

En adelante se presenta una colección diversa y desordenada de escritos, debates, etc. en inglés y español que ha llegado a nuestras manos a través de internet y mail sobre el desastre asociado con el Huracán Katrina. Creemos que pueden ser de utilidad para estudiosos y prácticos en el tema. En general las direcciones de las personas responsables por los escritos está puesta permitiendo que se les escriba para comentar o debatir.

" NO VALE LA PENA RECONSTRUIR NUEVA ORLEANS"

"No vale la pena reconstruir Nueva Orleans"

"Antes de terminar el siglo, acabará deglutida por el río y el mar". Eso sostiene Klaus Jakob, geofísico del Earth Institute, universidad Columbia, experto en desastres naturales.

Según señala el científico, "es una catástrofe varias veces anunciada. Los especialistas venimos explicando que esa zona del litoral está continuamente amenazada desde el golfo de Méjico, el Misisipi y el lago Pontchartrain". Lo malo es que, desde mediados siglo XIX, fue desarrollándose una concentración urbana enorme, en terrenos bajo el nivel de las aguas, sobre un delta inestable.

A criterio de Jakob, "un factor decisivo fue y es la presión de intereses económicos de corto aliento: petróleo, pesca y turismo. La naturaleza no perdona y, si alguna lección deriva de esta tragedia, es la necesidad de reevaluar los riesgos en el largo plazo". El geólogo admite que el peligro data de hace siglos, pero "hoy se agrava debido al calentamiento planetario".

Por supuesto, en el siglo XVIII tenía sentido afincarse donde confluyen el Misisipi, otros ríos y el mar. Esa ubicación daba acceso al interior todavía virgen de Estados Unidos. Máxime cuando, en 1804, Napoleón le vendió a Washington la Luisiana original; o sea, el inmenso territorio entre los grandes lagos, el Misisipi-Misuri, los montes Allegheny y el golfo.

"A principios del siglo XX –recuerda el experto-, el ejército norteamericano construyó un gigantesco sistema de canales y esclusas para imponerle al río un lecho artificial. Fue una grave violación al proceso natural de estas corrientes, que sirven justamente para arrastrar tierras hacia los brazos del delta y mantener bajo el lecho original".

Dado que el Misisipi no puede hacer su trabajo natural, "la tierra firme ha seguido bajando y, al cabo, este huracán aceleró la vuelta a la situación de hace tres siglos". Pero, por entonces, no había una gran urbe con poblaciones satélites hasta Biloxi al norte. No obstante, Jakob subraya que "la actual no es peor de las situaciones previsibles. Si el ojo de la tormenta hubiese golpeado un poco más al oeste, las trombas marinas habrían desencadenado un maremoto más violento y veloz sobre Nueva Orleans".

En lo tocante a consejos, el fundamental sería "no reconstruir la ciudad ni sus defensas artificiales, porque el fin es sólo cuestión de tiempo. Cautmo más altas son canales y esclusas, peor será la próxima inundación".

El propio Servicio Geológico Federal cree que "en menos de cien años, Nueva Orleans no existirá más". Por supuesto, la verdad desnuda es por ahora social y políticamente intolerable. Por tanto "malgastarán miles de millones –supone Jakob- en la reconstrucción".

Existe márgenes de compromiso, claro."Tendría sentido una reconstrucción parcial, selectiva, con un horizonte de 50 a 75 años. Pero debe admitirse que nada podrá evitar por siempre una violenta irrupción de las aguas.

Huracanes como Catalina son comunes en la región y el efecto invernadero –ése que el gobierno de George W. Bush niega en aras del "lobby" petrolero- están acentuando su violencia, pues tienden a licuar los hielos polares y a elevar el nivel de todo los mares".

Lo curioso es que la catástrofe de Nueva Orleans tenga un costado, si se quiere, geopolítico. Las tareas de rescate masivo, en EE.UU., quedan tradicionalmente a cargo de la poderosa y ubicua Guardia Nacional. Pero sus brigadas más selectas están empantanadas en Irak. No es casual que la convergencia de Katrina, el alza de combustibles y las pésimas noticias de Bagdad haya deteriorado la imagen presidencial. El apoyo cede a 43% en general y sube a 58% la desaprobación al manejo de la guerra (mientras, 61% de los sondeos considera que las bajas son inaceptables).

KATRINA... LA TRAGEDIA by Pablo Moctezuma, Texiani

La tragedia del Katrina golpeó a millones de personas en los Estados Unidos sembrando destrucción y muerte y desnudó el "modo de vida americano" como inhumano e incapaz de proveer seguridad y bienestar a la población, pues solo es movido por la ambición del dinero y no por el bien del ser humano.

Desde el jueves 25 de agosto se sabía que el huracán se dirigía a las costas del sureste de Estados Unidos, pero no hubo un plan de evacuación, luego cuando quedaba claro el sábado 27 que el huracán era de la categoría 5 máxima en la escala Saffir-Simpson de efectos devastadores no hubo reacción oficial "salvese el que pueda" fue el llamado de las autoridades abandonando a pobres, enfermos y personas impedidas para trasladarse, no hubo ningún plan de protección civil y menos se trató de prevenir el desastre movilizandolos masivamente recursos para apoyar a la población.

El lunes 29 y martes treinta vientos huracandos a una velocidad de 280 kilometros por hora y olas de ocho metros golpearon Louisiana, Mississippi y Alabama, dejando casi 3 millones de damnificados, miles de muertos y decenas de miles de heridos, pero no hubo respuesta alguna del Gobierno Federal hasta el viernes 2 de septiembre. La respuesta fué tardía, no hubo transporte para evacuar, hicieron falta centenares de helicópteros, no hubo rescate oportuno de personas enterrados y heridos, durante días no se dotó de agua y alimentos a decenas de miles de damnificados, ni mandaron socorristas, murieron muchos bajo los escombros, e innumerables heridos y ancianos que no fueron atendidos, los cadáveres fueron abandonados durante días.

George W Bush suspendió sus largas vacaciones hasta el jueves 1 de septiembre y el viernes 2 se fué a asomar al área devastada para "la foto" y luego regresó a Washington. Sus acciones anteriores ayudaron a potenciar el desastre. Desde hace 3 años desastre previsible, el diario local Times-Picayune lo advirtió en 2002. Pero Bush canceló una propuesta de investigación del cuerpo de ingenieros, redujo en 2003 los fondos federales para control de inundaciones, en 2004 redujo el 80 por ciento el financiamiento solicitado por el Cuerpo de Ingenieros del Ejército para controlar las aguas de la zona, de 2001 a 2005 redujo un 44.2 por ciento en total.

Bush partidario de la ilegal y abusiva "guerra preventiva" no toma ninguna prevención para seguridad de pueblo de EU, aunque siempre hay quien gana, hoy las empresas petroleras tienen ganancias multimillonarias al dispararse el precio de la gasolina. El calentamiento global, cambia el clima y provoca huracanes pero Bush se ha negado a firmar el Protocolo de Kioto para reducir la emisión de gases del país... EUA que más los genera. Por fin de manera tardía el congreso aprobó 10 mil millones para atender la emergencia, mientras para la guerra aprueban más de 400 000 millones de dólares. Atienden y mientras abastecen más de 200 bases militares en el mundo no son capaces de abastecer a los damnificados de su país.

Nueva Orleans, la cuna del jazz, fundada por invasores franceses en 1718 que trajeron miles de esclavos negros, ha quedado destruida por la negligencia del gobierno de Bush que no autorizó un presupuesto de 2,500 millones de dólares para reforzar el sistema de diques que se rompió. El alcalde Ray Nagin hizo un "desesperado llamado de auxilio" al gobierno federal para ayudar a la población que no ha podido salir de la ciudad y ante la pasividad de Bush calificó de "criminal" la tardía respuesta. Mientras que cuatro días después del desastre unas 100 mil personas continúan atrapadas en sus hogares anegados y en refugios improvisados. El hambre, el agotamiento y la desesperación por la ayuda que sigue sin llegar provocó brotes de violencia y enfrentamientos con la policía y la Guardia Nacional. Cuando por fin llegan tropas al área devastada en vez de atender a los atrapados, y abastecer a los hambrientos reciben la orden de "tolerancia cero" y "abrir fuego" contra los "saqueadores", en una actitud fascista, pues como distinguir a una familia que desesperada que ha perdido todo y que trata de obtener alimentos de una banda criminal.

Toda la actuación de los gobernantes norteamericanos los han dejado desnudos ante su pueblo y los pueblos del mundo. El movimiento "impeach Bush" para juzgar al presidente por sus crímenes crece y crecerá aún más en los Estados Unidos.

El país que gasta 5.600 millones de dólares al mes en invadir Iraq y vende 12.400 millones en armas no tiene recursos para evacuar a sus habitantes ante el huracán Katrina

Agencias/Rebelión

Miles de ciudadanos que no pudieron salir de sus poblaciones por falta de vehículos y recursos han nutrido las cifras de muertos y desaparecidos en el estado norteamericano de Nueva Orleans con la llegada del huracán Katrina. La cadena local WDSU señaló que el Superdome, el estadio cubierto donde se refugiaron 30 mil personas que no pudieron huir de la ciudad, estaba cercado por inundaciones de un metro de agua y había perdido grandes porciones de lámina de su techo. Los baños también colapsaron.

Escenas de saqueos salvajes aparecieron por toda la ciudad de Nueva Orleans cuando la gente invadía las tiendas para conseguir comida, aunque también se llevaban televisores, joyas, ropa y computadoras.

En algunas zonas, ciudadanos armados tomaron las calles para tratar de restablecer el orden. En los lugares que todavía estaban secos, los dueños de las tiendas se sentaban enfrente de sus negocios, con armas en la mano.

Uno puso un cartel que decía: "Tú saqueas, yo disparo."

Las autoridades estaban tan ocupadas en rescatar a las víctimas de las inundaciones que al principio dejaron que los saqueos siguieran, dijo Nagin.

