

KATRINA STUDY GUIDE



In commemoration of the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina

August 29, 2006

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Introduction



Why, with a plethora of materials available in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, would the Vision Integration Connecting Circle (VICC) go to the trouble of preparing its own reflection guide for the particular use of Adrian Dominicans? This storm (Katrina) holds much of what we need to know about the future, and about the integration of our Vision.

The insurance companies would tell us the storm is an “Act of God.” We know differently. While no single storm can be attributed to global warming, there is a consensus among scientists that global warming is real and, as author Bill McKibben tells us, it means more: more wind, more evaporation, more rain, more melt, and more severe storms. And we would add, more suffering.

It cannot escape our notice that all of those who are mentioned in our Vision are among those whose suffering has been most profound. Nor can it escape our notice that ultimately, global warming is about humankind's relationship with Earth community gone wrong. Use of this guide will make it exceedingly clear that Katrina and its aftermath give evidence to the unholy embrace of “heresies of local and global domination, exploitation and greed that privilege some, and dehumanize others.”

It is the ravaging of Earth that is ultimately at the root of the suffering. Seeking truth in the horrific experience of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath shows how seamless is the garment we have woven in our Vision, and how living in right relationships with Earth community becomes a doorway to the healing of much suffering.

- Margaret Galiardi, OP
VICC Member
May 2006

How to Use This Study Guide



The Vision Integration Connecting Circle (VICC) has developed this Katrina Case Study packet for Mission Groups and individuals for study and discussion. The intent is for sisters and associates to explore the root causes of the tragedy in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, and to make connections to injustices in one's own geographic area.

This packet was prepared by **Sisters Pat Dulka, Durstynne Farnan and Nancyann Turner**. The study guide is modeled after the pastoral cycle, a highly useful tool for group discernment, decision-making and action that was formulated by Peter Henriot, SJ. There are four cycles in the Katrina packet, and each cycle includes articles, stories and discussion questions for your reflection.

Mission Group members can share their own knowledge and experiences in each cycle, as well as opportunities to participate in prayer.

It is VICC's hope that Mission Groups and individuals will use the study packet throughout the year and that each group will spend as much time as necessary exploring the various cycles.

THE FIRST CYCLE focuses on being attentive to the information on Hurricane Katrina that is presented, as well as to one's own feelings, hopes and fears. A reading of the Vision and the sharing of personal reflections, reactions or connections to Hurricane Katrina are included.

THE SECOND CYCLE involves analysis of the root causes of the devastation that ensued in the aftermath of the hurricane, including structures, relationships and public policies that impacted how the people of New Orleans were or were not helped during the crisis.

THE THIRD CYCLE focuses on the theological implications of what occurred, and the various ways in which Mission Group members and individuals are called to address the needs and injustices of people in their places of ministry.

THE FOURTH CYCLE calls people to action and to make a change.

We prepare this booklet in commemoration of the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, August 29, 2006.

The Pastoral Cycle

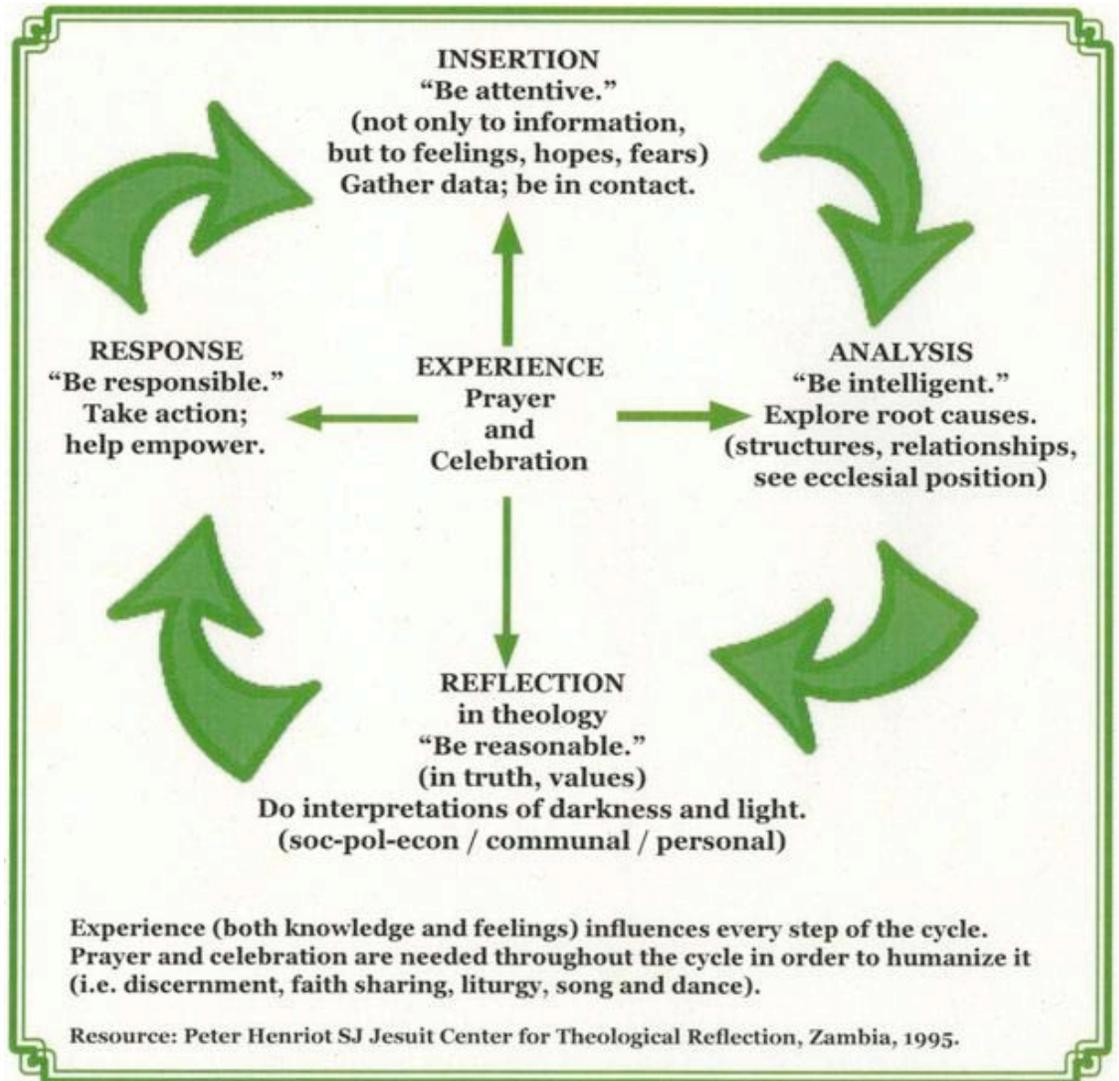
Formulated by
Peter Henriot, S.J.



The Pastoral Cycle is a highly useful model for group discernment, decision-making and action.

The Pastoral Cycle keeps our focus on experience, but invites us to sustain the process with frequent prayer and ritual celebration.

The challenge at each stage in the pastoral cycle is to focus on the victims of Hurricane Katrina as well as address the root causes of environmental, socioeconomic, and political injustice, and ecclesial response.



Cycle I



INCLUSION: "BE ATTENTIVE"

**(Not only to information, but to feelings, hopes, fears)
Gather data; be in contact**

INTENTION

This reflection tool was created at the invitation of the Vision Integration Connecting Circle. It is hoped that as you look at the connections within the tragedy of New Orleans/Katrina, you will feel empowered to make connections in your region, and at the end of the cycles, be moved to action.

READ THE VISION

We Dominican Preachers of Adrian impelled by the Gospel and outraged by the injustices of our day seek truth; make peace; reverence life.

Stirred by the Wisdom of God and rooted in our contemplative prayer, communal study and life in community, we challenge heresies of local and global domination, exploitation, and greed that privilege some, dehumanize others, and ravage Earth.

- We confront our racist attitudes and root out racist practices in our lives and systems.
- We confront systems where women are denied freedom, equality, and full personhood.
- We walk in solidarity with people who are poor and challenge structures that impoverish them.
- We practice non-violent peacemaking.
- We promote lay leadership and shared decision-making for a renewed Church.
- We live right relationships with Earth Community.

We claim the communal authority and responsibility of our Dominican heritage.

We commit ourselves to live this vision.

CONTEMPLATIVE TIME

SHARING OF PERSONAL REACTIONS TO KATRINA:

Do you recall your initial reactions to Katrina on August 29, 2005?

Did you or someone you know have a personal connection to Katrina?

CYCLE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

EYEWITNESS STORY: (read)

“Some are Found, All are Lost” - *Newsweek*, September 19, 2005

Maureen Fenlon, OP - Reflection

Jamie T. Phelps, OP, PhD - Reflection

CONTEMPLATIVE TIME

RE-READ THE VISION

We Dominican Preachers of Adrian impelled by the Gospel and outraged by the injustices of our day seek truth; make peace; reverence life.

Stirred by the Wisdom of God and rooted in our contemplative prayer, communal study and life in community, we challenge heresies of local and global domination, exploitation, and greed that privilege some, dehumanize others, and ravage Earth.

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Katrina Reflection

May 2006

by Maureen Fenlon, OP

This reflection booklet on the multiple aspects and insights of the Katrina catastrophe begins with an eyewitness account; mine, as one of many thousands whose life was turned upside down on August 29, 2005. This story has come full circle as I write this reflection, having returned to New Orleans and yet again surrounded by boxes and the confusion and chaos of another relocation. We are in the midst of returning to our home and office apartments in New Orleans after an 8.5-month exile in Baton Rouge. Prior to Katrina I had lived in New Orleans also for 8.5 months so, in a way, this return represents a fresh start but now in a city and community radically changed — a deep multi-layered change.

Shortly after the hurricane hit our region I read that the name Katrina means “cleansing” and “purification”. And then, a few days later, I discovered a similar image while reading the book *Beauty*, by John O'Donohue. I recorded in my journal this quote: “We need to undertake the meticulous work of clearance and clarification in order that our inner beauty may shine.” Although I recognized a deep wisdom in these insights, it was not easy at the time to find comfort in these words given the unfolding chaos as the immensity of this catastrophe grew day by day. However, a “clearance and clarification” was indeed taking place at every level of life in this Gulf Coast region and in the hearts and souls of each of us living here.

Eventually it became clear that our return home would not be anytime soon. This was shocking news indeed, given the notion that this would simply be another long weekend in Baton Rouge like previous evacuations. Sister Helen Prejean and I evacuated New Orleans the morning after returning from vacation, so we simply picked up our still-packed suitcases and drove to her family's home in Baton Rouge. Two other friends, Rose and Lillie, joined us by the end of the day, Saturday, August 27. As a newcomer to Louisiana I was told that such evacuation events become fun, long weekends in which everyone enjoys playing the Cajun card game, Boure, along with gin and tonic. That mood soon changed as we lost electricity when Katrina arrived. Listening to our battery-operated radio, we learned about the chaos that descended upon New Orleans with the rising flood waters and tens of thousands of people left behind with no place to go.

The impact of Katrina, and a few weeks later, Hurricane Rita, on this region, the environment, animals, people, neighborhoods, and communities was vast and unprecedented. But, for me, most disturbing of all was the scale of human suffering. Unfolding before us were shocking images of people: the poor, elderly, children, prisoners, the many faces of the abandoned and forgotten. These images, seen around the world, have changed all of us, individually and collectively. Experiencing first-hand such suffering over these many months has been a radical life-changing experience for me, and continues to be as we return to New Orleans. The “Big Easy” is now not so easy!

Over these months I've met many other New Orleanian exiles. As I recall these post-Katrina encounters my heart breaks all over again. Tears come easy these days. They serve as a reminder of the

profound impact that this catastrophe has had and continues to have on me. So, I offer a few stories of people met in the immediate aftermath of the storm as well as upon our recent return to New Orleans. These four encounters represent a diversity of people impacted by this catastrophe. These are stories to keep in our minds and hearts as we reflect, study, and analyze the many lessons Katrina teaches us about the state of Earth and her people.

1. The elderly: The trauma of an emergency evacuation under extreme chaotic circumstances was especially devastating to the elderly and infirm. A couple days after the hurricane, while walking in my new Baton Rouge neighborhood, I heard a very loud sobbing and followed it to the Catholic church only a block away. There I discovered the school gym full of elderly and very infirm patients evacuated from a New Orleans nursing home. In speaking with the manager of the home she told me that 56 residents were evacuated the day before but now there were only 54. No doubt others would not survive this sudden evacuation in the next few days. However, the energy in this space was so beautiful to experience. The gym was an inspiring scene of nurses, parish volunteers of all ages, rescue workers and police all tending to these elderly and frail people organized in long rows of mattresses on the floor, or in wheelchairs around the edges of the gym. The following day these fragile but brave souls were carefully carried and lifted, one by one, into three buses for the next phase of this exodus to out-of-state nursing homes.

A co-worker, Emile, shared with us his epic tale about evacuating his elderly and seriously injured aunt, Antoinette, as the waters rose in New Orleans, carrying her on an ironing board as they walked through the flood waters looking for medical help, then onto a backhoe and, ultimately, ending up at the Superdome where they were separated. Two weeks later he discovered her in a Baton Rouge hospital. However, just weeks later she died. A death hastened, no doubt, by the trauma and stress of evacuation but also of a heart broken by the destruction of her lifelong home and city.

Shortly after the New Orleans airport reopened, I drove Helen down there for a flight to a speaking engagement. Only one terminal was in use, so it was a crowded and chaotic scene with long lines of rescue workers and young military men and women returning to Iraq after being allowed to come home to help their families clean out their flooded homes. Given this overall confusion an airport worker suggested that we go down to terminal D to use the electronic ticketing machines. I realized that this was the terminal used after Katrina to fly out the sick and infirm from hospitals in the city. Terminal D had been cleaned up just a few days earlier. Upon entering it I could smell the lingering odors of an emergency medical scene. It was an eerie and disturbing feeling to stand in this large empty space where just days earlier, emergency medical workers had to perform a triage. Cards marked with an A, B, or C were placed on the stretchers of each evacuated patient indicating these difficult judgments: patients well enough to survive a flight out of New Orleans, (A's); patients that may be able to survive the flight, (B's); and patients that would more than likely not survive this evacuation, (C's). When I described this scene to Emile he commented about how relieved he was that ultimately his aunt did not get to a hospital in New Orleans because she surely would not have survived the hard choices being made in Terminal D. Gratitude arises within us in the most unusual life circumstances.

2. Homeless, hungry, HIV-positive young man: Our fellow evacuee, Rose, had been worried about her friend, Patrick, who lived in a trailer along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. She had not heard from him since Katrina devastated that region as well. Finally on Sunday, September 12, she was able to reach

him by cell phone. He had been left homeless when his trailer home was swept away by a tornado just minutes after he left with his eight dogs, three cats, and a rabbit to a nearby barn. Now, two weeks later, he had run out of food, water, and his medication. He was sinking into a deep depression that included suicidal thoughts as the second anniversary of his partner's death from AIDS approached. So, we hastily put together a "mercy mission," filling our car with food, water, five bags of dog food, cat

food, clothing and some cash. We drove east along the devastated Mississippi coast to an appointed rendezvous point. After more than a two-hour drive we met Patrick among the ruins of a roadside rest area. What a joyful yet tear-filled encounter it was for all of us. Even the National Guard stopped by to see if we were alright since this "was no kinda place for folks to meet!"

3. Prisoners: Whatever happened to all those New Orleans jail inmates we saw on TV who were sitting on a freeway overpass for days in the hot sun? They eventually ended up at prisons and jails across the state. A large number, both men and women, ended up at the main state prison, Angola. Shortly after their arrival we went to Angola for our usual monthly visit with the men we have befriended. Then we heard the rest of the story: of overcrowded conditions, inmates sleeping on mats in a gym, women crowded into dorms displacing the men, and the quality and quantity of the meals severely worsened. Furthermore, given the overcrowded conditions and, with women being held at Angola for the first time, security measures tightened, thus diminishing the ability for the inmates to move about in the normal confines of the prison. However, more troubling than these "inconveniences" is that many of these people were recent detainees from small jails, and had not yet been charged with a crime nor had a court hearing. They were invisible. Having had no contact with the outside world, their family and friends had no idea where they were or if they were among the missing.

4. Katrina rescue worker: One of the movers helping us unload our van upon our return two weeks ago shared with me his story of being a rescue worker in the immediate aftermath of Katrina. He lives in Houma, about 60 miles from New Orleans where we stored our home and office belongings. This was his first time back in New Orleans, a city he thought he would never be able to come back to because of the horrors he encountered as he moved about the city in his rescue boat. Their mission was to only "look for the living." But in the course of their search for survivors, they came upon unspeakable sights of bodies floating by them, of children tied to telephone poles in an unsuccessful effort to keep them above the rising water, of violent confrontations between looters and the police, and of the stench of death and destruction all around him. He can't sleep at night so haunted he is by the sights, sounds, and smells of such massive death and destruction.

It has been my experience over these months that we Katrina evacuees meet quite readily where our hearts have been broken. This sense of solidarity is especially reflected now as we find our friends and neighbors again. There is a new sense of community as I walk around our neighborhood encountering people who are seeing each other for the first time and telling their Katrina tales. Although there has been a cost to being displaced over an extended period of time this newfound community is an unexpected and heartwarming gift.

Shortly after Katrina changed our lives, members of my Mission Group sent me care packages of clothing and other surprises to soothe my soul self. One of the items in Esther Kennedy's box was a collection of Rilke's poems: *Rilke's Book of Hours*. Immediately I sat down and opened the book to see what poem would speak to me in that moment. I was stunned by the poem that appeared. It spoke ever so clearly about all that I have experienced since Katrina's arrival turned our lives and world upside down. It remains an unexpected grace/gift for me. I share it now with you as one of Katrina's surprising gifts.

“Dich wundert nicht des Sturmes Wucht”

You are not surprised at the force of the storm -
you have seen it growing.
The trees flee. Their flight
Sets the boulevards streaming. And you know:
he whom they flee is the one
you move toward. All your senses
sing him, as you stand at the window.

The weeks stood still in summer.
The trees' blood rose. Now you feel
it wants to sink back
into the source of everything. You thought
you could trust that power
when you plucked the fruit;
now it becomes a riddle again,
and you again a stranger.

Summer was like your house; you knew
where each thing stood.
Now you must go out into your heart
as onto a vast plain. Now
the immense loneliness begins.

The days go numb, the wind
sucks the world from your senses like withered leaves.

Through the empty branches the sky remains.
It is what you have.
Be earth now, and evensong.
Be the ground lying under that sky.
Be modest now, like a thing
ripened until it is real,
so that he who began it all
can feel you when he reaches for you.

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“Katrina and the Flood Waters of New Orleans”

September 19, 2005

Guest column, Catholic News Service

by Jamie T. Phelps, OP, PhD

Those of us from New Orleans who were not at home when Hurricane Katrina struck looked on with amazement and outrage at TV coverage which revealed the government's slow responses to the cry of the poor.

As the director of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans, I had left the city on business the Thursday before the hurricane hit and was to return the following Monday. I had to divert my return flight to my permanent residence in Chicago.

Watching the chaos on television, I was very anxious about my program assistant, Mrs. Netanya Watts Hart; my dean, Dr. Alvin Richard; and the people in my office. But I learned that my program assistant was with her church family. She and her husband decided not to evacuate. They stayed together with their pastor and others for a while, then waded out to the convention center.

Someone in their group had worked at the center and had set up a tent that protected them from the harshness of the sun. They were ready to die. They believe so much in God and that, with God, there are no accidents.

Eventually they were evacuated. Netanya didn't call me until I registered her with the Red Cross. She was safe in a wealthy suburb of Houston. She had made sure that she had identification documents in a plastic envelope.

As I continued to watch the coverage I searched the faces of the poor, disabled, elderly and people who refused to leave. Where do the poor go? How can they leave without their families — extended families and the church communities that have become the anchors of their life?

Institute members made calls searching for friends, students and colleagues, wondering: Did they get out or are they among the thousands who died?

We celebrated when we heard of successful evacuations and of the whereabouts of the students, staff and faculty of Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholic Studies. The institute articulates the distinct black Catholic theology and spirituality so essential for effective ministry in black communities.

Xavier has some 4,000-plus registered students. All but 400 were evacuated before the storm hit; the others were safely evacuated to Southern and Grambling State universities.

Television images unmask the masked systemic patterns of social injustice. Those who see with the eyes of faith are raising their voices against the racism and classism that are being revealed. Ordinarily we see and do not see, we hear and do not hear, blinded by our self-absorption, materialism, individualism and economic greed.

Ordinarily, the poor of the Gospel are the despised who are viewed as disposable. For some, their dark and brown skin marks them stereotypically as subhuman: criminals, looters, thugs who lack intelligence and morals.

Sociologists warn of the decline of family values, yet these despised marginalized black, brown, yellow, white and poor people of the South were those who refused to leave their elderly grandmothers, fathers and mothers. They refused to abandon those children and adults who were hospitalized or handicapped by mental or physical illnesses.

The storm unmasked the evil, but it also revealed the loving concern of many people.

People of faith clutched their children and Bibles when Katrina hit, relying on the power of God in their midst. Vietnamese Catholics took refuge in St. Mary's Vietnamese Catholic Church. Many black Catholics sought refuge in Corpus Christi Catholic Church.

We forget that New Orleans, the Big Easy, embodies the rich traditions of black Catholics. While others perceive the city only as a party town, still others have not forgotten the rich history and legacy of faith and fortitude of African slaves, native Indians and French. These gave birth to a new culture (Creole), new classical music (jazz, blues), poetry and Southern soul.

As we come close to the end of the year dedicated by Pope John Paul II as the Year of the Eucharist, we have witnessed in this tragedy people who know profoundly the power of prayer and Eucharist to bind us together as one bread, one body, one family of God.

(Sister Jamie Phelps, psychiatric social worker and veteran educator, is a professor of theology and director of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana, New Orleans. She also re-established the Black Catholic Theological Symposium.)

“Some Are Found, All Are Lost”

Newsweek - September 19, 2005

by Barbara Kantrowitz and Karen Breslad

The luckiest ones are merely displaced. The unlucky still can't find their parents. For every one, the trauma will last a lifetime.

