by the evening the storm is Category 5. It is now certain that Katrina will hit Louisiana and Mississippi.
- Mayor Nagin announces a mandatory evacuation and imposes a curfew in accordance with President Bush's advice. No mandatory evacuation has ever been imposed in the United States since the Civil War.
- Max Mayfield, Director of the National Hurricane Center, warns President Bush, Michael Brown (Director of FEMA), and Michael Chertoff (Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security) that the levees may be breached by Katrina.
- People are warned of imminent danger, but many do not heed the advice to leave.
- FEMA and the National Guard bring in supplies to the Superdome, including 2.5 million liters of water and 1.3 million MREs (Meals Ready to Eat).

Monday, August 29, 2005
- Around 4:30 a.m. minor breaches of levees send water into Orleans East and Orleans Metro bowls. Flooding goes on for thirteen hours.
- Breach of the levees in St. Bernard Parish sends water flooding into that area. Flooding continues for days.
- Katrina hits New Orleans at 6:10 a.m., and soon afterward the electricity is lost. Storm surge overtops the levees on the east bank of the Mississippi River. Levees are overtopped on the west bank. Flooding occurs in Plaquemines Parish.
- By 6:30 a.m., the levees in the Funnel area are overtopped, adding to flooding.
- By 6:50 a.m., the levees on both sides of the Industrial Canal are overtopped.
- Over the next two hours, further levee breaches contribute to catastrophic flooding of New Orleans.
- 8:30 a.m.: FEMA's regional office is informed that a “twenty-foot tidal surge . . . came up and breached the levee system in the canal.”
- Even though Mayor Nagin recognizes that levees have been topped as early as 8:00 a.m., official reports of levee breaks lag behind. Reports begin pouring in at 9:00 a.m. and continue until the 17th Street Canal levee is reported to be topped at 10:30 p.m.
- 9:08 a.m.: A brief from the Transportation Security Administration notes that the Industrial Canal levee has been breached. “There is heavy street flooding through-
out Orleans, St. Bernard, and Jefferson parishes,” the brief reports. A senior watch officer at the Homeland Security Operations Center receives the brief at 11:41 a.m.

- **9:14 a.m.**: A flash flood warning from the National Weather service notes: “A levee breach occurred along the Industrial Canal . . . 3–8 feet of water is expected.”
- **9:36 a.m.**: FEMA coordinator Matthew Green e-mails FEMA's Michael Lowder, deputy director of response, saying that the Industrial Canal levee has failed.
- **10 a.m.**: Department of Homeland Security adviser Louis Dabdoub sends an e-mail to officials at Homeland Security and its main operation center. It reads: “It is getting bad. Major flooding in some parts of the city. People are calling in for rescue . . . The bad part has not hit here yet.”
- **10:12 a.m.**: Michael Heath, special assistant to FEMA Director Michael Brown, sends an e-mail to FEMA’s chief of staff and acting director that reports: “Severe flooding in the St. Bernard/Orleans parish line . . . People are trapped in attics.”
- **11 a.m.**: FEMA staff member in New Orleans informs an assistant of Michael Brown of the flooding of New Orleans.
- **11:51 a.m.**: Heath sends an e-mail to Michael Lowder, FEMA's deputy director of response, informing him that the 17th Street Canal has been breached, as reported by Marty Bahamonde, a FEMA official on the ground in New Orleans. Michael Brown responds: “I'm being told here water over not a breach.”
- **12 p.m.–5 p.m.**: Levee breaches are reported by, among others, the Louisiana State Police, the National Weather Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Louisiana Office of Homeland Security.
- **6 p.m.**: A report from the Homeland Security Operation Center says: “Preliminary reports indicate the levees in New Orleans have not been breached.”
- **6:08 p.m.**: The American Red Cross e-mails officials at the White House and Department of Homeland Security about reports of levee breaches and “extensive flooding” in the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish.
- **9 p.m.**: Appearing on CNN, Michael Brown says: “We have some, I’m not going to call them breaches, but we have some areas where the lake and the rivers are continuing to spill over.”
- **9:29 p.m.**: John Wood, chief of staff for Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, is sent an e-mail that reads in part: “the first (unconfirmed) reports they are getting from aerial surveys in New Orleans are far more serious than media reports are currently reflecting.”
- **10:30 p.m.**: A Homeland Security situation report reads: “There is a quarter-mile [breach] in the levee near the 17th Street Canal. . . . An estimated 2/3 to 75% of the city is under water. . . . A few bodies were seen floating in the water.” This report reaches the White House around midnight, according to congressional investigators.
- **11:05 p.m.**: Michael Jackson, deputy secretary of Homeland Security, is sent an e-mail summarizing reports of the extensive flooding that followed the collapse of the 17th Street Canal levee. The reports had been submitted by Marty Bahamonde, a FEMA official on the scene, beginning at 10:12 a.m. that day.
- **Roads and communication devices damaged or destroyed by Katrina, making it difficult for information and supplies to travel. Faulty intelligence hurts government response. News reports indicate erroneously that New Orleans “dodged a bullet,” unaware that the levees broke.**
- **Most first responders immobilized by Katrina.**

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**Aerial photograph of the break in the levee in the Ninth Ward, August 30, 2005**

FEMA photo/Jocelyn Augustino
Tuesday, August 30, 2005

- 6 a.m.: A Homeland Security situation report states that the Industrial Canal and 17th Street Canal levees have been breached. It says: “Much of downtown and east New Orleans is underwater, depth unknown at this time…. Widespread and significant flooding has occurred throughout the city.”
- 80% of New Orleans is under water; 200,000 homes destroyed. About 15% of New Orleans’ police abandon their posts.
- U.S. Coast Guard, FEMA, and National Guard lead rescue efforts.
- The Superdome is surrounded by water, making it impossible to re-supply.
- Army Corps of Engineers starts trying to fix levees, but efforts are largely unsuccessful.

September 2005

1 President Bush claims: “I don’t believe anybody anticipated the breach of the levees.”
2 Military convoy arrives in New Orleans.
1 Evacuation from New Orleans now mandatory.
2 President Bush makes speech at Louis Armstrong International Airport; meets with Governor Blanco and Mayor Nagin on Air Force One.
1 City denies volunteers entry, saying they can’t protect them.
2 Michael Brown confirms that the Convention Center has become a makeshift shelter.
2 President Bush sends $10.5 billion request for emergency relief aid to Congress.
1 Governor Blanco decides not to allow president to federalize relief efforts.
3 7,000 active duty troops sent to New Orleans; 10,000 National Guard to follow.
4 Helicopters drop off survivors at New Orleans International Airport.
5 Mayor Nagin criticizes Governor Blanco’s decision not to allow federalized relief effort.
5 Focus on recovering dead and sending them to a morgue outside Baton Rouge.
5 One week after storm, victims still being rescued from rooftops.
6 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers begins pumping out city.
7 10,000 people resisting orders for complete evacuation. Questionable enforcement methods lead Governor Blanco to criticize Mayor Nagin.
7 House and Senate announce plans for a joint investigation into federal response.
8 Half of New Orleans still flooded.
8 President Bush asks Congress for an additional $52 billion.
9 Katrina estimated to be the nation’s most expensive disaster.
10 President Bush waives requirement that federal contracts go to companies paying prevailing wage.
13 President Bush takes responsibility for federal failures.
13 Michael Brown resigns as Director of FEMA.
13 Katrina recovery costing government $1 billion/day.
14 Owners of St. Rita’s nursing home, which was not evacuated, are indicted.
15 Businesses are being allowed to reopen.
15 City leaders discuss ambitious redevelopment plan that includes demolishing Ninth Ward.
15 President Bush gives speech in Jackson Square, where power is temporarily restored for the duration of his speech.
16 Cost of rebuilding Gulf Coast may top $200 billion. President Bush says money will come from spending cuts.
20 Conservatives push “Opportunity Zone”—reduced taxes, reduced environmental regulations, charity tax incentives, school vouchers, and individual worker recovery accounts.
20 Frances Townsend, Homeland Security advisor, named to probe federal failure.
24 Hurricane Rita floods parts of New Orleans again.
26 Laws changed to permit no-bid contracting, which is in wide use in New Orleans.
28 New Orleans Police Superintendent Edwin Compass resigns.
30 New Orleans creates advisory on rebuilding the city.
30 City begins allowing residents to return.

October 2005

3 More than 40,000 people still living in shelters, awaiting temporary housing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>All residents allowed to return except those in the Ninth Ward.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Corps has pumped most water out of city and finished temporary repairs to the levees.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Senate approves $1 billion loan.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Gun purchases by police, civilians, and law enforcement swell.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>95% of evacuees have now been moved from shelters to other housing.</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Geologists warn that if wetlands not rebuilt, New Orleans will flood again.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Hurricane Wilma hits Florida, Category 3.</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Class action lawsuits for failure of levees filed.</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>ExxonMobil reports third quarter profits of $10 billion due to Katrina-related supply disruptions that raised the price of oil.</td>
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<td>November 2005</td>
<td>Donal Powell, Texas bank executive, appointed by President Bush to coordinate federal support for rebuilding.</td>
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<td>Some public schools reopen.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>FEMA extends housing payments for evacuees to January 7, 2006.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2005</td>
<td>Residents of Lower Ninth Ward allowed to return.</td>
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<td>Governor Blanco postpones elections for New Orleans Mayor and City Council.</td>
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<td>Tens of thousands of homeowners begin defaulting on their mortgage payments.</td>
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<td>Louisiana establishes online exit exam for high school seniors, allowing them to receive a “distance diploma.”</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>January 2006</td>
<td>Lower Ninth Ward residents win restraining order to prevent razing of homes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Commission now proposes rebuilding homes in all areas of the city.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tulane re-opens.</td>
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<td>New plan for schools released: universal pre-K, school choice, local control.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Newly released documents reveal White House did receive more dire warnings than acknowledged.</td>
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<td>February 2006</td>
<td>Governor Blanco threatens to block offshore oil leases unless Louisiana gets bigger share of taxes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>House Republicans release harsh report on failure of response at all levels of government.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>White House releases review that is less harsh.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cost of rebuilding to withstand a Category 5 storm estimated at $32 billion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Private charities running out of money to help victims.</td>
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<td>March 2006</td>
<td>Government panel releases report that exonerates Army Corps of Engineers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Independent panel blames engineers who designed the levees.</td>
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<td>April 2006</td>
<td>Thousands march to request elections be further postponed.</td>
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<td>Election planned with thousands still unable to return to vote.</td>
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<td>May 2006</td>
<td>Mayor Nagin lays out new evacuation plan with focus on those with no transportation.</td>
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<td>Some parts of Lower Ninth Ward declared safe.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ray Nagin wins run-off election for mayor.</td>
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<td>June 2006</td>
<td>Satellite imagery shows parts of New Orleans sinking faster than previously thought.</td>
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<td>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers accepts responsibility for the condition of the levees; says city remains at risk.</td>
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<td>First criminal trials since Katrina.</td>
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<td>Congressional investigation finds evidence of massive fraud in relief work—up to $1.4 billion.</td>
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<td>President Bush signs bill for additional spending of $19.4 billion for Katrina. Louisiana gets less than Mississippi.</td>
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<td>HUD decides to demolish four of ten public housing units.</td>
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<td>Convention Center opens for business.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
July 2006
11 HUD approves $4.2 billion for Louisiana rebuilding. Road Home program provides funding to residents of up to $150,000 for rebuilding.
17 Construction workers file suit for being exploited in months after Katrina.
19 Doctor and two nurses indicted for giving lethal injections to patients.
26 Mayor Nagin outlines 100-day plan for rebuilding.
28 UN criticizes U.S. for failing to protect the rights of the poor.

August 2006
2 Louisiana sues to prevent Interior Department from auctioning off oil production leases. State wants share of income.
3 Grand jury investigation of New Orleans Police Department launched.
16 Federal judge sides with insurance industry in test case exempting insurance company of responsibility because damage judged to be caused by flood, not wind.

September 2006
11 St. Bernard Parish will demolish 4,000 homes that were never reclaimed.
21 Owners of St. Rita’s nursing home in St. Bernard Parish indicted on 35 counts of negligent homicide.
26 Football returns to Superdome. Saints win over Atlanta Falcons, 23–3.
27 New Orleans energy bills now up by 33% and rising.

October 2006
3 New Orleans has become national laboratory for charter school experiments to fill void left by destruction of school system.
9 Hundreds of Gulf Coast residents suing insurance companies over claim denials.
25 Refineries benefiting from fast track to permits.

November 2006
5 Mayor Nagin’s 100-day plan showing little action.
6 Army Corps proposes wetlands protection be reduced.
23 FEMA trailer population has tripled since a year ago.
28 New Orleans Police Superintendent requests that National Guard stay on to keep order.
30 Federal judge orders FEMA to restore housing assistance and pay back rent.

December 2006
5 Corps has still not completed floodgates. Work on highest level of flood protection will leave city vulnerable until 2010.
8 Less than half of the city has returned at the end of Mayor Nagin’s “100 days.”
11 Representative William J. Jefferson re-elected despite ongoing FBI investigation.
16 Army Corps of Engineers urges closing “Mr. Go” shipping channel, long perceived as risk to New Orleans.
29 Seven New Orleans Police officers are indicted on charges of first-degree murder in connection with deaths of two men on a bridge 6 days after the hurricane.

2007
January 2007
6 Hot 8 Brass Band drummer Dinerral Shavers shot while driving with his wife and child.
9 State Farm in final stages of settling claims in Mississippi. Will not apply to Louisiana.
21 New Orleans census at half pre-Katrina level of 444,000. Demographers believe future gains will be small.
23 President Bush gives State of the Union Address and makes no mention of New Orleans.
31 Consultants present new plan that does not call for razing homes.
30 Senators criticize slow pace of New Orleans recovery at a hearing in French Quarter.

February 2007
2 Army Corps of Engineers says more than 120 levees around the country could fail.
22 First new houses built in Lower Ninth Ward.

PUTTING KATRINA IN CONTEXT: 1993–2007

1993–2001
- In 1993 President Clinton appoints James Lee Witt as Director of FEMA. In 1996 Clinton elevates FEMA to a cabinet-level agency. Witt greatly improves FEMA’s reputation. Furthermore, the U.S. Congress adds to FEMA’s powers, including disaster preparation and planning.
- In 1998 and again in 2000, President Clinton bolsters a program initiated in 1990 to restore Louisiana’s wetlands.

2001
- On January 4, 2001, President-Elect Bush declares he will appoint Joe Allbaugh, his longtime campaign manager and former gubernatorial chief of staff, as FEMA head.
- On January 20, 2001, George W. Bush is inaugurated as president.
- A FEMA study determines that a hurricane hitting New Orleans is one of the three “likeliest, most catastrophic disasters facing this country.”
- In June, Joe Allbaugh criticizes cuts to FEMA’s National Flood Insurance Program.
2002
- In December, Joe Allbaugh announces he will start a consulting firm doing work in Iraq. He starts grooming his subordinate, Michael Brown, to replace him.

2003
- Joe Allbaugh officially resigns. Michael Brown becomes new Director of FEMA.
- War in Iraq begins.
- President Bush orders the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency to stop restoring wetlands in Louisiana. Restoration experts and a sum of money over 12 times that used to restore wetlands in the Mississippi delta are allocated to restore wetlands in Iraq. Nonetheless, overall wetland conservation nationally is increased in 2004.

2004
- In June, President Bush and Congress cut Army Corps of Engineers funding for work on the levees for Lake Pontchartrain by 44%.
- Michael Brown mistakenly distributes $30 million to a city not hit by Hurricane Frances. He claims that a “computer glitch” was to blame.
- President Bush is re-elected.
- On December 26, tsunami in Indian Ocean kills 200,000 in 11 countries. Most die in India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

2005
- President Bush explains plan for privatizing Social Security in his February 2 State of the Union Address.
- On July 7, London bombings occur on buses and subway lines.
- On August 29, Hurricane Katrina hits and devastates New Orleans. Levee failure sets off flooding that submerges 80% of New Orleans, forcing the largest urban dislocation in U.S. history. Hurricane Katrina kills more than 1,300 people in five states.
- In September, gas prices reach $3.07 a gallon at the pump after Katrina damages oil refineries along the Gulf Coast.
- On September 2, billions of dollars allocated to Katrina relief.
- Hurricane Rita hits Texas-Louisiana border as a Category 3 storm on September 24. Seven people are killed directly; total deaths, including those from “indirect” causes, reach 120.
- On October 3, President Bush nominates former White House Counsel Harriet Miers to replace Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor.
- Pakistan earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 on the Richter Scale strikes northern Pakistan on October 8, killing about 73,000 people and leaving 3 million homeless.
- On October 24, Hurricane Wilma strikes Florida. The Category 5 hurricane causes 35 deaths in Florida, and a total of 63 deaths when the Bahamas, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and Mexico are included.
- On October 26, American military deaths in Iraq war reach 2,000; deaths of journalists and media staffers reach 76, more than the 68 killed in Vietnam. Americans evenly divided on whether the decision to use force in Iraq was right or wrong.
- On November 14, President Bush’s poll numbers hit a low of 37% approval rating.
- Up to 15 million Iraqis vote on December 15 to select a constitutional parliament.
- On December 31, crude oil prices top $70 per barrel.

2006
- Washington Post reports that a United Arab Emirates firm, DP World, may oversee six U.S. ports. Later, DP World says it will transfer its operations of American ports to a U.S. entity.
- President Bush presses Congress for consensus on an immigration bill.
- Hezbollah captures two Israeli soldiers, leading to a war between Israel and Lebanon that Lebanon calls the “July War” and Israel calls the “Second Lebanon War.”
- British police arrest 25 in an alleged plot to blow up as many as 10 airliners flying from the United Kingdom to the United States. The plan to use liquid explosives in carry-on luggage changes airline security procedures.
- UN-brokered cease-fire between Israel and Lebanon goes into effect. Over 1,200 people (mostly Lebanese) died; 975,000 Lebanese and 300,000 Israelis left homeless.
- Comprehensive immigration reform put off in favor of border security bill.
- John Warner Defense Authorization Act allowing the federal government to declare a state of emergency and use the military to help in domestic relief efforts and suppress public disorder is signed into law. The federal government may take control of state-based National Guard units without the consent of the governor or local authorities. This act revises a set of laws designed to limit the president’s power to deploy troops within the United States.
- In October, five children die in Amish school shootings.
- In October, North Korea claims nuclear test.
- In November, Iraq’s High Tribunal finds Saddam Hussein guilty of crimes against humanity and condemns him to hang.
- Democrats gain control of House and Senate in midterm elections.
- U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld resigns.
- In December, former president Gerald Ford dies.
- On December 29, Saddam Hussein is hanged.

2007
- On January 10, President Bush announces troop surge in Iraq, committing 20,000 additional troops—mostly in Baghdad—to quell sectarian violence.
- On January 12, a new AP-Ipsos poll shows public opposition to a troop surge has reached 71%, a 10% increase from earlier the same week.
QUESTIONS BY CHAPTER

PART ONE: Act I

Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans” (16 minutes)

1. To whom does Spike Lee dedicate this documentary?
2. What do the opening scenes make you feel about the city?
3. What is FEMA? What is it supposed to do? Who was director of FEMA at the time of Katrina?
4. What is a “blog”? What was being posted on blogs about Katrina?
5. Who was the mayor of New Orleans when Katrina struck? Who was the governor of Louisiana?
6. On what date did Hurricane Katrina make landfall?
7. When was the city told to evacuate? Who gave the order? Was it voluntary or mandatory?
8. What does Spike Lee want the viewer to think about the order to evacuate? What makes you feel this?
9. What is portrayed as the significance of different “wards” in the city?
10. What category was Hurricane Katrina at maximum? What category was it when it made landfall south of New Orleans?
11. What is the Superdome? Where is it located?
12. How prepared were New Orleans and its residents for evacuation?

Chapter 2, “God’s Will?” (7 minutes)

1. What does Phyllis LeBlanc stop to ponder in the opening scene?
2. How did different people prepare for the storm? Who were proactive and who were reactive?
3. Why did people flock to the Superdome? Where was the Convention Center? How was it used?
4. What happened to parts of the roof of the Superdome?
5. How did the scene affect you?

Chapter 3, “Explosions” (10½ minutes)

1. Did Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans directly? If not, where did it make landfall?
2. What were the “explosions” that people heard?
3. Does Spike Lee think the levees were blown up? What do you think?
4. What is the levee system of New Orleans?
5. When Hurricane Betsy hit in 1965, what was done to the levees? Why?
6. What was “Hurricane Pam”?
7. Do you think anyone is to blame for the failure of the levees to hold, and if so, who?
8. Was this disaster the result of a natural event or a human failure?
9. Why were the levees blown up in 1927?

Chapter 4, “Day One” (10 minutes)

1. How high did the water get in some areas?
2. Why would water leaving the storm drains and manholes be of such concern?
3. What is a “first responder”? Was FEMA designed to be a “first responder”?
4. What point does Phyllis LeBlanc make about calling 911?
5. How do images of the ruins of Pompeii compare to images of New Orleans?

Chapter 5, “The Cajun Navy” (13½ minutes)

1. Which agency is most responsive to the emergency? Why do you think it was effective and how did it compare to other agencies and response organizations?
2. What point does the filmmaker seem to be making about leadership?
3. What extreme weather conditions affected people after the storm?
4. What is the “Cajun Navy”? Why was it needed?
5. Name the actor who helps with the rescue effort. Does it make a difference when celebrities play this kind of role? Are they being heroic?
6. How did statements by Eddie Compass, New Orleans Chief of Police, affect media coverage of the hurricane? Did his statements have other consequences?
7. Where were Herbert Freeman and his wheelchair-bound mother when she died?
8. How did you feel about his story?

Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot” (10 minutes)

1. Why did the mother of the five children die? How did this scene affect you?
2. How do you evaluate President Bush’s statement “no one anticipated the breach of the levees”?
3. How does the lack of response reflect upon the local, state, and federal governments?
4. How did you respond to the images of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police arriving in New Orleans before the federal government?
5. What point does Harry Belafonte make about the offers of help from other countries?
6. Which foreign president is shown offering to help the people in the region hurt by Katrina? Why do you think he made the offer?
7. What did a video clip show some police doing in the days following the hurricane?
8. How did conditions in the Superdome deteriorate?
9. According to Shelton, how are the senses affected by the conditions of the Superdome?
10. How does Shelton explain people in the Superdome singing “This Little Light of Mine”?
11. What images in this act affected you the most?
12. What was said that affected you the most?
13. What issues raised in this act need more clarification or explanation?

PART ONE: Act II

Chapter 1, “Jeffersonia” (9½ minutes)
1. How did Hurricane Katrina affect Will Chittenden?
2. What happened in Jefferson Parish?
3. What happened on the Gretna Bridge? How were citizens portrayed?
4. Why might those in Jefferson Parish have felt threatened?
5. How is Emil armed? Why is he armed?
6. What can we infer about Spike Lee’s views on gun ownership?

Chapter 2, “We Shoot Looters” (9 minutes)
1. What happened to the person who shot Darnell Herrington? With what was Herrington shot?
2. What explanations are given to explain why surrounding parishes would not let people fleeing from New Orleans enter?
3. In her speech, does Governor Blanco say that looters should be shot?
4. Why is footage of helicopter rescues specific to BBC coverage?
5. Why was Police Chief Eddie Compass criticized?
6. Based on the views expressed by Douglas Brinkley and David Meeks, how do you think Spike Lee feels about Compass?

Chapter 3, “Brownie, You’re Doin’ a Heck of a Job” (12 minutes)
1. Why did it take five days to get help to many of the hurricane victims?
2. What were the legal constraints on using the army for emergencies like Katrina?
3. What do you think of Soledad O’Brien’s confrontation on the availability of “intel”?
4. How does Spike Lee view the appointment of Michael Brown?
5. How much of New Orleans was under water?
6. Why does Spike Lee feel the director of Homeland Security has greater culpability than Michael Brown?
7. Is there any significance to Condoleezza Rice’s shoe shopping at Ferragamo during the crisis?
8. What point does Judith Morgan make about not being able to evacuate?
9. What is the value of showing poor Whites suffering? Does this contrast with most media images of those left behind?

Chapter 4, “The Mayor Calls In” (10 minutes)
1. Who should have evacuated the people in New Orleans if they could not do it themselves?
2. What was the main difference between the disaster of 9/11 and the storm?
3. Why do you think it took the federal government so many days to help?
4. How long did President Bush wait before going to New Orleans?
5. Was there tension between Governor Blanco and Mayor Nagin?
6. Why was Garland Robinette moved to tears during the interview?
7. Why did Mayor Nagin say his business career was over? What is his fear regarding the CIA? Do you think his fear is valid?
8. Do you think Mayor Nagin made a strategic choice to align with the president instead of the governor? Why?
9. What point does Marc Morial (former mayor) make about the role of politics in a crisis?
10. What story does Reverend Al Sharpton tell? Why does the man in the story question why God didn’t take him?

Chapter 5, “General Honoré” (12 minutes)
1. Who sent General Honoré to New Orleans? Where was he from?
2. In what way is Honoré shown as an all-American hero?
3. How is the Convention Center evacuation portrayed?
4. What images come to mind as the convoy is shown arriving in town?
5. How does Gralen Banks describe the evacuation process?
6. What are the images of evacuation? What associations do you have to those images?
7. Herbert Freeman describes being forced to leave his dead mother behind in order to get on the bus. How does his dilemma make you feel?
8. What happened at the airport?
9. Do you think the documentary presents a balanced account of the breaching of the levees? Does Spike Lee have a point of view?
10. What does Phyllis LeBlanc expect of uniformed people?

Chapter 6, “An Ancient Memory” (9 minutes)
1. How does the filmmaker want you to feel about the one-way ticket evacuation?
2. How were the evacuees treated when they were shipped out on buses and planes?
3. Where did Judith Morgan end up? How long did it take her to get there?
4. What is the point of the next-to-last video montage—the one containing images of children?
5. Why does Spike Lee choose to end with CNN anchor Soledad O’Brien introducing the abandonment of dead bodies?
6. What aspect of this act had the most effect on you?
7. What is the message of Shelton Shakespear Alexander’s poem?
8. What other questions should be asked about this act? What other information would you like to have? What other issues raised in this Act need more clarification or explanation for you?

PART TWO: Act III
Chapter 1, “By Way of Katrina” (10 minutes)
1. The scene opens with Mother Audrey Mason giving thanks for deliverance from the water. The prayer is juxtaposed with a video montage of devastation. What are you meant to feel? What do you feel from the image of Phyllis LeBlanc on the stoop of her FEMA trailer? How does she look? Is there irony in the prayer of thanks? What images follow?
2. There is a shot of a statue of Jesus crucified outside St. Bernard Parish. What does this image suggest?
3. The opening video montage is contrasted with the “Hot 8 New Orleans Jazz Band” in New York City on Halloween. What sentiment is conveyed by “When the Saints Go Marching In”?
4. What city in Texas took in the largest number of evacuees?
5. How many people were evacuated from New Orleans?
6. Do other cities blame New Orleans’ evacuees for increases in crime?
7. How does the closing video montage of families looking for each other affect you?

Chapter 2, “Polarized” (10½ minutes)
1. What celebrity says “George Bush doesn’t care about Black people”?
2. How does Michael Eric Dyson portray the responses of Mike Myers and Rev. Sharpton to West’s act?
3. What other Gulf state had very bad damage from Katrina?
4. What does Dr. Ben Marble say to Vice President Cheney? Whom does he say he is quoting and why?
5. How long did it take President Bush to venture into the center of New Orleans?
6. Why is use of the word “refugee” to describe the evacuees from New Orleans so controversial?
7. What is Joseph Bruno’s disappointment about the photo-op for President Bush?

Chapter 3, “American Citizens” (14 minutes)
1. Why won’t Phyllis LeBlanc, Wendell Pierce, Joseph Melancon, or Glenn Hall leave New Orleans?
2. Why are citizens outraged by the way the ABC news team described the evacuees?
3. What did Barbara Bush, the president’s mother, say about the people in the Astrodome?
4. What does Rev. Sharpton say is the problem with the president? Whom does he hold responsible?
5. How did Kathy end up in Utah? How does she portray it? What do you think Spike Lee’s view is? What is your view of this?
6. Phyllis LeBlanc describes the dispersal of her own family. Why are some members hesitant to come back?
7. Why doesn’t Mother Mason want to go back?
8. Why were people given only one-way tickets by FEMA?
9. How was the crime rate affected by the storm/disaster? What did Mayor Nagin do to combat crime?
10. What is revealed about the school system in New Orleans?
11. What does one person say New Orleans would be without Black people?
12. Where does Karen Carter place blame for the cycle of crime in New Orleans?
13. What does David Meeks say we have to do for New Orleans?
**Chapter 4, “The Roots Run Deep” (7½ minutes)**

1. In New Orleans, what term is used to describe Blacks who intermarried with the French?
2. What is your feeling about the French permitting slaves to participate in cultural events?
3. What ceremony in New Orleans is celebrated very differently than in other places?
4. To what city does Wynton Marsalis liken New Orleans?
5. Wynton Marsalis describes the jazz funeral as a combination of a dirge (mourning) and a happy parade (celebration). In what ways does the jazz funeral combine African and Christian tradition?

**Chapter 5, “Coming Back” (7 minutes)**

1. What does Harris mean by describing her old neighborhood as “a friend who has been disfigured”?
2. Terence Blanchard is shown taking his mother back to her house. How does she respond? What does his mom mean when she says “the china closet doesn’t have any business being over there”?
3. Did people coming back anticipate the level of devastation they found?
4. What happened to nature in the city?
5. Damon Hewitt talks about not being able to return home. What is the irony of having a brick-fronted house?
6. What does Cheryl say she came back to?

**Chapter 6, “Despair, Depression, Anxiety” (10 minutes)**

1. To what does Wynton Marsalis liken the unpredictable feelings people have?
2. What are the health and psychological effects Drs. Corey and Cataldie describe?
3. How are Will Chittenden and Phyllis LeBlanc trying to cope? What is Phyllis contemplating? What stops her?
4. What other questions should be asked about this act of the film? What other information would you like to have? What other issues raised in this act need more clarification or explanation for you?

**PART TWO: Act IV**

**Chapter 1, “Mardi Gras 2006” (7½ minutes)**

1. What is the significance of holding a jazz funeral for Katrina?
2. What impression do you get from the image of the church with the American flag on it?
3. Do you think coming back to celebrate Mardi Gras 2006 was the right choice? Do you think Spike Lee thinks so?
4. What do the T-shirts signify about the people of New Orleans? What are their sentiments about FEMA? Spike Lee bought those T-shirts and asked the people in the film to wear them. Does that make you feel differently about the scene?
5. How did people feel when Mardi Gras ended? How is this significant?

**Chapter 2, “The Markings” (8½ minutes)**

1. How long did it take the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to remove debris?
2. What does the content of the graffiti signify? Do you think graffiti is a form of self-expression or of vandalism?
3. What do Kenneth Kirsch and Ruel Douvillier explain about the FEMA markings? What is the 6:00 position?
4. According to Calvin, why weren’t the houses actually searched?
5. What point does Wendell Pierce make about the deaths? Did people have to die?
6. How does Paris Ervin describe finding his mom? What is the impact of going into his house? How long did it take him to get his mom’s body back?
7. According to Dr. Cataldie, how did people die, aside from drowning?

**Chapter 3, “Engineers, Oil & Money” (13½ minutes)**

1. Who built the levees in New Orleans? What does Cynthia Hedge-Morrell say was wrong with the levees?
2. Why weren’t the levees built to withstand a Category 3 hurricane? What does Robert Bea say caused the levees to break?
3. To what level did Colonel Lewis Setliff expect the levees to be restored by June 1st?
4. Did you believe Setliff’s claim that they didn’t know why the levees failed?
5. What is the irony of restoring the levees to “pre-Katrina safety”?
6. What does Brian Hall say is the result of the report on the Army Corps of Engineers?
7. Terence Blanchard and Joseph Bruno think someone should go to jail. Who? Do you agree?
8. What is the ratio for a proper levee (width to height)?
9. Why can’t you sue the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers? Should you be able to?
10. What is the name of the lake that borders New Orleans? What river runs through the city?
11. What does Ivor van Heerden mean when he says the wetlands are being “starved”? Why is this important to understand?
12. What is global warming? How will this impact other coastal cities?
13. What revenue does Garland Robinette think should be used to rebuild the wetlands?
Chapter 4, “Where Is My Government?” (9½ minutes)

1. What does the town hall meeting reveal about life after the disaster?
2. What did people need so badly that FEMA did not supply quickly enough?
3. Why is Phyllis LeBlanc so frustrated?
4. What message is given to those anticipating help from the government? Why did Mississippi get more trailers?
5. What is the problem Judith Morgan is having in proving her property is hers? How long has she been waiting?
6. Freddy Hicks and Michael Knight describe the quality of the trailers. What is their perspective?
7. How does Cheryl Livaudis say she will get her FEMA trailer? Why is she so cynical?
8. What is problematic in setting up the trailers? What does the tour of the trailer show about their quality?
9. What does Phyllis LeBlanc say about the effects of rain and thunder?
10. From the portrayal of local, state, and federal government responses, what is your impression of government’s ability to respond to disasters?
11. What does Fred Johnson say? What triggers it? Why does the video crew laugh?

Chapter 5, “A Signature Moment” (13½ minutes)

1. Why does Wynton Marsalis say Katrina events represent a “signature moment” in American history?
2. How have insurance companies avoided paying for much of the housing losses?
3. What does Louella Givens explain about her insurance dilemma?
5. Why do some people have to walk away from their homes?
6. How would you describe the attitude of the three generations of Harris women?
7. According to Wendell Pierce, who is trying to get control of the land in the Ninth Ward?
8. What point do Freddy Hicks and Michael Knight make about keeping their houses?

Chapter 6, “I Am Mending” (9½ minutes)

1. Who is rebuilding the levees? Why does Colonel Setliff say they are building the levees stronger?
2. Which country has an exemplary levee system? How does that country’s view of risk management contrast with the view in the United States?
3. What does Bruno say is the reason they are not rebuilding the levees adequately?
4. What contrast does Calvin Mackie say about the lack of preparation since Hurricane Betsy and the June 1st deadline?
5. Why haven’t the pumps begun working again?
6. Would people interviewed in the documentary evacuate in the face of another storm event?
7. What does Fred Johnson caution others to do? Does Phyllis LeBlanc agree?
8. When the civil engineer is asked by Spike Lee if it is safe to move back, what does he say?
9. What feeling are you left with as Setliff fades and there is a transition to the eroding flood walls?
10. What is the message of Phyllis LeBlanc’s poem?
11. The final scene is of the celebratory dimension of the New Orleans funeral (vs. the dirge), and the sunset on Lake Pontchartrain. What sentiment do you think the director wishes to convey? Is there hope?
12. What other questions should be asked about this act of the film? What other information would you like to have? What other issues raised in this act need more clarification or explanation for you?

Chapter 7, “My Name Is…” (6½ minutes)

Framing of characters

Chapter 8 (2½ minutes)

Credits

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Student volunteers from The Beacon School, a public high school in New York City, help gut the cafeteria of Alfred Lawless Senior High School in the Lower Ninth Ward, February 2007. Other rooms in the school (right) remain untouched seventeen months after the storm. Maureen Goldrick
OPENING AND CLOSING SCENES

This section is included to help orient users of this curriculum to the scenes included in each act and chapter of the documentary film. We strongly recommend that anyone using the film preview the segments to be used before showing them to audiences.

PART ONE: Act I

Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans” (16 minutes)

Opening: Old New Orleans (historical clips, racial conflicts)
- December 14, 2005, Congressional hearing; CNN debate on FEMA
- People get news of coming hurricane; many people leave
- Newscasters report New Orleans’ vulnerability to hurricanes; call for mandatory evacuation; traffic jams on highway leaving city
- Many people are unafraid and stay

Closing: Shelton Shakespear Alexander talks about how people knew the storm was coming

Chapter 2, “God’s Will?” (7 minutes)

Opening: “Tracking Hurricane Katrina”
- Weather events and loud winds
- Leak in Superdome

Closing: Woman says she wanted winds to “stabilize”

Chapter 3, “Explosions” (10½ minutes)

Opening: Man walking in water past mailbox
- People question whether water is rising over levee
- Some people hear “explosion”
- Others think it was sound of snapping levees
- Hurricane Betsy (1965); belief (urban legend?) that levees protecting Ninth Ward were blown up to save more expensive neighborhoods
- 1927 flooding in New Orleans; levees dynamited; poor Whites forced out
- Modern levees never fully completed due to money shortage
- Levees engineered badly (not according to Corps specs)

Closing: Two women saying they hope the federal government can sleep at night

Chapter 4, “Day One” (10 minutes)

Opening: “Day 1: One Day after the Storm” scrolling
- Manholes start overflowing and flooding streets
- Pumping stations and levees shown
- People calling for help, to no avail

Closing: Elderly man talks about possibility of 10,000 dead

Chapter 5, “The Cajun Navy” (13½ minutes)

Opening: Dale Girard
- People struggle to navigate city
- Accusations that Whites were rescued but not Blacks
- Praise for U.S. Coast Guard violation of its own rules and procedures in order to save people
- People take it upon themselves to help others

Closing: Elderly woman in wheelchair

Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot” (10 minutes)

Opening: Flooded house on September 5, 2005
- “People treated like animals”
- Bashing Bush for not doing enough
- Two kinds of looters—most taking necessities

Closing: People march out of Superdome singing

PART ONE: Act II

Chapter 1, “Jeffersonia” (9½ minutes)

Opening: People waiting for military response; forming into groups on bridges and at the Superdome
- People cross Mississippi River to find buses
- Armed police from Gretna prevent crossing
- Complaints about lack of freedom of movement and claims it is a racial issue
- People bring their own weapons for defense
- Looting and arson

Closing: Man wearing New Orleans Saints hat talks about people with weapons

Chapter 2, “We Shoot Looters” (9 minutes)

Opening: “Welcome to Old Algiers” sign
- Shooting of looters begins
- Soldiers and police sent in to restore order
- Exaggerated reports of rape and murder
- Complaints about lack of federal response and Bush’s callousness
- Claims FEMA and Bush knew in advance how bad the storm would be
- Harry Belafonte and Al Sharpton claim that Bush was too concerned with Iraq and other issues to deal with New Orleans

Closing: Man talks about Lyndon B. Johnson’s response during Hurricane Betsy

Chapter 3, “Brownie, You’re Doin’ a Heck of a Job” (12 minutes)

Opening: Man talks about America being “richest country in the world”
- Complaints about federal government still not being in New Orleans
- Newscaster complains that aid is not fast enough and that troops were not sent in soon enough
- Complaints about Michael Brown for ineptness
- Discussion of federal government’s advance knowledge of dangers of the hurricane

Closing: Men carrying elderly woman on a stretcher

Chapter 4, “The Mayor Calls In” (10 minutes)

Opening: “What you need right now is to get control of the situation.”
- Mayor Nagin gives interview; gets defensive about looting and angry about lack of help
- Mayor Nagin claims President Bush was too concerned with states’ rights and did not react quickly because of this
- President Bush goes to see hurricane victims
- Sharpton criticizes Bush for not using military and National Guard sooner (question of “Posse Comitatus”)
Closing: Woman says, “This is the way the Iraqis feel some of the time.”