Pero agregó en CNN: "Estaba creciendo a algo un poco diferente y estamos controlándolo." Y dijo que 3.500 soldados de la Guardia Nacional estaban siendo enviados a la ciudad.

Un gran problema para las autoridades era decidir qué hacer con la creciente cantidad de evacuados que quedaron sin hogar.

Los funcionarios dijeron que entre 20.000 y 30.000 personas estaban refugiadas en un estadio de fútbol americano gigante y que la gente se estaba poniendo impaciente porque no tenía electricidad ni aire acondicionado, mientras crecían las pilas de basura y el lugar quedaba en condiciones insalubres.

Eso sucede en el país más poderoso del mundo, que gasta 5.600 millones de dólares al mes por mantener la invasión de Irak y vendió 12.400 millones de dólares en armas el pasado año. Donde su presidente pasa cien días al año de vacaciones en su rancho de Texas, desde donde ahora parece que ha decidido salir.

A principios de este mes, la Guardia Nacional de Louisiana se quejó públicamente de que la mayoría de su equipamiento estaba en Irak. La filial local de la cadena de noticias ABC informó que decenas de vehículos anfibios, jeeps Humvee, unidades abastecedoras de aeronaves y generadores están fuera del país por lo que no podrán participar en las acciones de prevención y actuación frente al huracán Katrina.

La Guardia Nacional ha participado en operaciones de rescate y mantenimiento del orden en la zona del desastre, pero unos seis mil miembros de la Guardia de Louisiana y Mississippi tuvieron que ver la catástrofe desde 11.200 kilómetros de distancia, en Irak. El cuarenta por ciento de la Guardia Nacional de Mississippi y el 35 por ciento de la Guardia de Louisiana están en Irak. En los últimos ocho meses, 23 miembros de la Guardia Nacional de Louisiana murieron en Irak. Sólo la unidad de la Guardia de Nueva York ha sufrido tantas bajas en Irak.

En vista de la destrucción que ha causado *Katrina*, las autoridades de Estados Unidos calculan que los muertos ya son centenares, según informó el canal de televisión CBS.

La mayor parte de Nueva Orleans se encuentra bajo el nivel del mar, por lo que las aguas alcanzan los siete metros en algunos barrios. Los dos aeropuertos también están bajo el agua, y desde los techos de sus casas las personas piden ayuda a gritos a los helicópteros que evacúan gente de los tejados.

Un hospital inundado fue evacuado, y las autoridades pidieron a los dueños de botes que los pusieran a disposición de los socorristas.

Se estima en 700 el número de personas rescatadas de las aguas, que continúan su crecida un día después del paso del huracán.

Aún no se han confirmado muertes en Louisiana, pero el alcalde de Nueva Orleans, Ray Nagin, dijo que había cuerpos flotando sobre las aguas que cubren la mayor parte de la ciudad, y sólo hizo referencia a un número "significativo" de víctimas. En el Superdome, un hombre se lanzó de lo alto de una tribuna y falleció.

Se prevé que la cifra de muertos aumente a medida que los equipos de rescate avancen sobre las montañas de escombros para poder llegar a las áreas devastadas por *Katrina*.

Nagin calcula que el sistema eléctrico y las escuelas de Nueva Orleans volverán a funcionar en dos meses.

Por su parte, el gobernador de Mississippi, Haley Barbour, dijo que había información de 80 muertos sólo en el condado costero de Harrison, cifra que "aumentará cuando se sumen las de otros condados", agregó.

En la ciudad costera de Biloxi, en Mississippi, cientos de personas podrían haber muerto tras quedar atrapadas en sus casas por el agua que alcanzó los nueve metros.

Otros murieron por la caída de árboles y en accidentes de automóvil. "Habrá cientos de víctimas mortales", previó Vincent Creel, portavoz de la alcaldía de Biloxi, una de las ciudades más castigadas por el fenómeno, donde viven 50 mil personas.

El panorama de devastación que dejó el huracán *Katrina* en Estados Unidos comprende Nueva Orleans inundada, incomunicada y asolada por saqueos, así como pérdidas materiales que algunos analistas calculan en 35 mil millones de dólares; además, el fenómeno paralizó la producción petrolera en el Golfo de México.

El huracán provocó daños catastróficos a lo largo de la costa, cuando azotó el estado de Louisiana con vientos de 224 kilómetros por hora. Luego arrasó Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee y el oeste de Florida. Destruyó edificios, vehículos, arrancó árboles e inundó ciudades.

El martes por la mañana *Katrina* entró en la región noreste del estado de Mississippi como tormenta tropical con vientos de 80 kilómetros por hora, informó el Centro Nacional de Huracanes.

El presidente George W. Bush interrumpirá sus vacaciones en su rancho de Crawford, Texas, y volverá el miércoles a Washington para coordinar las acciones de socorro en la zona devastada, informaron voceros de la Casa Blanca.

"Nuestros corazones y nuestras plegarias están con nuestros compatriotas en la Costa del Golfo que tanto han sufrido por el huracán *Katrina*", dijo el presidente Bush en un mensaje.

"La devastación es mayor que nuestros peores temores", dijo la gobernadora de Louisiana, Kathleen Blanco, en una conferencia de prensa. "Es totalmente abrumadora", agregó.

"No hay electricidad (en Nueva Orleans) y tampoco habrá agua potable durante un buen tiempo. Además, ya casi no queda comida", aseguró. La ciudad está aislada porque las carreteras y los puentes están inundados, y siete vías rápidas elevadas son consideradas peligrosas.

El sistema de diques que protege Nueva Orleans del río Mississippi se rompió la madrugada del martes y permitió que el agua del lago Pontchartrain inundara 80 por ciento de la ciudad.

"Es nuestro *tsunami*", dijo el alcalde de Biloxi, A. J. Hollway, donde se habían confirmado 30 muertes, cuando un edificio de apartamentos se colapsó por la fuerza del huracán.

El estado de Alabama también fue golpeado por *Katrina*, que la noche del lunes se degradó a tormenta tropical, pero el Centro Nacional de Huracanes advirtió que seguía siendo peligroso.

Katrina dejó cerca de 5 millones de personas sin servicio eléctrico en los estados de Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama y Florida, dijeron las compañías de energía. Restablecer el servicio podría llevar semanas, advirtieron.

La Cruz Roja, por su parte, lanzó una importante operación para ayudar a la población, y las donaciones ya comenzaban a llegar desde todo Estados Unidos a las regiones más devastadas.

La Agencia Federal de Aviación informó que los aeropuertos comerciales de Nueva Orleans y Gulfport se encuentran en situación inoperable a consecuencia del huracán. Casi todos los vuelos comerciales a las ciudades afectadas están suspendidos.

RÉQUIEM POR NEW ORLEANS

Siendo precisamente en los EEUU donde se concentra el más inmenso desarrollo científico técnico y los más apabullantes avances institucionales, pero además donde se concentra la mayor riqueza del mundo y donde tanto las autoridades nacionales como sus instituciones y hasta las organizaciones no gubernamentales son las más ricas del mundo y disponen del más amplio acceso a información de todo tipo, como simuladores de todo tipo y tecnología de todo tipo. Pues en esas circunstancias, cómo se explica que una exquisita ciudad como Nueva Orleans y sus cientos de miles de habitantes, pero además una extensa franja de cientos de kilómetros sobre la costa del golfo, sufra un impacto tan inmenso como el que se está viendo a dos días de que Katrina dejó de ser huracán y se disipó. ¿Por qué dos días después del huracán el desastre apenas empieza?

Aparte de la ancestral discriminación contra la población pobre y negra y las políticas restrictivas que desde el 'reaganismo' ha dejado a muchas ciudades de EEUU

prácticamente en bancarrota –sobre todo para disponer de gastos en lo social- hay otros aspectos que deben tomarse en cuenta para empezar a entender ese desastre que empieza y lo que todavía no hemos visto ni en CNN. Por un lado la concentración en un tipo de ‘amenaza’ sin desarrollo suficiente de otras perspectivas, la preparación y el entrenamiento suponiendo un tipo de amenaza y la descripción simulada casi perfecta y los preparativos óptimos de lo que podría suceder en caso de que ‘un huracán de grado cinco impactara directamente’. Pero en este ‘óptimo’, por supuesto, se incluye una perspectiva ideológica de qué es lo que se debe salvar y qué no; de cuáles seres humanos son los más seres humanos y cuales no tanto. Ello incluye la capacidad local y estatal reducida –aunque todavía alta para los estándares de América Latina- y una respuesta que impacta por lo lenta, desarticulada y falta de dirección o coordinación; esto aparte la irritante ausencia del uso de los recursos masivos que se suponía que se tenían disponibles para algo como esto.

Así, los pobres sin carro se hacinaron inicialmente en el ‘superdome’, el superrefugio, uno refugio que casi se diría, “a lo gringo”: grandote, estático, sin mucha flexibilidad, lindo para la foto y ocultando el hecho de que muchos de esos miles son los pobres, sin carro, familias sin información y sin educación y sin opciones en la vida. Negros bisnietos del sur esclavista y, claro, algunas decenas de miles de centroamericanos, hondureños por ejemplo. Pero además, se debe pensar en los enfermos, los viejos y la masa de población que no tiene posibilidades de ir a otra ciudad o donde parientes.

En Nueva Orleáns el lunes en noche aparecía como si hubieran tenido la suerte de que el huracán no diera directo sino al lado y ya el martes en la mañana se podía ver gente tomando cerveza y caminando en nota celebración en las viejas calles del barrio francés y ya casi a la espera del próximo ‘mardi gras’. Pero, ¿qué pasó en las siguientes horas? ¿Cómo es posible que seis horas después el 80% de la ciudad estuviera inundada, en algunos sitios más altos más de un metro y en otros hasta tres metros? Esos sitios están varios metros por debajo del nivel del mar y fueron pantanos y se rellenaron en las últimas décadas para construir los suburbios de una ciudad rebosante de energía y con la industria del turismo y los casinos donde el juego crecía como la espuma de las cervezas en las esquinas de jazz y las calles que recorría en masa casi a diario la juventud ‘americana’ adornada de cuentas de colores. ¿Pero qué pasó con esta capital de estado, una de las grandes ciudades de los EEUU?

