My Louisiana Love

“"I want to keep living on our land—but I’m inheriting a dying delta."”
— Monique Verdin (Houma), Co-Producer/Co-Writer

Program Synopsis

My Louisiana Love follows a young, Native American woman, Monique Verdin (Houma), as she returns to Southeast Louisiana to reunite with her Houma Indian family. But soon, she sees that her people’s traditional way of life—fishing, trapping, and hunting in these fragile wetlands—threatened by a continuing cycle of social and ecological injustice. Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil leak are just the latest rounds in this century-old cycle that is forcing Monique’s clan to adapt in new ways. Monique must overcome the loss of her father, her partner, her house, and redefine the meaning of home.

Photos from top left: Warning sign in Bayou Pointe au Chien, located in a part of south Louisiana that is experiencing the most rapid land loss in the state. Photo by Monique Verdin; Monique Verdin gives an environmental tour by the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet in Louisiana. Photo by Andy Cook; Monique Verdin wears a gas mask during her first visit back to her grandmother’s house after hurricane Katrina. Photo by Mark Krasnoff
Inspired by Mark and Monique’s dedication to film, even as times got tough, I decided to keep the camera rolling. The social and ecological injustice story kept getting bigger. BP’s oil rig exploded in 2010 and started leaking oil into the Gulf of Mexico, revealing the seemingly continuous cycle of environmental crises occurring in Louisiana. My creative team and I recognized that this destructive cycle had developed from man’s manipulation and exploitation of nature over the past century, and we worked to find a way the film could reflect the complexities of these environmental, economic, and cultural issues.

We strived to make the documentary feel like Monique was telling her story to a new friend, much like when Monique and I were both 21 years old and she took me home to meet her “French-Indian” grandmother, Matine. I sat with Grandma Matine at her kitchen table as she pulled out old photographs from a wooden box, and in broken English shared stories of her childhood in southeast Louisiana’s wetlands. Grandma Matine’s worn hands carried a history not well known, and now 10 years later I am honored to help pass on her story. We hope My Louisiana Love will help the Houma people find a seat at decision-making tables, and give a face to the dire need for a long-term balance between industrial development and preservation of Indigenous cultures and the environment.”
Reflect & Relate

1. In the film, Monique feels the pull to return home to her Houma people and her land after 13 years. What does she find when she first returns? How has it changed? What does she discover about her relationships with both her family and the land they live on?

2. The Houma Tribe is recognized by the state of Louisiana but not by the federal government. What does this mean for a Tribe to be recognized or non-recognized by the United States Federal Government? Do you feel that Native American Tribes are entitled to compensation and support from the U.S. Government? Why or why not?

3. Monique feels a special kinship with her “Louisiana Love.” Do you feel that where we are born is an important part of our personal identity—who we are? In what ways is this true—or not true for you? Do you think this kinship had anything to do with Mark Krasnoff’s death? Explore this idea.

4. As the film progresses, we learn more and more about how the land is being changed by man’s endless efforts for “progress.” We learn about the impact of the oil and gas industry, manipulation of the waterways, and other influences that are hurting the fragile environment. Do you think there is a way for humans to live more gently on the earth? What is the connection between Mother Nature and Human Nature?

5. What do you think Grandma Matine meant when she said, “If you don’t know what to do—do what you know”? Have there been times in your life when you found relief in doing what you know? What were those times? What did you do?

Ideas for Action

1. We can see in the film how first Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita, and then the BP explosion and oil spill had a devastating effect on the Gulf Coast and the people who live there. On the Internet or in books and articles, discover how the communities have been impacted. What ongoing efforts continue to be done to help restore both the land and its people? Do you think the effort has been adequate? What else do you feel could be done?

2. It is common knowledge that too much loss can affect a person deeply. Name the losses that Monique experiences during the time documented in the film. How have those losses affected her? Then, as a class or in your group, have each individual share with one or two other people a loss that he or she has suffered and how he or she handled such a loss. When each person has shared a story, make a list of all the ways people deal with loss, both positive and negative.

3. Sometimes healing and strength can rise up out of our losses. Reexamine the activity from Question #2 both from Monique’s perspective and from each student or individual’s perspective. What was “gained” from each loss over time?

4. Care of the earth and its natural resources is the responsibility of all human beings. Explore what is being done in your own community, family, class, or group to keep our earth healthy. Ask what small (or large) activities we could add to these efforts. Begin a project—and then do it.

5. Until 1964, the children of the Houma Tribe were not allowed to attend public school. On the Internet or in the library, discover what prevented them from attending and then what finally made public schooling available to the Tribe. Expand your search to learn what other children of the world are being denied an education. As a group, explore what the benefits of education are in the real world, as well as how the lack of education can affect our lives.
Resources

Internet Resources

www.unitedhoumanation.org
www.bigorrin.org/houma_kids.htm
www.native-languages.org/houma.htm
www.louisiana101.com/hotlinks_wayback_houmahistory.html
www.nwrc.usgs.gov/releases/pr03_004.htm
http://pubs.usgs.gov/sim/3164/
www.mississippiriverdelta.org
www.mrgomustgo.org
www.healthygulf.org
www.labucketbrigade.org

Written Resources


All content in this Viewer Discussion Guide may be reproduced in whole or in part for educational use.

My Louisiana Love is a co-production of Within A Sense, LLC and Vision Maker Media. Major funding was provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Vision Maker Media.

This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master’s in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review, Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including Public Radio’s landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

Funding for this Viewer Discussion Guide was provided by Vision Maker Media. Vision Maker Media supports Native stories for Public Broadcasting. For more information, please visit www.visionmakermedia.org.

Educational resources for this film are available at www.visionmakermedia.org/education/my_louisiana_love.

© 2012 Vision Maker Media. All rights reserved.