Chapter 5, “General Honoré” (12 minutes)
Opening: General Honoré, “Day 5” scrolls past screen
- Honoré tells soldiers to stand down—praise
- Army/National Guard evacuates Superdome; evacuates city
- Evacuation at airport; less crime than expected
- Guns relinquished at airport
Closing: Woman asks for people, no matter their color, to treat people from New Orleans with empathy

Chapter 6, “An Ancient Memory” (9 minutes)
Opening: People talking about San Antonio
- People taken to diverse places like Texas, Oklahoma, Utah, Colorado
- People transferred several times
- People treated like “slaves in a ship”—families split up
- CNN calls New Orleans a ghost town
- Scenes of dead, bloated bodies
Closing: View of bridge; river; destroyed house

PART TWO: Act III
Chapter 1, “By Way of Katrina” (10 minutes)
Opening: Woman praying
- Montage of disheartened-looking people
- Men have to quit native New Orleans band
- Residents in other states claim New Orleans evacuees responsible for crime
- Families divided by evacuation
Closing: Radio host saying he thought such a hurricane and displacement of people could never happen

Chapter 2, “Polarized” (10½ minutes)
Opening: September 8, 2005, Astrodome
- People complaining about government
- Kanye West says “Bush does not care about Black people.”
- Scenes of destruction in Mississippi
- Doctor tells Cheney to “go F himself”
- Complaints about media coverage incorrect
- Charges FEMA did not respond soon enough
- FEMA stops paying for hotel rooms
Closing: Woman says she’s not leaving New Orleans; born there and will die there

Chapter 3, “American Citizens” (14 minutes)
Opening: Wendell Pierce reporting that many people in New Orleans decided to stay
- Many do not want to leave New Orleans
- Complaints about being called “refugees”
- People mad at Barbara Bush’s remark
- Residents who have left New Orleans report schools, hospitals, and opportunities better elsewhere
- Depictions of New Orleans’ extreme poverty, crime, and poor schooling
Closing: David Meeks indicates people from New Orleans must be given opportunities to return

Chapter 4, “The Roots Run Deep” (7½ minutes)
Opening: Man speaking—“the roots ran deep here”
- Sadness about loss of New Orleans culture
- History of New Orleans Black community
- Congo square and birth of jazz
- Funeral images
Closing: Explanations of New Orleans funeral celebrations—the afterlife promises to be full of riches after life of suffering

Chapter 5, “Coming Back” (7 minutes)
Opening: Crosses; horn playing; man walking and playing amidst scenes of devastation
- City looks devastated and destroyed, similar to aftermath of a bombing
- City is not the same, neighborhoods have been destroyed
Closing: Woman complains “I came back to nothing, absolutely nothing. No help, no home. Nothing.”

Chapter 6, “Despair, Depression, Anxiety” (10 minutes)
Opening: Woman, saying, “I’m 59 years old, my husband is 67 years old.”
- People talk about how awful it feels, widespread depression
- People need drugs, sleeping aids, anti-anxiety medications and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder
- Katrina causing premature deaths—government is blamed
- Funeral scene for young girl drowned while visiting her dad
Closing: Mother crying at funeral, young child running after her

PART TWO: Act IV
Chapter 1, “Mardi Gras 2006” (7½ minutes)
Opening: “ACT IV” displayed—horns playing
- Residents report everything they knew destroyed (homes, churches, hang-out spots, etc.)
- Mardi Gras after Katrina; portrayed as part of healing
Closing: Man says he is returning to nothing but garbage

Chapter 2, “The Markings” (8½ minutes)
Opening: Big red truck driving past—sign saying “Katrina Dump Site”
- Army Corps of Engineers takes a long time to clear tons of garbage and debris
- FEMA marks homes with symbols signifying hazards and dead bodies
- Some homes are not searched and have a marking, but bodies are inside
Closing: Young man whose mother died shows a picture of himself with his mother

Chapter 3, “Engineers, Oil & Money” (13½ minutes)
Opening: Helicopter sound; flying over flooded area
- Discussion of broken levees and their deficiencies
- 117 miles of damaged levees
- Levees under-built to save money
- Descriptions of global warming; damage to wetlands and coastal cities
- Oil money goes to federal government, not Louisiana

Closing: Governor saying Louisiana residents will be in danger for a long time

Chapter 4, “Where Is My Government?” (9½ minutes)
Opening: Woman saying “I want to go home”
- People complain government not giving help—more resources to Iraq than Louisiana and Mississippi
- Destroyed homes
- Woman speaking of pending FEMA application asks “Where is my government?”
- Not enough FEMA trailers; lack of electricity; flimsy construction

Closing: Man being interviewed gets upset complaining about government—asks to change subject and curses

Chapter 5, “A Signature Moment” (13½ minutes)
Opening: Wynton Marsalis says this is a signature moment in American history
- Insurance companies refuse to pay claims for houses with “water damage”
- Wendell Pierce discussing how father’s house was destroyed—father saved up all his World War II/GI Bill money for house
- “Master plan” to bulldoze all of Ninth Ward and rebuild with gentrified housing

Closing: Radio host says the whole city will become small, White, and gentrified

Chapter 6, “I Am Mending” (9½ minutes)
Opening: Mayor says the city will be rebuilt
- Army Corps of Engineers rebuilding levees
- Complaints that the new levees will be insufficient
- Phyllis LeBlanc reads poem

Closing: “Directed by Spike Lee”

Chapter 7, “My Name Is . . .” (6½ minutes)
Opening: Two people behind a picture frame they are holding
- Each person in the documentary presents themselves behind a picture frame and describes who they are

Closing: Roy Williams, Director of New Orleans National Airport

Chapter 8 (2½ minutes)
Opening: “Producers . . .”
Closing: Credits

PEOPLE APPEARING IN THE DOCUMENTARY

Shelton Shakespear Alexander, Resident of Violet/St. Bernard Parish and a poet
Lee Arnold, Resident of Treme and Hot 8 Brass Band manager
Darlene and Jay Asevedo, Residents of New Orleans
Gralen B. Banks, Resident of Uptown, director of security at a hotel, and a cultural activist
John Barry, Author of A Rising Tide, about 1927 Mississippi flood and a resident of Uptown

Robert Bea, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of California—Berkeley
Harry Belafonte, Famous actor and political activist
Terence Blanchard, Composer and musician who resides in the Garden District
Wilhelmina Blanchard, Terence Blanchard’s mother
Kathleen Babineau Blanco, Governor of Louisiana, who had not been endorsed by Nagin
Douglas Brinkley, Former Professor of History at Tulane University and author of The Great Deluge, among other books
Michael Brown, Appointed as Director of the Federal Emergency and Management Agency (FEMA). With no prior emergency management experience, he blames Governor Kathleen Blanco and Mayor Ray Nagin for the poor handling of the event
Joseph Bruno, Lawyer who resides in Carrollton section of New Orleans
Josephine Butler, Grandmother of Tanya Harris; it was her home that floated across the street in the lower Ninth Ward
Karen Carter, State representative and resident of Downtown area of New Orleans
Dr. Louis Cataldie, Louisiana state medical examiner
Will Chittenden, Resident of Jefferson Parish and a chef
Eddie Compass, Former chief of New Orleans Police Department
Harry “Swamp Thing” Cook, Hot 8 Brass Band member and resident of Uptown district
Sarah Dean, Resident of Upper Ninth Ward who, with Petri Laurimaa, was stopped from entering the city after flood
Alice Douglas, Terence Blanchard’s sister
Ruel Douvillier, Member of New Orleans Fire Department’s Urban Search and Rescue Team
Emil Dumesnil, Resident of Lower Ninth Ward who decided to leave before storm
Anthony Dunn, Resident of Lower Ninth Ward who had his home destroyed
Michael Eric Dyson, Professor, commentator, and author of Come Hell or High Water
Dr. Felton Earls, Social Medicine Professor at Harvard University
Paris Ervin, College student who resides in Lakeview, and found his mother dead in his home
Sylvester Frances, Resident of Lower Ninth Ward and curator of the Backstreet Cultural Museum
Herbert Freeman, Jr., Resident of Central City, he did not evacuate in the face of Katrina because family had weathered past hurricanes
Dale Girard, Resident of Gentilly who helped evacuate the elderly
Louella P. Givens, Lawyer and resident of Lakeshore area of New Orleans
Vanita Gupta, NACCP lawyer
Glenn Hall III, Resident of Gentilly and musician
Chirrie Harris, Tanya Harris’ mother, also resident of Lower Ninth Ward
Tanya Harris, Vocal member of Harris family, resident of Lower Ninth Ward, and community activist
Donald Harrison, Resident of Broadmoor section of New Orleans and jazz saxophonist
Dr. Corey Hebert, Resident of Uptown, Assistant Professor at Tulane Health Sciences Center
Darnell Herrington, Resident of Algiers
Damon Hewitt, New Orleans native and lawyer for NAACP
Freddy Hicks, Resident of Lower Ninth Ward and friend of Michael Knight
Justin Hite, Volunteer in the Lower Ninth Ward, working with Common Ground Collective
Lt. General Russel Honoré, Three-star general in the U.S. Army, nicknamed “the Ratin’ Cajun”
Fred Johnson, Resident of Treme and political activist for Black Men of Labor
Shawn Kael, Resident of St. Bernard Parish
Michael Katz, History Professor from University of Pennsylvania
Kenneth Kirsch, Captain in New Orleans Fire Department’s Search and Rescue Team
Michael Knight, Resident of the Lower Ninth Ward
Mitch Landrieu, Lt. Governor of Louisiana
Petri Laurimaa, Resident of Upper Ninth Ward who, with Sarah Dean, was stopped from entering the city after flood
Phyllis Montana LeBlanc, Resident of New Orleans East; lost her home and presently lives in a FEMA trailer
Trymaine Lee, Reporter for *Times-Picayune* and resident of Jefferson Parish
Paul Leonard, Police lieutenant who resides in Pascagoula, Mississippi
Cheryl Livaudais, Resident of Yscloskey/St. Bernard Parish
Brendan Loy, Blogger and second-year law student at Notre Dame University; days before the storm he predicted the severity of the storm
Calvin Mackie, Resident of the Algiers neighborhood in New Orleans; an Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering, he well understood the dangers of the storm
Dr. Ben Marble, Emergency physician at Biloxi Regional Medical Center
Wynton Marsalis, Musician, composer, and New Orleans native
Kevin A. Martin, Pump operator and resident of New Orleans East
Hassan Mashriqui, Professor at Louisiana State University’s Hurricane Center
Audrey Mason, Resident of Gentilly; she believes a bomb blew the levees
Betty and Charles McHale, Well-to-do residents of Park Island
David Meeks, City Editor for *Times-Picayune* who resides at Old Lakeview
Joseph Melanson, Resident of the Third Ward of New Orleans
Gina Montana, Resident of mid-city area of New Orleans
Henry Morgan, Resident of Yscloskey/St. Bernard Parish
Judith Morgan, Resident of Yscloskey/St. Bernard Parish
Marc Morial, Former mayor of New Orleans, now president of National Urban League
Arthur Morrell, Resident of Gentilly, Louisiana State Representative
Cynthia Hedge-Morrell, Arthur Morrell’s wife and member of New Orleans’ City Council
Jocelyn Moses, Resident of Lower Ninth Ward who had her home destroyed
Ray Nagin, Mayor of New Orleans
Betty Nguyen, CNN newscaster who questions Michael Brown in the movie
Linda Novak, Resident of Ninth Ward who disregarded warnings to leave
Soledad O’Brien, CNN anchor
Sean Penn, Famous actor who helped with evacuation efforts
Benny Pete, Resident of Lower Ninth Ward and Hot 8 Brass Band leader
Wendell Pierce, Resident of Pontchartrain Park; known as Detective Bunk Moreland from the HBO drama “The Wire”
Kimberly Polk, New Orleans evacuee who moved to Fort Worth, Texas
James Pullings, Jr., Pastor at Leviticus Church in Queens, New York
Garland Robinette, Radio host in New Orleans, resident of Uptown, former news anchor and Vietnam veteran
Robert Rocque, Resident of Lower Ninth Ward, evacuated his whole family in time
Henry “Jr.” Rodriguez, Resident of Verret and President of St. Bernard Parish
Daina Saulny, Resident of Jefferson Parish
Michael Scott Schlacter, Meteorologist and founder of Weather 2000
Jeffrey David Schultz, Chief climatologist for Weather 2000
Jay Scully, Ben Marble’s friend and resident of Gulfport
Michael Seelig, Resident of the Uptown section of New Orleans
Colonel Lewis Setliff, Commander for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Reverend Al Sharpton, Minister and political activist from New York
Dinerral “Dick” Shavers, Member of Hot 8 Brass Band and resident of Lower Ninth Ward
Brian Thevenot, Resident of Uptown and a reporter for the *Times-Picayune*
Dr. Ivor Van Heerden, Director of Hurricane Public Research at Louisiana State University’s Hurricane Center
Charlie Varley, Resident of Uptown and photojournalist
Pastor William Walker Jr., Resident of Kenner and Pastor of Noah’s Ark Church
Rhonda Washington, Nurse at University Hospital who helped evacuate patients
Kanye West, Rap musician and producer
Roy Williams, Director of Louis Armstrong International Airport
I thought I lived in America until shortly after Katrina.
—Karen Carter, Louisiana State Representative (D–New Orleans)

When the storm came in—that blew away our citizenship too? What? We weren’t American citizens anymore. . . . I thought that [refugee] was for folks that didn’t have a country—that didn’t have anywhere.
—Gralen Banks, Head of security at the New Orleans Hyatt

There is no city like New Orleans. With French, Spanish, African, and Caribbean influences dating back to the colonial period, New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz and Mardi Gras. Historian Emily Clark writes, “Twenty-first-century America regards New Orleans as something of an anomaly, an exotic cultural outpost that lies outside the mainstream of American experience and identity” (Clark, 2007).

New Orleans is a dynamic and diverse city that reflects the multicultural population of the United States. As the words of Karen Carter and Gralen Banks remind us, many New Orleans residents felt left out of American society in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans has contributed to the U.S. economy through tourism, entertainment, and offshore oil drilling. After Katrina, some residents of the city wondered if they were still part of the United States.

This essay is an overview of the history of New Orleans, variously nicknamed “the City that Care Forgot,” for the seemingly easygoing nature of its residents, “the Big Easy,” for its relaxed pace of life, and “the Crescent City,” for the course of the Mississippi River around New Orleans. We focus on its origins, religious traditions, and diversity. But New Orleans is a richly complex city. Use this essay as a starting point to explore a fuller view of New Orleans.

Colonial Louisiana

In April of 1682, among the mosquitoes, water moccasins, and other creatures, French nobleman René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, thrust a wooden fleur-de-lis into an island of fertile soil. Framed by the great Mississippi River, Lake Pontchartrain, and the Gulf of Mexico, he claimed the land for God, France, and the Catholic Church. Realizing this site offered riches for colonization, Cavelier named the land for his King Louis, calling it “Louisiane”—land of Louis. In 1718 Jean-Baptiste le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, established the city of New Orleans (Ekberg, 2000). The city was one hundred miles from the mouth of the Mississippi River on a crescent-shaped piece of land that sat on a band of natural levees rising eight to fifteen feet above sea level. It was an oasis in a wilderness of swamp and marshland. New Orleans’ location, in an area seemingly inhospitable to settlement, was intentional. The Mississippi River had great economic potential and New Orleans would become a vital center for trade.

Louisiana also had military value for France. It formed a barrier against British claims to the east and Spanish territories to the west and kept France’s continental claims viable (Eccles, 1990). New Orleans’ climate was not ideal for the profitable crops that fueled the colonial Atlantic economy—tobacco, indigo, and sugar. Its agricultural products could not compete with goods from more fertile colonies. However, the city’s economy boomed as trade continued along the Mississippi.

Slavery

For more than a decade, France supported the colony’s attempts to establish a staple-crop plantation economy by supplying slave labor. Beginning in the 1710s, French slavers brought African people to Louisiana to be sold. Between 1719 and 1721, 1,628 enslaved Africans destined for sale arrived in Louisiana on French ships (Hall, 1992). By the 1730s, however, the slave ships stopped calling at New Orleans. Instead, they took their trade to the successful sugar islands of Guadalupe, Martinique, and Saint-Domingue (now known as Haiti).

Slave ships did not call regularly in Louisiana again until the 1770s, after the Spanish took control of the colony. By the late 18th century, slavery played a significant role in the economic fortunes of New Orleans and Louisiana. The collapse of the Haitian sugar industry, following the revolution there in 1793, shifted sugar production to Cuba and Louisiana. Sugar contributed to the rapid growth of, and dependence upon, slavery in Louisiana.

In 1808, federal legislation banned the importation of slaves to the United States. This ban actually strengthened slavery by creating a sense of shortage. By 1850, “New Orleans was the largest slave-trading center of the deep South. A single block near the center of town held seven depots, and in one of the squares eleven dealers displayed their wares” (Meltzer, 1993).

Highly profitable and vital to the continued dominance of the White planter class, the slave industry pushed against the ban on international trade. On New Orleans’ many waterways and bayous, the illegal smuggling of slaves flourished.

Multicultural Character

New Orleans’ colonial history explains its diverse population. Founded by France, the city was ceded to the Spanish in 1762, secretly ceded back to France in 1800, and finally acquired by
Thomas Jefferson in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Both enslaved people born in Africa and their descendants played an important role in shaping colonial New Orleans.

The pause in the slave trade to Louisiana during the 1700s produced a Creole population composed of people of African descent. In the 18th century, “Creole” referred to people born in the Americas of mixed European (often French or Spanish) and African descent (Clark, 2007). In addition to the Creole, an influx of immigrants occurred, especially former slaves and landowners who had escaped the revolution in Saint-Domingue (McKinney, 2006). Over 10,000 people from the former French colony arrived in the city in 1809, doubling the population and significantly increasing French influence in the city.

The racial demographics of New Orleans began to take shape as ethnic groups created their own communities. According to the city’s leading historical geographer, Richard Campanella (2006), New Orleans remained within the original grid of the French Quarter for 70 years. The first suburb—Faubourg Saint Marie—was the hub of Anglo-American settlement. Today the area is occupied by the central business district.

The Garden District developed much later in the 19th century. The French and Spanish settled in the area now known as the French Quarter, and American settlers traveling down the Mississippi River established the “American Quarters,” which later became the Garden District. Canal Street represented a dividing line between two cultures (McKinney, 2006).

Indigenous people inhabited New Orleans long before it was claimed by the French. Each group had different traditions, language, and spiritual philosophies. The “Louisiane” Indians had traded with other Indian nations and western explorers throughout North America for years. Escaped slaves found sanctuary with the help of local Indians, with whom they formed alliances and intermarried.

By the antebellum period, New Orleans was considered the largest city in the South. The majority of New Orleans’ White population was foreign-born. French-speaking peoples came to New Orleans through the West Indies. Germans made up one-tenth of the population, and New Orleans’ Jewish community was the largest in the South, with resettled Jews hailing from Germany, Poland, Spain, and Portugal (Rosen, 2000). In addition, 24,000 Irish immigrants contributed to the cultural mix of the Crescent City. Until late in the 19th century New Orleans ranked second to New York as an immigrant port.

At the turn of the 19th century New Orleans was arguably the most exotic and diverse city in the United States. Writing of this time period, Clark describes New Orleans as “the place that can best show the rest of America what it was like when the nation was young and boundaries that became firmly set—geographic, cultural, ethnic, and occasionally even racial—were more frequently crossed, rearranged, erased, or ignored” (Clark, 2007).

Religious Heritage and Rituals

During New Orleans’ colonial period, Catholicism was the dominant religion. In fact, there was a prohibition against non-Catholic settlers. The Jesuits’ vigorous mission work brought Catholicism to the region, as did the work of the Capuchin and Ursuline orders. In 1727, the Ursuline nuns established the Ursuline Academy in New Orleans, the first school in the state and the oldest continuously operated school for girls in the United States (Calhoun, 1992).

In spite of a strong Catholic base, there was lax enforcement of the policy to exclude non-Catholics. A small number of Protestants and Sephardic Jews established roots in the New Orleans area in the 18th century, adding another dimension of diversity to the city.

The mix of cultures also influenced religious ceremony, especially New Orleans funerals. Because the city was below sea level, the dead were buried above the ground in crypts, lest the body be washed away during heavy rains or floods. Funerals were elaborately staged events that combined impassioned mourning and joyful celebration.

Mourners processed “wearing clothes and jewelry that symbolized stages of mourning,” playing music, dancing, and singing. Graves, crypts, and houses were adorned with ribbons and black wreaths. These customs go back to Louisiana’s colonial period and to the influences of the Latin, Indian, and African heritages (Benfey, 1999).

The people of New Orleans had their own ways of observing the Sabbath and rituals of worship. While Protestant America believed in a pious, somber Sabbath, New Orleanians saw Sunday as a celebratory day of praise and merriment, known as Continental Sunday. Mornings were spent worshipping in church, with the rest of the day reserved for music, dance, and socializing. On Sundays, enslaved people were permitted to celebrate the Sabbath, and they would gather at the edge of town on Congo Square to sing, dance, and exchange news and goods.

New Orleans has long been known as a center for arts and entertainment. During the antebellum period, theater, opera, balls, and festivals were available to free Blacks, enslaved people, Whites, and visitors. Although segregated, theater performances were given in a variety of languages to the delight of both local and foreign audiences. Congo Square is thought to be the birthplace of jazz. Incorporating elements of African rhythms, African American religious spirituals, ragtime, and the music of the French and Spanish colonial period, jazz developed into a truly American musical form.

The most famous entertainment tradition born in New Orleans was the Mardi Gras, which originated in New Orleans’
earliest years during the French and Spanish colonial period. Mardi Gras marks the final days of the Carnival season that can be traced to the Middle Ages in Europe. “Carnival” comes from the Latin “carnelevare,” which means “to life up or relieve from ‘flesh’ or ‘meat’” (Calhoun, 1992). It was associated with Catholicism and the beginning of the Lenten season. “Because the day before Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent, was one symbolized by the ritual slaughtered of a fatted bull or ox . . . it came to be known as Fat Tuesday” or in French, “Mardi Gras.”

The earliest celebration of Mardi Gras involved a modest one-day festival. Over time, the religious focus of the event has been lost. The current Mardi Gras tradition dates back to the late 19th century. Its practices are closely linked to the assertion of White supremacy in the Reconstruction period, after the Civil War ended. The Mardi Gras organizations, known as “krewes,” which date back to this period and the early 20th century, restricted their membership to Christian White men of northern European descent (including Spain, but not Italy). Dozens of other krewes without such restrictions have emerged over the last century. Today Mardi Gras is a sensory extravaganza but one still deeply marked by the vestiges of its origins. For an insider’s perspective on some of its rituals, the film *By Invitation Only* may be of interest to readers (Snedeker, 2006).

Nature vs. New Orleans

New Orleans’ greatest challenges have always come from nature. To harness the powerful waters of the Mississippi and protect the Crescent City from the frequent floods, the French erected levees, beginning in 1726, atop the natural levees that existed. A flood in 1735 collapsed the most formidable levee and caused extensive damage to the city (Colten, 2005). The levees were rebuilt to a greater height and length.

The first American governor, William Charles Cole Claiborne, was charged in 1803 to protect and expand Louisiana’s commercial interests and the port of New Orleans (Monette, 1848). Controlling the waters was paramount to protecting investments. To this end, additional levees were constructed in 1812, to safeguard 155 miles of land north of New Orleans on the east bank of the river and 180 miles north of the city on the west bank (Barry, 1997). By 1858 the levees stretched over a thousand miles, and were as high as thirty-eight feet in some areas. Canals and spillways were widened in an effort to relieve rising water. A series of pumps were recommended to remove the water from the city into larger canals (Colten, 2005). All of these remedies were costly. Eventually the state took on part of the expense, and the federal government subsidized levee building with the Swamp Lands Acts of 1849 and 1850 (Colten, 2005).

In June of 1878, the United States Congress established the Mississippi River Commission to set policy regarding the river. This policy was to be implemented by the Army Corps of Engineers (Barry, 1997). Private engineers recommended the use of outlets, jetties, and reservoirs to check the river’s rising levels and diminish the pressure on the existing levees. However, the Mississippi River Commission decided on a levee-only policy to control flooding (Kelman, 2003). This required a huge labor force. Thousands worked to maintain the levees up and down the Mississippi River, although the quality of upkeep depended on the resources of the adjacent cities. Still, in 1926, the Army Corps of Engineers emphatically proclaimed that the levees would do their job.

On April 21, 1927, at 8:00 a.m., the levee near Greenville, Mississippi failed. The breach released water power rivaling that of Niagara Falls. The flood water swallowed up the levee laborors and spewed its fury into the town. Thus began the Great Mississippi Flood, the worst natural disaster the United States had ever known. After heavy rains from storms brought the water level of the Mississippi central basin to flood stage, water began to breach the levees in more than 100 places, pouring over levee walls more than 50 feet high.

As the deluge continued to move south, a collection of bankers met to discuss the fate of New Orleans. Since their primary objective was to save the commercial interests of downtown New Orleans, they decided to dynamite the Poydras levee. This would save the business district while flooding a residential area inhabited by about a half million people. Within a day of the destruction of the levee, the storm subsided. The demolition had been unnecessary, but the damage was done. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their homes and livelihoods and the region faced millions of dollars worth of damage (Barry, 1997). Within hours President Coolidge determined that federal intervention was necessary and assigned the rescue and salvage mission to Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, who efficiently carried out the president’s charge.

On September 9, 1965, Hurricane Betsy struck Louisiana near the mouth of the Mississippi, raising flood levels on the river and Lake Pontchartrain. The levees failed and water poured from Lake Pontchartrain into New Orleans, flooding the Lower Ninth Ward as well as St. Bernard Parish, Gentilly, and the Upper Ninth Ward. The hurricane and flood damage was massive enough to rename the hurricane “Billion-Dollar Betsy.” Within hours of the storm’s end, Louisiana Senator Russell Long had telephoned President Lyndon Johnson requesting help. Johnson flew to New Orleans and witnessed firsthand the devastation. He promised to cut bureaucratic red tape in his follow-up calls to the various government aid agencies (Germany, 2005). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Hurricane Protection Program was established in the aftermath of Hurricane Betsy to rebuild the levees of New Orleans to withstand future hurricanes of similar magnitude. As we know, these rebuilt levees did not survive the wrath of Hurricane
Katrina, and their failure flooded many of the same neighborhoods deluged by Betsy in 1965.

Modern Louisiana

New Orleans remains one of the most racially diverse cities in the United States. Before Katrina, New Orleans was 67% African American/Black, 28% White, 3% Latino/Hispanic, and 2% Asian (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Each racial group lived throughout the city in communities that were both racially mixed and segregated by race and class.

Historians and economists have long attempted to understand the contradiction between New Orleans’ economic prosperity and its impoverished citizens. Before Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was one of the world’s great international ports—a central element of the city’s economy. The city was home to many oil companies with offshore operations in the Gulf of Mexico, as well as distribution and service centers for offshore equipment supplies.

The manufacturing industry played a principal role in the city’s economy, with petroleum, petrochemical, and shipbuilding industries all contributing. New Orleans’ ports and surrounding area also functioned as a mining, processing, and transportation center for other minerals, principally sulfur.

Service industries such as health care and telecommunications played a large role. The New Orleans region was regarded as one of the foremost centers of medicine and health care in the South (Brinkley, 2006). Yet the citizens of New Orleans have a higher rate of poverty than any other city in the United States: Twenty-one percent of people in New Orleans live in poverty compared to the national average of 12.7%.

New Orleanians feel a special sense of pride in their city and in their heritage. For many, ancestral roots are deep. Despite the challenges of living in New Orleans, they want to rebuild their homes and city. They embrace the diversity that sets New Orleans apart from other cities. You can hear that pride and love for the city in the words of New Orleans jazzman Louis Armstrong: “Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans when that’s where you left your heart?”

Works Cited


Monette, J. W. (1848). History of the discovery and settlement of the valley of the Mississippi, by the three great European powers, Spain, France, and Great Britain, and the subsequent occupation, settlement, and extension of civil government by the United States, until the year 1846 (Vols. 1, 2). New York: Harper and Brothers.


Spike Lee has said that his goal in making *When the Levees Broke* was to “dig deeper” into the Katrina story than what appeared on TV. Television is the medium that brought the story to most people around the world, including Lee, who watched in disbelief in Italy and decided on the spot that he was witnessing a defining moment in his country’s history. The documentary film medium, increasingly pressed into service as contemporary journalism, can be a powerful storytelling mix of words, images, music, and movement. Lee’s film, a work very much about “the news,” offers us an unusual opportunity to see ourselves refracted in our own media’s image. “It’s not a pretty picture,” as they say. But it is a telling one—one that repays close scrutiny, a judgment borne out by the fact that *When the Levees Broke* received the George Polk Journalism award for TV documentary six months after its premiere on HBO.

It was difficult for many members of the “sound bite” media to talk about the issues Katrina’s floodwaters tossed up: class, race, bigotry, years of studied neglect, not only of the Crescent City’s infrastructure, but of its social fabric. What began as a story on the weather, with reporters in windbreakers arriving on the Gulf Coast at the end of August 2005, had to be “reframed” more than once: first, into a story about the political “blame games” launched by politicians, and then into the even more controversial story of the social, economic, and racial divides starkly revealed by the storm. These last narratives are ongoing, as Spike Lee has pointed out: The meaning of Katrina in America’s history is yet to be defined.

The curriculum presented here (and at www.teachingthelevees.org), will serve educators interested in media literacy, journalism, civics, and history. In an era when large numbers of young people put more trust in “fake news” than any other news, and when anyone with a mobile phone is a prospective photojournalist, this is fascinating territory to explore. A media-saturated society like ours requires that everyone achieve media literacy. Wide availability of relatively inexpensive tools to take pictures, record sound, and make movies enables citizens to become media creators whose work can reach a global audience over the Internet, often in a matter of minutes. This is an unprecedented opportunity for educators to empower students, not just to become media literate, but also to engage in the civic dialogue that makes democracy work. That is filmmaker Spike Lee’s challenge: Find the American story—and tell it.

**A Note to Teachers**

We designed the lessons in the media literacy curriculum to work separately or as a sequence. The central theme of the unit is “frames,” an idea that is both concrete—Spike Lee’s characters holding picture frames around their faces at the end of the film, for instance—and abstract: Newscasters eschewing race and class themes in their coverage of Katrina. Two of the six lessons will be found on the Web site: www.teachingthelevees.org.

**Lessons in the Media Literacy Curriculum Unit**

1. Frames
2. People of the Press
3. The Power of Images
4. Documentary Design
5. Commentary (online only)
6. Citizen Media (online only)

Each lesson begins with a statement addressed to students. We have included thematic quotations to serve as conceptual touchstones for students. In many cases, these are excerpts from publications available online, or through the ProQuest database. Links to specific resources and materials used in the lessons are embedded within their texts. A list of additionally recommended references, both for particular lessons and for the unit as a whole, may be found at www.teachingthelevees.org. Since our focus is media literacy, we emphasize media creation as well as research and analysis, but this can be done with simple materials, such as magazines and markers, as well as with computers and iPods. For research on the Internet, and for access to necessary or recommended online materials, a computer will be required.

**LESSON 1**

**“A Defining Moment”**

**Frames**

Take a walk around an art museum anywhere in the world and instead of focusing on the artwork, focus on the frames. How are the paintings or drawings framed? Is the frame large and ornate, or spare and simple? Is the artwork framed at all? You may notice a difference between frames used on older works of art and those used on contemporary works—a difference that suggests an interesting perspective about how you are meant to view the art within. Many older paintings, those created from the Renaissance through the 20th century, have elaborate frames. These frames serve to demarcate the borders of the image and create a kind of box around it. In effect, they say to the viewer: Look no further. All you need to know is here, contained inside the box.

Influenced by the invention of photography and the way photographs changed our notion of composition in the late
19th century, some artists began to consider the region beyond the frame in how they composed their images. These artists allowed the action or space of their compositions to go outside the edge, and thus they invited the viewers to use their imaginations to complete the image. Frames became less important as means of containing the image, while the edge or what happened beyond it began to matter more. Many contemporary pieces of art have little or no framing. Without the “fence” created by the frame, viewers are allowed into the image to participate in creating meaning.

Framing as a metaphor can be applied to any form of information and is a useful way to give the viewer insight into how material is contained and presented, as well as into what is excluded. By looking at frames, we participate in creating the meaning of what we see and hear, becoming better media consumers. How does Spike Lee frame the story he presents in his film?

I think when we look back on this many years from now, I’m confident that people are gonna see what happened in New Orleans as a defining moment in American history. Whether that’s pro or con is yet to be determined. And that’s one of the reasons why I wanted to do this film.


Image + Image + Audio + Text = Possible Meanings
—John Golden, Reading in the Reel World: Teaching Documentaries and Other Non-fiction Texts, p. 27

Essential Questions
❖ How do the media frame news events?
❖ What is the role of news journalism in framing stories of national interest?
❖ How can we discover what is left out of the stories presented to us in the media?

Key Concepts
❖ Framing effect of opening and closing shots
❖ Meaning derived from juxtaposing images
❖ What is left out as a result of editing
❖ Effect of music in creating mood; camera placement and movement in effecting meaning

Skills Orientation
❖ Ability to recognize how opening and closing shots frame a subject
❖ Ability to recognize how putting two different images next to each other creates meaning
❖ Ability to identify the effect of added music in creating mood
❖ Ability to formulate questions about what is left out of a news story

Relevant Sections of the Film
Act I, Chapter 1, “I Miss New Orleans”
Act IV, Chapter 7, “My Name Is . . .”

Related Curriculum Standards
All states incorporate media literacy in their curriculum standards. Individual state standards can be viewed by visiting http://www.frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm.

Materials Used in the Lesson
Current magazines, newspapers, and access to a television or Internet-enabled computer. Other materials that could be used, if available, include: a CD of the 1928 Louis Armstrong recording, Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans? (available through many contemporary reprints); a work about using film in the classroom, such as Reading in the Reel World, by John Golden (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006) or Understanding Movies, by Louis Gianetti (Prentice Hall, 2004). Additional resources:


Additional Reference Materials

Katrina Timelines
BBC Katrina timeline, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4211404.stm
Think Progress Katrina timeline, http://thinkprogress.org/katrina-timeline

Katrina Articles Search
A list of online news sources may be found in Lesson 2, under “Topics for Further Study: I. Katrina’s Frames” (see pp. 31–32). It includes URLs for Aljazeera; AlterNet; American Conservative; BBC; The Louisiana Weekly; National Public Radio (NPR); the Nettizen database of international online press outlets; News Voyager, the Newspaper Association of America’s state-by-state newspaper locator; Public Broadcasting System (PBS); Salon; and Slate.
Katrina Photography Search
See page 34 for names and URLs of Katrina photo archives, listed as materials in Lesson 3.

Unfolding of the Lesson
A. Teachers have students view the opening sequence of When the Levees Broke (Act I, Chapter 1, “I Miss New Orleans”) and after the initial viewing, ask students to write one reaction and one question on a piece of paper. Teachers elicit reactions from students in an open forum. Everyone will have something to say and can make a contribution to this immediate-response exercise. The questions students write will be useful in directing the second, more focused, viewing of the clip and can also serve to organize group activity to follow. (This can also be done in small discussion groups with a designated group reporter, if more appropriate.)

