



Smithsonian



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About the WaterWays Film Series

[*Diversions*](#) is one of four films in the WaterWays series. Additional WaterWays films include [*Station 15*](#), [*Keepers of the Mound*](#), and [*Born on the Bayou*](#). The series title suggests rivers, bayous, and the ocean, but it also invites us to ponder the ways that water is meaningful in our lives and our communities, and the folkways and other ways of life that are affected by water and its over- or underabundance.

While the films consider specific issues regarding bodies of water in South Louisiana and the rainfall that feeds them, they raise more general issues about the human relationship with nature and our evaluation of what is important to us in our own communities, as well as at state, national, and even global levels.

The WaterWays films are made possible by a grant to the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities from the Walton Family Foundation to support a multi-year initiative to document the issues facing Louisiana's coast.

Look for these humanities themes as you watch the WaterWays films:

- Classic struggles: humanity versus nature and humanity versus technology
- Justice: Whose rights are most important in issues of water management?
- Identity: How do we define ourselves by where we live and what we do?
- History: What role does the past play in our planning for the future?
- Responsibility: Whose job is it to fix problems arising from water management issues? Who should fund the technological interventions deemed necessary to manage our waterways?
- Community: What role does water management play in the communities depicted in the films and in our own local communities?

- Civics: How are these local, state, and/or national issues? What voice or power does a community have in a national or global context? Who represents these local interests?
- Safety: What power do we have over our own safety in the face of nature's potentially greater power?

Explore these questions as you begin the WaterWays series and with each film:

- What role does nature play in our lives? Is it useful, decorative, exploitable, precious? Why?
- In the [trailer](#) introducing the series, Richie Blink says that the marshes of South Louisiana are “my classroom, my playground, my sanctuary.” Would you say this about a natural area in your hometown or where you grew up? What would it be like if you lost such an area to natural disaster or other event?
- Blink says that the loss of land in South Louisiana is “the ecological crisis of our time.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
- How is water a hazard? How is it a resource?
- Is technological intervention in natural processes always appropriate? If not, when is it appropriate?
- How complicit are humans in natural changes like erosion?
- How do we balance public versus private good: that is, what are the rights and responsibilities of those who seek to make a profit versus the rights and responsibilities those who don't?
- What issues of justice are implied in our interventions in nature—what tradeoffs must be discussed or managed?
- Do individuals have a right to profit from the land/ocean or associated resources?
- Who does the ocean belong to? The rivers and bayous?
- Have we been good stewards of our natural resources?

- What role does the land and water around us play in our identity? Our history? Our future?
- What is the relationship between ecological crisis and economic disaster? What economic changes can we expect with environmental changes?
- Why should the rest of the nation care about what happens in coastal Louisiana?

Diversions

Diversions

Directed by John Richie
2017; 24 min.

Summary

Plaquemines Parish, located just south of New Orleans, runs the entire length of the Mississippi on both banks of the river. No area of the state has been more impacted by coastal land loss. The State of Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan calls for a sediment diversion to begin replenishing the marshlands, building back the land using its original creator: the river. Residents are divided over the plan. Some welcome the prospect of saving their homes, while many oyster farmers fear the diversions will destroy their oyster beds and their livelihood. This film travels through Plaquemines communities exploring the science of diversion and the dilemmas it creates.

Discussion Questions

1. What role does music play in creating a mood or ambience in a film?
2. Is coastal restoration a losing proposition? Should we just let nature happen? Are we complicit in this erosion? Is the creation of an artificial reef too much intervention in nature?
3. We see many more local people in this film as the filmmaker explores the impact of coastal erosion on schools, residents, and communities. Why does this film introduce us to local individuals rather than government employees, scientists, or civil engineers?
4. Plaquemines Parish is mostly surrounded by water. What special issues does this bring?
5. This film juxtaposes the different needs of Plaquemines residents. Some are in favor of the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion and others are opposed. Why? What are the issues?
6. All of South Louisiana is composed of sediment from the Mississippi River. Is this surprising? Will the sediment diversion restore the land to the way it was before erosion?

7. Why might the introduction of more freshwater hurt the oyster business? Why can't the fishermen get oysters somewhere else?
8. What are the rights of the oyster fishermen in contrast to those of the residents on dry land who want avoid flooding? Should the oyster fishermen have to adapt to the changes? Do they have a right to their traditional fishing grounds?
9. Albertine Kimble says the sediment diversion will be the parish's salvation, but Peter Vujnovich says the sediment diversion threatens his livelihood and his sons' future because of the fresh water it will bring into Barataria Bay. Who has the best argument here?
10. Albertine Kimble says, "Mother Nature—she's gonna get you either way. If it ain't water, it'll be wind. It's just as well the insurance pays. That's my only concern." Why does she keep rebuilding her house and raising it higher off the ground? What do you think about Kimble's persistence? Why don't people in low-lying or threatened areas just relocate?
11. If we don't save Plaquemines Parish, why should we save any place? Is one area of land worth less or more than others?
12. Does it make economic sense to try to stop the coastal erosion now?

Explore these questions after you've watched all four WaterWays films:

1. After watching all four of these films, do you have a different attitude about coastal erosion, flooding, and water management than you did before watching them? Why?
2. Was there a specific fact, person, or shot that stands out as being particularly powerful?
3. Which film seems most successful in its exploration of the issues? Why?
4. Which is worse, the ecological or the economic crisis caused by the loss of land in South Louisiana? Why?
5. Do these films push an agenda? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?
6. What is the effect of the background music in these films?
7. What are the different kinds of visual images of water in these films? Are they of a certain quality or kind? How do they contribute to the story being told in these films?
8. Are all points of view represented in these films, or do they only tell one side of the story? If so, what is that side?
9. How did these films make you feel? Why?

Recommended Reading

These fiction and non-fiction works will help you continue to explore issues of the human relationship to nature and water. Many will be available at your local or school library.

Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America by John M. Barry

Ain't There No More: Louisiana's Disappearing Coastal Plain (America's Third Coast Series) by Carl A. Brasseaux and Donald W. Davis

Losing Ground: Identity and Land Loss in Coastal Louisiana by David M. Burley

The Awakening and "At Cheniere Caminada" by Kate Chopin

Southern Waters: The Limits to Abundance by Craig E. Colten

Atchafalaya Swamp Life Settlement and Folk Occupations by Malcolm L. Comeaux

Washed Away: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands by Donald W. Davis

A Wetland Biography: Seasons on Louisiana's Chenier Plain by Gay Gomez

The Old Man and The Sea by Ernest Hemingway

A Louisiana Coastal Atlas by Scott A. Hemmerling

Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer

Riverhorse by William Least Heat-Moon

"To Build a Fire" by Jack London

Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore by Elizabeth Rush

Tempest: Hurricane Naming and American Culture by Liz Skilton

Bayou Farewell: The Rich Life and Tragic Death of Louisiana's Cajun Coast by Mike Tidwell