Bueno, por supuesto que los barrios y suburbios pobres están en los peores sitios como en todo lado y los indigentes y pobladores que podían fueron llegando poco a poco al superrefugio, aunque cientos de ellos se empezaron a mover cuando la inesperada inundación empezó a darse el martes por la tarde y cientos simplemente no pudieron llegar por la velocidad de la creciente. ¿Por qué no se los evacuó de la ciudad con medios públicos como trenes o autobuses hacia lugares más seguros desde el inicio?

Si se prepara el escenario para un huracán que impacta por algunas horas y luego viene el período de limpieza, juntar los restos de lo destruido, rehabilitar y reconstruir o volver a las casas; entonces pues con agua y comida y atención básica para dos o tres días es más que suficiente para exhibir la maravilla del superrefugio urbano. La peor situación estaría en las barriadas de la costa del golfo que recibirían el impacto directo y como en efecto, se destruirían comunidades enteras y se perdería infraestructura que dos días después estaría reconstruyéndose, como en tantos otros grandes huracanes en la costa del país ‘americano’. Las pérdidas serían grandes,

habría muertos por el huracán pues no salieron o se quedaron en sus casas para evitar robos o no podían salir por estar enfermos o muy viejos o muy pobres o ilegales inmigrados de nuestros países.

Pero, ¿cuál era el riesgo real?, ¿era ese un escenario correcto?, ¿se habían revisado y analizado y vuelto a revisar los diques y canales que protegen a una ciudad localizada en un antiguo pantano bajo el nivel del mar? No parece, o no con la precisión adecuada, o no como era finalmente necesario, pues el dique cedió en diversas partes ya horas después de que los vientos y la lluvia habían dejado paso al sol de la tarde del martes. ¿Y no había experiencia en diques que cedieran en la misma región? Sí por supuesto, y ha habido otros huracanes menores, varios por cada década y ahí está el lago y ahí está el mar y ahí está el río en la ruta de los huracanes, y hace un año se realizó el último simulacro y es en EEUU.

Nueva Orleans está inundado casi por completo y muy contaminado y se tardarán meses para solo limpiar luego de reconstruir el dique y bombear el agua y empezar después a ver si vale la pena reconstruir y qué reconstruir y hacer el recuento de muertos, desaparecidos y demás pérdidas humanas y materiales. Pero se pudo evitar si los diques tuvieran mantenimiento, reparación, refuerzos para ocasiones tan especiales como un huracán grado cinco que se espera de un impacto directo, etc. Ahora el desastre apenas empieza con cientos de miles de refugiados 'de última hora', decenas de miles siendo evacuados hasta Houston a más de 400 kilómetros y sin idea de cuantos muertos habrá en las miles de casas cubiertas por el agua contaminada que sigue llenando la ciudad.

Los muertos y demás no se deben atribuir a Katrina sino a quienes, aún disponiendo de la más increíble riqueza y capacidad técnica y organizativa, discriminan y desprecian no solo a un sector de la población sino que al conjunto de los habitantes de una gran ciudad, simplemente porque no utilizan su capacidad para proteger a los seres humanos o al género humano en general. El rescate como siempre aparecerá (y será) heroico, pero pudo haber sido innecesario con las decisiones políticas mínimas adecuadas.

El miércoles temprano un ex alcalde de Nueva Orleans imploraba la llegada de los militares y decía que había que actuar YA o no se podría salvar la ciudad. Temprano los rescatistas y los cruzrojistas y los voluntarios estaban estupefactos por el inmenso impacto destructivo; pero todavía no reflexionaban –y difícilmente lo harán pronto por lo abrumador de la tarea de rescate- sobre los aspectos ideológicos y los enfoques utilizados para analizar el proceso de construcción económico y política del riesgo que se venía desarrollando en particular durante las últimas dos décadas. Al final el super-estadio dejó de ser el super-refugio y se convirtió en la super-trampa que ahora habría que evacuar y así la respuesta errónea se convirtió en nueva emergencia. Pero toda la ciudad es ahora una super trampa con hasta cien mil habitantes atrapados en una ciudad inundada con aguas muy contaminadas y sin posibilidad de comida o agua, mucho calor y a la espera de las enfermedades que podrán generarse por los muertos y la contaminación. A dos días del huracán los rescatistas están poniendo atención solo a los vivos para evitar muertes y no a los muertos, pues no hay comunicación, ni electricidad ni transporte en la mayor parte de la gran ciudad, por tanto no hay nada que hacer con los muertos.

No se trata de Katrina, sino de las condiciones sociales e institucionales con que se pretende resistir el impacto directo de un fenómeno anual, es decir estacional y cada

vez más estudiado y observable e incluso casi predecible en su dirección, tamaño, cobertura, velocidad y posible impacto de sus vientos y lluvias. Todo esa tecnología disponible y falta el analizar la construcción social e ideológica del riesgo que se distribuye en forma muy desigual y falta por supuesto empezar a discutir la economía política del riesgo, en este caso urbano, que lleva a la catástrofe ahora mismo a Nueva Orleans.

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Réquiem por Nueva Orleans MÁS UNO

Un experto de los ingenieros militares de los EEUU relató el jueves 1 de septiembre apoco después de medio día que en razón del amplio conocimiento sobre la incapacidad de los diques de Nueva Orleans para resistir impactos como los de un gran huracán, durante el gobierno de Clinton, una década atrás, se elaboró y financió un amplio plan federal para analizar en detalle, adecuar, reforzar o reconstruir con nuevos diseños y tecnología todo el sistema protector de la ciudad. Pero, a principios del gobierno de George W. Bush, y en particular luego del 9/11 el programa se canceló y se desfinanció pues se definieron otras prioridades para la defensa, la seguridad y la emergencia.

Ahora ya sabemos a quien se le puede atribuir la responsabilidad por las muertes y demás pérdidas humanas y la destrucción de esta gran ciudad 'americana' en vez de seguir diciendo que fueron causadas por Katrina.

El director de FEMA –la Agencia Federal para Manejo de Emergencias de EEUU- declaró el jueves 1 de noviembre, al anochecer, que todavía no habían atendido a miles de familias en el gran Centro de Convenciones, quienes no han tenido agua ni comida por más de cien horas porque hasta hoy día supieron que había gente ahí; y que era gente que había aparecido de pronto, que ellos ya desde anoche empezaron a evacuar a los del SuperDome. Pero se comprometió solemnemente y como un gran soldado a que, teniendo a su disposición al Primer Ejército de los EEUU, personalmente se encargaría de llevar el orden y la seguridad a la ciudad con miles de soldados y así evitar los saqueos y algunos disparos que se escucharon al medio día.

Ahora ya sabemos a quien se le puede atribuir la responsabilidad por la increíble, insospechada e insensata –aunque desfachatada- incapacidad de esa agencia federal y lo absurdo de que decenas de miles de 'ciudadanos americanos' no puedan recibir ni una botella de agua o una bolsa con una hamburguesa en dos días, teniendo a la disposición del director de FEMA al ejército norteamericano, y como él mismo lo afirmó, tan solo dos billones de dólares en su cuenta.

Obviamente ninguno de los dos renunciaran y están felicitándose mutuamente porque habrá una sesión del congreso para aprobar un fondo de diez billones para reconstrucción de lo que se pueda reconstruir, mientras las ancianas se mueren en sus sillas de ruedas y las ratas se comen los cadáveres y los muertos se acumulan en las esquinas o 'entradas de empleados' del Centro de Convenciones de Nueva Orleans, como lo expresaba con claridad un periodista de CNN el jueves a media tarde.

Manuel Argüello-Rodríguez, Ph.D.

Catedrático de la UNA (Costa Rica)

-31 de agosto del 2005-

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There are some very disturbing things coming out of New Orleans and small towns to the East along the Gulf Coast into the state of Mississippi. People over time have been put at risk because of economic disparities and the priority given to the petro-chemical and gambling/ casino development as well as the retirement home industry. Destruction of the wetlands, greed driven land use and location decisions in a laissez faire environment, disregard for the poor all are evident as Katrina made land fall.

People have discussed the effects of a direct hit by a large hurricane on New Orleans since hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Camille in 1969. In the aftermath of Camille, during which some 400 people died in Mississippi, documentation of racial discrimination in the allocation of recovery resources was first documented, leading to a U.S. Congressional investigation.

Has the social, political, and economic situation changed since then?

There was no plan to use the trains or some other form of mass transport to evacuate the indigent and those without private cars or money. They were herded like displaced persons (which they were) into the Superdome, whose roof was then ripped off in the wind. I saw images of these refugees, mostly black, being herded by armed national guardsmen who yelled at them about not allowing guns and drugs inside: very humiliating, not at all shelter with dignity and respect as the Red Cross tries to provide.

One Louisiana based geographer has tried over the past year since hurricane Ivan to get officials to develop a contingency plan to evacuate the indigent and those without private vehicles on the trains that run through New Orleans. His suggestions have fallen on deaf ears. A church based pilot project also began after Ivan in 2004 that partnered church members without access to vehicles with those that do. This, however, was an independent effort to fill the vacuum in policy at City, State, and Federal level.

Hurricane Ivan last year should have caused a re-doubling of precautionary planning. The night Ivan approached, 20,000 low-income people without private vehicles sheltered in their homes below sea level. A direct hit would have drowned them. A US Army Corps of Engineers computer simulation has calculated that 65,000 could die in the city, in the event of a direct hit by a slow-moving category 3 hurricane. Fortunately, Ivan veered away from the city at the last moment, but still killed 25 people elsewhere in the US south. At present there is no plan for the public evacuation of low-income residents who do not own cars other than the questionable shelter and assured stress and humiliation provided by the "shelter of last resort," the Superdome.

