

Film 2, *Fire in Paradise*

So, just what are the consequences of the climate crisis?

Note that I said “are,” rather than “will be,” as the consequences of the crisis are now, sadly, here – and more are arriving daily.

The fact is there are many, many consequences appearing across the planet.

The documentary *Fire in Paradise* looks at just one: wildfires caused by drought conditions exacerbated by the climate crisis. In fact, it looks at just one such fire.

Unlike many of the documentaries that we are watching in this class, this film does not focus on the climate crisis in the sense that it does not survey the problem or offer solutions. To the contrary, while *Fire in Paradise* does spend some time addressing the climate crisis, the focus is really on the horrific consequence for one Northern California town.

Consequently, if you didn’t first watch this lecture, you might wonder why I even included this film in a course on the climate crisis. Fair enough.

When the climate crisis entered into the public imagination in the closing quarter of the 20th century, we generally referred to it as “global warming” and saw the potential consequences in these terms. In other words, the big concern was sea level rise. As nearly half of the world’s population lives on or near the coast, sea level rise was rightfully an issue of great concern.

However, for the other half of the world’s population, it was often seen an issue of less immediate concern.

Moreover, it seemed rather far off to many Americans, not only in the sense of being far off in time (decades from now), but also not much of an issue close to home in the United States. The countries that would suffer, like the island nation of the Maldives in South Asia, where the average ground elevation is just 1.5 meters, seemed far away. And since scientists were predicting a gradual increase in sea level, it seemed likely that the wealthy country like the United States would have decades to respond, perhaps by building levees and other infrastructure.

We now know, however, that not only will climate change bring about many more changes than just sea level rise, but that they will come far faster than we imagined and hit close to home – regardless of where your home is on the planet.

Since this course is taking place in California, I thought it appropriate to consider the impact that it is having here, and now.

Four of the five largest wildfires in California history happened in the past decade (the teens).

One of them, the Thomas Fire, happened here in Santa Barbara just a few years ago. At the time, it was the largest wildfire in California's recorded history, though it has now been surpassed.

We could approach this from a statistical, scientific perspective. Doing so would reveal that we are in the midst of an ever-worsening situation with respect to wildfires in California.

But what does this mean in human terms? As we are approaching the climate crisis from a human, cultural perspective in this class, this is an important question. The documentary *Fire in Paradise* takes it up.

As it turns out, I can also address this question personally, as the 2017 Thomas Fire came within about a mile of my Santa Barbara house. At one point, it was spreading at one acre per second, which is absolutely astonishing. The smoke was so bad that I needed to leave town, as I was very concerned for my daughter (and her lungs), as she was a just a toddler at the time. It was an emotional moment when we left, as it was not at all clear that we would have a home to which to return.

Fortunately, our home, as well as the city of Santa Barbara, was spared.

Unfortunately, many people in nearby Montecito also thought that the danger was over, only to be caught in mud and debris flows a month later. Because vegetation had been burned by the Thomas Fire, there was no sufficient plant and root structure to deal with an extraordinary (and extraordinarily unusual) weather event, when 1/2" of rain fell in a five-minute period. Because this downpour took place at 3am, many people were not even aware of what was happening.

In some places, the debris flow was over 15 feet in height, bringing entire boulders with it. Moving at a speed of up to 20 miles an hour, it was impossible to out run. Over 20 people were killed. In some places, the debris flow continued all the way down to the ocean, crossing a major interstate freeway (Route 101) in the process. Because it deposited nearly 12 feet of mud, water, and debris on the freeway at some places, it was closed for nearly 2 weeks.

Having burned over 280,000 acres, there had never been anything like the Thomas Fire in recorded history in California. However, in just half a year, it would be surpassed by the Ranch fire, which burned nearly a half a million acres.

Astonishingly, the Ranch fire would be surpassed in the same year by the Camp fire, which is the subject of the PBS documentary *Fire in Paradise*. Surpassed not in the sense of burning more acres, which it didn't, but rather by being the most destructive. In fact, it was the most expensive natural disaster in 2018 – not only in California, but worldwide.

In addition, as it killed more people, it was the deadliest wildfire in the California history.

