

YELLOW FEVER

VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



From left to right, clockwise: 1) Warnings in Diné and English near a closed mine in Sonostee, New Mexico. Photo by Jay Minton. 2) Tina Garnanez (Diné) enjoying some time with her grandmothers. 3) Tina Garnanez (Diné) ready for battle with the U.S. military. Photo courtesy of Tina Garnanez.



Program Synopsis

Yellow Fever follows young veteran, Tina Garnanez (Diné), on her journey to investigate the history of the Navajo Uranium Boom, its lasting impacts in her area on the Navajo Reservation and the potential new mining in her region. What was once Cold War uranium mining is now being revived as energy development.

In There Words

"Here really is a substance that could end all life on the planet, and the question should be asked have we really considered all of the implications of what this mineral has meant?"

— Tom Zoellner, author of *Uranium: War, Energy, and the Rock that Reshaped the World*



Producer's Notes



Sophie Rousmaniere

I began my work on the topic of energy in Navajoland in 2007 while working on a film about the fight over the Desert Rock power plant. I went to a public hearing and became passionate about the issue of energy exploitation on Navajo land

—this concept of “the paradox of plenty” or the “resource curse” when regions with abundant natural resources are often poor in money had struck me as very bazaar.

Later I read Michael Eichsteadt’s book, *If You Poison Us*, which covers the Navajo uranium legacy, and I decided that the Navajo uranium story was the film I really wanted to make. There were so many compelling elements—the secret government “Nyosh” studies where the failing health of uranium miners was kept secret.

There was the flood of mining applications to re-open old uranium mines that have poisoned wells and aquifers for thousands of miles. There was a rich culture that had survived thousands of years, ending up a third world country in the middle of one of the world’s superpowers. And, it was a current issue.

I thought it might be a Ken Burn’s style documentary with still archival images and interviews with aging miners, but instead decided it needed a character to take an audience through the incredible amount of information—Navajo culture, cold war history, nuclear science, and political redress. I searched for the right character to tell this story and was introduced to Tina Garnanez (Diné) in 2008. We received a New Mexico New Visions film grant shortly after and seven years later, we are pleased to present *Yellow Fever*.

By the Numbers

1. The Navajo Nation extends **over nearly 30,000 square miles** with lands in Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. It is the largest Indian reservation in the U.S. An **estimated 3 billion tons of uranium ore** lay beneath the Navajo Nation. Over 173,000 Navajos live on the reservation.
2. The Navajo Nation, known as “Diné Bikéyah” in Navajo, is **larger than 10 of the 50 states** in the United States.
3. With **5,000 energy providers, 124 million residential customers, 17 million commercial customers**, and **\$300 billion in annual earnings**, the energy industry is one of the largest industries in the United States.
4. Uranium mining began on the Navajo Nation in the **1950s** to support the nuclear arms race of the Cold War. The energy industry dug more than **2,000 uranium mines** and built four uranium-processing mills.
5. In **1979, 98 million gallons of nuclear waste** spilled into the Puerco River, making it the largest nuclear disaster in U.S. history, bigger than the **Three Mile Island accident**.
6. **Uranium 238**, the main source fuel in power plants has a **half-life of 4.47 billion years**.
7. A figure released by New Energy Economy shows that converting only **2.5 percent** of the Southwest’s available solar radiation into electricity would match the total energy consumption for **2006** in the U.S.
8. Engineers and environmentalists quietly consider the lands containing and surrounding The Navajo Nation as an ‘Energy Sacrifice Zone’—a region highly impacted by pollution from the **16 power plants and 35,000 natural gas and oil wells** there. Much of the power is used in Phoenix and Los Angeles.



Showing a strong sense of patriotism and love for our country, four flags fly high at the Shiprock Navajo Nation parade. Photo by Jay Minton.



Marching to help bring remembrance and awareness to a massive radioactive water spill, the original event occurring near Churchrock, New Mexico, in 1979. Photo by Jay Minton.

Reflect & Relate

1. Tina says her people are caught between two worlds. Explore and discuss what she means by this in terms of the Navajo Nation's economics, lifestyle, cultural ways, language, etc. What do you feel are the difficulties in preserving a traditional Navajo way-of-life and still living in a modern age?
2. Tina is a veteran and suffered Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from her time in Kosovo and Iraq. She says that photography has become a form of therapy for her PTSD. Individually or as a group, explore how photography could help her heal from her inner wounds. What other kinds of creative activities do you use to handle stress and depression? Do you think nature plays a part in this?
3. Throughout the film, Tina honors her Grandma Daisy and the other elders with great respect for all they have given her. It is the loss of her male relatives that sends her on a quest to know more about the uranium mines. What role do elders play in your life? How do you think our society has changed in its treatment of elders?
4. Tina explores the pressing issue of our nation's need for energy—and our equally if not more powerful need to take care of earth's resources. These two powerful needs seem to be in conflict. Discuss and explore what you think our role is in resolving this conflict. What can we do as individuals? Collectively?
5. Jim Conca says that we need to use every energy source we have to be able to produce enough electricity for the coming decades. Some say if we do not develop nuclear power, global warming will increase exponentially. In order to prevent global warming, should nuclear energy be developed?
6. As you followed Tina through the film and saw the high price her people have and are paying to provide the rest of the United States with energy, do you feel the U.S. government has done enough to both correct what went wrong and to prevent it from happening again?