This time, too, things were not as bad as they could have been because of a small westward turn that placed the dangerous Northeast edge of the storm over Mississippi. Will authorities finally get the message and do serious planning for the needs of the poor? Could Katrina be the beginning of demands from below for social justice in the face of the present social and spatial distribution of risk?

Time will tell, but with so much of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agencies resources devoted to planning for terrorism and with cities like New Orleans struggling with financial burdens that neo-liberal ideology leaves them to sort out on their own, I am not optimistic.

Ben Wisner
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-----Original Message-----

From: Marian Douglas <dasha1900@HOTMAIL.COM>

Sent: Aug 28, 2005 11:59 AM

To: GENDER-AND-DISASTER-NETWORK@listserv.tamu.edu

Subject: New Orleans USA: Cat 5 Hurricane - Mandatory Evacuation; State of Emergency

These weather conditions directly affect at least 1.5 million people in the metropolitan New Orleans, Louisiana area. Parts of Mississippi and elsewhere also are on alert.

People in the storm area are warned they have only the remaining daylight hours today - Sunday - to evacuate or otherwise prepare for this massive storm.

In the history since formation of the United States there have been only 3 Category 5 hurricanes: one on (US) Labor Day holiday in 1935, Hurricane Camille in 1969, and Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Hurricane Andrew "which hit southern Miami-Dade [Florida] county in August that year, caused \$26.5 billion of losses, the costliest hurricane on record."

The mayor of New Orleans is saying after this storm hits, it will take about 2 weeks just to pump floodwater out of the city.

Is the impending Category 5 Hurricane Katrina catastrophe related to global warming? Some scientific predictions regarding global warming warn that much of southern

Louisiana is sinking and eventually will be submerged due to global warming. This includes the New Orleans area.

More pressing right now is the landfall of Hurricane Katrina early Monday, Aug 29th.

Some of the serious characteristics of this disaster event: New Orleans

-

Below sea level, up to 20 feet below; Lake Pontchartrain located in or along the city (lake water may be sucked into city by hurricane); additional 25-foot hurricane flood surges expected.

Mayor Ray Nagin of New Orleans, Louisiana USA has issued a mandatory evacuation order for the city of NO and Orleans parish. Category 5 Hurricane Katrina is expected to hit the area Monday morning - during high tide.

Kathleen Blanco, governor of Louisiana, has been meeting with emergency officials and holding public news conferences to instruct the public. George Bush has already declared a state of emergency in Louisiana.

Governor Blanco has pointed out on television that people evacuating the area by car must avoid interstate highway 10 (heading west toward Houston, Texas). She noted there is already gridlock (too many cars to allow any movement) on I-10 within the city of New Orleans. She advised using several other routes out of the city, heading East or North.

As noted, New Orleans is located BELOW SEA LEVEL. Some areas lie as much as 20 (twenty) feet below. The city's levees (barriers) built to protect the city against massive surges of water are NOT expected to protect against this hurricane; in fact, it is reported flooding+ the levees may turn the city into something like a cup - holding floodwaters for weeks.

By late Sunday morning, 28 August, Katrina's steady winds had increased from 155 to 175 miles per hour with even higher gusts. Plus 25-foot flood surges expected.

>From Bloomberg.com:

http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000086&sid=aLCQxsOn_PEO&refer=latin_america

"Katrina was upgraded to category 5 earlier today, U.S. National Hurricane Center spokesman David Miller said in a telephone interview from Miami. Such storms, with winds greater than 155 miles an hour (249 kph) can tear roofs off homes, blow down all trees and shrubs, and cause flooding. Only three Category Five hurricanes have hit the U.S. since records began.

"Katrina continues not only grow stronger, but it continues to grow larger," the city of New Orleans said in a statement posted before Nagin's press conference on its Web site. "Everyone along the northern Gulf of Mexico needs to take this hurricane very seriously and put action plans into play now." "

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A major storm has pummeled a large city in a country with an internationally unpopular leader who is squandering his nation's wealth on military exploits. This same leader focused resources on one type of threat while reducing initiatives against the event type which might now have killed hundreds. In response, an unfriendly oil-rich nation kindly or ironically offers assistance (despite Pat Robertson).

I shall update the Disaster Diplomacy website <http://www.disasterdiplomacy.org> with this case study after awaiting reaction from Washington. Will Havana, Tehran, or Pyongyang also offer assistance? Comments always welcome. Meanwhile, our thoughts are with everyone affected by this catastrophe and for the long months ahead.

Ilan

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20050829/wl_afp/usweathervenezuelaoil_050829235602

Venezuela offers fuel, food to hurricane-hit US Mon Aug 29, 7:56 PM ET

CARACAS (AFP) - Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez offered to send food and fuel to the United States after the powerful Hurricane Katrina pummeled the US south, ravaging US crude production.

The leftist leader, a frequent critic of the United States and a target himself of US disapproval, said Venezuela could send aid workers with drinking water, food and fuel to US communities hit by the hurricane.

"We place at the disposition of the people of the United States in the event of shortages -- we have drinking water, food, we can provide fuel," Chavez told reporters.

Chavez said fuel could be sent to the United States via a Citgo refinery that has not been affected by the hurricane. Citgo is owned by Venezuela's state-owned oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA).

In the Gulf of Mexico, which accounts for a quarter of total US oil output, 92 percent of crude and 83 percent of natural gas production were shut down due to Hurricane Katrina, which slammed Louisiana and Mississippi, according to US government data.

Venezuela is the fourth-largest provider of oil to the United States, supplying some 1.5 million barrels a day.

Last week, Chavez offered discount gasoline to poor Americans suffering from high oil prices and on Sunday offered free eye surgery for Americans without access to health care.

Cómo el libre mercado mató a Nueva Orleans

Michael Parenti

ALAI-AMLATINA 02/09/2005, Berkeley.- El libre mercado desempeñó un papel crucial en la destrucción de Nueva Orleans y la muerte de millares de sus residentes. Advertidos por adelantado que un colosal huracán (de fuerza 5) iba a abatirse sobre la ciudad y los alrededores, ¿qué hicieron los funcionarios? Pusieron en juego el libre mercado.

Anunciaron que todo el mundo debía evacuar la ciudad. Se esperaba que cada cual ideara su propia salida del área de desastre por medios privados, así como lo dicta el libre mercado, al igual que ocurre cuando el desastre asesta a los países de libre-mercado del Tercer Mundo.

Es una cosa hermosa, este libre mercado, en el cual cada individuo persigue sus propios intereses personales, de tal modo que efectúe un resultado óptimo para la sociedad entera. Es así como la mano invisible obra sus maravillas.

Allí no habría ninguna evacuación "colectivista y regimentada", como ocurrió en Cuba. Cuando un huracán de alcance especialmente grande golpeó esa isla el año pasado, el gobierno de Castro, apoyado por los comités ciudadanos de vecinos y los cuadros locales del Partido Comunista, evacuó a 1,3 millones de personas, más del 10 por ciento de la población del país, sin la pérdida de una sola vida; una hazaña alentadora que pasó prácticamente inadvertida en la prensa estadounidense.

En el Día Uno del desastre causado por huracán Katrina, ya quedaba claro que centenares, sino miles, de vidas americanas se habían perdido en Nueva Orleans. Mucha gente se había "negado" a evacuar, explicaron los reporteros de la prensa, simplemente porque eran "tercos". No era sino hasta al Día Tres que los comentaristas -relativamente pudientes- comenzaron a darse cuenta que decenas de miles de personas no habían podido huir, porque no tenían a donde ir, ni medios para desplazarse. Con poco dinero en efectivo a la mano, y carentes de vehículo propio, no les quedó más que permanecer allí y confiar a la suerte. En fin de cuentas, el libre mercado no funcionó tan bien para ellos.

Buena parte de esta gente era Afroamericana de bajo ingreso, junto con un número menor de blancos pobres. Vale recordar que la mayoría de ellos tenía un empleo antes de la visita mortal de Katrina. Eso es lo que hace la mayoría de la gente pobre en este país: trabaja, generalmente muy duro en empleos muy mal pagados, a veces en más de un empleo a la vez. Son pobres, no porque son perezosos, sino porque les cuesta

sobrevivir con salarios de miseria, a la vez que cargar con altos precios, alquileres elevados e impuestos regresivos.

El libre mercado incidió también de otra forma. La agenda de Bush es achicar los servicios estatales al mínimo y obligar a la gente a recurrir al sector privado para atender sus necesidades. Entonces, recortó \$71.2 millones del presupuesto del Cuerpo de Ingenieros de Nueva Orleans, una reducción del 44 por ciento. Y tuvieron que archivar los planes para fortificar los diques de Nueva Orleans y para mejorar el sistema del bombeo para el drenaje de agua.

Bush sobrevoló el área y dijo que nadie habría podido prever este desastre. Una mentira más que sale de sus labios. Toda clase de gente había estado prediciendo un desastre para Nueva Orleans, señalando la necesidad de consolidar los diques y las bombas, y fortificar las tierras costeras.

En su campaña para aniquilar al sector público, los secuaces reaccionarios de Bush también permitieron que los constructores drenen áreas extensas de pantano. Una vez más esa vieja mano invisible del libre mercado se encargaría de cuidar las cosas. Los constructores, persiguiendo su propia ganancia privada, aducirían que se trata de respuestas en beneficio de todos.

Sin embargo, los pantanos servían como absorbente y barrera naturales entre Nueva Orleans y las tormentas que llegan desde mar adentro. Desde hace ya algunos años, los pantanos han estado desapareciendo a un ritmo espantoso de la costa del golfo. Pero nada de esto les causó preocupación a los reaccionarios en la Casa Blanca.

En cuanto a la operación de rescate, los defensores del libre mercado suelen decir que la ayuda a los más desafortunados entre nosotros se debe dejar en manos de la caridad privada. Era una prédica preferida del presidente Ronald Reagan decir que "la caridad privada lo puede resolver". Y de hecho durante los primeros días, esa parecía ser la política para el desastre causado por el huracán Katrina.

