

ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINEE BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE



Trouble the Water

Directed and produced by Tia Lessin and Carl Deal
Executive produced by Danny Glover and Joslyn Barnes

Theatrical Booking Contact:
Clemence Taillandier
212-274-1989 x18
clemence@zeitgeistfilms.com

Publicity:
Jessica Manzi
HBO Media Relations
212-512-1322
jessica.manzi@hbo.com

Festival Booking Contact:
Nadja Tennstedt
212-274-1989 x15
nadja@zeitgeistfilms.com

A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

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Winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, this astonishingly powerful documentary is at once horrifying and exhilarating. Directed and produced by *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Bowling for Columbine* producers Tia Lessin and Carl Deal, *Trouble the Water* takes you inside Hurricane Katrina in a way never before seen on screen. The film opens the day before the storm makes landfall—just blocks away from the French Quarter but far from the New Orleans that most tourists knew. Kimberly Rivers Roberts, an aspiring rap artist, is turning her new video camera on herself and her 9th Ward neighbors trapped in the city. “It’s going to be a day to remember,” Kim declares. As the hurricane begins to rage and the floodwaters fill their world and the screen, Kim and her husband Scott continue to film their harrowing retreat to higher ground and the dramatic rescues of friends and neighbors. Lessin and Deal document the couple’s return to New Orleans, the devastation of their neighborhood and the appalling repeated failures of government. Weaving an insider’s view of Katrina with a mix of verité and in-your-face filmmaking, *Trouble the Water* is a redemptive tale of self-described street hustlers who become heroes—two unforgettable people who survive the storm and then seize a chance for a new beginning.

**Trouble the Water opened in New York and Los Angeles in August 2008
before playing across the country.**

**Press materials are available at www.troublethewaterfilm.com
or www.zeitgeistfilms.com**

THE GENESIS OF THE FILM

The film that New Yorkers Tia Lessin and Carl Deal made, rather than the one they envisioned, began two weeks after Katrina made landfall in New Orleans.

Director/Producer Tia Lessin says: “We were stunned and horrified by the televised images of elderly people laid out on baggage claim carousels at the airport, and bloated bodies floating where streets of the city had been. We wanted to know why New Orleans had not been evacuated before the storm, and why help was so late in coming after the levees collapsed. We wanted to make sense of it all.”

Kodak donated film stock, friends donated camera equipment, family donated frequent flier miles, and the duo flew to the central Louisiana city of Alexandria a week after the storm with co-producer Amir Bar-Lev (*My Kid Could Paint That*). There, they met their Texas-based director of photography, PJ Raval, who had left Austin just as evacuees were arriving in his city.

“What originally brought us to Alexandria was a report about the return of thousands of Louisiana National Guard soldiers from Baghdad to nearby Fort Polk a week after Katrina. These men who were supposed to be first responders during natural disasters were 10,000 miles away when floodwaters submerged the city of New Orleans. We wondered if their deployment in Iraq was one reason why help had come so late to the residents of New Orleans,” says director/producer Deal.

After being greeted at the airport by a Blackwater military contractor with a flat top and civilian clothes who mistook their tripod bags and gear for guns and ammo, the film crew spent several days documenting the homecomings of national guardsmen and women. “We interviewed soldiers who had lost their homes while doing sweeps of Sadr City,” says Lessin. “We watched one soldier reunite with his wife who had clung to her rooftop for three days in St. Bernard’s Parish, before being rescued by the Coast Guard. One soldier revealed that hundreds of high water vehicles for the state of Louisiana were sent to Iraq months earlier and remained there.”

The story started to bog down when the National Guard public affairs team closed off access to the independent filmmakers. “*Fahrenheit 9/11* screwed it up for all you guys,” said the media “liaison,” little suspecting she was addressing two of that film’s producers.

MEETING KIMBERLY AND SCOTT

“We were ready to shut down the cameras, send our crew home, and start volunteering to help the evacuees,” says Deal. That was when, outside a Central Louisiana Red Cross shelter on day four of the shoot, Kimberly and Scott Roberts, who had evacuated New Orleans a week earlier, spotted Deal and the crew. “They looked important,” says Scott Roberts and he and his wife sought them out.

