
Field Report:

Land of Opportunity

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BRIEFING

The [Land of Opportunity](#) transmedia documentary project encompasses a feature film and interactive web platform designed to foster dialogue and social impact around community (re)building in the face of crisis/disaster. In 2006, Director/Producer Luisa Dantas started filming for the documentary (“Land of Opportunity”), which follows several individuals through the early years of post-Katrina rebuilding in New Orleans. In 2012, the project evolved to include the interactive web platform ([LandofOpportunity](#))¹, which combines a rich archive of post-Katrina reconstruction stories with multimedia content from several other communities across the country. The interactive narratives featured on the platform explore a range of places and partners facing redevelopment issues. This field report is a primer on the process of creating an interactive web-based experience after releasing a traditional documentary, as part of a greater set of tools for public engagement. This report was compiled using a series of interviews that spanned the length of production and launch of the platform, some of which were used in shorter blog posts published by the [Center for Media & Social Impact](#). Center staff and graduate fellows conducted interviews and the LandofOpportunity production team provided research, consultation and coordination.

¹ Land of Opportunity refers to the transmedia project that includes: “[Land of Opportunity](#),” the feature documentary, and [LandofOpportunity](#), the interactive web platform. This report primarily references the platform and therefore refers to LandofOpportunity.

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INTRODUCTION

The Land of Opportunity transmedia project expands what we might consider to be interactive documentary. It's not meant to replace or substitute the traditional documentary form. Instead, it uses the traditional form and innovative new approaches as part of longer-term goals that extend the life of the project, reach new audiences and increase the potential for social impact.

Creating an interactive platform leveraging the web opens up opportunities for storytellers. LandofOpportunity, the platform, features a broad spectrum of multimedia content, including stories produced by the Land of Opportunity team that were not in the film, and diverse stories from partners that contribute to the expansive narrative of the interactive project. There are new ways to use video, audio, images, text and other web-based media that can benefit content in a wide range of categories.

The first rule of transmedia is: challenge the confines of "linear" storytelling.

What is LandofOpportunity?

LandofOpportunity is an experimental web platform that explores post-crisis community (re)building in America. The innovative platform merges compelling multimedia storytelling with curated data, research, and calls to action in one collaborative interactive space. Currently in Beta, LandofOpportunity features an interactive video player and timeline that allow users to explore and compare layered narratives about the people and processes that are shaping our increasingly vulnerable landscapes. Partners in different communities can create, curate and share their own multi-layered stories, laying a foundation for communication and knowledge-sharing across places, issues, and sectors. – [LandofOpportunity](#)

The LandofOpportunity platform leverages a rich archive of hundreds of hours of post-Katrina reconstruction stories captured in the production of "Land of Opportunity" the documentary, which are used as a starting point for a multifaceted conversation about community (re)development and post-crisis (re)building in America. The interactive experience of the website is an attempt to increase the impact of storytelling while fostering connectedness—so that viewers become users who explore stories and information on their own, discover links across issue and place, and even connect with people and groups advancing solutions to contemporary challenges in their own communities.

The first rule of transmedia is: challenge the confines of "linear" storytelling. LandofOpportunity meets this challenge by allowing users to trace their own path through a treasure trove of curated footage, and perhaps even more importantly, multimedia material contributed by strategic partners. The story space for LandofOpportunity starts with a choice of short videos called the "base layers." As the user watches the video, "triggers" to additional related content appear at specific moments. The user has the option to continue watching the base layer, or "dig deeper" by clicking to access the multimedia "nodal" content—an article,

additional video, an online campaign, a related stakeholder story, a map, a report, etc.

This kind of “vertical storytelling” relies on a range of content and tools that allow users to choose their own experience, with the intention of further engaging discussion on issues of urban justice, community development and post-crisis rebuilding.

Several themes emerge in the process of executing this vision: concept development, storytelling decisions, technology challenges, partnership development, funding and metrics.

THE CONCEPT

“In our quest to tell the story of the complex and unprecedented reconstruction of New Orleans from many points of view, the Land of Opportunity project has always demanded an eventual reach beyond the boundaries of a traditional feature film,” says Dantas.

The specific concept for LandofOpportunity emerged out of the desire to connect the stories from New Orleans’ rebuilding with similar stories playing out in different cities, providing a larger issue framework and opportunities for deeper engagement. That story could then become a jumping off point for a larger conversation about post-crisis community (re)building in the US.

“The hundreds of hours of recent New Orleans history gathered for this project are a crucial and unique archive of an unprecedented moment in our nation’s history. I have begun to understand the complexities of the post-Katrina landscape through the diverse stories I’ve encountered in Land of Opportunity’s footage. Because of our interactive video experience, this multifaceted history won’t be buried in our hard drives and instead will be accessible to educators and advocates in cities across the country. This experience allows us to surface the important material and say: this exists, come watch it, interact with it, share it, and add your voice to it.” – Luisa Dantas

This archival New Orleans footage forms one the roots of this interactive experience, along with multimedia content created by local and national mediamakers, and strategically curated information and data. The production team saw enormous potential for all of this material to create an in-depth dialogue around community development, and determined that a non-linear structure was the best way to showcase and provide access to the content. This structure would allow them to tell layered stories that drew on different perspectives and voices and combined personal narratives with context and issue framing. The Land of Opportunity team was then faced with the challenge of determining what technology and design would be used to execute this vision.

Traditional documentary films have a set length. Audiences will attend a screening and watch a film to its conclusion. Financing, production and many other aspects remain fairly consistent from project to project. While there may be a few different versions, overall the cut released to the public is considered final.

Web projects exist in an entirely different landscape. There are fewer technical limitations on the amount or type of footage that makes it into the final product. People interact on their own terms and schedule, and clips may be seen out of a traditional order (for example, in a chronological or narrative structure).

The production team believes that webmakers have much to teach us about the opportunities for documentary to be transformed online. The process is akin to software development—you are putting something out into the world, knowing it may not be perfect, and asking users to let you know if any issues arise. As a documentary filmmaker, “We’re used to sitting on material and making it look as perfect as possible,” says Dantas. While you may not be getting a traditional documentary product as a result, filmmakers may not realize that this is a natural part of the process. The feedback you get from partners, funders, and users is itself a form of iteration.²

THE STRATEGY

LandofOpportunity—the platform—evolved conceptually over time. The sequence demonstrates one way in which the new media/interactive components of a transmedia project come into fruition. It involved developing phases, prioritizing features and periodically adjusting goals and objectives. “Pick a piece of the work that you want to do, do that part really well, and then go on to the next phase,” says Dantas.

One early hope for LandofOpportunity was that an interactive video experience would give a user the ability to connect the dots between diverse stories and perspectives across place and time in a way that would add depth, breadth and an ever-growing context to the existing material. For example, housing advocates in New York mounting a campaign to preserve affordable and public housing could use stories of public housing redevelopment told through the eyes of displaced residents in Chicago and New Orleans, coupled with local journalism and data, to engage and galvanize their stakeholders.