B. After introducing key concepts (above), review the following questions:
❖ How does the opening scroll prepare you for what you are about to see?
❖ How do the first and last long shot of New Orleans frame the opening sequence? What direction is the camera moving in each shot and how does that compare to how we read a text? What’s the difference between the feeling of a shot that moves from the left to the right and one that moves from the right to the left?
❖ What does the juxtaposition of contemporary images with historical images mean?
❖ How does the Louis Armstrong song Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans? add to the opening sequence of images?
❖ In what ways is it appropriate for this introduction?
❖ Are there instances of direct reference between the lyrics of the song and the images, whether for ironic or purely narrative effect?
❖ Do you see any instance where there are two images in immediate juxtaposition that in some way reflect and/or comment on one another, in a way that was most likely created by a decision of Spike Lee’s?
❖ If this opening sequence of images, sound, and text were the only reference you had to determine Spike Lee’s intention for his entire documentary film, what could you say about it?
❖ After viewing this opening sequence and before viewing the rest of the film, what are some insights and questions you might have about Spike Lee’s point of view and choice of images?
❖ Act IV, Chapter 7, “My Name Is . . . ” is a literal use of frames as a means of allowing all the individuals in the film to introduce themselves. How does it work and what could it mean?

C. Note to Users: Working in groups, allowing students to focus on a particular question, may be the best approach to the second viewing of the clip. After questions have been assigned, view the clip a second time. Allow time for small-group interaction and review of responses with the larger group. Some post-activity discussion questions may include:
❖ What did you learn about film/documentary making that you didn’t realize before?
❖ What did you already have some idea about but didn’t realize was a filmmaking technique?
❖ Can you think of other films, TV shows, or commercials that also utilize one of the framing techniques you learned about today?

Closure: Activities for Media-Literate Citizens
I. Students select news stories from current magazines, newspapers, or television and discuss the selection of images and text used to frame the stories. They formulate questions about what is not being presented or what is “left out of the frame.”

II. After reviewing the news stories and discussing aspects that were left out, students discuss how they would go about investigating those aspects of the story to create a fuller picture.

Topics for Further Study: Framing and Reframing
Leaves opens with flashing black-and-white images of New Orleans’ tangled past—Mardi Gras, a confederate flag, a Black funeral—interspersed with images of desperate New Orleansians waving at passing helicopters while the floodwaters rose, small children being airlifted from rooftops and houses painted with the signs of death all over the gravelly tones of Louis Armstrong’s rendition of “Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?”

I. Project: Create a Frame With Pictures and Text
Students use images cut out of magazines to explore how the juxtaposition of diverse images creates meaning. Students look for images that create a visual analogy or are similar in design but radically different in subject matter. Students consider how these images “reflect” each other. Students select text for the images and discuss how the added text further frames the images.

II. Project: Reframe a Story With Sound
Students view a clip from a film or television news stories with the sound turned down, and then add an audio track of their own to see how it affects the meaning of the images in the clip.

III. Research: Track Katrina’s Frames Over Time
What should have been the most incredible part of the story—the conjunction of freak weather conditions that caused such damage on the night of August 29, 2005—in fact turns out to be its least remarkable aspect.

The storm itself is dwarfed for impact by the extraordinary reluctance of the US federal authorities to send help in the days after the hurricane, when 1.5 million displaced residents of the Big Easy found that sending a few bottles of water to their devastated city became the Big Difficult. The
aftermath, were you transfixed by television news, like people
How did you learn about Hurricane Katrina? In the storm’s
Questions for Consideration
How might these changes in media representation be explained?

LESSON 2
“But It’s Friday!”
People of the Press

How did you learn about Hurricane Katrina? In the storm’s
aftermath, were you transfixed by television news, like people
all over the world? Did you hear politicians and pundits play
“the blame game” on radio talk shows? Spike Lee has said he
made When the Levees Broke to “dig deeper” than what was
shown on the news. Media coverage of Katrina was controversi-

tial from the start. People praised the press for pursuing the
story, but also criticized reporters who spread rumors or used
racially charged language. Everyone agreed, however, that not
only did journalists make great efforts to bring Katrina news to
public attention, but also, in doing so, they themselves became
part of the hurricane story—whether by accident or desire.

That fact raised issues that are still being debated. Media
watchers from abroad argue that Katrina was a wake-up call
for a slumbering U.S. press; others, from African American and
alternative media outlets here at home, say the way the story
was slanted to show Black flood victims in a negative light indi-
cates that it was media “business as usual.” Two journalists
who became part of the story—Soledad O’Brien, anchor of CNN’s
American Morning, and Garland Robinette, a popular host on
New Orleans’ WWL Radio station—sat for interviews with
Spike Lee. Looking at their scenes in the film offers a provoca-
tive introduction to some of the roles the press played during
Katrina and, more important, to inquire into what citizens in
a democratic society expect media people to do—normally,
and when disaster strikes.

Why are you discovering this now? It’s five days. . . . Yes,
I understand that you’re feeding people and trying to get in
there now, but it’s Friday. It’s Friday.
—Soledad O’Brien, TV interview with
FEMA Director Michael Brown

Excuse me, Senator; I’m sorry for interrupting . . . for the
last four days, I’ve been seeing dead bodies in the streets here
in Mississippi. And to listen to politicians thanking each
other and complimenting each other, you know, I got to tell
you, there are a lot of people here who are very upset, and
very angry, and very frustrated.

And when they hear politicians . . . thanking one another,
it just, you know, it kind of cuts them the wrong way right
now. . . .

Do you get the anger that is out here?
—Anderson Cooper, TV interview with Senator
Mary Landrieu (D-Louisiana)

Nobody had the balls to say what was happening!
—Garland Robinette, film interview, When the
Levees Broke, Act II, Scene 4

Don’t tell me 40,000 people are coming here. They’re not
here. It’s too doggone late. Now get off your asses and do
something, and let’s fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the
history of this country.
—Mayor C. Ray Nagin, radio interview with
Garland Robinette, WWL Radio,
September 2, 2005

Essential Questions
Who decides what is considered news in a democratic
society?
What is the role of media in a democratic society when
there is a national disaster?

Key Concepts
Media construction, “the news,” “myth of objectivity,”
advocacy, bias
“Fourth estate,” “watchdog role,” investigative reporting
Mainstream media, alternative media, corporate media,
nonprofit media
Advocacy journalism, public (or civic) journalism, citizen
(or participatory) media

Skills Orientation
Ability to watch, listen to, analyze (deconstruct), and com-
pare newscast and documentary video and audio interviews
Ability through reading, research, and discussion, to
understand the meanings of media terms and concepts
which contextualize representations of Hurricane Katrina
by the press; among these terms and concepts are:
the news, fourth estate, watchdog role, investigative
reporting, objectivity, advocacy, bias, advocacy
journalism, public (or civic) journalism, citizen media
(or participatory journalism)

Ability to analyze the ways diverse media outlets framed
the Katrina story and what factors (based on students’
research) might account for these divergent representations

Reflection (after the lesson’s various activities) about pos-
sible meanings of Spike Lee’s ambition to “dig deeper”
than what people saw on the news and why it might be
necessary

Relevant Sections of the Film
Act II, Chapter 3, Soledad O’Brien interviews with Michael
Brown (CNN) and Spike Lee
Act II, Chapter 4, Garland Robinette interviews with C. Ray Nagin (WWL) and Spike Lee
Act II, Chapter 5, Soledad O'Brien tour of Armstrong Airport (CNN), interview with Spike Lee
Act II, Chapter 6, Soledad O'Brien tour of Convention Center (CNN), interview with Spike Lee

Related Curriculum Standards
All states incorporate media literacy in their curriculum standards. Individual state standards can be viewed by visiting http://www.frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

Materials Used in the Lesson
Internet-enabled computer(s) for online research, interview listening; word processing, spreadsheet, concept mapping software; tape recorder, iPod with microphone, or digital video camera for interviews; editing software to complete interview project; site for distribution

Transcripts of Broadcast Interviews Shown in the Film

Interviews for Viewing/Listening/Reading

Definition Resources
Committee of Concerned Journalists. The lost meaning of objectivity. Available at http://www.concernedjournalists.org/node/1860o

Journalists’ Role, Traditionally and During Katrina

Additional Reference Materials
Katrina Coverage Across Media/Media Ownership
For the record: Headlines from the New Orleans Times-Picayune on August 29, August 31, and September 2, 2005, document the evolving Hurricane Katrina story

Media Stars

Unfolding of the Lesson
A. 1. Students watch the segments of When the Levees Broke in which CNN anchor Soledad O’Brien and WWL radio talk show host Garland Robinette are interviewed. Students also listen to Garland Robinette’s December 2006 interview with Mayor Nagin on WWL Radio.
2. Students compare how these two people of the press present themselves in the interviews with Spike Lee and how they present themselves as professionals, either as revealed in the clips included in the film or on broadcast clips available on the CNN and WWL Web sites.
3. Students use their knowledge of frames (see Lesson 1) to compare these presentations.

B. 1. Students use Web resources to investigate the concept of journalistic objectivity, learning the origin of the phrase, and how its significance and application have changed over time.
2. Research into objectivity leads students to a consideration of advocacy and bias in news. Students listen to scholar Cornel West talk about advocacy with Tavis Smiley on NPR. They may follow this with readings from the transcript of The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords, which delves into the connection between the Black American press and advocacy journalism.
3. Students then discuss journalism’s general history of representing/advocating for the public, as outlined in Kovach and Rosenstiel’s article from the Columbia Journalism Review (2001).

C. 1. The center of the lesson is students’ inquiry into the role of the press in a democratic society—and in particular during a natural disaster like Katrina.
2. Here students rely on their contextualized knowledge of the TV anchors who reported from New Orleans (Soledad O’Brien and Anderson Cooper) and of local radio show host (Garland Robinette)—all of whom became important figures in the Katrina story as it unfolded.
3. Students also listen to “The unasked question,” a provocative discussion of the press in the storm that took place on NPR’s On the media program in September 2005. David K. Shipper’s brief but incisive article, “Monkey see, monkey do” (Columbia Journalism Review) brings the debate about the media’s role in a democracy squarely into the Katrina story.

Questions to Consider
❖ In a democratic society, what is investigative reporting? In the U.S. who did/does it?
❖ In a democratic society, what is advocacy journalism? In the U.S. where was/is it?

Closure: Activities for Media Literate Citizens
I. Media Watch
With many local news stations featuring an “I-team” and prime-time newsmagazines offering the promise of nightly exposés, we have created a permanent infrastructure of news devoted to exposure. . . . Much of this reportage has the earmarks of watchdog reporting, but there is a difference. Most of these programs do not monitor the powerful elite and guard against the potential for tyrannical abuse. Rather they tend to concern risks to personal safety or one’s pocketbook.

—Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, “Are Watchdogs an Endangered Species?” Columbia Journalism Review

Students watch their local TV station’s nightly news broadcasts for one week to see how many stories focus on issues like those that were exposed by Hurricane Katrina, and are described in the article by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) as central to the true watchdog role. Students report their findings in a media
II. Investigative Interviews

... what government fails to do is usually not defined as news. But it should be, for neglect is a form of policy, too. When government ignores a problem, the problem festers and usually fades into the shadows of coverage until a Hurricane Katrina ravages New Orleans. . . .

That explains the nation’s shock after the hurricane. . . .

Surely it was no revelation to those who work in nonprofit antipoverty agencies that many of the poor lived in neighborhoods most vulnerable to flooding but could not evacuate because they had no car, no place to go, no credit card for a motel, or—even if they owned vehicles—too little money for a tank of gas.

Unfortunately, people who staff antipoverty programs hardly ever get interviewed, although they’re primary sources of nonideological information about the grassroots problems of the poor.

—David K. Shipler, “Monkey See, Monkey Do,” Columbia Journalism Review

Students report on a nonprofit antipoverty agency in their community in order to inform the public of its activities and investigate what Shipler calls poverty’s complex “ecology.” Students conduct interviews with key agency personnel, either in audio or video format, then use a simple software program (e.g., iMovie, MovieMaker) to edit the raw material. Finished interviews may be distributed in digital format through a community Web site, school Web site, or a Weblog.

Topics for Further Study

I. Katrina’s Frames

When disaster strikes, Americans—especially journalists—like to pretend that no matter who gets hit, no matter what race, color, creed, or socioeconomic level they hail from, we’re all in it together. . . . But we aren’t one united race, we aren’t one united class, and Katrina didn’t hit all folks equally. By failing to acknowledge up front that Black New Orleanians—and perhaps Black Mississippians—suffered more from Katrina than Whites, the TV talkers may escape potential accusations that they’re racist. But by ignoring race and class, they boost the journalistic opportunity to bring attention to the disenfranchisement of a whole definable segment of the population.


[u.s.] national political reporters and anchors 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. . . . 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 New Orleans debacle may have liberated the debate in the press as well as the intelligentsia. Because this wound was self-inflicted—the warning about the levees ignored by the Bush administration, the ineptitude of the early relief effort—the veil of deference accorded the White House was pierced. As The American Prospect’s Robert Kuttner put it, New Orleans had given many members of the mass media—particularly television correspondents on the scene—permission to ask impolite questions. Gone was the fear—for a press corps that had been acting as if it was embedded in the White House—that to be too critical was to be taken as “liberal” or “soft.”


A media system that enlightens us, that tells us everything we need to know pertaining to our lives and liberty and happiness, would be a system dedicated to the public interest. Such a system would not be controlled by a cartel of giant corporations, because those entities are ultimately hostile to the welfare of the people. . . . The cartel’s favored audience, moreover, is that stratum of the population most desirable to advertisers—which has meant the media’s complete abandonment of working people and the poor.

II. Rise and Role of the Media Star

C. that drives cable news—the recycling of footage in some edge our pain. But at times, the surreal cycle of sameness found the news coverage therapeutic, a way to acknowl—many of us closest to the devastation have sometimes Watching the story of Katrina unfold before our eyes, it on. "He is the anchorperson of the future, " Klein told Katrina coverage, causing his promo-crazed boss to gush program saw its ratings increase 400% in the fi  first week of the government the fools. " . . . Anderson Cooper's "360" compelling TV story where they get to be the heroes and explanatory for these differences in coverage. Students compare how various news outlets reported/treated the Katrina story from these issue viewpoints, then compare their data for correlations—or lack of correlation—between coverage and media type, to suggest possible explanations for these differences in coverage.

II. Rise and Role of the Media Star

Cooper's crying and Williams' whining aside, what you really saw on your television screens last week was simply the media's true bias peeking through—not liberal, not conservative, but commercial and careerist. In other words, there was a helluva good story—and blood in the water, both literally (the residents') and figuratively (the President's). As Tom Friedman phrased it in the New York Times, “Hell hath no fury like journalists with a compelling TV story where they get to be the heroes and the government the fools.” . . . Anderson Cooper’s “360” program saw its ratings increase 400% in the first week of Katrina coverage, causing his promo-crazed boss to gush further. “He is the anchorperson of the future,” Klein told the New York Times. “He’s all human. He’s not putting it on.”

—Rory O’Connor, “Media Hurricane Is So Much Hot Air,” AlterNet, September 14, 2005

Watching the story of Katrina unfold before our eyes, many of us closest to the devastation have sometimes found the news coverage therapeutic, a way to acknowledge our pain. But at times, the surreal cycle of sameness that drives cable news—the recycling of footage in some Sisyphean rendition of Tragedy’s Greatest Hits—has also made me feel paralyzed.

—Danny Heitman, “In the 24/7 News Cycle, Repetition Is Not Revelation,” Christian Science Monitor, September 23, 2005

Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour was moved to ask Anderson Cooper one night “Is this an argument or an interview?” The issue cuts to the heart of what it means to be a journalist at a time when the matter is more in doubt than ever. In a profession that pledges itself to suppress self-interest to ensure its credibility, are emotionalism and outrage ever appropriate? And if so, when do they go too far? . . . Human emotion is at the heart of what makes something news. But if journalists try to manufacture it or use it to bring attention to themselves, they’re into something there is already enough of: reality entertainment.

—Tom Rosenstiel and Bill Kovach, “Media Anger Management,” The Washington Post, October 2, 2005

It's important to be passionate about news, and to figure out ways to take viewers on that trip that you take. There's this notion that viewers don't care about international stories. I don't think that's true. People care about any story that's well told and interesting. A good news anchor is someone who lives and breathes news. I think that passion comes across on the screen.

—“Anderson Cooper: ‘I Didn’t Go to Anchor School,’” Interview by Patrick Phillips, I Want Media, January 3, 2006

A. Students read articles from AlterNet, Christian Science Monitor, Huffington Post: The Blog, The Washington Post, and USA Today cited as materials for this lesson (and others they may find themselves) in order to enter the debate over the much-touted, much-lamented rise of media stars like Anderson Cooper—whose emotional coverage of Katrina influenced U.S. public opinion.

B. Contextualizing Cooper’s Gulf Coast reporting with what they have learned about the press’s role in a democracy from their work on previous activities in Lesson 2, and from reading Cooper’s I Want Media and New York Magazine interviews (and perhaps also, excerpts from his memoir, Dispatches From The Edge), students take a position and write an opinion piece for an online publication.

LESSON 3
“This Is America”

The Power of Images

Pictures bear witness to history as it is happening, we are told. Yet the pictures we see on front pages of newspapers and television news broadcasts represent someone’s choice. Other images of the same events never became “news” because they were not published—or were left out of the story frame. According to director Spike Lee, he and co-producer/editor Sam Pollard made a deliberate choice to end Act II of When the Levees Broke with images of dead bodies in the flooded streets
of New Orleans—a part of the film that is hard to watch and hard to forget.

Many of these images were taken not by professional photographers, but by ordinary citizens, people who, compelled by a deep need to document what was happening in early September 2005, used cell phones, digital cameras, and camcorders to compile the evidence Lee puts before us in “The City That Care Forgot.” Some of their pictures may have been seen before—on the Internet, where Katrina eyewitness testimony appeared in blogs and community bulletin boards and photo-sharing sites like Flickr.com, but Lee incorporates them into something new.

The remixed photomontage medium provides an opportunity for the director and writer to use pacing, composition, juxtaposition, lighting, sound, and musical scores to create meaning for the viewer. By examining the use of montage in a film, viewers can see how photographs function both as visual evidence and visual argument. What are the implications of making visual arguments? How does photomontage serve as a steward of history as well as a construction of it?

Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates.

—Susan Sontag, excerpt from the introduction to On Photography

Photography plays a huge role in the reportage from an event of this magnitude. Readers want to know what it looks like and what it feels like. We're trying our best to cover both areas. Now that we are a few days into this, the human emotion is the thing that I'm pushing our photographers to be more aware of. In the first day or so, we needed to get some perspective on events of national interest—the damage and flooding. Now it's time to focus more on the human toll, and it's a complete mess down there. The appearance is that people are being treated like cattle—abused cattle, to be more specific. They have been abandoned with little or no relief supplies.


Compelling photographic reportage offers a unique way of seeing America by getting in our face, tugging at our hearts and reducing us to very few words.


In a video montage, grouped shots of corpses floating in the water or sprawled on a car roof are held long enough for us to register the horror of abandonment but not so long that the shots draw attention to themselves as spectacle. . . . It's the primal curse of the Greek myths: the unburied corpse, an offense against the gods and against civilization too.


Essential Questions

❖ In a democratic society, what is photojournalism’s role in informing the public about events of national interest?
❖ In a democratic society, who is a photojournalist?
❖ Is photography more “truthful” than other forms of visual representation, like drawings or data charts?

Key Concepts

❖ Photo and film terminology: photojournalism, montage, film montage
❖ Moving images are constructed from many different sources, including photojournalism; every element of a moving image carries meaning and therefore has a potential value to serve as evidence.
❖ Sound and image have a dynamic relationship and serve to narrate a story in different ways; sound can work to reinforce, motivate, or serve as a counterpoint to a moving image.
❖ The ending credits of a documentary contain information about who made the text, who produced it, and what information they chose to incorporate.

Skills Orientation

❖ Ability to recognize how different media affect the way ideas are conveyed and represented
❖ Ability to research, discuss how photos are used in the media, role of photojournalism
❖ Ability to understand how intended audience of a medium can affect what it can say and what its ideological message may be
❖ Ability to analyze historical photographs

Relevant Sections of the Film

Montage Sequences

Act I, Chapter 1, “I Miss New Orleans,” 00:00:00–00:03:58
Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot,” 01:02:25–01:04:45
Act II, Chapter 1, “Jeffersonia,” 00:00:00–00:00:50
Act II, Chapter 6, “An Ancient Memory,” 00:55:44–00:56:55 and 00:58:35–01:02:02
Act III, Chapter 1, “By Way of Katrina,” 00:00:00–00:03:55
Act IV, Chapter 1, “Mardi Gras 2006,” 00:00:00–00:03:35
Act IV, Chapter 8, “Credits,” 01:08:15 to end

Image Makers

Act III, Chapter 2, “Polarized,” 00:15:03–00:17:07
Act II, Chapter 3, “Brownie, You’re Doin’ a Heck of a Job,” 00:21:58–00:26:00

Related Curriculum Standards

All states incorporate media literacy in their curriculum standards. Individual state standards can be viewed by visiting http://www.frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

Materials Used in the Lesson

Pencil/paper or concept mapping software such as Inspiration; computer(s) with Internet access and Flash plug-in; digital or film camera(s); iMovie or MovieMaker video editing software
if available; color ink jet printer; poster board and other art supplies for photo exhibitions.

**Definition Resources**


Student handout on shot types from the British Film Institute. Available at http://www.bfi.org.uk/education/teaching/storyshorts2/glossary.html

**Articles and Transcripts**


**Hurricane Katrina Photojournalism**


Gulf Coast hurricane recovery, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/photo/special/7/index.html

Hurricane Katrina (BBC), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/america/2005/hurricane_katrina/default.stm


Hurricane Katrina: The long road back (MSNBC), http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9107338/


Hurricane recovery: Rebuilding the Gulf Coast region, http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/hurricane/photoessay-index.html


**Additional Reference Materials**

**Historical Photography**

*Another Vietnam: Pictures of the war from the other side*, http://www.anothervietnam.com

*Under fire: Images from Vietnam*, http://www.pieceunique.gallery.com


**Perspectives Within the Photograph: Image Sources**

*AlterNet*, http://www.alternet.org/, for alternative publications


Flickr.com, http://www.flickr.com, a free photo-sharing Web site, has a photojournalism group

Nettizen database of international online press outlets, http://www.nettizen.com/newspaper/

News Voyager, the Newspaper Association of America’s hot-linked state-by-state newspaper locator, http://www.newspaperlinks.com/newspaperlist.cfm?sid=co

Public Broadcasting System (PBS), http://www.pbs.org


**Unfolding of the Lesson**

A. Students begin by defining terms. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

*Photograph:* “A still picture made with a camera”

*Photojournalism:* “The art or practice of relating news by photographs, with or without accompanying text”

*Montage:* “The technique of selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole; the technique of producing a new composite whole from fragments of pictures, text, or music”

B. 1. Students watch the opening and closing montage scenes in Act I, Act II, and the opening montage in Act III. Periodically pause the montage scenes so students can observe a particular photo. Students should be cognizant of the photographer’s decisions in composing the image: Was it color or black-and-white? What is the position of the subject? Is the subject framed in a close-up shot or a panorama shot? How is lighting and color used in the image? Is the image framed or cropped to reveal or hide a particular subject? What is the distance between the camera and subject? Is the subject still or moving? A photojournalist has to make a series of
choices when getting the “right shot,” including where the camera is positioned, the lighting, the subject matter, and other elements needed to create an aesthetic response in the viewer. As students pause to examine certain photos, they consider some of these strategies and questions.

2. Each student creates a descriptive chart of the opening and closing scenes of Act I and Act II, and the opening scene of Act III. What words or phrases could be used to describe the images Lee stitches together to create the montage sequences?

C. 1. After the descriptive charts are completed, students share them with each other. What do the charts have in common? How do they differ from each other? How does Spike Lee use the montage filming technique to create a perspective for the viewer? By “selecting, editing, and piecing together separate” images to create a “new composite whole,” does Spike Lee create an impression or narrative for the viewer?

2. Students watch some of the segments with sound and some of the segments without sound. Questions to consider: Is the film ever “silent”? If so, why was silence chosen? What difference do music, voice, sound effects, and/or silence make in viewing the film? How does this difference contribute to the meaning viewers might make when watching the film?

Closure: Activities for Media-Literate Citizens

I. Image Makers

And tonight I also offer this pledge of the American people: Throughout the area hit by the hurricane, we will do what it takes. We will stay as long as it takes to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives. And all who question the future of the Crescent City need to know: There is no way to imagine America without New Orleans, and this great city will rise again.

—President George W. Bush, Presidential address from Jackson Square, September 15, 2005

We pay particular attention to not only what the president says but what the American people see. . . . Americans are leading busy lives, and sometimes they don’t have the opportunity to read a story or listen to an entire broadcast. But if they can have an instant understanding of what the president is talking about by seeing 60 seconds of television, you accomplish your goals as communicators. So we take it seriously.


The whole way the President and the Congress and the world is treating us is so frightening because it truly could kill the city. And I guess if you could kill this city, you could kill any city.

—Joseph Bruno, attorney at law, resident of Carrollton, When the Levees Broke

For 5 days while we flooded, Bush Strutted. From press conference to press conference.

—Anonymous, graffiti on signpost in When the Levees Broke
A. Students watch *When the Levees Broke*, Act III, Chapter 2, “Polarized.” Students read Elisabeth Bumiller’s article, “Keepers of Bush Image Lift Stagecraft to New Heights” from *The New York Times*. Students deconstruct the image for the Jackson Square presidential address on September 15, 2005, using the techniques of media analysis: What was the setting? Why is it important? How was the scene lit? What colors were highlighted in the frame? What type of shot was used (e.g., close-up, long take, panoramic)? Who is the subject in the image? Do certain parts of the shot serve as a symbol or metaphor for the viewer? Is this a staged event? Does this image construct a certain type of persona for the president? What is the overall message of this event? Finally, students fast forward to the present to consider: Has President Bush lived up to his promise “to do what it takes” to help New Orleans?

B. Students watch another presidential address to the nation or view a photograph of the president addressing the public, in order to deconstruct the persona that the president is presenting. How does the president address his audience? What impression does he leave?

II. Reframing

A. Students watch *When the Levees Broke*, Act II, Chapter 3, “Brownie, You’re Doin’ a Heck of a Job.” Students discuss how Spike Lee juxtaposes images of members of the presidential cabinet with what they were doing during the first week of Hurricane Katrina. What impression does it create of the presidential cabinet and how does this shape the viewer’s emotional response? Were any of the juxtapositions in the section unusual?

B. Using storyboard or digital video software (e.g., iMovie, MovieMaker) students create their interpretations of the events discussed in the film. Students choose an issue that New Orleans continues to face in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (e.g., rebuilding, crime, education, citizenship, the role of the government). Students download images from a variety of news sources, and then select the music/score, sound effects, and narration they might use to reframe an issue. Students share the storyboards or photomontage sequences with the class.

III. Photo Essay

The best photography from Katrina has a power that sometimes comes along in photography of natural disasters and human tragedy and transcends the events themselves. It’s why video and audio sometimes can’t quite manage some of the same drama. It’s why still photography can freeze images in time for reflection, review and understanding later on and on and on. It’s why I hope still photography used on printed pages never dies.

—Randy Cox, Senior Editor/Visuals at *The Oregonian*, “Best Practices: Images of Disaster and How They Were Captured,” *Poynter Online*, September 3, 2005

A. Examining three or four photo essays from a range of sources (e.g., CNN, BBC, *Washington Post*, American Red Cross, *The White House, Poynter Online*), students consider how these images represent various points of view. To what extent do these photographs demonstrate “truthfulness”? How reliable are images? How do we know? Are these photos “authentic”? Do they “bear witness” to the events of Hurricane Katrina and the aftermath? Does the photo essay have an ideological or moral standing? What does the photo editor intend to present to the viewer? Does the viewer impose meaning on the image? Is a photo essay different if it is contextualized by a caption? What kind of meaning do captions or text impose on an image?

B. Students create their own photo essays using digital or film cameras to create/construct an argument on how their community is engaged or disengaged with the issues facing New Orleans. Students must incorporate at least five or six photographs, arrange the photos either digitally or on paper/poster board to create a construct or argument to help their classmates and school community understand the issue they have chosen to advocate.

Topics for Further Study

I. Perspectives Within the Photograph

Early images of Hurricane Katrina focused on the destruction wrought by the storm. They were a true testament to the awesome power of nature. Once the human element became part of the coverage, some images carried two messages: One of desperation—in the faces and actions of hur-
Students download three or four images from a photojournalism source. Working in groups, students select photos that convey different sides of a story. The images should revolve around the same issue, but cast a different light or point of view on it. Then students write captions to illustrate the photos' viewpoints. Some of the news sources could include:

ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox News, CNN, other major U.S. broadcasters’ online outlets

African American publications, including those located in the Gulf Coast states

BBC, CBC, and other international English-language broadcasters/publications

Nonprofit U.S. mainstream news outlets, such as PBS television stations

Non-corporate, non-mainstream U.S. media, including those available at AlterNet

Online publications such as Salon, Slate, or photo-sharing Web sites like Flickr.com

Students should pay particular attention to issues of race and class in the Katrina story as represented by these various images.

II. Sensationalism and Censorship

Here in Baton Rouge, while watching round-the-clock coverage of hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, I’ve been thinking about “The House of Sounds,” a chilling story by M. P. Shiel that began appearing in various forms in 1896. It’s the tale of people who are, quite literally, dying of too much news. . . . Scanning cable news channels, Web sites, and news blogs about Katrina or any other global tragedy, one can feel more than a little like Shiel’s stimulation-addicted [protagonist], a restless spectator so immersed in the present that he’s robbed of a past and a future. Information immersion of this sort can narrow the mind as much as widen it, muting yesterday or tomorrow in favor of the ever-present Now.

I sense that I am both living through history and being condemned to repeat it in the same breath.

—Danny Heitman, “In the 24/7 News Cycle, Repetition Is Not Revelation,” Christian Science Monitor, September 23, 2005

That’s how TV works: You know the pictures you want, the pictures you’re expected to find. Your bosses will be disappointed if you don’t get them, so you scan the hospital beds, looking for the worst, unable to settle for anything less. Merely hungry isn’t good enough. Merely sick won’t warrant more than a cutaway shot.

—Anderson Cooper, Dispatches from the Edge, p. 88

Mark Tapscott, a former editor at the Washington Times who now deals with media issues at the Heritage Foundation, said the FEMA decision did not amount to censorship. “Let’s not make a common-decency issue into a censorship issue,” Tapscott said. “Nobody wants to wake up in the morning and see their dead uncle on the front page. That’s just common decency.”


What this administration really is concerned about is not respect for those who died but what will follow when photojournalists help transform bureaucrats’ sterile column of casualty figures into the reality of thousands of dead Americans. That’s an image likely to haunt our political imagination for a long time to come.

—Tim Rutten, “Katrina’s Aftermath: Regarding Media; Image Is Capital in Wake of Storm,” Los Angeles Times, September 10, 2005

A. Students read the articles from the Los Angeles Times and The Washington Post describing FEMA’s refusal to let CNN photographers document the removal of dead bodies in New Orleans.

B. To contextualize FEMA’s decision (later rescinded), students read Susan Sontag’s article “Looking at War” (http://www.newyorker.com/printables/archive/05011ofr _archive04), and research previous American wartime photography controversies, using online resources like the American Memory Project (“The Case of the Moved Body”) and Vietnam War photography archives (the list of materials for this lesson, above, includes two of these as starting points).

C. Based on their research, students take a position in the debate “common decency” vs. “the public’s right to know,” making their arguments in an essay illustrated by a captioned exhibit of photojournalism which they curate from online Katrina and historical news photo sources.

Questions to Consider

❖ What is “sensationalism” in news reporting? In a democratic society, who decides?
❖ What constitutes “censorship” in a democratic society? Who decides?

LESSON 4

“In Remembrance of All . . .”

Documentary Design

“Based on a true story” is often the first “image” you see on a movie screen. Did you ever stop to consider how that statement affects your perception of the movie that follows? We understand the phrase to mean that the story has some general grounding in fact, but we do not expect to see a literal reenactment of the events and certainly not actual footage. Still, the phrase implies authenticity, which in turn confers a level of dignity or respect on the film. This makes us see the events the film portrays in a different way than we otherwise might.
We can define a documentary as a film that intends to present an objective account or interpretation of actual events, whether historical or contemporary. While some documentary filmmakers may claim to be impartial and we, the viewers, may assume that what we are seeing in their films is factual, it is important to recognize that they have at their disposal the same devices as makers of fictional films. Their particular viewpoints are conveyed through their selection of shots, camera work, choice of interview subjects, use of sound, text and, of course, their editing. These choices inevitably reflect the filmmaker's subjectivity, and we, as viewers, must always consider this in our own responses to a documentary's "truth."

Spike Lee conceals neither his point of view nor his passion about the events portrayed in his documentary. His intention in *When the Levees Broke* is more than just informing viewers about events surrounding the Hurricane Katrina disaster. His film is a call to action—one that asks viewers to consider testimony by individual witnesses and participants in the tragedy. He shifts the emphasis away from the storm itself to the lives of particular people, shown to be the victims of inept, irresponsible, and uncaring public decision makers.

[T]he documentary, especially at an hour or more in length, is one of the most powerful forms of human expression. Nothing can take its place; no single report on the evening news, no glitzy television newsmagazine piece, and certainly none of today's endless TV talk shows have the depth, substance, detail and emotional strength of a well-executed documentary.


To create an effective nonfiction piece, you need to be more persuasive than "true."

—John Golden, *Reading in the Real World; Teaching Documentary and Other Nonfiction Texts*, p. xvi.

The best documentary films are provocative challenges to the status quo, films that have an edge, a point of view, films which incite controversy and public debate, contributing to a healthy democracy.


This film document is in remembrance of all the Hurricane Katrina victims in New Orleans and in the Gulf states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

Today, the people living along the Gulf Coast continue in their daily struggle to rebuild, revive, and renew in these United States of America.

—Spike Lee, opening on-screen statement, *When the Levees Broke*

**Essential Question**

In the opening statement of *When the Levees Broke*, Spike Lee presents his aspirations for the film. He evokes a national purpose and framework by citing the United States of America.

◊ How can documentary film facilitate dialogue in a democratic society?

**Key Concepts**

- Elements and structure of a documentary; visual, audio, and text tracks
- The role of editing, storyboard
- Ethical considerations of documentary film
- Documentary film can be an effective tool to inform, persuade, extol, accuse, or call to action.

**Skills Orientation**

- Understand the elements of a documentary
- Understand how the choices and decisions made through the editing process affect meaning and point of view in documentary film
- Understand the ethical considerations involved in documentary film production
- Create a documentary film to investigate an issue and present a particular point of view

**Relevant Sections of the Film**

*Elements of a Documentary Film*: Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot”

*The Role of Editing*: Act IV, Chapter 3, “Engineers, Oil & Money”

*Ethical Issues of Documentary Film*: Any of the acts viewed in full, or the entire film

**Related Curriculum Standards**

All states incorporate media literacy in their curriculum standards. Individual state standards can be viewed by visiting http://www.frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm.

**Materials Used in the Lesson**

The film is the primary text for this lesson. Other materials that may be used include: pencil and paper, magazines, markers, copy machine, digital video cameras, computer running digital video editing software (iMovie, MovieMaker). For examples of young filmmakers' documentaries, see Education Video Center in New York (http://www.evc.org). For comparison to *When the Levees Broke*, see: PBS Frontline, NOVA, and NOW documentaries on Hurricane Katrina (http://www.pbs.org). The essential question in this lesson is discussed in the following article:


Three international Web sites contain valuable resources for teaching film and documentary:


Unfolding of the Lesson

I. Elements of a Documentary Film
A. Students become familiar with the main elements of documentary film (using all resources)

1. Visual Track
   a. Primary footage, sometimes called A-roll. This is footage shot by the documentary filmmaker, including interviews, scenes of surroundings, and action as it occurs.
   b. Supporting footage, sometimes called B-roll. This is footage that helps explain A-roll footage with archival photographs, footage from other sources or other filmmakers, stills, cut-ins (close-ups of an image), or cutaways (scenes or images outside the main subject).

2. Audio Track
   a. Voices, including dialogue and/or narration by an on- or off-screen narrator called Voice of God.
   b. Music, including music that is part of the image and recorded during the filming and background music that is not part of the image and added later, often as background
   c. Sound effects, including sound that is recorded during the filming and sound effects that are added later to support or enhance the images

3. Text Track
   Text refers to subtitles, which are added on the screen to identify speakers, locations, dates, translations, or provide background information, to contextualize what you are about to see. (Note: Words that are embedded in the original footage, such as on T-shirts or signs, are technically part of the visual track, not the text track. The text track is added later.)

Students review the three elements of documentary film and the Essential Questions above prior to viewing Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot.” Individuals or groups select one of the elements to investigate: A-roll footage, B-roll footage, Voice, Music, Sound Effects, or Text. Students view the clip (a second viewing may be helpful, or it may be necessary, in order for students to identify visual elements, to turn the audio track down while they are watching). (Note: Owing to its emotional content, this particular clip may be difficult for some members of the group to watch and maintain the needed objectivity. Other clips could work for this exercise. Teachers may need to view the clip with students first, then view it again with assigned tasks.)

II. Point of View: The Role of Editing

While the first editorial decision made by any filmmaker is when to start and stop the shot during the filming process, an equally important decision-making process occurs when the final film is assembled. This includes decisions about how to crop shots and about where to put them in relation to each other. Where to place the music and sound effects and the text are also part of the editing process. Although the events portrayed in a documentary ostensibly happened, and no one denies that they are true, the editing process gives filmmakers the freedom to interpret the “truth” according to their own points of view.