The chance meeting redirected the film and opened up a story that did, indeed, help “make sense” not only of this particular disaster, but of issues that haunt America: Who is vulnerable in the U.S. and why? What is the responsibility of the government to its citizens? And what does it take to beat the odds and survive, even triumph?

“People ask us how we found Kimberly and Scott,” Lessin says, “and the truth is that they found us.”

Within minutes after Deal, Lessin and their crew wandered across the parking lot that separated the National Guard Armory and the Red Cross shelter, Kimberly and Scott walked in front of their camera and never left. The city was on its knees, but Kimberly was back on her feet, peddling her footage.

“What I got, I’ve been saving it, ‘cause I don’t want to give it to nobody local. This needs to be worldwide. Cause all the footage I’ve seen on TV, nobody got what I got. I got right there in the hurricane...When you wanna’ get with me and look at the tape?”

The day before Katrina made landfall was the first day Kimberly ever used a video camera. A week earlier she had bought the camcorder on the street for \$20, “because it was a good value,” she says, intending on recording birthday parties and family moments or maybe she would capture the more than occasional police beating in her neighborhood.

When Katrina was brewing, she picked up the camera, “Since we had to stay, I figured I would record what happened, just in case something did happen, I would have something to show my kids.” Her motives for recording the experience changed as the situation grew worse, “Just in case we died, hopefully somebody would find the camera and know exactly how we died.”

After the storm hit and the power lines went down, Kimberly had two hours of charge left on her camera battery. The next day, when that battery ran out of juice, she shot several short movie clips on a still camera, documenting the long wait for a rescue that never came.

When Kimberly showed Lessin and Deal her raw tape a few days after they met, they were riveted. But even more compelling to the veteran documentary filmmakers were Kimberly and Scott themselves: “They drew us in immediately. They were hard edged, self-described street hustlers. As we got to know them, they also revealed themselves to be talented, resourceful, and deeply sympathetic people with a heart-stopping story of surviving not only failed levees and armed soldiers, but also their own pasts,” says Lessin. We were eager to see how it would turn out for them, and felt that an audience would be too.”

Deal and Lessin later decided to open the film with their first encounter with Kimberly and Scott at the Red Cross Shelter. Though it was shot by award winning cinematographer Raval, the camera is unsteady—Raval initially does not know where to land the camera and who to focus on. “It’s a little disorienting, but wanted to introduce the audience to Kimberly and Scott the way we met them ourselves.”

Together with Raval, Lessin and Deal taped Kimberly and Scott off and on over the course of thirty months, documenting the repeated failures of government, their relocation to Memphis and their ultimate return to New Orleans.

“Kimberly and Scott survived all the storms in their lives not because they are lucky, but because they have intelligence, guts, and the kind of hope that is based in will rather than experience,” says Deal.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The first call the directors made upon returning to New York after the first shoot was to T. Woody Richman, an editor they had worked with on both *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*. “Woody’s heart is as big as his talent, and we knew that this extraordinary story could be entrusted to his artistry in the edit room,” says Deal.

“I jumped at the chance to work with Tia and Carl on this project. Although the home video Kim’s footage presented huge technical challenges—Kim’s first day with the camera was the day before the hurricane—the content was like nothing I’d ever laid eyes on,” says Richman. “And her real time narration was chilling. The scenes that Tia and Carl subsequently captured over the next two years were intimate and revealing.”

Editing began in August 2006 and the team settled in with nearly 160 hours of footage the directors had filmed in the aftermath of Katrina and over a two and a half year period, hundreds more hours of archival news footage they collected from dozens of sources, and the two hour tape that Kimberly shot the day before and the day of the hurricane.

Richman painstakingly distilled that 2 hours in to fifteen minutes of dramatic home video footage and used it to anchor the first act of the film. It combines raw power with beguiling warmth and offers a rare, unforgettable first-person voice and a perspective.

The rest of the film is a combination of production footage shot in Super 16 mm film and 24p digital video by Raval and archival footage and audio from broadcast and off-air news sources.