First, the ferocious wind ripped off huge chunks of their roof. Then huge waves surged through the Lower Ninth Ward and forced Lisa Moore and Larry Morgan and their 10 children into the broiling heat of the attic. For four days, the Moores struggled to survive on a couple of cans of fruit cocktail. Larry painstakingly squeezed drops of juice into the mouths of the youngest children, who were withering from dehydration. The desperate parents worked out a system: one remained in the attic with the kids while the other stood on the remains of the roof, waving a towel to attract the helicopters they could see on the horizon. “We hollered and hollered,” says Lisa. “Nobody stopped?” On Aug. 31, when a chopper finally hovered overhead, the family faced a nightmarish dilemma. “I can only take five,” their rescuer shouted. The four youngest children, especially 2-year-old Irielle, were growing weaker by the hour, so Lisa and Larry handed them into the sky. Then Larry grabbed 13-year-old O’Neil, sent him up the rope ladder and urgently yelled one last instruction over the roar of the motor: “Look after one another?”

And so began an agonizing, all-too-common odyssey along the Gulf Coast last week as many thousands of families struggled to find their way out of Katrina's devastation. Before the storm, New Orleans alone was home to more than 130,000 children. They're all gone now, the human detritus of the storm scattered across the country in Red Cross shelters, churches and the homes of relatives, friends and even generous strangers. The luckier families lost everything—houses, cars, treasured heirlooms— but at least still have each other to hold onto. The less fortunate have had to face the future not knowing whether the people they love most are alive or dead. As of Saturday, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Virginia, which is tracking the whereabouts of the youngest victims of the storm, had received reports of 1,831 missing kids from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Of those, 360 cases had been resolved, the center says, either by reuniting families or locating the children. The fate of the rest was still unclear.

Even if they are found and reunited with their parents, therapists say the children of Katrina could suffer for years from the physical and emotional effects of their trauma. “Kids have lost their homes, their schools, their neighborhoods, connections with friends,” says David Fassler, a psychiatrist at the University of Vermont who studies children and disasters. “I would expect to see an increase in anxiety, sleep difficulties, fears?” Young children may get clingy or regress to babylike behavior; older children may become depressed and act out. Natural disasters can be particularly tough for kids to handle, experts say. Robin Gurwitsch worked with kids after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and is a member of the American Psychological Association's Disaster Response Network. “When you're talking about a man-made disaster, you can get angry at somebody because they bombed the Trade Center or they bombed the Murrah Building,” she says. “With a natural disaster, who do you get mad at?”

To struggling families like the Moores, the time and energy to ponder that question is still an unimaginable luxury. As the rescue helicopter disappeared from sight, the rest of their group, which by then included a grandmother and two neighbors who had taken shelter with them, clambered into rescue boats on the churning river that used to be Lizardi Street. "We thought they were going to take us all to the Superdome and we'd meet up there," says Larry. Instead, the chopper carrying O'Neil and the four younger children dropped them off on a freeway bridge in another part of the city. From there, they were transported by bus to the Terrabone Civic Center in Houma, about 60 miles from New Orleans, along with two adult neighbors. For a couple of days, they were all "adopted" by a local family, but they quickly returned to the Terrabone shelter when that family became overwhelmed by the responsibility. On Sunday, the neighbors took off to join relatives in Texas and O'Neil was left alone in charge of Irielle, 5; Larrelle, 5; Larioina, 10, and Leindre, 11. Meanwhile, the boat carrying Lisa and her older children dropped them off near the convention center. Larry and the rest of the family, in the other boat, ended up on a truck that took them to the Superdome. They didn't know when-or if-they would all be together again. At the Superdome, Larry says, "I was just walking around, asking everyone, 'Have you seen my kids?'"

In their temporary shelters, many other families felt the pain of uncertainty just as profoundly as the 140-mile-an-hour winds that tore apart their lives just a few days earlier. Technology provided some comfort. At the Reliant Center and the Astrodome in Houston, local companies donated computers and even reading glasses so evacuees could search dozens of Web sites listing the missing and the found. At the Astrodome, volunteers cheered and rang a cowbell to celebrate an impending reunion. The ultimate goal for everyone was modest: a return to something that could be considered normal. Going to school, even a new school, gave kids a sense of order. It also gave parents a breather-and a chance to plan the next steps in their lives. Wealthier parents sought places in private schools. Over the weekend, a representative of Phillips Exeter in New Hampshire was scheduled to fly down to Houston to interview nine students in the Astrodome before deciding whether to accept them. Other families were at the mercy of local districts, many already overcrowded.

In Texas, officials said they were enrolling 19,000 children displaced by the storm. They were able to waive normal rules, such as proving residency or providing immunization records, because federal law requires a place in class for students who are "homeless?" The chance to start again is critical for Kathy Jemison and her daughter, Sarah McClelland, 17. The night before the storm hit, they hurriedly packed up clothes, keepsakes and important papers like their birth certificates and Social Security cards. As the storm bore down on their apartment in Metairie, outside New Orleans, they drove 15 hours to a friend's house in San Antonio. Last week, Sarah began her senior year at San Antonio's MacArthur High School, and Kathy, who worked for a bank in New Orleans, is updating her r□sum□. Sarah's first few days were rocky. She had trouble finding her way around the huge school. At home, she was on the dance team, so a MacArthur counselor told her about her new school's team, but their skill intimidated her. She's trying out other activities to help fit in. "I'm still lost-and it's my third day," she says. "I don't like not knowing anybody."

Making the transition to the new normal will be critical in the next few weeks. "School gives kids structure," says Lynne Tan, a psychiatrist at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, N.Y., who treated children whose parents died in the September 11 attacks. "You have adults around to process

with the kids: teachers, volunteer parents, school counselors. There are people who can answer questions.” In the long run, a kid's psychological fate depends on many factors, says Tan. “You have to take into account genetics, maturity level, the environmental situation prior to the disaster, If you have a more stable parental structure in place before the disaster, then you're probably going to have a better outcome?’ Although some researchers think the stress of going through trauma may permanently damage developing brains, others say kids are resilient for reasons science can't yet explain.

If any kid has the right stuff to survive Katrina, it's O'Neil Moore. Each day in the shelter, he gathered food, clothing, toys and diapers for his younger brother and sisters. Somewhere along the way, he acquired a giant blue duffel bag that he stuffed with all their new belongings. Irielle recovered from her severe dehydration but refused to let go of her brother and would allow only O'Neil to feed, clothe or change her. Last week the state Department of Social Services, which had been granted emergency custody of the five children, transferred them to a shelter in Baton Rouge. There, social worker Stephanie Gomez called every other shelter in the area, trying to find Lisa and Larry. By this time, Larry and the two children had witnessed inconceivable horrors. “I saw four babies die of dehydration right in front of me;’ he says. At the convention center, Lisa paced the feces-smear floor at night, watching over her sleeping daughters. Nearby, she could hear a girl crying as she was raped. “We were all just surviving on a hope and a prayer,” she says.

Finally, her branch of the family was transferred to a shelter in Austin, where conditions were much better. Her cell phone started to work again, and there was a message from Larry telling her that he had made it to the Astrodome, She called back, and within hours Larry and the other kids were on a bus to Austin. But there was still no word from O'Neil and his siblings. In Austin, Lisa gave their names to a volunteer, who entered them into the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's database. Moments later, Lisa was on the phone with Gomez. On Thursday, a network of volunteer pilots called Angel Flight America flew O'Neil and the youngest Moore children from Baton Rouge to Austin. When they landed shortly before midnight, the parents rushed up to the plane and grabbed the kids before they could even touch the tarmac. It was Larry's 45th birthday. They celebrated--together.

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Cycle II



ANALYSIS

"BE INTELLIGENT"

Explore root causes - (structures, relationships, see ecclesial position)

VIEW VIDEO: "The Storm That Drowned the City"

From: NOVA/FRONTLINE (Length: 60 minutes)

CONTEMPLATIVE TIME

STUDY FACT SHEETS:

Six Months After Katrina, Who Was Left Behind

Katrina's 25 Biggest Questions

Remembering "Brothers and Sisters To Us" in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

The U.S. After Katrina

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- *What new insights, or learnings, have you gleaned? Or what has jarred you?
- *What connections are you beginning to see from the video, articles and your own personal experience?
- *Who benefits from the policy decisions being made, and who suffers?
- *Who gets to frame, define, and name?
- *Who gets to decide who is included?

CONTEMPLATIVE TIME

CYCLE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

RE-READ THE VISION

We Dominican Preachers of Adrian impelled by the Gospel and outraged by the injustices of our day seek truth; make peace; reverence life.

Stirred by the Wisdom of God and rooted in our contemplative prayer, communal study and life in community, we challenge heresies of local and global domination, exploitation, and greed that privilege some, dehumanize others, and ravage Earth.

- We confront our racist attitudes and root out racist practices in our lives and systems.
- We confront systems where women are denied freedom, equality, and full personhood.
- We walk in solidarity with people who are poor and challenge structures that impoverish them.
- We practice non-violent peacemaking.
- We promote lay leadership and shared decision-making for a renewed Church.
- We live right relationships with Earth Community.

We claim the communal authority and responsibility of our Dominican heritage.

We commit ourselves to live this vision.

Six Months After Katrina, Who Was Left Behind

1. The Katrina evacuation was totally self-help
2. Over one million people evacuated
3. 80% to 90% of the population evacuated

WHO WAS LEFT BEHIND IN THE SELF-HELP EVACUATION?

THE POOR

4. The poor, especially those without cars, were left behind
5. 27% of the people of New Orleans (125,000) did not have access to a car
6. Government authorities knew in advance that "... 100,000 citizens of New Orleans did not have means of personal transportation."
7. Greyhound and Amtrak stopped service on the Saturday before the hurricane
8. 27% of the people of New Orleans lived below the very-low federal poverty level before Katrina

THE SICK

9. 12,000 patients were evacuated
10. 24,000 people — staff and families of patients — were left behind in the 22 hospitals which were open at the time

THE ELDERLY

11. 280-plus local nursing homes remained mostly full
12. Only 21% evacuated
13. 215 people died in nursing homes
14. A physician reported that hundreds of people in wheelchairs were in front of the convention center
15. Evacuees in Houston shelters found one in seven physically disabled
16. 22% of the physically disabled were unable to evacuate

THE CHILDREN

17. About 25% of the people living in the areas damaged were children, about 183,000 kids, including 47,000 children under the age of five
18. Over 50% of the children displaced were African-American
19. 30% of children in the damaged areas were poor, nearly double the 2000 national census rate for child poverty of 16.6%
20. These children were almost twice as likely to live in a female-headed home as children nationally

THE PRISONERS

21. Local prisons held 8,300 inmates, most on local minor charges awaiting trial and too poor to post bond
22. Thousands were left behind with no food, water, or medical attention
23. Doors of cells, halls, pods, entrances and exits are electronically opened and closed
24. More than 600 hundred prisoners, one entire building, were left behind once the prisons were evacuated —left in chest-deep water, locked into cells
25. 40,000 people took refuge in the Superdome

26. 20,000 to 30,000 people were dropped off at the convention center
27. The Coast Guard reported it rescued 33,000 people
28. The National Guard reported rescues of another 25,000 people
29. 62,000 people were rescued from rooftops or out of water

WHERE DID THE SURVIVORS END UP?

30. FEMA evacuees ended up all over — applications came in from 18,700 zip codes in all 50 states — half of the nation's residential postal zones
31. Most evacuee families stayed within 250 miles of New Orleans
32. 240,000 households went to Houston

WHO ENDED UP IN THE SHELTER?

33. Over 270,000 evacuees started out in shelters

WHO WERE LEFT BEHIND IN KATRINA?

34. There were 469,000 fewer people in the metropolitan New Orleans area in January 2006 than in August 2005
35. About two-thirds of the homes in New Orleans did not have electricity in early 2006, even fewer had gas
36. 73% of the homes in New Orleans were in areas damaged by the storm
37. The population of the damaged areas was nearly half black (45.8% compared to 26.4% black in the rest of the region)
38. The black population was living in rental housing (45.7% compared to 30.9%)
39. Renters are not coming back because there is little affordable housing. With tens of thousands of homes damaged, the cost of renting has skyrocketed
40. Apartments rented for \$600 last summer and now rent for \$1400
41. Trailers have not arrived because of federal, state and local political misjudgments. Over 10,000 trailers were still sitting unused on runways in Hope, Arkansas, in February 2006
42. Louisiana is slated to receive \$6.2 billion in Community Development Block Grant money
43. \$1 billion of the Block Grant could be used to encourage the rebuilding of affordable housing
44. Affordable housing “could” end up with 16% of the assistance

BLACK POPULATION STATISTICS

45. U.S. Congressman Richard Baker, a longtime critic of public housing in New Orleans, was quoted in the *Wall Street Journal* after the storm saying “We finally cleaned up in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did.”
46. All public housing has been closed (and special barriers bolted to the doors). Plans for reopening the projects or for constructing new affordable housing have not become public

BEFORE THE STORM

47. As of February 2006, there are 200,000 fewer jobs in the area than in August 2005
48. Transportation in New Orleans averaged 124,000 riders per week; in January 2006, there were 11,709 a week, only 9% of the pre-storm number
49. There were 22 hospitals open in New Orleans in June 2005
50. In early 2006, there were seven hospitals open, a reduction of 78%

51. There were 53,000 hospital beds in the area in February 2006
52. There were 15,000 hospital beds in 2006, with waits of more than eight hours in emergency rooms
53. There is no public hospital open in New Orleans
54. The Charity Hospital that over 50% of the people in shelters went to has not been reopened
55. New Orleans had 117 public schools with 60,000 students
56. As of January 2006, there were 19 schools open, including eight new charter schools, serving about 13,000 students
57. Only 7 of 42 public defenders have returned to represent the thousands of prisoners still held in jail
58. White median income is \$61,000
59. New Orleans is at risk of losing 80% of its black population
60. 64% of the population were renters
61. 22% had to care for someone who was physically unable to leave — now there are many fewer hospital beds
62. 52% had no health insurance — now the main center of public healthcare is closed
63. 76% had children under 18 with them in the shelter — 93% were black — the areas hit hardest were black and poor
64. 67% were employed full- or part-time before the hurricane — there are now 200,000 fewer jobs than before the hurricane

Paraphrased from *Common Dreams*, February 21, 2006
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Katrina's 25 Biggest Questions

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(Reprinted with permission -- <http://www.alternet.org>)*

by Mike Davis and Anthony Fontenot, Tomdispatch.com

We recently spent a week in New Orleans and Southern Louisiana interviewing relief workers, community activists, urban planners, artists, and neighborhood folks.

Even as the latest flood waters from Hurricane Rita recede, the city remains submerged in anger and frustration. Indeed, the most toxic debris in New Orleans isn't the sinister gray sludge that coats the streets of the historic Creole neighborhood of Treme or the Lower Ninth Ward, but all the unanswered questions that have accumulated in the wake of so much official betrayal and hypocrisy.

Where outsiders see simple "incompetence" or "failure of leadership," locals are more inclined to discern deliberate design and planned neglect -- the murder, not the accidental death, of a great city. In almost random order, here are twenty-five of the urgent questions that deeply trouble the local people we spoke with.

Until a grand jury or congressional committee begins to uncover the answers, the moral (as opposed to simply physical) reconstruction of the New Orleans region will remain impossible.

1. Why did the floodwalls along the 17th Street Canal only break on the New Orleans side and not on the Metairie side? Was this the result of neglect and poor maintenance by New Orleans authorities?

2. Who owned the huge barge that was catapulted through the wall of the Industrial Canal, killing hundreds in the Lower Ninth Ward -- the most deadly hit-and-run accident in U.S. history?

3. All of New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish east of the Industrial Canal were drowned, except for the Almonaster-Michoud Industrial District along Chef Menteur Highway. Why was industrial land apparently protected by stronger levees than nearby residential neighborhoods?

4. Why did Mayor Ray Nagin, in defiance of his own official disaster plan, delay twelve to twenty-four hours in ordering a mandatory evacuation of the city?

5. Why did Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff not declare Katrina an "Incident of National Significance" until August 31 -- thus preventing the full deployment of urgently needed federal resources?

6. Why wasn't the nearby U.S.S. Bataan immediately sent to the aid of New Orleans? The huge amphibious-landing ship had a state-of-the-art, 600-bed hospital, water and power plants, helicopters, food supplies, and 1,200 sailors eager to join the rescue effort.

7. Similarly, why wasn't the Baltimore-based hospital ship USS Comfort ordered to sea until August 31, or the 82nd Airborne Division deployed in New Orleans until September 5?

8. Why does Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld balk at making public his "severe weather execution order" that established the ground rules for the military response to Katrina? Did the Pentagon, as a recent report by the Congressional Research Service suggests, fail to take initiatives within already authorized powers, then attempt to transfer the blame to state and local governments?

9. Why were the more than 350 buses of the New Orleans Regional Transportation Authority -- eventually flooded where they were parked -- not mobilized to evacuate infirm, poor, and car-less residents?

10. What significance attaches to the fact that the chair of the Transportation Authority, appointed by Mayor Nagin, is Jimmy Reiss, the wealthy leader of the New Orleans Business Council which has long advocated a thorough redevelopment of (and cleanup of crime in) the city?

11. Under what authority did Mayor Nagin meet confidentially in Dallas with the "forty thieves" -- white business leaders led by Reiss -- reportedly to discuss the triaging of poorer Black areas and a corporate-led master plan for rebuilding the city?

12. Everyone knows about a famous train called "the City of New Orleans." Why was there no evacuation by rail? Was Amtrak part of the disaster planning? If not, why not?

13. Why were patients at private hospitals like Tulane evacuated by helicopter while their counterparts at the Charity Hospital were left to suffer and die?

14. Was the failure to adequately stock food, water, portable toilets, cots, and medicine at the Louisiana Superdome a deliberate decision -- as many believe -- to force poorer residents to leave the city?

15. The French Quarter has one of the highest densities of restaurants in the nation. Once the acute shortages of food and water at the Superdome and the Convention Center were known, why didn't officials requisition supplies from hotels and restaurants located just a few blocks away? (As it happened, vast quantities of food were simply left to spoil.)

16. City Hall's emergency command center had to be abandoned early in the crisis because its generator supposedly ran out of diesel fuel. Likewise many critical-care patients died from

heat or equipment failure after hospital backup generators failed. Why were supplies of diesel fuel so inadequate? Why were so many hospital generators located in basements that would obviously flood?

17. Why didn't the Navy or Coast Guard immediately airdrop life preservers and rubber rafts in flooded districts? Why wasn't such life-saving equipment stocked in schools and hospitals?

18. Why weren't evacuee centers established in Audubon Park and other unflooded parts of Uptown, where locals could be employed as cleanup crews?

19. Is the Justice Department investigating the Jim Crow-like response of the suburban Gretna police who turned back hundreds of desperate New Orleans citizens trying to walk across the Mississippi River bridge -- an image reminiscent of Selma in 1965? New Orleans, meanwhile, abounds in eyewitness accounts of police looting and illegal shootings: Will any of this ever be investigated?

20. Who is responsible for the suspicious fires that have swept the city? Why have so many fires occurred in blue-collar areas that have long been targets of proposed gentrification, such as the Section 8 homes on Constance Street in the Lower Garden District or the wharfs along the river in Bywater?

21. Where were FEMA's several dozen vaunted urban search-and-rescue teams? Aside from some courageous work by Coast Guard helicopter crews, the early rescue effort was largely mounted by volunteers who towed their own boats into the city after hearing an appeal on television.

22. We found a massive Red Cross presence in Baton Rouge but none in some of the smaller Louisiana towns that have mounted the most impressive relief efforts. The poor Cajun community of Ville Platte, for instance, has at one time or another fed and housed more than

5,000 evacuees; but the Red Cross, along with FEMA, has refused almost daily appeals by local volunteers to send professional personnel and aid. Why then give money to the Red Cross?

23. Why isn't FEMA scrambling to create a central registry of everyone evacuated from the greater New Orleans region? Will evacuees receive absentee ballots and be allowed to vote in the crucial February municipal elections that will partly decide the fate of the city?

24. As politicians talk about “disaster czars” and elite-appointed reconstruction commissions, and as architects and developers advance utopian designs for an ethnically cleansed “new urbanism” in New Orleans, where is any plan for the substantive participation of the city's ordinary citizens in their own future?

25. Indeed, on the fortieth anniversary of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, what has happened to democracy?

Mike Davis is the author of many books including *City of Quartz*, *Dead Cities and Other Tales*, and the just published *Monster at our Door*, *The Global Threat of Avian Flu* (The New Press) as well as the forthcoming *Planet of Slums* (Verso).

Anthony Fontenot is a New Orleans architect and community-design activist currently working at Princeton University.

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“Remembering ‘Brothers and Sisters To Us’ in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina”

September 2005

by Pax Christi USA

Three weeks ago, Hurricane Katrina bared our nation's soul -- our hearts have been broken by the voices and images coming from the battered Gulf Coast region. Many within the Pax Christi movement have responded to this catastrophe, opening their homes to survivors, donating to relief efforts, and offering prayers for all those affected. Hundreds of Pax Christi members were also displaced because of the storm, including members of Pax Christi New Orleans and local groups throughout the Gulf region.

These last days have provided a searing image of what racism and misplaced national priorities look like in the United States. It was particularly overwhelming to be confronted with the media images of the disproportionate number of people - many of whom were people of color and living in poverty - unable to evacuate their communities. The emergency response to these sisters and brothers was shameful, and symbolic of failures in how our wealthy nation treats people who are poor and marginalized.

While racism lies beneath the question “Who was left behind?”, it also played a large role in media coverage, despite the efforts from some reporters to strike back at political posturing. News reports on white people looking for food and drink labeled them as survivors, while news stories reporting on black people doing the same thing labeled them as looters and robbers. The media were also only too quick to label survivors as refugees, despite the fact that these individuals are U.S. citizens - people who pay U.S. taxes, vote in U.S. elections, and contribute to the health and well-being of the entire Gulf Coast region.

