



A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY KATHERINE CECIL

DURATION: 58:46





C O N T A C T

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S H O R T L O G L I N E

A Conservative Black mayor is challenged by a White Liberal and the stakes could not be higher.
RACE in New Orleans – it's complicated.

M E D I U M L O G L I N E

Can one recent local election in Louisiana tell us anything about the state of race relations in twenty-first century America?
RACE is a story of high ground and low roads in post-Katrina New Orleans politics.

L O N G L O G L I N E

Set against the backdrop of a devastated city, a largely displaced citizenry, and an increasingly divided community, *RACE* charts the unlikely 2006 re-election of New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin by a completely different electorate than had first put him in office.

SHORT SYNOPSIS (1 7 2 W O R D S)

RACE is a cautionary tale about how not to go about rebuilding a city post-disaster, and challenges the mythology of post-racialism in the age of President Obama.

Funded by white conservatives and unpopular within most of the New Orleans African-American community, Mayor Nagin was first elected with 86% of the white and 38% of the African-American vote. Many thought he would cruise to re-election; but then Katrina hit.

After the levee failures, New Orleans was thought to have lost its African-American majority, Nagin's base abandoned him, and an unprecedented number of challengers emerged. The front-runner was Mitch Landrieu – son of a civil rights pioneer and the city's last white mayor. With the displacement of so many citizens, Nagin faced the fight of his political life.

But against all expectations, Nagin won re-election with 83% of the African-American vote and 21% of the white vote, a near reversal from 2002. This election constituted a post-Katrina civil rights protest, and *RACE* tracks what happened during a pivotal moment for a city in crisis.

MEDIUM SYNOPSIS (2 8 9 W O R D S)

RACE is a cautionary tale about how not to go about rebuilding a city post-disaster, and challenges the mythology of post-racialism in the age of President Obama. Against the backdrop of a devastated city, a largely displaced citizenry, and an increasingly divided community, this documentary film charts the unlikely 2006 re-election of New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin by a completely different electorate than had first put him in office.

Funded by white conservatives, Nagin first ran in 2002 as the business candidate. Largely unpopular within most of the New Orleans African-American community, Nagin was elected to office with 86% of the white vote and 38% of the African-American vote, and had been expected to cruise to re-election. But then Katrina hit.

Following the destruction wrought by the failure of the federal levees and the forced exodus from the city, it became apparent that New Orleans might have lost its African-American majority for the first time in 30 years.

Nagin was abandoned by his white base, and an unprecedented number of candidates emerged to challenge him, many of whom were white. Emerging as the frontrunner was Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu, the son of a civil rights pioneer and the last white mayor of New Orleans. With the displacement of so many voters, Nagin faced the fight of his political life.

But on May 22, 2006 and against all expectations, Nagin won re-election with 83% of the African-American vote and 21% of the white vote, a near reversal of his base. This local election captured national attention and came to constitute a post-Katrina civil rights protest, but one in which many participants had mixed feelings. *RACE* tracks what happened and why during a pivotal political moment for a city in crisis.

LONG SYNOPSIS (1,045 WORDS)

RACE is a cautionary tale about how not to go about rebuilding a city post-disaster, and challenges the mythology of post-racialism in the age of President Obama. Against the backdrop of a largely displaced citizenry, a devastated landscape, and an increasingly divided community, this documentary film charts the unlikely 2006 re-election of incumbent New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin from a completely different electorate than had first put him in office in 2002.

Funded by white conservatives, Nagin first ran as the business candidate. Unpopular with many New Orleans African-Americans, Nagin was elected to office with 86% of the white vote and 38% of the African-American vote, and had been expected to cruise to re-election. But then Katrina hit. Following the destruction wrought by the failure of the federal levees and the forced exodus from the city, New Orleans seemed to have lost its African-American majority for the first time in 30 years.

Post-Katrina land-use plans and exclusionary rebuilding rhetoric exacerbated a climate of distrust, and widespread talk of a “new” New Orleans witnessed the increased polarization of New Orleans communities, and sparked fears that not everyone was welcome back home.

Nagin had appointed the recovery body, the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC) while he was still beholden to his original political base, and the BNOBC’s infamous “green space” map, which advocated for a reduction in the city’s most devastated neighborhoods, the majority of which were African-American, had a profound effect upon a nervous and exiled community struggling to return and take part in rebuilding efforts. Supported by many returned white voters, this map and what it symbolized quickly came to be understood in racial terms.

