



Canon EOS 1D Mark IV and EOS 7D Digital SLRs Used to Chronicle Momentous New Orleans Events in New Documentary by Director Spike Lee

Five years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, famed director Spike Lee returned to document the city's ongoing recovery efforts. While filming a city still recovering from the catastrophe, yet buoyed by its historic 2010 Super Bowl victory, the disastrous Gulf of Mexico oil spill occurred. Amid this backdrop of hope and heartache Lee and his crew shot a new two-part documentary titled *If God Is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise*. The follow-up to Lee's award-winning 2006 HBO film *When The Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, the new production was shot using several film and video formats to achieve a variety of looks. Included among the HD cameras used on the project were Canon EOS-1D Mark IV and EOS 7D digital SLRs. As director of photography Cliff Charles explains, the Canon cameras were instrumental in capturing motion images needed for the film.

"I was interested in getting run-and-gun shots with a small, lightweight camera," Charles noted. "As a cinematographer, however, I also wanted to acquire these images at the highest quality and resolution. I had always owned Canon cameras, and when I learned about Canon's large-sensor digital SLRs that could also shoot HD, I wanted to see what they could provide for us in building a collage, if you will, of multiple formats."



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EOS-1D Mark IV / **EOS 7D**

Canon



A Good Run

The still-photography aesthetic, out of which the Canon-1D Mark IV and 7D emerged, provided numerous advantages for shooting *If God Is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise*, according to Charles. The first of these is that SLR cameras have always been well-suited for shooting landscapes.

"We captured as much of the Gulf Coast area and New Orleans as we could because the city itself is a 'character' in the film," he said. "Ricardo Sarmiento, one of our main camera operators, did a lot of the landscape shooting with the 1D Mark IV in particular."

"The relatively small size of the Canon digital SLRs enables one person to carry multiple cameras, which was another advantage," Charles added.

"These cameras were used for different shots, because of their different weights and sensor sizes."

The 1D Mark IV's body weight is slightly more than 2 lbs. with a 16.1-megapixel APS-H-size CMOS sensor measuring 28.7mm x 19mm. The 7D's body weight is a lighter 1.8 lbs. and the camera body itself is smaller with an 18-megapixel APS-C-size CMOS sensor measuring 22.2mm x 14.8mm. This allows camera operators to carry multiple cameras at once, with various lenses attached for unique perspectives while on the move.

"For run-and-gun applications – where you're wearing multiple cameras like Dennis Hopper in *Apocalypse Now* – the 7D is better because it's lighter," he continued. "Its smaller sensor gives you a bit more depth of field, which helps you get shots quickly and in focus. For more composed imagery, such as landscapes, the 1D Mark IV was better because its larger sensor provides more resolution. That said, both cameras got a good run around New Orleans."

Form-Factor Advantages

Another benefit, Charles cited, to shooting with an SLR-style camera is that many people know how to use them. Even if they are completely camera-illiterate, the learning curve is far simpler than that for a broadcast-grade HD camcorder or film camera. This enabled Charles to give Canon 1D Mark IV and 7D cameras to other members of the crew and obtain a greater variety of coverage at little-to-no cost. This additional-cameraman method is becoming a popular DSLR technique employed by cinematographers to quickly and simply capture an additional angle or perspective on an established shot.

"This is a great advantage in situations where you need to acquire a lot of footage very quickly," he said. "Everyone got an opportunity to work with the cameras, including Spike, who shot some footage with the 7D."

He would not have been able to shoot and direct if he was using anything larger than a DSLR camera."

The biggest bonus of all in using Canon's 1D Mark IV and 7D, Charles informed, is that people don't realize the cameras shoot video. Cameras must be as inconspicuous as possible when shooting documentaries, or else their presence could influence the people or events being photographed.

"Having a video camera in the form of an SLR is much less obtrusive," Charles said. "It is great to be able to walk around with a camera when people don't realize that you're capturing motion. When people see a still camera they just dismiss it and assume you're taking snapshots."

This came in handy even during Mardi Gras, which is famous for its uninhibited revelry. This year the celebration took on special significance after the Saints' Super Bowl victory gave the city's morale a much-needed boost. Charles and Sarmiento utilized Spike's hand-picked interns from the graduate film program of New York University (director Spike Lee's alma mater) to assist on the entire shoot.

"We walked the entire stretch of the parade route," Charles related. "The addition of these smaller cameras was incredibly beneficial to us. We also never had to use any extra lighting for the Canon cameras. We were pleasantly surprised by how well they handled low light. We shot tons of footage with the 1D Mark IV and the 7D all throughout one of the biggest Mardi Gras in years. We really captured New Orleans with those cameras."

Fast, Crisp, and Clean

In addition to the low-light capabilities of their megapixel CMOS sensors and convenient form factor, Charles also had good things to say about the optical performance of the Canon lenses on the production's 1D Mark IV and 7D.

"Canon glass is amazing," he said. "We were really happy with the selection of Canon lenses that we were able to use for both cameras. We didn't have to worry about the speed of the lenses because we had the ability to boost the effective ISO on the cameras. But it still was nice to have lenses that were very fast, crisp, and clean. We had an 85mm lens that got a lot of use, as did the 50mm. The zooms were also beautiful. Having a zoom is great for run-and-gun, because lens changes could cause you to miss the shot. Our HD video cameras were outfitted with Canon broadcast-style portable zoom lenses for our exteriors and run-and-gun set-ups. We used Canon lenses all the way through the production." ■