At the Public Day presentation for a [Bay Area Video Coalition](#) (BAVC) Producers Institute residency in 2011, Dantas heard from Ben Moskowitz of [Mozilla](#) about the development of [Popcorn.js](#), a JavaScript library that allows for annotating video and audio, to then integrate layers of video and multimedia content that can potentially be leveraged for greater engagement and awareness for users.

² For more on design strategy and iteration, see the Center’s report “[Social Justice Documentary: Designing for Impact](#).”

This was an ideal tool to help build the platform that Dantas was envisioning, where users could merge existing content with new technology and additional partner content to create a multilayered story space for targeted users.

The way [filmmakers] approach the web is the way that audiences approach our movies.

Dantas connected back to Mozilla and determined that the first step needed was a prototype. Why? Think of it as the equivalent of a fundraising trailer: it gives a preview of the story to come, it samples the work already in progress, it showcases your talent, and most importantly—it's not the final product. It also allows you to experiment with the technology to see what you'll need to build the full project.

The first and very preliminary stage was developing that fundraising prototype, which was presented at [Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network's](#) "Nonprofit Technology Conference" in 2011.

This was a time of steep learning for Dantas and her team who, like many traditional filmmakers, didn't speak the language of the web. The Land of Opportunity team tackled this head on, and Mozilla played a role in bridging the gap. Mozilla has been active in reaching beyond the choir, providing tools like Popcorn, launching Webmaker, and inviting filmmakers to [hackathons](#) to experiment. But Dantas will attest—it still took a while to become conversant with the language of developers. Some of the things you may need to master: front end vs. back end, developer vs. coder vs. designer, functionality-first approach, and content management systems. Said Dantas, "the way [filmmakers] approach the web is the way that audiences approach our movies—we don't know what it took to put it together."

After presenting the fundraising prototype, Dantas started to map out a more comprehensive plan to scope out the work.

This initial demo was a one-time showcase. The Land of Opportunity team then spent early 2012 creating a real robust prototype with then technology partner [C4](#), a New Orleans-based web design firm. The more robust prototype was built on a Drupal content management system that allowed the production team to load content and create layers in a functionality-first approach, which prioritizes function over aesthetics. A simulation of the prototype premiered at [SXSW Interactive](#) and the prototype itself launched that May.³

³ This prototype was funded by the Ford Foundation and the National Black Programming Consortium/[Blackpublicmedia.org](#).



Figure 1: Prototype

The following year, LandofOpportunity became a project of the 2012 BAVC Producer’s Institute, a social impact lab that brings together media makers, nonprofit partners, technologists and mentors to develop transmedia story assets. There, Luisa Dantas, Digital Producer Laine Kaplan-Levenson, and a community partner, Harold Simon from the [National Housing Institute/Shelterforce](#), tackled the issue of prioritizing features and defining the scope of the project. The reality of limited resources meant evaluating which features were essential to achieving the vision and goals of the project.

Part of this process involved reviewing the project’s diverse assets—content and expertise in community redevelopment, a website for the feature film, a functional prototype, diverse storytelling tools—and deciding what to keep and what to let go.

Another goal that emerged was making something that would be useful and abstractable beyond the Land of Opportunity project and content. Dantas felt strongly that she didn’t want to leave something behind that had limited utility.

The team’s conversations at the Institute focused on how to build the project out beyond the prototype and bring in community-generated content, and what the next steps should be in the development and implementation process—one of which was to hire a designer for a user-friendly interface.

TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

Up until Land of Opportunity participated in the BAVC Producer's Institute, the development process foregrounded the innovative technology tools that would be used to build the platform. The first prototypes focused mostly on the core functionality of "rich media" and annotated video and had little in the way of user experience or design. Mozilla encouraged the functionality-first strategy because of the groundbreaking new use of Popcorn.js integrated with the Drupal content management system.

Later, after the painstaking process of producing a prototype, Dantas and team came to the conclusion that the "functionality-first" approach wasn't the best way to move forward and user experience became more of a priority.

Three things became clear in 2012:

1. LandofOpportunity needed a robust content management system that could handle a high volume of multimedia content.
2. The system needed to be intuitive and easy enough to use that partners could access it and create and manage their own content.
3. In order to accommodate capacity and resources, the project needed to take on a modular structure in which the first phase of creating a rich media player took priority.

It's a good idea in this process to have a designer on board with expertise in user interaction and experience (UI/UX), which for LandofOpportunity was not an option in the process of building the prototype demo player.

The UI/UX designer is the person who establishes the aesthetic and narrative structure of the experience: What does the experience look and feel like? Is the experience consistent and the content unified? How much information will people encounter, and where and when will they encounter it? What kinds of interaction options will they have and how will it work? The designer takes layers of information and structures them in a way that feels intuitive and accessible to users.

At BAVC, the Land of Opportunity team met [Heidi Boisvert](#), a talented interactive designer with a social justice bent. Said Dantas, "We left feeling like we wanted to keep talking." Boisvert then visited New Orleans briefly as a consultant to help create a detailed set of wireframes and a design document. Land of Opportunity used this document⁴ to solicit proposals for a firm to take on Phase 1 of the project.

After weeks of dialogue with potential technology partners around the world, the Land of Opportunity team settled on [Uncharted Digital](#), a boutique interactive agency in Los Angeles founded by Jon Vidar. Vidar's extensive experience with

⁴ See Appendix 1.

innovative, socially conscious storytelling includes “[Tiziano Project](#)” and “[Counterspill](#).”

Vidar focuses on the convergence of technology and social impact storytelling. Teams like Uncharted Digital can help filmmakers to craft their projects in a way that’s realistic, that will be innovative but will work within their existing budget.

According to Vidar, the project was appealing because the idea of digging through footage and providing unique points of access was a new way to implement Mozilla’s Popcorn.js.

[C]ontextual information places the emotionally engaging storytelling within a larger issue framework.

Vidar’s team set to work creating wireframes and mock-ups for what the LandofOpportunity user experience and interface would look like. At this point, unlike in the prototype phase, the primary focus became design. The more the Land of Opportunity team spoke with technologists, the more they realized they were attempting something vastly complex and ambitious. There was no existing template or model to build on for this project in terms of design and development.

At the BAVC Producer’s Institute, Land of Opportunity had brainstormed about a set of tools that could most benefit the audience. After the residency, Dantas held mini “brain trusts” with educators, advocates and media makers in New Orleans, Chicago and New York to further develop the platform’s goals. One of the takeaways from this process was the need to place more emphasis on community advocates, educators and media makers involved with urban issues as target users of the site, rather than aiming at a more general audience.

