

# My Louisiana Love

## VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



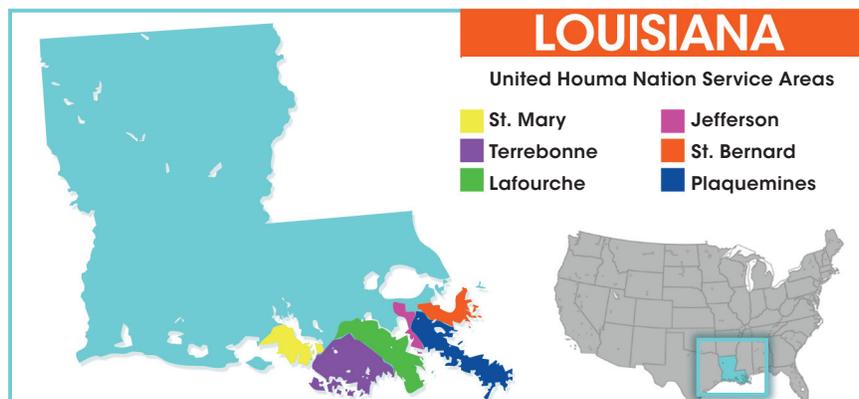
## Program Synopsis

***"I want to keep living on our land—but I'm inheriting a dying delta."***

— Monique Verdin (Houma),  
Co-Producer/Co-Writer

***My Louisiana Love*** follows a young, Native American woman, Monique Verdin (Houma), as she returns to Southeast Louisiana to reunite with her Houma Indian family. But soon, she sees that her people's traditional way of life—fishing, trapping, and hunting in these fragile wetlands—threatened by a continuing cycle of social and ecological injustice. Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil leak are just the latest rounds in this century-old cycle that is forcing Monique's clan to adapt in new ways. Monique must overcome the loss of her father, her partner, her house, and redefine the meaning of home.

Photos from top left: **Warning sign in Bayou Pointe au Chien, located in a part of south Louisiana that is experiencing the most rapid land loss in the state.** Photo by Monique Verdin; **Monique Verdin gives an environmental tour by the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet in Louisiana.** Photo by Andy Cook; **Monique Verdin wears a gas mask during her first visit back to her grandmother's house after hurricane Katrina.** Photo by Mark Krasnoff



## Producer's Notes



### Sharon Linezo Hong

*"My Louisiana Love first began when my best friend, Monique Verdin and her boyfriend, Mark Krasnoff started recording Monique's Native American relatives in southeast Louisiana. Hoping to capture the Houma Indian's struggle to live in bayou communities plagued with*

*environmental injustice, they filmed eroding wetlands and interviewed Native elders. Their documentation shifted after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and Mark and Monique started filming their personal struggles in the aftermath's apocalyptic reality. But 13 months after Hurricane Katrina, Mark Krasnoff committed suicide. His untimely death left a heavy collection of tapes behind. I helped Monique move out of Mark's house after his death, and I can vividly remember sitting in his home office as she shared his last written words with me. I could almost feel Mark over my shoulder while I read his wish for the documentary they had started to be completed and shared with the world. That day his last wish became my own.*

Inspired by Mark and Monique's dedication to film, even as times got tough, I decided to keep the camera rolling. The social and ecological injustice story kept getting bigger. BP's oil rig exploded in 2010 and started leaking oil into the Gulf of Mexico, revealing the seemingly continuous cycle of environmental crises occurring in Louisiana. My creative team and I recognized that this destructive cycle had developed from man's manipulation and exploitation of nature over the past century, and we worked to find a way the film could reflect the complexities of these environmental, economic, and cultural issues.

We strived to make the documentary feel like Monique was telling her story to a new friend, much like when Monique and I were both 21 years old and she took me home to meet her "French-Indian" grandmother, Matine. I sat with Grandma Matine at her kitchen table as she pulled out old photographs from a wooden box, and in broken English shared stories of her childhood in southeast Louisiana's wetlands. Grandma Matine's worn hands carried a history not well known, and now 10 years later I am honored to help pass on her story. We hope *My Louisiana Love* will help the Houma people find a seat at decision-making tables, and give a face to the dire need for a long-term balance between industrial development and preservation of Indigenous cultures and the environment."

## By the Numbers

1. The population of the Houma Tribe is about 17,000 Tribal members and is the largest Native American Tribe in Louisiana.
2. There are six service areas of the United Houma Nation: Terrebonne, Jefferson, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Lafourche, and St. Mary Parishes. Most of the Houma communities in these areas are located outside risk-reduction levees with decaying marshlands to the south as their only buffer against storm-surge floodwaters.
3. The Houma people, both past and present, lived by farming, fishing, and hunting game. This lifestyle has been severely threatened by a combination of both manmade and natural disasters. In November 2011, Gulf Oil Spill Claims Chief Ken Feinberg announced he would double payments for shrimpers and crabbers damaged by the April 2011 BP oil spill and its aftermath, with the claims facility managing the \$20 million that BP set aside to pay spill-related claims. The state of Louisiana lost about 50% of its oyster crop during the spill.
4. Although recognized by the state of Louisiana, the Houma Tribe has not achieved federal status as a nationally recognized Tribe by the United States Federal Government. They first petitioned to gain this status in 1987. The process took seven years and was denied. The Tribe continues to pursue national status and is currently awaiting a decision.
5. Until 1964 and the Civil Rights Act, Houma children were not allowed to attend public schools but relied on missionary schools for their education.
6. The Houma people met the French very early on and as a result adapted the colonial trade language into their native Muskogee tongue making it something uniquely their own—Houma French.
7. The first written record of the Houma Tribe was in 1862 when a French explorer noted the village of "Oumas" in his journal.
8. In the 1700s, the Houma Tribe was engaged in a border conflict with another Tribe over their hunting grounds. To establish territory, they put a great red pole in the ground on the bank of a bayou near a place that is now called Scott's Bluff. The French people called this marker "Baton Rouge." The location is now the current city of Baton Rouge.
9. South Louisiana has lost over 1,883 square miles from 1932 to 2010. This is a landmass greater than the state of Rhode Island.
10. Scientists estimate that over 60% of all coastal land loss in Louisiana is currently happening in the Barataria Terrebonne Basin, located between the Atchafalaya and Mississippi Rivers, where many Houma live.