The documentary *Fire in Paradise* puts a human face on the climate crisis, which will impact all sorts of people across the planet, in all sorts of ways.

Although some people (climate change deniers) would like us to believe that the climate crisis is just scientists wildly speculating on the future, incidents like the Camp fire make clear that the climate crisis is all too real – and that it is here, now. Even in sunny California. Even in incredibly wealthy parts of California, like Montecito, where scores of celebrities have homes.

I am curious to hear what you think – as well as how you feel – about of all this and the documentary *Fire in Paradise*.

As something of a postscript, when I put together the first draft of this section (during the first week of January in 2020), wildfires were burning across Australia. At that time, over 12 million acres had been burned. By the time it was over, these fires had burned and astonishing 46,000,000 acres in Australia.

Of the 20 largest wildfires in California history, 15 took place in the 21st century. The Australia were 15 times larger than all these 15 wildfires combined.

Let me repeat that, 15 times larger than the 15 largest wildfires in California history, combined.

Class discussion of *Fire in Paradise*

If you have not already made your weekly comment, I am curious to hear your thoughts.

The following observations have not been paraphrased or altered, though I do correct the occasional typo and, because of space concerns, sometimes just part of the comment is reproduced here.

No Comment!

“Fire In Paradise” is one of the most scary and heartbreaking things I have ever seen. I honestly wanted to stop watching the film during many scenes because I felt overwhelmed, as if I were experiencing the fire along with everyone else as well.

On the syllabus for our course, I put a trigger warning in to alert people to the fact that this can be an emotionally overwhelming documentary, especially if you personally have ever experienced a fire of any type, but especially a wildfire - which an increasing number of Californians now have.

Although it is well put together documentary, the emotional force comes in part from the striking images but mostly from hearing firsthand from people who experienced the Camp fire.

Because we tend to think of the impact of climate crisis being far off, either in a far-off place or far off in the future, it was particularly unnerving to see it right here, in California, right now.

When watching the film “Fire in Paradise”, I started having heavy flashbacks to where I was and what I was doing when the Paradise fire happened. Where I’m from, my hometown is only two hours away from Paradise, but we were still heavily affected by that fire. I can remember feeling that same panic that the people in the film were feeling, I can remember all of us in our town so nervous when thoughts began to pop up, such as, “Are the ashes going to land here? Is another fire going to happen here? If Sacramento is being alerted about the potential harm of the ashes and the smoke, do we have to worry too?” I can remember all the students, the teachers, and the parents protesting for our school district to cancel school because the air was terrible.

The documentary Fire in Paradise takes us to the epicenter of the Camp fire. However, it is important to realize that a wildfire like this can have far-reaching impact – often hundreds of miles away.

Recall that I noted in late 2017 the Thomas Fire near Santa Barbara was the largest wildfire in California’s recorded history at 280,000 acres. In late Summer and early Fall of 2020, two more wildfires surpassed this record: the Creek Fire, which burned 380,000 acres, and the North Complex Fire, which burned 319,000. The Creek Fire and the North Complex Fire, were, respectively, over 200 and 150 miles from San Francisco.

However, San Francisco became an extraordinarily eerie place at the time, as even in the middle of the day the skies were a dark red color - kind of like twilight, but a very odd twilight that filled the entire sky. This was because the air was filled with tiny microscopic particles. Unfortunately, the air was so saturated with these particles that it became unhealthy to breathe.

“The Northern California fires in August of 2020 impacted the air quality of nearly 7.8 million residents in the San Francisco Bay Area alone...[and]...Millions more outside the Bay Area” were impacted, including places as far away as Reno, Nevada.

“[W]ildfires release nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbons that contribute to elevated ozone levels,” which can “worsen symptoms of bronchitis, emphysema and asthma.” which can also increase the likelihood of cardiac arrest. A study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association found that “[e]xposure to heavy smoke during recent California wildfires raised the risk of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests up to 70%.”

One can imagine making a documentary about the impact that California's wildfires have had hundreds of miles away. I am not sure that it would be as striking as *Fire in Paradise*, but I imagine that it would be none-the-less be heartbreaking.