Working with Uncharted, the user experience came together. The user watches a short video or multimedia narrative about a community (re)development issue and then explores layers of additional curated content that knowledgeable partners have contributed, which appear at strategic moments during the video. This contextual information (which includes scholarly research, news articles, additional archival video, census data, maps, and more) places the emotionally engaging storytelling within a larger issue framework, deepening the users’ understanding of and engagement with the video, and consequently with the social issue.

The goals at this “discovery” stage were to work within the existing ideas and the available budget to figure out what was possible.

MAPPING OUT MODULES

The team settled on a modular strategy for building the transmedia experience. This meant starting with the main story space, which was the rich media player that was already prototyped, as the first module, and adding modules that would allow users to actively create and contribute content as resources became available.⁵ So at base, the LandofOpportunity site would be a space to encounter curated contextualized stories about community re(building) in America.

The idea for the second module began to emerge not long after Land of Opportunity's BAVC experience, when Hurricane Sandy hit the northeast United States. In the wake of that storm, the [Sandy Storyline](#) project was born: a "participatory documentary that collects and shares stories about the impact of Hurricane Sandy on our neighborhoods, our communities and our lives."⁶ Dantas knew the Sandy Storyline creators, Michael Premo and Rachel Falcone, from their work highlighting public housing stories, and saw an opportunity to collaborate on content that would highlight lessons from the comparison of two disasters that occurred seven years apart.

Boisvert and the team settled on the concept of a comparative timeline tool that could be used to compare/contrast disparate disaster events and even be used to predict certain outcomes. When he came onboard, Vidar was particularly interested in the Katrina/Sandy module, as he felt that this tool could be abstracted to any number of issues or comparisons.

The third module – the campaign builder – is aimed at enabling deeper engagement and action on the part of partners and their constituents and audiences. This tool, if created, would facilitate the creation and dissemination of multimedia campaigns that merge people's stories with data, analysis, and context, with the goal of spurring policymakers and/or the public to take action.

- MODULE 1. The interactive video player: watch and contribute to layered rich media videos (RMV).
- MODULE 2. The interactive timeline: watch juxtaposed narratives of related events (e.g., post-Katrina and post-Sandy rebuilding) to compare the events and discover connections.
- MODULE 3. The campaign builder: advocates take an RMV or timeline, or both, and package it in a way that can be used to target their audiences—lawmakers, decision makers, or supporters—as a tool for social change.

⁵ The number of modules that will ultimately be implemented by LandofOpportunity was determined by available funding and support.

⁶ <http://www.sandystoryline.com/about/>



Figure 2: Comparative Timeline

The progression of the modules demonstrates how user experience is evolved well beyond consumption of video content. These modules represent the journey from spectator to social change agent through interactive media. LandofOpportunity is cultivating “intervention through knowledge sharing” by bringing content into a singular space that makes connections and sparks dialogue and action.

USER EXPERIENCE

The unique nature of the LandofOpportunity experience is that the story deepens and grows because it’s surrounded by context. The user experience is coming from making connections between layers. You can start out as a digger, “sifting through the layers of information and charting a path based on your interest,” said Dantas.

In keeping with many current website structures, LandofOpportunity does away with the traditional home/landing page and site map that would neatly outline the organization of a site, in favor of a user-led navigation. Eventually, the goal is for the user to become a “doer,” not only navigating through the material but actively contributing to it.

“You’re encouraged through a series of questions to go on an in-depth yet somewhat open-ended exploration of thematically organized layered multimedia narratives. You’re also encouraged to contribute your voice through commenting.” –Luisa Dantas

The resulting wireframes, design and execution from Uncharted mapped the following experience:

- > The user starts by watching a video (or accessing other base-layer content).
- >> As the video progresses, curated multimedia content appears in strategic locations to increase engagement and encourage action. Users can access this content and go several “layers” deep.
- >>> This additional content doesn’t interrupt the viewing experience. Users have a choice of when to access the additional content.

Ultimately this design accommodates both the “lean-back” and “lean-forward” user – users who want to sit back and watch, and users who want to take a hands-on approach.

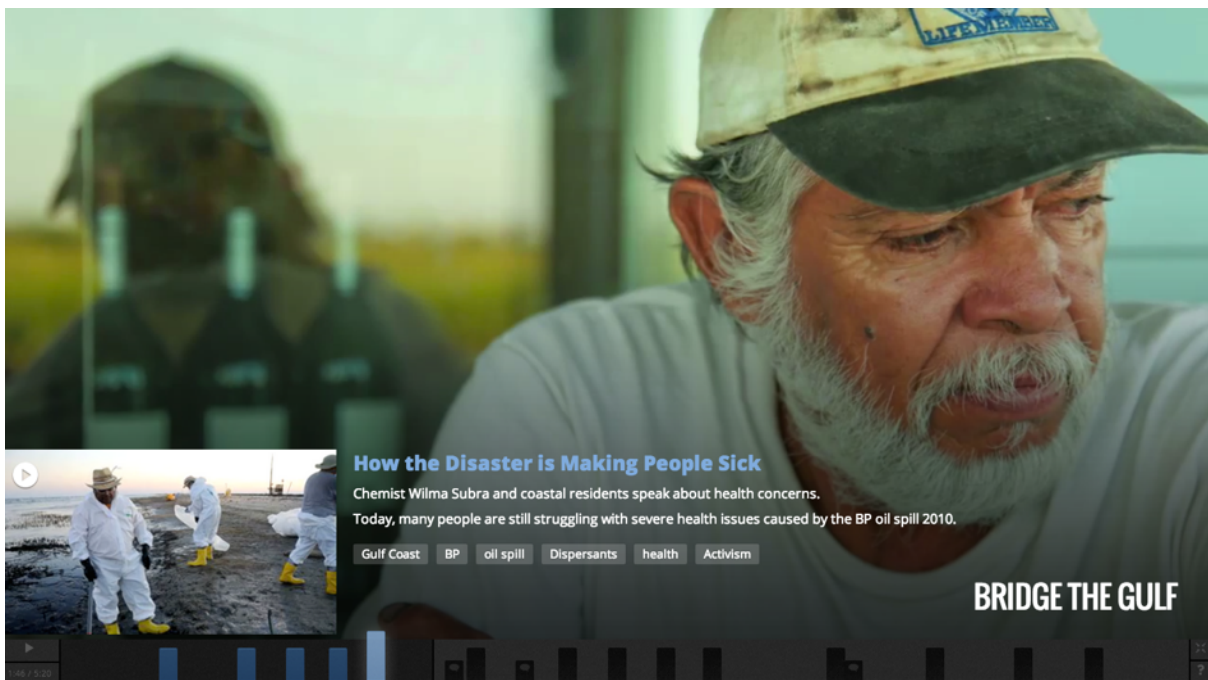


Figure 3: Rich Media Video

The triggers, or icons that indicate access points to additional material, went through at least three different design versions. Dantas didn't want pop-ups to disrupt the viewing experience, so the triggers are embedded in the video's progress bar, where they won't interfere with the video. Viewers are never forced to click on anything—the video continues playing until the viewer actively decides to change course.