Ideas for Action

1. Nuclear power doesn't produce greenhouse gases. Despite the fact that nuclear waste sticks around for millennia, is nuclear a "green" source of energy? Either as a class or individually examine the pros and cons of coal vs. nuclear power. Should average citizens be concerned with the source of their energy? Is it everyone's responsibility to care?
2. During the film Gilbert Badoni talks about the miners bringing water up from the mine and putting it in baby formula. This story illustrates how lack of knowledge can lead to health disasters. Using the resources listed below identify the specific known effects of exposure to uranium on the miners and their families. Then choose one location where there has been a nuclear incident and explore the effects on the water and the environment.
3. In the discussion question above we explored the conflict between our need for energy and our need to protect our natural resources. Either individually or as a group, identify at least 20 actions each individual could do to reduce his or her use of energy resources. Then initiate a group project to have each student or individual monitor their own use for a specified period of time. Encourage students to involve their families in the project.
4. The Navajo culture is rich in its traditional and cultural ways. As a class or a group, do research into the language and culture of the Diné people and create a collage of all that it contains. Feel free to use words, images, etc. or have the class create it as a slideshow.
5. The Navajo people are asking for help in resolving the many problems that have arisen from the energy industry on their lands. Initiate a class or group project to help our "neighbors to the south" by seeing how to support their efforts.
6. In your community or school, host a screening of *Yellow Fever* with a discussion forum after. Focus part of the discussion on possible environmental threats to your own area. End with a brainstorming session on how we can all reduce our energy use—small steps toward a safer and cleaner world.



A young Jameson Garnanez, Tina's nephew, with a lamb. Photo by Sophie Rousmaniere.

Sample Letter to Your State Senator or Congress Person



The members of NNDUWC stand together on the capitol steps in Washington, D.C. Photo by Jay Minton.

Use the following template to write to your Congress person

There is a list of all Senator's postal addresses at:

http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Additional Congress people's addresses can be found here:

<http://www.contactingthecongress.org>

The letter below is provided to show a sample format for addressing your State Senator or Congress Person. We encourage you to personalize your letter to address your concerns or issues regarding legislation. The left-hand column is a guide for the format. Feel free to make the letter unique to your needs.

| | |
|---|--|
| Return Address | Your Name Address City, State, Zip Code |
| Date | Date |
| Congress Person's Address | The Honorable [Insert Congress Person's or State Senator's Name] Address City, State, Zip Code |
| Salutation | Dear [Insert Congress Person's or State Senator's Name], |
| Introduce yourself: your name, address and school to identify that you are a constituent | My name is [Insert Your Name] and I reside at [Insert Your Address] in [City]. I am writing to [encourage your support/ask that you vote against passage] of [Insert Specific Bill]. This piece of legislation will [Summarize Bill]. |
| Why are you writing your Congress Person? | I appreciate your help and ask that you please send me a response letting me know if you are able to help [pass/stop] this Bill that would make such a huge difference in the lives of those affected by [Restate the Issue the Bill Addresses]. |
| Ask for a response. | |
| Thank your Congress Person for their time | Thank you for your time and considering my request. Sincerely, |
| Close with your name | [Insert Your Name] |

Resources

Internet Resources

- www.yellowfeverfilm.com
- Southwest Research and Information Center
www.sric.org
- Uranium Wise
www.wise-uranium.org
- Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment
www.masecoalition.org
- Protest Barrick Gold Mine
www.protestbarrick.net
- www.nukefree.org/node/101

Further Resources

- Frosch, Dan. *Uranium Contamination Haunts Navajo Country*. The New York Times. 7-26-09.
- Helms, Kathy. "Congressional committee outraged over Navajo uranium legacy." Gallup Independent. 2010.
- Little, Amanda. *Power Trip: The Story of America's Love Affair with Energy*.
- Eichsteadt, Michael. *If You Poison Us: Uranium and Native*.
- Pasternack, Judy. *Yellow Dirt*.
- Conca, James and Wright, Judith. *The GeoPolitics of Energy: Achieving a Just and Sustainable Energy Distribution by 2040*.



A young Apache Crow Dancer performs during the Shiprock Navajo Nation Fair. Photo by Jay Minton.

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Yellow Fever is produced by Issue Television and is a presentation of Vision Maker Media with major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

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*.

Funding for this Viewer Discussion Guide was provided by Vision Maker Media. Vision Maker Media supports Native stories for Public Broadcasting. For more information, please visit www.visionmakermedia.org.

Educational resources for this film are available at www.visionmakermedia.org/education/yellow_fever.

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