
Analysis of the Film "Before the Flood" by Fisher Stevens

Released in 2016, *Before the Flood*, presented by National Geographic and directed by Fisher Stevens, as well as produced and narrated by Leonardo DiCaprio, tells the very real tale of our current ecological catastrophe. The film and its message are directed towards those who are either already environmentally aware, or those who are trying to educate themselves.

The subject of *Before the Flood*, deals with what realities we face about climate change and how/if the effects can be reversed. The film follows Leonardo DiCaprio on a three year journey around the globe to come face to face with the changing Earth. DiCaprio meets with numerous influential scientists, politicians, and lobbyists to discuss their individual takes on climate change issues, as well as opinions on what can be done. The film was shot over the course of three years, and details DiCaprio's visits to five continents as well as the Arctic. The documentary spends a fair amount of its one and a half hour run time to talk about issues concerning global change. From the Paris Agreement, to the coal tax, to the anti-climate change lobby. The film was funded by Leonardo DiCaprio himself, showing that he cares strongly for this issue.

One of the first issues the film covers is tar sands. The implications of tar sands are terrifying, wreaking havoc on local ecosystems and producing massive amounts of greenhouse gasses. In the book, *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*, the author states that a proposed expansion for a tar sand mine would effectively destroy 31,000 acres of forest and also destroy 170 acres of fish habitats along the Muskeg river, the plan would also drain over hundreds of thousands of gallons of fresh water. (Nikiforuk) Another main issue covered by DiCaprio is the mass destruction of coral reefs. As stated in the film, over one billion people depend on the fishing around coral reefs for their livelihoods. The film also states that the reason for the destruction of these reefs is massive carbon emissions from the ocean. In the *National Meteorological and Ocean Service Centennials journal* it is stated that, an elevation in ocean temperature has been cited as the primary cause for mass coral bleaching. It is stated that mortality from coral bleaching can occur following extended heat exposure which leads to the loss of reef habitats and structures. (Spillman) Another main point of the film is the mass deforestation that occurs in Indonesia. The film goes into detail about how the massive, ancient rainforests act as a sort of carbon sponge, but when they are cleared to make way for palm oil plantations, they release huge concentrations of carbon into the atmosphere. In a recent study on palm oil production, it was reported that "The quantity of carbon released when just one hectare of forest is cleared to grow oil palms is roughly equivalent to the amount of carbon produced by 530 people flying from Geneva to New York in economy class" (Phys).

The purpose of the film is to spread an awareness of current the state of our earth by depicting

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what has already begun (i.e. polar ice melt, deforestation in Indonesia). The message that the director was trying to get across is the fact that climate change is occurring on a massive scale, and mankind must face this catastrophic event head on. Before watching this film, I felt I had a solid grasp on what was happening in terms of global change, however I did not realize that there was so much that I was unaware of. I was completely shocked when learning about the extent of the palm oil industry. According to the World Wildlife Fund, massive monocrop palm oil plantations have destroyed tropical rainforests around the globe in Asia, Latin America and West Africa (Palm Oil). During *Before the Flood*, I did expect to see some of the elements. Showing the rescued animals, the statistics of cow methane production, were reminiscent of other documentaries that deal with the topic of global change. The documentary makes many claims that are backed by scientific evidence, yet also relies heavily on emotional weight. *Before the Flood* seems to follow the typical analysis method of logos, pathos, and ethos. DiCaprio presents the audience with credible facts and sources, he provides evidence as well as quotes and statistics. The film then makes a switch and appeals to the emotions of the viewer, showing the disturbing state of the earth and how humans ultimately decide the fate of the Earth.

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