

January 2011

“Whenever the Lord allows it, I’ll be able to tell the story.”
—K. R. Roberts, August 28th, 2005

Greetings Kimberly Rivers Roberts,

Thank you for being the keynote speaker for Black Heritage Month at George Mason University, and for sharing your testimony on the endurance necessary to survive Hurricane Katrina. Your story is symbolic of countless social, political, and historic struggles within the United States and around the world.

It is imperative that conscientious citizens understand the gravity of natural disasters that occur domestically and abroad. Separated by time and region, it is much too easy for us to set-aside and forget the howling winds and torrential floods of Katrina. But your story retrieves the palpable wrath of the storm, its residential devastation, and the aftershocks that have, sadly, begun to fade from the forefront of our collective memory. This is why your story is so important. To overlook the mistakes of our past is to set up circumstances for potential mistakes in our future. In 2009, Italy dealt with earthquakes. And in 2010 Haiti and Chile both confronted similar disasters.

Thank you for using a simple video camera to capture the impact of the massive storm in all its fury on the residents of the lower ninth ward. Of course you did not stay behind by choice or preference, but your sharing allows us to see Hurricane Katrina in a unique and powerful way. Most impressive is the continued ingenuity in your efforts to create community empowerment opportunities for the people of New Orleans.

Your strikingly honest look at tragedy became the foundation for *Trouble the Water*. Viewers may not know that the film earned the 2008 Sundance Grand Jury Prize. They may not be aware that it was nominated for the 81st Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Moreover, viewers may not know that you were recognized in Time Magazine’s top 10 movie performances of 2008. As you have said, none of this is more important than the narrative itself, which serves to address sensitive issues having to do with disaster relief: including class, race, and location. When people see the film and hear your story, they get a better understanding of the social issues that remain with us.

Everyone should see this film and hear this story. Undoubtedly, this can benefit diversity programs & services; media and film; race and class; women & gender studies; amnesty international groups; student groups and associations; and departments focusing on communication, sociology, anthropology, conflict, leadership, and community engagement.

Your story offers an excellent opportunity to educate and uplift learners. Simultaneously this is an uncomfortable discourse, which is often the case with tragedy. Real change does not stop with consciousness-raising but includes taking responsibility for the ways in which difference matters. You have chosen to accept this responsibility. I hope others will too.

Keep up the good work,

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