El gobierno federal se hizo humo, pero la Cruz Roja entró en acción. Su mensaje: "No envíen alimentos ni mantas; envíen dinero". Mientras tanto, Pat Robertson y la Christian Broadcasting Network, -haciendo una breve pausa en su obra divina de impulsar el nombramiento de John Roberts a la Corte Suprema- hizo un llamado para donaciones y anunció la "Operación Bendición", que consistía en un envío altamente publicitado pero totalmente inadecuado de conservas y biblias.

Para el Día Tres, incluso los medios miopes comenzaron a darse cuenta del enorme fracaso de la operación de rescate. La gente se estaba muriendo porque la ayuda no había llegado. Las autoridades parecían más preocupadas en prevenir el saqueo que en el rescate de la gente. Era la propiedad antes que la gente, así como los defensores del libre mercado siempre lo han querido.

No obstante, surgieron preguntas que el libre mercado no parecía capaz de contestar: ¿Quién estaba a cargo de la operación del rescate? ¿Por qué tan pocos helicópteros y a penas un puñado de guardacostas? ¿Por qué los helicópteros demoraron cinco horas en sacar a seis personas de un hospital? ¿Cuándo se pondría en plena acción la operación de rescate? ¿Dónde estaban los feds (policía federal)? ¿Los troopers del

estado? ¿La Guardia Nacional? ¿Dónde estaban los autobuses y los camiones? ¿Las carpas e higiénicos portables? ¿Las provisiones médicas y el agua?

¿Dónde estaba la Seguridad Interior? ¿Qué ha hecho la Seguridad Interior con los \$33,8 mil millones asignados a ella en el año fiscal 2005? Incluso el propio noticiero de la tarde de ABC-TV (del 1 de septiembre 2005) citó a funcionarios locales que dijeron que "la respuesta del gobierno federal ha sido una vergüenza nacional".

En un momento de ironía sabrosa (y quizás pícara), llegaron ofertas de ayuda exterior por parte de Francia, Alemania y varias otras naciones. Rusia ofreció enviar dos aviones cargados alimentos y de otros materiales para las víctimas.

Como era previsible, todas estas ofertas fueron velozmente rechazadas por la Casa Blanca. América, la Hermosa y Poderosa, América el Salvador Supremo y Líder Mundial, América el Proveedor de la Prosperidad Global no podía aceptar la ayuda exterior de otros. Eso sería una inversión de roles humillante e insultante. ¿Será que los franceses buscaban otro puñete en la nariz?

Es más, aceptar la ayuda exterior hubiese significado admitir la verdad: que los bushistas reaccionarios no tenían ni el deseo ni la decencia de proteger a los ciudadanos comunes, cuando menos a aquellos en situación de necesidad extrema. Quien sabe si la gente comenzaría a pensar que George W. Bush realmente no era más que un agente a tiempo completo de la América corporativa.

- Michael Parenti es autor de: "Superpatriotism (City Lights)" y "The Assassination of Julius Caesar" (New Press), entre otros libros. En el otoño lanzará "The Culture Struggle" (Seven Stories Press). www.michaelparenti.org. Fuente: ZNet (<http://www.zmag.org>). Traducción del inglés: ALAI.

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New Orleans and Looting **Some thoughts from Terry Cannon**

The media has focused on the issue of "Looting" in New Orleans, and the predominant discourse has been one that demonises the looters and makes no distinction between different categories of behaviour (types of looting).

In a sense Bush is also being demonised for the failure of government (see Ian Davis excellent letter submitted to the Washinton Post), but there is a mismatch between the attitudes: a black looter in New Orleans is at risk of summary execution, while those who diverted/took money from the flood preparedness infrastructure are not called looters and suffer lesser penalties... The potential for having to divert resources to dealing with 'looting' surely suggests that we should get this issue and an understanding of it right.

In the listserv Natural Hazards, a debate has begun on these issues, and especially the relationship between poverty and what is considered by some commentators to be "acceptable behaviour" by the victims. (Within this debate we should also consider which people and institutions have the power and the right to decide what is acceptable).

I think my headline here is that in the USA with Katrina as with most/all disasters anywhere in the world you can only understand what is going on in the disaster event by having a very good understanding of 'normal' everyday life and how people existed before the trigger hazard strikes.

What I would say first off is that the key issue is not to EXCUSE violent behaviour, but to EXPLAIN it and UNDERSTAND it. This same confusion is apparent in policies on what creates terrorism, and a position that simply says it is not acceptable ends up with a policy correlate that attempts to deal with the problem through reciprocal (and much increased) violence which fails to deal with the causes (and as in the case of the UK bombings makes it worse...)

I really hope that some of the US National Science Foundation funding for research on Katrina (recently announced) goes on the "looting" problem. This is because it is likely to be an issue in any major (even some minor?) urban disaster in the USA, e.g. earthquakes in California. Lessons must be learned, and of course may also be helpful in other countries.

So some thoughts on New Orleans, based on very crude data gleaned from the UK media.

1. There are different kinds of looting. It is meaningless to discuss it under one heading. Some is benevolent "looters" were taking orders from disabled people and mothers of young children in the convention centre and then coming back with e.g. diapers and baby milk. Others were apparently seeking guns we need to understand what for. Others were delighted to take small comforts like a guy who was shown on TV delighted that he had 50 packs of cigarettes! No home or food, powerless and deprived, the cigarettes symbolised his small ability to control his appalling

circumstances... Still others were stranded people who took food and water and otherwise would have starved and dehydrated.

2. Some of the violent behaviour and looting may have been carried out by drug addicts and alcoholics desperate for their fixes. I have seen scant mention of this in the media in the UK. Given that the left-behind population of poor blacks would have included hundreds (thousands?) of people addicted to drugs and alcohol, we have little idea what is the impact on them of a sudden inability to score their hits. This is another perhaps crucial type of looting: aimless? Random? Angry at the world, authority and anyone who gets in the way?

3. Those who have apparently fired on rescuers or US Army Corp of Engineers may not be the same as 'looters'. Again we need a better understanding of what is going on here. In the UK there have been cases of Fire fighters being attacked when attending events in run down poor white areas. There is a POLITICS to this it is perhaps a symptom of something that is going on in pre-disaster New Orleans that must be understood. (We also need to have a more subtle understanding of the moral hierarchy that the government discourse is pursuing here: firefighters in the USA and other countries in Europe have been known to start forest fires because they then get paid to put them out. As regards the police, I suspect that in New Orleans the people's normal everyday experience of policing is less than positive, and this has been reinforced by the arrival of National Guard and deputies who are predominantly white to control people who are almost entirely black.)

4. The city was already divided between gangs, and we have of course little idea what the impact of the disaster has been on their behaviour, including looting and violence. It would be interesting to know if there was any incipient use of these gang structures to organise relief in any parts of the city. I am not saying this to support gangs or advocate this as a policy area, but simply we need to understand in order to devise the best policies for future crises.

5. Lastly back to the moral issue. Ten years ago, poor people in northeast Brazil in the midst of a famine famously looted supermarkets in their midst in order to survive. Were they right? Was this appropriate? Longer ago in 1943, Amartya Sen (Nobel economist) as a child witnessed people dying on his doorstep in Calcutta as a famine took hold and killed 3 million Bengalis (the famine driven mainly by British war policy in the face of Japanese invasion). He could not understand this because in his neighbourhood there were also stores of food that were full. Should those people have looted the warehouses rather than starved to death on the street outside? Last week Bush said that people in the Katrina zone would have to rely on themselves in their plight. (Does anyone have the exact quote this should be recorded for posterity!). That is exactly what some of the 'looters' did in order to survive...

Terry Cannon
University of Greenwich

To the Editor, The Washington Post

Dear Editor

Almost thirty years ago, in the aftermath of the Guatemala earthquake that killed over 22,000 people, Professor Nick Ambraseys of Imperial College London suggested that "*Today's act of God, will be regarded as tomorrow's act of criminal negligence*". He was referring to all the unnatural aspects of the disaster that contributed to the scale of deaths and damage. His words now ring true in relation to the chaos and acute suffering following Katrina. Therefore, when the US Congress initiates some form of Congressional Commission to investigate this tragedy, to decide on who was responsible for the 'unnatural' aspects of Katrina as well as to report on any essential policy changes, they will have an extensive agenda before them. It could include the following questions:

1. Why were the levees built and maintained without regard to the impact of a storm surge of this scale, and specifically, why was the 2004 model that predicted 10-15 feet of water in New Orleans, as a result of hurricane flooding, ignored?
2. Why was the pre-event evacuation of the region so incomplete, without attention being given to citizens of the city without means of transportation?
3. Why was the Louisiana Superdome opened to provide 'safety' to between 10-20,000 persons without even minimal provision being made for such basic needs as sanitation, food, shelter, water, medical needs and human security?
4. Why in the current search and rescue operation is minimal reliance being given for the use of rescue boats to supplement helicopter rescue operations?
5. Why are the extensive resources of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) not being used?
6. Why did it take six days before international assistance was requested? And finally,
7. Why did any disaster plans that might have been available for fully predictable severe hurricane winds accompanied by fully predictable severe flooding fail so miserably?

While working in forty five disaster situations within developing countries in over thirty five years, I have never seen anything approaching this level of governmental failure in any country, however poor and undeveloped. While **Mercy** demands any action to reduce further human suffering, **Justice** demands that responsibility for failures be assigned and policies be reviewed to avoid further "*acts of criminal negligence*"

Yours sincerely

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September 2, 2005

They Saw It Coming

By MARK FISCHETTI
Lenox, Mass.

THE deaths caused by Hurricane Katrina are heart-rending. The suffering of survivors is wrenching. Property destruction is shocking. But perhaps the most agonizing part is that much of what happened in New Orleans this week might have been avoided.

Watching the TV images of the storm approaching the Mississippi Delta on Sunday, I was sick to my stomach. Not only because I knew the hell it could unleash (I wrote an article for Scientific American in 2001 that described the very situation that was unfolding) but because I knew that a large-scale engineering plan called Coast 2050 - developed in 1998 by scientists, Army engineers, metropolitan planners and Louisiana officials - might have helped save the city, but had gone unrealized.

