

KANYE AND KATRINA: ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN NEW ORLEANS


Est. Time: 60-75 minutes

Subjects: History/Social Studies

Age Range: Middle & High School

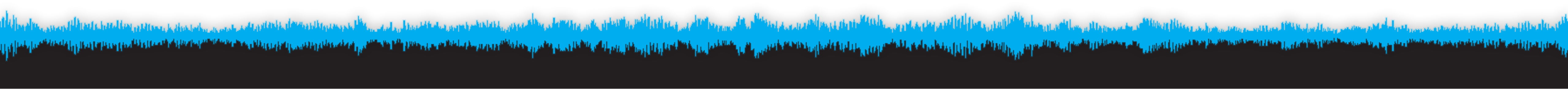
See the full lesson [here!](#)


★ *TEACHROCK* ★



What was Hurricane Katrina, and how was the government's response to the crisis an example of the anti-Black racism that has shaped the economic and political systems of the United States?

In this lesson you will:

- Identify the natural disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina and government responses at the local, state, and federal level
 - Compare and contrast the differing opinions Americans had about Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath
 - Analyze the motivation behind Kanye West's comments on Hurricane Katrina
 - Examine the statistical data on racism and poverty in New Orleans
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Ask a friend or family member how much they know about Hurricane Katrina and the events surrounding it. Use the following questions as prompts, and feel free to create your own. Take notes as you conduct the interview.

- What was Hurricane Katrina?
- Where did it occur?
- What about the hurricane made it an important historic event?
- How might a natural disaster lead to conversations on political and economic issues?
- How might the issue of race be an important part of the conversation?

If possible, pair with another classmate to share what each of you learned about the natural disaster.



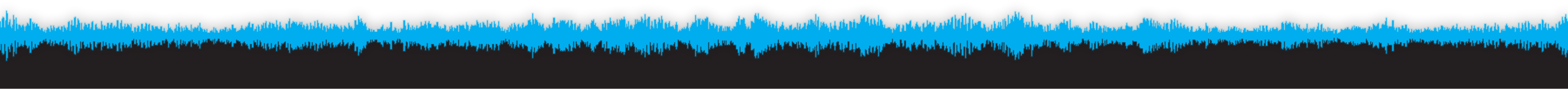


KANYE WEST ON HURRICANE KATRINA

Watch [this video](#) of Kanye West appearing on a television fundraiser for Hurricane Katrina relief and listen to his comments.



Consider or ask a friend:

- What are West's reasons for criticizing the government's response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina?
 - How does West criticize the media and what does he specifically mention?
 - What war is West referring to in his comments?
 - What might have happened during or after Hurricane Katrina that would inspire West to state, "George Bush doesn't care about black people"?
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Examine the chart from a Pew Survey taken after Hurricane Katrina.

Consider or ask a friend:

- What kind of conclusions can you reach looking at these statistics?
- Why might there be a discrepancy between responses from Black Americans versus those of White Americans?
- Who might have been most affected by the hurricane, and does that play a role in differing opinion?

Katrina Through the Prism of Race

<i>Gov't response if most victims had been white?</i>	<u>Total</u> %	<u>White</u> %	<u>Black</u> %
Faster	26	17	66
The same	68	77	27
Don't know	6	6	7
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100

<i>Shows racial inequality still a major problem?</i>	<u>Total</u> %	<u>White</u> %	<u>Black</u> %
Faster	38	32	71
The same	50	56	22
Don't know	12	12	7
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100

Number of Cases	(1,000)	(712)	(211)
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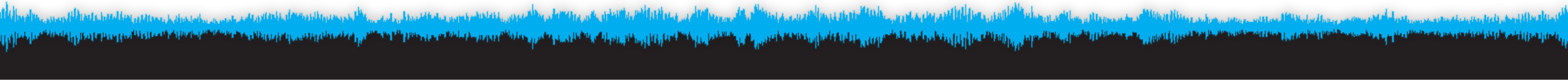