The news media have been criticized for showing primarily Black and poor Americans in their Katrina coverage. Spike Lee has said that one of his motivations in making When the Levees Broke was to “dig deeper” than what people saw on news broadcasts. What images does the director include to express his point of view about race and class in America?

Questions to Consider

♦ In what way(s) does Spike Lee’s account of Katrina differ from those of the news media?
♦ What is Spike Lee’s point of view about Katrina based on how he has edited his film?

Closure: Activities for Media-Literate Citizens—Editing for Point of View
A. Three or four students, functioning as objective observers during one whole class period, record on paper whatever they see and hear. This could include the behavior of the teacher, other students, things on the board, the wall, people talking, bells ringing, etc. They write down whatever strikes them without editing anything. During a subsequent class, students discuss all the points of view that might be possible in portraying the class on the basis of these notes.
This is the best/worst/most fascinating/most boring class in the school;
This is the best/worst teacher in the school;
Girls are smarter than boys; and many other possibilities.

Then, copies of the various viewpoint records are distributed to small groups of students. Each group works with one viewpoint record. Students in all groups then select items from the records to reinforce their particular points of view. It should be fairly clear during the sharing process that all the things included in the viewpoint records did happen, but the selective editing process determines the way a particular point of view emerges from the universal record of events.

B. Teachers gather a group of images from magazines or newspapers, or from an Internet search, avoiding images that include text. The selection should include images that portray action or some kind of activity as well as images that do not. Teachers then copy the images and clip them, in exactly the same order, into photo packets for students. Divided into small working groups, students arrange the images in a sequence in order to invent a story. Depending on the time available, students may also be asked to edit out a certain number of images, or to add dialogue or text to explain their stories. In the sharing portion of this exercise, it will become apparent to students how the same images lead to different narratives, depending on the editing process.

C. Teachers with access to video cameras and computers with editing software (e.g., iMovie, MovieMaker) have students storyboard a short documentary on a subject of concern to the U.S. or their own community in the aftermath of Katrina. Students should employ all or some of the elements of a documentary to express a clear point of view about the subject of their concern.

Questions to Consider

- How can codes of behavior, both one’s own and those of others, be developed and discussed?
- What were some of the ethical issues that journalists/filmmakers recording Katrina’s events encountered and how did these affect how they saw their roles as reporters/documentarians?
- Were subjects in Lee’s film treated fairly, both those interviewed and those (including politicians) who were presented but not interviewed?
- As an audience member, do you feel you were presented with material that was ethically obtained, processed (i.e., artistically manipulated), and presented?
- What are the ethical questions and issues the Spike Lee’s film presents us with?
- How can we act or change our own code of behavior as a response to Lee’s film?
- Is there evidence the media has changed in any way as a result of its involvement in Katrina?

B. After viewing any of the acts in full or, ideally, the entire film, students use the questions above as starting points for raising their awareness of the ethical issues involved in documentary filmmaking. Through discussion, the group decides what codes of behavior are important for (a) the filmmaker; (b) the subjects; (c) the interaction between filmmaker and subjects; and (c) the audience. This list of codes becomes their working guide as student filmmakers.

II. Call for Action

A. Researching through the Education Video Center in New York, http://www.evc.org, and comparable resources, students investigate how young filmmakers around the country have used video documentaries as a means of empowerment.

B. Students work in teams to create a short video about a topic of concern within the community. They incorporate the elements of a documentary film as identified above. Through the process of editing, they gain direct experience in creating a point of view. They plan a presentation of their film to the community, which includes engaging the audience in conversation afterwards on what ideas people have for positive change and response. (Alternatively, this project could be done with disposable or digital cameras, with slide show software, or in the form of a poster display.)

III. On the Record

To compare documentaries with diverse points of view and designs (e.g., “voice of God” narration vs. interviews), students consider any or all of the Katrina films produced by PBS (www.pbs.org) for Frontline, NOVA, and NOW, then make comparisons to When the Levees Broke. Both Martin Smith’s (Frontline) and David Brancaccio’s (NOW) interviews, for example, offer interesting counterpoints to Spike Lee’s. In particular, students should consider how these documentaries contribute to public knowledge or to “the historical record” that is being developed about Hurricane Katrina. In what way(s) do these diverse films contradict or complement each other?
Race, Class, and Katrina in *When the Levees Broke*

*Lessons Designed for Adult Audiences*

Jeanne Bitterman, Addie Rimmer, and Lucia Alcántara

This unit is designed to help participants examine their assumptions about what it means to be an American.

Community life in America requires that adults interact in ever changing groups, both real and virtual. It is anticipated that viewing the documentary for purposes of discussion will occur in a variety of settings, including but certainly not limited to such places as museums, libraries, religiously affiliated organizations, community centers, adult education centers, advocacy group meetings, community development organizations, women’s centers, and union halls.

The following discussion guide moves from the personal to the public and takes as its starting point the preconceptions participants bring to the viewing. Participants are encouraged to be open-minded and to use their experience with the movie to reconsider how they view America: what is currently wrong in America; what is fundamentally right and good in America; and, most importantly, what might be improved upon in America.

Given the great variation in how participants might be convened, facilitators/educators are provided with many options for using the documentary and guide. Entire acts can be shown in one sitting (each act is about one hour; there are four acts) and then discussed. Alternatively, excerpts from the documentary can be used with the related discussion questions. The following sessions are framed with questions and designed for use in a two-hour block of time. Each program includes most of the following elements:

- Guiding Questions
- Note to Facilitator
- Materials Used in the Program (listed)
- Activities Before Viewing the Documentary
- Viewing the Film: Dialogue Questions
- Relevant Sections of the Film
- Post Viewing
- Closure
- Works Cited and Additional Resources
- Handouts

*When the Levees Broke* is a powerful documentary film. This discussion guide raises questions intended to elicit a mix of perspectives on topics that are not always easy to discuss. Facilitators are urged to anticipate and encourage this and, in preparation for the discussion, consult the section of the Introduction that offers ideas for conducting democratic dialogues.

The Viewing Guide, found earlier in the book, provides a brief summary of each act, a set of questions to trigger recall and discussion of key scenes, an alphabetical list of people who appear in the film, and chapter transition scenes. Before beginning discussion, facilitators might want to use the Viewing Guide as way of recapturing important scenes in the segment(s) participants have watched.

Each two-hour session is organized around a guiding question that has its origins in the documentary film but extends to issues of broad relevance in this country. These questions have no single answer, and the facilitator should not push for consensus. Instead, the facilitator should work to assure that each participant understands other participants’ points of view well enough to restate them both accurately and fairly—especially those with which they disagree. After a successful two-hour session, our goal is to have participants feeling they better understand the issues, better understand the diversity of perspectives people bring to those issues, and are more committed to continuing the conversation.

- **Program 1:** Natural Disaster or Human Failure?
- **Program 2:** Government Responsibility for Citizens’ Safety, Health, and Well-Being
- **Program 3:** Citizens’ Accountability for Their Own Safety
- **Program 4:** Perception of Race, Class, and Citizenship After Katrina
- **Program 5:** Spirituality, Resilience, and Hope in Post-Katrina America

**Works Cited and Additional Resources**


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**PROGRAM 1**

**Natural Disaster or Human Failure?**

**Guiding Questions**

- Was Hurricane Katrina a disaster because of the force of the storm or because of catastrophic human failure? Or both?
- Why do some analysts insist on talking about “the breach of the levees” rather than “Hurricane Katrina” when they refer to the devastation of New Orleans on August 29, 2005?
- Does the term “natural disaster” describe the flooding of New Orleans?
- According to the movie, why didn’t people evacuate New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina hit?

**Note to Facilitator**

Many have argued that there is no such thing as a natural disaster, only the failure to deal with nature’s events responsibly and resourcefully. Examining natural events and human failure will help participants explore the importance of protection of the environment and the necessity for human preparedness. In this program participants are asked to consider whether, in this country, disasters disproportionately hurt the poor and/or people of color.

**Materials Used in the Program**

Film footage, discussion questions, and two handouts:

1. “America Gets a Dose of the Corps’ Inaction”
2. “Report: Up to 35,000 Kids Still Having Major Katrina Problems”

**Activities Before Viewing the Documentary**

Participants describe their personal experiences with natural catastrophic events such as hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, wildfires, floods, landslides, lightning strikes, avalanches, etc. Have participants been directly involved in any such disasters? In what ways were they prepared and/or not prepared to cope with the situation? Would they prepare differently now?

**Viewing the Film: Dialogue Questions**

- What can citizens reasonably expect from agencies dedicated to forecasting weather emergencies?
- During times of crisis, what should be the extent of the government’s responsibility for the safety and recovery of its residents?
- Since the Army Corps of Engineers failed to maintain the levees, should the responsibility be contracted out to a company in the private sector? Who should pay for this protection?
- In terms of disasters, what responsibilities do we have to ourselves, our families, our neighborhoods, our communities, and other citizens of the nation and the world?

**Relevant Sections of the Film**

**Act I, Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans” (16 minutes)**

Presents background information on weather reports forecasting Katrina and the response from the FEMA Director in preparation for Hurricane Katrina.

- Ask participants for their interpretations of Betty Nguyen’s questions for Michael Brown. Were there any unstated implications in her remarks?
- According to the documentary, how effectively were New Orleans residents notified of the impending crisis?
- Should participants have heeded the evacuation orders? Why didn’t or couldn’t they?
- Who is responsible for warning citizens about impending crises? What if any responsibility does the media have for providing their audiences with accurate and timely information? Are there ways in which the media contribute to complacency in the face of an impending crisis?
- What preparations are made for adverse weather conditions in the region where the participants live? What is the most likely weather crisis and how is it prepared for? When would they know “this time it is real”?

**Act I, Chapter 3, “Explosions” (10½ minutes)**

This section of the documentary film reveals that the hurricane did not actually hit New Orleans directly. It also introduces some residents of New Orleans who believe that the levees were blown up.

- Does the documentary lend credibility to this belief? What do you think?

**Act IV, Chapter 3, “Engineers, Oil & Money” (13½ minutes)**

A representative from the Army Corps of Engineers describes how the levees were built.

- Why were the levees built below standard?
- What does the Army Corp of Engineers reveal about building and rebuilding efforts?
- What do viewers learn about the wetlands and the contribution development has made to the vulnerability of coastal cities?
- How will global warming exacerbate the situation, if current predictions prove to be true?

**Post Viewing**

Review Handout 1: “America Gets a Dose of the Corps’ Inaction.”

- Ask participants to reflect on what should or could be done about “substandard” construction of levees across the country. Where do such hazards exist? Do we know the answer to this question at this time? Why or why not?

Ask participants to consider how the total number of casualties from an event like Katrina should be measured. Should these costs be shouldered by individuals, private insurance companies, the community, the state or federal government? Are there other ways to address these costs?

In addition to the dialogue questions above, participants can review the handouts and reflect on the new information they gained.

Closure

Ask participants to discuss what, if any, change in perspective they have had about governmental and individual responsibility after viewing and discussing the documentary? What, for example, might have been done to protect the wetlands? Should that protection have been the responsibility of the federal government; the responsibility of the people who would be most directly endangered by the loss of the wetlands, or of some independent advocacy group? Should federal money, collected in the form of income taxes across the country, have been used to save the wetlands in Louisiana? Who are the most vulnerable populations in such circumstances? Why? Finally, discuss how we can improve the safety of these groups.

Works Cited and Additional Resources


**HANDOUT 1**

**Program 1 of Adult Curriculum**

“America Gets a Dose of the Corps’ Inaction”

—By Jarvis DeBerry, editorial in *Times-Picayune*, January 30, 2007

One struggles at times not to wish this experience on others. After all, hurricanes and civil engineering failures kill. Kill in bunches. Therefore, one tells himself, if it takes people experiencing such destruction to comprehend what it’s like to lose a city, it’s better that they never understand.

Even so, the desire to be understood, to have one’s grief, one’s depression, one’s discombobulation fully appreciated and respected remains as strong as the desire to have others understand that the Katrina tragedy was less an act of God and more a failure of man to act intelligently. In this instance, man is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the government agency that poorly designed some of the floodwalls in New Orleans and, on top of that, built some in ways that failed to meet the design specifications.

We are so well informed of the corps’ failures that very few local people choose to call what happened to us a “natural” disaster. We know there’s nothing natural about the corps not driving sheet piling far enough into the ground to anchor its floodwalls, know there’s nothing natural about a storm that misses a city simultaneously laying waste to it.

But we wonder: Do other Americans know? Do they know how important a job the corps has been assigned? Do they know that a failure by the corps has the potential to kill innocent and unsuspecting Americans? Do they know of the agency’s father-knows-best public relations philosophy or how its officials are forever loath to accept responsibilities for the agency’s failures?

The corps has now revealed that there are 146 levees around the United States that are at real risk of failing during a flood. According to a chart published by *USA Today*, 42 of those levees are in California, 14 are in Oregon and 13 are in Arkansas, Louisiana, which is already home to the most infamous levee breaks in recent memory, still has six levees in danger of giving way during a major flood.

Upon hearing that news, which of us wouldn’t ask, “But where in Louisiana?” And surely, residents of other states want to know which of their levees have been poorly maintained. However, the corps—in typical corps fashion—has heretofore declined to give the exact locations of those 146 potential disasters.

A spokesperson told *USA Today* that before it releases a list, the corps would rather wait until it’s inspected all its levees and until every community with a faulty levee has been notified. A good way to notify those communities would be to release the information to a national newspaper. The corps decision to withhold such vital information is inexplicable and indefensible. But it’s not at all a surprise.

Meanwhile, FEMA officials say that if the faulty levees aren’t strengthened they would no longer qualify as sufficient flood protection and the people who live near those levees would need to purchase flood insurance.

But how are consumers going to know if flood insurance is recommended for them if the corps continues being so cagey?

This, America, is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in action. This is the agency that told New Orleans we had a level of flood protection we did not have. This is the agency culpable in the drowning deaths of more than 1,000 New Orleanians. This is the agency that knows of more than 12 dozen suspect levees nationwide and feels justified in keeping their locations secret. This is the agency that’s supposed to be protecting you.

We don’t wish broken levees and the subsequent flooding on anybody. We know that misery all too well and pray that no one else ever experiences it.

But there is some satisfaction, however perverse, in knowing that at least 146 other communities are about to get a lesson in Corps Frustration 101. One hopes such dealings create empathy and that as those other communities come to realize their own peril they demand greater accountability from the agency that imperiled us.

Note: The complete list of levees in jeopardy is now available at the Army Corps of Engineers Web site: http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/cepa/releases/leveesafety.htm
“Report: Up to 35,000 Kids Still Having Major Katrina Problems”
—By Janet McConnaughey, excerpt from NOLA.com, February 2, 2007

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—Up to 35,000 children—one-third of those across the Gulf Coast still displaced by Hurricane Katrina—are having major problems with mental health, behavior or school, a new study indicates.

To make things worse, many of their parents are depressed as well, leaving them less able to help the children, said Dr. Irwin Redlener, director of Columbia University’s National Center for Disaster Preparedness and president of the Children’s Health Fund, which conducted the study together.

More than 60 percent of the parents and caregivers tested high for anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, the report said. That is well above what is usually seen among people with debilitating chronic diseases, and even higher than Louisiana caregivers reported six months after the storm, it said.

“I’ve been doing advocacy and direct services for kids for more than 30 years. I’ve never seen anything like this,” Redlener said in an interview Friday.

Every day in the continued post-Katrina instability many are living through damages their chances of recovery, he said.

“What I’m concerned about is the long-term consequences for these kids will be horrendous in terms of academic achievement, mental health conditions and long-term ability to recover,” he said.


- Affordable housing?
- The right to enjoy their home, no matter its size and value, without being taxed to raise money for community services that they themselves would never use?
- Construction and maintenance of the infrastructure of roads, bridges, tunnels, and public transportation?
- The right to support only those roads and forms of transportation that they will use?
- Protected air, water, and food supplies?
- The right to engage in commercial enterprises without expensive and constraining regulation by the government?
- Protection of vulnerable populations?
- Freedom from the responsibility to support people who are less successful than they are?
- Protection of political rights?
- Protection from the views of extremist political groups?
- Should these expectations change during a crisis or disaster?
- How much assistance should people who build homes or businesses in vulnerable areas receive from the government?
- Following a disaster, who is responsible for rebuilding? Who decides? Who pays?
- If someone knowingly builds in a flood plain, does it affect their rights to recover costs?

Relevant Sections of the Film

Act II, Chapter 6, “An Ancient Memory” (10 minutes)

Shows flooded housing and scenes of the destruction. President Bush says he didn’t think anyone anticipated the failure of the levees. Terence Blanchard, a musician and composer, says he is worried about this country. One of the interviewees, Damon Hewitt, a New Orleans native and lawyer for the NAACP, says he felt helpless. Henry “Jr.” Rodriguez, a resident of Verret and President of St. Bernard Parish, says he was surprised the Canadian Mounted Police arrived before the federal government.

- What rights would Terence Blanchard think individuals living in a democracy should have to a social safety net?
- Does the documentary treat President Bush’s statement that no one anticipated the flood with credibility?
- How does President Bush’s response compare with President Lyndon B. Johnson’s response during Hurricane Betsy in 1965?
- Did the local, state, and national government reject responsibility for the citizens of New Orleans or were they unable to fulfill their responsibilities?
- How did responsibility for the victims of Katrina vary from the local to the state and national level? Who was responsible for what?

Act I, Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans” (16 minutes)

- Do participants think the Federal Emergency and Management Agency (FEMA) responded appropriately?
- Should the Director of FEMA be held accountable? Is he legally liable?
- Was the evacuation order given early enough? Was it mandatory or voluntary? Who gave the order, when, and why?
- Is it the mayor’s or governor’s responsibility to ensure that people comply with an evacuation order? Can or should they be held accountable? If so, what should or could consequences be?

Act II, Chapter 4, “The Mayor Calls In” (10 minutes)

New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin calls a local radio station on September 1, 2005, expressing his frustration and describing what the city needs. He calls the situation a national disaster. Two days later, Lt. General Russel Honoré, a three-star general in the U.S. Army, arrives. Nagin describes General Honoré as a “John Wayne dude.” General Honoré said he wanted the profile of his troops in New Orleans to be that of humanitarian relief, leaving the law enforcement role to the local police.

- What roles did the local police, the National Guard, and U.S. Army troops play during this crisis? Who sent in the National Guard and the U.S. Army?
- How were relief efforts coordinated between the federal, state, and local governments after Hurricane Katrina?

Act IV, Chapter 4, “Where Is My Government?” (9½ minutes)

A high level of bureaucracy and its impact is shown through the Town Hall meeting.

- What role does bureaucracy play in government functioning and accountability?
- Why didn’t FEMA respond more quickly?
- What do the quality of the trailers and the pace of their delivery and distribution reveal?
- What message is given to those anticipating help from the government?
- From the portrayal of local, state, and federal responses, what is the viewer’s impression of government’s ability to respond to disasters? Did the response to Katrina differ from responses to other disasters? If so, when, how, and why do you believe these differences occurred?
- Do participants feel the inadequacies portrayed in the film are inevitable or can they be attributed to lack of leadership? Should leaders be held accountable? How? When?
- Does the documentary show evidence of efforts made to respond to the emotional trauma of the flood and its aftermath?

Post Viewing

Compare and contrast how differently people interviewed for the documentary view the responsibilities of local, state and federal authorities. Consider differences between LBJ’s response to Hurricane Betsy and President Bush’s response to Katrina.

Closure

In popular culture, the American “character” is strongly identified with values of self-sufficiency and rugged individualism. Does General Honoré, the “John Wayne dude,” fit this mold? Do you have positive or negative associations with these values? Are they always a good thing? In what ways, if at all, have your views about the proper relationship between individual responsibility and government or social accountability changed after watching When the Levees Broke and discussing it with this group? Have your views of what constitutes heroism changed in any way?
**Guiding Questions**

- Should private citizens be held accountable for what they did or did not do to save themselves or others? What is the difference between “civic duty” and heroism?
- Did the disaster following the breaching of the levees reveal major fault lines along race and class in New Orleans? Do those fault lines exist throughout American society?
- Did the coverage of Hurricane Katrina change views about race in America?

**Note to Facilitator**

Discussing race and class in America is not easy. In a multi-racial, multi-ethnic group, participants often become either polarized or silent. Hurricane Katrina, as Wynton Marsalis notes, provided a “signature moment” for looking at America’s racial and class inequities. In this program, participants are encouraged to ask why so many of the people most vulnerable to the hurricane were Black. The focus is intended to expand the conversation about race and class in this country.

**Materials Used in the Program**

Film footage, discussion questions, and two handouts:

1. “Racism—Fact or Faith?”
2. Concentrated Poverty in New Orleans

**Activities Before Viewing the Film**

Post the following quote:

>You simply get chills every time you see these poor individuals . . . so many of these people . . . are so poor and they are so Black, and this is going to raise lots of questions for people who are watching this story unfold.

—Wolf Blitzer on CNN, September 1, 2005

If they watched the hurricane story unfold on television, ask participants to discuss what they recall about the images they
saw. What was their reaction? How did they feel about what they saw? What questions, if any, did Hurricane Katrina raise for them? Did the representation of Hurricane Katrina’s victims’ race on television jibe with Spike Lee’s portrayal of the victims?

**Viewing the Film: Dialogue Questions**

Review Handout 1.

- Would the events of Katrina have unfolded differently if New Orleans were a “Whiter” city? What evidence supports your view?
- Does the structure of our cities, our taxation policies, and our transportation systems disadvantage the urban poor and people of color? What evidence supports your view? What about the role of charities and social service agencies in big cities?
- Based on the presentation by Spike Lee’s film and your own experiences, how do you explain the concentration of poverty in the largely Black neighborhoods of New Orleans?
- From what you know, are these problems of recent vintage or longstanding duration in New Orleans?

**Relevant Sections of the Film**

**Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot” (10 minutes)**

The media are accused of calling Black residents “looters” while describing White residents as taking things for their survival. Does this representation match your recollection of the ways in which the media portrayed looters and survivors? Were there different reasons for residents taking goods from local stores in the aftermath of Katrina?

- How did the media characterize the victims of Katrina? Do viewers feel they were reflecting public opinion or creating it? Does the media, through such coverage, perpetuate racism?

**Act II, Chapter 1, “Jeffersonia” (9½ minutes)**

People are stranded for days with little food and water. Soledad O’Brien reports that conditions at the Superdome are horrendous. The President of Jefferson Parish says armed police would not permit anyone from Orleans Parish to cross the bridge into the city of Gretna. Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu attributes this to widespread rumors from the media about looting and shootings. NAACP lawyer Vanita Gupta says this was clearly aimed at keeping Blacks out.

- What do you make of these disagreements? Do they reveal fundamental racism or favoring of Whites by law enforcement agencies? Or something else? What do you think the perspective of the filmmaker is? Do you share this point of view?

**Act II, Chapter 2, “We Shoot Looters” (9 minutes)**

A Black man describes how he and his cousin were attacked by White men carrying guns in Algiers, a community within the city of New Orleans.

- In the midst of a major crisis, does such an incident surprise you? How do you account for such behaviors? What do you feel it reflects?

**Act III, Chapter 2, “Polarized” (10½ minutes)**

Kanye West goes on national TV saying that George Bush doesn’t care about Black people.

- Why do you think this segment of the film is repeated? What message is the director trying to convey? Do you agree with his judgment?
- How do various characters in the film react to West’s statement?

**Act IV, Chapter 4, “Where Is My Government?” (9½ minutes)**

Historian Douglas Brinkley says he has never seen a time when the U.S. government has turned its back on its people, “people in such dire need, getting such little help from the federal government while they are screaming for help. I think it’s unprecedented.”

- What do you think of this comment?

**Closure**

The facilitator, based on the group’s interests and concerns, should choose from among these topics as follow-ups to discussion of the video segments:

- Review the table in Handout 2, which presents statistics from *Key Indicators of Entrenched Poverty*, a 2005 report from The Brookings Institution. How do participants account for the data?

### HANDOUT 1

**Program 3 of Adult Curriculum**

**“Racism—Fact or Faith?”**

—By Shelby Steele, excerpt from *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 2006, Part A33

Is racism now a powerful, subterranean force in our society? Is it so subtly infused into the White American subconscious as to be both involuntary and invisible to the racist himself? A recent CNN poll tells us that 84% of Blacks and 66% of Whites think racism is a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem in American life. Is this true? . . .

Yet a belief in the ongoing power of racism is, today, an article of faith for “good” Whites and “truth-telling” Blacks. . . . The problem is that this truth blames the victim. It suggests that Black progress will come more from Black effort than from White goodwill—even though White oppression caused the underdevelopment in the first place. . . . Here, racism lives as faith rather than fact. It is something you believe in out of unacknowledged self-interest. . . .

The great mistake Americans made after the civil rights victories of the ‘60s was to allow race to become a government-approved means to power. Here was the incentive to make racism into a faith. And its subsequent life as a faith has destroyed our ability to know the reality of racism in America. Today we live in a terrible ignorance that will no doubt last until we take race out of every aspect of public life—until we learn, as we did with religion, to separate it from the state.
Read, reflect, and discuss quotes on the handouts. Do you agree or disagree with these perspectives?

Some people have said, “Katrina changed everything,” referring to the nation’s views about race, class, poverty, and emergency preparedness. Do you believe that anything has changed?

See the Web site (www.teachingthelevees.org) for ideas on engaging public policy issues from across the political spectrum.

Read, reflect, and discuss quotes on the handouts. Do you agree or disagree with these perspectives?

Some people have said, “Katrina changed everything,” referring to the nation’s views about race, class, poverty, and emergency preparedness. Do you believe that anything has changed?

See the Web site (www.teachingthelevees.org) for ideas on engaging public policy issues from across the political spectrum.

Why do the many immigrants to the United States—both legal and illegal—come here?

Is there another country in which you might want to live?

Did the breaching of the levees and its much publicized aftermath change the way in which race (and class?) is perceived in America? Did it change public perception of what it means to be an American?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Orleans</th>
<th>Jefferson Parish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>302,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>113,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with no car</td>
<td>10,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of households with no car</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home owner</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2005 (HUD)

Race of public housing residents | 100% | 0% | 100% | 0%

Public subsidized housing: Total units | 17,913 | 0% | 2,842 | 0%

Length of stay: Total families in public housing

20+ years | 31% | 20%
10–20 years | 29% | 17%

1999 (Census)

Number of families below poverty | 24,611 | 1,422 | 6,935 | 5,165

Percent | 31.3% | 4.7% | 27.1% | 6.0%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Questions for Discussion

How do participants account for these data? Is there anything here you find surprising?

PROGRAM 4
Perception of Race, Class, and Citizenship
After Katrina

It’s tough to be proud to be an American.
—Terence Blanchard, Act V

Guiding Questions

Does “being an American” say more about a person than that he or she has U.S. citizenship?

Should it mean more than that?

Film footage, discussion questions, and five handouts:

1. “Six Core Values”
2. “Katrina Has Only Modest Impact on Basic Public Values”
4. Interview With Richard Rodriguez  
5. The Racial Divide  

Activities Before Viewing the Documentary  
In Act V, Terence Blanchard says, “It’s tough to be proud to be an American.” Do you think much about “being an American”? If you do, are you connecting your identity to the actual practices and policies of the federal government, to values you consider uniquely American, to a sense of loyalty you feel to other people living in this country, or to something else? Have you ever felt the way Terence Blanchard says he does?  

Viewing the Film: Dialogue Questions  
❖ In what ways, if any, did the images of post-Katrina New Orleans challenge beliefs we might have had about how Americans take care of their vulnerable populations?  
❖ What, if any, are the shared values and standards of behavior that Americans think of as essential to our national identity?  
❖ How is national identity shaped?  

Relevant Sections of the Film  

Act I, Chapter 5, “The Cajun Navy” (13½ minutes)  
The second day after Katrina, striking images of stranded people were being televised and broadcast throughout the world. The world responded in disbelief.  
❖ In what ways do images correspond to or challenge viewers’ perceptions of America?  
❖ What does the “Cajun Navy” imply about civic duty or responsibility in America?  
❖ How is civic duty engaged during times of crisis? Who are the first responders supposed to be?  

Act II, Chapter 5, “General Honrè” (12 minutes)  
The army arrives in New Orleans and the formal post-Katrina evacuation process begins.  
❖ How do the images of evacuation impress viewers?  
❖ What implications are there in the documentary’s portrayal of having to leave the dead behind?  
❖ How do you feel Spike Lee feels about Russel Honrè? Is he portrayed as the “All American” hero, as Mayor Nagin later says?  

Act II, Chapter 6, “An Ancient Memory” (10 minutes)  
The chapter starts with a BBC segment on the conditions on the third day after Hurricane Katrina struck.  
❖ How does international coverage contrast with domestic coverage?  
❖ What do you feel about the portrayal of foreign countries’ offers of aid and their response time?  
❖ Do you know why these offers were rejected? If not, it might be useful to explore this question.  

Act III, Chapter 3, “American Citizens” (14 minutes)  
TV news broadcaster Brian Williams does a nationally televised segment on “refugee displacement.” Former First Lady Barbara Bush visits Katrina victims and says many are better off.  
❖ How do the statistics regarding poverty and crime impress viewers?  
❖ Is it possible to be a refugee in your own country?  
❖ Does becoming a refugee/evacuee while being a citizen redefine what kind of country this is?  

Act IV, Chapter 5, “A Signature Moment” (13½ minutes)  
Wynton Marsalis refers to the Katrina events as a “signature moment” in America. Plans for the future of New Orleans are presented.  

HANDOUT 1  
Program 4 of Adult Curriculum  

“Six Core Values”  

We believe that true opportunity requires a commitment to a core set of values. These values are integrally related to the principle of human rights. Equal treatment, a voice in societal decisions, a chance to start over, and the tools to meet our own basic needs are not just good policy ideas. They are the right of every human being simply by virtue of his or her humanity.  

Mobility—All of us who work hard must be afforded the opportunity to advance and participate fully in the economic, political, and cultural life of the nation, notwithstanding our status at birth.  

Equality—We all must have full access to the benefits, responsibilities, and burdens of our society regardless of race, gender, national origin, or socioeconomic status.  

Voice—We embrace democracy as a system that depends on the ability of all of us to participate, debate, and have real ownership in the public dialogue.  

Redemption—we recognize that humans are responsive and evolving beings, and that those who falter in their efforts or break societal rules warrant the chance for rehabilitation and redemption.  

Community—we share responsibility for each other, just as we are responsible for ourselves. The strength of our people and our nation depends on the vibrancy and cohesiveness of our diverse communities.  

Security—we are all entitled to the level of education, economic well-being, health care, and other protections necessary to human dignity, without which it is impossible to access society’s other rights and responsibilities.  

Questions for Discussion  
❖ How adequately do the above values address the challenges of When the Levees Broke?  
❖ Do they represent a shared vision of what America stands for?
Do viewers think this was a “mirror” on American values, as suggested by the film?

How can America reconcile economic growth with the needs and wishes of its citizens?

Post Viewing
See handouts for further discussion of issues related to the film.

Closure
Participants discuss the ramifications of Hurricane Katrina on their perceptions of what it means to be American. Focus should be given to beliefs about the fairness, justice, and compassion with which America treats its own citizens, regardless of race or class. Are these beliefs tied to participants’ perceptions of what it means to be an American? Have these beliefs changed in the aftermath of Katrina? How do you define basic human needs and human rights?

HANDOUT 2
Program 4 of Adult Curriculum

“Katrina Has Only Modest Impact on Basic Public Values”

As the Hurricane Katrina recovery effort unfolds along the Gulf Coast, there has been considerable speculation about the disaster’s possible impact on fundamental public attitudes on such questions as the role of government, the plight of the poor and the extent of racial progress in the U.S.

On the left, some have expressed the hope that Katrina will turn the public’s attention to the ongoing hardships of the poor and needy, leading to a revival of support for government assistance programs. Some on the right believe the widespread perception that government failed in responding to the crisis could bolster conservative efforts to limit government’s role generally. . . . Many wonder if the fact that so many of Katrina’s victims were Black will trigger a re-evaluation of race relations in this country.

However, a recent survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted Sept. 8–11 among 1,523 Americans, suggests that while Katrina’s impact has already been felt politically—in somewhat lower ratings for the president, for instance—it has had far less of an impact on long-term values relating to poverty, race and government. . . . But there is no evidence that basic attitudes on poverty—and the government’s role in addressing the issue—have been altered by Katrina. Currently, a narrow 51% majority expresses the view that poor people have it easy because government benefits don’t go far enough to help them live decently; 38% think poor people have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return.

Questions for Discussion
❖ What accounts for the findings in the above report on public opinion? Do participants find them surprising?
❖ Should business and industry assume a greater leadership role in addressing issues of race and poverty in the United States?

HANDOUT 3
Program 4 of Adult Curriculum

“The Wake-Up Call”

“This election was about scandal, it was about checks and balances, about Iraq,” [Ron Dellums] said. “Also about [Katrina]. Because at a time that this country was saying that we’re in a foreign country for the purposes of security and safety, when it hit home, our response was inept, inadequate, insincere and lacking in compassion. Here’s the wealthiest nation in the world—gave a Third World response to a major catastrophe. In my opinion, Katrina was a metaphor for everything wrong in urban America. What Katrina did was expose the stark reality of the vulnerability of urban life . . . the winds of Katrina blew through the television all of the pain of urban life.” . . . Dellums, 71, the former longtime congressman and mayor-elect of Oakland, said every city is a potential Katrina. . . .

Questions for Discussion
❖ What about poverty in rural America?
❖ Are most poor in the United States White or Black?
❖ Has Katrina damaged faith in the United States as a land of opportunity?

PROGRAM 5
Spirituality, Resilience, and Hope in Post-Katrina America

Guiding Questions
❖ How do individuals and communities grapple with feelings of resignation in the face of disaster?
❖ Is there hope for the recovery of New Orleans? What kind of country is America? What kind of country do we want it to be? How much do religion and spirituality have to do with the way these questions are answered at the individual level? How much should religion and spirituality have to do with the way these questions are answered at the national level?

Note to Facilitator
This program explores how individuals, institutions, and systems can contribute to the growth and development of the country. The role of spirituality, humor, and faith as demonstrated by the voices in the documentary are examined. How do

Note to Facilitator
This program explores how individuals, institutions, and systems can contribute to the growth and development of the country. The role of spirituality, humor, and faith as demonstrated by the voices in the documentary are examined. How do
Interview With Richard Rodriguez

New Orleans’ residents are a rich blend of cultural identities and race. They are self-described as Creole, Cajun, Black, Indian, Asian, and Spanish. Some of the terms used to describe the mixture of people in America include melting pot, tossed salad, and even boiling cauldron. Richard Rodriguez writes about race and ethnicity in America. In an online interview by Scott London, Rodriguez shared some of his thoughts on the concept of America as a melting pot.

Excerpts from the interview follow:

London: Why do we always talk about race in this country strictly in terms of Black and White?

Rodriguez: America has never had a very wide vocabulary for miscegenation. We say we like diversity, but we don't like the idea that our Hispanic neighbor is going to marry our daughter. America has nothing like the Spanish vocabulary for miscegenation. Mulatto, mestizo, Creole—these Spanish and French terms suggest, by their use, that miscegenation is a fact of life. America has only Black and White. In eighteenth-century America, if you had any drop of African blood in you, you were Black . . . there was talk about how the country was splitting in two—one part Black, one part White. It was ludicrous: typical gringo arrogance. It's as though Whites and Blacks can imagine America only in terms of each other. It's mostly White arrogance, in that it places Whites always at the center of the racial equation. But lots of emerging racial tensions in California have nothing to do with Whites: Filipinos and Samoans are fighting it out in San Francisco high schools. Merged is becoming majority Mexican and Cambodian. They may be fighting in gangs right now, but I bet they are also learning each other's language. Cultures, when they meet, influence one another, whether people like it or not. But Americans don't have any way of describing this secret that has been going on for more than two hundred years. The intermarriage of the Indian and the African in America, for example, has been constant and thorough. Colin Powell tells us in his autobiography that he is Scotch, Irish, African, Indian, and British, but all we hear is that he is African.

The interview was adapted from the radio series Insight & Outlook. It appeared in the August 1997 issue of The Sun magazine under the title “Crossing Borders.”

Questions for Discussion

- Is New Orleans’ tremendous cultural diversity known to most Americans?
- Is such cultural diversity widely appreciated as a positive dimension of a city’s identity by Americans?

The Racial Divide


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In handling relief efforts, President Bush . . .</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did all he could</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could have done more</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5</td>
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<table>
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<th>Bush job as president</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Sept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority for Bush</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>—</th>
<th>—</th>
<th>—</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic policy</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War on terrorism</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both/Neither (vol.)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gov’t response if most victims had been White?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faster</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The same</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shows racial inequality still a major problem?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
<td>(1,000)</td>
<td>(712)</td>
<td>(211)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
they support human resilience in the face of disaster? Perspectives on whether there is hope for the region and the country can be discussed through consideration of these ideas, along with the images and perspectives found in the documentary. This culminating program seeks to help participants in these discussions to articulate the potential for Hurricane Katrina and the breaching of the levees to shape a positive future.

Materials Used in the Program

Film footage, discussion questions, and three handouts:
1. “Wading Towards Home”
3. “Buzzwords”

Activities Before Viewing the Documentary

Post the following quote:

No man is an island, entire of itself; . . . any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

—John Donne, Meditation XVII

Reflect on and discuss the meanings of the words and their relevance to viewers and those affected by Katrina.