Nagin’s subsequent equivocation concerning the findings of his own commission reflected the uncertainty of his re-election bid, and his ultimate rejection of his own commission’s findings was pivotal to the course of the election. Nagin’s loss of financial support from members of the majority white business council forced him and his campaign strategists to look elsewhere, and they began to make conscious race-related appeals to African-American voters. *RACE* explores other controversial moments such as the “Chocolate City” speech, in which Nagin called for New Orleans to return to its pre-storm position as a majority black city, and this documentary places such rhetoric within the context of the social and political climate of the time.

The difficulties of holding this election were unprecedented; voting machines were flooded, poll commissioners were in exile, and almost two-thirds of the population remained displaced. As the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was up for renewal on the national stage, for many watching, the ability of displaced New Orleanians to participate fully in this local election became an increasingly pressing concern.

New Orleans was in the national spotlight and this post-disaster period was seen as an opportunity to reshape the landscape of New Orleans socially, economically, politically and, in the view of some, “demographically” as well. Many of the white conservative power-brokers began to shift their allegiance from the African-American candidates they had previously endorsed while the city remained majority black, and a record number of challengers entered the field, many of whom were white. Nagin’s white base abandoned him for

Republican-turned-Democrat and Audubon Nature Institute CEO Ron Forman; however, even in the “new” New Orleans, a candidate couldn’t win without some populist base.

Emerging as the frontrunner was Mitch Landrieu, the son of the civil rights pioneer and the last white mayor of New Orleans, Moon Landrieu. White media outlets believed Landrieu could draw on the fame of the family name and his father’s integrationist legacy, but this legacy was now decades old and proved to be a mixed blessing; some conservative white voters saw it as too dynastic, while others thought it too liberal. To many African-American voters, this legacy was ancient history, but with the displacement of so many voters, Nagin faced the fight of his political life.

Nagin is introduced within a post-Katrina context, as an incumbent tested like no other previous mayor, and we show the crowded field of candidates jostling to unseat him from City Hall. Nagin’s white base certainly left him for a candidate they felt to be more suited to the challenges of a city in crisis, but there other related factors also led to his new-found situation. There is nothing completely black and white about New Orleans politics, and *RACE* looks at the complexities of the politics of race post-disaster. The notion that African-Americans would support the incumbent due to a perceived white power grab holds some truth, but many other dynamics and ironies were in play.

After Forman failed to make the runoff, Nagin regained some support from the white conservative voters he lost during the primaries, allegedly – and ironically – white conservatives who could not bring themselves to vote for a Landrieu due to his father’s legacy. It was Landrieu who held the more solid Democratic credentials that pundits thought could reach across racial divides, while Nagin had been the more conservative candidate funded by a white business elite, and who had been largely cast as the conservative “white” candidate.

From within the fragile climate of an increasingly racialized post-Katrina New Orleans, *RACE* explores the various factors that enabled Nagin’s re-election; specifically, Landrieu’s reluctance to address potentially polarizing issues, and his failed attempt at a campaign rhetoric that went directly through race, both of which contrasted to Nagin’s more strategic campaign approach that tapped into more traditional racial divides.

The city’s residents had seen the need for change and understood that this was the opportunity for it, but within the post-Katrina climate, eventually the status quo, in which race trumped record, proved too strong for the forces of transformation.

In 2006, against all expectations, Nagin won re-election with 83% of the African-American vote and 21% of the white vote, a near reversal of his base from 2002. This local election captured national attention and came to constitute a post-Katrina civil rights protest of sorts, but one in which many participants had mixed feelings. While examining the difficulties of the electorate moving through race following the tragic and polarizing disaster of Hurricane Katrina, this documentary tracks what happened and how, during a pivotal political moment for a city in crisis.

B I O S



KATHERINE CECIL
Director, Producer, Videographer

Katherine Cecil began her film career as a researcher and field producer. Born and raised in the United Kingdom, and living in New Orleans since 2001, she has worked on programs and news shows for PBS, Louisiana Public Broadcasting, National Geographic, Associated Press, Greek public television, and Democracy Now!, and was Field Producer and Associate Producer on the documentary *LINDY BOGGS: STEEL & VELVET*. She formed CecilFilm Productions after Hurricane Katrina. Katherine is a member of the National Press Photographers Association, the Louisiana Association of Broadcasters, and the Press Club of New Orleans, and holds degrees from City and Guilds of London Art School, University College London, Tulane University, and the University of New Orleans.