THE LEVEES BREAK

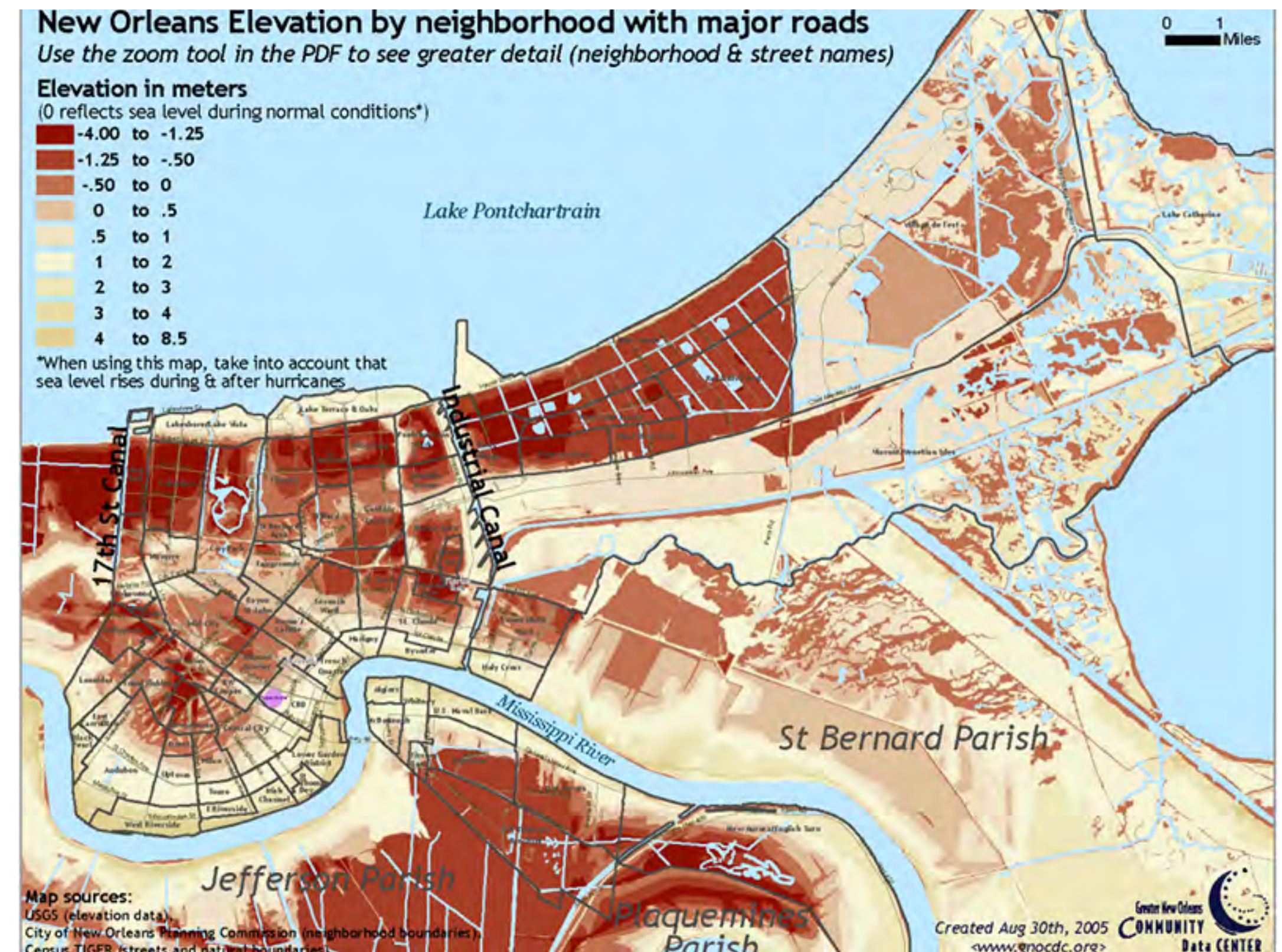
Watch [this video](#) of how the levee system in New Orleans failed and led to devastating flooding.



Consider or ask a friend:

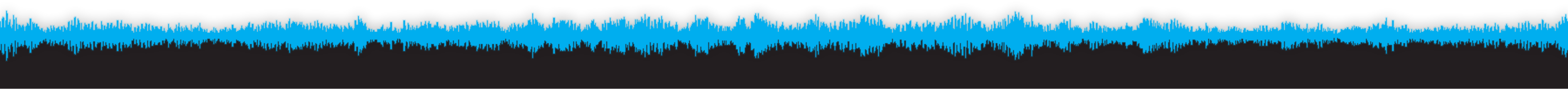
- Was the hurricane a sudden surprise, or was there notice to evacuate?
 - What might have motivated some people to evacuate or not?
 - What might have prevented some people from evacuating?
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Examine the three maps on **this handout**, paying particular attention to the demographic characteristics of each map.





