

Producer: Tulane University Libraries

Title: Hollow Tree: Film Screening Q&A with the Director & Three Protagonists

Description: Text transcript of video

Date Created: 7/25/23

Video URL: <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3A134923>

00:00:17:14 - 00:00:35:18

Rebecca Snedeker

Welcome to Tulane University and to the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South's screening of Hollow Tree. I'm Rebecca Snedeker, and I direct the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South, which is housed in Tulane School of Liberal Arts. We're thrilled to be here with you all for tonight's special screening and discussion with the film's director and three protagonists.

00:00:36:04 - 00:01:16:15

Rebecca Snedeker

We'll begin with a land acknowledgment by Dr. Judy Maxwell. Dr. Maxwell is a professor in the Department of Anthropology, and since 2010, she's been heading a collaborative team of Tulane students and the Tunica-Biloxi tribal members and scholars, the Tunica-Biloxi language and Culture Revitalization Program, working to revitalize the Tunica language. We're grateful to Dr. Maxwell for serving on the program committee of the Center's Tulane Gulf South Indigenous Studies Symposium for the past three iterations, and to her for launching the new Native American Studies minor within the School of Liberal Arts. Welcome, Dr. Maxwell. [Applause].

00:01:16:17 - 00:01:53:05

Judith Maxwell

[Greeting in Tunica]. Good evening, y'all. I'm Judith Maxwell. It wasn't a surprise, and I'm pleased to be here. I greeted you in Tunica. So just a small sample that the language is coming back. The last native speaker died in 1948, but we now have, according to ethnologue, we have 32 young speakers. The last count I had was 80. But you know who's counting?

00:01:53:14 - 00:02:13:08

Judith Maxwell

All right. I would like to begin this evening and thank you all for being here with the land acknowledgment and the land acknowledgment that I'm going to read to you is the official Tulane land acknowledgment. If you ever want this land acknowledgment, or one like it, it's on the Tulane landing page.

00:02:13:13 - 00:02:25:07

Judith Maxwell

You have to go all the way through everything on the page. At the very bottom, there's a link to this acknowledgement. Well, let me share this with you and let us all think about what these words mean.

00:02:26:06 - 00:03:03:01

Judith Maxwell

The Choctaw, Houma, Chitimacha, Biloxi and other Native peoples have lived on this land since time immemorial. Their identities are inextricably connected to this place. With gratitude and honor, Tulane University pays tribute to the original inhabitants of this land. The city of New Orleans was not built upon virgin soil, but merely served as a continuation of a great indigenous trade hub known in Choctaw as Bulbancha, the place of other tongues. For thousands of years, people lived along the Mississippi River and Bulbancha served as a place for diverse cultures to come together.

00:03:03:17 - 00:03:34:22

Judith Maxwell

We acknowledge the grounds of our campus and the city around us as home to numerous tribes before and after the arrival of Europeans. Their tradition of community and sharing demonstrated by indigenous peoples enabled European immigrants to survive in a foreign environment and has influenced New Orleans and the southeastern culture since colonization began. From food and music to art and language, Native Americans continue to leave their mark on our city and academic community.

00:03:35:18 - 00:04:03:09

Judith Maxwell

We recognize that as a result of broken treaties and involuntary removals, Native Americans were often forced from their lands. We remember and pay respect to the communities impacted by these actions. Yet the resilient voices of Native Americans are still heard and remain an inseparable part of our local culture. In that spirit, we acknowledge that indigenous nations that have lived and continue to live thrive here.

00:04:04:00 - 00:04:22:02

Judith Maxwell

That's the end of the official land acknowledgment. And I would just like to note that the purpose of a land acknowledgment isn't just to say some words, but to think about what they mean and to think about Indigenous people. So I'd like to share just a little bit, tiny little bit more of the Tunica language with you.

00:04:22:17 - 00:05:14:22

Judith Maxwell

So in the Tunica language, the word for an indigenous person is [Tunica]. And if you translate that, that means free person. And the [Tunica] are contrasted with the [Tunica], who are people that we would call African-Americans today, [Tunica], which is literally white people and all of these peoples are divided into different ethnic groups. So, for example, among the [Tunica], the white people we have [Tunica], which you can probably figure out is English. We have [Tunica], which you can probably figure out are the Spanish. And then there are the French who are [Tunica], the real white people.

00:05:15:00 - 00:05:48:15

Judith Maxwell

So I understand that there's nothing much that we can do about our ancestry. We are who we are. But there is something that we can do about our future. And I hope that in the spirit of the movie that you're going to see this evening and all of us who are gathered together in hope and solidarity, that we can all become [Tunica]. [Tunica greeting].