The debate over New Orleans's vulnerability to hurricanes has raged for a century. By the late 1990's, scientists at Louisiana State University and the University of New Orleans had perfected computer models showing exactly how a sea surge would overwhelm the levee system, and had recommended a set of solutions. The Army Corps of Engineers, which built the levees, had proposed different projects.

Yet some scientists reflexively disregarded practical considerations pointed out by the Army engineers; more often, the engineers scoffed at scientific studies indicating that the basic facts of geology and hydrology meant that significant design changes were needed. Meanwhile, local politicians lobbied Congress for financing for myriad special interest groups, from oil companies to oyster farmers. Congress did not hear a unified voice, making it easier to turn a deaf ear.

Fed up with the splintered efforts, Len Bahr, then the head of the Louisiana Governor's Office of Coastal Activities, somehow dragged all the parties to one table in 1998 and got them to agree on a coordinated solution: Coast 2050. Completing every recommended project over a decade or more would have cost an estimated \$14 billion, so Louisiana turned to the federal government. While this may seem an astronomical sum, it isn't in terms of large public works; in 2000 Congress began a \$7 billion engineering program to refresh the dying Florida Everglades. But Congress had other priorities, Louisiana politicians had other priorities, and the magic moment of consensus was lost.

Thus, in true American fashion, we ignored an inevitable problem until disaster focused our attention. Fortunately, as we rebuild New Orleans, we can protect it - by engineering solutions that work with nature, not against it.

The conceit that we can control the natural world is what made New Orleans vulnerable. For more than a century the Army Corps, with Congress's blessing, leveed the Mississippi River to prevent its annual floods, so that farms and industries could expand along its banks. Those same floods, however, had dumped huge amounts of sediment and freshwater across the Mississippi Delta, rebuilding each year what gulf tides and storms had worn away and holding back infusions of saltwater that kill marsh vegetation. These vast delta wetlands created a lush, hardy buffer that could absorb sea surges and weaken high winds.

The flooding at the river's mouth also sent great volumes of sediment west and east into the Gulf of Mexico, to a string of barrier islands that cut down surges and waves, compensating for regular ocean erosion. Stopping the Mississippi's floods starved the wetlands and the islands; both are rapidly disintegrating, leaving the city naked against the sea.

What can we do to restore these natural protections? Although the parties that devised Coast 2050, and other independent scientists and engineers who have floated rival plans, may disagree on details, they do concur on several major initiatives that would shield New Orleans, reconstitute the delta and, as a side benefit, improve ports and shipping lanes for the oil and natural gas industries in the Gulf of Mexico.

Cut several channels in the levees on the Mississippi River's southern bank (the side that doesn't abut the city) and secure them with powerful floodgates that could be opened at certain times of the year to allow sediment and freshwater to flow down into the delta, re-establishing it.

Build a new navigation channel from the Gulf into the Mississippi, about 40 miles south of New Orleans, so ships don't have to enter the river at its three southernmost tips 30 miles further away. For decades the corps has dredged shipping channels along those final miles to keep them navigable, creating underwater chutes that propel river sediment out into the deep ocean. The dredging could then be stopped, the river mouth would fill in naturally, and sediment would again spill to the barrier islands, lengthening and widening them. Some planners also propose a modern port at the new access point that would replace those along the river that are too shallow to handle the huge new ships now being built worldwide.

Erect huge seagates across the pair of narrow straits that connect the eastern edge of Lake Pontchartrain, which lies north of the city, to the gulf. Now, any hurricane that blows in from the south will push a wall of water through these straits into the huge lake, which in turn will threaten to overflow into the city. That is what has filled the bowl that is New Orleans this week. But seagates at the straits can stop the wall of water from flowing in. The Netherlands has built similar gates to hold back the turbulent North Sea and they work splendidly.

Finally, and most obviously, raise, extend and strengthen the city's existing but aging levees, canal walls and pumping systems that worked so poorly in recent days.

It's hard to say how much of this work could have been completed by today had Coast 2050 become a reality. Certainly, the delta wetlands and barrier islands would not have rebounded substantially yet. But undoubtedly progress would have been made that would have spared someone's life, someone's home, some jazz club or gumbo joint, some city district, some part of the region's unique culture that the entire country revels in. And we would have been well on our way to a long-term solution. For there is one thing we know for sure: hurricanes will howl through the Mississippi Delta again.

The Supplemental for Hurricane Katrina

WASHINGTON - September 2 - Congressman Dennis J. Kucinich (D-OH)

gave the following speech today on the House floor during a special session to provide relief money for the victims of Hurricane Katrina: "This amount of money is only a fraction of what is needed and everyone here knows it. Let it go forward quickly with heart-felt thanks to those who are helping to save lives with necessary food, water, shelter, medical care and security. Congress must also demand accountability with the appropriations. Because until there are basic changes in the direction of this government, this tragedy will multiply to apocalyptic proportions.

"The Administration yesterday said that no one anticipated the breach of the levees. Did the Administration not see or care about the 2001 FEMA warning about the risk of a devastating hurricane hitting the people of New Orleans? Did it not know or care that >civil and army engineers were warning for years about the consequences of failure to >strengthen the flood control system? Was it aware or did it care that the very same Administration which decries the plight of the people today, cut from the budget tens of millions needed for Gulf-area flood control projects?

"Countless lives have been lost throughout the South with a cost of hundreds of billions in ruined homes, businesses, and the destruction of an entire physical and social infrastructure.

"The President said an hour ago that the Gulf Coast looks like it has been obliterated by a weapon. It has. Indifference is a weapon of mass destruction. "Our indifferent government is in a crisis of legitimacy. If it continues to ignore its basic responsibility for the health and welfare of the American people, will there ever be enough money to >clean up after their indifference?

"As our government continues to squander human and monetary resources of this country on the war, people are beginning to ask, "Isn't it time we began to take care of our own people here at home? Isn't it time we rescued our own citizens? Isn't it time we fed our own people? Isn't it time we sheltered our own people?

Isn't it time we provided physical and economic security for our own people?" And isn't it time we stopped the oil companies from profiting from this tragedy? "We have plenty of work to do here at home. It is time for America to come home and take care of its own people who are drowning in the streets, suffocating in attics, dying from exposure

to the elements, oppressed by poverty and illness, wracked with despair and hunger and thirst.

"The time is NOW to bring back to the United States the 78,000 National Guard troops currently deployed overseas into the Gulf Coast region.

"The time is NOW to bring back to the US the equipment which will be needed for search and rescue, for clean up and reclamation.

"The time is NOW for federal resources, including closed Army bases, to be used for temporary shelter for those who have been displaced by the hurricane. "The time is NOW to plan massive public works, with jobs going to the people of the Gulf Coast states, to build new levees, new roads, bridges, libraries, schools, colleges and universities and to rebuild all public institutions, including hospitals. Medicare ought to be extended to everyone, so every person can get the physical and mental health care they might need as a result of the disaster.

"The time is NOW for the federal government to take seriously the research of scientists who have warned for years about the dangers of changes in the global climate, and to prepare other regions of the country for other possible weather disasters until we change our disastrous energy policies.

"The time is NOW for changes in our energy policy, to end the domination of oil and fossil fuel and to invest heavily in alternative energy, including wind and solar, geothermal and biofuels.

"As bad as this catastrophe will prove to be, it is in fact only a warning. Our government must change its direction, it must become involved in making America a better place to live, a place where all may survive and thrive. It must get off the path of war and seek the path of peace, peace with the natural environment, peace with other nations, peace with a just economic system."

Gone with the Water

By **Joel K. Bourne, Jr.**

Photographs by **Robert Caputo** and **Tyrone Turner**

The Louisiana bayou, hardest working marsh in America, is in big trouble-with dire consequences for residents, the nearby city of New Orleans, and seafood lovers everywhere.

It was a broiling August afternoon in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Big Easy, the City That Care Forgot. Those who ventured outside moved as if they were swimming in tupelo honey. Those inside paid silent homage to the man who invented air-conditioning as they watched TV "storm teams" warn of a hurricane in the Gulf of

Mexico. Nothing surprising there: Hurricanes in August are as much a part of life in this town as hangovers on Ash Wednesday.

But the next day the storm gathered steam and drew a bead on the city. As the whirling maelstrom approached the coast, more than a million people evacuated to higher ground. Some 200,000 remained, however-the car-less, the homeless, the aged and infirm, and those die-hard New Orleanians who look for any excuse to throw a party.

The storm hit Breton Sound with the fury of a nuclear warhead, pushing a deadly storm surge into Lake Pontchartrain. The water crept to the top of the massive berm that holds back the lake and then spilled over. Nearly 80 percent of New Orleans lies below sea level-more than eight feet below in places-so the water poured in. A liquid brown wall washed over the brick ranch homes of Gentilly, over the clapboard houses of the Ninth Ward, over the white-columned porches of the Garden District, until it raced through the bars and strip joints on Bourbon Street like the pale rider of the Apocalypse. As it reached 25 feet (eight meters) over parts of the city, people climbed onto roofs to escape it.

Thousands drowned in the murky brew that was soon contaminated by sewage and industrial waste. Thousands more who survived the flood later perished from dehydration and disease as they waited to be rescued. It took two months to pump the city dry, and by then the Big Easy was buried under a blanket of putrid sediment, a million people were homeless, and 50,000 were dead. It was the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States.

When did this calamity happen? It hasn't-yet. But the doomsday scenario is not far-fetched. The Federal Emergency Management Agency lists a hurricane strike on New Orleans as one of the most dire threats to the nation, up there with a large earthquake in California or a terrorist attack on New York City. Even the Red Cross no longer opens hurricane shelters in the city, claiming the risk to its workers is too great.