Consider or ask a friend:

- What is the specific data on each map?
 - Collectively, what do the three maps represent?
 - What sort of correlations do you notice between the maps?
 - Why might the people living in high-poverty zones have a harder time evacuating before the hurricane?
 - Based on the data provided in these maps, who do you think was likely affected the most after the hurricane?
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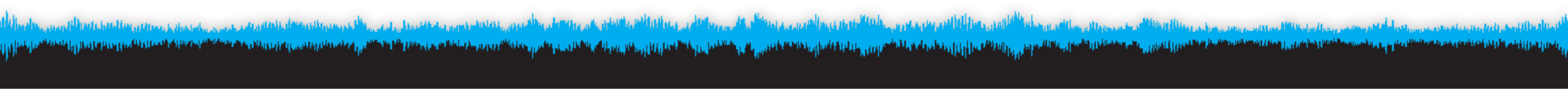


STRANDED

Watch [this video](#) detailing various government responses to the suffering of New Orleans citizens during and after the hurricane struck the area.




Consider or ask a friend:

- How would you describe the demographic of people stranded at the Superdome?
 - How would you answer Big Freedia's question, "What were the people supposed to do?" considering the events occurring after the hurricane?
 - Was Louisiana Governor Blanco's policy of employing "necessary force" appropriate? If not, what should the government have done for those in need?
 - What might be some reasons why the government failed to rescue and care for those in need?
 - Why might artists such as Kanye West have been critical of the government's response?
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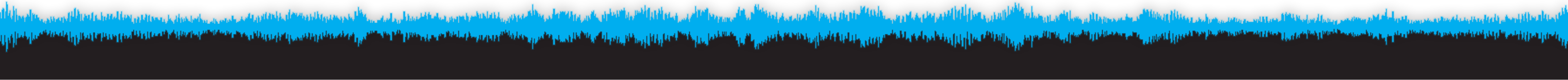


VOICES INSIDE THE STORM

Watch [this clip](#) from a congressional hearing investigating the preparation and response to Hurricane Katrina held in Washington, D.C.



After watching the clip, consider or ask a friend:

- What reasons did the evacuees give for arguing that class played a role in the government's response to Hurricane Katrina? What about race? How might have issues of class and race intersect according to the evacuees in the clip?
 - Who did the evacuees find culpable for the ineffective response after the hurricane? What were some of the failures that led to the Hurricane Katrina tragedy?
 - Did you find any evacuee's testimony particularly powerful? Why?
 - How might we prevent a situation like Hurricane Katrina from happening again? What do you think America has or hasn't learned since Hurricane Katrina and Kanye West's statement?
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SUMMARY

- Hurricane Katrina occurred in August 2005 and caused a natural disaster
- In the United States, it devastated the city of New Orleans and surrounding areas
- The New Orleans levee system failed, leading to historic and devastating flooding
- Local, state, and federal government responses to the devastation were widely criticized and viewed as racially and socioeconomically discriminatory
- 1,833 deaths in the U.S. are attributed to Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding it caused

BE CURIOUS

Research other incidents of racism during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina or another natural disaster. Briefly journal your thoughts on the similarities and differences to the event and Hurricane Katrina, but note how the incident is an example of racial neglect or related to environmental racism. Consider the following events as options or choose your own. Present your thoughts to your class via a video or audio recording.

- **The Danziger Bridge shootings**
 - **New Orleans' Hospitals Mercy-Killing Allegations**
 - **The Conditions at the Superdome**
 - **The Media's depictions of Katrina's aftermath**
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BE CREATIVE

Read Jamelle Bouie's **“If You Want to Understand Black Lives Matter, You Have to Understand Katrina.”** Create an illustration or write a poem or compose a short song based on the text and the images in the article.



CONNECT

Share it with us! Either you or an adult in your life can share your work with TeachRock on [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#), email to info@teachrock.org, or Tweet it to [@TeachRock](#)