Have you ever been in a disaster you considered devastating?
“Wading Towards Home”  
—By Michael Lewis, excerpt from the New York Times, October 9, 2005

The late great novelist Walker Percy, a lifelong New Orleanian, was attracted to the psychological state of the ex-suicide. The ex-suicide is the man who has tried to kill himself and failed. Before his suicide attempt, he had nothing to live for. Now, expecting to be dead and discovering himself alive, something inside of him awakens: so long as he’s alive he might as well give living a shot. The whole of New Orleans is in this psychological state. The waters did their worst but still left the old city intact. They did to the public schools and the public-housing projects what the government should have done long ago. They called forth tens of billions of dollars in aid, and the attention of energetic people, to a city long starved of capital and energy. For the first time in my life, outsiders are pouring into the city to do something other than drink. For the first time in my life, the city is alive with possibilities. For the first time in my life, it doesn’t matter one bit who is born to be a king. Whatever else New Orleans is right now, it isn’t stagnant. As I left, I thought about what an oddly characteristic thing it would be if it was a flood that saved New Orleans.

“Black New Orleans More Hopeful for City’s Recovery”  
—By Leonard Pitts, excerpt from The Olympian, March 16, 2006

Recently, they conducted a poll in New Orleans. Gallup, USA Today and CNN asked 399 White people and 311 Black ones about Hurricane Katrina’s effect on their lives. . . . To do it by the numbers: 53 percent of Black respondents told pollsters they lost everything they had when Katrina came ashore. Only 19 percent of White ones did. Blacks are also significantly more likely than Whites to report major difficulties finding work or getting power restored. And yet . . . when asked whether the wounded city will ever heal, 67 percent of Black people thought it would, compared with 52 percent of Whites. Despair becomes too easy. The thing we sometimes forget, the thing quantified in this study, is that we come from people who had—and have—faith in every sense of that word. Faith, determination, courage, hope. . . . Think Marcus Garvey crying, “Up, you mighty race!” Think Fiddler promising Kunta Kinte, “There’s gon’be another day.” Think Al Jarreau singing, “We got by, somehow, we always did, always got by.” So in a sense, this is nothing new. And if you wonder how optimism can flourish the most among those who have the least, well, maybe when you’ve been weaned on hardship, hardship doesn’t impress you. You do what you’ve got to do, suffer what you’ve got to suffer, to get where you’ve got to get. And after you do, you realize how much of the journey was owed to simple, stubborn guts.

“Buzzwords”  
—Excerpt from Times-Picayune, January 1, 2007, Living Section, p. 1

Buzzwords. We’ve earned our own. Heard, overheard and created by us, we give you our local version of a unique post-K vocabulary.

**Adjuster-Fiable Homicide**—n. The legal concept that may get you reduced prison time for crimes of passion against insurance companies.

**Auntie Depressant**—n. The relative you can’t stand who became a part of your extended family during the evacuation. Medication made her much more likeable.

**Con-Track-Tors**—n. Bounty hunters who track down the unscrupulous guys who take your money and never work on your house.

**Copped**—v. The ‘p’ is silent, rhymes with gored. As in “We’ve been copped!”

**Cat-a-Tonics**—n. People who had to drink lots of gin and tonics to cope with being separated from their cats.

**Disaspora**—n. Mass exodus when a city survives a hurricane, but the levees don’t.

**Dog-Dazed**—adj. The state of stupefied and weary disorientation that comes from evacuating without one’s dog.

**Evacuation**—n. Where you spend your time away from New Orleans.

**Evacuation Preparation Disorientation**—n. What we feel each time hurricane season rolls around.

**Hellavation**—n. The hell one goes through raising a house to meet flood elevations.

**Happy Talk**—n. No, not one of the tunes in the “South Pacific” musical. Any scrap of good news or recovery that lifts the spirits above the strife of post-K life.

**Katrinket**—n. Something you buy post-K to make you feel good.

**Levee-Tation**—n. What’s needed to build a Category 5 levee system.

**Mandacharity**—n. When one is required to volunteer to gut houses and build Habitat Homes.

**Road Wary**—adj. Fear of Louisiana’s treacherous Road Home program.

**Saintxious**—adj. Anxiety about the Saints’ future in the playoffs.
Invite participants to talk about their experiences.

- What resources helped you endure?
- Looking back, what meaning does that experience have for you now?
- What if any examples did you see of individual resilience in the documentary? Was it always tied to spirituality?

Participants can discuss how a community might support resilience. Consider what familial, social, and cultural factors contribute to resilience.

**Viewing the Film: Dialogue Questions**

- What role did religious leaders play in the aftermath of Katrina? Is there a proper role for religious leaders in community development and social change? Should they merely counsel and console their parishioners, or may they also inspire action?
- What relationship should faith-based recovery have to government efforts, if any? For example, the Catholic Charities organization in New Orleans is helping rebuild houses. Both Methodist and Baptist Churches in the Lower Ninth Ward are installing bunk beds and showers in their damaged church buildings to host volunteers who come to New Orleans to help with the recovery process. What other such examples have you heard of or can you think of?

**Relevant Sections of the Film**

**Act I, Chapter 2, “God’s Will?” (7 minutes)**

Phyllis stops to ponder her own mortality; she questions whether the storm and flooding were “God’s will.”

- As one of the main protagonists in the film, how is Phyllis characterized in the video?
- How is her sense of personal accountability juxtaposed with her anger at authorities?
- Do viewers think Spike Lee is presenting her as an archetype, as the personality representing the strength of the people of New Orleans?

**Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot” (10 minutes)**

Perspectives and images of the Superdome as well as the weather are shared by Shelton and Phyllis. In the final images from Shelton’s account, we see people joining in clapping and singing “This Little Light of Mine.”

- What images come to mind in this final scene? Do you perceive singing of “This Little Light of Mine” as a show of solidarity or resignation?
- Is spiritual faith shown to comfort and/or inspire action in this culminating scene?

**Act II, Chapter 4, “The Mayor Calls In” (10 minutes)**

At the end of Chapter 4, the Reverend Al Sharpton tells of talking to a man who lost his disabled wife. The man questioned why his own life was spared.

- How do viewers interpret this story? Is there a message of endurance and hope conveyed in this segment?
- How do viewers interpret the political action and social activist messages of many of the ministers shown in the film? Do they feel this is an appropriate stance for such leaders?

**Act II, Chapter 6, “An Ancient Memory” (last 3 minutes)**

After images of innocent children and floating dead bodies, Shelton Shakespear Alexander recites his poem.

- What is the message of this poem? Is it despairing or hopeful and in what ways?

**Act III, Chapter 1, “By Way of Katrina” (10 minutes)**

Mother Audrey Mason opens the Act with a prayer of thanks for deliverance. This is contrasted with a video montage of devastation. Included is a shot of Jesus being crucified outside St. Bernard Parish.

- In addition to thanks for deliverance, what other messages does Mother Mason convey? Whom does she blame for her trials? Is she an inspiration? Do viewers feel she is a catalyst to action? Should she be?
- What do viewers think the filmmaker is suggesting?

**Act IV, Chapter 4, “Where Is My Government” (9½ minutes)**

Cheryl Livaudis explains how she will get a FEMA trailer. Phyllis describes the impact of rain and thunder on her trailer. Tyree Johnson makes a comment, triggering laughter from the film crew.

- Do viewers think Cheryl and Tyree were intentionally being funny?
- Why do you think this scene was included in the documentary?

**Act IV, Chapter 6, “I Am Mending” (9½ minutes)**

Phyllis recites her poem about mending. Final images of the New Orleans funeral celebration and the beautiful sunset on Lake Pontchartrain.

- How does the fade-out shot of Setliff, set against the corroding flood wall, affect viewers?
- Do participants feel this final image implies anything about the director’s message? Is it hopeful? Why or why not?

**Closure**

What relationship, if any, is there between religious values and the values associated with what kind of a country many people want America to be? American churches have often been involved in social change, especially with efforts to make American life conform more closely to their own religious values. The documentary portrays the power of religious faith.

The civil rights movement is a good example of how religious faith worked to transform the country. If Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal, were overturned, that would be another example of the power of religious movements. What if any tensions are there in the role religion plays in American life and culture?
Spike Lee's HBO documentary film, *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, is more than a dissection of a tragedy; it is a dissection of the complex interplay of culture, race, class, and gender in the United States. The lessons in this unit offer further investigation of many issues raised in the film, focusing on the central issue of what New Orleans and the Katrina experience reveal about the complexities of life and identity in 21st-century America, how it got to be that way, and prospects for the future. These lessons are designed primarily for college students studying American history and culture, but can easily be adapted for students at many different levels, in different disciplines, and in a wide variety of settings.

The lessons included in this part of the book include the following:

- **Lesson 1** focuses on New Orleans' considerable contributions to the larger American cultural vocabulary, pondering the implications for this country if the social milieu that produced such achievement is not revitalized.
- **Lesson 2** asks whether Katrina and the breach of the levees reveals "two Americas," a phrase first used in the 1960s to indicate the great divide between rich and poor in this country.
- **Lesson 3** asks if and how racial and other demographic concerns should impact rebuilding efforts.
- **Lesson 4** focuses on the impact of Katrina on the African American community of New Orleans and asks whether there is a link between this tragedy and the historical experiences of African Americans during slavery and the Great Migration.
- **Lesson 5** reflects upon the often-overlooked demographic dimensions of an event such as Katrina and asks students to investigate the concept of the " feminization of poverty" and consider whether the impact of Katrina was felt differently by various age, race, gender, and class cohorts.

In different ways, each lesson encourages students to ask the larger question of what Katrina taught us about the kind of country we are, and how our response to Katrina will shape the kind of country we become in the future. Whether that question is answered through the lens of the New Orleans jazz musicians or prospects for the rebuilding of the Lower Ninth Ward, this curriculum offers students the opportunity to use Spike Lee's film to come a small step closer to understanding our nation in all its complexity.

**A Note on the Structure of the Lessons**

Please note that after each lesson's introduction, there is a list of readings. The instructor is encouraged to draw selectively from this list to assign readings to students prior to the discussions and other activities described in the lesson. In addition, brief excerpts from some of the readings have been included and may be used at the discretion of the instructor instead of the complete work. These excerpts are presented as Handouts for ease of photocopying and are designed to launch each discussion or activity. Most of the materials used in these lessons are available on the Internet, and links are provided. The only materials not available on the Internet are books (the books cited are generally available in bookstores and college libraries), and articles from the *New York Times* (which are also generally available in libraries and through research databases).

If educators wish to employ these lessons with students who do not read at higher levels, they might consider making audio or video recordings of the primary sources included in each section. They could then have students listen to the statements rather than reading them.

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**LESSON 1**

"**A Cultural Gem**"

**Essential Questions**

- Is New Orleans culturally important to America? Why or why not?

**Introduction**

New Orleans is commonly regarded as “a cultural gem,” as one commentator in *When the Levees Broke* puts it. In this lesson, students will focus on the city’s considerable role in the development of American music, particularly (but not exclusively) the rise of jazz. They will explore how jazz arose out of the numerous musical traditions of the New Orleans past, particularly traditional African rhythmic forms, and the close interconnection of music with social practices, from the interplay of music, dance, and ritual in jazz funerals to the participation of traditional social and pleasure clubs in Mardi Gras and other communal festivals.

In the second part of the lesson, students will pay particular attention to Louis Armstrong, a New Orleans native who is widely regarded as the single most important figure in the development of jazz. In many ways, Armstrong’s personal story provides the perfect metaphor for the cultural significance of New Orleans to America. Armstrong himself was raised in poverty, belonged to the social clubs that promoted music in the city and was even a “second-liner” in city parades and funerals. Thomas Brothers’ book, *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans*, describes the close interrelationship of Armstrong the person and New Orleans the city.
in great detail and provides an invaluable resource in understanding the link between the city and its music.

The lesson poses a question that lies at the heart of the consideration of whether or not to rebuild New Orleans. Preservation of the past is a much contested issue in the United States, a society in which great emphasis has been placed on progress, novelty, and youth. Pitched battles have been fought across the country over development versus preservation of historic landmarks such as Civil War battlefields. Nevertheless, much progress has been made over the last century in convincing Americans of the importance of preserving our cultural heritage. This question is: How important is rebuilding New Orleans so as to preserve its unique cultural identity?

Finally, we encourage all educators to allow students to develop their own questions for discussion and/or research at the end of each of these lessons. Feel free to use these lessons as a launching pad for your own creative development of these ideas.

Relevant Sections of the Film
Opening segment, Louis Armstrong, Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans? (00:00:58–00:03:58)
Closing credits, Fats Domino, Walking to New Orleans (end of Act IV, 01:08:14–01:10:14)
End of Act I, Chapter 4, Wynton Marsalis sings St. James Infirmary (00:39:18–00:40:27)
Act III, Chapter 1, segment on Hot 8 Brass Bands (00:04:00–00:06:05)
Act III, Chapter 4, “The Roots Run Deep”
Act IV, Chapter 1, “Mardi Gras 2006”
Act IV, Chapter 6, second half of jazz funeral for Katrina (00:59:14–01:01:15)

Materials Used in the Lesson
Web site of the New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park, www.nps.gov/jazz. The following two pages from this Web site are especially useful:
- New Orleans: The birthplace of jazz, from companion Web site to Ken Burns’ documentary Jazz, www.pbs.org/jazz/places/places_new_orleans.htm

Questions for Consideration

The Development and Cultural Significance of New Orleans Jazz
- What does Raeburn mean when he calls music “a necessity” in New Orleans? What social functions has music played in different New Orleans communities, both in the past and in more recent times?
- How does Piazza describe the interplay of music, dance, and ritual in New Orleans? What does he mean when he calls that interplay “a matter of spiritual life and death”?
- How did early jazz build on African musical traditions? What role did Place Congo (Congo Square) play in the cultural development of New Orleans?
- How did the ethnic diversity of early New Orleans influence the city’s musical development?
- How did the Mardi Gras Indians influence the development of jazz?
- How are jazz funerals (what the residents of New Orleans call “funerals with music”) distinctive? How do they represent the intersection of music and ritual in New Orleans? How do they represent the interplay of Christian and African traditions? The film depicts both halves of a jazz funeral for Katrina. Which half do you think best symbolizes the legacy of Katrina to the city?
- What role have musical festivals and institutions—Mardi Gras, Jazz Fest, musical groups (such as the Hot 8 Jazz Band), jazz clubs—played in defining New Orleans’ sense of itself?
- Why do the members of the Big 8 Brass Band and other musicians featured in the film want to return to New Orleans—even if they might be able to find music jobs elsewhere? What does jazz represent to the cultural identity of the city that might be lost if a cohesive network of musicians does not remain in the city?
- Does preserving jazz and its associated groups such as the Mardi Gras Indians matter to the cultural life of this country?
- Do music and art play a special role in healing New Orleanians in the aftermath of Katrina? Are music, art, and other cultural traditions important to preserve in American life? Why or why not?
New Orleans culture is of a piece. You can’t really lose one part without losing the whole thing. The music is part of the parades, and the basis of the dancing that you see, or do, at the parades. The parades are part of the rhythms of the year, and of life—the anniversaries, holidays, birthdays, and funerals. They wind through the streets of the neighborhoods where people live…. It amounts to a kind of cultural synthesis in which music is food, and food is a kind of choreography, and dance is a way of dramatizing the fact that you are still alive for another year, another funeral, another Mardi Gras. This is true at all levels of the society, but the maintaining and restating of that fact is a matter of spiritual life and death especially among the city’s poorest African American residents, among whom so many of New Orleans’s most recognized and important cultural expressions arose in the first place.

—Tom Piazza, Why New Orleans Matters

The scene could be Africa. In fact, it is nineteenth-century New Orleans. Scattered firsthand accounts provide us with tantalizing details of these slave dances that took place in the open area then known as Congo Square—today Louis Armstrong Park stands on roughly the same ground—and there are perhaps no more intriguing documents in the history of African-American music. Benjamin Latrobe, the noted architect, witnessed one of these collective dances on February 21, 1819, and not only left a vivid written account of the event, but made several sketches of the instruments used…. Although we are inclined these days to view the intersection of European-American and African currents in music as a theoretical, almost metaphysical issue, these storied accounts of the Congo Square dances provide us with a real time and place, an actual transfer of totally African ritual to the native soil of the New World.

—Ted Gioia, The History of Jazz

Almost the present day Indian gangs are best known for their fabulous costumes at Carnival time, their most far reaching contribution of New Orleans is in the world of music. It was the African drumming traditions carried on within the gangs that combined with the brass marching band traditions in New Orleans which led to the development of jazz. There are still extensive connections and cross memberships between the Indian gangs and the traditional brass bands of New Orleans; many of the drummers were members of, or closely associated with, the gangs. You can’t find a traditional “second-line” parade or jazz funeral in New Orleans where you won’t find numerous members of the Indian gangs backing up the band, gathered closely behind the drummers with percussion instruments. This is a creative combination which hasn’t changed at all over the years. The beat and lyrics of the gangs have inspired the music of Jelly Roll Morton, Smiley Lewis, Sugarboy Crawford, Guitar Slim, Professor Longhair, James Booker, Mac Rebennack, Fats Domino, the Neville Brothers, and countless others.

—Michael Smith, “Mardi Gras Indians: Cultural and Community Empowerment”

In the early twentieth century, New Orleans was a place of colliding identities and histories, and Louis Armstrong was a gifted young man of psychological nimbleness. The city and the musician were both extraordinary, their relationship unique, their impact on American culture incalculable.…

In New Orleans around 1900, the freedmen and their descendants were discovering common ground at Funky Butt Hall, in storefront churches and in street parades and funerals. These were Armstrong’s early training grounds, places where the musical culture that had been formed during slavery, the African-American musical vernacular, was preserved. The world “vernacular” (from the Latin verna, meaning “slave”) carries associations of class; it is everyday music made and appreciated by lower-class people—indeed, enslaved people. And it is mainly music made with no recourse to notation, existing purely in an oral (or aural) tradition. Armstrong lived a childhood of poverty, on the margins of society, and this position put him right in the middle of the vernacular traditions that were fueling the new music of which he would eventually become one of the world’s greatest masters.

—Thomas Brothers, Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans

Louis Armstrong: Cultural Icon?

❖ Why do you think Spike Lee chose to use a Louis Armstrong recording for the opening credits of the film? What is Armstrong’s symbolic importance to the city?
❖ In what ways did the early musical and other cultural practices of African Americans and Creoles influence Louis Armstrong’s musical development?
❖ What was Armstrong’s social and economic background? How did that influence his artistic development?
❖ Why was Place Congo (Congo Square) chosen as the centerpiece for what became known as Louis Armstrong Park?
❖ Why is Armstrong considered such an important figure in the development of jazz?

❖ Would Armstrong’s contributions have been possible without the influence of New Orleans?
❖ What makes a performer a cultural icon? Are cultural icons important to Americans’ sense of who they are as a people and a nation?

Closure

Watch the opening segment and closing credits of the film. Why did Lee choose performances not only of songs about New Orleans, but recorded by artists closely associated with the city (Armstrong and Fats Domino)? Would this film have been nearly as effective without the use of music? Can New Orleans have as strong an identity post-Katrina without music playing
a central role? Does it matter if New Orleans is rebuilt as a jazz center post-Katrina? Will jazz survive without New Orleans? Is preservation of this country’s cultural, artistic, and musical past something Americans should care about?

Taking Action
Ask any musically talented students or community members to perform examples of New Orleans jazz for the class. Musical ensembles on campus should be encouraged to perform a tribute to New Orleans, perhaps even as a fund-raiser to assist New Orleans musicians trying to rebuild post-Katrina. Please see the Web site for the Jazz Foundation of America for information on assisting New Orleans musicians, www.jazzfoundation.org/new_orleans.php.

Likewise, Our New Orleans is a benefit CD recorded in 2005 by a wide range of New Orleans musicians, including Allen Toussaint, Buckwheat Zydeco, and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. It is widely available at record stores and Web sites, or from the group’s Web site, www.ourneworleans.net.

Take a look around your region or state. Investigate which, if any, cultural sites are threatened by development. Launch a conversation in your college or community about the value of preserving these sites or saving them from encroachment by commercial or residential development: Are they worth preserving? At what cost? How do we decide? Who gets to decide?

Take a look at the “Teaching The Levees” Web site (www.teachingthelevees.org) for a related topic: the Mardi Gras Indians.

LESSON 2
Are There “Two Americas”?

Essential Question
Did Katrina expose the existence of “two Americas”?

Introduction
In 1968, members of the Kerner Commission, who had been empanelled to investigate the urban riots that gripped the country a year earlier, wrote: “This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one White—separate and unequal.” For many Americans, the most shocking images of Katrina were the images of dire poverty that seemed, to them, to be coming from a foreign country. In this lesson, students use statistical data to quantify what Katrina revealed about the persistence of poverty in the United States today, as well as the interconnections between class and race. The lesson ends with a discussion of what such evidence may or may not reveal about who we are as a country.

Relevant Sections of the Film
Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot”
Act II, Chapter 1, “Jeffersonia”
Act II, Chapter 3, “Brownie, You’re Doin’ a Heck of a Job”
Act III, Chapter 3, “American Citizens”
Act IV, Chapter 5, Wynton Marsalis speaks of a “Signature Moment” (00:38:34–00:39:02)

Materials Used in the Lesson

Opening Activity
View Act II, Chapter 1 (“Jeffersonia”), and Act III, Chapter 3 (“American Citizens”). Discuss the following with students:
Questions for Consideration

- Why were New Orleans residents not allowed to cross the Gretna Bridge? What is Vanita Gupta's explanation? Do you agree or disagree?
- Can one construct an argument based on this segment that there are “two Americas”—one on each side of the Gretna Bridge? Can the bridge be construed as some sort of dividing line between these two Americas? Or would such an argument oversimplify the complexity of what happened in the immediate aftermath of Katrina?
- What does use of the term “refugees” suggest about the attitudes toward the Katrina victims? Does the term imply that most Americans saw them as foreigners—i.e., members of a different country? Why or why not?
- How would you feel if you were the victim of a disaster and were called a “refugee” by other Americans?

According to government statistics, what percentage of the American population is considered living at or under the poverty level? Has this percentage risen or fallen in recent years?

- How does the U.S. poverty rate compare to that of other industrialized countries?
- What factors might account for changes in the poverty level in recent years?
- Despite numerous government programs aimed at reducing poverty, why do you think poverty rates in the U.S. are as high as they are? Is this a problem government can fix?
- What percentage of African Americans lives at or under the poverty level? Whites? Hispanics? What accounts for the discrepancies?
- Is there a link between race and class in the United States? Do you agree with Dyson’s comment that “race makes class hurt more”? How might a person living in poverty in Appalachia respond to this statement?
- What was the overall poverty level in New Orleans before Katrina? How did the poverty level of African Americans in New Orleans compare with that of Whites? Does poverty make a person more vulnerable to disasters such as Katrina? Why or why not?
- According to the Berube and Katz paper, what is “concentrated poverty”? Why, according to these authors, was concentrated poverty such a significant issue in shaping life in New Orleans? What policies do they suggest might alleviate this problem? How effective do you believe such policies would be?
- Based on the readings and viewing the film, do you believe Katrina was primarily about race or class? Take into consideration the experience of middle-class and wealthy African Americans. How was their experience different from (or similar to) poor and working-class African Americans during Katrina?
- Do you believe most Americans are aware of the extent of poverty in the United States? Why do you think so many people were shocked by the levels of poverty they witnessed during Katrina?
- Why will poor people have a greater difficulty rebuilding after Katrina? What specific policies might help them do so, and what are the difficulties enacting such policies?
- If you were a person living below the poverty level who evacuated New Orleans after Katrina, what do you think the odds are that you would return? What would be the deciding factors? If you were a middle-class person? A wealthy person?
- Who is responsible for the poor in our society? Is this an issue that Americans should talk about more often? Is our obligation to respond differently if the face of poverty is that of an immigrant?
- Is it in New Orleans’ best interest that the poor return and rebuild? Why or why not? What are the implications both for New Orleans and American society in general if the poor remain dispersed in other parts of the country?
- Do you foresee greater emphasis on addressing poverty in the U.S. in the aftermath of Katrina? Does the general spirit represented by President Johnson’s speech in 1964 exist today? Do our views on poverty suggest anything about who we are as a country? Can we eliminate poverty if we only have the social will to do so?

Closure

Wynton Marsalis speaks in the film about how Katrina is a “signature moment” in American history. Read Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” speech, which introduced the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Then, research contemporary historians’ views about the successes and failures of LBJ’s War on Poverty. Have lessons been learned from this effort? To what extent do you think Johnson’s attitude is shared by the U.S. government and general public today? Is the attention to poverty that emerged immediately after Katrina likely to produce a significant effort to reduce poverty, or has the interest in this issue already dissipated? What are the prospects for poverty becoming a significant political issue in the U.S. in the foreseeable future? Is poverty a personal or a societal issue? Does it make any difference to you whether there are “two Americas”?

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) seeks to limit the extent of eminent domain expropriations in the Lower Ninth Ward, February 2007

Maureen Grabhick
After seeing who escaped the flood and who remained behind, it’s impossible to ignore the shocking breadth of the gap between rich and poor. It’s as if we don’t even see poor people in this country anymore, as if we don’t even try to imagine what their lives are like…. To be poor in America was to be invisible, their lives of the White and non-White poor. It is bad enough to be poor in America was to be invisible, but not after this week, not after those images of the bedraggled masses at the Superdome, convention center and airport.

—Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (1962)

The table is an adapted version of data from The Brookings Institution, http://www.brookings.edu/metro/20050920_povertynumbers.pdf

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The poor are invisible is one of the most important things about them. They are not simply neglected and forgotten as in the old rhetoric of reform; what is much worse, they are not seen.

—Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (1962)

After seeing who escaped the flood and who remained behind, it’s impossible to ignore the shocking breadth of the gap between rich and poor. It’s as if we don’t even see poor people in this country anymore, as if we don’t even try to imagine what their lives are like…. To be poor in America was to be invisible, but not after this week, not after those images of the bedraggled masses at the Superdome, convention center and airport.


It takes a hurricane. It takes a catastrophe like Katrina to strip away the old evasions, hypocrisies and not-so-benign neglect. It takes the sight of the United States with a big black eye—visible around the world—to help the rest of us begin to see again. For the moment, at least, Americans are ready to fix their restless gaze on enduring problems of poverty, race and class that have escaped their attention. Does this mean a new war on poverty?

No, especially with Katrina’s gargantuan price tag. But this disaster may offer a chance to start a skirmish, or at least make Washington think harder about why part of the richest country on earth looks like the Third World.


This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one White—separate and unequal.


For a brief moment last year in New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina brought America’s poor into the spotlight. Poverty seemed on the government’s agenda. That spotlight has now been turned off. “I had hoped Katrina would have changed things more. It hasn’t,” says Cynthia Duncan, a sociology professor at the University of New Hampshire.

—Paul Harris, “37 Million Poor Hidden in the Land of Plenty,” *The Observer*, February 19, 2006

Because it is right, because it is wise, and because, for the first time in our history, it is possible to conquer poverty, I submit, for the consideration of the Congress and the country, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964…. Today, for the first time in our history, we have the power to strike away the barriers to full participation in our society. Having the power, we have the duty…. We are fully aware that this program will not eliminate all the poverty in America in a few months or a few years. Poverty is deeply rooted and its causes are many. But this program will show the way to new opportunities for millions of our fellow citizens…. and this program is much more than a beginning. Rather it is a commitment. It is a total commitment by this President, and this Congress, and this nation, to pursue victory over the most ancient of mankind’s enemies.

—Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” Speech, March 1964

The Black-White racial paradigm was also pressured by an enduring question among social analysts that was revived in the face of Katrina: is it race or class that determines the fate of poor Blacks? Class certainly loomed large in Katrina’s aftermath. Blacks of means escaped the tragedy; Blacks without them suffered and died. In reality, it is how race and class interact that made the situation for the poor so horrible on the Gulf Coast. The rigid caste system that punishes poor Blacks and other minorities also targets poor Whites. Even among the oppressed, however, there are stark differences. Concentrated poverty doesn’t victimize poor Whites in the same way it does poor Blacks…. In New Orleans, 53 percent of poor Blacks were without cars while just 17 percent of poor Whites lacked access to cars. The racial disparity in class effects shows up in education as well. Even poor White children are far less likely to live in, or to attend school in, neighborhoods where poverty is highly concentrated.

Moreover, one must also account for how the privileges of Whiteness that transcend class open up opportunities for poor Whites that are off limits to the Black poor…. This is not to deny the vicious caste tensions that separate poor and working class Whites from their middle-class and upper-class peers…. I simply aim to underscore the pull of racial familiarity that is often an unspoken variable, and sometimes the crucial difference, in the lives of the White and non-White poor. It is bad enough to be White and poor; it is worse still to be Black, or brown, and female, and young, and poor. Simply said, race makes class hurt more.

—Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*
Taking Action
The Brookings Institution produces monthly reports on the progress of Katrina Recovery efforts, available online at www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/200512_KatrinaIndex.htm. Have students track these reports each month to discern the extent to which the poor are returning to New Orleans and whether their basic issues are being addressed. Based on their findings, have students write letters to the editor of local or campus newspapers expressing their concerns about the progress of Katrina efforts.

Ask students to form a student group that first identifies and then considers how to address issues around poverty in the local community. The group should prepare a Poverty Action Report, detailing specific projects they can undertake to tackle the specific needs of the poor and homeless in their communities. They may wish to focus their efforts on a specific group, such as children, women, immigrants, or minorities, depending on the socioeconomic dynamics of their particular community.

LESSON 3
Should New Orleans Be Rebuilt as a “Chocolate City”?

Essential Questions
Mayor Ray Nagin suggested that New Orleans should be rebuilt as a “chocolate city.”

❖ Was New Orleans ever a “chocolate city”?
❖ Do you agree or disagree with this proposal for the city’s future?

Introduction
New Orleans before Katrina was a predominantly (67%) African American city. Of major American cities, only Detroit had a higher percentage of African Americans (82%). But does that make it a “chocolate city”? Some pundits feel it would be better labeled “Neapolitan,” as in the ice cream with vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry together.

Because so many of those displaced by Katrina were African American, the clear question arises: Will the rebuilt New Orleans remain a predominantly African American city, or will the African American population be dispersed? Early indications are that the overall African American population of New Orleans has been substantially reduced; a survey conducted in the summer of 2006 showed that while the overall population of New Orleans had been more than halved (from 455,000 to 187,500), the 67% figure had been reduced to 46%.

In “Purging the Poor,” Naomi Klein wrote in The Nation on October 10, 2005, that “New Orleans is already displaying signs of a demographic shift so dramatic that some evacuees describe it as ‘ethic cleansing.’” Is this a defensible statement or a sign of the inflammatory rhetoric of so much post-Katrina commentary? Brown University sociologist John R. Logan asks, “The continuing question about the hurricane is this: Whose city will be rebuilt?” Is this the right question, or a polarizing question that pits Black against White residents? Can a city be said to belong to one racial group or another?

Relevant Sections of the Film
Act III, end of Chapter 3, “American Citizens” (00:27:15 to end)
Act III, Chapter 4, “The Roots Run Deep”
Act III, Chapter 5, “Coming Back”
Act III, Chapter 6, “Despair, Depression, Anxiety”
Act IV, Chapter 1, “Mardi Gras 2006”
Act IV, Chapter 5, “A Signature Moment” (continue into Chapter 6, up to 00:51:50).

Materials Used in the Lesson


Questions for Consideration
❖ What are the overall conclusions of the Brown University report about the effects of Katrina on poor and African American neighborhoods in New Orleans? What statistics and other evidence do you find most compelling in support of this conclusion?
❖ Why would renters be less likely to recover from the storm or return to New Orleans than homeowners? What about...
those living in public housing? What about those living below the poverty line? Are there specific policies that can or should be implemented to bring these people back to New Orleans?

- Is it in the best interests of poor people and citizens from other social classes to return to New Orleans, or are they better off making a new start in other cities? Is it better to distribute poverty rather than concentrate it in one place? Compare the attitudes of the woman in the film who takes her children to a new home in Utah with those of Lower Ninth Ward resident Michael Knight.

- Using the data from the Census Bureau's 2005 community survey, compare the demographic, social, economic, and housing statistics for the New Orleans metropolitan area before and after Katrina. (Please note: This survey extends beyond the limits of the city of New Orleans and covers the overall New Orleans metropolitan area, including the suburbs.) There are four separate tables; you must click on the link for each one separately. Data can be compared in such categories as race, household and per capita income, families living at the poverty level, housing units, renter-occupied vs. owner-occupied housing, and many others. Based on this data, what conclusions can you draw about the differences between the populations of pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans?

- Review the Bullard article (“Katrina and the Second Disaster”). Based on your readings of the articles and viewing the film, what evidence is there to support the idea that business owners and others are making a deliberate effort to rebuild New Orleans as a more affluent, less African American city? Do you agree or disagree that the city should take extra steps to ensure that New Orleans should be rebuilt along pre-Katrina demographic lines? Why or why not?

- In Act IV, Chapter 5 (“A Signature Moment”), what is Tanya Harris’ attitude about how the rest of the city views the Lower Ninth Ward? Does she believe that most city officials and business owners want residents to return to this neighborhood? Why or why not? Do you agree with her perspective? Why or why not?

- If post-Katrina New Orleans is to resemble pre-Katrina New Orleans demographically, what steps should be taken to ensure that many of the pre-Katrina problems experienced by New Orleans do not reappear, such as high crime and poverty rates and low levels of educational attainment? Is discussion of these issues ever used as a proxy for talking about race?

- Can physically repairing the city heal the wounds from Katrina? Similarly, how important is the restoration of cultural activities such as Mardi Gras to the rebuilding effort? Do you agree with Gralen Banks’ assessment in the film that hosting Mardi Gras in 2006 was a vital part of the city’s recovery efforts, or should the resources have been spent on more basic services, such as rebuilding homes and schools? Do festivities such as Mardi Gras anesthetize New Orleans residents to the real problems of their city? What effect do you think Mardi Gras celebrations will have upon the city and its problems and its poor?

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**HANDOUT**

**Lesson 3 of College Curriculum**

There is no way to imagine America without New Orleans and this great city will rise again.

—George W. Bush, When the Levees Broke

Without Black people New Orleans would be a bad version of Disneyland. The history and culture of New Orleans comes out of the suffering, the creativity of Black people. To have a New Orleans without Black people would be to have nothing.

—Dr. Calvin Mackie, When the Levees Broke

New Orleans is not New Orleans without the mix of people that were here before. And it would not be the kind of city that I think most people would treasure.

—New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin, When the Levees Broke

Yet if the post-Katrina city were limited to the population previously living in areas that were undamaged by the storm—that is, if nobody were able to return to damaged neighborhoods—New Orleans is at risk of losing more than 80% of its Black population. This means that policy choices affecting who can return, to which neighborhoods, and with what forms of public and private assistance, will greatly affect the future character of the city.


The greatest tragedy of Katrina may well be not the flooded homes and looted shops, but an essential population scattered to the four winds. These were poor, uneducated people; but they were the lifeblood of the Big Easy, and they carried in their traditions and cuisine and mannerisms and habits of speech a kind of urban genetic code that made New Orleans what it was. Now they are gone off to Houston and Atlanta, Chicago, Baltimore and a hundred other towns and cities, part of the largest internal migration in America for a generation…Our armies are posted in foreign lands to help rebuild societies from the ground up. What we can do for Baghdad and Basra we must do for the Lower Ninth Ward, Treme, Bywater and other places destroyed by the hurricane, where the real battle for New Orleans will go on long after the television cameras are gone.


New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin…predicted that displaced African-American residents will return to the rebuilt city and it “will be chocolate at the end of the day.” “This city will be a majority African-American city. It’s the way God wants it to be,” Nagin said. “You can’t have it no other way. It wouldn’t be New Orleans.”

—“Evoking King, Nagin calls New Orleans ‘chocolate’ city: Speech addresses fear of losing Black culture.” The Times-Picayune, January 17, 2006
Some geographers have argued that the most flood-prone and generally poorer sections of the city, such as the Lower Ninth Ward, should not be rebuilt because of the dangers they represent to the people who live there. Others have argued that the technology exists to protect these neighborhoods if there is political will to invest in it. If low-income neighborhoods are not rebuilt, how might this affect the racial composition of the city?

Research the full context of Mayor Ray Nagin’s Martin Luther King Day speech, given on January 16, 2006, the reaction, and his subsequent refinements of his meaning. Do you consider Mayor Ray Nagin’s comment a statement of fact or a divisive act? Would reaction differ if someone called for rebuilding New Orleans as a “vanilla city”?

Closure

In When the Levees Broke, radio host Garland Robinette states flatly, “We’re probably going to end up a small city, gentrified, primarily White, primarily well-to-do. And I think the rest of the United States thinks that’s just fine.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Is it desirable for urban planners to aim at rebuilding Katrina in a fashion that demographically resembles pre-Katrina New Orleans?

LESSON 4

After the Levees Broke

Great Migration or Middle Passage?

Essential Question

In the wake of Katrina and the failure of the levees, was the displacement of poor, mostly Black Katrina survivors a voluntary re-location or involuntary exodus?

Introduction

Katrina created one of the largest forced migrations in American history, what National Public Radio has called “a diaspora of historic proportions.” Numerous accounts have used the term “Great Migration” to describe the relocation of Katrina victims, recalling the movement of millions of African Americans from the South to the industrial North in the mid-20th century. Yet some observers, including Michael Eric Dyson in When the Levees Broke, suggest that the Katrina displacement, having been entirely involuntary and affording little opportunity for returning to New Orleans, might more aptly be compared with the slave trade.