Charlie Verdin opens his shrimp nets while full moon shrimping.

Photo by Monique Verdin

## Reflect & Relate

1. In the film, Monique feels the pull to return home to her Houma people and her land after 13 years. What does she find when she first returns? How has it changed? What does she discover about her relationships with both her family and the land they live on?
2. The Houma Tribe is recognized by the state of Louisiana but not by the federal government. What does this mean for a Tribe to be recognized or non-recognized by the United States Federal Government? Do you feel that Native American Tribes are entitled to compensation and support from the U.S. Government? Why or why not?
3. Monique feels a special kinship with her “Louisiana Love.” Do you feel that where we are born is an important part of our personal identity—who we are? In what ways is this true—or not true for you? Do you think this kinship had anything to do with Mark Krasnoff’s death? Explore this idea.
4. As the film progresses, we learn more and more about how the land is being changed by man’s endless efforts for “progress.” We learn about the impact of the oil and gas industry, manipulation of the waterways, and other influences that are hurting the fragile environment. Do you think there is a way for humans to live more gently on the earth? What is the connection between Mother Nature and Human Nature?
5. What do you think Grandma Matine meant when she said, “If you don’t know what to do—do what you know”? Have there been times in your life when you found relief in doing what you know? What were those times? What did you do?

## Ideas for Action

1. We can see in the film how first Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita, and then the BP explosion and oil spill had a devastating effect on the Gulf Coast and the people who live there. On the Internet or in books and articles, discover how the communities have been impacted. What ongoing efforts continue to be done to help restore both the land and its people? Do you think the effort has been adequate? What else do you feel could be done?
2. It is common knowledge that too much loss can affect a person deeply. Name the losses that Monique experiences during the time documented in the film. How have those losses affected her? Then, as a class or in your group, have each individual share with one or two other people a loss that he or she has suffered and how he or she handled such a loss. When each person has shared a story, make a list of all the ways people deal with loss, both positive and negative.
3. Sometimes healing and strength can rise up out of our losses. Reexamine the activity from Question #2 both from Monique’s perspective and from each student or individual’s perspective. What was “gained” from each loss over time?
4. Care of the earth and its natural resources is the responsibility of all human beings. Explore what is being done in your own community, family, class, or group to keep our earth healthy. Ask what small (or large) activities we could add to these efforts. Begin a project—and then do it.
5. Until 1964, the children of the Houma Tribe were not allowed to attend public school. On the Internet or in the library, discover what prevented them from attending and then what finally made public schooling available to the Tribe. Expand your search to learn what other children of the world are being denied an education. As a group, explore what the benefits of education are in the real world, as well as how the lack of education can affect our lives.



Grandmother Matine by her chicken coop in Saint Bernard Parish, Louisiana.

Photo by Anne Conway Jennings

## Resources

### Internet Resources

[www.unitedhoumanation.org](http://www.unitedhoumanation.org)  
[www.bigorrin.org/houma\\_kids.htm](http://www.bigorrin.org/houma_kids.htm)  
[www.native-languages.org/houma.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/houma.htm)  
[www.louisiana101.com/hotlinks\\_wayback\\_houmahistory.html](http://www.louisiana101.com/hotlinks_wayback_houmahistory.html)  
[www.nwrc.usgs.gov/releases/pr03\\_004.htm](http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/releases/pr03_004.htm)  
<http://pubs.usgs.gov/sim/3164/>  
[www.mississippiriverdelta.org](http://www.mississippiriverdelta.org)  
[www.mrgomustgo.org](http://www.mrgomustgo.org)  
[www.healthygulf.org](http://www.healthygulf.org)  
[www.labucketbrigade.org](http://www.labucketbrigade.org)

### Written Resources

Dardar, T. Mayheart (2000). *Women-Chiefs and Crawfish Warriors: A Brief History of the Houma People*, Translated by Clint Bruce. New Orleans: United Houma Nation and Centenary College of Louisiana.

Goddard, Ives. (2005). "The Indigenous Languages of the Southeast," *Anthropological Linguistics*, 47 (1), 1-60.

Miller, Mark Edwin. "A Matter of Visibility: The United Houma Nation's Struggle for Federal Acknowledgment," in *Forgotten Tribes: Unrecognized Indians and the Federal Acknowledgment Process*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.



Mark Krasnoff dancing on the highway with a marsh fire behind him.

Photo by Monique Verdin

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This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master's in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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