The devastating effects of environmental racism are also felt throughout the South, as areas submerged in “toxic soup” are primarily in communities of color. Large petrochemical, plastic and manufacturing companies have sowed damage in poor communities of color in the Gulf region for decades, while making millions of dollars in profit at these communities' expense. The massive flooding throughout this region has only exacerbated the pollution these communities experience.

This disaster has also reminded the nation of the consequences of our country's spending priorities. While the Bush administration and Congress continue to spend significant national resources on the occupation of Iraq, money dedicated for U.S. infrastructure and community development has been slashed dramatically. These cuts are emblematic of a decades-long trend by the federal government to divest from community development projects.

Hurricane Katrina has shown that the politics of individualism have eroded in our national conscience the sense of a commitment to the common good. Our true failures as a nation regarding Hurricane Katrina cannot be blamed on one individual, but on a national ideology of personal responsibility over community well-being; a national ideology that says “you are only entitled to what you can afford,” rather than “we are all entitled to the basic necessities of life.”

We are now in the 25th anniversary year of the U.S. Bishops' historic pastoral on racism, "Brothers and Sisters to Us." As the bishops wrote in the pastoral, "Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns."

Hurricane Katrina has provided an opportunity for all of white America to acknowledge some level of participation in the racist structures that brought about this unimaginable degree of suffering. As a predominately white organization, Pax Christi USA must open its eyes to the lingering fears and prejudices that keep us from the mindfulness needed to be accountable to the most disempowered of our brothers and sisters. We, too, must read the Gospel with anti-racist eyes, and seek the next steps in our own transformation into a people who, as part of our mission, would have been working alongside our brothers and sisters of color, caring about and preparing for their safety and continued well being long before Hurricane Katrina hit.

During this phase of clean-up and recovery in the Gulf Region, let us hold up the work being done by grassroots, low-income, people of color-led organizations. A list of groups can be found at <http://katrina.mayfirst.org/>. These organizations are at the forefront of grassroots level organizing in hurricane-affected areas, and are providing immediate disaster relief to poor people and people of color; are directed by, or accountable to, poor people and people of color; and are fostering the democratic inclusion of poor people and people of color in the rebuilding process.

As the coverage of Hurricane Katrina continues in the next weeks and months, let us, as Catholics, also strive to call to accountability those institutions that contributed to the misery that has exposed our country's racist underpinnings to the entire world. As we open our eyes to ourselves, we also turn our eyes toward the structures that support the daily evil of racism. "Our struggle is not only against blood and flesh but against powers and principalities." (Ephesians 6:12)

The bishops wrote 25 years ago, "[T]he sin of racism defiles the image of God and degrades the sacred dignity of humankind which has been revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation. Let all know that (racism) is a terrible sin that mocks the cross of Christ...for the brother and sister of our Brother Jesus Christ are brother and sister to us." (Brothers and Sisters to Us, 1979)

September 2005 statement by *Pax Christi USA*, the national Catholic peace movement, www.paxchristiusa.org.
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Hurricane Katrina: Seeking Meaning in the Midst of Tragedy A Sucker's Bets for the New Century

The U.S. After Katrina

by Bill McKibben

If the images of skyscrapers collapsed in heaps of ash were the end of one story—the U.S. safe on its isolated continent from the turmoil of the world—then the picture of the sodden Superdome with its peeling roof marks the beginning of the next story, the one that will dominate our politics in the coming decades of this century: America befuddled about how to cope with a planet suddenly turned unstable and unpredictable.

Over and over following Hurricane Katrina, people said that the scenes from the convention center, the highway overpasses, and the other suddenly infamous Crescent City venues didn't "look like America," that they seemed instead to be straight from the Third World. That was almost literally accurate, for poor, black New Orleans (whose life had never previously been of any interest to the larger public) is not so different from other poor and black parts of the world: its infant mortality and life expectancy rates, its educational achievement statistics mirroring scores of African and Latin American enclaves.

But it was accurate in another way, too, one full of portent for the future. A decade ago, environmental researcher Norman Myers began trying to add up the number of humans at risk of losing their homes from global warming. He looked at all the obvious places—coastal China, India, Bangladesh, the tiny island states of the Pacific and Indian oceans, the Nile delta, Mozambique, on and on—and predicted that by 2050 it was entirely possible that 150 million

people could be "environmental refugees," forced from their homes by rising waters. That's more than the number of political refugees sent scurrying by the bloody century we've just endured.

Try to imagine, that is, the chaos that attends busing 15,000 people from one football stadium to another in the richest nation on Earth, and then multiply it by four orders of magnitude and re-situate your thoughts in the poorest nations on earth. And then try to imagine doing it over and over again—probably without the buses.

Because so far, even as blogs and websites all over the Internet fill with accusations about the scandalous lack of planning that led to the collapse of the levees in New Orleans, almost no one is addressing the much larger problems: the scandalous lack of planning that has kept us from even beginning to address climate change, and the sad fact that global warming means the future will be full of just this kind of horror.

Consider the first problem for just a minute. No single hurricane is "the result" of global warming. But a month after Katrina hit, MIT hurricane specialist Kerry Emanuel published a landmark paper in the British science magazine, *Nature*, showing that tropical storms were now lasting half as long and spinning winds 50 percent more powerful than just a few decades before. The only plausible cause: the ever-warmer tropical season which these storms thrive. Katrina, a Category 1 storm

when it crossed Florida, roared to full life in the abnormally hot water of the Gulf of Mexico. It then punched its way into Louisiana and Mississippi-the latter a state now governed by Haley Barbour, who in an earlier incarnation as a GOP power broker and energy lobbyist helped persuade President Bush to renege on his promise to treat carbon dioxide as a pollutant.

So far the U.S. has done exactly nothing even to try to slow the progress of climate change: We're emitting far more carbon than we were in 1988, when scientists issued their first prescient global-warming warnings. Even if, at that moment, we'd started doing all that we could to overhaul our energy economy, we'd probably still be stuck with the one degree Fahrenheit increase in global average temperature that's already driving our current disruptions. Now scientists predict that without truly dramatic change in the very near future, we're likely to see the planet's mercury rise five degrees before this century is out. That is, five times more than we've seen so far.

Which leads us to the second problem: For the ten thousand years of human civilization, we've relied on the planet's basic physical stability. Sure, there have been hurricanes and droughts and volcanoes and tsunamis, but averaged out across the Earth, it's been a remarkably stable run. If your grandparents inhabited a particular island, chances were that you could too. If you could grow corn in your field, you could pretty much count on your grandkids being able to do likewise. Those are now sucker's bets-that's what those predictions about environmental refugees really mean.

Here's another way of saying it: In the last century, we've seen change in human societies speed up to an almost unimaginable level, one that has stressed every part of our civilization. In this century, we're going to see the natural world change at the same kind of rate. That's what happens when you increase the amount of heat trapped in the atmosphere. That extra energy expresses itself in every way you can imagine: more wind, more evaporation, more rain, more melt, more. ..more.. ..more.

And there is no reason to think we can cope. Take New Orleans as an example. It is currently pro forma for politicians to announce that it will be rebuilt, and doubtless it will be. Once. But if hurricanes like Katrina go from once-in-a-century storms to once-in-a-decade-or-two storms, how many times are you going to rebuild it? Even in America there's not that kind of money-especially if you're also having to cope with, say, the effects on agriculture of more frequent and severe heat waves, and the effects on human health of the spread of mosquito-borne diseases like dengue fever and malaria, and so on ad infinitum. Not to mention the costs of converting our energy system to something less suicidal than fossil fuel, a task that becomes more expensive with every year that passes.

Our rulers have insisted by both word and deed that the laws of physics and chemistry do not apply to us. That delusion will now start to vanish. Katrina marks Year One of our new calendar, the start of an age in which the physical world has flipped from sure and secure to volatile and unhinged, New Orleans doesn't look like the America we've lived in. But it very much resembles the planet we will inhabit the rest of our lives.

*November/December 2005 Zion Herald.
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Cycle III



REFLECTION IN THEOLOGY

"BE CONTEMPLATIVE"

(IN TRUTH, VALUES)

Do interpretations of darkness and light.

(Social-Political-Economic/Communal/Personal)

Song: "In the Land of the Living," p.36

INTRODUCTION:

Each of us looks at the tragedy of Katrina (as well as many other situations of abuse and injustice) through multiple lenses.

We approach the suffering of people and Earth with heart and compassion rooted in the Gospel. We bring our Dominican charism and our sense of mission to our lives and ministry. We bring our history, our poetry, our arts and our prayers to those peoples with whom we journey.

Scripture: Amos 2:6-8

For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals — they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God, they drink wine bought with fines they imposed.

What significance does this passage have for our government, our corporate leaders and for us?

CONTEMPLATIVE TIME

CYCLE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

DISCUSSION

***Quote:** “Christian communities that commit themselves to solidarity with those suffering and to confrontation with those attitudes and ways of acting which institutionalize injustice will themselves experience the power and presence of Christ. They will embody in their lives the values of the new creation while they labor under the old. The quest of economic and social justice will always combine hope and realism, and must be renewed by every generation. It involves diagnosing those situations that continue to alienate the world from God's creative love as well as presenting hopeful alternatives that arise from living in a renewed creation. This quest arises from faith and is sustained by hope as it seeks to speak to a broken world of God's justice and loving kindness.”*

(“Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy”

READ ARTICLE: “What the Waters Revealed.” (Discussion guide from the editors of Sojourners magazine), Jim Wallis, Editor-in-Chief.

CONTEMPLATIVE TIME

Reflection Questions

- * How would you characterize the biblical priority of caring for the marginalized?
- * How would you characterize the priorities of our society?
- * Why the disparity? (Priorities for the poor?)
- * From a Christian perspective, what troubles you most about the church's involvement in efforts to overcome poverty?
- * What is most encouraging?

DISCUSSION

CONTEMPLATIVE TIME

CYCLE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

RE-READ THE VISION

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- We live right relationships with Earth Community.

We claim the communal authority and responsibility of our Dominican heritage.

We commit ourselves to live this vision.

Land of the Living

by Janet Sullivan Whitaker

VERSES

1. One thing I ask, and all that I seek is to
2. Some may be weak and some may be strong, but

1. live with you for - ev - er in the land of the liv - ing. No - bod - y knows
2. each of us is bless - ed in the land of the liv - ing. Jus - tice will roll,

1. what hard - ships a - wait, but we can help each oth - er in the
2. and all shall re - turn to love that lasts for - ev - er in the

land of the liv - ing here and now. Don't

look to the sky when the reign of our God is here!

REFRAIN

Let none of us fear. We do this to - geth - er.

Let noth - ing con - found in us the gos - pel of peace.

With God as our strength, we shall build up

here and now, in this land, the land of the liv - ing.

Detailed description: The image shows the musical score for the song 'Land of the Living'. It is written in a single staff with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The score is divided into verses and a refrain. The verses consist of two lines of music, each with two numbered lyrics. The refrain consists of four lines of music, each with two lyrics. The music includes various note values, rests, and triplet markings. The lyrics are printed below the notes, with some words hyphenated across lines. The final line of the refrain has an asterisk above it, indicating a repeat instruction.

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*Last time, repeat final phrase twice.

SOJOURNERS on the Issues

Christians and Hurricane Katrina

“What the Waters Revealed”

by Jim Wallis

Hurricane Katrina destroyed entire cities, the lives of more than a thousand people, the homes of hundreds of thousands, and the confidence of millions in the government's commitment and ability to protect them. Then Hurricane Rita reflooded New Orleans and caused millions to flee their homes in Texas, including many who had already fled there from their homes in New Orleans. Much of New Orleans was emptied of its people, and broad areas of the Gulf Coast in Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas were devastated. More than 1 million Americans are now displaced across the country, and their fellow Americans around the nation are trying to take them in, perhaps for a long time.

But the waters of Hurricane Katrina also washed away our national denial of the shockingly high number of Americans living in poverty and our reluctance to admit the still-persistent connection of race and poverty in America, and perhaps even eroded the political power of a conservative anti-social services ideology that, for decades now, has weakened the idea of the common good.

The pictures from New Orleans stunned the nation. They exposed the stark reality of who was suffering the most, who was left behind, who was waiting in vain for help to arrive, and who is now facing the most difficult challenges of recovery. The faces of those stranded in New Orleans were overwhelmingly poor and black, the very old and the very young. They were the ones who could not evacuate; had no cars or money for gas; no money for bus, train, or airfare; no budget for hotels or no friends or

family with room to share or spare. They were already vulnerable before this calamity; now they were totally exposed and on their own. For days, nobody came for them. And the conditions of the places they were finally herded to (“like animals,” many testified) sickened the nation. Those left behind in New Orleans had already been left out in America.

From the reporters covering the unprecedented disaster to ordinary Americans glued to their televisions, a shocked and even outraged response was repeated: “I didn't realize how many Americans were poor.”

“We have now seen what is under the rock in America,” said a carpenter in Washington, D.C. The vulnerability of the poorest children in New Orleans has been especially riveting to many Americans, especially to other parents. Many say they had trouble holding back their tears when they saw mothers with their babies stranded on rooftops crying for help or jammed into dangerous and dirty places waiting for help to arrive.

As a direct result of Katrina and its aftermath, and for the first time in many years, the media were reporting on poverty, telling Americans that New Orleans had an overall poverty rate of 28 percent (84 percent of them African American), and a child poverty rate of almost 50 percent-half of all the city's children (rates only a little higher than other major cities and actually a little lower than some others). Ironically (and some might say providentially), the annual U.S. Census poverty report came out during Katrina's deadly assault, showing that

poverty had risen for the fourth straight year and that 31 million Americans were stuck below the poverty line. Such people were the ones most stuck in New Orleans.

Katrina revealed what was already there in America: an invisible and often silent poverty that most of us in the richest nation on earth have chosen not to talk about, let alone take responsibility for. After the storm hit, we all saw it-and so did the rest of the world. It made Americans feel both compassion and shame. Many political leaders and commentators, across the ideological spectrum, acknowledged the national tragedy, not just of the horrendous storm but of the realities the flood waters exposed. And some have suggested that if the aftermath of Katrina finally leads the nation to demand solutions to the poverty of upwards of a third of its citizens, then something (cont.) good might come from this terrible disaster.

THAT IS WHAT WE must all work toward now. Rescuing those still in danger, assisting those in dire need, relocating and caring for the homeless, and beginning the process of recovery and rebuilding are all top priorities. But dealing with the stark and shameful social and racial realities Katrina has revealed must become our clear, long-term goal. That will require a combination of public and private initiatives, the merger of personal and social responsibility, the rebuilding of both families and communities-but also the confronting of hard questions about national priorities. Most of all it will require us to make different choices.

The critical needs of poor and low-income families must become the first priority of federal and state legislatures, not the last. And, the blatant inequalities of race in America-especially in critical areas of education, jobs, health care, and housing- must now be addressed. Congressional pork-barrel spending that aligns with political power more than

human needs must be challenged as never before. That will require a complete reversal of the political logic now operating in Washington and state capitals around the country: A new moral logic must reshape our political habits.

In the face of this natural disaster-and during a time of war, with already rising deficits-new budget cuts to vital programs such as food stamps and Medicaid, and more tax cuts for the wealthy, in the form of estate tax repeal and capital gains and stock dividend reductions, would be both irresponsible and shameless.

The nation is starting to realize that the weakness of the nation's infrastructure is not a problem limited to the levees of New Orleans, and that restoring the Gulf Coast will require an environmental reconstruction as well. We can no longer neglect the loss of critical wetlands that once offered some protection from flooding, or deny the fact that increased water temperature in the Gulf of Mexico stokes the strength of tropical storms - such negligence is irresponsible and will only produce more disasters.

Katrina has also focused new attention on Iraq. The growing human and economic costs of a war in Iraq that more and more Americans believe to be a terrible mistake has also become an increasingly controversial issue as the current disaster has unfolded. Resources diverted from urgently needed levee repair in order to pay for war, the diminished availability of National Guard troops and first responders on tour in Iraq, and the embarrassing comparisons between poor planning and implementation for war and the ill-preparedness and incompetence of the national response to Katrina have all raised new and deeper questions about the nation's foreign policy and political leadership. A bad war, bad financial choices of how we spend our resources, and a bad strategy to combat terrorism are now inextricably linked in the minds of many to a bad natural disaster

strategy, or lack thereof. The war in Iraq hasn't made us more secure; Katrina's aftermath has made that even more clear.

THERE IS HISTORICAL precedent for natural disasters provoking a re-evaluation of our social thinking and political direction. In 1889, a great flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, trapped and killed hundreds of people, most of them poor. Some of the blame fell on the Pittsburgh millionaires whose private fishing pond overflowed onto the destitute. The tragic event helped to catalyze the already growing popular anger against the new industrialists who seemed so callous to the suffering of people around them. The flood, many historians feel, helped to prepare the way for the turn of the century progressive movement, which focused on breaking up the powerful corporate trusts that had come to dominate the country.

In 1927, another flood visited destruction on the city of New Orleans. In his provocative book *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*, historian John M. Barry describes how the disaster revealed both racial and economic inequalities. The response to the disaster by local authorities directly exposed the brutal inequities of race and class and provoked a deep populist anger. People demanded new responses from the federal government, and the 1927 flood helped pave the way for the New Deal. Citing both Johnstown and 1927 New Orleans as examples, columnist David Brooks wrote insightfully in *The New York Times* immediately following Katrina, "Hurricanes come in two waves. First comes the rainstorm, and then comes what the historian John Barry calls the 'human storm' -the recriminations, the political conflict, and the battle over compensation. Floods wash away the surface of society, the settled way things have been done. They expose the underlying power structures, the injustices, the patterns of corruption, and the unacknowledged inequalities. When you

look back over the meteorological turbulence in this nation's history, it's striking how often political turbulence followed." Such natural disasters, says Brooks, can become "civic examinations."

Interviewing Barry on *Meet the Press*, Tim Russert asked, "Do you see the same thing happening now in terms of the re-emergence of class and race and poverty as political issues?" Barry replied, "I think it's certainly possible and maybe likely. But it's obviously too early to tell." The storm "ripped off the cover" from America, said Barry, revealing what happens to people without resources. The question, said the historian, is whether Katrina would cause a "shift in public thinking" about our collective responsibilities to people in need.

That shift in thinking cannot just be the reassertion of old social and political agendas that seek to take advantage of the current moment of opportunity. The truth is that our failure of the poor is a collective one: Both conservative and liberal agendas have proven inadequate and left us with a very large underclass of poor people- adults, children, families-in America. Both sides have important insights that must be factored into any real solutions, but both have fallen far short of providing real answers. Many, even most, poor people work hard, full time, yet are still forced to raise their children in poverty. That should be unacceptable in America. To change that, we will need a new commitment, a new approach, and a new alliance to overcome poverty in America.

THERE ARE TWO obstacles to making real progress against poverty: the lack of priority and the lack of agreement on strategy. The poor have been near the bottom of our priority list, if they are on the list at all. It will take a moral and even religious imperative to change our priorities, but the time has come to do so. But we have also been paralyzed by the debate between liberals and conservatives on what

solutions to pursue, with the Right favoring cultural changes and the Left endorsing policy changes.

We must be disciplined by results when it comes to poverty reduction. It's time to move from the politics of blame to a politics of solutions. Liberals must start talking about the problems of out-of-wedlock births and about strengthening both marriage and parenting, and conservatives must start talking about strategic public investments in education, health care, affordable housing, and living family incomes. We must focus on making work really work for low-income families. Those who work hard and full time in America should not have to raise their children in poverty-but many still do. Together, we must end the debate that's limited to the choices of large or small government and forge a common commitment to good and effective government.

This is indeed a teachable moment, but one that will require good teachers. What have we learned, how must we change, where will we transform our priorities, and when will we commit ourselves to forging a new strategy that actually might work to defeat the cycle of poverty?

Restoring the hope of America's poorest families, renewing our national infrastructures, protecting our environmental stability, and rethinking our most basic priorities will require nothing less than a national change of heart and direction. It calls for a transformation of political ethics and governance, a move from serving private interests to ensuring the public good. If Katrina changes our political conscience and reinvigorates among us a commitment to the common good, then even this terrible tragedy might be redeemed.

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners*. This article appeared in the November 2005 issue of *Sojourners* magazine.

“A Brave and Startling Truth”

by Maya Angelou

We, this people, on a small and lonely planet
Traveling through casual space
Past aloof stars, across the way of indifferent suns
To a destination where all signs tell us
It is possible and imperative that we learn
A brave and startling truth

And when we come to it
To the day of peacemaking
When we release our fingers
From fists of hostility
And allow the pure air to cool our palms

When we come to it
When the curtain falls on the minstrel show of hate
And faces sooted with scorn and scrubbed clean
When battlefields and coliseum
No longer rake our unique and particular sons and daughters
Up with the bruised and bloody grass
To lie in identical plots in foreign soil

When the rapacious storming of the churches
The screaming racket in the temples have ceased
When the pennants are waving gaily
When the banners of the world tremble
Stoutly in the good, clean breeze

When we come to it
When we let the rifles fall from our shoulders
And children dress their dolls in flags of truce
When land mines of death have been removed
And the aged can walk into evenings of peace
When religious ritual is not perfumed
By the incense of burning flesh
And childhood dreams are not kicked awake
By nightmares of abuse

When we come to it
Then we will confess that not the Pyramids
With their stones set in mysterious perfection
Nor the Gardens of Babylon
Hanging as eternal beauty
In our collective memory
Not the Grand Canyon
Kindled into delicious color
By Western sunsets

Nor the Danube, flowing its blue soul into Europe
Not the sacred peak of Mount Fuji
Stretching to the Rising Sun
Neither Father Amazon nor Mother Mississippi who, without favor,
Nurture all creatures in the depths and on the shores
These are not the only wonders of the world

When we come to it
We, this people, on this minuscule and kithless globe
Who reach daily for the bomb, the blade and the dagger
Yet who petition in the dark for tokens of peace
We, this people on this mote of matter
In whose mouths abide cankerous words
Which challenge our very existence
Yet out of those same mouths
Come songs of such exquisite sweetness
That the heart falters in its labor
And the body is quieted into awe

We, this people, on this small and drifting planet
Whose hands can strike with such abandon
That in a twinkling, life is sapped from the living
Yet those same hands can touch with such healing, irresistible tenderness
That the haughty neck is happy to bow
And the proud back is glad to bend
Out of such chaos, of such contradiction
We learn that we are neither devils nor divines

When we come to it
We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
Without crippling fear

When we come to it
We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world
That is when, and only when
We come to it.