00:05:48:17 - 00:06:23:16

Rebecca Snedeker

Thank you, Dr. Maxwell. And I'll continue with some more gratitudes. I want to thank Dean Brian Edwards and the School of Liberal Arts Dean's office for their support. Our team at the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South, Dr. Denise Frazier, Regina Cairns, and Demi Ward in hosting this programing. The Liberal arts interdisciplinary programs who have co-sponsored and publicized this event Africana Studies, Environmental Studies and Native American Studies, as well as Tulane Library for documenting this evening. And finally, to everyone who helped spread the word and all of you who have joined us this evening on campus.

00:06:23:18 - 00:06:48:11

Rebecca Snedeker

The New Orleans Center for the Gulf South is an interdisciplinary place-based center that promotes the understanding of New Orleans and the Gulf South region and the region's relationship to the planet. We support research, teaching and community engagement that relate the local to the global. And all of our programing is based on the idea that the more we understand where we are, the more fully we can engage our democracy and therefore our collective destiny.

00:06:49:09 - 00:07:01:22

Rebecca Snedeker

We have a lot of upcoming events working with a new registration process. We are grateful to everyone who registered. That means you will also receive our newsletter, which you're welcome to unsubscribe from, but we hope that you might stick around on it.

00:07:02:02 - 00:07:33:18

Rebecca Snedeker

We always feature our events and things going on publications and presentations by our research fellows, and we recommend other people's events and other organization events as well as advertising select job positions and funding opportunities. We have an upcoming fellowship deadline, a research fellowship deadline that is next Monday, March 13th, and it's called the Global South Fellowship. And for some logistics for the bathrooms, if you need to go there, head out the doors in the back and take your first left and then another left.

00:07:34:11 - 00:07:52:05

Rebecca Snedeker

And at the end of the film, I want to let you know we're going to let all the credits roll. That doesn't always happen. But we want to appreciate everyone who made this film and just have a minute to continue letting it kind of sink in. And then I'll invite director Kira Akerman and the protagonists to the stage for a brief discussion and a Q&A.

00:07:52:17 - 00:08:10:07

Rebecca Snedeker

After the discussion, we welcome you to join us in Newcomb Hall, and we'll be having people help direct you there if you don't know where it is. It's on the end of the Newcomb Quad here toward the right when you exit the building. And on the first floor in the faculty lounge, we'll have refreshments and hope to continue the conversation with anyone who's able to stay.

00:08:11:09 - 00:08:24:16

Rebecca Snedeker

Please know that this intro and the Q&A after the screening will be filmed and available online. And a safety note, just please keep a pathway in the aisle for at least two people to pass. So now to the film, at last.

00:08:24:23 - 00:09:03:01

Rebecca Snedeker

The film *Hollow Tree* is winner of the 2022 New Orleans Film Festival's Best Louisiana Feature Jury Award and the Populist Audience Award. The film is a centerpiece in the growing body of work that shares narratives that tell the story of this region from the formation of our deltaic lobes and draws connections between our land, water, racialized histories and of indigenous and African descended peoples and infrastructure. The director, Kira Akerman, is the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South Fellow. She received a fellowship for *Station 15*, which is a beautiful documentary short that served as a prototype for *Hollow Tree*, her first feature film.

00:09:03:01 - 00:09:26:10

Rebecca Snedeker

And in 2019, she received a Monroe Fellowship to support production of this feature film. More recently, she's been an ongoing consultant in the center's strategic planning and has been an invaluable partner to think through the role of climate justice education in the liberal arts. She's been a guest speaker at many departments and programs at Tulane, including Architecture, Digital Media Practices, Environmental Studies and History.

00:09:26:10 - 00:09:46:10

Rebecca Snedeker

And for those of you who are faculty here, I would love to talk to you about the use of the film in your classes. She also just had an exhibit at the Small Center. And I want to mention, speaking of the Small Center, which is in Central City, some of you may know is a part of the School of Architecture. There's an exhibit there called *Extractivism* that relates deeply to this film that I recommend.

00:09:47:06 - 00:10:13:15

Rebecca Snedeker

We're excited to have many of the film crew members with us tonight, and also its stars. So in addition to Kira, I want to welcome the film's protagonists, Kenzie Fanguy, Tanielma DaCosta and Annabelle Pavy. We also have producer Chachi Hauser here, executive producer Jolene Pinder who's also professor at Tulane and cinematographer Maxime Kathari.

00:10:13:17 - 00:10:34:21

Rebecca Snedeker

Welcome you all. And we want to also acknowledge Tulane professors and instructors who played a role in the film. Jelagat Cheruiyot, who's an evolutionary biologist in the School of Science and Engineering, and Aron Chang, who's a former instructor in the School of Architecture, as well as former Tulane professor and environmental historian Andy Horowitz, who's now at Yale and UConn.

00:10:35:21 - 00:10:39:09

Rebecca Snedeker

And with that, we're now going to roll the film, and we'll see you after.