“Working in the edit room, we decided to use Kimberly and Scott’s insider’s point of view as flashback and to shift back and forth in time to mirror the way traumatic memory interrupts the present,” says Lessin.

Trouble the Water avoids talking head interviews with experts, voice-over narration, lower third captions, and other traditional documentary story-telling devices. “We didn’t want to impart information as much as create a mood and an emotional connection with the characters,” says Deal. “We set out to tell the story of a city and the journey of a few individuals, the natural disaster and the official response. The glue binding the story elements was the journey of Kimberly and Scott and their friend Brian, a gentle stranger they had met on their journey to higher ground.”

One of the many storytelling challenges the team faced was that while Kimberly had filmed incredibly intimate, jarring footage and brilliant real-time commentary of Hurricane Katrina, her camera battery died on day one of the hurricane—soon after the levees broke. “We had to dig deep into other collections of Katrina footage to find the POV-style video to match the raw emotional intensity of Kim’s and Scott’s footage, and weave them together to tell the complete story of their journey out of the city.” Deal says.

In one case, a network news producer had filmed a drive-by of the convention center four days after the levees broke, on the very day that Kim and Scott and those they helped rescue were finally driving out of the flooded city. This network footage supplied the visual component for that scene. The

directors were also given footage shot during Katrina from inside the Orleans Parish Prison that helped them tell the story of the prisoners trapped there during the flood.

They also tracked down hours of audio recordings of emergency 911 calls during the storm. “People were stranded in their attics, being told by operators that there was no help coming. When we listened to these chilling calls, we were brought to tears. We’ll never know what happened to those people—whether they lived or died.” says Lessin. Cutting the audio from those phone conversations with the video Kimberly shot from her attic window of the raging storm and rising floodwaters created a devastating scene that revealed Kimberly and Scott and their friends and neighbors as their own, best, first responders.

After completing a cut of the film, Lessin, Deal and Richman were invited to the Sundance Institute as lab fellows in the summer of 2007. The Institute and the Lab advisers, including director Robb Moss (*Secrecy*), editors Mary Lampson (*Harlan County, USA*), Jean Philippe Boucicault (*Citizen King*) and Lewis Erskine (*Jonestown: The Life and Death of the Peoples Temple*) gave invaluable support and feedback on the work-in-progress and helped the filmmakers further refine the narrative.

It was their first opportunity to see the images on the big screen at the Sundance resort and they knew they had a film with theatrical potential. Back in New York, Lampson joined the filmmaking team for the final stretch.

“When we went to New Orleans, we struggled to get it right, to be true to voices and experiences that were very different from our own. It was important to us as white filmmakers from the north to not to follow the easy path of portraying Kimberly and Scott and their community as helpless victims, and also not go the other extreme of casting them as larger-than-life heroes. We were determined to avoid typecasting and portray them as they are – streetwise survivors, trying to change their lives and community for the better. When we started filming with Kimberly and Scott, their only demand on us was to “keep it real,” says Lessin

The Roberts told Lessin and Deal that they didn’t want to see the film until it was “done.” So, it was with some trepidation that Lessin and Deal screened a fine cut for the Roberts in September 2007. “We hoped they would like it, but you never know how people will respond to seeing themselves on screen. And Kimberly and Scott exposed so much of themselves to the camera.”

“I liked the movie. Tia and Carl confirmed the real me,” says Kimberly. “The movie let me see a part of me that, you know, I know exists, but is just smothered out by my environment, and negative things. It has helped me see myself in a way that I hadn’t realized until somebody like Tia and Carl came along and put a title on it.”

She continues: “I’m grateful for the person that I’ve become. I want people to be inspired by this film. I want people to get encouraged and gain strength to be able to do what they need to do when their storm comes their way.”

BORN HUSTLER

Using the moniker Black Kold Madina, Kimberly recorded a dozen underground rap songs before Katrina on a demo album “Tryed and True.”

“I grew up in the streets of New Orleans, where the opportunity to go to prison is much greater than being successful. Where like a lot places you gotta play the hand you dealt, until it's your turn to deal,” says Kimberly. “Being pressured by those options, I knew I had to come up with a way to get me and my family into a better situation than the one that was given to us.”