Incidentally, quite a few students in the class are from in the area surrounding the Paradise Fire. Here is another example of how it impacted someone:

I had avoided watching the Fire in Paradise film for so long because I knew it would be completely heartbreaking. I live about an hour away from Paradise and I remember how terrified everyone was here, even though we were so far from the flames. I can't even imagine the emotions that residents of Paradise and the surrounding communities must have been experiencing. My high school was shut down for a week and a half not only because the downpour of ashes made for unhealthy air quality but also our campus was an evacuation site.

When the Thomas Fire was still some distance from the city of Santa Barbara, I woke to an eerie sight, as the ground was blanketed in a white-gray color and the air was filled with flakes dropping to the ground. It almost looked like snow. But, of course, it wasn't. Ashes from a fire many miles away we're falling on our yard.

Although at the time I didn't know the above facts about the inhalation of particulates caused by wildfires, having made my living as a furniture maker for many years, I knew that the really scary part was not what you could see, but what you could only smell, as the air was filled with tiny microscopic particles that were being absorbed into people's lungs.

Which is why my little family, like so many others during wildfires, evacuate - even if they live some distance from the fire.

During my first year at UCSB I became friends with someone who lived in Paradise. I remember him telling me how beautiful Paradise was and how I had to go visit. But soon his hometown was engulfed in flames and him and his family lost everything. He had to move back in with his family to regroup and restart their lives. I was heartbroken when I heard about the fire, but after watching the documentary "Fire in Paradise" my heart was completely crushed.

Because Climate Crisis 101 is such a large class, it contains many students who have either personally experienced consequences of the climate crisis, wildfires, or know people that have.

While the documentary focused on the fast-moving fire itself, we sometimes forget that an event like this will have consequences not only many miles from the wildfires themselves (as I just noted), but also for many years to come.

Not only will students have to leave school to go back home, but people will lose jobs in businesses that will never reopen, homes will never be rebuilt because of lack of adequate insurance, and people will continue to directly suffer the bodily consequences, such as from lung damage from smoke inhalation during the fire for years.

If this wasn't all bad enough, there are a range seemingly obscure issues that are nonetheless quite a problem.

As The New York Times noted, the “runoff from burned homes can put harmful chemicals [such as benzene] into ground water and reservoirs...The Environmental Protection Agency classifies water with benzene levels above 500 parts per billion as hazardous. Some samples in Paradise after the fire were found to have 2,000 parts per billion. In Sonoma County after the wine country fires some samples had 40,000 parts per billion.”

Moving at 80 football fields a minute and eventually covering the size of Chicago, this incident that should have not been as big of a deal as it was became seared in the memories of the 50,000 people who managed to escape – but also ended up being the last memory made for 85 people. No matter how crazy the statistics of the fire are, nothing was more impactful to me than seeing the vigor of the fire contrasted to how serene Paradise once was...Not only will the altering climate worldwide affect the earth's ecosystem from a scientific point of view, but it has a sentiment attached to it as it kills all types of species – including humans. But not just humans in general – our grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, neighbors. It is happening and needs to be addressed.

Well put.

Statistics, like the fact that the Camp fire was the size of the city of Chicago, can certainly be instrumental; however, as this person notes, “nothing was more impactful...than seeing the vigor of the fire contrasted to how serene Paradise once was.” The fire did not just impact a certain number of acres, but rather a real place (which happened to have been strikingly beautiful) inhabited by real people.

And let's not forget that a range of additional beings that also lost their lives. A whole other documentary, which I would imagine would be very moving, could have focused on all the animals and birds living in the area that also lost their homes and lives.

This comment rather succinctly draws attention to the human focus of Climate Crisis 101. Yes, as this comment wonderfully noted, we can approach the climate crisis “from a scientific point of view, but it has a sentiment attached to it as it kills all types of species – including humans. But not just humans in general – our grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, neighbors.”

Not only is the climate crisis being brought about by human action, our actions are impacting all of the beings on the planet, including the human ones. While we might find this fact useful, actually seeing the faces of people suffering because our actions brings the issue home.