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CYCLE IV



RESPONSE

"BE RESPONSIBLE"

Take Action: Help Empower

INTRODUCTION

Working together is often more powerful than working alone.

- * What are some of the ways you have heard how the Adrian Dominican Sisters responded to Katrina?
- * Adrian Dominican Sisters contributed financially to the Hurricane Katrina relief.
- * What/Who else?
- * What group or organization have you joined, or can you join, to further the Adrian Dominican Sisters Vision?
- * 8th Day Center for Justice
- * What other local justice groups could you join?
- * In your own geographic area, are there places where you see several aspects of the Vision connected: negatively or positively?
- * How does Katrina and/or this analysis shed light on possible 2007 Chapter Initiatives?
- * Katrina Study Guide
- * How will such collaboration bring about the preferred future?
- * How you have been changed by reading, praying and reflecting on the tragedy of Katrina?
- * What action(s) are you called to take?
- * What commitment(s) is/are unfolding for you now?

CYCLE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

CONTEMPLATIVE TIME

RE-READ THE VISION

We Dominican Preachers of Adrian impelled by the Gospel and outraged by the injustices of our day seek truth; make peace; reverence life.

Stirred by the Wisdom of God and rooted in our contemplative prayer, communal study and life in community, we challenge heresies of local and global domination, exploitation, and greed that privilege some, dehumanize others, and ravage Earth.

- We confront our racist attitudes and root out racist practices in our lives and systems.
- We confront systems where women are denied freedom, equality, and full personhood.
- We walk in solidarity with people who are poor and challenge structures that impoverish them.
- We practice non-violent peacemaking.
- We promote lay leadership and shared decision-making for a renewed Church.
- We live right relationships with Earth Community.

We claim the communal authority and responsibility of our Dominican heritage.

We commit ourselves to live this vision.

FINAL PRAYER AND COMMITMENT

Using the Vision as a context, create a closing prayer that may include a commitment to some action.

APPENDIX

“Hurricane Katrina and the Flood Waters of New Orleans: A Reflection”
by Jamie T. Phelps, OP, PhD

“Blue Print for Social Justice”
by Bill Quigley

“Hurricane Katrina and the Flood Waters of New Orleans: A Reflection”

by Jamie T. Phelps, OP, PhD

The fifth year of the 21st century was marked by a series of natural disasters that claimed the lives of thousands of innocent victims of many ages, cultures and nations.

This hurricane season in the United States has been determined to be one of the most disastrous in our nation's history. As a scholar who had accepted an academic appointment at Xavier University two years ago, I was not prepared for the challenge that would evolve on the Gulf Coast.

Initial Response

What a difference a day makes! For those whose lives have been directly touched by the events of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, life will never be the same. For some, this crisis is an opportunity to build a new life grounded in a profound sense of the meaning of life. How easily all that we take for granted, can be altered! What really matters is life in relationship with God, with family, with all humanity and all creatures because of God. “I have come that you may have life and live it to the full!” (John 10:10)

Realization that a Category-five Hurricane was headed toward New Orleans struck fear in the hearts of some, defiance in the hearts of others. The poor who had no choice embraced resignation. Those of us from New Orleans, who by some coincidence were not at home, looked on with amazement and outrage as we watched the slow response to the cry of the poor. On a personal level we searched the faces of the poor, disabled, elderly, and people who refused to leave. Where do the poor go? How can they leave without their families — extended families and the church communities who are the anchors of their life?

In the first days and weeks of the tragedy we called and searched for friends, students and colleagues, wondering: Did they get out or are they among the dead? Through the past four months we have contacted many of those members of our Xavier University and Institute faculty, staff, and student body, and hear daily of their struggle to begin anew while they battle FEMA, insurance companies, and landlords who seem to be either overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster or opportunistic scavengers of those suffering economic and personal loss. Confronted by such a disaster, one immediately searches for meaning, while my first impressions still linger. As more and more data is reported in the media, my thought and analysis continue to deepen.

I firmly believe that every situation in life contains good and evil aspects at the same time. After identifying these elements it is important to identify and challenge the individual or social immorality of the evil aspect, uncover the source of hope, and articulate the hope for the future as rooted in the good aspects understood in the light of our life of faith. This is an exercise in faith seeking to find meaning for Hurricane Katrina from the perspective of life lived in light of the Gospel and the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church and to understand how God's unconditional love is being revealed in and through the Katrina-flood disaster and how people of faith should act in response to that love by doing right, loving goodness, and walking humbly with God. (Paraphrase of Micah 6:8)

Unmasking the Mask

I was horrified, saddened, and angered as the television images unmasked the shrouded systemic patterns of social injustice that characterize much of our current social, political, economic and ecclesial relationships. Sadly these dynamics have operated so long within the social systems of our society that too many of us, regardless of our ethnic-racial identity, think that racial and class segregation and alienation is natural. One need not harbor a specific negative thought about blacks or the poor; such thoughts are anchored within our collective cultural unconscious. The poor, disabled, elderly, and black people, who are generally invisible on a day-to-day basis in the South and all over our county, became visible as the flood waters made us see poor black and white people and other people of color who are poor.¹

Ordinarily we see and do not see; we hear and do not hear, because our self-absorption, materialism, individualism, and economic greed blind us to the reality of the poor. Ordinarily the poor who are at the heart of the mission of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:14) live in the invisible margins of church and society. Ordinarily, the poor of the gospel are the despised who are viewed as the disposable of our society. We forget that New Orleans embodies a distinct blend of the rich and diverse traditions of Native American, African and French cultures augmented by an array of European cultures. We forget that under the Napoleonic Codes, all peoples of Louisiana were Catholics and thus the Creole and black cultures of New Orleans were traditionally diverse expressions of Catholic culture. While many come to party in the “Big Easy,” others have not forgotten the rich history and legacy of faith and fortitude of African slaves, Native Indians, and French that gave birth to a new culture (Creole) and new classical music (jazz, blues), poetry, and southern soul. Today, New Orleans and Louisiana are an indeed a diverse society both ethnically and religiously. This pocket of society embodies a microcosm of the best and worst of our nation and world. The hurricanes and their aftermath unmasked the good and the social immorality of our socio-political thought and structures that characterize not only New Orleans and the southern gulf-port region but our entire nation and the world.

The Good

My two-year experience of living in New Orleans deepened my appreciation of the centrality of family values that dominate this part of our country. Sociologists warn us of the decline of family and family values; yet among these despised marginalized, poor black, brown, yellow, and white folk of the South, they refused to leave their elderly grandparents, fathers and mothers. They refused to abandon those children and adults who were hospitalized or handicapped by mental or physical illnesses.

As I watched the television montage of those stranded in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, I did not see criminals or animals but black, Creole people of faith, Catholic and Protestant, clutching their children protectively. Thrown into random assemblies they had formed small groups and communities of love and protective power mediating God's care for people in the midst of suffering. Individual human beings became the mediating comforting arms of the God of Jesus Christ. A nameless white nurse called for insulin and it appeared from the crowd. Black men stood around making an effort to revive a fallen companion. Others creatively organized a soup kitchen taking supplies from abandoned stores to feed the multitudes as it became apparent that help was not coming soon. Black women and men cradled their children holding them close, protecting them from the natural disaster and the storm of those who were unhinged by chaos.

Later we would learn that the gun shots reported first as attacks on the rescuing forces of the Army and Coast Guard were in fact an attempt to call attention to those still needing help. Later we would hear of the young black men who had been labeled “street thugs,” organizing the waiting throngs so women and children were able to board the buses first. They had become a protective guard rather than a menace. Later we would hear of people seeking refuge in their churches, temples and synagogues as places of safe harbor. In one instance, a group of twenty-five, including eleven children and a disabled person, gathered with their Black Baptist Church of the Good Shepherd minister to seek safety in their church. Once the church was flooded, they had to depend on God and the resourceful skills and social networking of church members to wade through the water and find peace in the midst of chaos at the convention center. They began their post-Katrina life in the warm and hospitable Red Cross shelter in Houston.ⁱⁱ Seemingly, those who relied on faith and community survived as they worked collectively to assist family members and neighbors escape the dangerous waters. These men and women of faith knew well the wisdom of the Gospel. “If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it, if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness.” (I Corinthians 12:26)

When we observe and listen with eyes and ears of faith we see the fortitude, resourcefulness, creativity, wisdom, and holiness of large numbers of poor and middle-class black people and those of every culture — who, empowered by the Spirit — remain determined and hope-filled in the midst of hopelessness. U.S. Coast Guard personnel, Catholic Charity workers, Red Cross volunteers and other rescue teams, and police officers of all religious persuasions risked their own lives and left their own families to respond immediately to the needs of the hurricane victims. Those individuals and nations who observe and listened with eyes and ears of faith and humanity at those displaced by the storm responded generously with offers to aid other human beings in extraordinary need. Homes and hearts opened. Food, medical help, money and clothes flowed to the places where the evacuees had traveled for safety.

Social Immorality of Our Socio-Political Thought And Structures

The storm unmasked our collective social immorality. To many, the dark and brown skin of many of the evacuees who assembled in the Superdome and convention center marked them stereotypically as poor, subhuman criminals, looters and thugs, who lacked intelligence and morals. The party politics of Louisiana, a Republican state with Democratic local and state leadership, complicated the federal government's ability to hear the cries of the marginalized and displaced evacuees and their state representatives. Regional devaluation, race, class, and political factors produced the delayed indifference we first witnessed with horror. The U.S. government was found woefully neglectful or ill prepared as reflected in a statement for the U.S. Chapter of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (henceforth, EATWOT), which described the multi-faceted aspect of the inadequacy and failure of the early response to Hurricane Katrina in their statement drafted collectively at their 2005 fall meeting in Chicago, Illinois.

“... the United States government and citizenry failed in responding to the devastation of the hurricane. The failures included:

- 1) A squandering of resources for an illegal war in Iraq and the repressive “war on terror.” As a consequence, we did not fund infrastructure and environmental protection in poor communities and communities of color, a failure that made much worse the devastation the hurricane caused. This same war diverted National Guard and other resources that could have helped provide a timely and adequate emergency response.

- 2) An assumption that the U.S. could not be affected by catastrophe. Government officials did not prepare for Hurricane Katrina despite adequate advanced warning. Our government ignored information available from science about Global Scorching in favor of an ideology that placed corporate profits above facts, and it disregarded the clear information from scientists about the impending hurricane
- 3) A sustained dismantling of social safety networks, which have resulted in increasing poverty, exacerbated by racism and neglect of immigrant populations, all of which aggravated the effects of this natural disaster.
- 4) A failure to provide prompt, humane assistance to poor people and people of color. Moreover, the most oppressed people were blamed for their predicaments by suggesting that they should have left earlier (with the assumption that everyone had the same financial ability to leave).
- 5) Contempt for the poor and people of color who were not treated equally when rescue efforts began, a contempt which suggests that they will not be treated equitably in recovery. Assistance to rich people before providing for the people who needed it the most — poor people — showed a failure to understand or acknowledge the interrelationship between racism and economic justice.
- 6) Ongoing government claims that racism and economic justice had nothing to do with the inadequate response to Katrina. These denials mean government officials continue to be unaccountable for their actions. ⁱⁱⁱ

In the long run, however, when we ask who was responsible for the inadequate response and follow up, the most honest answer must be all of us, individuals, local, state and federal governments and their agencies: those individuals who did not heed the warnings for hurricane levels 4 and 5. After years of avoiding serious damage and devastation, gulf-port natives adopted a false sense of invincibility. Years of masking the reality of the economic poverty that characterizes the majority of those who live in New Orleans made us insensitive to the special needs for re-location posed by the economic poverty of the area. The lives of poor people in the Big Easy, the cooks, janitors, laborers and staff workers, etc., are largely invisible to those who benefit from their talents and services.

Though local New Orleans officials had an evacuation plan that had been implemented three times before, only when Katrina struck and the levee broke was the inadequacy of the Counter-flow Plan made evident to all of us. I, and many people like me, never once thought about people who did not have cars. Nor did I and most natives of the Gulf Coast think of the reality that a real disaster would bring. Although many native New Orleanians told me that if “the big one comes and hits the lake and river at the same time, New Orleans will be under water.” No one anticipated what the reality would harbor. No one really expected “the big one” to come.

The state government was understandably reluctant to abdicate all its power and decision-making to federal authorities, but later we would discover that such relinquishment was not necessary and federal agencies already had the authority and responsibility to collaborate and intervene in the event of such catastrophic devastation.^{iv} The party-politics and power plays blinded the decision makers and delayed some rescues that added to the death toll of the region.

Stereotypical thinking blinded many in their reporting and assessing the character of the victims and the self-reliant resources available within the native peoples of the region. Despite the fact that the Gulf Region

is one the major native sources of oil for the United States and a major port for import of goods needed for the country, most U.S. citizens are not mindful of this reality. Too often Northerners think of the South in terms of great vacation spots, i.e., Florida, New Orleans, and Houston etc., ignoring the economic and cultural gifts of the region. Too often the lives and contributions of people of color who hold service positions in these areas and throughout the country are invisible backdrops to the material and cultural assets sought on Gulf Port beaches, casinos, restaurants, etc. In the South and throughout the United States, many remain unaware of the gifts of hospitality, generosity, family and God-centered spirit that characterizes the culture of the black poor and other poor people of faith.

Devaluing and disrespecting the humanity and needs of the poor, we close the churches and schools and special programs in cities across the nation citing economic limitations. In many other areas of U.S. public life, those who have money have access to privilege and service and those who are poor remain marginalized, and or invisible objects to be of use solely for the benefits of the middle and upper classes. Forgetful of our rich religious history and mission, some churches of all denominational and cultural identities cultivate and placate the rich at the expense of the poor. We forget the evangelizing and social justice mission of Jesus and the Christian churches that compel followers of the way of Jesus to serve all people because of God's call to universal communion and mission of salvation. (Lumen Gentium, 1, and Gaudium et Spes, 1).^v

The Future

Looking through the lens of the Gospel toward the future of the Gulf region in general and New Orleans in particular, we must actively urge our church and civic leaders to embrace the fundamental option for the poor and encourage the re-development of New Orleans and the other Gulf Port cities of the South in such a way that they remain culturally and class diverse. The Gulf Region that has experienced “death” from the destructive forces of water and political bungling must experience a new birth that transforms the old systems of racial, cultural, and class exclusion from power and decision-making into a region that welcomes all God's children as fully human subjects and co-laborers who are called to be midwives for God's will and way “on earth as it is in heaven.” In this new life the divisions between rich and poor and racial-ethnic groups will cease.

EATWOT members expressed their collective dream of the future in the conclusion of the EATWOT statement:

“The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina revealed ruptures — deep divisions and deep inconsistencies — in our society. Appropriately addressing these ruptures means we must look for moral resources to guide our movement forward. The tragedy of Hurricane Katrina requires that we must first be motivated by love and compassion for all those affected. Through generosity and kindness, we must tend to those most in need first. However, our vision and work cannot stop with simply meeting immediate needs. We must address the power structures in our society that allowed this situation to happen in the first place. The lack of adequate hurricane and flood protection laid bare the country's injustices toward and devaluation of people of color and the poor. At the same time that we meet the needs of those affected by Katrina, we must move forward with a transformative and integrated mind-body-spirit framework so that this kind of travesty of justice does not happen again.

We must restore a sense of the common good, an understanding that we share life together and that when we are all whole and strong separately, we are stronger collectively ... We must also determine ways to

give agency to those who are most affected by this disaster and determine ways to act in concert with them. In the immediate and long term, this means that we must develop structures to empower persons at all levels of society to speak for themselves about the things that they need, thereby shifting the center of authority and voice in ways that lessen the control of persons with the most access, the most expertise, and the most resources. We must strive for justice by holding accountable those who are responsible for developing state systems and policies, calling on them to build systems that empower all, and that especially attend to removing structures that destroy the lives of people of color and poor people.

We must respond to the failures of our government with a call to all citizens to prophetically speak truth to power, justice to discrimination, and life to the pursuit of death.”^{vi}

As Christians, we are always called to walk in the light of Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. “We may be sure that we know Jesus” if we “keep his commandments ... whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in [them] the way that we know we are in union with him: whoever claims to abide in Him (Jesus) ought to walk just as he walked.” (1 John 2:3-6)

Walking in the way of Jesus is to walk in the way of the Paschal Mystery. In our individual and collective lives we will experience the joys and sorrows of daily life and suffering death and rising again empowered by the Holy Spirit. Those of us challenged by the aftermath of the hurricane season must live in the spirit of fortitude, wisdom, and hope that characterize the Resurrection. We are suffering the pangs of uncertainty, anxiety, and death today but we live in the hope and blessed assurance of a new life and joy of resurrection in the mornings of tomorrow!”

END NOTES

ⁱ The shock of realizing the depth of poverty in New Orleans made the author research more deeply the reality of poverty in America. Though a frequent visitor to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development web page documenting U.S. Poverty, <http://www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/povfacts.shtml>, I suddenly found this not enough and searched for more documentation. See Mark Robert Rank, *One Nation, Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) for an interesting argument for policy addressing the need to eliminate U.S. poverty.

ⁱⁱ I was fortunate to be able to communicate with my program assistant, who was a part of this church group and she gave me a first-person account of her and her family's ordeal in the convention center in New Orleans and the Red Cross shelter in Houston. She experienced both bad and good treatment in the evacuation process.

ⁱⁱⁱ A Response To Hurricane Katrina From The Ecumenical Association Of Third World Theologians, U.S. Minorities Group, <http://www.faithvoices.org/programs/eatwotkatrina.html>

^{iv} See Homeland Security Act of 2002 #. 505. CONDUCT OF CERTAIN PUBLIC HEALTH-RELATED ACTIVITIES. (a) Except as the President may otherwise direct, the Secretary shall carry out the following responsibilities through the Department of Health and Human Services (including the Public Health Service), under agreements with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and may transfer funds to him in connection with such agreements: (1) all biological, chemical, radiological, and nuclear preparedness-related construction, renovation, and enhancement of security for research and development or other facilities owned or occupied by the Department of Health and Human Services; and (2) all public health-related activities being carried out by the Department of Health and Human Services on the effective date of this Act (other than activities under functions transferred by this Act to the Department) to assist State and local government personnel, agencies, or authorities, non-

Federal public and private health care facilities and providers, and public and non-profit health and educational facilities, to plan, prepare for, prevent, identify, and respond to biological, chemical, radiological, and nuclear events and public health emergencies, by means including direct services, technical assistance, communications and surveillance, education and training activities, and grants. (b) With respect to any responsibilities carried out through the Department of Health and Human Services under this section, the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall have the authority to establish the preparedness and response program, including the setting of priorities.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/deptofhomeland/bill/title5.html#505>

^v Dogmatic Constitution On The Church Lumen Gentium Solemnly Promulgated By Holiness

Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)

[ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) “... Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.; Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World Gaudium Et Spes promulgated by his holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965;

[\[-cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html\]\(http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html\) “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men \[sic\] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every \[one\]. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with \[hu\]mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.” Op Cit., A Response to Hurricane Katrina.](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-</p></div><div data-bbox=)



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BLUEPRINT

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Katrina – The First Eight Months - Fall 2005 – Spring 2006

By Bill Quigley

Editor's Note

Dear Blueprint Readers:

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina dramatically changed everything in our part of the country, including the Blueprint for Social Justice. For many reasons, we were not able to publish our regular series of issues.

For the 2005-2006 academic year, instead of our usual assortment of social justice articles, the Blueprint for Social Justice is publishing this one issue. This issue shares with you a series of articles I wrote after Katrina as our challenges and hopes unfolded.

We recognize this is a serious departure from the history of this wonderful publication and we ask for your understanding.

We will resume the normal way of publishing of the Blueprint for Social Justice in the summer.

Thank you again for your support and patience and your solidarity.

Peace, love, justice,

Bill Quigley – Editor, Blueprint for Social Justice Quigley@loyno.edu

September 2005 - Boating Down Napoleon Avenue: Reflections on Katrina

I was in a hospital for 5 days and 4 nights during Katrina. My wife is a nurse and I was there with her. We left in a small fishing boat pattering down Napoleon Avenue.

The hospital had about 2000 people in it. Katrina exploded several big windows and the floods surrounded us with 8 feet of water. We lost electricity right away and soon lost the backup generator which was in the flooded basement. The water system stopped. We were advised not to drink the water and could not flush toilets.

You can imagine a hospital with 2000 people without electricity, water and flush toilets. Breathing machines did not work. Computers did not work. Cell phones did not work. Lights did not work. Elevators did not work. The cafeteria was in the basement so we had limited food for the first days and no food at the end. There was some bottled water. Nurses and aides and doctors and staff and families and visitors were all pitching in and doing heroic work despite the absence of modern medicine.

Outside it was much worse. People on rooftops were screaming for help. People fired guns to try to get the attention of the helicopters that kept going overhead. People were swimming in the water. People were boating in the water. A body was floating in the water.

Security turned wandering people away from the hospital and they walked back out into the waters.

The hospital first evacuated some premature infants in incubators out on Tuesday. Staff and families carried incubators down several flights of stairs to the parking garage. There they were handed through a hole in the wall into the back of a truck which took them to the roof for helicopter rescue.

No one was ever told where the helicopters were going. Mothers of the infants were not allowed to evacuate with them. Not enough room in the helicopters, they said. The tiny babies flew away to who knew where, mothers behind. Heartbreak unimaginable to any parent.

The helicopters stopped when it got dark Tuesday night. Nearly 1500 people remained in the hospital. Some doctors broke open vending machines for food so we had cheetos and Hawaiian punch for dinner. It was getting hotter all the time. People lay down by broken windows to try to catch a breeze. People were very tired but sleep was tough.

My wife and I tried to take some quiet time together to plan and went into the darkened chapel. We were stopped by a dead body lying on a gurney covered in a sheet. Patients were dying.

On Wednesday, the helicopters started up again. Elderly patients were carried down dark stairwells and driven to the roof. Small groups of people went out by airboats that roared down Claiborne Avenue and up Napoleon. But suddenly around lunch time the helicopters stopped coming. No one knew why.