00:10:43:16 - 00:11:31:15

Rebecca Snedeker

What I'd love to do is invite everyone -- sorry, I just did that because I'm so moved by the film. I get just kind of like somatically overwhelmed. It's really beautiful. Y'all have made such a beautiful film. So I want to invite everyone who's here who contributed to making this film. Kira and the three protagonists who you've met through the film, and also the producer and cinematographer who are here and anyone else who's contributed to the film. Whether you gave feedback out of focus group or showed the film in a class or gave money during fundraising in any way, just please stand up for a minute. [Applause].

00:11:31:16 - 00:12:05:23

Rebecca Snedeker

Thank you. All right. So I'm going to start with some questions. So this is Kira, who you haven't seen on camera yet. Kira Akerman the director and Annabelle, Mekenzie and Tanielma. And I just want to start with asking the protagonists if you can bring us into a moment during the filmmaking in the film production, where you learned something from from a place where you were that was previously unfamiliar and just what was it like being part of this filmmaking and learning from different people in different places?

00:12:06:09 - 00:12:18:20

Rebecca Snedeker

And do y'all have a mic up here? Okay, great. And we can pass these to...

00:12:18:22 - 00:12:59:01

Annabelle Pavy

Hello. Okay. I think of the many moments that I could talk endlessly about. One of them that stood out to me was whenever I was out at the Atchafalaya River Basin with Annie and Roy, that's the couple who was talking about the tree that was chopped down, the cypress tree. And what I observed during my time with them was the happiness that can come with living so close to nature and the home that I grew up in was just surrounded by streets.

00:12:59:07 - 00:13:32:09

Annabelle Pavy

I didn't have a lot of like field time, I guess you could say. And I think that whether you recognize it or not within yourself, every human has this part of themselves that's so drawn to nature because we are from nature. And I really -- even from observing the film, like time and time again, I observe even more how much they influenced me.

00:13:39:06 - 00:14:12:08

Mekenzie Fanguy

Every time I see the boat scenes, mainly the one shrimping with my grandpa that is very dear because, you know, after we filmed that and then like we all went home and started talking about it, like everything looked very different to him. So the land slowly, well, eroding very quickly. As for him just taking a couple of years away from it and him going back and really not recognizing certain places, it was, you know, kind of like it made me kind of like sad for him.

00:14:12:08 - 00:14:36:03

Mekenzie Fanguy

Like, wow, like you've only been away for a couple, you know, years and you going back and you don't even, like, recognize it yourself. You know, when I talk about a childhood fishing spot and I hold that so dearly because that's, you know, like where we started from and I can go there today and it look completely different. And I mean, I still have the memories. It's just like to like, physically see it. It, you know, it kind of hurts. So.

00:14:37:03 - 00:14:49:17

Tanielma DaCosta

Yeah, I think for myself, just thinking about speaking with Eve being in Freetown and Cancer Alley and just -- Oh, you can't... Oh, do I need to move it closer? Is that better?

00:14:49:17 - 00:15:37:14

Tanielma DaCosta

Okay. I was just saying that being speaking with Eve in Cancer Alley and being in Freetown and just learning about how, you know, when you have this instance where your own experiences are evidence and for that to not be taken seriously or not to be like, credible or... that was definitely very powerful for me to know that, you know, we're in spaces and systems that, you know, are... we are, our experience can be devalued, but that that shouldn't keep us from holding onto them and knowing that they're valid and that that is a source of experience.

00:15:37:14 - 00:15:57:10

Tanielma DaCosta

That is a source of credibility just as any expert or anything like that. That evidence is important. And yeah, it also takes me back to being in the Army Corps of Engineers and being like, I know what I know. I know what I see. I know what I've heard. I see this. And for, for you tell me that that's not true. That's kind of crazy.

00:16:02:03 - 00:16:11:19

Rebecca Snedeker

What did y'all learn from each other? What are some moments where you realize - I mean, some of them that are so beautiful are in the film - but are there other ones that come to mind to me?

00:16:15:05 - 00:17:05:17

Mekenzie Fanguy

I've said this in a previous Q&A, but I honestly mean this. Working with Annabelle not working with y'all... Learning and gaining a friendship with Annabelle and Tanielma has honestly given me a sense of, I don't know, like I feel more comfortable being my true self. They have given me the outmost support and guidance throughout this whole journey that we've been on. So I take away from them as just believing in myself more and I cannot thank y'all enough for that.

00:17:05:19 - 00:17:56:22

Annabelle Pavy

I think what I learned is that the kind of the act of participating in environmental activism requires community. Community often results in friendship and being able to observe the different ways that each of us absorbs information and the different outlooks we had on it are further evidence for the necessity to learn together. And I think that's another great reason to, like, share the movie even more, because now all of you have a different outlook on it and you are a part of the family now of learning with us.

