



Smithsonian



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## About the WaterWays Film Series

[Station 15](#) is one of four films in the WaterWays series. Additional WaterWays films include [Diversions](#), [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?

## Station 15

### **Station 15**

Directed by Kira Akerman; co-directed by Sophie Tintori  
2017; 15 min.

### **Summary**

Often labeled a “sinking city,” New Orleans is a place where flooding occurs all too regularly. Water pumping stations strategically placed throughout the city serve as the front line of defense. The film portrays a day in the life of the DPS 6 pump station (formerly the biggest pump station in the world) through the eyes of Chasity Hunter, a teenager from the surrounding neighborhood, who interviews geographer Richard Campanella of Tulane University, geomorphologist Denise Reed of the Water Institute for the Gulf, and pumping station operator James Taylor in an effort to understand the ways New Orleans coexists with water.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why does the filmmaker choose high-school student Chasity Hunter as our guide to the issues of water management in New Orleans? What effect does her age have on the way we receive the information?
2. Why do we begin with Chasity’s memory of Hurricane Katrina in 2005?
3. Richard Campanella points out that the drainage of water 300 years ago enabled the creation of the city of New Orleans. Was the colonial-era decision to drain the area a good one? What kind of consequences resulted from this decision? Does it tie us to the past? If so, in which ways?
4. How does the story of New Orleans compare to the story of land draining in the Netherlands, Belgium, and eastern England with series of dykes? How does the story of New Orleans compare with the story of Venice, another city that is slowly being submerged? What lessons can we learn from these comparisons?
5. The pump stations in New Orleans contribute to soil subsidence that makes the land even lower and more flood-prone. Does pumping out the water make things worse rather than better? Is it just time to give up? Can you think of another example of a solution to one problem causing other problem in turn?

6. Chasity says: "The city was built on control: walls, and barricades that stop us from seeing what it really is." What does she mean?
7. Is it true that "safety is a binary concept: you're either safe or not safe?" Are there any grey areas?
8. Do you think Chasity was comforted by what she learned or not? Are you comforted? Why or why not?
9. How does living in New Orleans force a person to accept the ambiguity of water?
10. What do we mean when we say "natural disaster"? Was Katrina a natural disaster? Were the 2017 New Orleans floods a natural disaster? What about the flooding that took place in the Baton Rouge area in 2016? Do humans contribute to natural disasters?
11. Have you seen floods in your town? What impacts did they have? Have changes been made to make you safe?
12. What technologies exist in your local community to control water? Do they always work? What personal adaptations or interventions can we make to manage rain, flooding, or erosion on our property? In our town?
13. Do you think that New Orleans can meet the challenges of extreme rainfall events?
14. Poet Kalamu ya Salaam tells Chasity, "What man has done, man can do." What do you think this means? How does this apply to flood protection and restoration?
15. Can poetry, art, and literature contribute to understanding this crisis? How so?
16. After Katrina, some said New Orleans should be abandoned. What do you think? Should we protect New Orleans? Why or why not?

**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