In this lesson, students evaluate which of these metaphors most aptly applies to the Katrina exodus from New Orleans. They will further explore both the physical and psychological impact of forced migration on the thousands of people displaced from New Orleans and evaluate the prospects for their return.

After exploring the metaphors for Katrina presented in this lesson, consider what other metaphors students might consider apt in describing the effects of this hurricane on the population of New Orleans.

Relevant Sections of the Film

Act II, Chapter 6, “An Ancient Memory”
Act III, Chapter 1, “By Way of Katrina”

Materials Used in the Lesson


In motion: The African-American migration experience [online exhibit of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture]. See especially the links for “The Transatlantic slave trade,” “The domestic slave trade,” and “The great migration,” www.inmotionaame.org [Historical overview of African American migrations]

Foster, M. (2006, August 27). There was the fear, the heat, the misery, but most of all—the smell. Associated Press, www.signonsandiego.com/news/nation/20060827-0918-katrina-superdomesurvivors.html [A look back at the New Orleans Superdome since Hurricane Katrina]

FEMA’s dirty little secret: A rare look inside the Renaissance Village trailer park, home to over 2,000 Hurricane Katrina evacuees. (2006, April 24). Democracy Now! http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=06/04/24/1346217

Opening Activity

Read the following passages:

Passage 1

The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship’s cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves. . . .

—First-person account of conditions on a slave ship during the Middle Passage, from Olaudah Equiano, The Life of Gustavus Vassa

Passage 2


“I can’t stand to even look at pictures of that time,” said Terrie Green, 41, who went to the Superdome with her three children and infant granddaughter on Tuesday, August 30, after being rescued from their flooded Ninth Ward home.

By the time we got out of there we were all sick. Sick from the heat, sick from that stink that was there. Just worn out.”

Because of the heat—outside temperatures soared into the high 90s, and it reached an estimated 125 degrees inside the Superdome—the family, including little Alea, only 2 days old when the storm hit, moved to the concourse that runs around the exterior.

The heat took a toll on the baby, who developed a rash and became dehydrated. After they evacuated to Houston, the infant was hospitalized for a week.

“She’s still kind of sickly,” said Green, who remains in Houston looking for work.

—Description of conditions in the New Orleans Superdome during Hurricane Katrina, from Mary Foster, “There was the fear, the heat, the misery, but most of all—the smell,” Associated Press, August 27, 2006

Questions for Consideration

Ask students what similarities they can identify between the descriptions of conditions in the two passages. Is this a valid comparison?

Note: Recent historiography, particularly Vincent Carretta’s Equiano the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man (University of Georgia Press, 2005), has cast some doubt on the authenticity of the slave narrative cited above. While Carretta’s research indicates that Equiano may not himself have actually experienced the Middle Passage, there is little doubt that the passage accurately describes conditions endured by slaves during their transatlantic voyage.

What is a diaspora? How has the term been used in history? Is the term appropriately applied to Katrina?

Approximately how many residents of New Orleans were forced to leave the city because of Katrina? To date, approximately how many have returned?

Look at the New York Times diaspora map. What are the main areas to which Katrina evacuees have relocated? What on the map do you find surprising? How might the experiences of the Katrina evacuees differ depending upon the part of the country they relocate to, the racial and ethnic composition of that region, and other factors?

During the “Great Migration” of the mid-20th century, millions of African Americans relocated from the South to the industrial North and other parts of the United States. Was this migration largely voluntary or involuntary? In what ways does it present a valid comparison with the Katrina migration? In what ways do the two instances differ?

In When the Levees Broke, New Orleans resident Gina Montana comments that “With the evacuation scattering my family all over the United States, I felt like it was an ancient memory, as if we had been put up on the auction block.”

Michael Eric Dyson makes a similar comparison, as does University of Pennsylvania History Professor Steven Hahn in The Katrina Migration (NPR audio file, above). Do you think these comparisons are valid, or are they “hyperbolic,” in Dyson’s words? On the other hand, former first lady Barbara Bush, in touring an evacuation center in Houston in the wake of Katrina, commented about the poor who had lost their homes in New Orleans that “This is working very well for them.” (Editor and Publisher, September 5, 2005, http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id =1001054719)
Students may wish to consider each of the following when evaluating the validity of this comparison. Ask students if other factors should be added to this list.

◆ The physical conditions inside the Superdome and Convention Center
◆ The psychological impact of feeling abandoned and displaced from home
◆ The separation of families in the aftermath of the evacuation, especially children from their parents and the breakup of extended families
◆ The uncertainty of destination of evacuation buses
◆ The lack of arrangements for return of evacuees to New Orleans; evacuees were given a “one-way ticket” out of New Orleans
◆ The overall emotional and psychological impact of witnessing and surviving a horrific ordeal

How might your views on the evacuation of Katrina victims differ if you were the direct descendant of slaves? Would your views be different if this had not taken place in New Orleans, which was once a major slave port, but in a younger northern city that had little history of slavery? Would your views be different if you were from a different racial or ethnic group? If you were poor, rather than middle class? If you were a man, rather than a woman; a woman, rather than a man? Does your “social location” influence the way you think about this subject?

Ask students to assume the roles of Katrina survivors now living in another city. Assign one student (or a team of students) to take the position that they want to return to New Orleans; assign a second student or team to take the position that they do not want to return to New Orleans and plan to remain where they are permanently. Have students debate the reasons for their position, and ask them to identify what factors might lead a Katrina survivor to take the position s/he did (e.g., whether they owned or rented their home, whether they believe they can find employment in New Orleans, how difficult their experience during Katrina might have been, etc.). Have students write down their statement of feelings first before debating their viewpoint. Instructors may wish to collect these statements for review after the debate to see if any students have changed their positions.

Does the Katrina-related diaspora have the potential to create the same sort of racial tension that appeared in several northern cities after the African-American population increased as a result of the Great Migration?

Read the accounts listed above of life for Katrina survivors in the FEMA trailer park known as Renaissance Village (“Life in a Post-Katrina Disaster Camp” and “FEMA’s Dirty Little Secret”). In what ways might conditions in this trailer park be similar to conditions in the living quarters inhabited by slaves? Is this a valid comparison? Why or why not?

Have you ever had the experience of having to move from one place you considered home to another place that didn’t feel like home? Were there psychological and/or social ill-effects that you experienced as a result? How long did it take you to acclimate yourself to the new environment? Do you think displaced New Orleanians feel the same way?

Closure

More than two years after Katrina, does the evacuation of the poor from New Orleans seem more of a latter-day “Middle Passage,” in which poor African Americans were violently and involuntarily forced from their homes and sent into exile, or a Great Migration leading to better long-term opportunities? Might it also be considered analogous to the “Trail of Tears”—the forced migration of Cherokee Indians from their ancestral homelands in 1838–1839? Does your answer affect your view about whether and how resources should be directed to Katrina survivors and the rebuilding of New Orleans?

Taking Action

Have students attempt to locate any Katrina survivors who may be living in nearby areas. This may be done by researching local newspapers for articles about Katrina evacuees or contacting the local chapters of the American Red Cross or other relief agencies. Was the “welcome mat” rolled out, rolled up, or both? Why? Consider what you and your class or community might do to address the needs of any Katrina survivors living in your area.

LESSON 5
Katrina, Women, and Other Vulnerable Populations

Essential Question

Did Katrina, like other disasters, affect women more than men? If so, in what ways?

Introduction

Many of the most memorable images of Katrina—and in When the Levees Broke—are those of women, from the vision of Ethel Freeman’s body slumped over in her wheelchair at the Superdome, to Kimberly Polk’s tearful farewell to her five-year-old daughter, to Wilhelmina Blanchard returning to the
ruins of her home for the first time, to three generations of red-shirted women surveying their destroyed property in the Lower Ninth Ward. The persistence of these images raises a fundamental question: Is there an implicit gender- or age-related dimension to disasters such as Katrina that should be examined more explicitly? In the weeks and months after Katrina, the importance of race and class to the discussion has been widely addressed; the gender and age dimension, less so. In this lesson, students will examine the many ways in which Katrina affected women, particularly poor women and women of color. We also encourage educators to use some of the statistics here to discuss with students the plight of the elderly, who disproportionately were victims of the New Orleans flooding in the wake of Katrina and the breach of the levees.

Examination of statistics will enable students to consider the interrelationship of race, class, and gender in the United States today and the meaning of the term “feminization of poverty.” For example, statistics indicate that in pre-Katrina New Orleans a person living under the poverty line was more likely to be female than male; according to “The Calm in the Storm: Women Leaders in Gulf Coast Recovery,” fully 88% of public housing units in the city were occupied by female-headed households. The same report shows that two-thirds of all female-headed households had not yet returned to the city a year after the storm. Women were less likely to have access to automobiles than men. But there are gender issues beyond those of socioeconomics, including the vulnerability of women to sexual assault in times of chaos, the difficulties women face in returning with their children to the city in the face of inadequate childcare and schools, and the long-term mental health implications for women trying to provide a stable family life for their children in temporary housing or a tiny FEMA trailer. And although Louisiana had a female governor at the time of Katrina, women generally do not play a key role in the policy-making that takes place after an event such as Katrina, raising the question of whether government agencies need to address women’s concerns as they plan for the rebuilding of New Orleans.

Finally, students should attempt to make some sense of the conflicting reports of sexual assault during and after Katrina. Initial reports indicated widespread rape, which were later dismissed as greatly exaggerated. Yet more recent reports indicate that sexual assault was more prevalent than has commonly been accepted. Indeed, Charmaine Neville, a member of one of New Orleans’ most accomplished musical families—an artist who has recorded an album called “Queen of the Mardi Gras”—reported that she and other women had been raped in the days of chaos immediately following the storm.

Relevant Sections of the Film
Act I, Chapter 2, brief segment concerning reports of rapes (00:13:05–00:14:28)
Act I, Chapters 5 and 6, segment on death of Ethel Freeman and effect on other women (00:47:20–00:57:00)
Act III, Chapter 1, “By Way of Katrina”
Act III, Chapter 5, Wilhelmina Blanchard sees her ruined home for the first time (00:43:55–00:46:45)
Opening montage of Act III (00:00:00–00:04:00)
Act III, Chapter 6 (Death of Sarena Polk, 00:54:22 to end)

Materials Used in the Lesson


The two reports listed below are from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research Web site, www.iwpr.org:


Activities
Using Statistics as a Basis for Understanding

1. Look at the statistics on fatalities associated with Katrina on the table from The Earth Institute at Columbia University (http://www.katrinalessons.columbia.edu/stats.php,
included in the handout for Program 2 of the Adult Curriculum on page 46). What overall conclusions about the effects of Katrina on women are supported by these statistics? How do these statistics compare to those cited by Joni Seager for the Kobe, Japan, earthquake or the Southeast Asian tsunami? How might you account for these differences?

2. Using statistics from the above report, The Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Multiple Disadvantages and Key Assets for Recovery. Part 1: Poverty, Race, Gender and Class (www.iwpr.org), do the following:

a. Compare the percentage of poor women in pre-Katrina New Orleans aged 65 and older to the percentage of poor men aged 65 and older. [p. 3]

b. Compare the percentage of families with children under age 18 that are headed by females in the pre-Katrina New Orleans area with the comparable figure for the United States as a whole. [p. 3]

c. Compare the percentage of men and women living below the federal poverty line in pre-Katrina New Orleans city [p. 5]

d. For families with children living below the poverty line in pre-Katrina New Orleans, compare the percentage that are headed by married couples with those headed by women [p. 6]

e. Compare the average median earnings of African American women working full-time in New Orleans to those working in Houston [p. 9]

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**HANDOUT**

**Lesson 5 of College Curriculum**

It was low-income African American women, many single mothers among them, whose pleas for food and water were broadcast around the world from the Superdome, women more than men who were evacuated from nursing homes, and women more than men whose escape of sorts was made with infants, children and elders in tow. Now we see on nightly TV the faces of exhausted women standing in seemingly endless lines seeking help of any kind. In the long run, as we have learned from studies of past disasters, women will be at the heart of this great city’s rebirth, and the emotional center of gravity for their families on the long road to the new normal. They will stitch the commemorative quilts, organize community festivals and hurricane anniversary events, support their schools and faith-based organizations and relief agencies, and compose and sing many of the Katrina songs to come. Though not this simple, it is often said that men rebuild buildings while women reweave the social fabric of community life.

—Elaine Enarson, Women and Girls Last? Averting the Second Post-Katrina Disaster, Social Science Research Council, November 15, 2005

And yet there is another equally important and starkly apparent social dimension to the hurricane disaster that media coverage has put in front of our eyes but that has yet to be “noticed”: This disaster fell hard on one side of the gender line too. Most of the trapped survivors are women. Women with children, women on their own, elderly women in wheelchairs, women everywhere—by a proportion of what looks to be…somewhere around 75 or 80 percent…. The gender gap is no surprise, or shouldn’t be. Disaster is seldom gender neutral. In the 1995 Kobe, Japan, earthquake, 1.5 times more women died than men; in the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami, death rates for women across the region averaged three to four times that of men.

—Joni Seager, “Natural Disasters Expose Gender Divides,” Chicago Tribune, September 14, 2005

Law enforcement authorities dismissed early reports of widespread rapes in New Orleans during the lawless days following Hurricane Katrina. But a growing body of evidence suggests there were more storm-related sexual assaults than previously known…. One of the victims is Ms. Lewis, a 46-year-old home health-care worker from New Orleans East, who asked that her first name not be used…. Lewis and others had taken refuge in the Redemption Elderly Apartments, in the Irish Channel section of New Orleans. On that first night after the storm, the city had lost power, and she was sleeping in a dark hallway, trying to catch a breeze. It was there, she says, that an unknown man with a handgun sexually assaulted her. She insists other women were raped in the same apartment building over the next four nights, but her claim could not be checked out.

“Some bad things happened, you know. There was nobody there to protect you,” Lewis says…. Lewis says that later in the week, national guardsmen forced evacuees out of the building at gunpoint. They were finally able to leave the city on Saturday. She says she tried to report the assault at the time, but authorities weren’t listening.

—John Burnett, More Stories Emerge of Rapes in Post-Katrina Chaos, NPR, December 21, 2005

Gender inequality plays an important role in the level of vulnerability to natural disasters and their consequences. Women are more vulnerable during disasters because they have less access to resources, are victims of the gendered division of labor, and they are the primary caregivers to children, the elderly and the disabled. This means that they are less able to mobilize resources for rehabilitation, more likely to be over-represented in the unemployed following a disaster, and overburdened with domestic responsibilities leaving them with less freedom to pursue sources of income to alleviate their economic burdens. It is most often the women who go without food in order to feed their families during a disaster, also. In addition to these issues, women are often the victims of domestic and sexual violence following a natural disaster.

—Rochelle Jones, Gender and Natural Disasters: Points to Ponder, Disaster Watch
3. Based on the statistics compiled above, what overall conclusions can you reach about the level of poverty of women in New Orleans compared to men, and compared to women in other parts of the country?

4. What is meant by the term “feminization of poverty”? Do these statistics support the idea? What general conclusions can you draw from these statistics about the interrelationship between gender, poverty, and race in New Orleans? Would these conclusions be the same for women of the United States more generally?

5. Which demographic group was the most vulnerable to the effects of the storm? Why do you think this was the case? What measures might be taken to protect the most vulnerable in dangerous situations in the future? Who is responsible for taking preventive measures for the most vulnerable in our society?

The Many Faces of Vulnerability

1. Watch the video clip of Charmaine Neville’s account of sexual assault in the immediate aftermath of Katrina. Why might incidents of rape and sexual assault increase during an event such as Katrina? Why did authorities downplay such incidents in New Orleans after the storm (and in the film)? How likely is it that women who were sexually assaulted during and after Katrina would report the crime or find adequate medical treatment?

2. How did the reports circulated by the media about rapes, looting, murders, etc., factor into the way events were handled after the levees broke? For example, how might the false report that his daughter had been raped have affected Eddie Compass’ overall performance?

3. Many of the images in When the Levees Broke are of women caring for small children. Why might such women be less likely to have evacuated before the storm? If women are often seen as responsible for maintaining the social fabric, are there particular demands that they face in circumstances of tragedy and its aftermath?

4. According to the reports listed above, what sort of child-care provisions are now available in New Orleans? How might this affect the ability of women to return to New Orleans? Have enough schools re-opened to ensure educational opportunities for children?

5. Might living in a small FEMA trailer, or other temporary housing, have a different effect on men than on women?

6. As the city rebuilds, what job opportunities are available for men? For women?

7. Does the rise in crime reported in post-Katrina New Orleans affect men and women in the same ways?

Closure

In her commentary on Katrina (see link above), feminist geographer Joni Seager asserts that “disaster is seldom gender neutral.” Is this a valid conclusion? Should policy makers take the particular needs of women and other vulnerable groups into consideration when preparing for disasters and in the rebuilding process? Or does separating people out into groups this way overlook our common humanity and distract from the need to do a better job protecting everyone?

Taking Action

The Ms. Foundation for Women has awarded numerous grants to women’s groups aiding in the Katrina relief and rebuilding effort. Students could contact one of the groups to find out ways they might volunteer and assist in their efforts.
What Does It Mean to Be a Citizen?
A CURRICULUM ABOUT KATRINA USING CIVICS AND GOVERNMENT
Anand Marri, Christina Morado, and Christopher Zublionis

The tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, more than material and physical in nature, has unmasked vital questions that have not recently been at the epicenter of discussions about our American ideals and values. Hurricane Katrina, in some ways an unprecedented disaster on U.S. soil, raises questions about what kind of country we are and what kind of country we want to be.

Memories of Hurricane Katrina create an imperative opportunity for critical and fundamental discussions about citizenship, leadership, responsibility, and democracy. The civics/government lessons in this unit use the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina and the documentary film as a vehicle for student engagement in democratic dialogues about the United States.

This set of lessons has been designed for use in high school civics and government classes, although the lessons might work in other contexts as well. The lessons include essential questions, concepts and skills, relevant sections of the film, references to national curriculum standards, materials, handouts, and steps for carrying out the lessons.

In some cases, teachers may decide that the content needs more scaffolding or that the level of the lessons is too high. We encourage educators to tailor the lessons here to make them more workable for their classrooms. Enrichment materials for these lessons are available on the “Teaching The Levees” Web site (www.teachingthelevees.org).

LESSON 1
“Am I My Brother’s and Sister’s Keeper?”
Personal and Social Responsibility in Times of Crisis

Opinions about what it means to be a “citizen” differ according to time, place, and person. Some scholars say that Americans are too individualistic and that they have lost the sense of community. Others say the “rugged individual” has made America great. This lesson explores a set of concepts about citizenship called a “typology.” Students are asked to consider different types of citizens and what these differences mean for their understanding of individual responsibility in a crisis.

Essential Question
❖ What responsibilities, if any, do citizens have toward their neighbors in times of crisis?

Students from New Orleans’ Academy of Sacred Heart High School peacefully protest to ask for Category 5 levees to be built to save property and lives. Many people are asking the federal government and FEMA to build Category 5 levees to help prevent future hurricane flooding and destruction. January 12, 2006
FEMA photo/Marvin Nauman
Key Concepts
Civic engagement, civic responsibility, the common good, and a “can-do” attitude.

Skills Orientation
- Understanding what it means to be a citizen
- Developing empathy and shared sense of civic responsibility

Relevant Sections of the Film
Act I, Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans”
Act I, Chapter 4, “Day One”
Act I, Chapter 5, “The Cajun Navy”
Act II, Chapter 5, “General Honoré”
Act II, Chapter 6, “An Ancient Memory”

Related Curriculum Standard
National Standards for Civics and Government (NSCG) Standard V, C2: Civic Responsibilities—“Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding civic responsibilities of citizens in American constitutional democracy.”

Materials Used in the Lesson
Handout with “What Type of Citizen?” chart adapted from Westheimer and Kahne, to accompany Part F of the lesson.

Unfolding of the Lesson
A. Group activity: What does it mean to be a citizen? Write this question in the center of a piece of chart paper. Tell students to conduct their conversation in writing. That is, they will read and respond to one another’s comments without speaking for 5–10 minutes.

B. Pair activity: Consider various forms of disasters (e.g., heat wave, ice age, earthquake, tsunami, forest fires, etc.). Together, generate a list of actions you might do in the event of such a disaster.

C. Explain the classical meaning in American history and culture of a “can-do” attitude about challenges. Link this notion to the concept of “participatory citizenship.”

D. Categorize the types of actions that responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented citizens might take. Make a list (e.g., helping people evacuate, providing food, etc.).

E. Discuss students’ differing perspectives about what is or is not required of citizens. Allow for competing viewpoints. Do not attempt to create resolution of differences.

F. View the film clips and complete the chart in the handout for this lesson.

- Stop after each chapter and discuss the individuals and their action(s).
- Where does each type of action fall on the Westheimer and Kahne matrix?

G. Debrief: Consider your findings. Which types of actions were most common during the disaster? Why do you think this is the case?

H. Individual student response: Respond to the following questions in a well-organized written response (approximately one page).

- According to the three types of citizenship, where would you fall on the chart?
- What actions would you be likely to take (or not)? Why?
- How civically responsible would you rate yourself? Explain.
- How civically responsible would you like your neighbors to be?

Closure
Consider the three types of citizenship used to examine citizen responses during and after Hurricane Katrina. Can Participatory and/or Justice-Oriented forms of citizenship be learned? Should they be taught? In the United States, are we our brother’s and sister’s keepers?

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**HANDOUT**
Lesson 1 of Civics and Government Curriculum

**What Type of Citizen?**

*Directions to students:* Read the descriptions of each citizen “type.” As you watch the film, write down brief notes about each individual and his or her actions in the column you feel best captures the actions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personally Responsible Citizen</th>
<th>Participatory Citizen</th>
<th>Justice-Oriented Citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acts responsibly in his/her community; pays taxes; obeys laws; recycles; gives blood; volunteers in times of crisis</td>
<td>Active in community organizations; organizes community efforts for those in need; understands how government works; knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks</td>
<td>Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes; seeks out and addresses areas of injustice; knows about democratic processes to create change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taking Action

Have students research notable citizens in their community. Interview these individuals to learn about their background, motivations for becoming engaged in their local communities, and philosophies of citizenship and citizenship responsibility. Videotape the interviews, if possible, using Spike Lee’s framing style. Write an essay on what you have learned for your school newspaper and/or put examples of your interviews up on your school’s Web site.

LESSON 2

“Where Is My Government?”

Federalism in Time of Disaster

In When the Levees Broke, a news report shows 62-year-old Florence Jackson waiting for help from FEMA months after Hurricane Katrina. “Where is my government?” she asks. Henry “Jr.” Rodriguez concludes in the film that “FEMA is a four-letter word.”

In the 20th century, the role of the U.S. government in providing different forms of “safety nets” for its citizens increased dramatically, with the introduction of Social Security, welfare, Medicare, and other social welfare programs. Government’s responsibility in caring for citizens in the wake of disasters has also increased substantially from the days when such relief was considered the responsibility of private agencies.

Even today, the first line of disaster relief is typically city or state government. Only recently—in 1979—did the federal government establish the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which replaced the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration as the “lead agency responsible for disaster relief, preparedness, and civil defense” (Mushkatel & Weschler, 1985). In 2003, FEMA became part of the Department of Homeland Security. Some have argued that moving FEMA into this Department was a mistake because it no longer operates as effectively as it did in the past (Cooper & Block, 2006).

One of the issues at the heart of this film is the difficulty encountered in coordinating action before and after a disaster. This lesson considers federalism and raises the question of its utility in crises such as Katrina and the breach of the levees.

Works Cited


Essential Question

• Is federalism an obstacle to dealing with disasters?

Key Concepts

Federalism, checks and balances, separation of powers, jurisdiction

Skills Orientation

Examine, analyze, and evaluate different levels of governmental response during crisis (local, state, and federal) from multiple perspectives

Relevant Section of the Film

Act I, Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans”
Act I, Chapter 6, “The City that Care Forgot”
Act II, Chapter 3, “Brownie, You’re Doin’ a Heck of a Job”
Act II, Chapter 4, “The Mayor Calls In”
Act IV, Chapter 1, “Mardi Gras 2006”
Act IV, Chapter 4, “Where Is My Government?”

Related Curriculum Standards

• NSCG Standard I, A3: The Purposes of Politics and Government—“Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on competing ideas regarding the purposes of politics and government and their implications for the individual and society”

• NSCG Standard I, D2: Confederal, Federal, and Unitary Systems—“Students should be able to explain the advantages and disadvantages of federal, confederal, and unitary systems of government.”

Materials Used in the Lesson

The United States Constitution, specifically articles II and IV, http://www.constitutioncenter.org

Brookings Institution Timeline (as background for the lesson), http://www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/homeland/katrinatimeline.pdf

Three handouts (graphic organizers for activities conducted during the lesson)

Unfolding of the Lesson

A. Before the film: Review statements concerning the separation of powers and checks and balances in the U.S. Constitution, specifically Articles II and IV. Students can use a U.S. history textbook or relevant Web site. Handout 1 can be used for note-taking.

• The Constitution establishes a system of separation of powers among the three branches of government. The framers of the Constitution derived their ideas about the separation of powers from the French philosopher Montesquieu, and they divided the U.S. government into the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Article I gives Congress the power to make the laws; Article II gives the president the power to enforce the laws; and Article III gives the judiciary the power to interpret the laws.

• Governmental powers and responsibilities intentionally overlap. For example, congressional authority to enact laws can be checked by an executive veto, which in turn can be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote in both houses; the president serves as commander-in-chief, but only the Congress has the authority to raise and support an army and to declare war; the president has the power to appoint all federal judges, ambassadors, and other high government officials, but all appointments must be affirmed by the Senate; and the Supreme Court has final authority to strike down both legislative and presidential acts as unconstitutional. This balancing of power is intended to ensure that no one branch grows too powerful and dominates the national government.
B. Individual activity: Using Handout 1 and Articles II and IV of the Constitution, explore the roles of local, state, and federal governments as expressed in the Constitution.

- Federalism refers to the apportioning of power between the federal government and the states. By the time the American Revolution had been waged and won, state governments were fully entrenched. It was unlikely, therefore, that the states would agree to the creation of a powerful central government at the total expense of their self-governing authority. Granting the states specific self-governing powers and rights was not only politically expedient but also served the framers’ intent to limit the central government’s authority. The sharing of power between the states and the national government was one more structural check in an elaborate governmental scheme of checks and balances.

C. Explain the growth in federal power over the 20th century, especially in taking responsibility for citizens’ social welfare.

- One perspective can be found at http://www.house.gov/paul/tst/tst2006/tst011606.htm
- “Federal power: Its growth and necessity” by Henry Litchfield West [review by Lindsay Rogers], The American Political Science Review, 14(2), 344–345 (May 1920)
- Inaugural address of Herbert Hoover, www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/inaug/hoover.htm

D. Debrief: Students watch film clips and analyze the actions taken by federal and state authorities. Fill in Handout 2.

- What are the responsibilities of each level of government? What do they share? Is anything missing and/or unclear?
- How is federalism defined?
- What is the relationship of agencies such as FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) to state and local governments?

E. Hypothesize about what areas of conflict or clear delineation of duties may occur in a time of crisis.

F. Group activity: Role-play conversations between victims and government officials. Choose an individual from the selected film clips (possibilities include Governor Kathleen Blanco, Charles Mackie, Phyllis Montana LeBlanc, Herbert Freeman, Garland Robinette, and Tanya Harris) and create a conversation between the selected individual and an elected official from any level of government. Use Handout 3 to structure the dialogue.

G. Students can also go beyond what is presented in the film and do research on how the storm and its aftermath were handled in Mississippi, comparing and contrasting the story there with what occurred in Louisiana. Similarly, students can investigate other hurricanes, such as Hurricane Andrew in 1992, or other disasters, such as September 11, 2001, in New York City, and determine how well federalism worked in dealing with those disasters.

H. Performance: Have several students present their dialogues (as recorded in Handout 3). Perhaps have a partner read the accompanying voice for greater dramatic effect.

Closure

Debate whether the federal system of government served as a help or hindrance to taking necessary action in the wake of Katrina. Was this situation a result of individual or systemic failure in dealing with crises?

Taking Action

- Read through parts of Rousseau’s Social Contract/Principles of Political Right as a basis for formulating a social contract for their local community grounded in common needs (education, public safety, transportation, health, etc.). Share these contracts with others in the school or town, if possible.
- Students interview at least one public official to understand the public official’s viewpoint on the responsibilities of their agency/organization to the public. Students should ask the official how these responsibilities would change during a disaster and what aid they could expect to receive and from which agency.

Lesson 3

“There Would Be No New Orleans Without Black People”

The Many Legacies of Jim Crow

Some commentators feel that the events associated with Katrina revealed once again the long-standing rifts in this country associated with race. The legacy of enforced legal segregation, known as “Jim Crow,” lives on in the racial composition of many areas of the South.
In northern cities, de facto forms of segregation have shaped residential patterns for decades. Still, other commentators believe that what happened in New Orleans in late August 2005 has more to do with the incompetence of elected officials at all levels of government than with racial attitudes.

In this lesson, investigate the historic legacy of Jim Crow in New Orleans, considering what the evidence shows about its impact, especially on Black people, the majority of citizens of this city before Katrina struck.

**Essential Question**
- Did the legacies of slavery and the Jim Crow system of segregation have an impact on who was most at risk in the aftermath of Katrina?

**Key Concepts**
- “De jure” and “de facto” segregation, “Jim Crow,” legacy

**Skills Orientation**
- Locating evidence within a text to support argument
- Reading and manipulating demographic data from the U.S. Census

**Relevant Sections of the Film**
- Act I, Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans”
- Act I, Chapter 3, “Explosions”
- Act I, Chapter 4, “Day One”
- Act I, Chapter 5, “The Cajun Navy”
- Act II, Chapter 2, “We Shoot Looters”
- Act III, Chapter 1, “By Way of Katrina”
- Act III, Chapter 2, “Polarized”
- Act III, Chapter 3, “American Citizens”
- Act III, Chapter 4, “The Roots Run Deep”

**Related Curriculum Standards**
NSCG Standard II, D5: Disparities Between Ideals and Reality in American Political and Social Life—“Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about issues concerning the disparities between American ideals and realities.”

Materials Used in the Lesson
Three maps and one chart that can be found on the U.S. Census Web site, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/AFFAdvSearch GeneralServlet?_lang=en
- R0202—Percent of the Total Population Who Are Black or African American Alone: 2004
- M1402—Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed a Bachelor’s Degree: 2005
- M0103—Percent of the Total Population Who Are 65 Years and Over: 2005
- M1701—Percent of People Below Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months (for Whom Poverty Status Is Determined): 2005

Three handouts

Unfolding of the Lesson

A. Pair activity: Examine the U.S. Census Bureau chart and maps on distribution of the African American population, attainment of a bachelor’s degree, distribution of the elderly, and percentage of people below the poverty line. Consider what the chart and maps suggest about the Gulf Coast region. What conclusions can be drawn?

B. Teacher provides brief lecture on the historical background of the systems of enforced racial separation in the United States, “de facto” and “de jure” segregation. Teacher raises the question as to what legacies, if any, these systems, which were largely dismantled legally in this country in the 1950s and 1960s, have had on contemporary New Orleans and other parts of this country. Teacher poses the question as to what connection, if any, such legacies have to the conditions set in motion in that city by Katrina and the breach of the levees.

Talking Points for Teachers
- Segregation by law, or de jure segregation, occurred when local, state, or national laws required racial separation, or when the laws explicitly allowed segregation. De jure segregation has been prohibited in the United States since the mid-1960s.
- De facto segregation, or segregation in fact, occurs when social practices, political acts, economic circumstances, or public policy result in the separation of people by race or ethnicities even though no laws require or authorize racial separation. De facto segregation has continued even when state and federal civil rights laws have explicitly prohibited racial segregation. At the end of the 20th century, de facto segregation remained a problem in many places in the United States. De facto segregation has resulted from residential housing patterns, economic factors, personal choice, “White flight” from central cities, and private (often illegal) discrimination by homeowners, real estate agents, and lending institutions. The results are often segregated neighborhoods and, consequently, segregated schools, recreational facilities, and other public and private institutions.
- After Reconstruction the strides that Blacks had made—holding political offices, having the right to vote, and participating as equal members of society—were reversed as the South gradually re-imposed racially discriminatory laws. These laws achieved two main goals—disenfranchisement and segregation.
- In addition, the Supreme Court turned its back on racial equality. In the Civil Rights Cases (1883), the court declared that Congress had no power to prevent private acts of discrimination. The Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) upheld the constitutionality of separate railroad cars for Blacks and Whites. In Williams v. Mississippi (1898) the Supreme Court approved a Mississippi scheme that prevented almost all Blacks in the state from either voting or serving on juries. In 1896 there were 130,344 Blacks registered to vote in Louisiana; by 1900 the new Louisiana constitution had reduced that number to 5,320. Only 3,000 out of the more than 180,000 Black men of voting age in Alabama were registered to vote in 1900.
- After 1900, Southern legislators carried segregation to extremes. A 1914 Louisiana statute required separate entrances at circuses for Blacks and Whites. All Southern states prohibited interracial marriages. Segregation touched the sacred and the profane. Georgia prohibited Black ministers from performing a marriage ceremony for White couples, and New Orleans created segregated red light districts for White and Black prostitutes.
- As the United States entered World War II (1939–1945), the South was a fully segregated society. Every school, restaurant, hotel, train car, waiting room, elevator, public bathroom, college, hospital, cemetery, swimming pool, drinking fountain, prison, and church was for either Whites or Blacks but never for both.

C. Individual activity: Free-write exercise (5–7 minutes): What do you see on these maps? Can you just “erase” the memory of segregation from a place? From people’s minds? What do you think will be the impact of Katrina on this area (for people and their city)? What are the specific challenges faced by the elderly in disasters? And in the aftermath of disasters? Based on the information from the maps, what might happen if another hurricane hits the Gulf Coast region?

D. Select two arguments Dyson makes in the excerpt from Come Hell or High Water given in Handout 1. Write the argument on the left side and then find evidence from the reading to support the argument. Insert these arguments and evidence into the chart in Handout 2.

E. Read excerpts from the sources provided in Handout 3 and prepare notes on their perspectives:
- Social Science Research Council article by Cutter
- CNSNews.com article on race as an issue in the Katrina disaster
- Students should also refer to the statistics on Katrina’s toll of dead and missing persons provided by the Earth Institute at Columbia University, found in the handout for Program 2 of Chapter 3 of this manual (p. 46).
“Does George W. Bush Care About Black People?”
—Michael Eric Dyson (2006), *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*, Chapter 2, pp. 21–27

When it comes to the federal government’s response to the victims of Hurricane Katrina, the specific elements at play must be examined. There were poor blacks, mostly from Louisiana, drowning in twenty-five-foot floods, stranded in their homes, or crammed into makeshift shelters, awaiting help from a Texas-bred president and an Oklahoma-born head of FEMA. At its core, this was a Southern racial narrative being performed before a national and global audience. If Southern whites have been relatively demonized within the realms of whiteness—when compared to their Northern peers, they are viewed as slower, less liberal, more bigoted, and thoroughly “country”—then Southern blacks are even more the victims of social stigma from every quarter of the culture, including Northern and Southern whites, and even among other blacks outside the region. . . .

It is safe to say that race played a major role in the failure of the federal government—especially for Bush and FEMA head Michael Brown—to respond in a timely manner to the poor black folk of Louisiana because of black grief and pain have been ignored thought the nation’s history. Bush and Brown simply updated the practice. Southern black suffering in particular has been overlooked by Southern whites—those in power and ordinary citizens as well. . . .

The black poor of the Delta lacked social standing, racial status, and the apparent and unconscious identifiers that might evoke a dramatic empathy in Bush and Brown. Had these factors been present, it might have spurred Bush and Brown to identify with the black poor, indeed, see themselves as the black poor. Since their agency and angst had been minimized in the Southern historical memory, the black poor simply didn’t register as large, or count as much, as they might have had they been white. If they had been white, a history of identification—supported by structures of care, sentiment of empathy, and an elevated racial standing—would have immediately kicked in. That might have boosted considerably their chances of survival because the federal government, including Bush and Brown, would have seen their kind, perhaps their kin, and hence themselves, floating in a flood of death in the Delta.

* * *

“I hate the way they portray us in the media,” [Kanye] West intoned. “If you see a black family, it says, ‘They’re looting.’ You see a white family, it says, ‘They’re looking for food.’ And, you know, it’s been five days [waiting for the government to arrive] because most of the people are black. And even for me to complain about it, I would be a hypocrite because I’ve tried to turn away from the TV because it’s too hard to watch. I’ve been shopping before even giving a donation. So now I’m calling my business manager right now to see what is the biggest amount I can give. And just to imagine if I was down there, and those are my people down there. So anybody out there that wants to do anything that we can help—with the way America is set up to help the poor, the black people, the less well-off, as slow as possible. I mean, the Red Cross is doing everything they can. We already realize a lot of people that could help are at war right now, fighting another way. And they’ve given them permission to go down and shoot us!”