The following observation approaches the same issue:

This film is difficult to watch, largely because of how “human” it is. In my other ecology classes, I have always been told the cold, hard facts and numbers. While the statistics are convincing and concerning, they never made me feel as distraught as the personal account, onsite footage, and recorded phone calls presented in this film...

As I continue to note throughout Climate Crisis 101, I have enormous respect for my friends and colleagues in the sciences, including (and in some ways especially) those offering courses that translate the climate crisis into “cold, hard facts and numbers.”

However, as I will also continually note through our Climate Crisis 101, even if you are not a scientist, there are definitely things that you can do to make an intervention in the climate crisis.

Communication is a great example.

Let me take this opportunity to throw in a plug, just in case you are looking for a way to help mitigate the climate crisis (or in case you are looking for a major): we have an excellent Department of Film and Media Studies at UCSB,.

It’s also worth noting that, now that film has been democratized thanks to the Internet and technological advances in the last few decades (I am especially thinking of the fact that smartphones now have excellent video cameras), anyone can be an influencer, thanks to YouTube, TikTok and other platforms.

Indeed, I can imagine going to a place like Paradise after the fire and just recording a series of personal accounts with a smartphone, as well as filming the damage caused by the fire. With the right mix of creativity and careful editing, I would imagine that this would make for a striking series of videos on YouTube or TikTok.

Finally, regarding this comment, it is worth noting that Climate Crisis 101, even though it takes a human approach to the issue, is for more than just majors in the humanities and social sciences. In that sense, think of our approach as being complementary to the natural sciences. As this person notes, “statistics are convincing and concerning,” but they are not the same as “personal account, onsite footage, and recorded phone calls.”

In other words, one of the goals of Climate Crisis 101 is to not only understand the problem, but to feel it as well. The following two comment made this point especially well:

As an Environmental Studies major and a climate activist, I have watched many films about the climate crisis and the impacts it has caused and will continue to cause if action is not taken immediately. However, I do not recall any film that has evoked the same level of emotion that “Fire in Paradise” did. I found myself reaching for a box of tissues more than once

The following statement made a similar point:

In Ken's Youtube video that gives an introduction to this documentary, he explains that because this film isn't a scholarly film, we may wonder why it's even required. But I wasn't questioning this at all! It's easy to see why this would be such an important film to broadcast. In fact, I sometimes think that films like these are more important to watch than films that spew a bunch of facts. This documentary had me so engrossed and invested that I even shed a few tears at some points. I feel like I just went through such a visceral, cathartic experience after watching the utter devastation that this wild fire created. Looking at environmental issues from a humanistic perspective rather than a scientific one allows people to form emotions about climate issues rather than simply being exposed to facts.

One of the most remarkable things about human beings is that we can experience empathy with other beings, which is, incidentally, not limited to human beings, as we can feel empathy for animals.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*, "Empathy is often defined as understanding another person's experience by imagining oneself in that other person's situation: One understands the other person's experience as if it were being experienced by the self, but without the self actually experiencing it."

One of the remarkable things about communication is that we can activate feelings of empathy by way of films and other media. As this comment noted, "I feel like I just went through such a visceral, cathartic experience after watching the utter devastation that this wild fire created." This is, of course, just a feeling rather than this individual's own personal experience. However, because of the gift of empathy, it feels rather like we had actually experienced it ourselves, as this person aptly notes.

As much as I respect the natural sciences, empathy is not generally their stock-in-trade. However, if we hope to convince people that we need to act to mitigate the climate crisis, engaging their emotions can be a very important approach.

The difficulty is that feeling emotions of this sort can sometimes be a little overwhelming. This is, of course, why Climate Crisis 101 can be especially depressing in the first three weeks.

Fortunately, empathy works both ways, as we will be meeting a range of individuals (by way of the course documentaries and reading) in the second two thirds of Climate Crisis 101 who are doing amazing things to mitigate the climate crisis. With any luck, meeting them will help bring about good, positive feelings.