At this stage of development, LandofOpportunity experienced another shift in focus, from design, development and functionality – to content. “You don't have to put your content completely on the back burner,” said digital producer Laine Kaplan-Levenson. The team felt in retrospect that these content conversations could have been happening even earlier. Staying connected to the footage and stories boosts creativity and inspiration in addition to providing the foundation for implementation.

PARTNERS AND CONTENT

As the design and development of the LandofOpportunity platform was being honed, Dantas and her team began to ramp up efforts to build strategic partnerships with content providers and curators, including filmmakers, journalists, educators, and advocates in New Orleans, New York, Chicago, Detroit, Boston and the Gulf Coast.

According to Dantas, these partners also helped hone the purpose and strategy behind the platform. “Core goals for the site have expanded or been more fleshed out because of the interactions we've been having with partners and the importance that their content is taking,” she said.

Partnerships played out in a range of ways. Some partners scripted and organized all their own content. Others worked closely in collaboration with the Land of Opportunity team. Still others simply provided footage.

The question across the board with all partners was: how does the content fit together in a strategic and compelling way? Land of Opportunity took on the role of making suggestions, and ultimately partners helped draw conclusions. When the platform launched in November of 2013, it included content from over twenty “pilot” partners.

Media Makers

Media makers in several communities form a core of strategic content partners for LandofOpportunity. Many have produced longform documentaries on subjects ranging from gentrification in Brooklyn to public housing redevelopment in Chicago to community organizing in rural Mississippi. Others curate and produce multimedia content for community media sites with multiple contributors. These partners also include filmmakers with films recently or about to be released, frequently using footage or stories that have never yet been shared.

Conversations with filmmakers have gravitated to topics and themes important for the site, assessing existing material, and determining “how all of our work could communicate with each other,” said Dantas.

Key filmmakers and media maker partners involved with the project included Kelly Anderson and Allison Lirish Dean (“[My Brooklyn](#)”), Ronit Bezael (“[70 Acres in Chicago](#)”), Oren Goldenberg (“[Brewster Douglass, You’re My Brother](#)”), Mark Lipman and Leah Mahan (“[Gaining Ground](#)”), the community media project [Bridge The Gulf](#), and Sandy Storyline.

The partnership with Sandy Storyline referenced above was also critical for developing the content layers included in what became the [Katrina/Sandy timeline](#), which launched in August of 2014. The interactive timeline juxtaposes multimedia content about Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy created by Sandy Storyline, Land of Opportunity and other media makers in New York and New Orleans⁷ and provides an opportunity for future development of community-generated content in the context of post-disaster recovery and rebuilding.

Educators

Educators and researchers are equally important partners, both in curating and contributing content to the site, and in using the platform as a tool in their classrooms and scholarly research.

Including data, scholarly research, diverse viewpoints, and expert references that contextualize and create a framework for the user to understand the larger issues is essential to the LandofOpportunity platform. Educators help identify data and objective information that can provide context for character-driven storytelling. This encourages public engagement and increases the potential for social impact.

In some cases educators were closely tied to filmmaking partners. For example in Chicago, Janet Smith from the [Voorhees Center](#) at the University of Illinois, Chicago worked with filmmaker Ronit Bezael and Land of Opportunity to curate content for two pieces about public-housing redevelopment in Chicago and New Orleans. In other cases, filmmakers working in various cities collaborated. For example, an [interactive video on youth leadership in Boston](#) drawing from the feature film “Gaining Ground,” was layered with footage about youth organizing in New Orleans from the documentary “[A Village Called Versailles](#).”

Educators and students also emerged as key users of the platform, playing a critical role in user testing and providing feedback in the months before it launched. During the 2013-2014 school year after the platform launched, six educators integrated the platform into their curricula in a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses (for example, Urban Planning and Environmental Justice at the University of New Orleans), then provided feedback to Land of Opportunity for a forthcoming curriculum guide. Students from the

⁷ See Appendix 1.

University of New Orleans and Tulane University were also instrumental in conducting research and participating in content management for the platform.

Advocates

From the very early stages, Land of Opportunity cultivated the partnership of the [National Housing Institute](#) (NHI), which continues to serve as a crucial mentor, particularly in content strategy and ongoing partnership development. NHI “supports the individuals and organizations that work to create healthy and thriving communities” through research and convenings.⁸ NHI also prints a respected quarterly magazine on housing and community development called “Shelterforce,” and publishes the [“Rooflines”](#) blog. Their resources and expertise allowed NHI to provide a variety of curated, multimedia content that could be layered into the interactive videos.

Mediamakers, educators and advocates have unique voices and stylistic approaches to contribute.

The [New Orleans Coalition on Open Governance](#) (NOCOG) became another key advocate partner. When they saw the platform’s capabilities, NOCOG became interested in developing an [interactive video](#) that would inform and engage their constituents in New Orleans about Participatory Budgeting, a process for democratizing decisions about city budgets. NOCOG became a pilot for how an advocacy group could use the platform to further their social-change goals, in this case by educating their base through an interactive video. Once the platform launched, other advocacy groups such as the [Right To The City Alliance](#) began using videos on the site to inform and engage their constituents around multiple issues, including affordable housing and land-use.

The goal of the platform was always to shed light on post-crisis community rebuilding issues on a larger scale than the documentary could do on its own. The ability to combine content from diverse partners in multiple communities allows for a wider breadth of context. Just one filmmaker working alone couldn’t cover this kind of scope. Mediamakers, educators and advocates have unique voices and stylistic approaches to contribute.

Challenges and Benefits

After several years of documenting diverse and often divergent perspectives on post-crisis community redevelopment, Dantas and others saw the need for a multi-pronged approach to storytelling around these complex issues. LandofOpportunity content partnerships have engaged a critical need in social impact media for showing and facilitating an intersectional and cross-sector dialogue around issues like affordable housing, land-use and post-disaster recovery. The team recognized early on that it was critical that partners be involved in the development of the concept and functionality of the platform. As

⁸ NHI’s mission statement

a result, this transmedia experiment both reveals and attempts to create that needed space.

The focus on content also shed light on a burgeoning challenge, which was mobile access. The Beta platform only really works with a current operating system, recent browser and a high-speed Internet connection – that’s a challenge for some of the communities Land of Opportunity wants to reach with the content and that are depicted in the content. Also, some advocate partners may not have access to that level of technology. Even students in some public universities may not have access to an updated operating system. On the flip side, many users have access to a robust mobile experience, and the current mobile capacity of the project extends to tablets.

Making partnership and collaboration central to the creation and dissemination of content had a huge payoff in terms of the depth, breadth, and reach of the platform, but building these partnerships and creating the rich media videos required a great deal of time, effort and resources. The team realized they didn’t have the capacity in this phase of the project to have non-partner users upload and create their own content on the site.