00:17:59:03 - 00:18:31:00

Tanielma DaCosta

Yeah, I'll just piggyback on that. Community has been so important because I mean, everything that we learned was so heavy. Like I think about just being, you know, at the plantation after Robin. And I love the fact that we were there talking about that together and kind of, you know, collecting everything. And it's so important because, you know, facing climate change is not something that anyone can do on their own.

00:18:31:07 - 00:18:50:16

Tanielma DaCosta

So I'm so grateful I did have you guys because it is so heavy. But when we think about how all of us care about it, all of us can come together for it. It definitely strengthens us. So I hope you guys can see our friendship and as well, and feel that as well.

00:18:55:13 - 00:19:16:10

Rebecca Snedeker

One thing that -- there's so many things that again moved me about the film. It's something that I want everyone to see, particularly in southern Louisiana, but there's so many ways that it relates to elsewhere in the world. And when I think of you, Kira, as a friend and colleague being here, I'd just love to hear your perspective on what inspired you to make the film.

00:19:17:03 - 00:19:47:17

Rebecca Snedeker

I think one of the wild things, ways that has been a gift in my life, in addition to the long timeline that it sets up for us to learn about and be able to understand our surroundings more is just the role of infrastructure in our lives and engineering and just seeing you all hang out on this oil rig and come to know one another in that setting is really profound to me because so many of those things that our lives depend on in a variety of ways and that impact us so deeply are hidden and not visible.

00:19:48:03 - 00:20:16:10

Rebecca Snedeker

So if you could just share some about some of the choices you made in coming to making the film. And just I want to say how much I admired the... how you and your team like laid out just the exposition of the film and the complexity of the connections that you're making over time throughout the film and how beautiful that is. And I know how challenging that is to to describe and really clearly educate us in what is happening around us.

00:20:17:03 - 00:21:01:01

Kira Akerman

Yeah, it's very, very hard [laughter]. Every issue in this state is connected to myriad other issues. You can't talk about one without there being so many other problems. So I before this film, I made a short film that's 15 minutes long and it's about a young person exploring the pump station system in Louisiana or New Orleans, rather. And as she learns about this underground system, she comes to connect it to herself and her own identity and the ways that she feels oppressed like water.

00:21:01:12 - 00:21:51:08

Kira Akerman

And it was such a powerful experience to learn alongside this young person in the short 15 minute film that I wanted to expand it into a longer film about a larger drainage basin. So moving from the pump station system in New Orleans to the Mississippi River basin, with not one but three young people who lived in different geographies in this place. And seeing if together we could figure out how the river shaped us and how our infrastructure shapes us, particularly as women here. Yeah.

00:21:51:08 - 00:22:22:02

Rebecca Snedeker

This'll be my last question then I'll open it up. But I could ask things all night. But one of the things that is so beautiful in the film is the sound and all the sounds in the film - the sound design, the location recording, your voices, your singing. We're doing a project through the Center for the Gulf South where Dr. Frazier and I have been hosting and organizing a series called Anthroposonic, and considering the intersections of music, sound studies, and climate change and racial and social justice.

00:22:22:11 - 00:23:01:06

Rebecca Snedeker

And we've invited a different artist every semester for the past year and a half to collaborate with us and present work at that intersection. And we just took a group of mostly students and some members of the public out to Lily Bayou near Lake Maurepas, and an artist, Demi Ward, who also works with us recorded sounds in the landscape and is going to make a composition. But just having this focus on sound and moving through that experience really changed the day for me. Like we were... when we set out, we went under the interstate in our kayaks and I felt the vibration of that infrastructure and the sound of the traffic.

00:23:01:06 - 00:23:18:08

Rebecca Snedeker

And then as we moved further into the bayou, there were more animal sounds, or we could hear them more. They weren't masked. Anyhow, I just wanted to bring that question to y'all this evening and just think about just the way that you all listened to one another and listened to the people who are sharing information is really beautiful to me.

00:23:18:08 - 00:23:41:20

Rebecca Snedeker

And we've been able to -- we're here listening to y'all. Can you just speak of any sound that comes to mind when I ask that from the landscape or from the film and elaborate if you want or not. But I would just love to hear

what you think. And then Kira also at some point to hear about your process in designing the soundscape. Sound is something that so often overlooked gets overlooked in film but is essential.

00:23:42:00 - 00:23:55:20

Rebecca Snedeker

And I'm grateful that my first lesson in filmmaking was, If it sounds good, it looks good because it's so hard to tolerate sound that we can't hear if we want to understand what's happening. So I'll pitch that to y'all now.

00:23:55:22 - 00:24:33:05

Tanielma DaCosta

Well I think about being at the old river control structure. You can hear the Mississippi River rushing very, very well. And it's just this contradiction of knowing how powerful and how like how much force it has. Yet it's like being controlled. And that was definitely -- like being able to hear it kind of makes it more alive, knowing that this body of water is -- well not body of water, but this force is flowing and it's sad that it's being controlled just like how it's alive, just like us.