People waited for hours for the helicopters to come back, but they never came. Patients were lined up on the roof and down the halls. Volunteers were waving pieces of cardboard over them trying to cool them off. Medicines were unavailable. We were out of food.

Until the sun set, an army sergeant and I held up a homemade sheet sign on the heliport trying to flag down helicopters. The sheet said "HELP!!! People dying!!!" A medical mechanic waiting on the roof to be picked up by his company was cynical. "You are wasting your time" he said, "people are dying all over the city."

A marine helicopter saw our sign and landed but it was too small to take patients. They gave us a case of water and a case of Vienna sausages.

As darkness fell, the patients already outside the hospital were kept on the parking lot ramp because the halls inside were full of waiting patients in wheelchairs and cots. The doctor in charge apologized for

the situation and explained that they had no medicine to give anyone. "We have some food," he said, "but those who have already eaten today should not eat because we do not have enough for everyone." He then handed out a tin of Vienna sausages to those who had not eaten. The patients spent the night on in the parking lot ramp – nurses working around the clock to fan them, do the bedpans, and help whatever way they could.

The night was hot and slow. There were still over a thousand people left in the hospital. Worried about security, the hospital asked everyone to gather up their clothes and possessions on the first and second levels. We "slept" on the floor by a pair of broken windows.

The next morning nothing happened for several hours, then the skies started roaring as helicopter after helicopter landed. A sweet sound.

About mid-day all the patients had left and we boarded a small fishing boat piloted by two young volunteers who were ferrying people out to Napoleon and St. Charles. There we waited with hundreds of other people for a ride out in whatever showed up - a flatbed truck, a garden supply truck or a school bus.

We boarded an open topped truck with nearly a hundred others and drove through the streets of New Orleans in the rain. The woman next to me was in her 20s, pregnant, and holding a clear plastic bag with \$30 in coins and a half-empty bottle of anti-biotics. That was all she had. Another woman tried to shield her 9 day old infant from the rain. Others held black garbage bags full of what they could save.

That truck took us out to Causeway and I-10. When we rounded the ramp, the whole truck gasped.

Thousands and thousands of people were waiting in the rain under the bridges. Mud was everywhere. There were no toilets. National Guard people were everywhere. Helicopters were landing across the highway and then taking off. It seemed like a big crowd scene from a bad movie.

As busses pulled up, the crowd surged forward. Many people had been outside for days and were desperate to get on a bus. No one knew where the busses were going – they would not tell us, but people wanted on no matter what.

We decided to volunteer until the lines went down and ended up catching a ride out with some volunteer nurses.

The city is trying to get back on its feet. It will be hard. Uptown is in pretty good shape. The rest of the city is still in deep trouble. Many have suffered economically, personally, and psychologically.

No one was ever told where the helicopters or busses were going.

There is much depression, much denial, and much anger.

But there is also great generosity, great courage and great solidarity. There is probably more courtesy on the sidewalks and streets of New Orleans than I have ever seen.

New Orleans needs Loyola to help our community re-group, re-build in a more just way, and heal. It will not be a quick process, but it is one that fits with our mission to be aligned with those seeking social justice in our community.

Boating down Napoleon, we saw many trees felled by Katrina. Almost all had sparkling Mardi Gras beads stuck in their branches. I hope that image will remind me to look honestly at both the painful destruction and the bright hope for better times.

October 10, 2005: New Orleans: Leaving the Poor Behind Again!

They are doing it again! My wife and I spent five days and four nights in a hospital in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. We saw people floating dead in the water. We watched people die waiting for evacuation to places with food, water, and electricity. We were rescued by boat and waited for an open pickup truck to take us and dozens of others on a rainy drive to the underpass where thousands of others waited for a bus ride to who knows where. You saw the people left behind. The poor, the sick, the disabled, the prisoners, the low-wage workers of New Orleans, were all left behind in the evacuation. Now that New Orleans is re-opening for some, the same people are being left behind again.

When those in power close the public schools, close public housing, fire people from their jobs, refuse to provide access to affordable public healthcare, and close off all avenues for justice, it is not necessary to erect a sign outside of New Orleans saying "Poor People Not Allowed To Return." People cannot come back in these circumstances and that is exactly what is happening.

There are 28,000 people still living in shelters in Louisiana. There are thousands of public housing apartments in New Orleans, many in good physical condition. None have been reopened. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimated that 112,000 low-income homes in New Orleans were damaged by the hurricane. Yet, local, state and federal authorities are not committed to re-opening public housing. Louisiana Congressman Richard Baker (R-LA) said, after the hurricane, "We finally cleaned up public

housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."

New Orleans public schools enrolled about 60,000 children before the hurricane. The school board president now estimates that no schools on the city's east bank, where the overwhelming majority of people live, will reopen this academic school year. Every one of the 13 public schools on the mostly-dry west bank of New Orleans was changed into charter schools in an afternoon meeting a few days ago. A member of the Louisiana state board of education estimated that at most 10,000 students will attend public schools in New Orleans this academic year.

The City of New Orleans laid off 3,000 workers. The public school system laid off thousands of its workers. The Archdiocese of New Orleans laid off 800 workers from its central staff and countless hundreds of others from its parish schools. The Housing Authority has laid off its workers. The St. Bernard Sheriff's Office laid off half of its workers.

Renters in New Orleans are returning to find their furniture on the street and strangers living in their apartments at higher rents – despite an order by the Governor that no one can be evicted before October 25. Rent in the dry areas have doubled and tripled.

Environmental chemist Wilma Subra cautions that earth and air in the New Orleans area appear to be heavily polluted with heavy metal and organic contaminants from more than 40 oil spills and extensive mold. The people, Subra stated, are subject to "double insult – the chemical insult from the sludge and biological insult from the mold." Homes built on the Agriculture Street landfill – a federal toxic site – stewed for weeks in floodwaters.

Yet, the future of Charity Hospital of New Orleans, the primary place for free comprehensive medical care in the state of Louisiana, is under furious debate and discussion and may never re-open again. Right now, free public healthcare is being provided by volunteers at grassroots free clinics like Common Ground – a wonderful and much needed effort but not a substitute for public healthcare.

The jails and prisons are full and staying full. Despite orders to release prisoners, state and local corrections officials are not releasing them unless someone can transport them out of town. Lawyers have to file lawsuits to force authorities to release people from prison who have already served all of their sentences! Judges are setting \$100,000 bonds for people who steal beer out of a vacant house, while landlords break the law with impunity. People arrested before and after the hurricane have not even been formally

We have to look honestly at both the painful destruction and the bright hope for better times.

charged by the prosecutor. Because the evidence room is under water, part of the police force is discredited, and witnesses are scattered around the country, everyone knows few will ever see a trial, yet timid judges are reluctant to follow the constitution and laws and release them on reasonable bond.

People are making serious money in this hurricane, but not the working and poor people who built and maintained New Orleans. President Bush lifted the requirement that jobs re-building the Gulf Coast pay a living wage. The Small Business Administration has received 1.6 million disaster loan applications and has approved 9 in Louisiana. A US Senator reported that maintenance workers at the Superdome are being replaced by out of town workers who will work for less money and no benefits. He also reported that seventy-five Louisiana electricians at the Naval Air Station are being replaced by workers from Kellogg Brown and Root – a subsidiary of Halliburton.

Take it to the courts, you say? The Louisiana Supreme Court has been closed since the hurricane and is not due to re-open until at least October 25, 2005. While Texas and Mississippi have enacted special rules to allow out of state lawyers to come and help people out, the Louisiana Supreme court has not. Nearly every person victimized by the hurricane has a price-gouging story. Yet, the Louisiana Attorney General has filed exactly one suit for price-gouging – against a campground. Likewise, the US attorney has prosecuted 3 people for wrongfully seeking \$2000 FEMA checks.

No schools. No low-income apartments. No jobs. No healthcare. No justice.

A final example? You can fly on a plane into New Orleans, but you cannot take a bus. Greyhound does not service New Orleans at this time.

You saw the people who were left behind last time. The same people are being left behind all over again. You raised hell about the people left behind last time. Please do it again.

October 31, 2005: Why Are They Making New Orleans A Ghost Town?

On Halloween night, New Orleans will be very, very dark. Well over half the homes on the east bank of New Orleans sit vacant because they still do not have electricity. More do not have natural gas or running water. Most stoplights still do not work. Most street lights remain out.

Fully armed National Guard troops refuse to allow over ten thousand people even visit their property in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood.

Despite the fact that people cannot come back, tens of thousands of people face eviction from their homes. A local judge told me that their court expects to process a thousand evictions a day for weeks.

Renters still in shelters or temporary homes across the country will never see the court notice taped to the door of their home. Because they will not show up for the eviction hearing that they do not know about, their possessions will be tossed out in the street.

In the street their possessions will sit alongside an estimated 3 million truck loads of downed trees, piles of mud, fiberglass insulation, crushed sheetrock, abandoned cars, spoiled mattresses, wet rugs, and horrifyingly smelly refrigerators full of food from August.

There are also New Orleans renters facing evictions from landlords who want to renovate and charge higher rents to the out of town workers who populate the city. Some renters have offered to pay their rent and are still being evicted. Others question why they should have to pay rent for September when they were not allowed to return to New Orleans.

New Orleans, known for its culture and food and music, is now pushing away the very people who created the culture and food and music. Mardi Gras Indians live and paraded in neighborhoods that sit without electricity or water. The back room cooks for many of the most famous restaurants cannot yet return to New Orleans. Musicians remain in exile. Housing is scarce and rents are soaring. Over 245,000 people lost jobs in September. Public education in New Orleans has not restarted. The levees are not even up to their flawed level in August.

Dr. Arjun Sengupta, the United Nations Human Rights Commission Special Reporter on Extreme Poverty, visited New Orleans and Baton Rouge last week. He toured the devastated areas and listened to the evacuees still in shelters and those living out of town with family.

Dr. Sengupta described current conditions as “shocking” and “gross violations of human rights.” The devastation itself is shocking, he explained, but even more shocking is that two months have passed and there is little to nothing being done to reconstruct vast areas of New Orleans. “The US is the richest nation in the history of the world. Why cannot it restore electricity and water and help people rebuild their homes and neighborhoods? If the US can rebuild Afghanistan and Iraq, why not New Orleans?”

The longer the poor and working class of New Orleans stay away, the more likely it will be that

People are making serious money in this hurricane, but not the working and poor people who built and maintained New Orleans.

they never return. That, some say, is exactly what those in power in New Orleans and Louisiana and the US must want. Otherwise, why are they making New Orleans a ghost town?

November 23, 2005: No Home for the Holidays: Stop Evictions of Katrina Evacuees

Sabrina Robinson lived her whole life in New Orleans. When Katrina and the floodwaters hit her house, she and her three children swam to a dry bridge where they lived for 2 days. "We watched people die," said Ms. Robinson. Now her family and 52 other families from New Orleans face eviction from the Houston apartment complex where they lived for the last month. Tens of thousands of other Katrina evacuees also face holiday evictions.

After a bus took the Robinson family to Houston, they slept on the floor for a month. On October 2, the family received federal housing vouchers from the Disaster Relief Center in Houston. Quail Chase apartments in Houston agreed to accept the vouchers. Ms. Robinson and 52 other families from New Orleans moved in to Quail Chase. After the families lived there for several weeks, Quail Chase changed their mind and refused to accept vouchers. Quail Chase has now given eviction notices to all 53 families. Now they face the streets again. "There is nothing else available," Ms. Robinson said. "All the decent housing is taken."

In the same spirit, FEMA announced November 15 it would quit paying for housing for most of the nearly 60,000 homeless Katrina families who are residing in government paid hotel and motel rooms.

In Texas, where 54,000 people are living in 18,000 rooms, Republican Governor Rick Perry said these evictions will "fuel the cycle of evacuees moving from one temporary housing situation to another - if they can secure housing at all."

The story is being repeated across the nation. In New York, 487 Katrina victims, including 115 kids, have been told their hotel rooms will no longer be paid. In the Carolinas, between 400 and 600 Katrina families in hotels face eviction even as local homeless shelters are already full.

Back home in New Orleans, legal aid lawyers estimate there will be 10,000 evictions filed in November against Katrina evacuees - more in one month than are usually filed in an entire year.

At this holiday time, resolve to stand in solidarity with the hundreds of thousands of people victimized by Katrina and the floods that followed.

Katrina evacuees in your community need your support. Stop the evictions in your community.

Nationally, 54 members of Congress, including all the members of the Congressional Black Caucus, have co-sponsored HR 4197, the Hurricane Katrina Recovery Act. Ask your representative to co-sponsor this bill and to take action to force FEMA to assist those still left behind.

There are also many other great grassroots, regional and national efforts underway to provide solidarity with Katrina evacuees. Many are listed at www.justiceforneworleans.org.

People displaced by Katrina do not want charity. What is needed at this holiday time is solidarity. Resolve to stand with the victims of Katrina as they search for justice.

February 21, 2006: Six Months After Katrina: Who Was Left Behind Then and Who is Being Left Behind Now?

Introduction

Nearly six months ago, my wife Debbie and I boated out of New Orleans. We left five days after Katrina struck. Debbie worked as an oncology nurse in a New Orleans hospital. She volunteered to come in during the hurricane so that other nurses with children could evacuate.

Imagine an entire city with no electricity, water, food or flushing toilets and tens of thousands of people left behind.

Debbie and I left five days later by way of a small fishing boat, the back of a garden truck, and the kindness of strangers. We returned 15 weeks later. Many of those left behind then who evacuated with us have yet to return.

The Katrina evacuation was totally self-help. If you had the resources, a car, money and a place to go, you left. Over one million people evacuated - 80 to 90% of the population.

No provisions were made for those who could not evacuate themselves. To this day no one has a reliable estimate of how many people were left behind in Katrina - that in itself says quite a bit about what happened.

Who was left behind in the self-help evacuation?

In the hospital, we could not see who was left behind because we did not have electricity or TV. We certainly knew the 2000 of us were left behind, and from the hospital we could see others. Some were

Who was left behind in the self help evacuation?

floating in the street – face down. Some were padding down the street – helping older folks get to high ground. Some were swimming down the streets.

We could hear people left behind screaming for help from rooftops. We routinely heard gunshots as people trapped on rooftops tried to get the attention of helicopters crisscrossing the skies above. We could see the people trapped in the Salvation Army home a block away. We could hear breaking glass as people scrambled to get away from flooded one story homes and into the higher ground of several story office buildings. We saw people swimming to the local drugstore and swimming out with provisions. But we had no idea how many were actually left behind.

The poor, especially those without cars, were left behind. Twenty-seven percent of the people of New Orleans did not have access to a car. Government authorities knew in advance that "...100,000 citizens of New Orleans did not have means of personal transportation." Greyhound and Amtrak stopped service on the Saturday before the hurricane. These are people who did not have cars because they were poor - over 125,000 people, 27% of the people of New Orleans, lived below the very low federal poverty level before Katrina.

The sick were left behind. Some government reports estimated 12,000 patients were evacuated. I estimate at least an additional 24,000 people - staff and families of patients - were left behind in the twenty-two hospitals which were open at the time.

The elderly were left behind. The 280 plus local nursing homes remained mostly full. Only 21% evacuated and as a consequence 215 people died in nursing homes, at least six people died at a single nursing home while they waited four days for busses. The aged who lived at home also certainly found it more difficult than most to evacuate as they were more likely to live alone, less likely to own a car and nearly half were disabled.

Untold numbers of other disabled people and their caretakers were also left behind. There were tens of thousands of people with special needs in New Orleans. A physician reported hundreds of people in wheelchairs were in front of the Convention Center. A comprehensive study of evacuees in Houston shelters found one in seven physically disabled, 22% physically unable to evacuate, 23% stayed behind to care for someone physically disabled, and 25% had a chronic disease such as heart disease, diabetes or high blood pressure. There were no provisions made for their evacuations.

Children were left behind. While there are no official estimates breaking out children left behind,

I know from what we saw during our evacuation that many, many children were among those left behind. About one-fourth of the people living in the areas damaged were children, about 183,000 kids, including 47,000 children under the age of 5. Over half of the children displaced were African-American and 30% of children in the damaged areas were poor, nearly double the 2000 national census rate for child poverty of 16.6%. These children were almost twice as likely to live in a female-headed home than children nationally.

Prisoners were left behind. Local prisons held 8300 inmates, most on local minor charges awaiting trial and too poor to post bond. Thousands were left behind with no food, water, or medical attention. Jails depend on electricity as much as hospitals do – doors of cells and halls and pods and entrances and exits are electronically opened and closed. More than 600 hundred prisoners, one entire building, were left behind once the prisons were evacuated – left in chest deep water, locked into cells.

Ultimately as many as 40,000 people took refuge in the Superdome which lost power, lost part of its roof, the water system failed and the toilets backed up. Another 20-30,000 people were dropped off at the Convention Center. Conditions at the Convention Center were far worse than at the Superdome because the Convention Center was never intended to be used for evacuees. It did not have any drinking water, food, or medical care at all. Ten people died in or around the Superdome, four at the convention center.

Unfounded rumors flew about rapes and murders inside these centers – and the myth that rescue helicopters were fired upon – have all been found to be untrue.. But those rumors so upset military and medical responders that many slowed down demanding protection from the evacuees – only to be greeted by “a whole lot of people clapping and cheering” when they arrived.

Debbie and I left the hospital after five days. Helicopters finally came and airlifted out many patients, their families and staff. Others, like us, left in small fishing boats piloted by volunteers.

The Coast Guard reported it rescued 33,000 people and the National Guard reported rescues of another 25,000 people. Louisiana Department of Homeland Security said 62,000 people were rescued from rooftops or out of water – not including those already in shelters. Many, many others, like us, were rescued by volunteers in boats and trucks.

Some people never made it out of metropolitan New Orleans. February 2006 reports from the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals show 1,103 bodies were recovered from the storm and flood, with over 2,000 people still reported missing. About

The myth that rescue helicopters were fired upon - has been found to be untrue - but it slowed down the evacuations.

215 people died in local hospitals and nursing homes.

Where did the survivors end up? According to FEMA, evacuees ended up all over – applications came in from 18,700 zip codes in all 50 states – half of the nation’s residential postal zones. Most evacuee families stayed within 250 miles of New Orleans, but 240,000 households went to Houston and other cities over 250 miles away and another 60,000 households went over 750 miles away.

Who ended up in shelters? Over 270,000 evacuees started out in shelters. The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health surveyed 680 randomly selected adult evacuees in Houston shelters on September 10-12, 2005. The results of that survey illustrate who ended up in shelters:

- 64% were renters
- 55% did not have a car or a way to evacuate
- 22% had to care for someone who was physically unable to leave
- 72% had no insurance
- 68% had neither money in the bank nor a useable credit card
- 57% had total household incomes of less than \$20,000 in prior year
- 76% had children under 18 with them in the shelter
- 77% had a high school education or less
- 93% were black
- 67% were employed full or part-time before the hurricane
- 52% had no health insurance
- 54% received their healthcare at the big public Charity Hospital

The people who were left behind in Katrina were the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, children, and prisoners – mostly African-American.

Who is Being Left Behind Now?

“Hurricane Katrina likely made one of the poorest areas of the country even poorer....Both those who were poor before the storm and those who have become poor following the storm, are likely to face a particularly difficult time in reestablishing their lives, have few if any financial resources upon which to draw.”

Congressional Research Service 2005

Debbie and I ultimately ended up spending several months in an apartment in Houston while New Orleans started its recovery. Loyola Law Clinic, where I work, moved into the Disaster Relief Center in Houston and our clinic students interviewed and gave assistance to over a thousand evacuees.

We were able to come back to New Orleans for good in mid-December because our house was located close to the University and only sustained roof damage. Very few of the people who were evacuated with us have been able to return.

It seems clear that most of the same people who were left behind in the evacuation for Katrina are being left behind again in the reconstruction of New Orleans. In fact, now there are even more being left behind. Hundreds of thousands of people have not been able to make it back.

Drive through the city away from the French Quarter, Central Business District and the St. Charles streetcar line and you will see tens of thousands of still damaged and unoccupied homes.

Hundreds of thousands of people have not made it back. There were 469,000 fewer people in the metropolitan New Orleans area in January 2006 than in August 2005.

Why? Many reasons.

Most of the City was still without power in early 2006. About two-thirds of the homes in New Orleans did not have electricity in early 2006, even fewer had gas.

Seventy-three percent of the homes in New Orleans were in areas damaged by the storm. But, as the Brown University study concluded “... storm damage data shows that the storm’s impact was disproportionately borne by the region’s African-American community, by people who rented their homes and by the poor and unemployed.” Poor people were hardest hit and are having the hardest time returning. “The population of the damaged areas was nearly half black (45.8% compared to 26.4% black in the rest of the region), living in rental housing (45.7% compared to 30.9%), and disproportionately below the poverty line (20.9% compared to 15.3%.”

Renters are not coming back because there is little affordable housing. With tens of thousands of homes damaged, the cost of renting has skyrocketed. An apartment down the block from my house rented for \$600 last summer – it now rents for \$1400. Trailers have not arrived because of federal, state and local political misjudgments. Over 10,000 trailers were still sitting unused on runways in Hope, Arkansas in February 2006. In my interviews with evacuees who were renters, few were protected by any insurance - most lost everything.

The little reconstruction that has started is aimed at home-owners. Louisiana is slated to receive \$6.2 billion in Community Development Block Grant money and the Governor says \$1 billion “could be

The storm's impact was disproportionately borne by the region's African American community, by people who rented their homes and by the poor and unemployed.

used to encourage the rebuilding of affordable housing.” So with 45% of the homes damaged occupied by renters, affordable housing “could” end up with 16% of the assistance.

Public housing is politically out of the question in early 2006. There is no national or local commitment to re-opening public housing in the city. U.S. Congressman Richard Baker, a longtime critic of public housing in New Orleans, was quoted in the Wall Street Journal after the storm saying “We finally cleaned up in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did.” As the Brown study politely observed “people who previously lived in public housing seem to have the least chances to return, given current policy. All public housing has been closed (and special barriers bolted to the doors)...plans for reopening the projects or for constructing new affordable housing have not become public.”

