



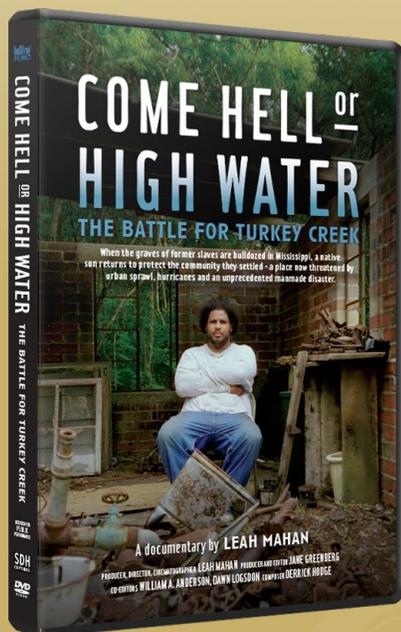
# Community Screening & Discussion Guide

## COME HELL OR HIGH WATER

Use your screening of **COME HELL OR HIGH WATER** as a tool for educating your community about the concept of environmental racism and the impact of energy development and sprawl on local communities. This guide offers some background information, helpful tips & discussion questions for an informative, rewarding screening. **Good Luck!**

### what you'll find inside!

- about the film & filmmaker
- ready to watch! screening guide
- ready to talk! discussion guide
- ready to act! handout



### About the film

COME HELL OR HIGH WATER follows the painful but inspiring journey of Derrick Evans, a Boston teacher who moves home to coastal Mississippi when the graves of his ancestors are bulldozed to make way for the sprawling city of Gulfport. Over the course of a decade, Derrick and his neighbors stand up to powerful corporate interests and politicians and face ordeals that include Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil disaster in their struggle for self-determination and environmental justice.



### About the filmmaker

Leah Mahan is a producer, director, and cinematographer. Mahan began working on documentary films in 1988 as a research assistant for filmmaker Henry Hampton on the acclaimed PBS series EYES ON THE PRIZE. Her first independent film, HOLDING GROUND: THE REBIRTH OF DUDLEY STREET, aired on public television in 1997. In 2010, Leah worked with Derrick Evans and the Gulf Coast Fund for Community Renewal and Ecological Health to develop a new media project related to the film called BRIDGE THE GULF, which was presented at the 2011 Media That Matters conference.

# ready to watch!

## Ideas and best practices to help make your community screening a success!

- 1. Publicize Your Event!** This is the most important step because it not only tells the world what you're up to, but it lets the Bullfrog Community team know what your plans are so we can help you publicize your event. Visit [http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/come\\_hell\\_or\\_high\\_water](http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/come_hell_or_high_water) to register and get the word out about your upcoming screening. You can also email us at [info@bullfrogcommunities.com](mailto:info@bullfrogcommunities.com) if you need help getting started!
- 2. Visualize Your Goal!** What do you hope to achieve with your screening? Your goal could be to generate a lively post-film discussion about issues raised in the film, gain support or recruit volunteers for a local grassroots campaign, or raise funds for a group on your campus or in your community. Or, you can simply use the screening to provide an opportunity for your audience to watch and learn together.
- 3. Where To Host?** Consider which locations in your area would be ideal for accommodating a community film screening of the size you anticipate: downtown movie theaters, churches and synagogues, town halls, community centers, public libraries, school auditoriums, university and college venues, warehouses at a business and outdoor screenings at parks and playgrounds, and even private homes have been venues for many successful community screenings.
- 4. Find A Partner!** Give some thought to who is already working on this issue in your community. Can they help sponsor the event? Spread the word? Speak on a panel discussion after the screening? Some potential partners include: student groups at schools, universities and colleges; a local public or campus library; representatives from local religious congregations or faith-based community groups; local chapters of national/global activist or grassroots organizations; faculty members at nearby universities and colleges; reporters/journalists from local news publications such as newspapers and magazines; local nonprofits; and any community organizations that share goals or views with the film you are screening.
- 5. Invite A Guest Speaker!** Guest speakers and panelists are a great way to encourage discussion and debate after a community screening. When people are engaged and thinking about the issues they will stay engaged long after the screening has passed. Contact representatives of local non-profits, faith groups, journalists and reporters from local media outlets, or teachers and professors who have expertise and/or insight into the issues raised by the film, and invite them to attend your screening and participate in a discussion or Q&A session with your audience.
- 6. Engage Your Audience!** Use this discussion guide to engage your audience. Included in this guide is a section called Ready to Talk! with a few suggested discussion questions to get the conversation started, and a section called Ready to Act!— which can be used as a handout — listing additional resources for further investigation about key issues raised in the film.