West’s nervy chiding of the federal government froze [Mike] Myers’s face in disbelief and small panic. . . . Once again, Myers turned to West, this time with a bit of trepidation creasing his brow. West let out his final off-script pronouncement with as sure a statement as he had made during his brief and amiable diatribe. “George Bush doesn’t care about black people.” With that, just as Myers mouthed the beginning of his plea for viewers to phone in—“Please call . . .”—someone in the NBC control room, working with a seven-second delay aimed at blocking profanity, finally understood West’s tack and ordered the camera to turn unceremoniously away from the duo and cut to comedian Chris Tucker, who picked up his cue and tried to roll past West’s punches. . . .
The South’s segregated past was best seen in the spatial and social evolution of southern cities, including New Orleans. Migration from the rural impoverished areas to the city was followed by White flight from urban areas to more suburban communities. Public housing was constructed to cope with Black population influxes during the 1950s and 1960s and in a pattern repeated throughout America, the housing was invariably located in the most undesirable areas—along major transportation corridors, on reclaimed land, or next to industrial facilities. Employment opportunities were limited for inner city residents as jobs moved outward from the central city to suburban locations, or overseas as the process of globalization reduced even further the number of low skilled jobs. The most impoverished lived in squalor-like conditions concentrated in certain neighborhoods within cities, with little or no employment, poor education, and little hope for the future for their children or grandchildren. It is against this backdrop of the social geography of cities and the differential access to resources that we can best understand the Hurricane Katrina disaster.

Race and class are certainly factors that help explain the social vulnerability in the South, while ethnicity plays an additional role in many cities. When the middle classes (both White and Black) abandon a city, the disparities between the very rich and the very poor expand. Add to this an increasing elderly population, the homeless, transients (including tourists), and other special needs populations, and the prospects for evacuating a city during times of emergencies becomes a daunting challenge for most American cities. What is a major challenge for other cities became a virtual impossibility for New Orleans. Those that could muster the personal resources evacuated the city. With no welfare check (the hurricane struck near the end of the month), little food, and no help from the city, state, or federal officials, the poor were forced to ride out the storm in their homes or move to the shelters of last resort. This is the enduring face of Hurricane Katrina—poor, Black, single mothers, young, and old—struggling just to survive; options limited by the ineffectiveness of preparedness and the inadequacy of response.

Census data from 2000 suggest a decline in segregation of African Americans in the United States from 1980 to 2000. Nevertheless, despite these findings poor African Americans often live in highly segregated communities. Based on the materials discussed, do you believe that the tragedy associated with Katrina and the breaching of the levees was fundamentally shaped by race and class? If not, what alternative hypotheses explain the events described in the film and the evidence presented here? Discuss this question with students, requiring them to back up their assertions with evidence from these materials or others you or they introduce into this lesson.

Taking Action

Have students use the U.S. Census Web site (www.census.gov) to research population patterns in their communities. How does their own community compare with national trends (decline in segregation) and with New Orleans? Are there any recent increases in the number of immigrants to the community? What does census information from the U.S. Census archives suggest about this community? What patterns, trends, and so on do they find? Are there any causes for concern? Why?

Have students write letters in favor of or against the notion of diversity within their community. Is diversity a positive social good? Send these letters to their elected local representatives.
The engine of prosperity that has fueled this country’s growth for hundreds of years is one of its most appealing attributes. Every year thousands of immigrants come to this country to pursue the “American Dream.” Nevertheless, the benefits of prosperity have never been distributed equally. Some fear that inequality, which has been on the rise in recent years, may jeopardize the strength of democracy in the United States. Hurricane Katrina’s dramatic and devastating path exposed fault lines between the American ideal of equality and the realities of a social class system shaped by its free market economy.

When the Levees Broke can stimulate student engagement with economic concepts such as scarcity, allocation of resources, and opportunity costs. Related concepts such as the distribution of wealth and economic opportunity are also important in addressing the questions:

- What kind of country are we?
- What kind of country do we want to be?

LESSON 1
Answering the Questions of Who Left and Who Stayed Before Katrina Struck

One of the most vexing questions about the tragedy associated with Katrina and the breach of the levees has to do with why some people did not evacuate the city as the hurricane approached. Many answers have been given.

- Some answers are historical: Some people turned a deaf ear to the warnings because of past false alarms.
- Some answers are sociological: The elderly and sick were trapped in hospitals and nursing homes.
- Some answers are economic: The poor lacked credit cards, cars, gasoline, and even radios and televisions so they may not have known of the storm or had ways of getting out of the city.

This lesson explores the issue of scarcity—that is, lack of access to the means necessary to leave one’s home—and the role it may have played in evacuation of New Orleans prior to Katrina.

Essential Question

- Why didn’t some people leave New Orleans before Katrina struck?

Key Concepts
Scarcity, shortages/surpluses, supply and demand, entrepreneurs, free enterprise

Skills Orientation

- Identifying multiple causes of various instances of scarcity
- Analyzing quantitative data to make social and economic conclusions

Relevant Sections of the Film

Act I, Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans”
Act I, Chapter 4, “Day One”
Act I, Chapter 5, “The Cajun Navy”
Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot”

Related Curriculum Standard

National Council on Economics Education (NCEE) Standard 1: Scarcity—“Students will understand that: Productive resources are limited. Therefore, people can not have all the goods and services they want; as a result, they must choose some things and give up others.”

Materials Used in the Lesson

New Orleans scarcity resources:

- http://www.gnocdc.org/prekatrinasite.html: Pre-Katrina demographics for New Orleans
there was a fleet of school buses that went unused in evacuating those without cars from New Orleans. Mayor Ray Nagin of New Orleans says he had no drivers and that the number of buses would have been insufficient to evacuate all the poor and elderly (see http://mediamatters.org/items/200509120005). Should there be alternative modes of transportation available in a city to evacuate residents who cannot do it themselves?

D. Students can also investigate how these shortages may have affected certain groups in very different ways, and how they could have been prevented.

E. Ask students to wrap up with a brief reflective essay on the following question:

Choose three areas of scarcity and discuss the ways in which each one influenced the situation of New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina. Propose solutions for the future in dealing with such problems in New Orleans and other American cities.

Closure

Given what students have learned about the problem of scarcity in New Orleans in August 2005, answer the question of why some people did not leave New Orleans before the hurricane struck. Consider the follow-up question of what can and should be done in the future in circumstances like this in New Orleans and in other parts of the United States.

Students can also follow up by investigating ongoing issues of scarcity in post-Katrina New Orleans:

- Shortage of mental health services: http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=56312

Taking Action

Students can create a plan for preparedness in their local communities based on how certain types of scarcity will magnify the problems created by natural disasters. Their critiques of the local problems they uncover and their plans for addressing these problems should be communicated to local officials and news outlets.
LESSON 2
“If We Want to Put a Man on the Moon . . . We Find the Money”
Spending the Taxpayers’ Money in Response to Disasters

Katrina and the resulting breach of the levees is only one of many disasters to befall the nation over its history. Hurricanes, earthquakes, terrorist strikes—all are part and parcel of modern American life. If the predictions of global warming are accurate, then the country may be in for more experiences of this sort. A legitimate question may be raised about the degree to which government, whether it be federal, state, or local, should expend resources to help out those who are victims of such events, especially when citizens choose to “live in harm’s way,” for example, in coastal areas susceptible to hurricanes.

Essential Question
❖ What should be the government’s economic responsibility to victims of a disaster?

Key Concepts
Market economy/command economy, bureaucracy, economic responsibility, opportunity costs, externalities

Skills Orientation
❖ Formulating and supporting positions on political and economic issues
❖ Modifying positions using feedback from other perspectives
❖ Evaluating the economic impact of political decisions

Relevant Sections of the Film
Act I, Chapter 3, “Explosions”
Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot”
Act II, Chapter 2, “We Shoot Looters”
Act II, Chapter 3, “Brownie, You’re Doin’ a Heck of a Job”
Act III, Chapter 3, “American Citizens”

Related Curriculum Standards
❖ NCEE Standard 16: Role of Government—“Students will understand that: There is an economic role for government in a market economy whenever the benefits of a government policy outweigh its costs. Governments often provide for national defense, address environmental concerns, define and protect property rights, and attempt to make markets more competitive. Most government policies also redistribute income.”
❖ NCEE Standard 17: Using Cost/Benefit Analysis to Evaluate Government Programs—“Students will understand that: Costs of government policies sometimes exceed benefits. This may occur because of incentives facing voters, government officials, and government employees, because of actions by special interest groups that can impose costs on the general public, or because social goals other than economic efficiency are being pursued.”

Materials Used in the Lesson
Handout 1, The Economic Role of Government During Hurricane Katrina: Discussion Questions

Views on government economic responsibility:
The American Prospect: http://www.prospect.org/web/page.www?section=root&name=ViewWeb&articleId=10391
The Heritage Foundation: http://www.heritage.org/Research/GovernmentReform/sr05.cfm
Handout 2, Assessment of the Economic Role of Government During Hurricane Katrina
Handout 3, Roundtable Discussion: Talking Points

Unfolding of the Lesson
A. Begin with discussion of the general questions posed in Handout 1.
B. Utilizing clips from the film, students complete a graphic organizer (Handout 2) in which they evaluate how various levels of government responded to the Katrina crisis (e.g., prevention, evacuation, shelter/food, temporary space, displacement, returning home, rebuilding homes, rebuilding schools, etc.).
C. In group roundtable discussions utilizing the “Talking Points” worksheet (Handout 3), students examine how the various levels of government failed or succeeded in helping the economic needs of the public. They then analyze the reasons behind what they uncover.
D. [Optional] Students can engage in an investigation of how citizens around the world in both command (that is, an economy centrally controlled by the government) and market (that is, a market that operates according to free exchange of goods and services and is not planned by government) economies define the economic responsibility of government.
E. [Optional] Students can develop a “report card” for grading all levels of government in their responses to this and other disasters.
F. Students come up with their own individual responses to the question of why (or why not) the government should respond to victims of a disaster. They also consider the
limits of that response from both philosophical and fiscal standpoints and the particular level of government (local, state, federal) with the greatest responsibility. Students may wish to investigate what has occurred in New York City since September 11, 2001, in terms of governmental response and compensation of families of the victims.

Closure
Students return to the essential question posed in this lesson and debate: What should be the government’s economic responsibility in the aftermath of a disaster? As part of this debate, which can be structured in any way most workable for the group, educators should encourage students to listen, respond, and be respectful of alternative viewpoints from their own. The teacher may then wish to introduce this issue: The United States helped rebuild Europe after World War II and is committed to the rebuilding of Iraq. Students should discuss why the same commitment seems to be lacking for rebuilding New Orleans and Louisiana.

Taking Action
Students will develop a public opinion survey to be distributed to people in their local area, asking questions about issues raised by this lesson. Students will share the analysis of the survey results with their class and school and community members, if possible.

HANDOUT 3
Economics Lesson 2

Roundtable Discussion: Talking Points
In small groups, discuss the following questions related to Hurricane Katrina and government economic responsibility.

- In what areas was each level of government successful in its response to Hurricane Katrina?
- In what areas did each level of government fail in its response to Hurricane Katrina?
- What were the major reasons behind success or failure?
- Did governments fulfill their economic responsibility during and after Hurricane Katrina? Which levels and in what circumstances? Why or why not?
- Have your ideas on the responsibilities of government changed as a result of this lesson? Explain why or why not.

LESSON 3
Were the Citizens of the Ninth Ward Trapped Long Before the Levees Broke?

For many people in the United States and around the world who watched the unfolding of the tragedy in New Orleans, the scenes of the poor and dispossessed were shocking. Some questioned whether what they saw could be images of the “richest country in the world.” Why were so many Americans surprised by what they saw? How could they be unaware of the problem of poverty in this country?

Perhaps the answer lies, in part, in the concentration of poverty and the presence of a seemingly permanent underclass in inner-city neighborhoods. Of course, the poor are also present...
in many rural areas across the country, although typically not in such a densely populated fashion as in most urban areas.

New Orleans’ nickname, “the city that care forgot” is meant to suggest that one leaves one’s cares behind upon entering the city. But read another way, the nickname might seem to suggest that care or caring forgot New Orleans. Had the nation forgot about its poor citizens prior to August 2005? Today, the question must be asked: Have we forgotten them once again?

Essential Question
❖ Does the United States have an underclass?

Key Concepts
Concentrated poverty, underclass, standard of living, human capital

Skills Orientation
❖ Analyzing economic data
❖ Using data to support claims
❖ Making judgments on economic problems

Relevant Sections of the Film
Act I, Chapter 2, “God’s Will?”
Act I, Chapter 4, “Day One”
Act I, Chapter 5, “The Cajun Navy”
Act III, Chapter 3, “American Citizens”
Act IV, Chapter 5, “A Signature Moment”

Related Curriculum Standard
NCCE Standard 15: Growth—“Students will understand that: Investment in factories, machinery, new technology, and in the health, education, and training of people can raise future standards of living.”

Materials Used in the Lesson

Unfolding of the Lesson
A. Introductory discussion questions: Students spend a few minutes writing down responses to these questions as a starting point for a teacher-led discussion on poverty. Students’ responses are written on the board.
❖ What does poverty mean to you?
❖ What are some examples of poverty that you have heard about or studied?

B. Possible causes of poverty: Teachers help the students categorize the possible causes of poverty based on their examples and additional examples generated during the discussion. Some possible categories include educational, physical/health, race/ethnicity, and geographic factors. Concentrated poverty is the segregation of poor families into extremely distressed neighborhoods.

C. What does the term “underclass” mean to sociologists? http://www.elissetche.org/dico/U.htm

D. Analysis of the socioeconomic demographics of the Lower Ninth Ward: Using the information in Table 1 and the sources above, students create a demographic profile of the Lower Ninth Ward, the city of New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, and one neighboring state and categorize possible reasons for these demographics.
❖ Desperate for property but unable to afford housing in other areas of the city, African Americans, who were formerly enslaved Africans, risked flooding and disease to move into the Lower Ninth Ward (Jackson, 2006).
❖ The most notable feature of their circumstances suggests that those who did not evacuate in the face of Katrina were those who lived in concentrated poverty.


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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lower Ninth Ward</th>
<th>Orleans Parish</th>
<th>Louisiana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>14,008</td>
<td>484,674</td>
<td>4,468,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total households</td>
<td>4,820</td>
<td>189,251</td>
<td>1,656,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity—Black</td>
<td>98.3%</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity—White</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
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in poor neighborhoods with low paying jobs (Dyson, 2006, p. 6).

- The impoverished citizens of the Gulf states were often very poorly educated. Schools in New Orleans, for example, have long been considered among the poorest performing in the nation. Dropout rates were high and literacy levels low as a result, at least in part, of the inadequacies of this educational system.

- New Orleans ranked second among the nation’s largest cities in the degree to which its poor families, mostly African American, were clustered in extremely poor neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward (Berube & Katz, 2005).

- Inner-city New Orleans has an unemployment rate of 13%—over twice that of the rest of the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) unemployment rate of 5.4% (Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, 2004).

- Beyond the confines of its tourist districts, New Orleans was a far poorer city than most Americans probably imagined. The average annual household income of families there is below $27,500, significantly less than the national average, with a quarter of African Americans earning less than $10,000 (Alterman, 2005).

- Over 98% of the Lower Ninth Ward’s 20,000 residents were African American.

- Over 1995 to 2001, job growth in inner-city New Orleans remained flat, lagging behind the rest of the surrounding MSA. Throughout the city, employment increased slightly by 0.6%, but grew 2.3% in the rest of the MSA (Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, 2004).

E. Were the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward an underclass, according to standard sociological understanding of that term?

**Closure**

*In-Class Essay:* Students, in groups of two, write a short (300-word) essay answering either of these two questions:

- Why were so many of the residents of the Ninth Ward trapped when the levees broke?
- Do more affluent citizens of this country have an obligation to try to improve the lives of the poor, especially if it is determined to be an underclass? Why or why not?

**Taking Action**

Students write and send a short memo (300 words) to an elected/public official or a media outlet, either local, national, or in Louisiana, concerning their views on rebuilding the Lower Ninth Ward. The following reports offer differing perspectives but either can serve as a model for the students’ memos.


**LESSON 4**

"As Rich as Saudi Arabia"

*Resources, Revenues, and Reinvestment in New Orleans*

One of the many things Spike Lee’s film makes clear is that if Louisiana is a poor state, it is not due to lack of natural resources. The problem, instead, has to do with who has control over those resources. In the wake of the Katrina tragedy, it is important to explore the question of how monies generated off the coast of Louisiana are used and who gets to decide this matter.

**Essential Question**

- Should revenue from Louisiana’s resources be used in the rebuilding of New Orleans?

**Key Concepts**

Revenue, resources, factors of production (land, labor, capital, and entrepreneurship), taxation, markets, consumption, scarcity, choice

**Skills Orientation**

- Analyze aggregate data
- Construct flowchart to show changes in resources and prices
- Participate in a market simulation

**Relevant Sections of the Film**

Act IV, Chapter 3, “Engineers, Oil & Money”
Act IV, Chapter 5, “A Signature Moment”
Act IV, Chapter 6, “I Am Mending”

**Related Curriculum Standards**

- NCEE Standard 3: Allocation of Goods and Services—“Students will understand that: Different methods can be used to allocate goods and services. People acting individually or collectively through government, must choose which methods to use to allocate different kinds of goods and services.”
- NCEE Standard 10: Role of Economic Institutions—“Students will understand that: Institutions evolve in market
economies to help individuals and groups accomplish their goals. Banks, labor unions, corporations, legal systems, and not-for-profit organizations are examples of important institutions. A different kind of institution, clearly defined and enforced property rights, is essential for a market economy."

■ NCEE Standard 13: Role of Resources in Determining Income—“Students will understand that: Income for most people is determined by the market value of the productive resources they sell. What workers earn depends, primarily, on the market value of what they produce and how productive they are.

■ NCEE Standard 15: Growth—“Students will understand that: Investment in factories, machinery, new technology, and in the health, education, and training of people can raise future standards of living.”

■ NCEE Standard 16: Role of Government—“Students understand that: There is an economic role for government in a market economy whenever the benefits of a government policy outweigh its costs. Governments often provide for national defense, address environmental concerns, define and protect property rights, and attempt to make markets more competitive. Most government policies also redistribute income.”

Materials Used in the Lesson


Unfolding of the Lesson

A. Students read the following facts about the resources of Louisiana and the economic costs of Katrina.

■ The offshore wells off Louisiana’s coast generate almost 30% of total U.S. oil production and over 20% of natural gas production (Petterson, Stanley, Glazier, & Philipp, 2006).

■ The Port of New Orleans is located in an economically strategic location at the mouth of the most important commercial waterway in the United States. The port recently generated direct and indirect employment for over 100,000 people, over $2 billion in fees, over $13 billion in user revenue, and $231 million in tax revenue (Petterson et al., 2006).

■ According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (2006), uninsured losses from Katrina, combined with a $1.6 billion dollar decrease in 2005 net earnings, drove Louisiana’s per capita personal income rate from $27,297 in 2004, when it ranked 42nd in the nation, to $24,820. With this 9.1% decline, Louisiana finds itself 28% below the national average of $34,586.

■ Fishing communities along Louisiana’s southeastern coast have been particularly hard hit, disrupting both the state’s shrimp and oyster fisheries. State officials estimate Katrina-related losses to Louisiana’s seafood industry at about 40% of the industry’s annual total retail value or $1.3 billion (Wulfhorst, 2005).

B. Individual task: Have students watch video clips from *When the Levees Broke* in which New Orleans residents indicate that the oil industry is an integral part of their community, but not a significant financial supporter of local redevelopment efforts. Students can then examine the following map of the region, which displays the proximity of oil refineries and ports near the city: http://dma.jrc.it/Services/Global_Atlas/maps/PUBLIC/new_orleans_flooded_areasA3.jpg.

The recovery from Hurricane Katrina will have a significant impact on the U.S. economy. In addition to the death and destruction caused by the storm, the infrastructure of the entire region has been affected. The need for financial assistance and reconstruction will most likely reach $150 billion. Because of this, it is necessary to consider new revenue sources. One obvious possibility is the enormous profits being collected by many oil companies. Taxing these profits could easily generate $10 billion a year, without worsening current shortages. However, such proposals are not without controversy, since many large corporations have argued that higher taxation would increase unemployment and slow growth in the region even further.
C. Students should answer the following questions:

- How close are the oil refineries to the center of the city?
- How close are the main oil ports to the center of the city?
- Were any of the oil refineries or ports located in flooded areas?
- Are oil companies such as Royal Dutch Shell, Kerr-McGee, Chevron, and BP classified as businesses within the state of Louisiana? Do they pay city and state taxes?
- To what extent should the city of New Orleans be entitled to share profits earned by oil revenue from the region?

D. Investigate this problem in more depth and connect it to current events:

- California and Louisiana are the largest oil-producing states, followed by Texas. But most of Louisiana’s oil production happens outside the 3-mile limit accounted for by the state of Louisiana. Ignoring that limit finds that 80% of the entire country’s offshore production flows through Louisiana for processing and distribution. Imagine what would happen if Louisiana seceded from the United States and became an independent country. How would it compare to other oil-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia and Venezuela?


Then answer these questions: Why is the federal government enforcing a three-mile limit that prevents Louisiana residents from receiving any financial benefits from offshore drilling? How did this law originate? How long has this law been in place?


- One of the last acts passed in the 2006 Congress increased Louisiana’s share of offshore oil revenue. What are the pros and cons of an increased tax on oil revenues? How would this affect the local economy of New Orleans?


WASHINGTON—On the cusp of adjournment, Congress passed catch-all legislation early today that created for the first time a permanent source of federal financing to repair Louisiana’s eroding coastline and shore up its hurricane defenses.

The Senate vote today represented the capstone of generations’ worth of lobbying by Louisiana lawmak-
A Sense of Place, A Sense of Home
USING GEOGRAPHY TO UNDERSTAND THE LEVEES CATASTROPHE
William Gaudelli, Thomas Chandler, and Yom Odamten

One of the most profound aspects of the losses associated with Katrina—one that is ever present in Spike Lee’s documentary film—is the overwhelming loss of a beloved city, neighborhood, and home. These are all typically very much a part of a person’s identity.

To lose such things is to have one’s very self-altered, broken, and in the case of Katrina, betrayed by those in power—whether it be the political leadership or the insurance company to which one has paid dividends over many years.

The lessons in this unit, each of which will probably take several days to unfold, explore issues of space and place and the ways in which these dimensions have shaped the reality of New Orleans in the past and its prospects for the future.

LESSON 1
Land Use Patterns and the Future
To Rebuild or Not to Rebuild?

On September 1, 2005, former House Speaker Dennis Hastert said that it makes no sense to spend billions of dollars rebuilding New Orleans, since many sections of the city are below sea level and will only suffer further catastrophic flooding during future hurricanes. He said that “It looks like a lot of that place could be bulldozed. We ought to take a second look at it. But you know we build Los Angeles and San Francisco on top of earthquake fissures and they rebuild, too. Stubborness.”

Perhaps Hastert is right. People cling stubbornly to their homes, their cities, their customs and habits. Perhaps it’s simply the human condition. But the residents of the Ninth Ward had been assured by the Army Corps of Engineers that the levees would hold in the face of a Category 3 hurricane. The Army Corps of Engineers was wrong, as Ivor van Heerden has shown in his book *The Storm* and Jed Horne in *Breach of Faith*.

So, the question must be posed: Whose needs were being served in New Orleans and whose needs will be served in the future of New Orleans? Geography will surely play a part in the answer, whatever decision is made.

Essential Questions
❖ Given New Orleans’ geography and history of neglect of its infrastructure and natural resources, should the city be rebuilt? And, if so, who gets to decide?

Key Concepts
House and home, development, human-environment interactions

Skills Orientation
❖ Viewing video segment
❖ Reading comprehension
❖ Analysis of written and visual texts
❖ Analysis of maps

Relevant Sections of the Film
Pay particular attention to the following scenes in Act IV, Chapter 3:
❖ Description of how the building of canals hurts coastal cities and wetlands
❖ Suggestion by interviewees that New Orleans will lose its African American identity if the city gentrifies

Related Curriculum Standards
Students will gain knowledge of:
❖ Recent developments in foreign and domestic politics (National Council for History Standards [NCHS] 5–12, Era 10, Standard 1)
❖ Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States (NCHS 5–12, Era 10, Standard 2)
❖ How human actions modify the physical environment (National Geography Standard 14)
❖ How physical systems affect human systems (National Geography Standard 15)
❖ The changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources (National Geography Standard 16).

Materials Included in the Lesson
Aerial photos, marshland legal brief, articles:

Unfolding of the Lesson
A. Students will respond to the following writing stems:
❖ My home means _________ to me
❖ When I think of “home,” the sounds that come to me are __________
❖ When I think of “home,” the sights that come to me are __________
When I think of “home,” the feelings that come to me are __________
When I think of “home,” the tastes that come to me are __________
I feel connected to places like __________
Places like these make me feel connected because __________

After a 5-minute writing period, students will share these reflections while they attempt to generate working generalizations from their experiences about the nature of place and how it connects people to it. Teachers may want to include some of the more insightful generalizations about place on the board or a poster as a reminder throughout the lesson.

B. Students can also be encouraged to create a Venn diagram of the characteristics of:
- House
- Home

Students could then be encouraged to create a response (either through poem, song, sculpture, essay, drawing, editorial, cartoon, etc.) of “What Home Means to Me.” They should follow up their creative response with a reflective consideration of what the loss of home has meant to many citizens of New Orleans.


If I gleaned one pertinent insight about human nature from writing this book, it’s that the love of geographical places is more all-encompassing than most of us imagine. When reading about the horror of St. Bernard Parish “Wall of Water” or the Bay St. Louis “Lake Borgne Surge,” you might think only a crazy person would rebuild there. Yet people are rebuilding there and they are not crazy. I interviewed more than three hundred people, and none, not even those who lost everything they had, want to live anywhere else. They were born in Pascagoula or Ocean Springs or Belle Chasse, and they plan on dying there. It’s their unflappable spirit, with private-sector and federal help, which guarantees that all off these devastated communities—even poor Chalmette, Louisiana—will be back. (p. xvii)

D. Discuss the following questions with students:
- How does the loss of one’s home represent a loss of one’s self for the victims of Katrina?
- How would you respond under similar circumstances? Have students read the Schafer and Klein articles in whole or in part. Teachers can print these out ahead of class time and make copies for students.

E. Ask students with which perspective they agree and why. Then ask them to research the issue by looking for online sources updating these older perspectives from 2005.

F. Students can begin their research by looking at the map on page 87, which shows the extent to which flooding occurred in different communities within New Orleans (see also http://www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu/files/katrina/flood.jpg). As students gather research, the following questions can be considered:
- What types of communities experienced the worst damage, with over 10 feet of flooding? Were these communities originally below sea level?
- What are the implications of Hastert’s comments, in terms of future rebuilding efforts in the most devastated communities? For example, should the primarily residential Lower Ninth Ward receive the same amount of federal financial assistance as the central business district, which received less damage?
- What is “gentrification”? How could it impact the future development of New Orleans? What role do race and class play in gentrification initiatives? Has any area near where you live undergone gentrification? How do people feel about its effects on the “sense of the community”?
- What are the rights of homeowners living in flooded areas that have been completely destroyed? Do they have the unconditional right to rebuild on their own property, even if the government deems it to be unsafe?
- What is the level of risk that New Orleansians face from hurricanes, as compared with residents of San Francisco and Los Angeles, where major earthquakes are a constant threat? If San Francisco were destroyed by an earthquake, do you think many public officials would suggest that the city should not be rebuilt in the same location? Why or why not?

Once the students have noted their responses to these questions, review their answers in a discussion aimed at checking for their understanding of these issues.

G. Ask students to look at two different aerial photos of New Orleans, at this Web address: http://www.nasa.gov/images/content/126535main_neworleans_flood_0831.jpg. One image (August 27, 2005) was taken before the storm and the breach of the levees. The second image (August 30, 2005) was taken after these events occurred. Pose a set of questions to check for their understanding:
- How has the region changed?
- What are some notable patterns in land use development along the Mississippi Delta?
- How have various stakeholders used the land for their own benefit?
- What are precautionary steps that can be taken to improve the marsh areas after the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina?

H. The New Orleans region is the most industrialized wetland area in the United States. It produces or transports more than a third of the nation’s oil and a quarter of its natural gas. It is also an important commercial fishing area, falling only behind Alaska. Forty percent of the nation’s fish and
shellfish come from the Gulf of Mexico. As noted by Eric Berger, science writer for the Houston Chronicle, increased human development over the past 50 years has significantly increased Mississippi River delta erosion and subsequently the possibility of more severe storm surges from hurricanes. In his December 2001 article, “Keeping Its Head Above Water: New Orleans Faces Doomsday Scenario,” Bergen wrote that “New Orleans is sinking. And its main buffer from a hurricane, the protective Mississippi River delta, is quickly eroding away, leaving the historic city perilously close to disaster . . . .” Ivor van Heerden, Louisiana State University meteorologist, has asserted that Louisiana’s wetlands are being washed away, and that an area the size of a football field disappears every 35 minutes. If possible, have students go outside and measure 100 yards to get a mental image of this specific size. Then have students use Google Earth to measure the same distance on a map of the Louisiana marsh areas. Students can also develop their own mathematical calculations to determine how much marshland would be lost per year.


J. Check for understanding:
   - Which communities have the most to lose from further wetland erosion?
   - How long has the Army Corps of Engineers been aware of this danger?

K. Have students investigate the present situation regarding the rebuilding of New Orleans.
   - How does the process of rebuilding both help and hinder healing?
   - What are the prospects for rebuilding New Orleans?
   - What are the biggest issues?
   - Who should participate in making decisions about rebuilding?
   - Is the rebuilding effort going to advantage one group over another? Why or why not?
As the deluge continued to move south, a collection of bankers met to discuss the fate of New Orleans. They believed the most important goal was to save downtown New Orleans, and therefore dynamite was set off at a levee in St. Bernard Parish. Water went pouring through, devastating St. Bernard Parish, home to a half million people (Barry, 1998). It was later discovered that this was not needed to save New Orleans.

Knowledge of this history fueled the fears of African American citizens of New Orleans in 2005 that their interests might yet again be sacrificed for those of wealthier citizens of the city.

**Work Cited**


**Essential Question**

- Can the levees simultaneously be considered symbols of protection, neglect, and conspiracy?

**Key Concepts**

- Symbol, conspiracy, historical evidence

**Skills Orientation**

- Analyzing evidence
- Drawing conclusions based on evidence
- Perspective taking

**Relevant Sections of the Film**

Act I, Chapter 3, “Explosions”
Act IV, Chapter 3, “Engineers, Oil & Money” (optional)

**Related Curriculum Standards**

Students will gain knowledge of:

- People, places, and environment (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS] Standard III)
- Science, technology, and society (NCSS Standard VIII)
- Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States (NCHS 5–12, Era 10, Standard 2)
- How human actions modify the physical environment (National Geography Standard 14)
- How physical systems affect human systems (National Geography Standard 15)
- The changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources (National Geography Standard 16)

**Materials Used in the Lesson**


Additional useful books are:

Unfolding of the Lesson

A. Teacher opens lesson by asking students to share what they know about three concepts:

Protection    Neglect    Conspiracy

B. As students share their understandings of each term, teacher should record these as ideas on the board under each heading.

C. Students view the *Times-Picayune* Web site that depicts with graphics the historical evolution of Louisiana’s topography: [http://www.nola.com/speced/lastchance/multimedia/flashlandloss1.swf](http://www.nola.com/speced/lastchance/multimedia/flashlandloss1.swf). After viewing the presentation, discuss the following questions:

- What factors contribute to the topographic development of southern Louisiana?
- How has that geography changed over the past 2,000 years?
- What role have people played over the last 200 years to contribute to this problem?
- What recent factors endanger the area of NOLA? What are the projections for this land area over the next 150 years?

D. Teacher then asks students to watch the clip of *The Levees* about the levee system of New Orleans and capture quotes, images, or anecdotes that relate to the three key concepts.

Protection    Neglect    Conspiracy

E. Viewing of Act I, Chapter 3 from “The Levees”: Teacher will introduce the concept of *perspective taking* in history and contemporary life. Students will watch this video excerpt and consider the following question, to be discussed after viewing:

- What differing perspectives about the levees are represented in the film?
- Who offers them?
- What reasons might explain the speakers’ differing points of view?

Students will work in pairs or trios to share what they captured from the film about the concepts of protection, neglect, and conspiracy, linking them to evidence in the film that indicates whether different groups had opposing perspectives about the government’s investment in protecting them as citizens of New Orleans.

F. Students will now be given a series of documents and resources about the New Orleans levees. The teacher will use either large poster paper or the chalkboard to record evidence about the problems associated with the levees. Teachers might have students read evidence (steps 1–3) and then lead them in a collection of evidence from each resource. This activity concludes with a recitation of the information from these sources and evaluation of their meaning.

1. Students will be given a short excerpt (2 pages, I-3 through I-4) from the Executive Summary of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ 2006 Performance Evaluation of the New Orleans and Southeast Louisiana Hurricane Protection System (available at [https://ipet.wes.army.mil/](https://ipet.wes.army.mil/)), which states, in part:

   *The System did not perform as a system: the hurricane protection in New Orleans and Southeast Louisiana was a system in name only. Flood protection systems are an example of a series system—if a single levee or floodwall fails, the entire area is impacted. It is important that all components have a common capability based on the character of the hazard they face. Such systems also need redundancy, an ability for a second tier of protection to help compensate for the failure of the first tier. Pumping may be the sole example of some form of redundancy; however, the pumping stations are not designed to operate in major hurricane conditions. The system’s performance was compromised by the incompleteness of the system, the inconsistency in levels of protection, and the lack of redundancy.* (p. I-3)

   Pause to review the above quotation and collect evidence from it.


   *The President’s budget for fiscal year 2006 is $3.0 million. This will be insufficient to fund new construction contracts. We could spend $20 million if the funds were provided. These funds are necessary to maintain the project schedule and to meet our contractual and local sponsor commitments. Overall project completion is scheduled for 2015.*

   Pause to review the above quotation and collect evidence from it.

3. If the teacher has access to Proquest, Lexis-Nexis, or another online news outlet, he or she may wish to distribute the *Times-Picayune* article “Rumor of Levee Dynamite Persists” by Tara Young (December 12, 2005, p. 1). This article explains the purposeful flooding of the Lower Ninth Ward in 1927 as an example of why the rumor has such staying power among poor and Black New Orleanians. The teacher might also share an excerpt from Douglas Brinkley’s book *The Great Deluge* (2006, p. 43), which gives additional historical background.

   Students review any such materials that are available and collect evidence from them.

G. For cross-cultural comparison, students review the Netherlands flood control statement offered to the U.S. Congress in the aftermath of Katrina (available at [http://www.embassy.org/article.asp?articleref=AR000017](http://www.embassy.org/article.asp?articleref=AR000017)).


construct a model of a levee or draw a picture of a levee
create a computer simulation of a levee breach
design a flow chart showing the “domino effect” of water moving swiftly through a city
create a song, poem, dance, film, or artwork that captures their sense of the flood and the breaching of the levees
design a cartoon
write an editorial
create a play

The teacher could pose the following interpretive questions in conjunction with the creation of student projects above:

- In your judgment, how should the levees be viewed?
- As a form of protection?
- As a symbol of neglect by the city, state and/or country?
- As a symbol of conspiracy against the poorest citizens of New Orleans?

**Closure**

Students will write a brief essay about what this lesson reveals, if anything, about the questions: What kind of country are we? Do we want to be?

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**LESSON 3**

“I Want to Go Home!”

**Refugees in the United States?**

Within days of the breach of the levees, evacuees from New Orleans were being labeled “refugees,” a term ordinarily applied to people displaced from their own country.

About a month after the levees broke, Michael Ignatieff notes:

_Having been abandoned, the people in the convention center were reduced to reminding their fellow citizens, through the medium of television, that they were not refugees in a foreign country._

Ignatieff’s views are reinforced by Tulane historian Emily Clark’s (2006) essay about New Orleans called “On Colonial Subjects.” In this essay, Clark argues that the “historically constructed definition of New Orleans as ‘other,’ an island of exotic, erotic creole something-or-other that is essentially foreign to what is ‘American’” is precisely what has allowed the city to be ignored over so many years of neglect. As a result, it may not be surprising that those forced to flee New Orleans in the wake of flooding were called “refugees.”

This lesson addresses the issues around use of the term _refugees_ to signify those forced to evacuate their city after the flooding of New Orleans. What does this say about our perspectives on who they are and the meaning of their tragedy?

**Works Cited**


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_A broken retaining wall in a flooded New Orleans neighborhood, September 8, 2005_
Essential Question

❖ Can American citizens be refugees in their own country?

Key Concepts

Refugee, displacement, trauma

Skills Orientation

❖ Evaluating competing claims
❖ Analyzing primary sources
❖ Writing and reflecting
❖ Reading comprehension
❖ Viewing video segment

Relevant Sections of the Film

Act III, Chapter 3, “American Citizens”
Act III, Chapter 4, “The Roots Run Deep”

Related Curriculum Standards

Students will gain knowledge about
❖ Culture (NCSS Standard I)
❖ Individual development and identity (NCSS Standard IV)
❖ Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States (NCHS 5–12, Era 10, Standard 2)
❖ That people create regions to interpret Earth’s complexity (National Geography Standard 5)
❖ How culture and experience influence people’s perception of places and regions (National Geography Standard 6)

Materials Used in the Lesson

Group One: On Use of the Term Refugee


Group Two: Population Data Pre- and Post-Katrina

Post-hurricane population data released, http://geography.about.com/od/obtainpopulationdata/a/postkatrina.htm

Group Three: On FEMA

FEMA tells 150,000 in hotels to exit in fifteen days, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/15/AR2005111501704.html

Unfolding of the Lesson

A. Concepts are ideas. Introducing students to concepts or ideas with certain attributes that define the concept is an important part of the high school social studies curriculum. In this lesson, the most important concept for students to grapple with is “refugee.”