Debbie lost her nursing job when her hospital failed to reopen. She is not alone. There are now 200,000 fewer jobs in the area than in August.

When I teach about the working poor, I tell my students to look for the working poor at the bus stops in the morning and in the evening. The working poor have not returned. As the Brookings Institution Katrina Index tells us pre-Katrina public transportation in New Orleans averaged 124,000 riders per week; in January 2006 there were 11,709 a week, only 9% of the pre-storm number.

The sick are not likely to return anytime soon. Healthcare in New Orleans is now difficult even for those with insurance but nearly impossible for the poor without it. While there were 22 hospitals open in New Orleans in June, in early 2006 there were 7, a 78% reduction. Before Katrina there were 53,000 hospital beds in the area, in February 2006 there were 15,000 – waits of more than 8 hours in emergency rooms are not uncommon. With so many hospitals closed, people needing regular medical care like dialysis or chemotherapy cannot expect to return.

Worse still for the poor, there is no public hospital in New Orleans any more – the Charity Hospital that over 50% of the people in shelters went to has not been reopened.

Many of the disabled are still in the areas where they evacuated to, causing financial and medical concerns in those states. Others of the disabled, who lived at home prior to the evacuation, fear being institutionalized.

Children have not returned to New Orleans. Most public schools remain closed or have been converted into charter schools. Before the storm there were 117 public schools with 60,000 students. In

January 2006, there were 19 open, including 8 new charter schools, serving about 13,000 students. Houston alone has nearly 20,000 evacuated students. The failure to reopen public schools in New Orleans has prompted litigation to force the charter and public schools to accept children.

Prisoners have again been left behind. Some of those evacuated were kept in jail long after their sentences had run. Only 7 of 42 public defenders have returned to represent the thousands still held in jail.

Even among homeowners, it is much more likely that white homeowners will have the chance to rebuild than black homeowners because of deep patterns of racial disparities in income – white median income is \$61,000 compared to black income of \$25,000. Black businesses were severely impacted by Katrina. Rebuilding by homeowners in mostly black low-lying neighborhoods is much less likely at the time of the writing of this article because of bulldozing plans by the city and because rebuilding in those areas depends heavily on planning and homeowners insurance and flood insurance issues, many of which have yet to be resolved.

As a result, because renters, poor people and those without work are overwhelmingly African-American, “New Orleans is at risk of losing 80% of its black population.”

“New Orleans is not going to be as black as it was for a long time, if ever again,” Alphonso Jackson, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, told a Houston audience.

Recall some of the characteristics of people who ended up in shelters, then compare to the situation currently in New Orleans:

64% were renters – now rents have skyrocketed and public housing is mostly closed;

22% had to care for someone who was physically unable to leave – now there are many fewer hospital beds;

52% had no health insurance – now the main center of public healthcare is closed;

76% had children under 18 with them in the shelter – most public schools are closed;

93% were black – the areas hit hardest were black and poor;

67% were employed full or part-time before the hurricane – there are now 200,000 fewer jobs than before the hurricane.

The people left behind in the rebuilding of New Orleans are the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, children, and prisoners, mostly African-American. Again left behind.

The working poor have returned.

The television showed who was left behind in the evacuation of New Orleans after Katrina. There is no similar easy visual for those who are left behind now, but they are the same people.

Conclusion

There is not a sign outside of New Orleans saying "If you are poor, sick, elderly, disabled, children or African-American, you cannot return." But there might as well be.

The people left behind in the evacuation of New Orleans after Katrina are the same people left behind in rebuilding of New Orleans - the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, and children, mostly African-American.

Now that we are back from Houston, Debbie has just started a new job at another hospital. I am fortunate enough to work at one of the universities which was not severely physically damaged by the storm and floods.

We are back. But where are our neighbors, the people we rode out of the city with? Where are the hundreds of thousands of our neighbors and will they ever be allowed to return?

Where is New Orleans now, and more important, where is it going to be?

Finally, if all levels of government and corporate power allow this to happen in New Orleans, do you think it will be any different in your city?

***March 29, 2006: Seven Months After Katrina:
Sleeping in Your Car in Front of Your Trailer in
Front of Your Devastated Home, Tales of Lunacy and
Hope from New Orleans***

In New Orleans, seven months after Katrina, senior citizens are living in their cars. WWL-TV introduced us to Korean War veteran Paul Morris, 74, and his wife Yvonne, 66. They have been sleeping in their 2 door sedan since January. They have been waiting that long for FEMA contractors to unlock the 240 square foot trailer in their yard and connect the power so they can sleep inside it in front of their devastated home.

This tale of lunacy does not begin to stop there.

Their 240 square foot trailer may well cost more than their house. While FEMA flat out refuses to say how much the government is paying for trailers, reliable estimates by the New York Times and others place the cost at over \$60,000 each.

How could these tiny FEMA trailers cost so much?

Follow the money.

Circle B Enterprises of Georgia was awarded \$287 million in contracts by FEMA for temporary housing. At the time, that was the seventh highest award of Katrina money in the country. According to the Washington Post, Circle B was not even being licensed to build homes in its own state of Georgia and filed for bankruptcy in 2003. The company does not even have a website.

Here is how it works. The original contractor takes their cut and subcontracts out the work of constructing the trailer to other companies. Once it is built, they subcontract out the transporting the trailers to yet other companies which pay drivers, gas, insurance and mileage. They then subcontract out the hookups of the trailers to other companies and keep taking cuts for their services. Usually none of the people who make the money are local workers.

With \$60,000 many people could adequately repair their homes.

Why not just give the \$60,000 directly to the elderly couple and let them fix up their home? Ask Congress. FEMA is not allowed to give grants of that much. Money for fixing up homes comes from somewhere else and people are still waiting for that to arrive.

While many corporations are making big money off of Katrina, Mr. and Mrs. Morris wait in their car.

Craziness continues in the area of the right to vote.

You would think that the nation that put on elections with satellite voting boxes for Iraqis and Afghans and Haitians and many others would do the same for Katrina evacuees. Wrong. There is no satellite voting for the 230,000 citizens of New Orleans who are out of state. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Advancement Project, ACORN and the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund have all fought for satellite voting but Louisiana and the courts and the U.S. Justice Department have said no.

The rule of thumb around here is that the poorer you are, the further you have been displaced. African Americans are also much more likely to be poor and renters – the people who cannot yet come back to a city where rents have doubled. They are the ones bearing the burdens of no satellite voting.

The people already back are much more affluent than the pre-Katrina New Orleans. The city is

Sleeping in
your car in
front of your
trailer in
front of your
devastated
home.

also much whiter. Many of those already back in New Orleans are not so sure that all of New Orleans should be rebuilt. The consequence of that is not everyone will be allowed to return. Planners and politicians openly suggest turning poor neighborhoods into green spaces. No one yet has said they want to turn their own neighborhood into green space – only other people’s neighborhoods – usually poor people’s neighborhoods. Those who disagree are by and large not here.

New Orleans has not been majority white for decades, but it is quite possible that a majority of those who are able to vote in the upcoming election will be white. Thus the decisions about the future of New Orleans are poised to be made by those who have been able to get back and will exclude many of those still evacuated. Guess what type of plans they will have for New Orleans?

There are many, many more tales of lunacy all over town as all systems have melted down: criminal justice, healthcare, public education, churches, electricity, water, garbage, our environment – you name it, it melted down and is not yet fully back up.

But, there are also clear signs of hope.

Across New Orleans neighborhood groups are meeting every weekend planning their own come-backs. People catch rides back into town and visit ruined neighborhoods and greet neighbors and together make plans to recover. Because governmental action and contractors are so slow, groups are looking to their own resources and partnering with churches and community groups and universities and businesses to fill in the gaps where the politicians have not yet been able to respond. The citizens themselves are our greatest hope.

We also have allies that give us hope.

We have been amazed and refreshed by the thousands of college students who took their spring break in New Orleans helping our elderly and uninsured families gut houses, clean up streets and advocate for justice with Common Ground Relief, the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund, Catholic Charities, ACORN and many other church and civic groups. Even law students! Over 1000 law students helped provide legal aid and are providing the first comprehensive documentation of abuses of local and out of town workers by businesses.

Over 100 clergy from across the US visited New Orleans with the PICO Network, as did hundreds of other people of faith with the Jeremiah community. The Protestant Women are here now and the Interfaith Worker Justice group meets here soon. Together, these groups raise the voices of their faith communities and call for justice in the rebuilding of our communities.

On the national level, we see rising support from numerous social justice groups. Several created the Katrina Information Network, an internet advocacy group that enables people across the country to take action with us to influence all levels of government in the rebuilding effort. We are inspired by the veterans and allies who marched from Florida to New Orleans to highlight the diversion of money from our cities to war efforts.

Yes, we have lunacy in New Orleans. But there are also signs of hope.

Whether lunacy or hope will triumph in New Orleans is yet to be determined. But we appreciate those of you who are working in solidarity with us to try to keep our hope alive.

April 27, 2006: Eight Months After Katrina: “Don’t Come Back to New Orleans Unless You Intend to Join the Fight for Justice!”

On Monday, April 17, 2006, two bodies were found buried beneath what used to be a home in the Lower 9th Ward. Their discovery raised to 17 the number of Hurricane Katrina fatalities that have been discovered in New Orleans in the past month and a half. Katrina is now directly blamed for the deaths of 1,282 Louisiana residents. Eight months after Katrina, the state reports 987 people are still missing.

Chief Steve Glynn, who oversees the New Orleans Fire Department search effort that found the latest two bodies told CNN: “You want to put it to rest at some point. You want to feel like it’s over and it’s just not yet.”

Eight months after Katrina, there are still nearly 300,000 people who have not returned to New Orleans. While we can hope that our community is nearing the end of finding bodies, the struggle for justice for the hundreds of thousands of displaced people continues.

Election Blues

The right to vote remains displaced from New Orleans.

In what was billed as “the most important election in the history of New Orleans,” only 36 percent of those registered voted in the recent city elections. Turnout was heavy and high in the mostly prosperous and white areas of Uptown where little damage occurred and exceptionally low in the heavily damaged and mostly black areas of the New Orleans East, Gentilly and the Ninth Ward – where some

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precincts reported as few as 15% voter participation.

The state refusal to set up satellite voting for those displaced outside the state resulted in exactly the disenfranchisement predicted.

While Iraqis who had not lived in Iraq in years were helped to vote in the US by our government, people forced out of state by Katrina for seven months were not allowed to vote where they are temporarily living.

This has national implications. The New Orleans Times-Picayune reported that in the 2002 U.S. Senate seat runoff between incumbent Democrat Mary Landrieu and Republican Suzanne Haik Terrell, the Orleans factor made the difference for Landrieu. The senator won Orleans by 78,900 votes, compared with her statewide lead of 42,012. In the 2003 gubernatorial runoff between Democrat Kathleen Blanco and Republican Bobby Jindal, Blanco won statewide by 54,874 votes. She won by a margin of 49,741 votes in New Orleans.

Worse, the systematic exclusion of the displaced gives fuel to those who do not want the poor to return and helps create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Low turnout in poor neighborhoods where the displaced could not drive back in to vote can now be taken as an indication of lack of interest and an excuse to further silence their voices. As the Washington Post noted: "How many people turned out to vote in each precinct was being viewed as an indicator of which neighborhoods are likely to be rebuilt; in many abandoned neighborhoods, people fear that residents who have left for good would not vote, revealing their lack of interest in the neighborhood and the city. Turnout could offer clues to the future racial makeup of the city."

Healthcare Crisis

New Orleans has lost 77% of its primary care doctors, 70% of its dentists and 89% of its psychiatrists since Katrina.

National Public Radio reported that the few hospitals in New Orleans are dangerously overburdened, especially emergency rooms. Nationally, it takes an average of 20 minutes to take a patient from an ambulance waiting in front of hospital to emergency room. In the New Orleans area, according to one surgeon at the East Jefferson Hospital, load times are usually 2 hours, but sometimes more. The longest time he's seen is 6 hours, 40 minutes, of a patient waiting in ER driveway to receive care.

Non-emergency care in New Orleans is also in crisis. With the closure of Charity Hospital and most public health clinics, it is very difficult to get a

child tested for lead poisoning or other toxins – even though recent reports indicate there are 46 environmental "hot spots" in the city. One corner, Magnolia and First in Central City, showed lead levels of 3,960 parts per million – nearly 10 times the acceptable level. Dr. Howard Mielke of Xavier University says 40 percent of the city soil has elevated lead levels.

Among the displaced, the healthcare situation is much worse. The Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health surveyed hundreds of the thousands of families living in FEMA trailers and found: Nearly half of the parents surveyed reported that at least one of their children had emotional or behavioral difficulties that the child didn't have before the hurricane; More than half the women caregivers showed evidence of clinically-diagnosed psychiatric problems, such as depression or anxiety disorders; On average, households have moved 3.5 times since the hurricane, some as many as nine times, often across state lines; More than one-fifth of the school-age children who were displaced were either not in school, or had missed 10 or more days of school in the past month.

Public Education Phase Out

New Orleans has become the national experiment for charter schools. Pre-Katrina 60,000 students attended over 115 New Orleans public schools. Now about 12,000 students attend public school in New Orleans. However, only four public schools are operated by the elected school board – the rest are now privately operated public charter schools or operated directly by the state. State authorities recently approved opening 22 more charter schools in the fall. Still many children in New Orleans are not in school at all because no schools have opened in their neighborhoods.

Where Has All the Money Gone - Robin Hood in Reverse

People who visit New Orleans are amazed at how devastated it still is. Where has all the money gone, they ask? Follow the money.

"How many contractors does it take to haul a pile of tree branches?" asked the Washington Post. If it's government work, at least four: a contractor, his subcontractor, the subcontractor's subcontractor, and finally, the local man with a truck and chainsaw. The big contractors typically receive between \$28 to \$30 a cubic yard for the debris. By the time they subcontract the work out to smaller and smaller companies, the guy in the truck receives about \$6 to \$8 per cubic yard.

The Miami Herald reported that the single biggest receiver of federal contracts was Ashbritt, Inc.


Robin Hood in reverse.

of Pompano Beach, FL, which received over \$579 million in contracts for debris removal in Mississippi from Army Corps of Engineers. The paper reported that the company does not own a single dumptruck! All they do is subcontract. Ashbritt, however, had recently dumped \$40,000 into the lobbying firm of Barbour, Griffith & Rogers, which had been run by Mississippi Governor and former National GOP Chair Haley Barbour. The owners of Ashbritt also trucked \$50,000 over to the Republican National Committee in 2004.

Draw your own conclusions about where the money has gone.

Federal Housing Funds for Rehab of Private Housing

Unfortunately, not a dime of the billions of federal housing reconstruction money from the Community Development Block Grant has yet made it to New Orleans. Seventy percent of CDBG money is usually targeted to low and moderate income families. HUD has already lowered that to 50% and for poorest among us, there will be little help at all.

Despite the fact that New Orleans was over half renters and that 84,000 rental units were destroyed or damaged, only 6,000 low-income rental units are part of state plan.

People are already living in damaged houses all over the city, many without electricity. A night trip through New Orleans neighborhoods shows people on porches surrounded by candles.

Louisiana calls its CDBG plan the "The Road Home." Obviously, few of the working poor are going to be able to go on this road trip.

Public Housing Closed

In 1996, New Orleans had 13,694 units of public housing. In August 2005, they reported 7,381. Now? Maybe 700. Residents returning to New Orleans who want to move back in their apartments are being told they forfeited their public housing apartments because they abandoned them! Abandoned apartments which have been forcibly closed for months? Many apartments are closed by locked metal shutters and surrounded by chain link fence. The housing authority also has a secret list of 1407 units of housing scheduled to be demolished. The housing authority let go 290 employees, mostly maintenance. Does it sound like they are planning to reopen?

In New Orleans, public housing was occupied by women, mostly working, children and the elderly. How are they supposed to return when private rents have skyrocketed?

HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson, whose agency is now running the local housing authority, stated clearly that public housing residents should not be allowed to return. In an interview with the Times-Picayune, Jackson said: "Some of the people shouldn't return. The developments were gang-ridden by some of the most notorious gangs in this country. People hid and took care of those persons because they took care of them. Only the best residents should return. Those who paid rent on time, those who held a job and those who worked." The blunt-spoken Jackson, who is black, acknowledged his comments might be seen as racially offensive. He told a white reporter, "If you said this, they would say you were racist."

Signs of Hope

Despite our very serious problems, there are also serious signs of hope. For every campaign of injustice and ugliness, there are people struggling despite the odds to create opportunities for justice and beauty. The people of New Orleans, joined with allies from across the nation and indeed the world, continue to resist the forces of injustice and to create opportunities for decency, community and equity. Here are a few examples.

St. Augustine's Church, one of the oldest black catholic churches in the nation, was abruptly closed by the Archdiocese of New Orleans in the months after Katrina. St. Augustine was dedicated in 1842 by the free black citizens of New Orleans and welcomed both free and slave as worshippers. It served both as a multiracial church and a center of community activities. After continual petitions, vigils and protests by community, neighborhood and church members, including direct action where some young people locked themselves inside the rectory, the Catholic hierarchy reversed itself. The joyous reopening of St. Augustine is a great cultural, spiritual, community and neighborhood victory.

Lower Ninth Ward residents have had no public schools open since Katrina. They wanted their neighborhood school, Martin Luther King, Jr., repaired and fixed up after it took in ten feet of water. Authorities refused to fix it up. So the residents, joined by members of Common Ground and the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund, decided to do it themselves. They started gutting the moldy parts and repairing and re-painting the school. They continued until the State Superintendent of Education called the police and stopped the work saying the neighbors were doing more harm than good. After days of public outcry of support of the volunteers, the State backed off. Volunteers went back to work, creating a place for education in the neighborhood as well as a symbol of resistance.

Despite our very serious problem, there are also serious signs of hope.

Mildred Battle is 70 and gets around in a wheelchair. She is one of more than 1000 families who been displaced from their apartment in the St. Bernard Housing Development in New Orleans since Katrina. Despite coming back three times, she was never allowed to go back to retrieve her belongings. Her apartment has heavy metal sheets locked into place over the windows and a new heavy metal door for which she is not allowed a key. The ramp to her building that allowed her to roll up to her apartment is blocked by a block-long chain link fence to keep all residents out. This month, Ms. Battle's wheelchair was the first one through the gate in the chain link fence as dozens of residents rushed past the lone security guard and broke back into their own homes. Friends of Ms. Battle helped her retrieve a picture of her dead son and a broken glass Martin Luther King award she received in the 1990s. She clutched them to her breast and cried saying, "This has been my home for decades. I want to come home." She and the other residents, along with veteran public housing organizers and activists from C3, a local anti-war organization, vow there will be more direct actions to enforce the rights of public housing residents to return home.

Before this action, veteran organizer Endesha Jukali yelled through a bullhorn to the crowd outside the St. Bernard Housing Development. "Those who attack public housing refuse to understand that we are talking about poor women and children, the poorest of the poor. Why attack them? Some people say do not come back to New Orleans if you don't intend to work. We say something else. Don't come back to New Orleans if you don't intend to fight! The only way that we are going to be able to come back, is to fight for justice every step of the way!" He then dropped the bullhorn and started pushing Ms. Battle in her wheelchair across the street and through the gate so she could break into her own home.

Suggestions for further reading on this topic include:

"A Failure of Initiative: Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina," U.S. House of Representatives. February 15, 2006. <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>

"Hurricane Katrina: Social-Demographic Characteristics of Impacted Areas," CRS Report for Congress, November 4, 2005, Summary. Report available at:

<http://www.gnocdc.org/reports/crsrept.pdf>;

"Katrina Index," Brookings Institution, updated monthly. Available at:

http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/200512_katri-

[naindex.htm](#)

John R. Logan, "The Impact of Katrina: Race and Class in Storm-Damaged Neighborhoods," <http://www.s4.brown.edu/Katrina/report.pdf> "Survey of Katrina Evacuees," This survey of 680 randomly selected adult evacuees in Houston shelters was conducted September 10-12, 2005 by The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health, questions 11a and 62. The entire survey can be found at:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/katrina_poll091605.pdf

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch.

<http://www.reconstructionwatch.org>

Want to advocate for and with the people of the Gulf?

Advocacy ideas are readily available at:

<http://www.katrinaaction.org>

Want to volunteer to come down and help?

ACORN: <http://www.acorn.org>

Catholic Charities Operation Helping Hands:

<http://www.catholiccharities-no.org>

Common Ground Relief: <http://www.commongroundrelief.org>

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund:

<http://www.communitylaborunited.net>

PICO – All Congregations Together -

<http://www.piconetwork.org/>

Other updates, ideas and suggestions for Action can be found at

<http://www.justicefornorleans.org>



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Katrina – The First Eight Months - Fall 2005 – Spring 2006

By Bill Quigley

Editor's Note

Dear Blueprint Readers:

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina dramatically changed everything in our part of the country, including the Blueprint for Social Justice. For many reasons, we were not able to publish our regular series of issues.

For the 2005-2006 academic year, instead of our usual assortment of social justice articles, the Blueprint for Social Justice is publishing this one issue. This issue shares with you a series of articles I wrote after Katrina as our challenges and hopes unfolded.

We recognize this is a serious departure from the history of this wonderful publication and we ask for your understanding.

We will resume the normal way of publishing of the Blueprint for Social Justice in the summer.

Thank you again for your support and patience and your solidarity.

Peace, love, justice,

Bill Quigley – Editor, Blueprint for Social Justice Quigley@loyno.edu

September 2005 - Boating Down Napoleon Avenue: Reflections on Katrina

I was in a hospital for 5 days and 4 nights during Katrina. My wife is a nurse and I was there with her. We left in a small fishing boat pattering down Napoleon Avenue.

The hospital had about 2000 people in it. Katrina exploded several big windows and the floods surrounded us with 8 feet of water. We lost electricity right away and soon lost the backup generator which was in the flooded basement. The water system stopped. We were advised not to drink the water and could not flush toilets.

You can imagine a hospital with 2000 people without electricity, water and flush toilets. Breathing machines did not work. Computers did not work. Cell phones did not work. Lights did not work. Elevators did not work. The cafeteria was in the basement so we had limited food for the first days and no food at the end. There was some bottled water. Nurses and aides and doctors and staff and families and visitors were all pitching in and doing heroic work despite the absence of modern medicine.

