

# Lake of Betrayal

## VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



Top: Producer/Director Paul Lamont and Researcher Caleb Abrams at the former community of Coldspring, Pennsylvania. Photo by Scott Sackett

Above: Lake of Betrayal Film Crew (Caleb Abrams, Paul Lamont, Stephen McCarthy, John V. Davis). Photo by Scott Sackett

***“You grew up feeling that the river is power, it has purpose. That’s the connection of the Allegheny River; that river has life.”***

- Dennis J. Bowen, Sr.,  
Seneca Nation, Bear Clan



The Kinzua Dam and Allegheny Reservoir in Pennsylvania. Completed in 1965, the dam was originally proposed to help mitigate flooding 200 miles down river. Photo by Caleb Abrams

### Program Synopsis

*Lake of Betrayal* explores the history of Kinzua Dam development and building on the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania and its impact on the Seneca Indian Nation. Completed in 1965 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the dam was originally proposed to help mitigate flooding in Pittsburgh—200 miles down river. However, the 27-mile reservoir that formed behind the dam inundated vast tracts of the Seneca Indians’ ancestral lands, forcing their removal in breach of the United States’ oldest treaty, the Treaty of Canandaigua (1794).

*Lake of Betrayal* examines the Seneca Nation’s fight to protect its sovereignty against the U.S. government’s Indian termination policy and overwhelming political and economic forces driving the post-WWII economic boom. The building of the dam also displaced residents in four towns and villages located in Pennsylvania and New York states, a backdrop that is not readily or widely known. While the greatest concentration was the Seneca people working to protect their land and rights, there were larger public and private interests pushing and pulling to revitalize a growing nation.

In 1960, at the time of the Seneca’s final pushback, President John F. Kennedy was firmly opposed to its development in principle, but the decision to build was one of much scrutiny in the political landscape at the time. The documentary takes a long view of Kinzua Dam and the imposed changes on the Seneca’s way of life that have led to irreplaceable cultural and personal losses, but also major economic benefits for the Seneca.

## Producer's Notes



### Paul Lamont

Dams change the course of rivers, but they also change the course of people's lives. When we began research for *Lake of Betrayal*, we knew that when Kinzua Dam was built in 1965, a treaty with the Seneca Nation of Indians was broken and 10,000 acres of land taken in the name of flood control for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. However, we had

little understanding of the profound cultural effect and deep soul wound that Kinzua Dam had inflicted upon the Seneca people and their way of life. Producing a film about a culture that isn't yours is a delicate and complex undertaking. There are inherent risks, something we knew going in. This was a Seneca story, not ours, and we had to tell the story from the inside out. But the Seneca story was contained within a larger American story that we needed to explore.

How could the federal government simply break one of its oldest Indian treaties in effect, especially considering there was a viable alternative that would have saved their treaty protected land? To fully understand how the events of Kinzua Dam unfolded, it was important to understand the climate of America that nurtured it. It was a time when dam-building was a sign of national progress, when hydropower and rural electrification were part of the democratic impulse, and the national policy in America was to assimilate Indians and bring an end to all tribal sovereignty. These factors, when combined with back-door politics and powerful Pittsburgh business interests, resulted in one of the most egregious taking of Native lands in recent history. Shamefully, the sentiment that embraced the exploitation of indigenous lands continues today. Despite the U.S. government's efforts to eliminate the Seneca, they survived, and they adapted to become a stronger nation. Kinzua Dam stands as a symbol of stolen lands and broken treaties but also the determination of the Seneca to remain a sovereign people.

## By the Numbers

1. On St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1936, the Allegheny River flooded and reached a flood stage of 16 feet in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The flood also threatened the eastern seaboard of the country, including Washington, D.C., which was scheduled to crest at 19 feet. The damage to the city of Pittsburgh was tabulated at \$25 million in a time when post-depression development under President Roosevelt's New Deal was beginning to gain momentum.
2. Between 1776 and 1887, the United States, seized over 1.5 billion acres from Americas indigenous people by treaty and executive order.
3. During the post WWII era, 113 Native American tribes lost 1.4 million acres of land to support expanding New Deal projects to build economic stability for growing communities and various public domains. Several of these public works projects were to build dams, like Kinzua, as well as other federal efforts that were important for national economic prosperity. Indian tribal lands were considered by the Seneca as U.S. "supermarkets" to take whatever resources were needed in the development of new business and industrial infrastructure for public welfare.
4. The total cost to build Kinzua Dam, and to support Seneca and other community relocation efforts was \$108 million. In a 1972 report filed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, seven years after opening, a total of \$250 million in savings was realized by flood damage prevention to areas served by the operation. The result of Kinzua Dam's development was a 4-foot reduction in the flood level stage in Pittsburgh and justification made for the investment. Since opening, Kinzua Dam has saved an estimated \$1 billion of flood damage to the region.
5. In return for their precious and sacred land, the Seneca Nation received a total of \$15 million from the U.S. government. Described in the film as "conscience money" by George Heron, president of the Seneca Nation in the early 1960s. The money was initially used to build 126 new homes, schools and other community resources and programs for the nine displaced tribal communities.