She lost all her music in the hurricane. Or so she thought. At the rock solid heart of the film is a spontaneous performance by Kimberly of her own song “Amazing” just moments after she finds the only existing copy of her recorded music with a relative in Memphis.

Black Kold Madina is rooted deeply in the traditions of the New Orleans Hip-Hop bounce music which, like that of the better known local Jazz scene, often goes unrecognized, but well-imitated throughout the world. Before Katrina, Kim was trying to break through in the city's underground rap scene that has produced artists like Juvenile and Master P, and Mia X, a role model. Post-Katrina, Kold Madina has recorded dozens more tracks on Born Hustler Records, the record label she and Scott formed, including two featured in the film: “Bone Gristle” and “Troubled the Waters,” a song she specifically wrote for the film after she learned the intended title of the film.

THE SCORE: MASSIVE ATTACK

Neil Davidge & Robert Del Naja of the pioneering trip-hop group Massive Attack brought their cinematic fusion of hip-hop, soul and hypnotic melodies to Trouble the Water. Founding member Del Naja, also known as 3D, was originally famous as a graffiti artist and a member of the hip hop collective known as “The Wild Bunch.” Skilled writers and producers, Davidge and Del Naja have collaborated on major film scores including Snatch, The Matrix and Unleashed.

Already Massive fans, the filmmakers had temped in some of their music and sent a rough cut to the band's manager. “As soon as I saw those 911 calls set to that amazing home movie footage, I said ‘we have to do this, mate’ there was just no doubt from the start.” says Davidge.

Davidge/Del Naja's score gives way to blues, gospel, jazz and underground hip hop by a variety of recording artists including a piano arrangement of the traditional “Wade in the Water” by Dr. John, a gospel version of that same song by duo Mary Mary, blues by John Lee Hooker, hip-hop from The Roots, the soul stirring “Hurricane Waters” from Citizen Cope and New Orleans second line music performed by The Free Agents Brass Band.

PARTNERSHIP WITH LOUVERTURE FILMS

Trouble the Water received critical seed money in the form of two grants from George Soros' Open Society Institute and the Sundance Documentary Program, which funded the first round of editing and two more weeks of shooting. After the second anniversary of Katrina, Danny Glover and his partner Joslyn Barnes, and their company Louverture Films, saw the film, joined the project as executive producers and found finishing funds.

"Danny told us that he wanted to be of service to the film. He saw it had the potential to transform lives. We have long admired him as both an artist and a humanitarian and when he and Joslyn offered to help, it gave new life to the project," says Deal.

Kimberly and Scott's story resonated with Executive Producer Glover, "I felt so empowered by Kimberly and Scott and by their actions. Their story very clearly shows why it is critical for all people to have a voice—no one can be disenfranchised or marginalized if we are all going to genuinely have a stake in choosing our future."

Glover had been to New Orleans many times after Katrina, raising money for relief and rebuilding efforts. "When the hurricane struck the Gulf and the floodwaters rose and tore through New Orleans," Glover says. "It did not turn the region into a Third World country... it revealed one."

Glover sees the connections between his work on the Gulf Coast and his work throughout the developing world. "The question in my mind," Glover says, "whether it's in Africa, in Latin America, or in the Lower Ninth in New Orleans, is, what do you mean by development? ... Go down to New Orleans, you'll see right there. New Orleans is global south meets global north."

Glover and Barnes' film company, Louverture, is dedicated to the development and production of films of historical relevance, social purpose, commercial value, and artistic integrity. They partner with progressive filmmakers and producers around the world and particularly from the global south. They recently executive produced Abderrahmane Sissako's *Bamako*.

"Why not use cultural production as a way of talking about issues?" Glover asked. "How do we empower people to be architects of their own rescue?" Part of the answer is in the story of Kimberly and Scott's survival in New Orleans's toxic poverty and Katrina's troubled waters.

