



Cut Off / When the Levees Broke

Resource Page¹

Over three years have passed since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita slammed into the Gulf Coast, yet the scars remain with those who survived those deadly days in August and September 2005. Unfortunately, while hurricanes and tropical storms are personified by receiving names (“Katrina”) and identities (“Category 5”), often times the people affected by their wrath are merely reduced to statistics and bar graphs. The two films featured as part of “Katrina/Rita Week” during the 9th Annual Human Rights Film Series – Broderick Webb’s *Cut Off* and Spike Lee’s *When the Levees Broke* – strive to counter that impersonal approach and tell the very human stories of the storms, their aftermath, and the struggle to rebuild the proud city of New Orleans.

Cut Off chronicles the challenges facing New Orleans residents as they work to rebuild their lives and the institutions of the city following the storm. Due to mismanaged government funds and a poorly executed development strategy which has resulted in the demolition of thousands of public housing units, many Gulf residents remain homeless, without health care and access to education and other basic services. Broderick Webb, a local New Orleans activist and filmmaker, was there to document the disappointment and outrage of local residents as they worked to gain control of their lives and future.

When the Levees Broke, produced by Lee and Sam Pollard, is a four-part series that first aired on HBO in August 2006. Three months after the storm, Lee and a camera crew traveled to New Orleans to interview residents and capture raw footage for the film. They returned seven more times and interviewed around 100 people – residents, politicians, celebrities, and others – which resulted in the final product, a 255 minute “Requiem in Four Acts,” which is considered by many as one of the most definitive pieces of reporting on the hurricane and its aftermath. “[H]opefully, this documentary will bring this fiasco, this travesty, back to the attention of the American people,” says Lee. “And maybe the public can get some politicians’ ass in the government to move quicker, and be more efficient in helping our fellow American citizens in the Gulf region.”

To learn more about these films and Gulf Coast recovery, visit:

- *When the Levees Broke* (official website): <http://www.hbo.com/docs/programs/whentheleveesbroke/>
- US Human Rights Network Katrina materials: <http://www.ushrnetwork.org/resources#katrina>
- New Orleans City Council Shuts Down Public Housing Debate (YouTube):
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMBWAXfGsc4>
- KatrinaRitaVille Express (National FEMA Trailer tour): <http://krvexpress.org/>
- FEMA Gulf Coast Recovery Office: <http://www.fema.gov/hazard/hurricane/2005katrina/index.shtm>
- *The Times-Picayune* Katrina Archive: <http://www.nola.com/katrina>
- The New Orleans Index Anniversary Edition: Three Years after Katrina (Brookings):
<http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2007/08neworleansindex.aspx>

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