In 2019, Greta Thunberg delivered a powerful speech asking people to act as if their house is on fire, but this is no longer an if, our house is literally on fire. The climate crisis is a daunting task and can at times make us feel like sitting ducks, as people did in the film, waiting for climate change or a fire to wipe us out. However, I have hope for our future. I believe that my generation

will be able to make the cultural change to finally put out the fire that has engulfed our home we call planet Earth.

It is an altogether remarkable fact that Greta Thunberg, who was in many ways just an average high school student, forever changed the climate change discussion.

Perhaps because “‘[s]hout[ing] fire in a crowded theater’ is a popular analogy for speech or actions made for the principal purpose of creating panic,” for a long time most climate activists shied away from making statements that would allow them to be perceived as “climate alarmists,” which is, in fact, the term that climate change deniers use for climate activists. This was a clever move on the part of deniers (and, make no mistake, they can often be very clever), as it discouraged speaking about the climate crisis in alarmist terms.

However, in her January 2019 speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Thunberg reframed the conversation by baldly proclaiming that “[o]ur house is on fire.” In other words, this is an emergency and we need to act immediately. Lives are at stake.

Astonishingly, as the above student noted, for some people, their houses have literally been burned to the ground by the climate crisis.

There is a potential danger to this approach, as people can become petrified (i.e. stunned into an action) by fear or made to feel that, in the words of this comment, “like sitting ducks...waiting for climate change or a fire to wipe us out.” However, this person resists this feeling to instead declare that “I have hope for our future.”

This strikes me as a perfect balance: on the one hand, taking the issue most seriously, even to the point of being alarmed. On the other hand, not being petrified by the fear, but rather having hope.

I have tried to balance the material in Climate Crisis 101 in the hope that most people will feel this way by the end of the term. If you do not feel this way right now, I wouldn’t worry, as we have not gotten to any of the solutions.

Finally, this comment notes that “I believe that my generation will be able to make the cultural change to finally put out the fire that has engulfed our home we call planet earth.” As I explained in the chapter of Climate Crisis 101 on Generation and Climate, I believe that my students and their generation can and will solve this problem. It is frustrating that it has landed on your shoulders, as my generation (and the one after it) has done very little to mitigate the climate crisis. This is unfair. You deserve an apology.

Having taken English 22 already, I watched the second film and found it to be effective because of the people that tell the story. The fact that the film showcased the story of young kids around our age, made me think about what this situation may have been like if it had happened to me and those around me. Seeing people who lived a very similar life to yours, and then their life got

turned completely upside down was very disheartening, but also very close to home. When I watched the other films, such as the one starring DiCaprio or Al Gore, although also powerful, I did not get the same feeling. This film showed that this type of disaster can happen to anyone at any moment, and change your entire life forever.

Although most people watched the documentary Fire in Paradise, students who had already seen this film were asked to instead watch The Story of California's Camp Fire, as Told By Paradise High School. It is in August 2020 documentary produced by The New Yorker magazine.

As far as I'm concerned, Fire in Paradise is the better, more effective of the two films. However, I offered up this option, as it, to borrow words from this comment, "showcased the story of young kids around our age...[which]... made me think about what this situation may have been like if it had happened to me and those around me."

This turns back on the question of empathy. While plenty of people in the class expressed deep empathy for people in the Fire in Paradise documentary (many were literally brought to tears), we don't always feel the same amount of empathy for everyone. This is simply human nature. Consequently, it can sometimes be difficult for a college student to emotionally connect up with a famous and wealthy person in his forties like Leonardo DiCaprio or Al Gore, another wealthy white guy, who is old enough to be DiCaprio's father.

Consequently, seeing how people just like you, in this case high school students, were impacted by the wildfire in Paradise can sometimes be very effective. This turns us back to the issue of communication, as certain approaches may work best with certain audiences.

For example, taking an alternate approach by focusing on the loss of houses, businesses, and property may not elicit a great deal of empathy from high school students. However, if you knew that your audience were relatively wealthy homeowners, this might be an effective approach.

As far as I am concerned, when it comes to communicating the severity of the climate crisis and prompting people to action, a broad range of approaches should be explored, even though I am

My dad is a firefighter and talks about how draining and dangerous wildfires can be and how he has lost friends trying to help out in situations like this, and even though he talks about his experiences, I don't think I've ever fully understood how detrimental wildfires truly are; I've heard the stories and watched the news, but this documentary really opened my eyes to how climate change is such a large, dangerous influence and how it has made fires so much worse.