"Tia Lessin and Carl Deal are filmmakers whose talent, commitment and insight have been repeatedly demonstrated in their extensive body of work, ranging from major award-winning films made with directors like Michael Moore, to courageous undertakings like documenting and resisting the disgraceful round up of Arab-American citizens in the post 9-11 environment, and traveling to Iraq in 2003 examine everyday life before the war began," says Joslyn Barnes.

"It seems only fitting that Carl and Tia should intersect with an equally remarkable couple like Kimberly and Scott Roberts who invited them into their lives and whom they, in turn, invited into the journey of discovery that became the film *Trouble the Water*. To build bridges like that across the chasms of race and class that still describe 21st century America is inspirational and at times, breathtaking. Their example inspired all of us here at Louverture Films to get behind this very important film," she concludes.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

TIA LESSIN (Director/ Producer)

Tia Lessin is director and producer of *Trouble the Water*. Tia was a producer of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, winner of the Palme d'Or, and the Academy Award-winning *Bowling for Columbine*. Her other film credits include line producer on Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* and coordinating producer on Michael Moore's *The Big One*. She began her film career working on Charles Guggenheim's Oscar-nominated *Shadows of Hate*.

Tia was awarded the Women of Worth "Vision" Award by L'Oréal Paris and Women in Film for *Trouble the Water*. In television, Tia won the Sidney Hillman award for producing and directing *Behind the Labels* and her work as producer of the series *The Awful Truth* earned her two Emmy nominations, one arrest and a lifetime ban from Disneyland.

Tia is a Sundance Institute Fellow and an Open Society Institute Katrina Media Fellow.

CARL DEAL (Director/ Producer)

Carl Deal is director and producer of *Trouble the Water*. He was the Archival Producer for *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Bowling for Columbine*, and John Pilger's *The War on Democracy*, and has contributed to many other documentaries on television and in the cinema, including the 2006 Sundance favorites, *God Grew Tired of Us* and *My Kid Could Paint That*. He previously worked as an international news producer and has reported from natural disasters and conflict zones throughout the U.S., Latin America, and in Iraq.

Carl graduated from Columbia University's School of Journalism, which awarded him the Sander Social Justice Prize. He has authored investigative reports for Greenpeace, Amnesty International and Public Citizen.

Carl is a Sundance Institute Fellow and received the 2005 FOCAL International/ Associated Press Library Award for best use of footage in a feature film. He was a juror in the US feature documentary competition at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival.

T. WOODY RICHMAN (Editor & Co-producer)

T. Woody Richman edited *Fahrenheit 9/11* and was associate editor of *Bowling for Columbine*. He edited Sooni Taraporevala's first feature, *Little Zizou*. He has cut several other independent features, including *Destination Unknown*, winner of the Hamptons Film Festival. Woody began his career working as an assistant editor in the cutting rooms of Nick Gomez, Spike Lee and Oliver Stone.

DANNY GLOVER (Executive Producer)

In addition to being one of the most acclaimed actors of our time, with a career spanning 30 years from *Places in the Heart*, *The Color Purple*, the *Lethal Weapon* series and the award-winning *To Sleep with Anger*, Danny Glover has also produced, executive produced and financed numerous projects for film, television and theatre. Among these are *Good Fences*, *3 AM*, *Freedom Song*, *Get on the Bus*, *Deadly Voyage*, *Buffalo Soldiers*, *The Saint of Fort Washington* and *To Sleep with Anger*, as well as the series *Courage* and *America's Dream*. Since co-founding Louverture Films, Glover has executive produced *Bamako*, *Africa Unite*, and the forthcoming *Salt of This Sea* and *Soundtrack For A Revolution*.

The recipient of countless awards for his humanitarian and advocacy efforts on behalf of economic and social justice causes, Glover is a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from Amnesty International.

JOSLYN BARNES (Executive Producer)

Joslyn Barnes is a writer and producer with experience in several fields. She is the author or co-author of twelve commissioned screenplays for feature films including the upcoming epic *Toussaint*, and the award-winning film *Bàttu*, directed by Cheikh Oumar Sissoko (Mali), which she associate produced with British Screen and EMET Films. Since co-founding Louverture Films, Barnes has executive produced the award-winning feature *Bamako*, the music documentary *Africa Unite*, and the forthcoming *Salt of the Sea* and *Soundtrack For A Revolution*.