**7. Spread The Word!** Think about the best methods available to you for publicizing your film screening to people in your community. Sending emails to a contact list, creating event notifications on Facebook, Google+, Eventbrite or an online community calendar, using Twitter to announce your event, and placing screening announcements in local newspapers and newsletters is a good start. In addition to this guide, you can find and download a screening poster and press photos at [http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/come\\_hell\\_or\\_high\\_water](http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/come_hell_or_high_water) that can be used to help publicize your event.

**8. Tell Us How It Went!** Visit [http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/come\\_hell\\_or\\_high\\_water](http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/come_hell_or_high_water) to tell us about your event. Contribute to the film's discussion page to help other student groups, universities, non-profits, congregations and community groups further the discussion and put on successful screening events of their own. Where was your screening held? Who attended? What went well, and what was challenging? What did you discuss? Your feedback will help others to organize their own events, and will energize Bullfrog Communities as a whole.

# ready to talk!

**Your audience will be excited to discuss the issues raised by COME HELL OR HIGH WATER. Here are some questions that will get people talking.**

- 1.** Derrick explains in his classroom: “You know, we talked about racism. It’s not simply a function of ignorance. Because if it was simply a function of ignorance, it could be educated away and it would be over. No, racism is probably the most profitable invention of the last 500 years.” What does Derrick mean by this? Who profits from racism? How might some people (especially those with more privilege and/or power) “profit” from racism? How can we relate these ideas back to the environment and environmental justice?
- 2.** What are the attitudes of the developer and city officials toward the community’s concern about plans to fill in hundreds of acres of wetlands? What do these two attitudes tell you about how the Turkey Creek community has been recognized and treated by the local government and developers?
- 3.** Eminent domain is defined as “the power to take private property for public use by a state, municipality, or private person or corporation authorized to exercise functions of public character, following the payment of just compensation to the owner of that property” (<https://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/>). In the case of Butch Ward and the developers in Turkey Creek, what do they understand as the land’s highest potential for public use? What about the community in Turkey Creek? Why do you think these two understandings are at odds with one another? What would “just compensation” look like for people’s private property? Is there such a thing as “just compensation” in this case?
- 4.** What are some of the tactics the Turkey Creek community uses to battle the development corporations trying to displace them?
- 5.** What is a conservation easement? What does it mean to put a piece of land into conservation for perpetuity? What could be the long-term benefits of this kind of plan? What might be some possible downsides? Who are the different stakeholders that would need to work together to make a conservation plan like this work? How does this environmental project help promote a social justice agenda in Turkey Creek?
- 6.** What publicly funded projects are undertaken in the name of hurricane recovery? Why does Derrick think some of these projects may have been poorly planned and poorly designed? What are the alternatives that Derrick and fellow organizers propose?
- 7.** What additional tactics are used by the Turkey Creek community to protect their rights and their land from degradation?
- 8.** What is FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency)? What services do they provide? Where did much of the FEMA funding go in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina?

**9.** What are some of the bittersweet “wins” for the Turkey Creek community? What are some of the new threats to the Turkey Creek conservation efforts? How does Derrick strategically use these threats to the community’s advantage?

**10.** Derrick’s mother expresses fear for her son while he “visions” and fights to protect the Turkey Creek community. She explains, “I respect what he’s doing, but my son is not on salary. And we have to survive. And sometimes, just to keep a positive attitude, we tend to go into denial because we have to live.” How has Derrick’s life been affected as he fights for justice and environmental protection in Turkey Creek? How might Derrick’s story relate to other fights for social and/or environmental justice elsewhere?

**11.** After the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Derrick picks up the phone to discuss a community disaster response. What are some pieces of wisdom that he shares? How do his recommendations relate to notions of justice?