In conception, a goal of the platform was to create a space where content partners could work autonomously, but that couldn’t be realized in phase 1 of the project. Creating complex, collaborative, multilayered narratives on the platform is a time consuming process that requires familiarity with the emerging technology. To be autonomous on the platform, partners would have to be willing and available to do more than just contribute content, they have to upload and manage it in the long term. Creating each rich media video means editing and compiling individual videos, organizing them, titling and tagging, researching supplemental multimedia content, and uploading everything via the content management system.

Many partners did work independently at some stage in creating their own content, despite limited resources and capacity. But the Land of Opportunity team, including video editors and researchers, put in many hours for each rich media video, even when partner filmmakers were taking the lead. Cultivating successful partnerships was across-the-board labor intensive, for partners and for the Land of Opportunity team, in part due to the learning curve associated with interactive media. With the risk involved in collaborative and partner-generated content efforts, it is helpful to have a “Plan B” that relies on your own content as the project lead or creator.

Rather than autonomous contributors, partners were generally in a role more akin to clients, each requiring a different degree of feedback or technical assistance. To manage this fluid, collaborative environment, the team developed the following workflow mechanism for managing content partnerships and content, from concept to realization.

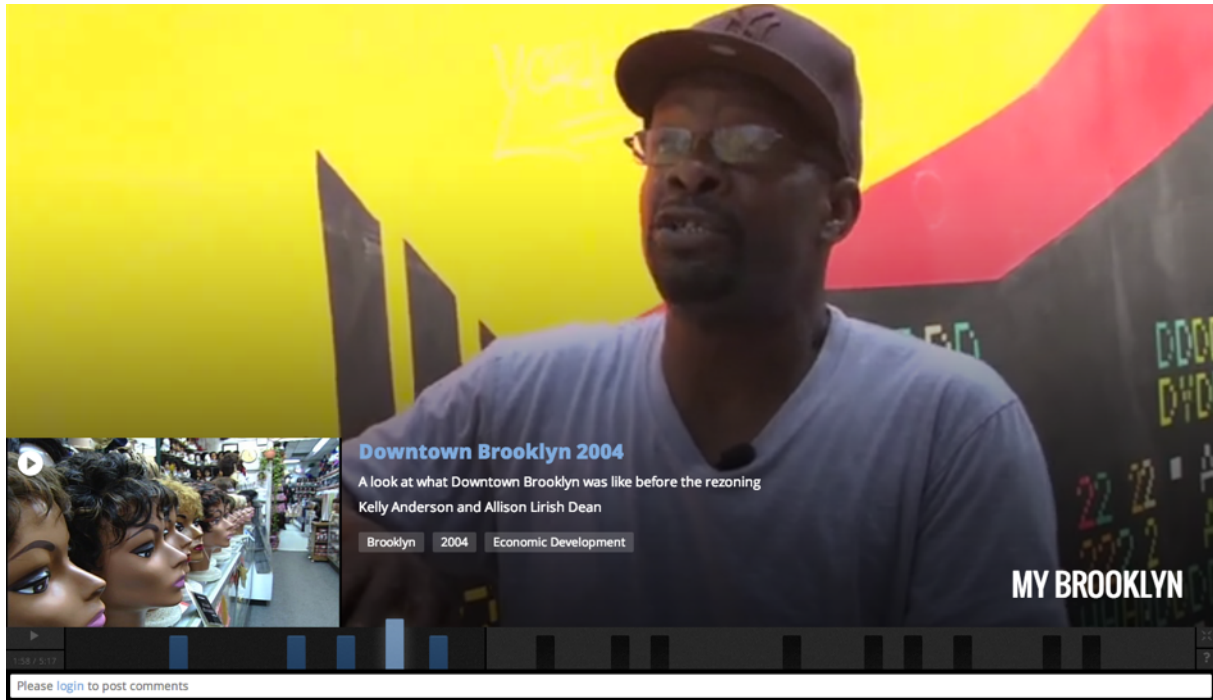


Figure 4: "My Brooklyn"

PROCESS

Partnerships start with a conversation about the platform, the partner's content and how they may be aligned. The team's message is that the new platform can take your content and make it strategically interactive to provide context and an issue framework in the interest of engagement and impact. That can mean a new way to showcase existing content, or that unused content has a new place to be seen, understood or interacted with by new audiences.

- The next step is finding out what content makes most sense as a "base layer." The base layer serves as the primary point of entry or portal through which other content layers are accessed. It is the first video or multimedia piece the user encounters for each interactive narrative and is designed to be a stand-alone story that the user can engage with even if they choose not to access any additional content.
 - o In the case of the documentary "My Brooklyn," director Kelly Anderson selected an existing scene from the film (a longtime resident giving a tour of recent changes in a Brooklyn neighborhood), lengthened it to create more opportunities for layers or nodal content, and then began plugging in content that made sense according to references in the scene.
 - o Alternatively, the web-based project Bridge the Gulf sent the team a range of potential content about the effects of the BP oil spill on communities in the Gulf Coast. Land of Opportunity made

suggestions for the base layer and nodal pieces, then edited together (with Bridge The Gulf's input and feedback) a [base layer video](#) that pulled from multiple videos and audio slideshows.

Script

- Land of Opportunity created a script template,⁹ starting with the base layer. The team's researchers then helped to find multimedia nodal content that would be a good fit, provided both by the content partner and external sources. Scripts were essential for managing the relationships of content.

Spreadsheet

- The team then shared a spreadsheet template to visually map the vertical storytelling structure of each rich media video. A blueprint for the interactive narrative, the spreadsheet was designed to create a spatial snapshot, using color-coding and horizontal layers, of how the content of each rich media video would be arranged and presented on the site. The spreadsheets tracked every piece of content in each rich media video, and the fields of required information corresponded with the back-end of the site (such as title, short description, source, and what time-code the nodal content would appear at).

PRODUCTION

- In various configurations, the rich media videos then had to be produced. In some cases, as with "My Brooklyn," the team received a finished base layer video. In other cases the Land of Opportunity team took on editing the base layer along with connecting nodal content.
- Completed production also meant finalizing title, description, proper citation and permissions, as is standard in any documentary or media process.

PLATFORM

- Once the content and order of things (as tracked in the spreadsheet) was agreed on, the next step was loading content onto the site, a task taken on mostly by the Land of Opportunity production team prior to launch.
- Post-launch, three major partners have created and are loading content independently: Sandy Storyline, [Anti-Eviction Mapping Project](#), and NOCOG.

⁹ See Appendix 2.

EDITING

- Each rich media video then underwent further adjustments, as the producers saw how they came together on the platform itself. Nodal content was removed, added, moved, re-titled, etc. Changes were first noted in the spreadsheet, with a color code to indicate a need to update the Content Management System of the platform, and an explanatory note from the editor about the changes. That way, the spreadsheet always remained up-to-date, a broader group of people could make comments and edits without logging directly into the CMS, and Dantas or the collaborating partner could review proposed edits before they were made on the platform.