Barnes has also served as an expert consultant and programme officer at the United Nations. She has lived and travelled widely in Africa and Asia, and has written numerous articles covering trade and social development issues, as well as contributing to books on the establishment of electronic communications in developing countries, food security and production in Africa, and strategic advocacy for the inclusion of gender perspectives on the international development agenda.

KIMBERLY RIVERS ROBERTS (Director of Photography, principal subject) & SCOTT ROBERTS (principal subject)

Kimberly and her husband Scott were born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, and are featured in *Trouble the Water*. Just 24 hours before Hurricane Katrina flooded her city, Kimberly recorded a day in the life of her neighborhood on her hi-8 camcorder, and continued to tape through the storm until a lack of electrical power forced her to stop.

Before the storm, Kimberly was working on her music career in the 9th Ward and, using the MC name Black Kold Madina, had recorded an underground demo album called *Tryed and True*. She believed all her music was lost in the storm, until she discovered that one of her relatives in Memphis had the only existing copy.

Kimberly's husband, Scott Roberts, grew up streetwise in New Orleans and worked odd jobs through most of his adult life. He has overcome many of life's challenges and is now working in the construction industry, a profession he started post-Katrina.

Kimberly and Scott recently started an independent record company, Born Hustler Records:
www.bornhustlerrecords.com.

PJ RAVAL (Director of photography)

PJ Raval's work has been showcased at both Sundance and Cannes and earned him the ASC Charles B. Lang Jr. Heritage Award and the Haskell Wexler Award for Best Cinematography. PJ has been featured in *American Cinematographer*; his other feature cinematography credits include the 2006 Independent Spirit Award nominated *Room*, the Los Angeles Film Festival Narrative Feature Award winner *Gretchen*, and the Burnt Orange produced *Cassidy Kids*. PJ recently completed a new film with Jay Hodges, *Trinidad*, a feature documentary about a small Wild West outpost town turned "sex change capital of the world."

DAVIDGE / DEL NAJA (Original score)

Robert Del Naja & Neil Davidge brought their cinematic fusion of hip hop, soul and hypnotic melodies to *Trouble the Water*, Del Naja is one of the founding members of Massive Attack the pioneering Bristol, UK based band who's last five CDs have sold over 12 million copies world-wide. Together with his writing and producer partner Davidge—who joined Massive Attack in 1998—they have written and produced music for three films in 2007: *In Prison My Whole Life*, *Battle In Seattle* and *Trouble the Water*, as well as working on the new Massive Attack record due in Fall 2008.

MARY LAMPSON (Additional editor)

Mary Lampson was co-editor of Barbara Kopple's Academy Award winning film *Harlan County, USA*. She was the co-producer and editor with Emile de Antonio and Haskell Wexler of *Underground* and edited several more de Antonio films. She recently edited Anne Makepeace's *Rain in a Dry Land* and Julia Reichart's Emmy nominated film *A Lion in the House*. Mary began her editing career with Ricky Leacock and D.A. Pennebaker as an associate editor on *Monterey Pop* and *One P.M.*, a film by Jean-Luc Godard.

Trouble the Water

directed and produced by
TIA LESSIN and CARL DEAL

featuring
KIMBERLY RIVERS ROBERTS AND SCOTT ROBERTS

directors of photography
P.J. RAVAL
KIMBERLY ROBERTS

editor and co-producer
T. WOODY RICHMAN

executive producers
JOSLYN BARNES
DANNY GLOVER
TODD OLSON
DAVID ALCARO

additional editing by
MARY LAMPSON

co-producer
AMIR BAR-LEV

consulting producer
HAROLD MOSS

Original score by
DAVIDGE / DEL NAJA

Introducing the music of
BLACK KOLD MADINA

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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

247 CENTRE ST • 2ND FL • NEW YORK • NY 10013
www.zeitgeistfilms.com • mail@zeitgeistfilms.com
(212) 274-1989 • FAX (212) 274-1644