ABOUT THE FILM

In If God Is Willing And Da Creek Don’t Rise, director Spike Lee continues his examination of the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans and its citizens as well as the new challenges they face as a result of the catastrophic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Throughout the film, Lee revisits the individuals, communities and institutions that he encountered in his epic 2006 Emmy and Peabody-winning documentary, When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts and highlights the successes and failures of the ongoing efforts to restore housing, healthcare, education, economic growth and law and order to a battered but undefeated community.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

SPIKE LEE, DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

Spike Lee is an award winning writer, director, producer, actor, and author who revolutionized both the landscape of independent cinema and the role of black talent in film. Widely regarded as a premiere African-American filmmaker, Lee is a forerunner in the ‘do it yourself’ school of filmmaking with a body of work that spans feature film, documentary, commercials and music videos. His most notable works include Do the Right Thing, Get On the Bus, Inside Man, 25th Hour, The Original Kings of Comedy, Mo’ Better Blues, Clockers, Four Little Girls, and When the Levees Broke.

Photograph © Home Box Office, Inc.

THINKING AHEAD

Q: What words and images come to mind when you think of New Orleans? What do you think life is like for teenagers living in that city today?

Q: Do you remember Hurricane Katrina? What do you know about it? Do you think that Hurricane Katrina changed the United States? In what ways?

Q: The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is the biggest environmental disaster in US history. How long do you think it will take to repair the damage? What impact is the spill having on your life?
THE FILM IN CONTEXT

KATRINA: 5 YEARS LATER

One of the strongest storms ever to affect the United States, Hurricane Katrina came ashore on August 29, 2005 causing massive devastation to cities and communities along the coasts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. New Orleans suffered the worst damage due to the failure of the levee system (a man-made structure designed to protect the city from floods), and five years later the impact of the disaster can still be felt in every aspect of life for the city’s residents. Did you know:

- Hurricane Katrina was the most devastating and costly natural disaster in United States history causing about $75 billion in physical damages. It is estimated that the long-term economic cost for the region will exceed $150 billion.
- Over 1 million people were evacuated from South East Louisiana, nearly 500,000 of which were from New Orleans. As of 2008, an estimated 100,000 people still had not returned to New Orleans including 37% of the city’s African-American population.
- An estimated 275,000 homes were destroyed across the region as a result of the hurricane, which is ten times more than any other natural disaster in US history. In addition, an estimated 400,000 jobs were lost after the storm, sending the Gulf Coast into a financial crisis.
- The official death toll for Katrina is 1,836 people, primarily from Louisiana and Mississippi. This figure does not include over 700 people who are still listed as missing and the thousands of deaths that are related to but not directly caused by the storm.


BP OIL SPILL: DEEPWATER HORIZON

The massive oil spill that occurred in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 is the worst environmental disaster in US history, affecting over a hundred miles of coastline and hundreds of square miles of open water.

BP Oil Spill Timeline:

- On April 20, 2010, an explosion aboard the Deepwater Horizon, a drilling rig leased by the oil company British Petroleum, started a fire that killed 11 crewmembers.
- Two days later, the oil-rig sank about 50 miles off the coast of Louisiana and crude oil began gushing out of a broken pipe 5,000 feet below the surface.
- Within a month, after a series of failed attempts to plug the leak, oil began to reach the coasts and marshes of Louisiana.
- The damaged well was sealed in August 2010 after releasing more than 5 million barrels of oil into the Gulf.
- The clean up continues and it is estimated that the impact may take decades to repair with much of the damage being irreversible.

Before the accident, the US Government announced plans to open new offshore areas for oil and gas drilling.

- Do you think companies should be allowed to continue drilling for oil offshore? What are the benefits? What are the drawbacks?
- Should limitations be put on the oil industry, and if so, what should they be?
- What other energy sources could the United States invest in to break our dependence on oil?

President Obama and his administration have received a great deal of criticism for their management of the BP oil spill, with many people comparing their response to the mistakes made by the Bush administration during the Katrina disaster.

- Do you think that President Obama has managed the crisis well?
- Is there anything you think the government should have done differently?
- What would you do if you were president?

HOW TO BE A CRITICAL VIEWER

Being a critical viewer is different than simply watching a movie. Critical viewing is about being able to examine the information that a movie, commercial, music video or TV show is giving you and ask meaningful questions about the information that you receive. Media makers create work for many reasons: to inform, persuade, entertain, shock, sell, etc. A critical viewer asks, “What goal is the media maker trying to achieve, and what impact do they want to have on me?”

A critical viewer is someone who:

• Listens carefully to what is being said in the movie
• Pays attention to the details used by the filmmaker to convey the message of the film
• Asks meaningful questions

Being a critical viewer will help you understand:

• The themes and issues that the filmmaker is addressing
• The reasons why the filmmaker chose to make the movie
• The message of the movie

In this study guide you will find background information, activities, and questions that will help you practice being a critical viewer.
CRITICAL VIEWING REFLECTION

Now that you’ve watched the film and worked through the Study Guide, take some time to reflect on the following questions. These worksheets are an important step in practicing your critical viewing skills. Write down your answers and compare with your friends and classmates.

Every film has a **MESSAGE** that the filmmaker wants to communicate. There are a few key questions you can ask yourself to help figure out a film’s message.

What do you think the film is about?

What is the filmmaker trying to say about the subject? What evidence is used?

Why do you think the filmmaker made this film?

