

1-12-2010

The Last Days of Shismaref

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Repository Citation

Ipri, T. A. (2010). The Last Days of Shismaref. *Educational Media Reviews Online* 1. University at Buffalo Libraries.

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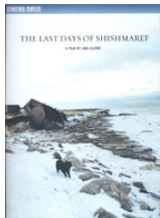
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The Last Days of Shishmaref

2008

Distributed by [Cinema Guild](#), 115 West 30th Street, Suite 800, New York, NY 10001; 212-685-6242

Produced by Juul Kappelhof

Directed by Jan Louter

DVD, color, 90 min.

Sr. High - Adult

American Studies, Environmental Studies, Native American Studies

Reviewed by Tom Ipri, University of Nevada Las Vegas

Highly Recommended

Date Entered: 1/12/2010

The Last Days of Shishmaref chronicles the lives of several families who live in the eponymous village in northwest Alaska as the effects of global warming begin to decimate their surroundings. This beautifully filmed and meditative documentary focuses on the lives of the Inupiaq Eskimo villagers and does not overtly politicize the often volatile issue of the causes of global warming. The film is more concerned with the effects of climate change rather than the causes.

Director Jan Louter allows the villagers to speak for themselves to great benefit. The choice to not use narration lends the film a subtlety that many environmental films lack. The film contrasts the more traditional lives of the older generation, who are seen ice fishing and hunting with a younger generation, who listen to rap music and prefer Western food. This contrast not only sheds light on the growing materialism of the younger generation but also hints at the greater impact that Western lifestyles have on the environment without ever becoming didactic. Louter allows the audience to make their own connections.

The latter part of the film shows how Shishmaref becomes a focal point for mainland America concerning the effects of global warming as news shows begin drawing attention to the small village of approximately 600 inhabitants. Stronger storms caused by climate change eat away at the coast line, as much as 10 feet per year, and warm weather causes fall to be 2-3 weeks late and spring to be 2-3 weeks early disrupting the villagers ability to ice fish and hunt for seal.

The film ends with the villagers being relocated to Tin Creek by the government. Only during this final stretch does the film deal with any political issues as the cost of the move is balanced against the welfare of the inhabitants. The hesitation by the government to help the indigenous people speaks to a long history of mistreatment.

The Last Days of Shishmaref is a mesmerizing documentary that is **highly recommended** for collections with an interest in environmental issues and those with an interest in Native American studies.