00:24:40:16 - 00:25:08:10

Annabelle Pavy

I think throughout the film there were like, varying pitches of like the grumbling of flowing water and it kind of... it makes you think about like, I don't know, this grumbling. I personify a lot of nature, like the ending little song that I sang, I was like, personifying a tree.

00:25:10:18 - 00:25:10:22

Mekenzie Fanguy

[Inaudible].

00:25:10:22 - 00:25:15:14

Annabelle Pavy

No, no, no singing. [Laughter].

00:25:15:16 - 00:25:46:02

Annabelle Pavy

And I, I think especially today, whenever I was listening to, like, the grumbling at the Old River control structure, it kind of feels like the grumbling of Mother Nature. And like, even whenever things seem like they're going

okay, there's always an underlying passing of water that is influencing our structures and ecosystems, whether we're regarding it or not, actively.

00:25:51:13 - 00:26:15:08

Mckenzie Fanguy

I too will talk about the water. [Laughter]. So the sound of the water crashing against a boat, it's, you know, it could be scary if it's like, you know, strong and forceful, but also take into account this slow just cruising waves and just smashing. Any time I've ever been on a boat and I hear that I can go straight to sleep.

00:26:15:23 - 00:26:40:21

Mckenzie Fanguy

It's peaceful to me. But not only that. I was asked a question the other day and they asked me, Are you scared to lose your home? And I'm like -- or like, are you scared knowing, like, knowing something is coming? And I'm like, You can wake up and be scared every day, but if you live with that, then you will never experience, you know, life as it is.

00:26:41:03 - 00:27:08:09

Mckenzie Fanguy

Life is beautiful. You can't take, you can't live with having fear that something's going to happen. It's like you said about being scared. You can't do that because then you miss out on the opportunities that are right in front of you. But you're too worried about being scared. So y'all water forceful mind slow bringing back memories of just taking a good nap on a boat. [Laughter].

00:27:08:11 - 00:27:14:04

Kira Akerman

I don't think I can say anything better than that. [Laughter].

00:27:14:06 - 00:27:37:02

Kira Akerman

All the water sounds are intentional. Intentional water sound design. So when you hear -- when you see the levees, you're hearing constrained, restrained water. And when you're in more organic, natural places, you're hearing more free flowing water. And it's working on a very subtle level throughout the film.

00:27:40:01 - 00:27:43:15

Rebecca Snedeker

And a shout out to your beautiful composer, Free Feral.

00:27:43:20 - 00:27:44:20

Kira Akerman

Free is amazing.

00:27:45:17 - 00:27:47:12

Rebecca Snedeker

And who did the sound design?

00:27:48:01 - 00:27:52:04

Kira Akerman

Arjun Sheth. He's also totally amazing. Yeah.

00:27:53:06 - 00:28:04:20

Rebecca Snedeker

So let's open it up to the audience. And I'm curious, I would like to foreground any student voices if there are any students who have questions. We want to kick it to y'all first. Yes.

00:28:04:21 - 00:28:41:08

Audience Member 1

First, thanks to y'all for being vulnerable and doing this work, it really is extremely meaningful. I'm from Houma as well about ten years older than you guys, and I spent my entire life basically trying to articulate what you guys did really so, so thoroughly and so movingly. I guess my question is, do you know from this experience like the moment that things clicked to you, like I grew up in Houma going to public school where I learned all these factors but never the synthesis of how it all worked together in a system.

00:28:41:10 - 00:28:53:20

Audience Member 1

So now, having had this kind of an experience, do you think that it's changed what you're going to do with your life or how you communicate about where you're from?

00:28:53:22 - 00:28:56:04

Audience Member 1

[Inaudible].

00:28:59:00 - 00:29:19:12

Mckenzie Fanguy

Yeah. So as soon as you said I immediately thought about being at that little restaurant and watching that video clip of the land just slowly disappearing. That was the first time I've ever seen it like on a screen. I mean, like I said, I've had teachers tell me Houma would be underwater. I knew that, you know, we lose a football field every hour.

00:29:19:18 - 00:29:49:17

Mckenzie Fanguy

And when you hear that, you're like, okay, but actually, like actually seeing it is like, wow. So for me that, you know, and then like I said, you know, I can go back to old spots and I'm like, wow, this is -- I see it on the screen, but now I can also see it visibly. Yeah, it makes me, you know, like, what can we do, you know, to preserve the little land that we have left before it is nothing but water? And then we also have no land for our homes.

00:29:49:23 - 00:30:13:09

Mckenzie Fanguy

You know, it makes everyone relocate. And I'm a big Houma person. Like, you know, I have family who no longer live in Houma and they come down as their vacation Houma And I'm like, You coming to Houma for vacation? I miss being home. I missed the bayou. I miss just being here and that's it. I mean, that's what it's about. Coming back home and being in the scenery that you've seen all your life.