This comment address is an important point, which not only applies to California's wildfires, but to a range of other consequences of climate crisis.

Are the recent wildfires that we have been considering caused by anthropogenic climate change? No, they are not, in the sense that this area of North America has a long history of wildfires that predates climate change and even human beings arriving here thousands of years ago.

However, we are now having more, and more severe wildfires, than we ever had before. As this person succinctly notes, the “climate crisis... has made fires so much worse.”

Incidentally, the same can be said of other consequences of the climate crisis, such as hurricanes. Hurricanes have probably been around nearly as long as the Atlantic Ocean; however, we are now having more and more severe hurricanes than ever before in human history.

Climate change is making wildfires more common and more severe because of “a combination of rising heat, longer droughts, and powerful winds.” In terms of longer droughts, it used to be the case that California would begin its rainy season around October. When I first arrived in Santa Barbara in 2006, this was generally the case. These were very welcomed occurrences, as they would wet everything down, greatly reducing the chance of a wildfire.

However, because of climate change, the seasonal rains do not come until November or even December. Consequently, not only does the dry season exist for a longer period, everything dries out even more as the months go on. Which significantly raise his risk of wild fire. The Camp Fire that destroyed the town of Paradise occurred in November. The Thomas Fire that threatened Santa Barbara happened in December. If seasonal rains had come in October of either a year, neither fire may have happened.

Because the climate has changed, people have begun to refer to California’s current situation of more and more severe wildfires as the “new normal.” After the Thomas fire near Santa Barbara, the governor of the state at the time, Jerry Brown, noted that “[t]his is the new normal, and this could be something that happens every year or every few years — it happens, to some degree. It's just more intense, more widespread, and we're about ready to have firefighting at Christmas,”

However, as “Philip B. Duffy, a climate scientist who is president of the Woodwell Climate Research Center” noted to The New York Times, “People are always asking, ‘Is this the new normal?’” he said. “I always say no. It’s going to get worse.”

Documentaries like these should be played in science classes across the country because they could further influence the generations who will continue to take action against worsening climate change. However, big corporations and businesses are the ones who hold wads of power, and most of them aren't doing anything to slow/end their impact on the world and its climate. Big names/brands/companies need to be held accountable for their actions, whether it is for something giant like starting a devastating wildfire or just admitting that they need to alter

production and come up with a new sustainability model that could potentially make a difference in the world we all live in.

I wholeheartedly agree that documentaries like this should be played in classrooms across the country.

However, I would argue that, to be most effective and elicit the most empathy, such films should be tailor-made for each area. I happened to have been a visiting professor at Princeton University when Superstorm Sandy hit. Although the situation was entirely different, as the problem was principally gale winds and a massive storm surges that flooded, among other places, some of Manhattan's subways, the death toll was far greater than the Camp Fire at Paradise, , as "233 people across eight countries from the Caribbean to Canada" were killed.

In other words, as the climate crisis is now hitting close to home, regardless of where you live, I think that everyone should know how it is impacting their nearby friends and neighbors.

Regarding the observation that "Big names/brands/companies need to be held accountable for their actions" in contributing to the climate crisis, the following comment squarely takes on this issue:

a)

There is a shortlist of people who could be considered directly responsible for the loss of life in Paradise. The higher-ups of ExxonMobil who created their own studies and knew for a fact that continued use of fossil fuels was going to be disastrous and said nothing. The Koch brothers and every other right-wing think tank funded by oil money that lied to the American people and the world. Many of these people are still around today, living comfortable luxurious lives. What these CEOs and politicians have done to my generation and the many that will come after goes far beyond negligent or selfish. It's criminal. These people are criminals. Their mindless pursuit of infinite growth lays the fate of every town like Paradise squarely at their feet. One can only hope for a day when these people could be tried for crimes against humanity, a sort of Climate Nuremberg Trials, but sadly, that day likely won't be coming anytime soon. All we can do is ensure towns like Paradise are never forgotten and keep fighting for a better world.

