
Analysis Of The Documentary Trouble the Water

The documentary *Trouble the Water* is the story of Kimberly Rivers Roberts and her husband, Ninth Ward citizens of New Orleans, as they survive Hurricane Katrina. The movie opens with footage taken by Kim before the storm actually hits. In it, she goes around asking her neighbors what they are doing for the storm to find out that those who can leave are, and those who have no means of leaving are staying. Kim herself mentions a few times throughout the interviewing of her neighbors that she is staying because she has no means of evacuating and no money to help get herself and her loved ones out either. Following the interviews, footage of the mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin, issuing an evacuation of the city is shown. However, no evacuation transportation was organized and all public transportation was shut down, leaving those without transportation of their own stuck in the city to endure Katrina.

Kim continues to document the storm through home videos showing it as it gets worse and worse. Winds and rain become violent causing damage to her neighbors' houses and her own. In the midst of her filming news footage of a reporter in the storm is shown for further proof of how intense and dangerous the storm actually is. The reporter hides behind a trashcan for cover and when he gets up to come back into safety even he cannot stand against the high-speed winds and rain. The reporter gets blown over into a wall. After this segment the documentary continues on. Kim shows the flood damage that has taken place in her home and how they had to move to the attic to escape drowning. Immediately after she finds out from a neighbor that stayed that the levees broke and that is why the flooding is so bad. Two by two, their neighbor takes people from her house that is slowly but surely going under to his house across the street, which is at less risk of flooding all the way up to the top. After the storm lets up though is where the documentary really begins to evoke the issues faced by Ninth Ward citizens both during and after the storm. Using the Sociological Perspective, it becomes very easy to understand why these issues were only those of the citizens of the Ninth Ward, and not those of the entirety of the citizens of New Orleans.

The Sociological Perspective is how sociologists study how groups and societies influence people. In this case, it can be applied to show why more privileged groups in New Orleans, those not living in the Ninth Ward, were able to evacuate before Katrina and receive help quickly after she passed, while less privileged groups, such as Kim and those others living in the Ninth Ward were left behind in the evacuation and left without help for weeks after the weather cleared. The social location of Kim and her neighbors was one big reason why they were overlooked by the rest of society. The Ninth Ward was a community populated by African Americans for the most part, and as a result it was viewed by the rest of society as the poor, uneducated, low income, and dangerous neighborhood, that it was. History can be blamed for

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the stereotypical view and in turn reality of the Ninth Ward as sociologist C. Wright Mills describes it as a stream of events throughout time that give people their orientations in life. In other words external influences of society become part of peoples thinking and motivations over time. The history of slavery in the south and idea that there were races superior to the African Americans who lived there never truly ceased to exist in southern states such as Louisiana, and consequently the Ninth Ward emerged as a lesser community of less valuable people to the rest of society because of this. Throughout Trouble the Water, there are many examples in which the Sociological Perspective, and more specifically the Conflict Theory that lies within it, can be used to analyze and explain why things were the way they were for Kim and her community, and not for those of other more privileged communities.

Karl Marx developed the Conflict Theory when he saw the poor masses working for the elite few. He concluded from this that in all societies class struggle was key to human history because those few who were in control exploited those who were not. Basically, those who do not have more money, power, education, and social prestige than the elite few are in a constant class struggle with those few for resources, wealth, power, and prestige. This struggle is what causes the conflict that the theory is based around, which is the documentary that Kim made of how herself and her neighbors were treated before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina in this case, because it made their issue public and highly debated so that their need for change became public as well.

Before Katrina hit New Orleans, it was completely expected to be a devastating category four or five hurricane that was capable of causing mass death and damage as seen in the documentary when Mayor Nagin issued the evacuation. Although an evacuation was issued, no consideration for those without cars who only had public transportation, if they could afford it, was given. Those privileged and wealthy enough to have cars and afford gas to use them were able to leave because they had the means to do so, while those without the wealth and privilege were left behind to survive on their own because even if they could find the money to pay for public transportation, it was shut down. In Kim's footage before the storm when she is asking her neighbors what they are going to do, most of them say they are going to stay because they cannot do anything else but wait it out and hope for the best. As the storm begins to pick up, it is clear from the home footage that no one had even checked to see if the Ninth Ward had been evacuated and there was no type of precautions taken to help anyone who was forced to remain there for lack of means to leave, they were left to fend for themselves. The food and water that they could manage to get before the storm was all they had to live off of for however long the storm took to pass, and it was not much.