00:30:18:03 - 00:30:18:15

Rebecca Snedeker

Who else?

00:30:18:15 - 00:30:19:06

Tanielma DaCosta

So.

00:30:19:08 - 00:30:21:05

Rebecca Snedeker

Oh.

00:30:21:07 - 00:30:48:03

Tanielma DaCosta

Oh, sorry. I was just going to say like, it's 1897, just knowing that, you know, some things are actually very -- I mean, we learn about, you know, Okay, we need to fix the, all the problems with the environment and there's all these little factors. But we -- I don't think I really ever, it ever clicked until that moment that everything was deliberately like everything were choices made over decades.

00:30:48:11 - 00:31:02:02

Tanielma DaCosta

That was really key for me because it's like, Oh, you need to save water and you need to recycle. But it's like, why? [Laughter].

00:31:02:04 - 00:31:42:16

Annabelle Pavy

I think the moment that things started clicking for me was when I visited the Whitney Plantation, because it kind of showed me like how much of history has promoted the restriction of our, of our natural ecosystems as well as our fellow individuals accompanied with learning about Cancer Alley and how the effects are still present today. And so seeing like a broader picture kind of allowed everything else to fall into place.

00:31:49:03 - 00:31:50:07

Rebecca Snedeker

Other questions.

00:31:53:12 - 00:31:54:02

Rebecca Snedeker

Yes.

00:31:55:12 - 00:31:56:07

Rebecca Snedeker

Hello, Professor.

00:31:58:05 - 00:32:08:13

Audience Member 2

Thank you for being so vulnerable, so brave. This is a question for Kira. How did you find them?

00:32:08:15 - 00:32:35:23

Kira Akerman

Well, Lauren Cargo, who's sitting over there, and Chachi and I spent a very long time driving sometimes together, sometimes separately around the state, interviewing young people and asking them what they noticed in their changing environments. And at the same time, we were sending emails to friends and I knew I wanted to work with three young people in different geographical locations.

00:32:37:11 - 00:33:06:09

Kira Akerman

And so I was emailing friends, saying like, Do you know any young person who is curious and cool and, you know, might want to oddly be on camera for an extended period of time and I got a bunch of emails back and it was those emails from friends ultimately that led me to these three, and it was multiple people in their communities who are like Annabelle, Tanielma, Mekenzie.

00:33:06:13 - 00:33:36:20

Kira Akerman

And then they all asked really beautiful questions about why, why their community was flooding so much or why they weren't being taught about these issues in school, or why was nobody talking about the land sinking? And I had really compelling conversations with each of them. And that was it.

00:33:36:22 - 00:33:38:23

Rebecca Snedeker

Other questions. Yes.

00:33:39:13 - 00:34:04:04

Audience Member 3

Again, just amazing. I'm a seventh grade teacher and I so want to show this to my class. I'm very excited. First thing that popped in my head when you all were at the Army Corps of Engineers, you were talking to the front lady of the desk and then a public affairs guy. Were scientists not available or engineers to talk to when you were there?

00:34:04:06 - 00:34:07:10

Kira Akerman

The woman actually who we were talking to is an engineer.

00:34:07:13 - 00:34:10:00

Audience Member 3

Oh. Very interesting.

00:34:12:00 - 00:34:21:20

Audience Member 3

Yes, she was I think following Army Corps protocol and, as you saw, regurgitating what she was supposed to say. Yeah.

00:34:22:03 - 00:34:25:12

Audience Member 3

[Inaudible].

00:34:25:14 - 00:34:32:14

Kira Akerman

We didn't -- we weren't intending to set her up either. That just had, that organically occurred.

00:34:32:16 - 00:34:38:23

Rebecca Snedeker

Yes. Grace.

00:34:39:01 - 00:34:57:19

Annabelle Pavy

Yeah, thanks so much y'all. Y'all are very inspiring and this was really beautiful to watch. I just was curious what y'all are up to now and what you're curious about whether it's around kind of environment stuff or whether it's just like what're you doing.

00:34:57:21 - 00:35:41:19

Annabelle Pavy

Yeah. So right now I am a senior in graphic design at LSU. And like, it's remarkable how much this project has influenced the things that I'm creating. So right now I'm doing my final thesis project and it's really central around bringing people back into Louisiana because I started my research recognizing like cultural trauma that has existed in Cajun communities and it was such a hard and difficult topic to just express to a community.

00:35:41:19 - 00:36:19:12

Annabelle Pavy

And so I, I developed this kind of call to action to invite people back to this beautifully blooming community in the South and... Cajun community. Yeah, Lafayette, New Orleans, everywhere in the south, Southern Louisiana in particular. But it was heavily influenced by the knowledge and appreciation that I have for my community that I learned through this, through this film.

