

‘Desert Bayou’ Delves Deep Into Hurricane Katrina’s Human Psyche

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on May 24, 2007 - 5:57pm

- [Adam Fendelman](#) [2]
- [Alex LeMay](#) [3]
- [Cinema Libre Studio](#) [4]
- [Desert Bayou](#) [5]
- [Interview](#) [6]
- [Jim Finkl](#) [7]
- [Taproot Productions](#) [8]

CHICAGO – When Hurricane Katrina rocked New Orleans in 2005, Chicago filmmaker [Alex LeMay](#) [9] became fixated on the soul behind the ruin.

Without an investor, he hurried a producer on the scene two days after first contact. With thousands of news cameras already covering the cataclysmic events on 24-hour news channels, new-angled footage was scarce.



“Desert Bayou” director Alex LeMay.

Photo courtesy of Taproot Productions

Eager to humanize a gripping subplot and stir thought-provoking reflection, LeMay’s muse came in the form of a “cute” story in the *New York Times*.

Distributed by [Cinema Libre Studio](#) [10], “[Desert Bayou](#) [11]” chronicles 600 African-Americans who were airlifted from their Louisiana homes to a Mormon community in Utah.

“While it might be cute, it’s based on tragedy,” LeMay said in an interview with Adam Fendelman. “Everything about the evacuees from New Orleans is polar opposite to Utah. This is a story of below sea level, African-American, Baptist Democrats going into an above sea level, Mormon, Republican, white bastion. It’s a clash-of-culture, fish-out-of-water story.”

Utah is a state overwhelmingly comprised of white residents with less than 1 percent of people of color. The film examines whether two markedly dissimilar cultures can rally together in a time of sheer pandemonium.

Realizing once the news cameras left that Katrina would result in a histrionic story of human defeat and restoration, director LeMay of Chicago-based [Taproot Productions](#) [12] shadowed two families over the last two years.

Declining to comment on the documentary’s production budget, LeMay says its primary investor is Jim Finkl of Finkl & Sons Co. The steel company is based in Chicago’s Bucktown neighborhood.

Even though it’s two years later, the film bucks the misnomer that New Orleans is even nearly restored.

“I just returned from New Orleans last week. The city is unchanged,” LeMay said soberly. “The middle class has been wiped out and that says nothing of the poor. Some 200,000 people are displaced and three generations are gone. While there will be pockets that remain, the landscape that was New Orleans will never be again.”



The documentary production crew shooting “Desert Bayou”.

Photo courtesy of Taproot Productions

In a monstrosity of nature that claimed approximately 2,000 people and cost \$105 billion in property damage, LeMay also describes the resultant corruption and profiteering that has run rampant in Katrina’s curing years.

“Whatever money was sent down there is gone,” LeMay said. “Where it went no one knows. There are rumors of people who administered that money making \$360,000 a year.”

Through all the gloom and doom, LeMay’s film lights up all the incredible interwoven in all the dread.

“Average Americans came out of the woodwork from all faiths, religions, races, demographics and politics,” he said. “The outpouring of generosity we saw in Utah and New Orleans was staggering. These people lost everything and we were invited into their homes, fed and welcomed as family.”

He added: “The unbelievable backbone that is the black population of the Gulf Coast is alive and well. They are the true heroes.”

LeMay says success with his third documentary will come in the form of inducing a shrill wake-up call. He is reminding America that we’re all brethren despite dramatically different distinctions.

“We want people to talk about the fact that this country is compartmentalized. There’s a big divide between the rich and poor that’s getting bigger,” LeMay said. “We’re not Democrats and Republicans. We’re just Americans.”

He added: “We have to get the conversation going again. Americans may have gotten used to seeing black people in positions of poverty. I’m not sure which is worse: racism or indifference.”

The film will be in theaters beginning on Oct. 5, 2007.

8:53 p.m. update on Sept. 6, 2007: “Desert Bayou” has launched its official film [Web site](#) [11].

© 2007 Adam Fendelman, HollywoodChicago.com



[13]

By [ADAM FENDELMAN](#) [14]
Editor-in-Chief
HollywoodChicago.com
adam@hollywoodchicago.com [13]

Source URL (retrieved on Apr 20 2024 - 3:00am): <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/2007/05/desert-bayou-delves-deep-into-hurricane.html>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hollywoodchicagocom>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/adam-fendelman>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/alex-lemay>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/cinema-libre-studio>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/desert-bayou>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jim-finkl>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/taproot-productions>
- [9] <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1974552/>
- [10] <http://www.cinemalibrestudio.com>
- [11] <http://www.desertbayoumovie.com>
- [12] <http://www.taprootproductions.com>



[13] <mailto:adam@hollywoodchicago.com>
[14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#ADAM>