**PRODUCTION** describes the process of making a film and includes writing the script, choosing different types of shots while filming, editing the final footage, and choosing music. The choices made during production affect how we experience the movie.

How is the story of the film told? Does it remind you of other films you have seen? If so, which ones and how? If not, how was it unique?

How does the way the film is made change the way you understand the topic? (Think about the structure of the film, the music, etc.)
When you CRITIQUE a film as a critical viewer you are doing more than saying whether you like it or not, you are forming your own opinions about the quality of the film, clearly explaining your thoughts, and using evidence from the film to support these opinions.

What did you find interesting about the film? Why?

Why is the film interesting to other viewers (even if it wasn’t interesting to you)?

Why do you think the filmmaker took the time to make this film?

What would you have done differently if you were the director?

What kind of audience is the film targeting? (Remember, one film can target many different kinds of audiences!)
RESOURCE GUIDE

FURTHER READING  IF YOU’RE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE FILM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS.

**The End of Oil**  
By Paul Roberts  
Global oil supplies are being used-up at an alarming rate. This timely and essential book looks at the energy sources that could replace oil and explores who will control the new energy economy and what impact this transition will have on the way we live.

**Life in the Wake: Fiction from Post-Katrina New Orleans**  
Edited by Joe Longo and Jarret Lofstead  
A collection of short fiction set in post-Katrina New Orleans by writers from the region.

**Silent Spring**  
By Rachel Carson  
Released in 1962, this seminal book offered the first shattering look at widespread ecological degradation and launched the modern environmental movement.

**Zeitoun**  
By Dave Eggers  
The true story of a man who decides to stay in New Orleans to protect his property after his family flees Hurricane Katrina.

FURTHER WATCHING  IF YOU LIKED THIS FILM, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE SOME OF THESE OTHER FILMS.

**When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts**  
Spike Lee’s award winning four-hour documentary examining the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans and the institutional failures that transformed a natural disaster into a human catastrophe.

**Treme**  
From David Simon who created *The Wire*, this HBO TV series is set in the New Orleans neighborhood called Treme and follows the lives of struggling artists and musicians in aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

**Trouble the Water**  
Academy Award nominated documentary that follows the story of a couple surviving failed levees, bungling bureaucrats, and their own troubled past and a portrait of a community abandoned long before Hurricane Katrina hit.

**Crude**  
Award-winning documentary that investigates the largest and most controversial legal case in history as 30,000 indigenous Ecuadorians sue Chevron oil company for the environmental and public health disaster caused by multiple oil spills at drilling sites in the Amazon rainforest.

ONLINE RESOURCES  DISCOVER MORE INFORMATION ON THE WEB ABOUT THIS FILM AND RELATED TOPICS.

**If God Is Willing And Da Creek Don't Rise:**  
Official film website featuring a video interview with director Spike Lee and additional information on how to take action.

**Make It Right Foundation**  
[www.makeitrightnola.org](http://www.makeitrightnola.org)  
Founded by Brad Pitt, this nonprofit organization works to help to return former residents of the Lower 9th Ward in New Orleans to their community.

**Bridge the Gulf Project**  
[www.bridgethegulfproject.org](http://www.bridgethegulfproject.org)  
A storytelling project that is run by activists, filmmakers, and artists to promote cultural survival, environmental justice and sustainable development in Gulf Coast communities.

**Restore the Gulf**  
[www.restorethegulf.gov](http://www.restorethegulf.gov)  
The official federal website for the Deepwater BP oil spill response and recovery. This site provides the public with information on the response, current operations, news and updates.

GET INVOLVED

**Speak Out:** Urge your local representative to support efforts to restore the ecosystems in Coastal Louisiana. Protecting the region’s natural habitat is key to the survival of the people and wildlife that depend upon it. Check out [www.audubonaction.org](http://www.audubonaction.org) for details.

**Donate:** Launch a “Pennies for the Planet” campaign at your school and help save and protect birds and wild life all along the gulf coast who have been threatened do to the BP oil spill. Visit [www.togethergreen.org](http://www.togethergreen.org) for information on how to get started.

**Volunteer:** Help improve NYC’s habitat by joining the New York Restoration Project’s (NYRP) Volunteer Corps at [www.nyri.org](http://www.nyri.org).
ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES

This program provides NYC public school students and teachers with access to free, educationally-relevant and challenging films. Each screening is followed by a Q&A, study guides and supplemental educator materials are provided, and teachers are strongly encouraged to utilize films as part of their curriculum. This monthly-series strives to expose New York City students to independent films and help educators and students incorporate film-viewing into their classroom work. For more information about TFI’s youth programs, please visit www.tribecafilminstitute.org/youth or email youth@tribecafilminstitute.org

ABOUT HBO DOCUMENTARIES

Whether measured by awards, critical acclaim, subscribers, profitability or viewers, Home Box Office, Inc. is America’s most successful premium television network and home to two 24-hour premium television services—HBO® and Cinemax®. Together, both networks reach over 40 million subscribers in the United States via cable and satellite delivery. In the documentary area, HBO Documentary Films is consistently at the forefront of programming, producing and developing some of the most provocative, ground-breaking and award-winning films. HBO Documentary Films focus on contemporary issues, allowing viewers entry to worlds rarely seen. These films have won virtually every major programming award including the Academy Award®, the Emmy® Award, the George Foster Peabody Award, and the Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia University Award.