**12.** One passage in the “Earth Day” article referred to in the film reads: “[Derrick] Evans, a community activist, says repeated appeals to local officials to halt harmful projects went unanswered. He says, ‘Things finally started going our way’ when he realized that Turkey Creek was a haven for tropical birds, and he reached out to conservation groups such as the Audubon Society that, he says, had the legal resources to help. ‘It’s as if people cared more about birds than African-Americans...It shouldn’t have to be so hard.’” What does this passage say about the relationship between the “traditional” environmental movement and the environmental justice movement? Based on what you’ve seen in *Come High or Hell Water* and in your personal life, when are these two components of the environmental movement at odds with one another? When do they (or should they) work in concert toward a common goal?

# ready to act!

handout

**Bridge the Gulf Project** - <http://www.bridgethegulfproject.org/>

Bridge the Gulf places the Turkey Creek story in a broader context, connecting viewers to a network of Gulf Coast community journalists with deep roots in diverse communities and fields who report on pressing social and environmental issues.

**Reel Power** - <http://www.screeninghq.org/collections/details/1/reel-power>

A collaborative of award-winning documentary filmmakers, individual leaders and organizations working to address climate change and the long-term impact of destructive resource extraction. Reel Power is advancing a sustainable and just energy future through targeted screening events and hands-on trainings across the country.

**The Pascagoula River Audubon Center** - <http://pascagoula.river.audubon.org/audubon-and-turkey-creek>

As part of the National Audubon Society, this 100-plus year old non-profit organization is focused on promoting conservation and education about birds and wildlife and the habitats that support them. Audubon and community leaders in Gulfport, Mississippi are protecting Turkey Creek's rich cultural and natural history.

**Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain** - <http://tmcp.org/>

The Land Trust is a member supported, not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to protect the six coastal counties' natural lands, scenic areas, fresh water resources, and wildlife habitat.

**Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law** - <http://www.lawyerscommittee.org/>

The Lawyer's Committee works to secure equal justice for all through the rule of law, targeting in particular the inequities confronting African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities. The Lawyers' Committee is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to enlist the private bar's leadership and resources in combating racial discrimination and the resulting inequality of opportunity - work that continues to be vital today. View the report "Protecting Vulnerable Coastal Communities: Meaningful Political Action and Strategies After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita" here: <https://lawyerscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/Protecting-Vulnerable-Coastal-Communities.pdf>

**Mississippi Center for Justice** - <http://www.jointcenter.org/hpi/sites/all/files/EnvironmentalJustice.pdf>

The Mississippi Center for Justice advances racial and economic justice through an approach that combines legal services with policy advocacy, community education and media advocacy. The Center partners with national, regional and community organizations and volunteers to develop and implement campaigns that are creating better futures for low-wealth Mississippians and communities of color in the areas of educational opportunity, financial security, access to healthcare, affordable housing and community development.

## Mississippi Department of Archives and History

<http://www.savemyplacems.com/listing/turkey-creek/>

Listing for Turkey Creek on the National Register of Historic Places (2009) and Mississippi Heritage Trust 10 Most Endangered Historic Places (2001).

**Sierra Club, Mississippi Chapter** - <https://mississippi.sierraclub.org/gulf-coast>

The Sierra Club, the nation's oldest grassroots environmental organization, was established by John Muir in 1892. In Mississippi, the Sierra Club has been active for over two decades, working to protect the health of communities and the environment.

**Steps Coalition** - [http://www.stepscoalition.org/?page\\_id=203](http://www.stepscoalition.org/?page_id=203)

The Steps Coalition was formed in 2006, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The mission of the Steps Coalition (“Steps”) is to build a democratic movement to support and create a healthy, just and equitable Mississippi Gulf Coast.

**Turkey Creek Community Plan** (PDF)

[http://www.leahmahan.com/comehellorhighwater/wp-content/uploads/docs/FI I\\_08-26\\_CommunityPlan.pdf](http://www.leahmahan.com/comehellorhighwater/wp-content/uploads/docs/FI I_08-26_CommunityPlan.pdf)

There is a scene in *Come Hell or High Water* after Hurricane Katrina when community residents are gathered outside the battered home of Derrick Evan's great-grandfather, beginning to dream up ideas about how the community should be revitalized. This is the result of those discussions, created with the help of urban and environmental planners at MIG, Inc.

**We Are Power Shift** - <http://www.wearepowershift.org/>

A grassroots-driven online community that seeks to empower and serve as a hub for the youth climate movement.