In any future iteration, under limited capacity and resources, Land of Opportunity will face the challenge of creating a workflow that can be sustained and is not so complex that partners can't ultimately be autonomous. The likelihood remains an open question, as the major resources for the project have been used.

BETA TESTING AND PRE-LAUNCH

Around the spring of 2013, it was time to begin user testing. The platform was still being built and content still being edited, but there was enough of a user interface and sample content to have users dive in and provide specific feedback on how they encountered the platform. Land of Opportunity relied on a handful of educator partners and their graduate classrooms to user test the platform, as well as partners, advisors, and friends of the project. User testing happened in two stages, at first focused on general feedback and at the next identifying specific bugs or glitches.

As the project began to reach deadline for launch, numerous challenges arose related to getting it over the finish line - unforeseen bugs and technical errors, and elements in the original scope of work that were taking more time and effort than originally anticipated. This was a hectic period of making hard decisions about which essential changes the team should invest additional resources in to build, fix, or improve, and what had to be scrapped. As it got down to the wire, the launch date had to be pushed back a few times.

LAUNCH

LandofOpportunity launched in Beta form in mid-November 2013 with three major content categories in place: Displacement/Home, Devastation/Rebuilding and Exclusion/Engagement. The team brought on media strategist [Felicia Pride](#) to develop a targeted outreach and rollout plan, focusing on people and organizations working in the space of urban and community development. Outreach post-launch involved incrementally highlighting content within the categories in partnership with the relevant content partners.

Pride's goal was to focus the outreach campaign in an effort to maximize an already limited capacity and budget. The first step was determining how best to describe a new platform in a landscape still in flux over vocabulary and understanding.

"The challenges facing communities of all types and sizes are often too complex and interconnected to be explained in the traditional policy categories such as housing, education, health care, disaster management, and so forth. Rather than try to fit into these silos, we have broken out our stories into a thematic categories that draw out tensions that transcend typical boundaries." Luisa Dantas

The current language was the foundation for developing the usual components: press kit and outreach messages. The next step was identifying people, organizations and projects who had a particular interest in the issue and reaching out by category. After the platform was launched, LandofOpportunity highlighted a different content category roughly every two months, including content and video. The team also rolled out a new content category, Community/Commodity, featuring "stories about the controversial privatization of public space and services like housing and health care." Wherever possible, content partners were mobilized to do cross promotion with their existing networks.

Partner promotion can have a major impact on the reach of a platform; the most viewed piece to date has been "[Out With the Old, In With the New](#)" which the team attributes to the strength and size of Kelly Anderson's existing network, for whom the piece really mattered, along with her outreach effort. Land of Opportunity observed that it's been a challenge to get people to care about the platform as a whole in comparison to sharing individual videos, perhaps with the exception of the interactive storytelling community and educators. Readers of a blog about Brooklyn can get excited about an interactive video on gentrification in downtown Brooklyn, while they may not be compelled to visit a site about "post crisis community (re)building." This speaks to the nature of interactive media, distinct from trends in web video—reach isn't about sharing a compact entertaining product, but about encouraging people to dive in and explore, more akin to the culture of a classroom.

Thus far the classroom has been one of the most compelling spaces for using the platform. There's no homepage that points out the various components of the site, and the site is organized around thematic categories rather than issue areas — an intentional choice intended to invite exploration and defy expectations of a linear and bounded experience. In general, the lack of structure in the user experience is meant to be what peaks your interest and encourage exploring and making connections with an open mind. Educators are able to provide an external structure by guiding students to particular nodes or directions in content.

Dantas incorporated the platform into her "Place-Based Storytelling in New Orleans" course that she teaches at Tulane. Students collaborated on an interactive narrative about the contentious post-Katrina gentrification of a traditional working-class neighborhood in New Orleans.

Encouraging users to be guided by interest is a deliberate conceptual choice in this form of interactive media. A curriculum guide in development will have sample paths students can take and nodal content they can explore, but if the team had had more resources, they would have liked to address further the issue of how to better guide the experience. While in some ways the issue of how much to guide your audience is fundamental to storytelling, what's unique about LandofOpportunity is there are many stories and many relationships among them, rather than just a different way of looking at a single narrative.

What's unique about LandofOpportunity is there are many stories and many relationships among them.

THE QUESTION OF METRICS

Metrics presented a challenge for the LandofOpportunity team, as with other media projects, where there's often the expectation that a project be able to measure and prove its social impact. Yet web metrics simply don't measure user learning. Numeric indicators of success represent a challenge for an interactive site, where volume of traffic doesn't tell us much about user engagement. The experimental nature of the project means there aren't clear benchmarks against which to evaluate the platform.

The team's challenge was to analyze and use metrics in a way that enhanced their understanding of how the site was being used, but they were concerned about side-by-side comparisons of numbers. For example, would the project look successful to a funder based on number of visitors alone? Would the platform's numbers be compared to audience members of a traditional documentary film, or users for a successful documentary site, or another benchmark?

The analytics available indicate that the average time spent on the site is substantial when compared to the "Land of Opportunity" documentary film site, which seems to indicate deeper engagement. But ultimately the team's approach was to take analytics with a grain of salt, and do additional qualitative and

quantitative surveying to understand how the platform was being used. The team developed an educator survey and conducted interviews with a pilot group of educators and advocates to help determine how the platform is being used and what kind of learning and engagement it is facilitating in graduate and undergraduate classroom and community settings.

FUNDING

Perhaps the greatest challenge for present and future experiments in transmedia is securing adequate funding for execution, including design, development, and long-term project sustainability. While there are some organizations that provide technology training and encourage the next generation of web and interactive developers—web design and development still remain in the range of highly skilled professionals whose services can be cost prohibitive. High costs are associated with anything that is custom and a high-quality production.

Land of Opportunity was able to move forward and build Phase 1 thanks to a strategic synergy with the efforts of the Ford Foundation's [Metropolitan Opportunity Unit](#). In 2011, representatives from the Ford Foundation took a trip to New Orleans along with the mayor of Detroit, looking for lessons from the city post-Katrina, that could inform the Detroit Works planning process. Dantas cut a piece for the presentation, made up entirely of content about the post-Katrina planning process that hadn't been seen in the "Land of Opportunity" documentary. This drove home for Ford that having an integrative experience would be valuable for exploring issues of urban (re)development—the platform could help connect the dots between cities, communities and processes.

With this pot of funding, Dantas was able to assemble a small team to execute the LandofOpportunity vision. What she discovered is that working in a web environment reveals myriad opportunities and possibilities, allowing enormous room for creativity, but that creativity can be expensive and labor-intensive. Online, interactive components to a project are not a cheap afterthought, but extremely expensive and complex projects that require their own workflow and their own development, production and dissemination processes.