In one sense, the Camp Fire that destroyed Paradise, California "was caused by electrical transmission lines owned and operated by Pacific Gas and Electricity (PG&E) located in the Pulga area." However, in another sense, it could be argued that the cause of the Camp Fire may have indeed been anthropogenic climate change.

In the past 140 years, the average temperature on earth has increased by roughly 2°F. However, in California the increase was 3°F. As the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) notes "[t]he length of fire season is estimated to have increased by 75 days across" parts of California, such as the Sierras. As CAL FIRE

further notes, this “seems to correspond with an increase in the extent of forest fires across the state.”

In other words, if the fire season ended with October rains in 2018, as it has traditionally, the PG&E transmission lines may not have sparked the Camp Fire on the morning of November, 8 of that year. If this is indeed the case, who then should we blame for the problem?

This comment boldly suggest that ExxonMobil should be partially held responsible for the Camp Fire because they “created their own studies and knew for a fact that continued use of fossil fuels was going to be disastrous and said nothing.” So, what’s the story here?

As [InsideClimate News](#) noted in a milestone 2015 article, back in 1977, the senior scientist with the Exxon Corporation delivered to talk at the corporate headquarters where he noted that “there is general scientific agreement that the most likely manner in which mankind is influencing the global climate is through carbon dioxide release from the burning of fossil fuels.” Exxon quickly responded by commissioning an “ambitious program [that] included both empirical CO2 sampling and rigorous climate modeling.”

“Then, toward the end of the 1980s, Exxon curtailed its carbon dioxide research. In the decades that followed, Exxon worked instead at the forefront of climate denial. It put its muscle behind efforts to manufacture doubt about the reality of global warming its own scientists had once confirmed. It lobbied to block federal and international action to control greenhouse gas emissions. It helped to erect a vast edifice of misinformation that stands to this day.”

So, it can - and certainly has - been argued that organizations like ExxonMobil and the Koch Brothers (also mentioned in this comment) could have intervened in anthropogenic climate change just as it was really beginning to take off forty years ago. (In 1977, CO2 in the atmosphere was 334 ppm: it is nearly 420 ppm today – an increase of almost 25%.) Instead, they not only concealed the findings of their own scientists, but vehemently denied it. Indeed, they helped inaugurate an era of climate change denial.

This is why this student is so outraged. “What these CEOs and politicians have done to my generation and the many that will come after goes far beyond negligent or selfish. It’s criminal. These people are criminals. Their mindless pursuit of infinite growth lays the fate of every town like Paradise squarely at their feet.”

I don’t know what more I could say.

The documentary doesn't explicitly say much about climate change, but it does explain that it was greatly exacerbated by it. Thus, it got me wondering what the fire would have been like if Climate Change wasn't a thing. Would it have started as a bush fire that was easily just put out by a fire truck?

Prior to watching Fire in Paradise, I knew the climate crisis was bad but watching these stories come to life made me understand that the name is not just a name; we, as a planet, are in a CRISIS. My heart dropped when children and family members shared the stories of their loved ones passing or when firefighters began taking matters into their own hands even in the face of extreme danger.

Just to put this into perspective, a football field is around 1.1 acres in area. It's very hard to imagine 200 football fields worth of fiery destruction. Another thing to note is that it is also mentioned that at one point the fire was spreading at 80 football fields a minute, which is absurd. Looking at these facts it's very hard for me to conclude that the Camp Fire was any ordinary fire. A fire this massive and fast spreading is very unnatural. The video does subtly mention the reasons for this, that is the dry ground due to lack of rainfall and the rising temperatures. With these facts, it is now clear that a major part of this fire was because of climate change.

Fire in Paradise, was an extremely emotional documentary that hit very close to home, especially because I've been a NorCal resident my entire life, and I vividly remember when "The Campfire" fire was occurring. Since I was younger I wasn't able to fully grasp what was happening at the time, and the long lasting effects that it caused. I vividly remember the sky being filled with smoke, and my entire town was covered with ashes for days. I also remember not being able to go to school because of how bad the air quality was, which goes to show how this fire didn't just affect the citizens of Paradise, but citizens of neighboring towns as well.

