



Rising Waters: Global Warming and the Fate of the Pacific Islands. Bullfrog Films,

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Rising Waters opens with a boat excursion to the former island of Bikeman, a now submerged part of the Micronesian nation of Kiribati. Our guide explains the meaning of the island's name as he jumps off of the boat and then strides, thigh-deep in sea-water, over this mini-Atlantis in the Pacific. *Rising Waters* presents Kirabati as prophecy for Pacific Islands more generally--places that could be swallowed up by the sea if global warming continues unabated. The documentary treats global warming itself as an anthropogenic catastrophe in the making. A short segment of the film, using archival footage, graphics, and the testimony of university-based climatologists, traces the rise of industrialization and presents the basic relationships among the greenhouse effect, carbon dioxide production, and planetary warming. Far from being a matter of debate, the film presents a graph of rising temperatures and projects the increase upwards toward a total of 5 degrees by the year 2100. The film's main purpose, however, is not to argue the existence of global warming but to explore its imminent impact on Pacific Islanders. Indeed, the strength of this approach to global warming is the human and cultural dimension that this film highlights. Three segments focus on Samoa, Kirabati, and the Marshall Islands. For each nation, the film presents a short look into the traditional cultural life of the islanders. Each is celebrated for its community values and its respectful and reciprocal relationships with the sea

and nature more generally. The basic narrative is a twist of an old theme: how Western outsiders have threatened to corrupt or destroy noble and innocent peoples, this time flooding them not with, say, consumer goods or nuclear fallout but with the excess waters produced indirectly by their consumption of fossil fuels. But the documentary avoids simply typecasting the islanders as primitive innocents. Islanders are portrayed as articulate, resourceful and modern actors attempting to save their ways of life and inject their perspective into the political discourse. Penehuro Lafale, a Samoan climatologist who is often shown working at his laptop computer, is as knowledgeable on the science of global warming as he is eloquent about the culture and land he is trying to save. Through such indigenous voices, the documentary succeeds in creating empathy for the island nations and respect for their particular vantage point on global warming. The final third of the *Rising Tide* turns its attention to the global politics surrounding the issue. International negotiations at Kyoto and Bonn are covered. Following the efforts of Pacific island diplomats and lobbyists such as Anginette Hefferman of Fiji casts these discussions in a new light. By delving into the landscapes these islanders believe are in imminent danger, viewers are enabled to feel what people like Hefferman do when addressing the issue: global warming for them is not an abstract environmental issue but a looming threat to peoples and places they love. Looking at

the delegates debating levels of greenhouse gas reductions, the viewer can recall the poignant images from the islands of people--for example, having to rebury the skeletal remains of family members from a cemetery being reclaimed by the sea. By creating empathy and connections to such meaningful places, the film frames the politics of global warming with a poignant and grounded urgency. <p> The documentary addresses the global warming nay-sayers briefly, giving a spokesperson for the Greening Earth Society some airtime. This Society greets the prospect of increased planetary temperature warmly, seeing it as a kind of tropical boon for more southern and northern climes. Though the documentary counters these perspectives with the arguments of other scientists, the heart of its argument is showing how seriously islanders, some of whom are scientists in their own right, take the threat. Several of these spokespersons make the point that the cultural and environmental loss facing Pacific islanders is a harbinger of things to come for others; one segment follows Lafale's journey to Manhattan, where he seeks to build common cause with the people who live on the most powerful island on earth. <p> <cite>Rising Tides</cite> could be used effectively in classes addressing global warming. But it is best viewed not as a single source on global warming, but as a complement to other investigations. The documentary, which is fifty-seven minutes long, would deepen students' understanding of the global issue and imbue them with a vivid sense of the cultural impact of rising sea levels in the Pacific.

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