Not all stories have to be transmedia. The LandofOpportunity project goal of bringing multiple perspectives and voices into dialogue around a spectrum of issues, as well as the diversity of LandofOpportunity's partner content, made interactive exploration a key component of the project—but not all stories require that.

In this technical realm, you may develop a plan and set deadlines, but technical roadblocks are unpredictable and complicating, often leading to a much bigger financial investment for the finished product.

"I think there's a huge demand," said Dantas. "Everyone's trying to figure out what they can do with new interactive media, but there's a huge misunderstanding of what it costs to do these projects." Funding streams for

transmedia are still not clear and are hard to come by in the documentary world, as is consistent with experimental phases of media and technology.

The best advice on funding to come out of the LandofOpportunity experience is, “When you talk to funders, have a conversation not just about the vision of your project, but the long-term sustainability.” In addition to the funding for the development of the technology of the transmedia project, it is equally important for projects like LandofOpportunity to secure funding for content creation, and to have a plan and financial support in place for the ongoing curation, outreach, maintenance and institutional partnerships needed to keep the project relevant and useful. For LandofOpportunity it’s a minimum of \$1,000 annually to cover costs like technical maintenance, CMS updates and server.

CONCLUSION

The LandofOpportunity platform is part of a paradigm shift for web design, interaction, and storytelling. Despite the success of the design in incorporating the LandofOpportunity vision and the real-time changes based on user testing, Dantas is cautionary: “This is an experiment, and it’s very important that that always be remembered.”

That being said, even in Beta phase, the platform is being put to use in classrooms and in the community—where partners and piloting educators are seeing potential in the interactive, multimedia, layered approach to complex issues like urban planning and post-disaster housing. Advocate partners New Orleans Coalition on Open Governance, the Right to the City Alliance and the Anti-Eviction Mapping project are also using or promoting the platform. Educator partners include the University of New Orleans, the University of Colorado Denver, The University of Illinois Chicago and Georgetown University.

The technology of transmedia can require a significant learning curve—it’s the thing that attracts people but is also the thing that is hardest to grasp as it dominates the strategy and conversation. For filmmakers who want to play in this space, it’s important to embrace from the outset that you are doing something that involves significant iteration. Dantas would advise filmmakers not to put the same set of expectations on this kind of venture that you would on a form of media that you’ve already mastered. The process involves an extraordinary amount of uncertainty, because of the pressures of creating something that doesn’t have many existing models for reference.

For Dantas, the current site is a Beta of an ongoing project. “We put the Beta out into the world knowing it’s ongoing and imperfect, and that there may be features that people ultimately won’t find useful or engaging,” she said. “We’ll hopefully be able to take that feedback and improve the platform for its next iteration.”

APPENDIX 1

DIRECT LINK TO PLATFORM

<http://beta.landofopportunityinteractive.com/>

Content Categories

Devastation/Rebuilding
Displacement/Home
Community/Commodity
Exclusion/Engagement

Katrina/Sandy Timeline

<http://beta.landofopportunityinteractive.com/#/compare>

Storm
Aftermath
Recovery/Rebuilding
Future

Sample Script

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LuaTateO2S3YsYibfYE9J3XYiWI1-ltIDc7lfBdDIP8/edit>

Sample Nodal Content Spreadsheet

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1H9aVKssVHbZ3h_v-nc0SamVbLfmPR1iZgPVNzFp-whA/edit#gid=0

PARTNERS

Current partners and content contributors for the interactive platform include:

- National Housing Institute/Shelterforce (NY, NJ)
- University of New Orleans-Department of Urban Planning and Studies
- Sandy Storyline and Housing is a Human Right (New York)
- Bridge the Gulf (Gulf Coast)
- New Orleans Coalition for Open Governance (NOCOG)
- Kelly Anderson and Alison Dean (New York, filmmakers, *My Brooklyn*)
- Meerkat Media Collective (*New York*)
- Nathan Fitch (New York, filmmaker, *The Darker Side of Dreamland*)
- Ronit Bezalel (Chicago filmmaker, *70 Acres in Chicago*)
- Leah Mahan (Bay Area/Boston, filmmaker, *Come Hell or High Water*)
- Mark Lipman (Bay Area/Boston, filmmaker, *Gaining Ground*)
- Oren Goldenberg, (Detroit, filmmaker, *Brewster Douglass, You're My Brother*)
- Brent Joseph (New Orleans, filmmaker, *Holdout*)
- William Sabourin (New Orleans, filmmaker)
- Ed Goetz (scholar/author, *New Deal Ruins*)

- Janet Smith (scholar/ author, Nathalie P. Voorhess Center, University of Illinois-Chicago)
- Katy Reckdahl (journalist, New Orleans)
- Tulane University, Newcomb College Institute
- Center for Social Media and Impact (American University)

Partners by Category

-Devastation/Rebuilding

Royce Osborne, Bridge the Gulf

- Displacement/Home

Central Advisory Committee, Cass Corridor Films, Edward Goetz, National Housing Institute, My Brooklyn, Kelly Anderson, Allison Lirish Dean, Families for United Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE)

-Exclusion/Engagement

Gaining Ground, Cabrini Green: Mixing It Up, Edward Goetz, Meerkat Media, Participatory Budgeting NOLA, New Orleans Coalition for Open Governance

-Community/Commodity

Big Charity, Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Gaining Ground

-Katrina/Sandy

Sandy Storyline, Nathan Fitch, William Sabourin, My Louisiana Love, Brent Joseph

APPENDIX 2

SCRIPT:

BASE LAYER

pw:

TIME	BASE LAYER	2nd Layer	3rd Layer	4th layer
00:14	Hi, my name is Darla Rooks. I spent all my life out here on the water. I moved away for a little while, turns out you can take the girl out of the Bayou but you can't take the Bayou out of the girl so I moved right back. Got me a shrimp boat and that's what I've been doing ever since.			
00:34	Darla People don't know that this is such a wonderful place that exists. This is a totally different way of life, it's just wonderful.	Video @ 00:40 Title : A Different Way of Life - part 1 https://vimeo.com/album/2504865/video/71129472		
00:44	Hi my name is Rosina Philippe, I'm from Grand Bayou Village in LA. Hello my name is Geraldine Philippe-Carr. There is something about the Bayou life that is peaceful and quiet. You can actually hear the fish splashing in the morning.			
01:04	Rosina All the animals, that's part of our world. It taught me to be a steward of my environment. To appreciate what was around me, I got a lot of that from the people before us.	Video @ 01:19 Title: Heritage and the Wetlands. https://vimeo.com/album/2504865/video/72987415		