MIRANDA YOUSEF
Editor

Miranda Yousef worked for the Sundance Film Festival's programming department for several years, before moving into a career as a feature documentary editor. She has worked as an editor on several features, including Academy Award nominee Kirby Dick's *OUTRAGE* (theatrical release May 2009); 2008 Sundance Film Festival favorite *I.O.U.S.A.* (dir. Patrick Creadon, theatrical release August 2008); and 2008 IDA Audience Award winner *FOOD FIGHT* (dir. Chris Taylor). Miranda received a BA from Harvard in Comparative Literature before going to the University of California, Los Angeles for an MFA in Film Directing / Production.



BROCK STONEHAM
Assembly Editor, Associate Producer

Brock Stoneham recently returned home to Louisiana after a stint in Paris running a tour company and works as an editor for CecilFilm. Brock began his editing career in Austin, Texas, on the daily 90-minute morning broadcast for the ABC-affiliate KVUE News. In Los Angeles, he worked as apprentice editor on *ABOUT A BOY* (dir. Chris and Paul Weitz, theatrical release May 2002). He has since been involved on a number of freelance productions. Brock received his BS degree in Radio, Television, and Film from the University of Texas at Austin, specializing in the intensive production sequence.



ROYCE OSBORN
Consulting Producer

Royce Osborn has worked as a writer and producer for network and public television for over twenty years. His professional credits include *FROM TRAMPS TO KINGS* (Producer), a historical documentary currently in production about the 100th anniversary of the Zulu organization; *WALKING TO NEW ORLEANS* (Writer/Producer), a documentary about New Orleans' cultural traditions post-Katrina, and *ALL ON A MARDI GRAS DAY* (Writer/Producer), a one-hour documentary on black Mardi Gras traditions, winner of New Orleans Film Festival award, and broadcast nationally on PBS. Royce Osborn has been a member of the Writer's Guild of America since 1987.

B I O S



ALI DUFFEY
Consulting Producer

Ali Duffey has been a Producer for over twenty years, based in New Zealand, Australia & the USA, producing dozens of hours of programs, arts documentaries, travel shows and music-related productions, most destined for international markets. Since moving to New Orleans in 2001 her positions have included: Director of the New Orleans Film Society; Development Associate on *HURRICANE ON THE BAYOU*, for MacGillivray-Freeman Films, Los Angeles, and Field Producer on *NEW ORLEANS*, a two-hour PBS American Experience documentary, for Insignia Films, New York. She graduated from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, with a B.A. in English and Classical Literature.



EVAN CHRISTOPHER
Music Composer and Arranger

Evan Christopher left his native California for New Orleans in 1994, where he quickly became an important member of the local music community. He combines virtuosity, immaculate taste, and enthusiasm with a deep commitment to exploring the full range of possibilities of music anchored in the traditions of New Orleans. As a composer and clarinetist, his role as an ambassador for the New Orleans clarinet style is reflected in his appearances and recordings with New Orleans artists, including Kermit Ruffins, Irvin Mayfield's New Orleans Jazz Orchestra, and Tom McDermott. Critically acclaimed recordings featuring his original compositions include *Delta Bound*, with Dick Hyman (Arbors Records 2007) and *The Remembering Song*, with Bucky Pizzarelli (Arbors Records 2009).



JUSTIN SHIELS
Graphics and Web Design

Justin Shiels began his freelance design career in 2005. He has worked as interactive director for EC Advertising and currently is a graphic designer for the prestigious New Orleans firm Peter Mayer Advertising. Justin has worked with a variety of different clients, from New Orleans Tourism, Louisiana Tourism, Louisiana Economic Development, the Urban League of New Orleans, and the World Trade Center of New Orleans. He started his own design business, Curious Tribe, shortly after Hurricane Katrina. Justin graduated from Loyola University in New Orleans, and now calls the city home.



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“JESUS ON THE MAIN LINE (TELL HIM WHAT YOU WANT)”

Performed by Glen David Andrews &
The Treme Brass Band

ADDITIONAL MUSIC PROVIDED BY

Freeplay Music

ORIGINAL MUSIC FOR TRAILER

Carl LeBlanc

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Donaldson & Callif
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Louisiana Data News Weekly
Louisiana Weekly
The New Orleans Agenda
The New Orleans Tribune
The Times-Picayune
The Wall Street Journal
Vanderbilt Television News Archive

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THE PRODUCERS WOULD LIKE TO THANK

The Ron Forman Campaign
The Mitch Landrieu campaign
The Ray Nagin Campaign
The City of New Orleans
The returned and still displaced
people of New Orleans

INTERVIEWEES INCLUDE

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Karen Carvin Shachat
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