I watched "The Story of California's Camp Fire as Told by Paradise High School..." Watching this short film by The New Yorker really illuminated just how tragic the fire continued to be after the event. It wasn't a tragedy that stopped and started with the fire, but one that continued to have ramifications afterward and will probably continue to be a painful subject for decades to come.

I found myself enraged when I began to see a common theme appearing: the majority of the students felt like their pain was being insincerely inquired about for the sake of news articles or viral videos, yet no one seemed to care about how they really felt. While I agree that educating the public on what happened in 2018, the worst wildfire California had ever seen, there was a much more tactful way to go about it. One which didn't leave barely adults, or not even adults, feeling like they were putting on a show for the public.

This movie reminds me of the flood I experienced last year. Last year there was a flood in Santa Barbara and my car was trapped in the flood. The freeways were flooded and my car couldn't move and I remember the fireman had to pull me out of the water. Moreover, there was so much traffic I remember feeling a type of anxiety I never felt before. The emotions of the woman who called 911 was the same terror I felt in the flood plus a million.

This week I watched The Story of California's Camp Fire, as Told by Paradise High School, and this film struck home for me. I took Eng 22 last quarter, and the other film gave a good insight into the situation, but this documentary resonated with me more because of the intimate interviews. I was able to empathize with each person by placing myself in their shoes as I graduated from high school last year. It is heartbreaking to hear that thousands were displaced, almost 100 people dead, and they had to finish their senior year in a building 20 miles away. I feel for Ms. Partain, it was clear she cared for her students immensely, and her whole life was ripped from beneath her. These are the stories that should go viral and grab the public's attention.

A third moment that was jarring and horrifying is when a man was filming outside and panned to a burnt car, talking about how his friend died. At first, I didn't see the burnt corpse that he was referring to, but as soon as I registered it, I had to pause. It was so nauseating and unsettling to see the the direct result the fire had in the way of taking a human life. The fact that this happened to 85 people because of Camp Fire had me imagining 85 burnt corpses next to each other, and the thought was too devastating to bear.

Because I am Korean, I didn't know the destructiveness of wildfires. In Korea, the environment does not allow wildfire to cause as big of a problem as it does in the United States. So, while watching this documentary, I realized how potentially dangerous wildfires are to people and the environment. The sight of a huge amount of embers blowing in the wind, forcing people to evacuate from their homes gave me goosebumps.

A comment that particularly stuck with me was when an interviewee said, "The problem is you can't take a corporation and put it into prison," when reading off all the charges that PG & E faced. I hope that with climate reparations becoming a more popular topic, there will be a way to properly punish large corporations that are reckless towards our environment. Giving money to communities that are disproportionately affected by climate disasters is a good start, but there needs to be more ways to hold these companies accountable. This doesn't just have to apply to big oil companies, but energy companies as well, like PG & E.

I also watched The story of California's camp fire, as told by Paradise high school and I think the film did a great job of putting a face on the aftermath of the paradise fire. The film was especially emotionally compelling because it demonstrates that even those who physically survived the fire still have a way to go before they are emotionally anchored and understandably so. I would say this documentary hit home because being a freshman in college means I just finished my senior year of high school. I can only imagine what experiencing a fire in my last few months at home would have been like.

I watched the film about the students at Paradise High School where they talk about the fire that happened in 2018. I remember when this happened but the fire that I remember clearly is the Thomas Fire. I will always remember how physically sick I got from the air quality. My family tried to keep the windows closed as much as possible but there was still always a faint smell of smoke in my home. I then came to realize that while I was there just struggling with the smell, there were people out there whose lives really changed because of fires. After watching this video, it is clear to see how the people of Paradise became victims of this very large wildfire.

As someone who has experienced 2 evacuations in my life for multi week long periods due to wildfires, this documentary hits extremely close to home. My community has not faced the destruction seen in Paradise but I can certainly empathize with their fear and frustration towards everything. However, it remains one of my top worries because of my previous experiences and because of the possibility of a devastating fire happening truly at any time and spreading so rapidly like seen in the Camp Fire.