

Mountainfilm FILM REVIEW â??Mossville: When Great Trees Fallâ?• Listen to What They Say

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Mossville: When Great Trees Fall, directed by Alexander Glustrom*,* follows a man living alone at 3009 5th Avenue in what once was a community initially founded by free slaves intent on living in peace and love along the Louisiana Gulf of Mexico Coast. The last remaining resident of a once-proud African-American community, Stacey Ryan, has refused the state-run, South African global petrochemical conglomerate Sasolâ??s latest offer of $30,000 to vacate what is left of his pride and his familyâ??s history.

The film opens with text titles from a Maya Angelou poem, â??When Great Trees Fall,â?• transitioning to a narrative voice-over with footage of gravediggers digging a hole and fitting a coffin for an eternal resting place. The audience is informed of the seven initial families that started the historic Mossville community, at once a safe haven from the Civil War and a respite from the Jim Crow Laws of the Deep South.

Former Mossville resident, Erica Jackson Hartman is revealed holding a family photo telling of her familyâ??s plight on Fisher Street, a once joyful and harmonious street in a neighborhood â??where everyone knew everyone.â?• The community had been self-sustaining. Jackson-Hartman continued addressing the camera and reminisced of abundant fruit trees â?? until the chemical plants began coming in one after another peaking at an unfathomable fourteen facilities.

Mossville: When Great Trees Fall also reveals that one of the largest U.S. spills of ethylene dichloride (EDC) ever occurred when a leaking transfer pipeline leaked EDC into a nearby estuary. Despite the corporate leadership assuring the residents there was nothing to fear, the residents began dying from various cancers. Twenty-eight independent tests revealed the area had high levels of dioxin, a group of highly toxic chemical compounds harmful to immune systems, hormones, reproduction, human development, leading to cancer. Eventually, a lawsuit was settled for forty-seven million dollars.

A 2012 archival news piece shows the then Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal beaming announced a massive $16-20 billion dollar project from Sasol, a global energy conglomerate based in South Africa. A brief capture of a snide Sasol executive discussing the Louisiana Westlake project, â??a gas to liquids cracker complex,â?• reveals the corporate intent of developing the site as another South African Secunda. Secunda is the biggest emitter of greenhouse (carbon dioxide) gases in the world. The emissions from Secunda exceed the amounts from a hundred individual countries.



Sasolâ??s Secunda mega-plant (Photo by Alexander Glustrom)

The heart of *Mossville: When Great Trees Fall* captures Mr. Ryanâ??s bravery and indomitable spirit in direct cinema, with direct interviews and with brief footage of his hospitalizations due to health complications from the nearby plants. The city has shut off his power and sewer. A face mask-wearing Ryan is shown constructing a 6-8 foot straight- board fence as tandem and tri-axle dump trucks roll past kicking up contaminated dust in their wake.

In other footage, Ryan reveals inside his trailer that after EDC got into the drinking water, he lost both of his parents to cancer, as well as his forty-four-year-old aunt and a fifty-seven year-year-old uncle. Another uncle died young from liver failure. Sasol, one of the economic engines behind the racist, South African apartheid offered Ryan an initial voluntary buyout of $2000. Ryan is seeking enough money to raise his son in nearby Texasâ??s town of Helotes, known as the â??best place to raise kids.â?•

As the film closes, Ryan is shown getting medical treatment. Text titles reveal the buyout monies Ryan eventually received has gone primarily to paying medical bills as he has been hospitalized a dozen times. And, he is still hoping to move to Helotes, Texas.

Mossville: When Great Trees Fall resonates deeply with Maya Angelouâ??s poem as the viewer becomes the witness to an egregious wrong perpetrated visibly upon a human being, a Brother of mankind, and invisibly upon the environment, the Mother of us all. Highly recommended documentary.

Category

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Tags

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