<p>01:27</p>	<p>Rosina Day 46 the oil came rolling into the bay. Tons of it, thick, black orange. It was horrible, it kept coming in and there was nothing to stop it. There were a bunch of pelicans caught up in it. It was coming in and everything it touched was going to die. And that's what happened.</p>	<p>Video @ 01:36 Title - Health Effects https://vimeo.com/album/2504865/video/72015060</p> <p>web article & video 1:45 Fisherman find green sludge, BP calls it algae http://bridgethegulffproject.org/node/123?page=1</p>	<p>Video @ 0:56 Tracy's as a Louisiana Bayoukeeper - fisherman trying to find work. http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=3VtBJrWclR8</p> <p>Video @ 01:315 Is the seafood safe to eat? Darla, Rosina, Acy Cooper, George Barish https://vimeo.com/72009570</p> <p>Audio @ 2:06 Bodies in Crisis - 3 years later conference call. https://soundcloud.com/landofopp/bodies-in-crisis-17min **shorter version, no Q&A https://soundcloud.com/landofopp/bodies-in-crisis-9min</p>	<p>web article @ 00:15 about the conference call, Bodies in Crisis. http://bridgethegulffproject.org/node/749</p>
<p>1:45</p>	<p>There were a bunch of pelicans caught up in it. It was coming in and everything it touched was going to die. And that's what happened.</p>	<p>Video @ 01:56 Title: Oil and Dispersant Impacts on Food Supply https://vimeo.com/album/2504865/video/72009570</p>	<p>Video @ 01:03 Dispersants Wilma Subra, Robert Kuhns, Lora Ann, Maurice Phillips</p>	

02:00	Hi my name is J.J. Creppel. I knew our future was ruined. I was so stressed, I knew my whole livelihood was coming to an end. When I'm not shrimping I'm making shrimp nets for the people. At one time I was picking up \$400 / \$500 like nothing. Now I'm lucky if I make \$40 or \$50 a day.			
2:36	Darla We are multitask people, we learned that from our ancestors. When BP came and put oil in our water they wiped out all our options. We can't go anywhere else, we don't how to survive on anything else but this water.	<p>Video @2:40 Title: How the oil industry affects the Native Tribes of Louisiana.</p> <p>https://vimeo.com/album/2504865/video/72011715</p> <p>web article 2:51 Title: Black and Brown Workers Seek Unity in Gulf Recovery http://www.bridgethegulfpject.org/node/140</p>	<p>Video at 00:44 Monique Verdin documentary photography and filmmaker for Houma nation</p> <p>http://bridgethegulfpject.com/node/615</p>	
2:54	Byron You know it'll take us years and years and years to replenish our oyster beds. And we don't have the equipment that we had when we built these oyster beds. What are we gonna do, go back and invest another lifetime?			
3:12	Darla They are not from here, this is not their homeland. This is not what they have to live in. This is what we love. This is our heart, our soul, our income, their taking away everything and that of our descendants.	<p>Video @ 3:19 Title: "A Different Way Of Life part 2"</p> <p>https://vimeo.com/album/2504865/video/71114189</p>		

<p>3:26</p>	<p>Darla And they have no remorse. It's just like a paycheck. A small paycheck. How long is that going to last? What am I suppose to do when that runs out? I'm almost 50 years old, I don't have time to go back to school and do something that will make any money. All I can do is go flip burgers, try to grow some crawful or alligators.</p>	<p>Web article / video @3:37 Title: Organizing for Green Jobs and Environmental Justice http://bridgethegulfproject.org/node/655</p> <p>NODAL CONTENT:ARTICLE/RESEACH on job loss/ economic impact http://www.southernstudies.org/2013/08/three-years-after-bp-gulf-fishermen-struggle-to-su.html What: Learn how the BP oil spill effects the fishing industry three year later. Why: There is no certainty of the duration of the economic, environmental, and health impacts of the BP oil spill.</p>		
<p>3:50</p>	<p>I don't grow crawfish and alligators, I fish in saltwater. With nets, on a boat. And I have a \$65,000 boat that ain't worth a wooden nickel.</p>	<p>Video @ 3:55 Vietnamese fishing community Thao Vu http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=u5n838Nps8 Title: Vietnamese fishermen in Mississippi</p>	<p>web article @ 3:12 Daniel Nguyen, teaching aquaponics to Vietnamese community http://bridgethegulfproject.com/node/611</p>	

4:03	J.J. It's rough, a lot of them had good jobs, they had money coming in, now their collecting food stamps.	Nodal content about post-BP rise in food stamps etc?		
4:15	Byron Why didn't they just come up and say - ok "We're gonna take all our from the stockholders, we gonna take them millions of dollars of bonus that you're paying your CEO's, and we're gonna give ya'll some food stamps and we gonna give these fisherman - You didn't destroy their livelihood and their existence. We gonna give them your checks.	<p>Title: 3 Years Later, How Is BP Paying?</p> <p>http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/20/gulf-oil-spill-anniversary_n_3118965.html</p> <p>What: Learn about the current events of the civil suit against BP. Why: It is the three year anniversary of the spill and the ramifications are still felt by the community. (carousel)</p>		
4:35	J.J. We used to be a proud parish. We didn't ask for nothin', didn't look for nothin'. But since the oil spill now we gotta take whatever we can get.			
4:49	Darla This is what we love to do. I was born a fisherman, I'm gonna die a fisherman.			
5:00	Darla I was very depressed and suicidal for awhile until I talked with a man, he said "You know you can go kill yourself but I think that's exactly what BP would like. Because dead people don't talk, dead people don't complain, and dead people don't fight. You wanna give BP what they want? Go ahead and kill yourself. And I decided right there and then I'm gonna stand up and fight for my land.	<p>web article @ 5:24 Title: Fisherman try to challenge state and federal officials</p> <p>http://www.bridgethegulfproject.org/node/26?page=1</p>		

<p>5:28</p>	<p>Byron Enough is enough. We're not gonna see our community and our children and our grandchildren get destroyed for a handful of greedy people. Our existence is hanging in the balance this time.</p>	<p>web link @ 5:34 Anthony Thompson Title: Focusing on Youth in Alabama</p> <p>http://bridgethegulfpject.com/node/623</p>		
<p>5:44</p>	<p>J.J. I took my first breath here in this parish, it'll take more than that oil to chase me outta here.</p>			
<p>5:51</p>	<p>Geraldine It's hard to imagine our way of life is going to be totally changed. I'm so glad I can talk today. God is putting you people in our lives for our good. Because somebody cares. Somebody wants to hear about life on the bayou. Pass our story and our lives on. Give someone what's in our hearts, let them know life on the bayou is a wonderful life.</p>	<p>web article and video @ 5:47 Title: Bryan Parras on Sharing a Fenceline with Polluters in Houston</p> <p>http://bridgethegulfpject.com/node/621</p> <p>web link @ 6:08 Title: Communities Making Decisions</p> <p>http://bridgethegulfpject.com/node/610</p>	<p>web article 0:35 Drowning in Industry in Houston's East End</p> <p>http://www.bridgethegulfpject.org/node/746</p>	