The Kinzua Dam and Allegheny Reservoir. The total cost to build Kinzua Dam and to support Seneca and other community relocation efforts was \$108 million. Photo by Scott Sackett



Caleb Abrams at the road that used to run through Coldspring, Pennsylvania. Photo by Scott Sackett

## Discussion Questions

1. The building of the Kinzua Dam was completed over 50 years ago, but what makes the film relevant today? What are the social, public health and welfare issues that these developments present to people affected? Why is it important to tell stories from the past to help shape the future and generate a more focused understanding of the issues today?
2. Discuss the nature of political power in terms of absolute versus court authoritative powers. How do overarching realms of authority differ in treaties or agreements with entities in their respective abilities to change courses of action? Does reigning authority exist in our country? If so, provide examples and discuss them.
3. In 1830, Red Jacket, a Seneca Indian Chief and tribal diplomat, was skeptical of whether his people would survive the future based on the taking of land held sacred by his people in his time. What aspects of the Canandaigua Treaty made it an intriguing argument from both sides (the U.S. government and Seneca Nation) to challenge?
4. Describe the forces that were in play that ultimately shut down the tribal effort and proposed an alternative plan (Conewango) developed by Dr. Arthur Morgan? What efforts, if any, might have been done differently to change the final outcome? Did behind-the-scene groups, individuals or organizations infringe on the feasibility to change the final outcome? If so, what tactics were used to defuse the plan?
5. Discuss the shift in family and traditions for the nine Seneca communities in terms of what they tried to maintain and were allowed to keep, versus what was lost and perhaps never will be regained.

## Activities

1. *Lake of Betrayal* showcases the Seneca Allegheny School building and classroom experience in two ways—visualizing classroom activities in the 1950s and '60s that reflected more homogenous Americanized activities and showing people walking up the steps into the school building. The film later showcases the steps into the building and that those school steps still exist today. Make a list of the tangible aspects of family, culture and tradition that still exist for the Seneca people today. Outline the aspects of sovereignty and ways of life that will be lost to the future Seneca and other Native generations to come.
2. Although many people in the tribes understood the Tribal land dam construction projects in the U.S. were an effort to generate power and money for public and private interests, no Native American tribes or communities were offered any free or reduced power for their communities. The Seneca Nation was given a settlement fund of \$15 million for community revitalization. Given that investment, determine an estimated economic benefit or savings if a low cost discount rate of 15 percent had been given to each of the 126 homes that were built 1965. Estimate the total dollars that could have been saved or realized over the last 50 years for the nine displaced communities. Would it be greater or less than the initial \$15 million?
3. *Lake of Betrayal* examines a variety of perspectives from Seneca Nation people from across generations. Some in the tribe felt what's done is done; we will survive it as a people. Describe how residents from Corydon, Pennsylvania, or the other non-native communities feel about sense of place. In small groups, discuss whether they are similar or different from Seneca people.
4. As a large group, consider the historical and current policies and issues on immigration and migration of people into and across America. As we see more dramatic shifts in our population, will American and Native American cultures remain the same or change to something more unrecognizable? Discuss why or why not.



View of Red House area from Ga'hai Hill. Photo by Scott Sackett

## Resources

### Resource Acknowledgements

The producers gratefully acknowledge and wish to thank the following institutions for their assistance and support with archival resources:

#### Antioch College, Antiochiana Archives, Yellow Springs, Ohio

<http://www.antiochcollege.org/antiochiana>

#### George Eastman Museum, Moving Image Department

<https://www.eastman.org/moving-image>

#### National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/washington/>

#### Seneca-Iroquois National Museum

<https://www.senecamuseum.org/>

#### Seneca Nation of Indians Archives Department

<https://sni.org/departments/tribal-archives-department/>

#### Seneca Nation of Indians Tribal Historic Preservation Office

<https://sni.org/departments/tribal-historic-preservation/>

#### U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Pittsburgh District

<http://www.lrp.usace.army.mil/>

#### Warren County Historical Society, Warren, Pennsylvania

<http://www.warrenhistory.org/>



*Filming Jeremiah Bové on Allegheny Reservoir. Photo by Caleb Abrams*



*Tossing of the wreath at the annual "Remember the Removal" ceremony. Photo by Paul Lamont*



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This Viewer Discussion Guide writer, John D. Craig, Ph.D., has been involved in education for more than 26 years, which includes many years leading and directing the education and outreach department of the public broadcasting station in Buffalo, New York, WNED|WBFO. Dr. Craig has been a community educator and outreach expert in schools, colleges, business and industry securing millions of dollars in funding in designing and directing more than 100 projects, services and programs that have impacted thousands of educators, students and individuals across New York State, the country, and into Canada.

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This program is produced by Toward Castle Films & Skipping Stone Pictures in association with the Center for Independent Documentary for Vision Maker Media with major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Educational resources for this film are available at <http://www.visionmakermedia.org/educators/lake-betrayal>

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