00:36:26:07 - 00:36:44:22

Mekenzie Fanguy

I'm currently still in Houma. I'm working. Lately what I've been doing, and I'm very proud of this. You know, so I've been taking off work to come to screenings and they're like, What are you doing? I'm like, Watch my trailer. This is my trailer. And they're like, It's only a minute. I'm like, Yeah, you got to come. You got to come with me one day and watch it. They're like, okay.

00:36:45:01 - 00:36:58:04

Mekenzie Fanguy

So my thing is, whatever I'm just -- I don't know what we're doing next, but we're going to do something next. But my thing is spreading what we already experienced to people around me. So that's what I'm doing.

00:36:58:21 - 00:37:43:00

Tanielma DaCosta

Okay. I'm studying computer engineering and I want to go into research on how to build tech more sustainably using materials in a better way and increasing access to technology. That's what I really want to do. So I'm doing computer engineering and some international studies with the concentration in environment and development. So, I mean, I've wanted to be a computer engineer since I was pretty young, but the film definitely allowed me to create a space where I can think about our community and still be myself and bring my experiences into my field.

00:37:48:15 - 00:37:49:04

Rebecca Snedeker

Yes.

00:37:49:18 - 00:38:08:05

Audience Member 5

Oh, how so at all did it change the way that you feel about where you're from [inaudible] growing up in different places, but like how this shared common river and experiences [inaudible]?

00:38:08:07 - 00:38:43:15

Tanielma DaCosta

Oh okay. Being from Baton Rouge and you know, seeing the oil refineries, it made me think about how Louisiana has a toxic relationship with oil. And it's kind of like, you know, we need to value ourselves. We need to value the culture we have that it's priceless. Yeah, that made me think about how, you know, even though we have this strong tie to oil, it's not benefiting us. So yeah, time to change things.

00:38:43:15 - 00:39:12:01

Mekenzie Fanguy

So I would say to enjoy where you live and appreciate it because you never know what can happen, but also to come together as a community and try to see what you can do. Where as a whole, rather than have one person try to do it all by themselves because that's not going to happen. So staying together as a community and still enjoying where you live and loving where you live.

00:39:15:14 - 00:40:02:03

Annabelle Pavy

Honestly, like loving where you live, that's like the whole motivation behind preserving Louisiana environment. It's like, that's the drive. That wasn't my initial answer, but it's just like, I love where I live. I want to preserve it. I want everybody to come here and and celebrate with us. But I think what I understand about my community, I guess, in Lafayette, is I address it with a critical eye, but also a patient eye. Like understanding the truths about enslaved people in our history, but also understanding you can't change history. You can change the future, hopefully for the better.

00:40:07:13 - 00:40:09:07

Rebecca Snedeker

Yes.

00:40:09:08 - 00:40:27:21

Audience Member 6

I have a question related to all the screenings. Do the reactions differ in terms of the age of the audience, you know? Like do older people respond differently to the movie than your peers? Or were generally the reactions to it [inaudible]?

00:40:30:17 - 00:40:46:01

Mekenzie Fanguy

I'm trying to think. I mean, I think it's kind of similar. Y'all just say it in different ways if that makes -- because we always get Army Corps of Engineers questions and then yeah, it's pretty much.

00:40:46:10 - 00:41:13:06

Tanielma DaCosta

Yeah, I think there's a really good response. Everyone is blown away in one way or another. And I think that, you know, even though we're young and we're bringing that perspective, I still think that it is able to reach everyone. I think they can still find themselves. Everyone can feel tied to our narrative to some degree. Yeah.

00:41:13:08 - 00:41:43:00

Annabelle Pavy

Yeah, I think across all screenings we've been met with this kind of reciprocation which before, before we premiered, it was like a kind of a build up of nervousness, like how, how are people going to see me when it's

not about how are people going to see me? It's about how are people going to see the subject as a whole? And there's been like outstanding reciprocation of what we're expressing.

00:41:44:17 - 00:41:46:18

Mekenzie Fanguy

I still get nervous every time.

00:41:48:05 - 00:42:00:05

Kira Akerman

Yeah, we have a survey and we'll send it to all of you, but these guys haven't seen it. But I can affirm that the surveys sort of echo what all of them are reporting.

00:42:06:11 - 00:42:39:09

Audience Member 7

I heard, I think it's Miriam Cava has like very commonly she's an abolitionist contemporary who says like hope is a choice. And so I'm wondering as you all are, you know, articulated at the end of the film, like this is the world you're going to be inheriting. And so what sort of where are you finding hope? And what changes would you want to see that are working towards that preservation you were talking about Annabelle? And then, um, are there any efforts that you would want to highlight particularly that are inspiring to you?