Outside it was much worse. People on rooftops were screaming for help. People fired guns to try to get the attention of the helicopters that kept going overhead. People were swimming in the water. People were boating in the water. A body was floating in the water.

Security turned wandering people away from the hospital and they walked back out into the waters.

The hospital first evacuated some premature infants in incubators out on Tuesday. Staff and families carried incubators down several flights of stairs to the parking garage. There they were handed through a hole in the wall into the back of a truck which took them to the roof for helicopter rescue.

No one was ever told where the helicopters were going. Mothers of the infants were not allowed to evacuate with them. Not enough room in the helicopters, they said. The tiny babies flew away to who knew where, mothers behind. Heartbreak unimaginable to any parent.

The helicopters stopped when it got dark Tuesday night. Nearly 1500 people remained in the hospital. Some doctors broke open vending machines for food so we had cheetos and Hawaiian punch for dinner. It was getting hotter all the time. People lay down by broken windows to try to catch a breeze. People were very tired but sleep was tough.

My wife and I tried to take some quiet time together to plan and went into the darkened chapel. We were stopped by a dead body lying on a gurney covered in a sheet. Patients were dying.

On Wednesday, the helicopters started up again. Elderly patients were carried down dark stairwells and driven to the roof. Small groups of people went out by airboats that roared down Claiborne Avenue and up Napoleon. But suddenly around lunch time the helicopters stopped coming. No one knew why.

People waited for hours for the helicopters to come back, but they never came. Patients were lined up on the roof and down the halls. Volunteers were waving pieces of cardboard over them trying to cool them off. Medicines were unavailable. We were out of food.

Until the sun set, an army sergeant and I held up a homemade sheet sign on the heliport trying to flag down helicopters. The sheet said "HELP!!! People dying!!!" A medical mechanic waiting on the roof to be picked up by his company was cynical. "You are wasting your time" he said, "people are dying all over the city."

A marine helicopter saw our sign and landed but it was too small to take patients. They gave us a case of water and a case of Vienna sausages.

As darkness fell, the patients already outside the hospital were kept on the parking lot ramp because the halls inside were full of waiting patients in wheelchairs and cots. The doctor in charge apologized for

the situation and explained that they had no medicine to give anyone. "We have some food," he said, "but those who have already eaten today should not eat because we do not have enough for everyone." He then handed out a tin of Vienna sausages to those who had not eaten. The patients spent the night on in the parking lot ramp – nurses working around the clock to fan them, do the bedpans, and help whatever way they could.

The night was hot and slow. There were still over a thousand people left in the hospital. Worried about security, the hospital asked everyone to gather up their clothes and possessions on the first and second levels. We "slept" on the floor by a pair of broken windows.

The next morning nothing happened for several hours, then the skies started roaring as helicopter after helicopter landed. A sweet sound.

About mid-day all the patients had left and we boarded a small fishing boat piloted by two young volunteers who were ferrying people out to Napoleon and St. Charles. There we waited with hundreds of other people for a ride out in whatever showed up - a flatbed truck, a garden supply truck or a school bus.

We boarded an open topped truck with nearly a hundred others and drove through the streets of New Orleans in the rain. The woman next to me was in her 20s, pregnant, and holding a clear plastic bag with \$30 in coins and a half-empty bottle of anti-biotics. That was all she had. Another woman tried to shield her 9 day old infant from the rain. Others held black garbage bags full of what they could save.

That truck took us out to Causeway and I-10. When we rounded the ramp, the whole truck gasped.

Thousands and thousands of people were waiting in the rain under the bridges. Mud was everywhere. There were no toilets. National Guard people were everywhere. Helicopters were landing across the highway and then taking off. It seemed like a big crowd scene from a bad movie.

As busses pulled up, the crowd surged forward. Many people had been outside for days and were desperate to get on a bus. No one knew where the busses were going – they would not tell us, but people wanted on no matter what.

We decided to volunteer until the lines went down and ended up catching a ride out with some volunteer nurses.

The city is trying to get back on its feet. It will be hard. Uptown is in pretty good shape. The rest of the city is still in deep trouble. Many have suffered economically, personally, and psychologically.

No one was ever told where the helicopters or busses were going.

There is much depression, much denial, and much anger.

But there is also great generosity, great courage and great solidarity. There is probably more courtesy on the sidewalks and streets of New Orleans than I have ever seen.

New Orleans needs Loyola to help our community re-group, re-build in a more just way, and heal. It will not be a quick process, but it is one that fits with our mission to be aligned with those seeking social justice in our community.

Boating down Napoleon, we saw many trees felled by Katrina. Almost all had sparkling Mardi Gras beads stuck in their branches. I hope that image will remind me to look honestly at both the painful destruction and the bright hope for better times.

October 10, 2005: New Orleans: Leaving the Poor Behind Again!

They are doing it again! My wife and I spent five days and four nights in a hospital in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. We saw people floating dead in the water. We watched people die waiting for evacuation to places with food, water, and electricity. We were rescued by boat and waited for an open pickup truck to take us and dozens of others on a rainy drive to the underpass where thousands of others waited for a bus ride to who knows where. You saw the people left behind. The poor, the sick, the disabled, the prisoners, the low-wage workers of New Orleans, were all left behind in the evacuation. Now that New Orleans is re-opening for some, the same people are being left behind again.

When those in power close the public schools, close public housing, fire people from their jobs, refuse to provide access to affordable public healthcare, and close off all avenues for justice, it is not necessary to erect a sign outside of New Orleans saying "Poor People Not Allowed To Return." People cannot come back in these circumstances and that is exactly what is happening.

There are 28,000 people still living in shelters in Louisiana. There are thousands of public housing apartments in New Orleans, many in good physical condition. None have been reopened. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimated that 112,000 low-income homes in New Orleans were damaged by the hurricane. Yet, local, state and federal authorities are not committed to re-opening public housing. Louisiana Congressman Richard Baker (R-LA) said, after the hurricane, "We finally cleaned up public

housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."

New Orleans public schools enrolled about 60,000 children before the hurricane. The school board president now estimates that no schools on the city's east bank, where the overwhelming majority of people live, will reopen this academic school year. Every one of the 13 public schools on the mostly-dry west bank of New Orleans was changed into charter schools in an afternoon meeting a few days ago. A member of the Louisiana state board of education estimated that at most 10,000 students will attend public schools in New Orleans this academic year.

The City of New Orleans laid off 3,000 workers. The public school system laid off thousands of its workers. The Archdiocese of New Orleans laid off 800 workers from its central staff and countless hundreds of others from its parish schools. The Housing Authority has laid off its workers. The St. Bernard Sheriff's Office laid off half of its workers.

Renters in New Orleans are returning to find their furniture on the street and strangers living in their apartments at higher rents – despite an order by the Governor that no one can be evicted before October 25. Rent in the dry areas have doubled and tripled.

Environmental chemist Wilma Subra cautions that earth and air in the New Orleans area appear to be heavily polluted with heavy metal and organic contaminants from more than 40 oil spills and extensive mold. The people, Subra stated, are subject to "double insult – the chemical insult from the sludge and biological insult from the mold." Homes built on the Agriculture Street landfill – a federal toxic site – stewed for weeks in floodwaters.

Yet, the future of Charity Hospital of New Orleans, the primary place for free comprehensive medical care in the state of Louisiana, is under furious debate and discussion and may never re-open again. Right now, free public healthcare is being provided by volunteers at grassroots free clinics like Common Ground – a wonderful and much needed effort but not a substitute for public healthcare.

The jails and prisons are full and staying full. Despite orders to release prisoners, state and local corrections officials are not releasing them unless someone can transport them out of town. Lawyers have to file lawsuits to force authorities to release people from prison who have already served all of their sentences! Judges are setting \$100,000 bonds for people who steal beer out of a vacant house, while landlords break the law with impunity. People arrested before and after the hurricane have not even been formally

We have to look honestly at both the painful destruction and the bright hope for better times.

charged by the prosecutor. Because the evidence room is under water, part of the police force is discredited, and witnesses are scattered around the country, everyone knows few will ever see a trial, yet timid judges are reluctant to follow the constitution and laws and release them on reasonable bond.

People are making serious money in this hurricane, but not the working and poor people who built and maintained New Orleans. President Bush lifted the requirement that jobs re-building the Gulf Coast pay a living wage. The Small Business Administration has received 1.6 million disaster loan applications and has approved 9 in Louisiana. A US Senator reported that maintenance workers at the Superdome are being replaced by out of town workers who will work for less money and no benefits. He also reported that seventy-five Louisiana electricians at the Naval Air Station are being replaced by workers from Kellogg Brown and Root – a subsidiary of Halliburton.

Take it to the courts, you say? The Louisiana Supreme Court has been closed since the hurricane and is not due to re-open until at least October 25, 2005. While Texas and Mississippi have enacted special rules to allow out of state lawyers to come and help people out, the Louisiana Supreme court has not. Nearly every person victimized by the hurricane has a price-gouging story. Yet, the Louisiana Attorney General has filed exactly one suit for price-gouging – against a campground. Likewise, the US attorney has prosecuted 3 people for wrongfully seeking \$2000 FEMA checks.

No schools. No low-income apartments. No jobs. No healthcare. No justice.

A final example? You can fly on a plane into New Orleans, but you cannot take a bus. Greyhound does not service New Orleans at this time.

You saw the people who were left behind last time. The same people are being left behind all over again. You raised hell about the people left behind last time. Please do it again.

October 31, 2005: Why Are They Making New Orleans A Ghost Town?

On Halloween night, New Orleans will be very, very dark. Well over half the homes on the east bank of New Orleans sit vacant because they still do not have electricity. More do not have natural gas or running water. Most stoplights still do not work. Most street lights remain out.

Fully armed National Guard troops refuse to allow over ten thousand people even visit their property in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood.

Despite the fact that people cannot come back, tens of thousands of people face eviction from their homes. A local judge told me that their court expects to process a thousand evictions a day for weeks.

Renters still in shelters or temporary homes across the country will never see the court notice taped to the door of their home. Because they will not show up for the eviction hearing that they do not know about, their possessions will be tossed out in the street.

In the street their possessions will sit alongside an estimated 3 million truck loads of downed trees, piles of mud, fiberglass insulation, crushed sheetrock, abandoned cars, spoiled mattresses, wet rugs, and horrifyingly smelly refrigerators full of food from August.

There are also New Orleans renters facing evictions from landlords who want to renovate and charge higher rents to the out of town workers who populate the city. Some renters have offered to pay their rent and are still being evicted. Others question why they should have to pay rent for September when they were not allowed to return to New Orleans.

New Orleans, known for its culture and food and music, is now pushing away the very people who created the culture and food and music. Mardi Gras Indians live and paraded in neighborhoods that sit without electricity or water. The back room cooks for many of the most famous restaurants cannot yet return to New Orleans. Musicians remain in exile. Housing is scarce and rents are soaring. Over 245,000 people lost jobs in September. Public education in New Orleans has not restarted. The levees are not even up to their flawed level in August.

Dr. Arjun Sengupta, the United Nations Human Rights Commission Special Reporter on Extreme Poverty, visited New Orleans and Baton Rouge last week. He toured the devastated areas and listened to the evacuees still in shelters and those living out of town with family.

Dr. Sengupta described current conditions as “shocking” and “gross violations of human rights.” The devastation itself is shocking, he explained, but even more shocking is that two months have passed and there is little to nothing being done to reconstruct vast areas of New Orleans. “The US is the richest nation in the history of the world. Why cannot it restore electricity and water and help people rebuild their homes and neighborhoods? If the US can rebuild Afghanistan and Iraq, why not New Orleans?”

The longer the poor and working class of New Orleans stay away, the more likely it will be that

People are making serious money in this hurricane, but not the working and poor people who built and maintained New Orleans.

they never return. That, some say, is exactly what those in power in New Orleans and Louisiana and the US must want. Otherwise, why are they making New Orleans a ghost town?

November 23, 2005: No Home for the Holidays: Stop Evictions of Katrina Evacuees

Sabrina Robinson lived her whole life in New Orleans. When Katrina and the floodwaters hit her house, she and her three children swam to a dry bridge where they lived for 2 days. "We watched people die," said Ms. Robinson. Now her family and 52 other families from New Orleans face eviction from the Houston apartment complex where they lived for the last month. Tens of thousands of other Katrina evacuees also face holiday evictions.

After a bus took the Robinson family to Houston, they slept on the floor for a month. On October 2, the family received federal housing vouchers from the Disaster Relief Center in Houston. Quail Chase apartments in Houston agreed to accept the vouchers. Ms. Robinson and 52 other families from New Orleans moved in to Quail Chase. After the families lived there for several weeks, Quail Chase changed their mind and refused to accept vouchers. Quail Chase has now given eviction notices to all 53 families. Now they face the streets again. "There is nothing else available," Ms. Robinson said. "All the decent housing is taken."

In the same spirit, FEMA announced November 15 it would quit paying for housing for most of the nearly 60,000 homeless Katrina families who are residing in government paid hotel and motel rooms.

In Texas, where 54,000 people are living in 18,000 rooms, Republican Governor Rick Perry said these evictions will "fuel the cycle of evacuees moving from one temporary housing situation to another - if they can secure housing at all."

The story is being repeated across the nation. In New York, 487 Katrina victims, including 115 kids, have been told their hotel rooms will no longer be paid. In the Carolinas, between 400 and 600 Katrina families in hotels face eviction even as local homeless shelters are already full.

Back home in New Orleans, legal aid lawyers estimate there will be 10,000 evictions filed in November against Katrina evacuees - more in one month than are usually filed in an entire year.

At this holiday time, resolve to stand in solidarity with the hundreds of thousands of people victimized by Katrina and the floods that followed.

Katrina evacuees in your community need your support. Stop the evictions in your community.

Nationally, 54 members of Congress, including all the members of the Congressional Black Caucus, have co-sponsored HR 4197, the Hurricane Katrina Recovery Act. Ask your representative to co-sponsor this bill and to take action to force FEMA to assist those still left behind.

There are also many other great grassroots, regional and national efforts underway to provide solidarity with Katrina evacuees. Many are listed at www.justiceforneworleans.org.

People displaced by Katrina do not want charity. What is needed at this holiday time is solidarity. Resolve to stand with the victims of Katrina as they search for justice.

February 21, 2006: Six Months After Katrina: Who Was Left Behind Then and Who is Being Left Behind Now?

Introduction

Nearly six months ago, my wife Debbie and I boated out of New Orleans. We left five days after Katrina struck. Debbie worked as an oncology nurse in a New Orleans hospital. She volunteered to come in during the hurricane so that other nurses with children could evacuate.

Imagine an entire city with no electricity, water, food or flushing toilets and tens of thousands of people left behind.

Debbie and I left five days later by way of a small fishing boat, the back of a garden truck, and the kindness of strangers. We returned 15 weeks later. Many of those left behind then who evacuated with us have yet to return.

The Katrina evacuation was totally self-help. If you had the resources, a car, money and a place to go, you left. Over one million people evacuated - 80 to 90% of the population.

No provisions were made for those who could not evacuate themselves. To this day no one has a reliable estimate of how many people were left behind in Katrina - that in itself says quite a bit about what happened.

Who was left behind in the self-help evacuation?

In the hospital, we could not see who was left behind because we did not have electricity or TV. We certainly knew the 2000 of us were left behind, and from the hospital we could see others. Some were

Who was left behind in the self help evacuation?

floating in the street – face down. Some were paddling down the street – helping older folks get to high ground. Some were swimming down the streets.

We could hear people left behind screaming for help from rooftops. We routinely heard gunshots as people trapped on rooftops tried to get the attention of helicopters crisscrossing the skies above. We could see the people trapped in the Salvation Army home a block away. We could hear breaking glass as people scrambled to get away from flooded one story homes and into the higher ground of several story office buildings. We saw people swimming to the local drugstore and swimming out with provisions. But we had no idea how many were actually left behind.

The poor, especially those without cars, were left behind. Twenty-seven percent of the people of New Orleans did not have access to a car. Government authorities knew in advance that "...100,000 citizens of New Orleans did not have means of personal transportation." Greyhound and Amtrak stopped service on the Saturday before the hurricane. These are people who did not have cars because they were poor - over 125,000 people, 27% of the people of New Orleans, lived below the very low federal poverty level before Katrina.

The sick were left behind. Some government reports estimated 12,000 patients were evacuated. I estimate at least an additional 24,000 people - staff and families of patients - were left behind in the twenty-two hospitals which were open at the time.

The elderly were left behind. The 280 plus local nursing homes remained mostly full. Only 21% evacuated and as a consequence 215 people died in nursing homes, at least six people died at a single nursing home while they waited four days for busses. The aged who lived at home also certainly found it more difficult than most to evacuate as they were more likely to live alone, less likely to own a car and nearly half were disabled.

Untold numbers of other disabled people and their caretakers were also left behind. There were tens of thousands of people with special needs in New Orleans. A physician reported hundreds of people in wheelchairs were in front of the Convention Center. A comprehensive study of evacuees in Houston shelters found one in seven physically disabled, 22% physically unable to evacuate, 23% stayed behind to care for someone physically disabled, and 25% had a chronic disease such as heart disease, diabetes or high blood pressure. There were no provisions made for their evacuations.

Children were left behind. While there are no official estimates breaking out children left behind,

I know from what we saw during our evacuation that many, many children were among those left behind. About one-fourth of the people living in the areas damaged were children, about 183,000 kids, including 47,000 children under the age of 5. Over half of the children displaced were African-American and 30% of children in the damaged areas were poor, nearly double the 2000 national census rate for child poverty of 16.6%. These children were almost twice as likely to live in a female-headed home than children nationally.

Prisoners were left behind. Local prisons held 8300 inmates, most on local minor charges awaiting trial and too poor to post bond. Thousands were left behind with no food, water, or medical attention. Jails depend on electricity as much as hospitals do – doors of cells and halls and pods and entrances and exits are electronically opened and closed. More than 600 hundred prisoners, one entire building, were left behind once the prisons were evacuated – left in chest deep water, locked into cells.

Ultimately as many as 40,000 people took refuge in the Superdome which lost power, lost part of its roof, the water system failed and the toilets backed up. Another 20-30,000 people were dropped off at the Convention Center. Conditions at the Convention Center were far worse than at the Superdome because the Convention Center was never intended to be used for evacuees. It did not have any drinking water, food, or medical care at all. Ten people died in or around the Superdome, four at the convention center.

Unfounded rumors flew about rapes and murders inside these centers – and the myth that rescue helicopters were fired upon – have all been found to be untrue.. But those rumors so upset military and medical responders that many slowed down demanding protection from the evacuees – only to be greeted by “a whole lot of people clapping and cheering” when they arrived.

Debbie and I left the hospital after five days. Helicopters finally came and airlifted out many patients, their families and staff. Others, like us, left in small fishing boats piloted by volunteers.

The Coast Guard reported it rescued 33,000 people and the National Guard reported rescues of another 25,000 people. Louisiana Department of Homeland Security said 62,000 people were rescued from rooftops or out of water – not including those already in shelters. Many, many others, like us, were rescued by volunteers in boats and trucks.

Some people never made it out of metropolitan New Orleans. February 2006 reports from the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals show 1,103 bodies were recovered from the storm and flood, with over 2,000 people still reported missing. About

The myth that rescue helicopters were fired upon - has been found to be untrue - but it slowed down the evacuations.

215 people died in local hospitals and nursing homes.

Where did the survivors end up? According to FEMA, evacuees ended up all over – applications came in from 18,700 zip codes in all 50 states – half of the nation’s residential postal zones. Most evacuee families stayed within 250 miles of New Orleans, but 240,000 households went to Houston and other cities over 250 miles away and another 60,000 households went over 750 miles away.

Who ended up in shelters? Over 270,000 evacuees started out in shelters. The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health surveyed 680 randomly selected adult evacuees in Houston shelters on September 10-12, 2005. The results of that survey illustrate who ended up in shelters:

- 64% were renters
- 55% did not have a car or a way to evacuate
- 22% had to care for someone who was physically unable to leave
- 72% had no insurance
- 68% had neither money in the bank nor a useable credit card
- 57% had total household incomes of less than \$20,000 in prior year
- 76% had children under 18 with them in the shelter
- 77% had a high school education or less
- 93% were black
- 67% were employed full or part-time before the hurricane
- 52% had no health insurance
- 54% received their healthcare at the big public Charity Hospital

The people who were left behind in Katrina were the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, children, and prisoners – mostly African-American.

Who is Being Left Behind Now?

“Hurricane Katrina likely made one of the poorest areas of the country even poorer....Both those who were poor before the storm and those who have become poor following the storm, are likely to face a particularly difficult time in reestablishing their lives, have few if any financial resources upon which to draw.”

Congressional Research Service 2005

Debbie and I ultimately ended up spending several months in an apartment in Houston while New Orleans started its recovery. Loyola Law Clinic, where I work, moved into the Disaster Relief Center in Houston and our clinic students interviewed and gave assistance to over a thousand evacuees.

We were able to come back to New Orleans for good in mid-December because our house was located close to the University and only sustained roof damage. Very few of the people who were evacuated with us have been able to return.

It seems clear that most of the same people who were left behind in the evacuation for Katrina are being left behind again in the reconstruction of New Orleans. In fact, now there are even more being left behind. Hundreds of thousands of people have not been able to make it back.

Drive through the city away from the French Quarter, Central Business District and the St. Charles streetcar line and you will see tens of thousands of still damaged and unoccupied homes.

Hundreds of thousands of people have not made it back. There were 469,000 fewer people in the metropolitan New Orleans area in January 2006 than in August 2005.

Why? Many reasons.

Most of the City was still without power in early 2006. About two-thirds of the homes in New Orleans did not have electricity in early 2006, even fewer had gas.

Seventy-three percent of the homes in New Orleans were in areas damaged by the storm. But, as the Brown University study concluded “... storm damage data shows that the storm’s impact was disproportionately borne by the region’s African-American community, by people who rented their homes and by the poor and unemployed.” Poor people were hardest hit and are having the hardest time returning. “The population of the damaged areas was nearly half black (45.8% compared to 26.4% black in the rest of the region), living in rental housing (45.7% compared to 30.9%), and disproportionately below the poverty line (20.9% compared to 15.3%.”