"The killer for Louisiana is a Category Three storm at 72 hours before landfall that becomes a Category Four at 48 hours and a Category Five at 24 hours-coming from the worst direction," says Joe Suhayda, a retired coastal engineer at Louisiana State University who has spent 30 years studying the coast. Suhayda is sitting in a lakefront restaurant on an actual August afternoon sipping lemonade and talking about the chinks in the city's hurricane armor. "I don't think people realize how precarious we are," Suhayda says, watching sailboats glide by. "Our technology is great when it works. But when it fails, it's going to make things much worse."

The chances of such a storm hitting New Orleans in any given year are slight, but the danger is growing. Climatologists predict that powerful storms may occur more frequently this century, while rising sea level from global warming is putting low-lying coasts at greater risk. "It's not if it will happen," says University of New Orleans geologist Shea Penland. "It's when."

Yet just as the risks of a killer storm are rising, the city's natural defenses are quietly melting away. From the Mississippi border to the Texas state line, Louisiana is losing its protective fringe of marshes and barrier islands faster than any place in the U.S.

Since the 1930s some 1,900 square miles (4,900 square kilometers) of coastal wetlands—a swath nearly the size of Delaware or almost twice that of Luxembourg—have vanished beneath the Gulf of Mexico. Despite nearly half a billion dollars spent over the past decade to stem the tide, the state continues to lose about 25 square miles (65 square kilometers) of land each year, roughly one acre every 33 minutes.

A cocktail of natural and human factors is putting the coast under. Delta soils naturally compact and sink over time, eventually giving way to open water unless fresh layers of sediment offset the subsidence. The Mississippi's spring floods once maintained that balance, but the annual deluges were often disastrous. After a devastating flood in 1927, levees were raised along the river and lined with concrete, effectively funneling the marsh-building sediments to the deep waters of the Gulf. Since the 1950s engineers have also cut more than 8,000 miles (13,000 kilometers) of canals through the marsh for petroleum exploration and ship traffic. These new ditches sliced the wetlands into a giant jigsaw puzzle, increasing erosion and allowing lethal doses of salt water to infiltrate brackish and freshwater marshes.

While such loss hits every bayou-loving Louisianan right in the heart, it also hits nearly every U.S. citizen right in the wallet. Louisiana has the hardest working wetlands in America, a watery world of bayous, marshes, and barrier islands that either produces or transports more than a third of the nation's oil and a quarter of its natural gas, and ranks second only to Alaska in commercial fish landings. As wildlife habitat, it makes Florida's Everglades look like a petting zoo by comparison.

Such high stakes compelled a host of unlikely bedfellows—scientists, environmental groups, business leaders, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—to forge a radical plan to protect what's left. Drafted by the Corps a year ago, the Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) project was initially estimated to cost up to 14 billion dollars over 30 years, almost twice as much as current efforts to save the Everglades. But the Bush Administration balked at the price tag, supporting instead a plan to spend up to two billion dollars over the next ten years to fund the most promising projects. Either way, Congress must authorize the money before work can begin.

To glimpse the urgency of the problem afflicting Louisiana, one need only drive 40 minutes southeast of New Orleans to the tiny bayou village of Shell Beach. Here, for the past 70 years or so, a big, deeply tanned man with hands the size of baseball gloves has been catching fish, shooting ducks, and selling gas and bait to anyone who can find his end-of-the-road marina. Today Frank "Blackie" Campo's ramshackle place hangs off the end of new Shell Beach. The old Shell Beach, where Campo was born in 1918, sits a quarter mile away, five feet beneath the rippling waves. Once home to some 50 families and a naval air station during World War II, the little village is now "ga'an pecan," as Campo says in the local patois. Gone forever.

Life in old Shell Beach had always been a tenuous existence. Hurricanes twice razed the community, sending houses floating through the marsh. But it wasn't until the Corps of Engineers dredged a 500-foot-wide (150-meter-wide) ship channel nearby in 1968 that its fate was sealed. The Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, known as "Mr. Go," was supposed to provide a shortcut for freighters bound for New Orleans, but it never caught on. Maybe two ships use the channel on a given day, but wakes from even those few vessels have carved the shoreline a half mile wide in places, consuming old Shell Beach.

Campo settles into a worn recliner, his pale blue eyes the color of a late autumn sky. Our conversation turns from Mr. Go to the bigger issue affecting the entire coast. "What really screwed up the marsh is when they put the levees on the river," Campo says, over the noise of a groaning air-conditioner. "They should take the levees out and let the water run; that's what built the land. But we know they not going to let the river run again, so there's no solution."

Denise Reed, however, proposes doing just that-letting the river run. A coastal geomorphologist at the University of New Orleans, Reed is convinced that breaching the levees with a series of gated spillways would pump new life into the dying marshes. Only three such diversions currently operate in the state. I catch up with Reed at the most controversial of the lot-a 26-million-dollar culvert just south of New Orleans named Caernarvon.

"Caernarvon is a prototype, a demonstration of a technique," says Reed as we motor down a muddy canal in a state boat. The diversion isn't filling the marsh with sediments on a grand scale, she says. But the effect of the added river water-loaded as it is with fertilizer from farm runoff-is plain to see. "It turns wetlands hanging on by the fingernails into something quite lush," says Reed.

To prove her point, she points to banks crowded with slender willows, rafts of lily pads, and a wide shallow pond that is no longer land, no longer liquid. More like chocolate pudding. But impressive as the recovering marsh is, its scale seems dwarfed by the size of the problem. "Restoration is not trying to make the coast look like a map of 1956," explains Reed. "That's not even possible. The goal is to restore healthy natural processes, then live with what you get."

Even that will be hard to do. Caernarvon, for instance, became a political land mine when releases of fresh water timed to mimic spring floods wiped out the beds of nearby oyster farmers. The oystermen sued, and last year a sympathetic judge awarded them a staggering 1.3 billion dollars. The case threw a major speed bump into restoration efforts.

Other restoration methods-such as rebuilding marshes with dredge spoil and salt-tolerant plants or trying to stabilize a shoreline that's eroding 30 feet (10 meters) a year-have had limited success. Despite the challenges, the thought of doing nothing is hard for most southern Louisianans to swallow. Computer models that project land loss for the next 50 years show the coast and interior marsh dissolving as if splattered with acid, leaving only skeletal remnants. Outlying towns such as Shell Beach, Venice, Grand Isle, and Cocodrie vanish under a sea of blue pixels.

Those who believe diversions are the key to saving Louisiana's coast often point to the granddaddy of them all: the Atchafalaya River. The major tributary of the Mississippi River, the Atchafalaya, if left alone, would soon be the Mississippi River, capturing most of its flow. But to prevent salt water from creeping farther up the Mississippi and spoiling the water supply of nearby towns and industries, the Corps of Engineers allows only a third of the Mississippi's water to flow down the Atchafalaya. Still, that water and sediment have produced the healthiest wetlands in Louisiana. The Atchafalaya Delta is one of the few places in the state that's actually gaining ground instead of losing it. And if you want to see the delta, you need to go crabbing with Peanut Michel.

"Peanut," it turns out, is a bit of a misnomer. At six foot six and 340 pounds, the 35-year-old commercial fisherman from Morgan City wouldn't look out of place on the offensive line of the New Orleans Saints. We launch his aluminum skiff in the predawn light, and soon we're skimming down the broad, café au lait river toward the newest land in Louisiana. Dense thickets of needlegrass, flag grass, cut grass, and a big-leafed plant Michel calls elephant ear crowd the banks, followed closely by bushy wax myrtles and shaggy willows.

Michel finds his string of crab pots a few miles out in the broad expanse of Atchafalaya Bay. Even this far from shore the water is barely five feet deep. As the sun ignites into a blowtorch on the horizon, Michel begins a well-oiled ritual: grab the bullet-shaped float, shake the wire cube of its clicking, mottled green inhabitants, bait it with a fish carcass, and toss. It's done in fluid motions as the boat circles lazily in the water.

But it's a bad day for crabbing. The wind and water are hot, and only a few crabs dribble in. And yet Michel is happy. Deliriously happy. Because this is what he wants to do. "They call 'em watermen up in Maryland," he says with a slight Cajun accent. "They call us lunatics here. You got to be crazy to be in this business."

Despite Michel's poor haul, Louisiana's wetlands are still a prolific seafood factory, sustaining a commercial fishery that most years lands more than 300 million dollars' worth of finfish, shrimp, oysters, crabs, and other delicacies. How long the stressed marshes can maintain that production is anybody's guess. In the meantime, Michel keeps at it. "My grandfather always told me, Don't live to be rich, live to be happy," he says. And so he does.

After a few hours Michel calls it a day, and we head through the braided delta, where navigation markers that once stood at the edge of the boat channel now peek out of the brush 20 feet (six meters) from shore. At every turn we flush mottled ducks, ibis, and great blue herons. Michel, who works as a hunting guide during duck season, cracks an enormous grin at the sight. "When the ducks come down in the winter," he says, "they'll cover the sun."

To folks like Peanut Michel, the birds, the fish, and the rich coastal culture are reason enough to save Louisiana's shore, whatever the cost. But there is another reason, one readily grasped by every American whose way of life is tethered not to a dock, but to a gas pump: These wetlands protect one of the most extensive petroleum infrastructures in the nation.

The state's first oil well was punched in south Louisiana in 1901, and the world's first offshore rig went into operation in the Gulf of Mexico in 1947. During the boom years in the early 1970s, fully half of the state's budget was derived from petroleum revenues. Though much of the production has moved into deeper waters, oil and gas wells remain a fixture of the coast, as ubiquitous as shrimp boats and brown pelicans.

The deep offshore wells now account for nearly a third of all domestic oil production, while Louisiana's Offshore Oil Port, a series of platforms anchored 18 miles (29 kilometers) offshore, unloads a nonstop line of supertankers that deliver up to 15 percent of the nation's foreign oil. Most of that black gold comes ashore via a maze of pipelines buried in the Louisiana muck. Numerous refineries, the nation's largest

natural gas pipeline hub, even the Strategic Petroleum Reserve are all protected from hurricanes and storm surge by Louisiana's vanishing marsh.