During the storm the damaging winds and rain only got more and more deadly for Kim and her neighbors. In the footage from Kim's camera she talks about having to move up to the attic to avoid drowning in her quickly flooding house and then she pans outside to show that the flood

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conditions are very real as there is water covering the majority of a stop sign outside on her street. They move the remaining food and water that they have and everyone that is with them up there even though the waters continue to rise. In the next scene from her camera, Kim sees her neighbor swimming across to her house as the conditions have lessened using a punching bag as a flotation device. He informs them that the levees only three blocks away from them have broken. Two by two he helps move the men, women, children, and disabled from Kim's house to his own. Once they are safely there, Kim captures the underwater disaster that used to be her street in the Ninth Ward. As this is shown there is nothing to be heard except for recordings of 911 calls that were made from the Ninth Ward during this time just after the storm passed. All of the calls are desperate voices begging for rescue or some kind of assistance. Every responder's answer was the same though; that there are no rescue teams right now and that no help can be given. In one call, a woman even says that she is going to drown and die without help and there is still no concern on the responder's end. However, those who had been privileged enough to escape, such as the responders, did not even have to deal with the horror of watching their home fill up with water as they sat inside helpless, just waiting and hoping that it would stop before it drowned them. The lack of remorse on their end proved that they saw those in need as less valuable than themselves or others who escaped because they were not even worth the risk of trying to help them. Those who escaped would rather keep their privilege of being safe and having resources to survive than share them in order to help those who were not as privileged.

In the aftermath of Katrina, a state of emergency was declared, as thousands in the Ninth Ward were dead or stranded with no food, water, shelter, or aid of any kind. This part of the documentary is where the most shocking of the issues that those people of the Ninth Ward faced both in Kim's footage and in news footage that the world had seen before the documentary was released. In a newscast over one hundred hours after conditions became safe for FEMA and other emergency organizations to begin working, it is asked how over 100,000 people, those in the Ninth Ward, have still not seen any kind of aid. This matches up to Kim's footage when she is in her street after two weeks and there is still no aid presence there to the point that she can walk into her uncle's house and find his decaying remains before anyone else has. In addition to this, her husband tells the story of how in an effort to be of some help to his neighbors and family he waded in knee deep water with them to a closed Navy base where he was told they could receive shelter, only to have guns pointed at them and be told to leave. There were over five hundred open rooms at the base and despite that the government who knew they were living in the state of emergency turned them away to fend for themselves once again. Had Kim, her husband, and her neighbors been from anywhere else they would not have had to deal with this in the first place because they would have had the means to get out and if not the privilege or prestige to be aided by the government.

Trouble the Water proved the Conflict Theory that Marx suggested to be true through its many

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examples of how those masses with less, the Ninth Ward, are constantly struggling against those with more, those who got out, for resources especially, but also wealth, power, and prestige. Had Kim and the others stranded in the Ninth Ward held more power, prestige, wealth, and resources, they would not have been left for dead by the rest of society. Nowhere in any newscast or documentary did it say that others from New Orleans were treated in the way that Kim and her community were, because they all were part of the elite few and not the masses. Had any other community be treated like that it would have been addressed immediately, however even after Kim's eye opening story, a lot of the problems that existed before, during, and after Katrina still existed years later. Everywhere in New Orleans that was touristy or home to the white and wealthier population was rebuilt by the government as soon as possible whereas the Ninth Ward barely got any government funding to rebuild, and what they did get was used for them to rebuild themselves without government help. The government repaired the levees, but they still remain vulnerable and flawed so that if any large storm came through again there would most likely be a repeat of the same situation for those in the Ninth Ward. Many of these issues would have remained without debate had it not been for Kim being the hero of her community and sharing them when no one else could. The class struggle there still exists today, but it is no longer unnoticed.

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