Renters are not coming back because there is little affordable housing. With tens of thousands of homes damaged, the cost of renting has skyrocketed. An apartment down the block from my house rented for \$600 last summer – it now rents for \$1400. Trailers have not arrived because of federal, state and local political misjudgments. Over 10,000 trailers were still sitting unused on runways in Hope, Arkansas in February 2006. In my interviews with evacuees who were renters, few were protected by any insurance - most lost everything.

The little reconstruction that has started is aimed at home-owners. Louisiana is slated to receive \$6.2 billion in Community Development Block Grant money and the Governor says \$1 billion “could be

The storm's impact was disproportionately borne by the region's African American community, by people who rented their homes and by the poor and unemployed.

used to encourage the rebuilding of affordable housing.” So with 45% of the homes damaged occupied by renters, affordable housing “could” end up with 16% of the assistance.

Public housing is politically out of the question in early 2006. There is no national or local commitment to re-opening public housing in the city. U.S. Congressman Richard Baker, a longtime critic of public housing in New Orleans, was quoted in the Wall Street Journal after the storm saying “We finally cleaned up in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did.” As the Brown study politely observed “people who previously lived in public housing seem to have the least chances to return, given current policy. All public housing has been closed (and special barriers bolted to the doors)...plans for reopening the projects or for constructing new affordable housing have not become public.”

Debbie lost her nursing job when her hospital failed to reopen. She is not alone. There are now 200,000 fewer jobs in the area than in August.

When I teach about the working poor, I tell my students to look for the working poor at the bus stops in the morning and in the evening. The working poor have not returned. As the Brookings Institution Katrina Index tells us pre-Katrina public transportation in New Orleans averaged 124,000 riders per week; in January 2006 there were 11,709 a week, only 9% of the pre-storm number.

The sick are not likely to return anytime soon. Healthcare in New Orleans is now difficult even for those with insurance but nearly impossible for the poor without it. While there were 22 hospitals open in New Orleans in June, in early 2006 there were 7, a 78% reduction. Before Katrina there were 53,000 hospital beds in the area, in February 2006 there were 15,000 – waits of more than 8 hours in emergency rooms are not uncommon. With so many hospitals closed, people needing regular medical care like dialysis or chemotherapy cannot expect to return.

Worse still for the poor, there is no public hospital in New Orleans any more – the Charity Hospital that over 50% of the people in shelters went to has not been reopened.

Many of the disabled are still in the areas where they evacuated to, causing financial and medical concerns in those states. Others of the disabled, who lived at home prior to the evacuation, fear being institutionalized.

Children have not returned to New Orleans. Most public schools remain closed or have been converted into charter schools. Before the storm there were 117 public schools with 60,000 students. In

January 2006, there were 19 open, including 8 new charter schools, serving about 13,000 students. Houston alone has nearly 20,000 evacuated students. The failure to reopen public schools in New Orleans has prompted litigation to force the charter and public schools to accept children.

Prisoners have again been left behind. Some of those evacuated were kept in jail long after their sentences had run. Only 7 of 42 public defenders have returned to represent the thousands still held in jail.

Even among homeowners, it is much more likely that white homeowners will have the chance to rebuild than black homeowners because of deep patterns of racial disparities in income – white median income is \$61,000 compared to black income of \$25,000. Black businesses were severely impacted by Katrina. Rebuilding by homeowners in mostly black low-lying neighborhoods is much less likely at the time of the writing of this article because of bulldozing plans by the city and because rebuilding in those areas depends heavily on planning and homeowners insurance and flood insurance issues, many of which have yet to be resolved.

As a result, because renters, poor people and those without work are overwhelmingly African-American, “New Orleans is at risk of losing 80% of its black population.”

“New Orleans is not going to be as black as it was for a long time, if ever again,” Alphonso Jackson, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, told a Houston audience.

Recall some of the characteristics of people who ended up in shelters, then compare to the situation currently in New Orleans:

64% were renters – now rents have skyrocketed and public housing is mostly closed;

22% had to care for someone who was physically unable to leave – now there are many fewer hospital beds;

52% had no health insurance – now the main center of public healthcare is closed;

76% had children under 18 with them in the shelter – most public schools are closed;

93% were black – the areas hit hardest were black and poor;

67% were employed full or part-time before the hurricane – there are now 200,000 fewer jobs than before the hurricane.

The people left behind in the rebuilding of New Orleans are the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, children, and prisoners, mostly African-American. Again left behind.

The working poor have returned.

The television showed who was left behind in the evacuation of New Orleans after Katrina. There is no similar easy visual for those who are left behind now, but they are the same people.

Conclusion

There is not a sign outside of New Orleans saying "If you are poor, sick, elderly, disabled, children or African-American, you cannot return." But there might as well be.

The people left behind in the evacuation of New Orleans after Katrina are the same people left behind in rebuilding of New Orleans - the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, and children, mostly African-American.

Now that we are back from Houston, Debbie has just started a new job at another hospital. I am fortunate enough to work at one of the universities which was not severely physically damaged by the storm and floods.

We are back. But where are our neighbors, the people we rode out of the city with? Where are the hundreds of thousands of our neighbors and will they ever be allowed to return?

Where is New Orleans now, and more important, where is it going to be?

Finally, if all levels of government and corporate power allow this to happen in New Orleans, do you think it will be any different in your city?

***March 29, 2006: Seven Months After Katrina:
Sleeping in Your Car in Front of Your Trailer in
Front of Your Devastated Home, Tales of Lunacy and
Hope from New Orleans***

In New Orleans, seven months after Katrina, senior citizens are living in their cars. WWL-TV introduced us to Korean War veteran Paul Morris, 74, and his wife Yvonne, 66. They have been sleeping in their 2 door sedan since January. They have been waiting that long for FEMA contractors to unlock the 240 square foot trailer in their yard and connect the power so they can sleep inside it in front of their devastated home.

This tale of lunacy does not begin to stop there.

Their 240 square foot trailer may well cost more than their house. While FEMA flat out refuses to say how much the government is paying for trailers, reliable estimates by the New York Times and others place the cost at over \$60,000 each.

How could these tiny FEMA trailers cost so much?

Follow the money.

Circle B Enterprises of Georgia was awarded \$287 million in contracts by FEMA for temporary housing. At the time, that was the seventh highest award of Katrina money in the country. According to the Washington Post, Circle B was not even being licensed to build homes in its own state of Georgia and filed for bankruptcy in 2003. The company does not even have a website.

Here is how it works. The original contractor takes their cut and subcontracts out the work of constructing the trailer to other companies. Once it is built, they subcontract out the transporting the trailers to yet other companies which pay drivers, gas, insurance and mileage. They then subcontract out the hookups of the trailers to other companies and keep taking cuts for their services. Usually none of the people who make the money are local workers.

With \$60,000 many people could adequately repair their homes.

Why not just give the \$60,000 directly to the elderly couple and let them fix up their home? Ask Congress. FEMA is not allowed to give grants of that much. Money for fixing up homes comes from somewhere else and people are still waiting for that to arrive.

While many corporations are making big money off of Katrina, Mr. and Mrs. Morris wait in their car.

Craziness continues in the area of the right to vote.

You would think that the nation that put on elections with satellite voting boxes for Iraqis and Afghans and Haitians and many others would do the same for Katrina evacuees. Wrong. There is no satellite voting for the 230,000 citizens of New Orleans who are out of state. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Advancement Project, ACORN and the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund have all fought for satellite voting but Louisiana and the courts and the U.S. Justice Department have said no.

The rule of thumb around here is that the poorer you are, the further you have been displaced. African Americans are also much more likely to be poor and renters – the people who cannot yet come back to a city where rents have doubled. They are the ones bearing the burdens of no satellite voting.

The people already back are much more affluent than the pre-Katrina New Orleans. The city is

Sleeping in
your car in
front of your
trailer in
front of your
devastated
home.

also much whiter. Many of those already back in New Orleans are not so sure that all of New Orleans should be rebuilt. The consequence of that is not everyone will be allowed to return. Planners and politicians openly suggest turning poor neighborhoods into green spaces. No one yet has said they want to turn their own neighborhood into green space – only other people’s neighborhoods – usually poor people’s neighborhoods. Those who disagree are by and large not here.

New Orleans has not been majority white for decades, but it is quite possible that a majority of those who are able to vote in the upcoming election will be white. Thus the decisions about the future of New Orleans are poised to be made by those who have been able to get back and will exclude many of those still evacuated. Guess what type of plans they will have for New Orleans?

There are many, many more tales of lunacy all over town as all systems have melted down: criminal justice, healthcare, public education, churches, electricity, water, garbage, our environment – you name it, it melted down and is not yet fully back up.

But, there are also clear signs of hope.

Across New Orleans neighborhood groups are meeting every weekend planning their own come-backs. People catch rides back into town and visit ruined neighborhoods and greet neighbors and together make plans to recover. Because governmental action and contractors are so slow, groups are looking to their own resources and partnering with churches and community groups and universities and businesses to fill in the gaps where the politicians have not yet been able to respond. The citizens themselves are our greatest hope.

We also have allies that give us hope.

We have been amazed and refreshed by the thousands of college students who took their spring break in New Orleans helping our elderly and uninsured families gut houses, clean up streets and advocate for justice with Common Ground Relief, the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund, Catholic Charities, ACORN and many other church and civic groups. Even law students! Over 1000 law students helped provide legal aid and are providing the first comprehensive documentation of abuses of local and out of town workers by businesses.

Over 100 clergy from across the US visited New Orleans with the PICO Network, as did hundreds of other people of faith with the Jeremiah community. The Protestant Women are here now and the Interfaith Worker Justice group meets here soon. Together, these groups raise the voices of their faith communities and call for justice in the rebuilding of our communities.

On the national level, we see rising support from numerous social justice groups. Several created the Katrina Information Network, an internet advocacy group that enables people across the country to take action with us to influence all levels of government in the rebuilding effort. We are inspired by the veterans and allies who marched from Florida to New Orleans to highlight the diversion of money from our cities to war efforts.

Yes, we have lunacy in New Orleans. But there are also signs of hope.

Whether lunacy or hope will triumph in New Orleans is yet to be determined. But we appreciate those of you who are working in solidarity with us to try to keep our hope alive.

April 27, 2006: Eight Months After Katrina: “Don’t Come Back to New Orleans Unless You Intend to Join the Fight for Justice!”

On Monday, April 17, 2006, two bodies were found buried beneath what used to be a home in the Lower 9th Ward. Their discovery raised to 17 the number of Hurricane Katrina fatalities that have been discovered in New Orleans in the past month and a half. Katrina is now directly blamed for the deaths of 1,282 Louisiana residents. Eight months after Katrina, the state reports 987 people are still missing.

Chief Steve Glynn, who oversees the New Orleans Fire Department search effort that found the latest two bodies told CNN: “You want to put it to rest at some point. You want to feel like it’s over and it’s just not yet.”

Eight months after Katrina, there are still nearly 300,000 people who have not returned to New Orleans. While we can hope that our community is nearing the end of finding bodies, the struggle for justice for the hundreds of thousands of displaced people continues.

Election Blues

The right to vote remains displaced from New Orleans.

In what was billed as “the most important election in the history of New Orleans,” only 36 percent of those registered voted in the recent city elections. Turnout was heavy and high in the mostly prosperous and white areas of Uptown where little damage occurred and exceptionally low in the heavily damaged and mostly black areas of the New Orleans East, Gentilly and the Ninth Ward – where some

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You want to put it to rest at some point. You feel like it’s over and it’s just not yet.

precincts reported as few as 15% voter participation.

The state refusal to set up satellite voting for those displaced outside the state resulted in exactly the disenfranchisement predicted.

While Iraqis who had not lived in Iraq in years were helped to vote in the US by our government, people forced out of state by Katrina for seven months were not allowed to vote where they are temporarily living.

This has national implications. The New Orleans Times-Picayune reported that in the 2002 U.S. Senate seat runoff between incumbent Democrat Mary Landrieu and Republican Suzanne Haik Terrell, the Orleans factor made the difference for Landrieu. The senator won Orleans by 78,900 votes, compared with her statewide lead of 42,012. In the 2003 gubernatorial runoff between Democrat Kathleen Blanco and Republican Bobby Jindal, Blanco won statewide by 54,874 votes. She won by a margin of 49,741 votes in New Orleans.

Worse, the systematic exclusion of the displaced gives fuel to those who do not want the poor to return and helps create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Low turnout in poor neighborhoods where the displaced could not drive back in to vote can now be taken as an indication of lack of interest and an excuse to further silence their voices. As the Washington Post noted: "How many people turned out to vote in each precinct was being viewed as an indicator of which neighborhoods are likely to be rebuilt; in many abandoned neighborhoods, people fear that residents who have left for good would not vote, revealing their lack of interest in the neighborhood and the city. Turnout could offer clues to the future racial makeup of the city."

Healthcare Crisis

New Orleans has lost 77% of its primary care doctors, 70% of its dentists and 89% of its psychiatrists since Katrina.

National Public Radio reported that the few hospitals in New Orleans are dangerously overburdened, especially emergency rooms. Nationally, it takes an average of 20 minutes to take a patient from an ambulance waiting in front of hospital to emergency room. In the New Orleans area, according to one surgeon at the East Jefferson Hospital, load times are usually 2 hours, but sometimes more. The longest time he's seen is 6 hours, 40 minutes, of a patient waiting in ER driveway to receive care.

Non-emergency care in New Orleans is also in crisis. With the closure of Charity Hospital and most public health clinics, it is very difficult to get a

child tested for lead poisoning or other toxins – even though recent reports indicate there are 46 environmental "hot spots" in the city. One corner, Magnolia and First in Central City, showed lead levels of 3,960 parts per million – nearly 10 times the acceptable level. Dr. Howard Mielke of Xavier University says 40 percent of the city soil has elevated lead levels.

Among the displaced, the healthcare situation is much worse. The Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health surveyed hundreds of the thousands of families living in FEMA trailers and found: Nearly half of the parents surveyed reported that at least one of their children had emotional or behavioral difficulties that the child didn't have before the hurricane; More than half the women caregivers showed evidence of clinically-diagnosed psychiatric problems, such as depression or anxiety disorders; On average, households have moved 3.5 times since the hurricane, some as many as nine times, often across state lines; More than one-fifth of the school-age children who were displaced were either not in school, or had missed 10 or more days of school in the past month.

Public Education Phase Out

New Orleans has become the national experiment for charter schools. Pre-Katrina 60,000 students attended over 115 New Orleans public schools. Now about 12,000 students attend public school in New Orleans. However, only four public schools are operated by the elected school board – the rest are now privately operated public charter schools or operated directly by the state. State authorities recently approved opening 22 more charter schools in the fall. Still many children in New Orleans are not in school at all because no schools have opened in their neighborhoods.

Where Has All the Money Gone - Robin Hood in Reverse

People who visit New Orleans are amazed at how devastated it still is. Where has all the money gone, they ask? Follow the money.

"How many contractors does it take to haul a pile of tree branches?" asked the Washington Post. If it's government work, at least four: a contractor, his subcontractor, the subcontractor's subcontractor, and finally, the local man with a truck and chainsaw. The big contractors typically receive between \$28 to \$30 a cubic yard for the debris. By the time they subcontract the work out to smaller and smaller companies, the guy in the truck receives about \$6 to \$8 per cubic yard.

The Miami Herald reported that the single biggest receiver of federal contracts was Ashbritt, Inc.


Robin Hood in reverse.

of Pompano Beach, FL, which received over \$579 million in contracts for debris removal in Mississippi from Army Corps of Engineers. The paper reported that the company does not own a single dumptruck! All they do is subcontract. Ashbritt, however, had recently dumped \$40,000 into the lobbying firm of Barbour, Griffith & Rogers, which had been run by Mississippi Governor and former National GOP Chair Haley Barbour. The owners of Ashbritt also trucked \$50,000 over to the Republican National Committee in 2004.

Draw your own conclusions about where the money has gone.

Federal Housing Funds for Rehab of Private Housing

Unfortunately, not a dime of the billions of federal housing reconstruction money from the Community Development Block Grant has yet made it to New Orleans. Seventy percent of CDBG money is usually targeted to low and moderate income families. HUD has already lowered that to 50% and for poorest among us, there will be little help at all.

Despite the fact that New Orleans was over half renters and that 84,000 rental units were destroyed or damaged, only 6,000 low-income rental units are part of state plan.

People are already living in damaged houses all over the city, many without electricity. A night trip through New Orleans neighborhoods shows people on porches surrounded by candles.

Louisiana calls its CDBG plan the "The Road Home." Obviously, few of the working poor are going to be able to go on this road trip.

Public Housing Closed

In 1996, New Orleans had 13,694 units of public housing. In August 2005, they reported 7,381. Now? Maybe 700. Residents returning to New Orleans who want to move back in their apartments are being told they forfeited their public housing apartments because they abandoned them! Abandoned apartments which have been forcibly closed for months? Many apartments are closed by locked metal shutters and surrounded by chain link fence. The housing authority also has a secret list of 1407 units of housing scheduled to be demolished. The housing authority let go 290 employees, mostly maintenance. Does it sound like they are planning to reopen?

In New Orleans, public housing was occupied by women, mostly working, children and the elderly. How are they supposed to return when private rents have skyrocketed?

HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson, whose agency is now running the local housing authority, stated clearly that public housing residents should not be allowed to return. In an interview with the Times-Picayune, Jackson said: "Some of the people shouldn't return. The developments were gang-ridden by some of the most notorious gangs in this country. People hid and took care of those persons because they took care of them. Only the best residents should return. Those who paid rent on time, those who held a job and those who worked." The blunt-spoken Jackson, who is black, acknowledged his comments might be seen as racially offensive. He told a white reporter, "If you said this, they would say you were racist."

Signs of Hope

Despite our very serious problems, there are also serious signs of hope. For every campaign of injustice and ugliness, there are people struggling despite the odds to create opportunities for justice and beauty. The people of New Orleans, joined with allies from across the nation and indeed the world, continue to resist the forces of injustice and to create opportunities for decency, community and equity. Here are a few examples.

St. Augustine's Church, one of the oldest black catholic churches in the nation, was abruptly closed by the Archdiocese of New Orleans in the months after Katrina. St. Augustine was dedicated in 1842 by the free black citizens of New Orleans and welcomed both free and slave as worshippers. It served both as a multiracial church and a center of community activities. After continual petitions, vigils and protests by community, neighborhood and church members, including direct action where some young people locked themselves inside the rectory, the Catholic hierarchy reversed itself. The joyous reopening of St. Augustine is a great cultural, spiritual, community and neighborhood victory.

Lower Ninth Ward residents have had no public schools open since Katrina. They wanted their neighborhood school, Martin Luther King, Jr., repaired and fixed up after it took in ten feet of water. Authorities refused to fix it up. So the residents, joined by members of Common Ground and the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund, decided to do it themselves. They started gutting the moldy parts and repairing and re-painting the school. They continued until the State Superintendent of Education called the police and stopped the work saying the neighbors were doing more harm than good. After days of public outcry of support of the volunteers, the State backed off. Volunteers went back to work, creating a place for education in the neighborhood as well as a symbol of resistance.

Despite our very serious problem, there are also serious signs of hope.

Mildred Battle is 70 and gets around in a wheelchair. She is one of more than 1000 families who been displaced from their apartment in the St. Bernard Housing Development in New Orleans since Katrina. Despite coming back three times, she was never allowed to go back to retrieve her belongings. Her apartment has heavy metal sheets locked into place over the windows and a new heavy metal door for which she is not allowed a key. The ramp to her building that allowed her to roll up to her apartment is blocked by a block-long chain link fence to keep all residents out. This month, Ms. Battle's wheelchair was the first one through the gate in the chain link fence as dozens of residents rushed past the lone security guard and broke back into their own homes. Friends of Ms. Battle helped her retrieve a picture of her dead son and a broken glass Martin Luther King award she received in the 1990s. She clutched them to her breast and cried saying, "This has been my home for decades. I want to come home." She and the other residents, along with veteran public housing organizers and activists from C3, a local anti-war organization, vow there will be more direct actions to enforce the rights of public housing residents to return home.

Before this action, veteran organizer Endesha Jukali yelled through a bullhorn to the crowd outside the St. Bernard Housing Development. "Those who attack public housing refuse to understand that we are talking about poor women and children, the poorest of the poor. Why attack them? Some people say do not come back to New Orleans if you don't intend to work. We say something else. Don't come back to New Orleans if you don't intend to fight! The only way that we are going to be able to come back, is to fight for justice every step of the way!" He then dropped the bullhorn and started pushing Ms. Battle in her wheelchair across the street and through the gate so she could break into her own home.

Suggestions for further reading on this topic include:

"A Failure of Initiative: Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina," U.S. House of Representatives. February 15, 2006. <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>

"Hurricane Katrina: Social-Demographic Characteristics of Impacted Areas," CRS Report for Congress, November 4, 2005, Summary. Report available at:

<http://www.gnocdc.org/reports/crsrept.pdf>;

"Katrina Index," Brookings Institution, updated monthly. Available at:

http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/200512_katri-

[naindex.htm](#)

John R. Logan, "The Impact of Katrina: Race and Class in Storm-Damaged Neighborhoods," <http://www.s4.brown.edu/Katrina/report.pdf> "Survey of Katrina Evacuees," This survey of 680 randomly selected adult evacuees in Houston shelters was conducted September 10-12, 2005 by The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health, questions 11a and 62. The entire survey can be found at:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/katrina_poll091605.pdf

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch.

<http://www.reconstructionwatch.org>

Want to advocate for and with the people of the Gulf?

Advocacy ideas are readily available at:

<http://www.katrinaaction.org>

Want to volunteer to come down and help?

ACORN: <http://www.acorn.org>

Catholic Charities Operation Helping Hands:

<http://www.catholiccharities-no.org>

Common Ground Relief: <http://www.commongroundrelief.org>

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund:

<http://www.communitylaborunited.net>

PICO – All Congregations Together -

<http://www.piconetwork.org/>

Other updates, ideas and suggestions for Action can be found at

<http://www.justicefornorleans.org>