B. Begin the lesson by asking students: Consider using a Venn diagram to display the differences:
❖ What is a refugee?
❖ In what contexts have you heard this term used before?
If you had to define the notion, how would you do so?

How is the term alike or different from other terms such as "evacuee," "displaced person," "asylum seeker," or "fugitive"?

C. Ask the students what they know about refugees in Darfur. In Palestine, Jewish refugees during the Holocaust. What do they have in common? What differences exist among these examples?

D. Provide students with the United Nations definition of refugee status, which is based on the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees:

A refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. . . ."


If possible, students should review the frequently asked questions (FAQs) in the online document for the various circumstances that lead to a declaration of refugee status. Alternatively, teachers may do this in preparation for class and clarify the points made there for students.

E. Students will clarify the criteria that determine whether an individual can properly be considered a "refugee." These criteria can be written on the board. The teacher can check for student understanding by asking questions contained on the above Web site which applies the definition and criteria to certain examples, such as: "Can a soldier be a refugee?"

F. Have students read quotes from When the Levees Broke. Have them write down their thoughts about each statement in the space provided in the handout under the heading "Before Viewing the Film."

G. Students should view appropriate segments of When the Levees Broke and re-read the statements in the handout, writing new responses under the heading "After Viewing the Film." They should explain why their responses changed or remained the same. When possible they should cite specific portions of the film.

H. Could the use of the term "refugee" simply have been meant to denote a person "seeking refuge" without the political connotations as used by the United Nations and other governmental bodies? Is this flap "much ado about nothing"? Why might it have been such a sensitive issue?

I. Students share their responses with class and discuss:

- What new insights did you gain about the label refugee based on watching the film segments?
- Based on the UNHCR definition of a refugee, are victims of Katrina appropriately referred to as refugees? Why? Why not?
- Based on your readings of the materials on FEMA and the population dispersal after the flooding of New Orleans, assess how well you feel the federal government handled the removal and resettling of New Orleans citizens.

J. [Optional] If teachers wish to pursue the difficult topics of post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide in the aftermath of the levees tragedy, they should use the concept formation approach to introduce the term trauma modeled above for the term refugee. Then, show Act III, Chapter 6.

The U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs defines post-traumatic stress disorder as:

A psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults like rape. Most survivors of trauma return to normal given a little time. However, some people will have stress reactions that do not go away on their own, or may even get worse over time. These individuals may develop PTSD. People who suffer from PTSD often relive the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, have difficulty sleeping, and feel detached or estranged, and these symptoms can be severe enough and last long enough to significantly impair the person's daily life. PTSD is marked by clear biological changes as well as psychological symptoms. PTSD is complicated by the fact that it frequently occurs in conjunction with related disorders such as depression, substance abuse, problems of memory and cognition, and other problems of physical and mental health. The disorder is also associated with impairment of the person's ability to function in social or family life, including occupational instability, marital problems and divorces, family discord, and difficulties in parenting. (http://www.ncpet.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/fact_shts/fs_what_is_ptsd.html)

- What are the psychological effects of the loss of place associated with Katrina?
- How is the category of "Hurricane Victim" complicated by PTSD-related deaths?
- What can be done to address the widespread PTSD afflicting New Orleansians?


If possible, teachers could invite a physician, nurse, social worker, or counselor into class to talk about PTSD, its symptoms, and ways of dealing with it.

Closure

Lead into the end of the activity by writing the following quotes on the board. No attribution can be found for these old sayings. They might be considered “proverbs” or “epigrams” — two vocabulary words that may be useful for students to learn.

- “Charity is when you give someone something that is yours.”
- “Justice is when you give someone something that is theirs.”

Have students write an essay that answers the questions: Is it possible to be a refugee in your own country? Under what conditions? Who gets to decide? How does the prospect of becoming
a refugee while being a U.S. citizen redefine the notion of what kind of country the United States is? Is this the kind of country we want to be?

**Taking Action**

**Option A:** Students conduct oral histories with older citizens in their communities based on this lesson. They ask the elderly about their experiences of moving, coping with catastrophe, and being an outsider in a new community. Ask these individuals what they know and what they think about the federal government’s response to the situation in New Orleans. Is it alike or different from anything they experienced in their own lives? If they lived through the Great Depression, ask them how local, state, and federal government agencies responded during that crisis.

**Option B:** Students will brainstorm a list of actions that they might take to provide support and comfort to victims of Hurricane Katrina. Once the list has been established, teachers may have students develop these proposals into social action projects.

- See the HBO Web site for *When the Levees Broke* for some options for these projects: http://www.hbo.com/docs/programs/whentheleveesbroke/?ntrack_par1=leftnav\_category6\_show4
- See the Operation Assist Web site: http://chf.childrenshealthfund.org/site/PageServer?pagename=hurricaneresponse
- See the Common Ground Relief Web site: http://www.commongroundrelief.org/
- See the Acorn New Orleans Web site: http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=8219
Learning From History in an Effort to Understand the Tragedy of Katrina
William Gaudelli, Thomas Chandler, and Yom Odamtten

What kind of country are we? What kind of country do we want to be?

No questions are more important in the tattered aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Katrina unleashed a literal and figurative flood—of recriminations and blame, of questioning and debate, of sadness and exhaustion—all of which continue to this day.

As this nation absorbed the enormity of the damage done to New Orleans, we were confronted with the reality of just how divided the United States remains—Black, White, and brown, haves and have-nots. Can we pull together to make this city whole again? Do we care enough to invest the effort? Will we forget? Have we forgotten already?

The lessons in this unit are designed to help secondary students deal with the complexity of how time and place shaped New Orleans and are being reshaped in the wake of Katrina. Although the lessons deal with the past, events continue to unfold in New Orleans and throughout the Gulf States on a daily basis. Teachers are encouraged to use these lessons as a launching pad for current events investigations into the aftermath of Katrina and the breaching of the levees.

LESSON 1
“A Signature Moment in American History”
Perspective Taking on “the Blame Game”

Each of us sits in a unique “social location.” In other words, who we are—whether male or female, old or young, rich or poor, Black or White, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, or atheist, American or Palestinian—influences how we see the world, interpret events, and react to our experiences.

Whether we are an “insider” or an “outsider” in a situation also influences our perspective. Clearly, the individuals featured in Spike Lee’s film are insiders. Yet they still have differing perspectives on “the blame game,” as it has been called, concerning who is responsible for the chaos in New Orleans after the levees broke. Issues of social location shape views of insiders as well as outsiders.

In this lesson, students explore the idea of multiple perspectives, even when the different viewpoints are held by eyewitnesses. They will compare the differing perspectives, and then formulate their own positions on these issues.

Through the process of democratic dialogue about this very difficult and complex event in our nation’s history, we hope to talk across our differences in order to understand our shared investment in making this country a better place by forging a stronger sense of our communal bonds.

Essential Questions
❖ Why have there been so many competing perspectives on the “blame game” concerning Katrina?
❖ Can these differences be reconciled?
❖ Where do you come down on these issues?

Key Concepts
Perspective taking, multiple perspectives, bias, historical thinking, social location

Skills Orientation
❖ Identifying and describing perspectives relevant to an event or issue
❖ Connecting perspective and historical narrative
❖ Understanding the notion of bias
❖ Taking a stand based on evidence

Relevant Sections of the Film
Act I, Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans,” Governor Blanco
Act I, Chapter 4, “Day One,” Phyllis Montana LeBlanc
Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot,” Harry Belafonte
Act II, Chapter 2, “We Shoot Looters,” Darnell Herrington
Act II, Chapter 4, “The Mayor Calls In,” Ray Nagin
Act II, Chapter 5, “General Honoré” (three-star general)
Act III, Chapter 2, “Polarized,” Kanye West
Act III, Chapter 3, “American Citizens,” Barbara Bush
Act IV, Chapter 6, “I Am Mending,” Calvin Mackie

Related Curriculum Standards
Students will gain knowledge about:
❖ Time, continuity, and change (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS] Standard II)
❖ Individual development and identity (NCSS Standard IV)

Materials Used in the Lesson
Handout 1, Identifying Perspectives Worksheet
Handout 2, Creating a Perspective-Based Narrative
Handout 3, Jigsaw Discussion Talking Points Worksheet—The Many Voices of Katrina

Unfolding of the Lesson
A. Teacher should review the concepts of perspective taking, multiple perspectives, bias, social location, and blame.
B. Utilizing the preselected scenes from the film, students will identify the backgrounds of the speakers and chart the speakers’ opinions concerning the events associated with
Katrina and with local, state, and federal governments’ handling of the crisis. Be clear that for purposes of doing this lesson, “insiders” are defined as those who witnessed/experienced the events associated with Hurricane Katrina and the breach of the levees. “Outsiders” are those who did not. Identify which are which with students. Use Handout 1, “Identifying Perspectives Worksheet,” to complete this task. Be sure that students understand that even if someone is an eyewitness to an event, his or her perspective can still be partial and biased and that there may be multiple “insider” views just as there are multiple “outsider” views.

C. Look up the meaning of the word bias and decide whether it applies in the case of each person considered in this lesson. How would you decide?

D. Students will be assigned to one of five groups, taking the perspective of one of the insiders featured in the film (Mayor Ray Nagin, Governor Kathleen Blanco, and Phyllis Montana LeBlanc) or one of the outsiders (Barbara Bush and Kanye West). Use the series of question prompts in Handout 2 to get each person’s likely historical perspective. Teachers can create more groups and draw on other voices from the film or on Handout 1 if they wish.

E. Students will then be jigsawed into groups where one member from each perspective is present. Upon reading a copy of their own narrative and speaking from their assigned perspectives, group members will respond to each perspective and challenge or comment on their point of view. They will consider the question of whether these competing perspectives can be reconciled.

F. Students can certainly go beyond the film for further evidence. Teachers can suggest accounts of Hurricane Katrina online as well as in newspapers or books that provide a broader line of vision than that which is articulated in the individual accounts on the documentary film. See, in particular, Douglas Brinkley’s The Great Deluge, Jed Horne’s Breach of Faith, Ivor van Heerden’s The Storm, and Christopher Cooper and Robert Block’s Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security.

G. Students will use Handout 4 to help them form their own judgments about how history should tell the story of Katrina and the levees and who should be accountable. What kind of blame has been dispensed for the flooding of New Orleans? Who is dispensing the blame? What might be some consequences of a blame game?

Closure
Students share their viewpoints, defending their perspectives by calling upon the evidence they found most convincing. The teacher should wrap up the lesson by returning to the essential questions: Why have there been so many competing perspectives on the “blame game” concerning Katrina? Can these differing views be reconciled? Where do you come down on these issues?

**HANDOUT 1**
High School History Lesson 1

**Identifying Perspectives Worksheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/Group</th>
<th>Description of Situation/Experience</th>
<th>Position/Opinion on Causes and Responses to Hurricane Katrina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governor Kathleen B. Blanco</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllis Montana LeBlanc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Belafonte</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Darnell Herrington</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor Ray Nagin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Russel Honoré</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanye West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Bush</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin Mackie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Creating a Perspective-Based Historical Narrative

*Directions:* Storytellers usually tell stories from the point of view of one person. Historians try to bring multiple perspectives to bear in recounting past events. Certainly, the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina produced multiple perspectives through which to analyze and evaluate its legacy. Journalists and historians have been at work since the event occurred trying to sort through those perspectives to get an overall perspective. This is not an easy thing to do and it will take time to compile all the evidence—to write a complete history, in other words.

In this exercise, you are still working from one perspective only. Using your assigned perspective, write a brief set of responses to the questions below. Be sure to think and write from the viewpoint you have been assigned and not from your own viewpoint.

- Why was New Orleans not better prepared for the arrival of Hurricane Katrina?
- What were the largest problems created in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina?
- How did different individuals respond to the emergency? Why were there these individual differences?
- What are the roles of the local, state, and national governments in facing crises such as Katrina?
- Can you imagine what it must have been like to live through this disaster? What feelings does this stimulate in you as you imagine what the experience was like—for children, parents, the sick and disabled, the elderly, the poor, middle class, and rich?
- Has Hurricane Katrina changed America? If so, how?

**LESSON 2**

*“Who the Heck Is in Charge Here?”*

**Courage, Callousness, and (In)competence Among Leaders in a Crisis**

One of the key questions that surfaced in the aftermath of Katrina and the breaching of the levees was the issue of leadership. Three elected leaders were prominent during the crisis: Mayor Ray Nagin of New Orleans, Governor Kathleen Blanco of the state of Louisiana, and President George W. Bush of the United States. Many other leaders emerged during the crisis, people like Lt. General Russel Honoré of the U.S. Army, who was sent in to get control of the city, and members of the U.S. Coast Guard, who did a heroic job of rescuing stranded individuals in and on top of their homes.

Historical examples abound of leaders and their mettle during times of crisis. In the following mini-unit, which will take several days to unfold, students examine several examples of leaders in such times: President Lyndon Baines Johnson during Hurricane Betsy, Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy. Teachers might also want to consider adding in other leaders, such as Harry Truman and Winston Churchill, who were not popular nor terribly well regarded when they left office but whom history has judged more favorably.

This lesson assumes a good amount of historical background knowledge about the presidencies of the teachers and leaders here. Although a comprehensive lesson plan is offered, teachers may wish to review their knowledge of these historical figures, either through their own library resources or the recommended reading offered here, before tackling this lesson.

**Essential Question**

- How effective were public leaders in the face of the Katrina crisis?

**Key Concepts**

Leadership, crisis, opportunity, management

**Skills Orientation**

- Reading comprehension
- Historical comparison
- Application of criteria to evaluating actions
- Development of analytic skills in interpretive discussion
Related Curriculum Standards
Students will gain knowledge about:
- Power, authority, and governance (NCSS Standard VI)
- Recent developments in foreign and domestic politics (National Council for History Standards [NCHS] 5–12, Era 10, Standard 1)
- Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States (NCHS 5–12, Era 10, Standard 2)

Materials Used in the Lesson

Background Reading for the Teacher

Unfolding of the Lesson
A. Teachers begin by clarifying student understanding of the key concepts of this lesson: leadership, crisis, opportunity, and crisis management. Students then read the following quote:

_In most, if not all crises, the moment arrives when a single man or woman must make faithful choices about the government’s course of action . . . everybody is looking to them for direction, yet a crisis makes it very difficult and painful to provide just that. In choosing, leaders have to somehow discount the uncertainties, overcome any anxieties they may feel, control their impulses, and commit the government’s resources to a course of action that they can only hope is both effective and appropriate in the political context they are in._ (Boin, Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005, pp. 43–44)

B. Given this statement, students brainstorm a list of the qualities of character and background they feel would be suitable for meeting the demands of the above statement. In other words, what do we want from a public leader in a time of crisis?

C. Having discussed leadership, students now turn to an historical case study of leadership: LBJ and Hurricane Betsy in 1965. To begin, teachers can get background information about Hurricane Betsy from various online sources, including *New Orleans Hurricane History*, at http://www.hurricane city.com/betsy.htm. Some highlights of this information:
- 112 mph wind in New Orleans
- 8–10-foot storm surge in New Orleans
- 75 deaths in Louisiana and Florida
- Massive property damage
D. To provide context for their discussion of leadership, students can compare and contrast aspects of the two storms, Betsy and Katrina, using Handout 1.

E. LBJ’s response to Hurricane Betsy: If the equipment is available, teachers can play the audio recording of “President Lyndon Johnson’s Remarks on Hurricane Disaster in New Orleans” delivered September 10, 1965 (less than one day after Betsy), available at http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/Johnson/AV_hom/hurricane_disaster.shtm. Students may note that there was still a strong, audible wind blowing as LBJ speaks. Text transcript of LBJ speech: http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/AV_hom/Hurricane/audio_transcript.shtm:

Ladies and gentlemen . . . I am saddened by the damage and the suffering that I have seen. The high winds that reached a speed of 145 miles per hour wreaked massive destruction. Roofs were crushed, trees toppled, tons of broken glass and shattered electric and telephone lines lay in the wake of the savage storm. I have ordered that all red tape be cut. Our assistance will be given the highest priority. The Department of Agriculture is already providing emergency food at food stations such as we visited. They’ve been set up by the Red Cross and the help of other local agencies. Troops from Fort Polk have called into action to prevent starvation and to protect life and property. The Small Business Administration, under the direction of Gene Foley, will tomorrow morning begin processing the first long-term loans in New Orleans. The Corps of Engineers is at work tonight, opening levees and dikes and removing debris. But we’re ready to do much more. Within the hour, Governor McKeithen asked us to declare Louisiana a disaster area. We will so declare it tonight. This nation grieves for its neighbors in Louisiana, but this state will build its way out of its sorrow. And the national government will be at Louisiana’s side to help it every step of the way in every way that we can.

❖ To what extent does LBJ’s response fit with our brainstormed list of effective leadership qualities in times of crisis?
❖ What did LBJ see as the role of the federal government in responding to disasters?

F. The teacher can then choose a historical event familiar to students that demonstrates a leader’s capacity in times of crisis. Teachers may select one or more of the examples below, or one of their own choosing or solicited from students’ suggestions. Then, teachers should:
- Divide the class into three groups and have each group take one leader for focus.
- If appropriate, choose a different leader more relevant to their course of study or students.

Example One: Abraham Lincoln’s leadership during the crisis of the U.S. Civil War. Sources for background information:


Example Two: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s leadership in Birmingham bus boycott. Source for background information:

Example Three: John F. Kennedy’s leadership in the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. Sources for background information:


G. Students will discuss questions related to leadership capacity in times of crisis, as exemplified by Lincoln, King, and Kennedy. Comparisons among the three are also quite useful if time allows.
❖ What did Lincoln/King/Kennedy do that exemplified effective leadership?
❖ What did they do wrong?
❖ What qualities did they exhibit that demonstrated their ability to lead in crisis?
❖ Did they have weaknesses or blind sides?
❖ Would they have been just as effective in a very different crisis—such as global warming?
❖ How might these periods of time have been different if these leaders were not present? If someone without these qualities had been a leader? If someone with different qualities had been a leader?

H. Students watch excerpts of When the Levees Broke that depict the leaders during the crisis. Students will form a tentative view of each leader’s ability in time of crisis on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = ineffective, 5 = effective) based on his or her depiction in When the Levees Broke while acknowledging that the film provides only one perspective.

❖ Leaders:
Ray Nagin, Mayor of New Orleans
Kathleen Blanco, Governor of Louisiana
Michael Brown, FEMA Director
George W. Bush, President
Thad Allen, Vice Admiral of U.S. Coast Guard

❖ Primary When the Levees Broke excerpts:
Act I, Chapter 1, “Miss New Orleans”
Act I, Chapter 5, “The Cajun Navy”
Act II, Chapter 2, “We Shoot Looters”
Act II, Chapter 3, “Brownie, You’re Doin’ a Heck of a Job”
Act II, Chapter 4 (Nagin, 12 minutes)
Act III, Chapter 2 (Brown/Bush/Blanco, 10 minutes)

❖ Additional excerpts, if time allows:
Act II, Chapter 9 (Bush, 9 minutes)
Act II, Chapter 3 (Brown, 10 minutes)
Act III, Chapter 3 (Brown/Bush, 10 minutes)
Act I, Chapter 5 (Coast Guard [Allen], 13 minutes)
Notes

1. *When the Levees Broke* does not provide much detail about Allen’s leadership in search and recovery efforts, where he chose to violate Coast Guard policy in order to save lives. A brief summary of his work can be compiled from various sources online and from a *U.S. News & World Report* article, “Always Ready for the Storm” (http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/061022/30allen.htm). Allen’s inclusion serves as an interesting example of what some would consider effective leadership in times of crisis.

2. The total film time of all segments is 64 minutes. Teachers may want to use one to three clips per day over the course of two or three days so that each can be viewed and analyzed by students.

3. Spike Lee’s views as reflected in the film should not serve as the only source of information for students investigating the issue of leadership in this situation. Teachers are encouraged to consult the many excellent books now available on the handling of the storm, as well as newspaper articles and Web essays dealing with this historical event, so that students can gain multiple perspectives on this matter.

Directions

Use the worksheet in Handout 2 to take note of the major events that occur as you watch the clips, keeping track of which leaders were most active on which days.

**HANDOUT 1**

**High School History Lesson 2**

**Historical Context: Hurricane Betsy vs. Hurricane Katrina**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Context</th>
<th>Hurricane Betsy (1965)</th>
<th>Hurricane Katrina (2005)</th>
<th>Other Crises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extent and Type of Hurricane Destruction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Government Response</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>State/Local Government Response</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reactions of Individuals</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Salient Current/World Events That Required Government Attention/Spending</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other Contextual Differences Between the Two Events</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Questions for consideration:
   - How does LBJ’s response to Betsy compare to George W. Bush’s response to Katrina?
   - Did Blanco/Nagin/Bush/Brown demonstrate personal limitations or was their behavior a function of circumstances beyond their control?
   - Reflecting back on the historical examples of Lincoln/King/Kennedy,
     - How were the crises different?
     - Do different types of crises demand different forms of leadership and different types of response to the crisis or catastrophe?
     - How was Blanco/Nagin/Bush/Brown different in a time of great crisis?
     - How might the situation in New Orleans have been different if Thad Allen had been mayor? Or Lincoln? Robert F. Kennedy? (Or Giuliani, or Obama, or Clinton? Or someone else that the teachers or students wish to include in this analysis.)

Closure

Teachers lead a summative discussion about the following questions: How effective were public leaders at the local, state, and federal levels in the wake of Katrina? Can you draw any conclusions (make any generalizations) about leadership based on this lesson?

Although this lesson has focused on public leaders, many “everyday heroes,” who were not official leaders of any sort,
emerged in the days after Katrina and the breach of the levees. Students should discuss whether the qualities of character and courage found in these individuals are the same or different from those they seek in publicly elected officials. They might focus on the questions: What makes a hero in a time of crisis? Does everyone have the potential to be a hero?

Taking Action

Students consider the issue of student leadership at their school. They might ask their student government leaders if they could present their conclusions about leadership to the student body. They might also consider the disaster preparedness plans at their school and what role students and other school leaders will play in case of a crisis or disaster at their school. In light of school and college shootings in recent years, this might be a very useful exercise.

Lessons

LESSON 3

Looking Beyond New Orleans

Hurricane Katrina and Other Disasters in American and World History

Disasters are an ever-present aspect of the human condition. They occur around the globe, and with all-too-regular frequency. In a five-year period, they included but were certainly not limited to the terrorist attack on New York City in 2001, the tsunami in South Asia in 2004, the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, and the Pakistani earthquake of 2005.

Within minutes, disasters can destroy a community and change the lives of its residents forever. The United States has experienced a number of calamities throughout its history, particularly in relation to flooding and heat waves, which have caused problems for underserved populations, just as Hurricane Katrina did. For example, the Johnstown Flood disaster of 1889 was the result of several days of extremely heavy rainfall, made worse by the failure of a dam situated upstream of the town of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, which unleashed a torrent of additional water.

The San Francisco earthquake of 1906 was a major earthquake that struck San Francisco and the northern coast of California on April 18, 1906. The most widely accepted estimate for the magnitude of the earthquake is 7.8; however, other values have been proposed, from 7.7 to as high as 8.3. The epicenter occurred offshore about 2 miles (3 km) from the city. The earthquake and resulting fire are remembered as one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States. The toll from the earthquake and resulting fire represents the greatest loss of life from a natural disaster in California's history.

As the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 approached New Orleans, Louisiana, dynamite was set off on the levee at Caernarvon, and sent water pouring through. This prevented New Orleans from experiencing serious damage, but flooded much of St. Bernard Parish. To residents of New Orleans at the time of Katrina, this seemed yet another decision designed to protect the rich at the expense of the poor.

In 1995, the Chicago heat wave brought temperatures of 120 degrees to numerous low-income communities, which did not have the resources to escape the scorching heat.

In all of these disasters, historians have attributed the loss of life and infrastructure damage to poorly conceived urban development policies that benefited the wealthy, while ignoring the plight of the less fortunate.

This lesson will focus on parallels between the Johnstown Flood of 1889, the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, the Chicago heat wave of 1995, and Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans. With some additional teacher research, other comparisons could be made, for example, to the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the December 26, 2004, South Asian tsunami, or the October 8, 2005, Pakistan earthquake.

Essential Question

What does the study of history tell us about the nature and effects of so-called natural disasters?

Key Concepts

Floods, disaster prevention and relief, social inequality

Skills Orientation

- Viewing video segment
- Reading comprehension
- Analysis of written and visual texts
- Analysis of maps

Relevant Sections of the Film

Act I, Chapter 3. Note in particular the following scenes:
- Others think it was merely the sound of snapping levees
- Hurricane Betsy (1965): Question of purposeful dynamiting of levees of Ninth Ward to save expensive property (urban legend?)
- 1927 flooding in New Orleans: Levees were dynamited, forcing out poor Whites
- Modern levees never fully completed due to money shortage
- Levees engineered badly (i.e., not according to Army Corps of Engineers specs)

**Related Curriculum Standards**

Students will gain knowledge about:
- Power, authority, and governance (NCSS Standard VI)
- Production, distribution, and consumption (NCSS Standard VII)
- Civic ideals and practices (NCSS Standard X)
- Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States (NCHS 5–12, Era 10, Standard 2)
- How human actions modify the physical environment (National Geography Standard 14)
- How physical systems affect human systems (National Geography Standard 15)

**Materials Used in the Lesson**


On the South Asian tsunami, see [http://newton.uor.edu/departments&programs/AsianStudiesdept/tsunami.html](http://newton.uor.edu/departments&programs/AsianStudiesdept/tsunami.html)

On the Pakistan earthquake, see [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4324534.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4324534.stm)

On the Johnstown Flood, see [http://www.nps.gov/jofl/](http://www.nps.gov/jofl/)

**Unfolding of the Lesson**

Teachers should be sure that students have access to a map or maps before beginning this lesson.

**A.** Read through the Johnstown Flood Web site: ([http://www.nps.gov/jofl](http://www.nps.gov/jofl)) and then watch at least Act I, Chapter 3, of *When the Leves Broke*. Where did the wealthier residents live in both cities? Where were the evacuation routes? Where did the majority of people die?

**B.** Write a first-person narrative imagining what it would have been like to have survived the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 or the flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina. Situate yourself in this catastrophe in a particular place with a certain age, gender, social class, race, etc. Where would you have sought refuge? What other resources or organizations could you depend on for help? Who was to blame for the failure of the dam/levee systems in both instances? How might your social identity and social class have altered your experiences of these storms?

**C.** Questions for students to consider:

- How long did it take St. Bernard Parish to recover from the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927?
- How long do you think it will take the city of New Orleans to rebuild after Hurricane Katrina?

Note: In answering the second question, students might take a look at the growing field called “the sociology of disaster.” Scholars in this specialty have done work that hypothesizes about how long communities take to recover from catastrophes such as floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes. See, for example, Gary Rivlin’s *New York Times* article of April 17, 2006, about the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 or the research of Russell R. Dynes.

**D.** Read the interview with Eric Klinenberg, author of *Heatwave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*, located at this Web address: [http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/443213in.html](http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/443213in.html)

- Why does Klinenberg suggest that the Chicago heat wave of 1995 was a social disaster as well as a natural one?
- What does he suggest are the benefits of social networks during times of crisis?

**E.** Consider Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley’s 1995 comment that “You cannot claim that everybody who has died in the last eight or nine days died of heat. Then everybody in the summer that dies will die of heat.”

- Do you agree or disagree with Mayor Daley’s assertion?
- What is the most accurate way to measure mortality during a disaster?
- What problems occurred when public health officials attempted to record the number of deaths after Hurricane Katrina?

**F.** During the Chicago heat wave of 1995, the Latino Little Village neighborhood had a much lower death rate than North Lawndale, which was predominantly African American.

- Why was this so?
- Were requests for help from North Lawndale residents ignored?
- Examine the mortality rate for the 1995 Chicago heat wave and then Hurricane Katrina. What are the demographic similarities? What are the differences?

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*Chicago Ambulance Alliance travels to New Orleans for disaster relief, September 4–10, 2005. Taken by a paramedic from Chicago and posted on Flickr*
**“Race and Hurricane Katrina: Two Questions”**


First, have you noticed that numerous articles refer to the affected region as “third world” in its devastation? (Example: CNN) I always cringe when I read that.

But it’s worth thinking about. Remember how after the Bombay flood last month (37.1 inches in 24 hours), there were numerous articles in the Indian media lamenting the city’s inability to keep things running smoothly? Well, it doesn’t just happen in India. Natural disasters happen to everyone; it isn’t something to be embarrassed about. (Still, I wish they wouldn’t use poorer parts of the world as a benchmark for the scale of the disaster.)

Here the authorities had access to good predictions for the storm, and were able to execute a large-scale evacuation of part of the population quickly. It would be great if monsoon rains could be predicted with as much accuracy. Does anyone know the science behind this? Why did no one have any idea that 37 inches of rain were about to hit the city of Bombay last month? How could this happen? Why do we always have to be surprised? Why do we always have to think the science is so bad that we can’t predict it? Have students consider the impact of disasters from a global perspective. In the South Asian tsunami in 2004, 275,000 people were killed.

The second issue circles around race within the U.S. If you watch the news footage of the post-Katrina rescue operations, you’ll notice again and again that the people being rescued seem to be overwhelmingly African American.

There could be any number of reasons for this. One is, it’s quite plausible to infer that more African Americans ignored or didn’t get the message about the mandatory evacuation before the storm. Some folks may not have had the physical means to get out (i.e., a car & a credit card), or a place to go. Another factor might be topography: it’s possible that many Black neighborhoods are in low-lying areas (though I admit I don’t know the New Orleans area very well). And finally, one shouldn’t forget that in terms of sheer demographics, these areas as a whole have large African American populations.

I’m not trying to imply racism is afoot. Only this: the fact that Blacks seem to have been disproportionately affected by this tragedy reminds us of the inequities that existed before the Hurricane happened. When we see folks being airlifted to safety, it should probably be on our minds that they were the ones who lived in the most vulnerable housing to begin with, and were also in many cases unable to think of leaving it behind.

The mayor of Biloxi, Mississippi called Katrina “Our Tsunami”, and judging from the pictures of Biloxi and Jackson, he may be right (though, as massive as the disaster is, it is still much smaller in scale than the Tsunami, which caused huge damage in eight countries, and left nearly 1000 times more people dead). But as with the tsunami, there is here a story behind the tragedy—a pattern of ongoing suffering that existed before the storm—that people aren’t talking about.

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**G. The South Asian tsunami catastrophe of 2004:**

1. Have students consider the impact of disasters from a global perspective. In the South Asian tsunami in the 2004, 275,000 people were killed.

2. Discuss the following questions:
   - Why were so many casualties reported in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand?
   - What are some similarities between this disaster and Hurricane Katrina? What are some differences? For the 2004 Tsunami, did the worst destruction occur in underserved and low elevation areas?
   - Do you agree with the assertion made by an interviewee in *When the Levees Broke* that the U.S. government provided more immediate assistance to victims of the 2004 tsunami than to its own citizens after Hurricane Katrina? How does this debate relate to usage of the term “refugee” in *When the Levees Broke*?
   - What are the dangers of leaving several hundred casualties in one place for several days? Was this also a concern during Hurricane Katrina? Which communities suffered the most casualties? Why?

3. Have students read the excerpted version of Professor Singh’s Web log (Handout 1), in which he cites the mayor of Biloxi, MS, who compares Katrina to “our tsunami.”

**Closure**

Discuss the following questions: What does Professor Singh believe to be the connection between the Katrina disaster and the tsunami disaster? What reasons does he give for the fact that it seemed that so many of those who were being rescued were African Americans? Does he believe racism is at work here? From what you know about the tragedies of September 11 and the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, what are the similarities and differences between the two? What are the similarities and differences between the Katrina tragedy and the South Asian tsunami? Why is it that there comes a point when “people aren’t talking about” the disasters anymore? Is this a problem?

**Taking Action**

Students can check out the National Service Learning Clearinghouse for ways to respond to recent disasters: http://servicelearning.org/. They can also look into the possibilities for responding to Katrina on the HBO Web site at http://www.hbo.com/docs/programs/whentheleveesbroke/resources.html.
Three Options for Summative Activities

OPTION 1
Taking a Stand on “The Blame Game”

Judgments
After studying Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath from various viewpoints, you will now record your own judgments about the events and accountability for the failures associated with Katrina in preparation for a “Democratic Dialogue about Katrina and the Breaching of the Levees.” Here are some questions to get you started:

- Why were New Orleans and its citizens not better prepared for the arrival of Hurricane Katrina?
- What were the biggest problems created in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina?
- How will history judge the successes and failures of the local and national governments in responding to Hurricane Katrina? Why?
- Does this storm reveal anything about who we are as Americans?
- Does the aftermath of the storm suggest anything about what should be changed in this country?

Democratic Dialogue
Then hold a democratic dialogue, allowing an entire class period for discussion of the questions listed above. Be sure to follow the guidelines for doing democratic dialogues offered on pages 2 and 3 of this manual. Before beginning this lesson, you may also wish to consult the “Teaching The Levees” Web site (www.teachingthelevees.org) once again to review the brief essays on “Talking About Race in the Classroom” by Jane Bolgatz and “Fostering Effective Discussions” by Diana Hess.

After doing the first round of the democratic dialogue, have students switch sides or play different roles, for example, taking up positions of those who are:

- a believer in “God’s will”
- an immigrant laborer
- a small business owner
- someone who believes in government-sponsored social programs
- a political conservative
- someone who believes that President Bush and the federal government have been overly blamed for Katrina
- persons of different ages, of different wealth levels, from different regions of the country, etc.

Debrief after both sessions, paying particular attention to how students felt taking a side different from their original position.

OPTION 2
The Council of Economic Advisors

Essential Questions
- How can government be most responsive in times of crisis?
- How should policies be changed to address future disasters?

Activities

Background and Task Statements
Read the Background and Task statements with students.

Background: Established in 1946, the Council of Economic Advisors is a small group (3 members) who are charged with staying abreast of economic developments and trends both current and forthcoming in order to advise the president on economic policy.

One of the studies the president and Congress are interested in involves the 10-year forecast suggesting that weather patterns that produce Category 5 hurricanes like Hurricane Katrina will occur with greater frequency.

Your group’s primary function is to advise the federal government. Due to the nature of the impact of Hurricane Katrina, you have been asked to supply policy recommendations to federal, state, and local governments on how best to handle the potential impact of repeated hurricane damage to the Gulf Coast region of the United States.

A New Orleans resident searches through mold damage for salvageable items in her Lower Ninth Ward home, October 23, 2005

FEMA photo/Andrea Booher
Task: As the Council of Economic Advisors, you will consider economic policy in the following areas in order to develop recommendations for federal, state, and local governments on how best to handle hurricane damage to the Gulf Coast region. You and your colleagues will develop five recommendations for federal, state, and local governmental policy related to disaster preparedness and relief.

Consider the following areas to orient your economic policy recommendations:
- Rebuilding (private and public): Housing/residential, education/schools, businesses, historical/cultural
- Disaster prevention measures (levees, roads, transportation, public safety)
- Disaster awareness
- Evacuation
- Relief

Policy Recommendations
Students will be divided into teams of four to complete the remaining activities and generate their policy recommendations.

- Identify two or three major problems facing each of the following groups: federal, state, and local governments; businesses; individuals/citizens; community groups; hospitals.
- Establish two or three priorities that each group must deal with in generating policy recommendations (e.g., reasonable cost, ability to implement sooner rather than later, feasibility, scope of solution, etc.).
- Come up with several recommendations for each group. A recommendation is a policy proposal concerning what to do and how to do it. Decide what specific steps should be taken to implement the policy. To whom should these policy recommendations be made?
- The recommendations should take the form of a memo to the appropriate group at the local, state, or federal level (e.g., Congress, governor, etc.), explaining the five recommendations and how they address the priorities established at the outset.

Closure
- Debrief: Have students draft their proposals on chart paper to hang up around the classroom.
- Conduct a Gallery Walk for all teams to view and analyze the recommendations of the other teams. Have each team complete a feedback sheet for the other teams, with the following headings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

  The purpose of the feedback sheet for the Gallery Walk is simply to have students evaluate the costs/benefits of each proposal, giving detailed reasons for their judgments, and then decide if they can recommend that the proposal go forward.
- Share the feedback forms with each team.
- Decide as a class, through building consensus or voting, about which set of proposals the class should send on and where (local, state, etc.).

OPTION 3
New Orleans Today
Updating Spike Lee’s Story

Investigate
Students or other users of this curriculum will investigate the condition of New Orleans at the present moment.

- What has changed since the film was created? Why and how?
- What has not changed since the film was created? Why not?
- What information can you discover about the people, places, and institutions featured in the film and their situation today?
- What about the situation of displaced students and teachers or schools and colleges damaged due to Katrina? Is there a story about education waiting to be told here?

Communicate
Students or other users of this curriculum can display what they have learned from their investigation in a variety of forms, including:

- Writing an essay, editorial, or article for publication
- Creating a Web site
- Volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, Catholic Charities, Common Ground, Acorn, People’s Organizing Congress, etc., or another community or charity group working to rebuild New Orleans
- Spreading the word among family, friends, and community members by organizing a fund-raising event
- Writing a story, play, or song, or creating a work of art about the current state of New Orleans and the Gulf states

Update
If you were remaking Spike Lee’s film today, how would you approach it? What themes would be central to the story you wish to tell? How would you go about telling the story? What are the voices you would include? Why? What techniques would be central to getting your perspective across? Would the questions “Who are we as a country? Who do we want to be?” play a role in your documentary film? Why or why not?