00:42:39:11 - 00:43:13:23

Annabelle Pavy

I think in my own life, especially recently, what kind of brings me hope is like reconnecting with my community. I think whenever I moved away from Lafayette to Baton Rouge, I kind of felt this need to like, run away from home and find myself. Yeah, except like, the only thing I've realized is that I, I just, I love the place that I'm from, and it is what gives me hope.

00:43:13:23 - 00:43:56:12

Annabelle Pavy

This is one example that, like, brings such a smile to my face. This past summer I was back in Lafayette and I was living with my parents and my dad invited me to a Cajun jam and I just sat on the sidelines. I don't really know. I forgot how to Cajun dance. Can't play any Cajun instruments, but just the opportunity to be there and observe just like, filled my soul. Yeah, everybody go to that.

00:43:56:14 - 00:44:36:13

Tanielma DaCosta

Okay. Well, you said that hope is a choice. I think it made me think about just how the biggest problem we tend to face is that people think it's impossible or that it's insurmountable of issues and I think just thinking about how in the same manner that, you know, decisions have resulted in what we're faced now, in the same way, decisions are the only thing that can, you know, counteract that.

00:44:36:15 - 00:45:12:18

Tanielma DaCosta

It is a choice to to come together. It is a choice to do what you can with what you have. And it's a choice to talk about it. Have these these discussions. I mean, what I really hope to see or I hope to change -- that I hope to what changes I hope to see. It's just that there's just so much of a taboo like period in talking about the environment sometimes.

00:45:12:18 - 00:45:40:01

Tanielma DaCosta

I want there to be more of a comfortability just so that, you know it's so -- although the divisive, the divisiveness that, you know, I want everyone to be able to see that no matter where you are or where you're from, what you're going through, who you are, it's all of our problem. So, yeah, community. Yeah.

00:45:41:17 - 00:46:02:10

Mekenzie Fanguy

My thing is that Miss Tammy, who was on there with us -- I don't, I don't talk very well. So she said that it's going to be hard for us to stay a tribe. And it brought back to mind on that down at Point-au-Chien along the island road there are people who are refusing to leave.

00:46:02:20 - 00:46:28:11

Mekenzie Fanguy

So that gives me hope that, you know, people may flee from Houma, flee from the bayou but there's some of us who still live there and who will not give up their home that easily. So that's that's my hope to still being a tribe and keeping that language alive. And hopefully one day I too learn it if I can master English first. [Laughter].

00:46:28:13 - 00:46:30:05

Rebecca Snedeker

All right, let's have one last question.

00:46:31:04 - 00:46:37:16

Audience Member 8

Oh, this might be more for Kira, but how did you choose Hollow Tree? And like, what does that title mean to you?

00:46:42:06 - 00:47:13:01

Kira Akerman

How did it -- well, I just wanted to say quickly to the other question and then I'll answer that question that I think also learning is helpful. Once you see something one way, you can't ever go back. And I think together we demonstrated that. Hollow Tree, I first saw hollow trees when I was making a short film many years ago, and they were just so evocative as an image.

00:47:14:19 - 00:47:36:01

Kira Akerman

And the way that we learn in this film is by looking at our environment together and noticing it and asking questions about it. Why are the trees hollow? Why are there so many stumps? Why is it flooding so often? Why is the land sinking? Why are there potholes everywhere? So the hollow tree is sort of a starting point.

00:47:37:11 - 00:48:11:06

Kira Akerman

Why is the tree hollow? And the answer reveals a lot about the system of economic systems, of exploitation and control that we're living under and that shape our natural and unnatural world and ourselves. So it is one manifestation of that. Do you want to add anything having written lyrics about hollow tree and you spent a lot of time there?

00:48:14:18 - 00:48:52:21

Annabelle Pavy

Yeah, let me think about it for a second. I think I can speak on the lyrics in that earlier I mentioned I tend to personify nature and I think in that last song I was trying to express the nature of the tree itself. How though its core is empty, its walls still stood strong and so this kind of metaphorical heart still persevered.

00:48:52:22 - 00:49:02:22

Kira Akerman

Any other final meditations on the Hollow tree? Or a hollow tree? No, alright.

00:49:02:22 - 00:49:26:05

Rebecca Snedeker

Alright, we are going to have a reception for anyone who wants to continue the conversation and be with everyone over in Newcomb Hall and we'll direct you there once we are closed. Thank you all so much so deeply for making this film and for being here tonight and bringing your voices to Tulane. You're incredibly inspiring and generous, generous hearted.

00:49:26:15 - 00:49:42:11

Rebecca Snedeker

And I appreciate the risk that you took to co-create this and be your full selves on camera and here on campus. And I look forward to seeing how your lives unfold and how we continue living here together. It's an honor to be here with you tonight.

00:49:42:18 - 00:49:44:00

Kira Akerman

Thank you for having us.

00:49:46:00 - 00:49:47:22

Rebecca Snedeker

So let's give them a big round of applause. [Applause].