You can smell the petrodollars burning at Port Fourchon, the offshore oil industry's sprawling home port on the central Louisiana coast. Brawny helicopters shuttle 6,000 workers to the rigs from here each week, while hundreds of supply boats deliver everything from toilet paper to drinking water to drilling lube. A thousand trucks a day keep the port humming around the clock, yet Louisiana 1, the two-lane highway that connects it to the world, seems to flood every other high tide. During storms the port becomes an island, which is why port officials like Davie Breaux are clamoring for the state to build a 17-mile-long (27-kilometer-long) elevated highway to the port. It's also why Breaux thinks spending 14 billion dollars to save the coast would be a bargain.

"We'll go to war and spend billions of dollars to protect oil and gas interests overseas," Breaux says as he drives his truck past platform anchors the size of two-story houses. "But here at home?" He shrugs. "Where else you gonna drill? Not California. Not Florida. Not in ANWR. In Louisiana. I'm third generation in the oil field. We're not afraid of the industry. We just want the infrastructure to handle it."

The oil industry has been good to Louisiana, providing low taxes and high-paying jobs. But such largesse hasn't come without a cost, largely exacted from coastal wetlands. The most startling impact has only recently come to light—the effect of oil and gas withdrawal on subsidence rates. For decades geologists believed that the petroleum deposits were too deep and the geology of the coast too complex for drilling to have any impact on the surface. But two years ago former petroleum geologist Bob Morton, now with the U.S. Geological Survey, noticed that the highest rates of wetland loss occurred during or just after the period of peak oil and gas production in the 1970s and early 1980s. After much study, Morton concluded that the removal of millions of barrels of oil, trillions of cubic feet of natural gas, and tens of millions of barrels of saline formation water lying with the petroleum deposits caused a drop in subsurface pressure—a theory known as regional depressurization. That led nearby underground faults to slip and the land above them to slump.

"When you stick a straw in a soda and suck on it, everything goes down," Morton explains. "That's very simplified, but you get the idea." The phenomenon isn't new: It was first documented in Texas in 1926 and has been reported in other oil-producing areas such as the North Sea and Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela. Morton won't speculate on what percentage of wetland loss can be pinned on the oil industry. "What I can tell you is that much of the loss between Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Terrebonne was caused by induced subsidence from oil and gas withdrawal. The wetlands are still there, they're just underwater." The area Morton refers to, part of the Barataria-Terrebonne estuary, has one of the highest rates of wetland loss in the state.

The oil industry and its consultants dispute Morton's theory, but they've been unable to disprove it. The implication for restoration is profound. If production continues to taper off in coastal wetlands, Morton expects subsidence to return to its natural geologic rate, making restoration feasible in places. Currently, however, the high price of natural gas has oil companies swarming over the marshes looking for deep gas reservoirs. If such fields are tapped, Morton expects regional depressurization to continue. The upshot for the coast, he explains, is that the state will have to focus

whatever restoration dollars it can muster on areas that can be saved, not waste them on places that are going to sink no matter what.

A few days after talking with Morton, I'm sitting on the levee in the French Quarter, enjoying the deep-fried powdery sweetness of a beignet from the Café du Monde. Joggers lumber by in the torpid heat, while tugs wrestle their barges up and down the big brown river. For all its enticing quiriness, for all its licentious pleasures, for all its geologic challenges, New Orleans has been luckier than the wetlands that lined its pockets and stocked its renowned tables. The question is how long Lady Luck will shine. It brings back something Joe Suhayda, the LSU engineer, had said during our lunch by Lake Pontchartrain.

"When you look at the broadest perspective, short-term advantages can be gained by exploiting the environment. But in the long term you're going to pay for it. Just like you can spend three days drinking in New Orleans and it'll be fun. But sooner or later you're going to pay."

I finish my beignet and stroll down the levee, succumbing to the hazy, lazy feel of the city that care forgot, but that nature will not.

The People of the Dome by Mitchel Cohen

Les Evenchick, an independent Green who lives in the French Quarter of New Orleans in a 3-story walkup, reports that 90 percent of the so-called looters are simply grabbing water, food, diapers and medicines, because the federal and state officials have refused to provide these basic necessities. Les says that "it's only because of the looters that non-looters -- old people, sick people, small children -- are able to survive." Those people who stole televisions and large non-emergency items have been SELLING THEM, Les reports (having witnessed several of these "exchanges") so that they could get enough money together to leave the area.

Think about it:

- People were told to leave, but all the bus stations had closed down the night before and the personnel sent packing.
- Many people couldn't afford tickets anyway.
- Many people are stranded, and others are refusing to leave their homes, pets, etc. They don't have cars.

You want people to stop looting? Provide the means for them to eat, and to leave the area.

Some tourists in the Monteleone Hotel paid \$25,000 for 10 buses. The buses were sent (I guess there were many buses available, if you paid the price!) but the military confiscated them to use NOT for transporting people in the Dome but for the military. The tourists were not allowed to leave. Instead, the military ordered the tourists to the now-infamous Convention Center.

HOW SIMPLE it would have been for the State and/or US government to have provided buses for people BEFORE the hurricane hit, and throughout this week. Even evacuating 100,000 people trapped there -- that's 3,000 buses, less than come into Washington

D.C. for some of the giant antiwar demonstrations there. Even at \$2,500 a pop -- highway robbery -- that would only be a total of \$7.5 million for transporting all of those who did not have the means to leave.

Instead, look at the human and economic cost of not doing that! So why didn't they do that?

On Wednesday a number of Greens tried to bring a large amount of water to the SuperDome. They were prevented from doing so, as have many others. Why have food and water been BLOCKED from reaching tens of thousands of poor people?

On Thursday, the government used the excuse that there were some very scattered gunshots (two or three instances only) -- around 1/50th of the number of gunshots that occur in New York City on an average day -- to shut down voluntary rescue operations and to scrounge for 5,000 National Guard troops fully armed, with "shoot to kill" orders -- at a huge economic cost.

They even refused to allow voluntary workers who had rescued over 1,000 people in boats over the previous days to continue on Thursday, using the several gunshots (and who knows WHO shot off those rounds?) to say "It's too dangerous". The volunteers didn't think the gunshots were dangerous to them and wanted to continue their rescue operations and had to be "convinced" at gunpoint to "cease and desist."

There is something sinister going down -- it's not just incompetence or negligence.

How could FEMA and Homeland Security not have something so basic as bottled drinking water in the SuperDome, which was long a part of the hurricane plan? One police officer in charge of his 120-person unit said yesterday that his squad was provided with only 70 small bottles of water.

Two years ago, New Orleans residents -- the only area in the entire state that voted in huge numbers against the candidacy of George Bush -- also fought off attempts to privatize the drinking water supply. There have also been major battles to block Shell Oil's attempt to build a Liquid Natural Gas facility, and to prevent the teardown of public housing (which failed), with the Mayor lining up in the latter two issues on the side of the oil companies and the developers.

One of the first acts of Governor Kathleen Blanco (a Democrat, by the way) during this crisis was to TURN OFF the drinking water, to force people to evacuate. There was no health reason to turn it off, as the water is drawn into a separate system from the Mississippi River, not the polluted lake, and purified through self-powered purification plants separate from the main electric grid. If necessary, people could have been told to boil their water -- strangely, the municipal natural gas used in stoves was still functioning properly as of Thursday night!

There are thousands of New Orleans residents who are refusing to evacuate because they don't want to leave their pets, their homes, or who have no money to do so nor place to go. The government -- which COULD HAVE and SHOULD HAVE provided water and food to residents of New Orleans -- has NOT done so INTENTIONALLY to force people to evacuate by starving them out. This is a crime of the gravest sort.

We need to understand that the capability has been there from the start to DRIVE water and food right up to the convention center, as those roads have been clear -- it's how the National Guard drove into the city.

Let me say this again: The government is intentionally not allowing food or water in. This is for real. MSNBC interviewed dozens of people who had gotten out. Every single one of them was WHITE.

The people who are poor (primarily Black but many poor Whites as well) are finally being allowed to leave the horrendous conditions in the SuperDome; many are being bussed to the AstroDome in Houston.

Call them "People of the Dome." If people resist the National Guard coming to remove them against their will, will New Orleans become known as the first battle in the new American revolution?

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"No vale la pena reconstruir Nueva Orleans" por Klaus Jakob

"Antes de terminar el siglo, acabará deglutida por el río y el mar". Eso sostiene Klaus Jakob, geofísico del Earth Institute, universidad Columbia, experto en desastres naturales. Según señala el científico, "es una catástrofe varias veces anunciada. Los especialistas venimos explicando que esa zona del litoral está continuamente amenazada desde el golfo de Méjico, el Misisipi y el lago Pontchartrain".

Lo malo es que, desde mediados siglo XIX, fue desarrollándose una concentración urbana enorme, en terrenos bajo el nivel de las aguas, sobre un delta inestable.

A criterio de Jakob, "un factor decisivo fue y es la presión de intereses económicos de corto aliento: petróleo, pesca y turismo. La naturaleza no perdona y, si alguna lección deriva de esta tragedia, es la necesidad de reevaluar los riesgos en el largo plazo". El geólogo admite que el peligro data de hace siglos, pero "hoy se agrava debido al calentamiento planetario".

Por supuesto, en el siglo XVIII tenía sentido afincarse donde confluyen el Misisipi, otros ríos y el mar. Esa ubicación daba acceso al interior todavía virgen de Estados Unidos. Máxime cuando, en 1804, Napoléon le vendió a Washington la Luisiana original; o sea, el inmenso territorio entre los grandes lagos, el Misisipi-Misuri, los montes Allegheny y el golfo.

“A principios del siglo XX –recuerda el experto-, el ejército norteamericano construyó un gigantesco sistema de canales y esclusas para imponerle al río un lecho artificial. Fue una grave violación al proceso natural de estas corrientes, que sirven justamente para arrastrar tierras hacia los brazos del delta y mantener bajo el lecho original”.

Dado que el Misisipi no puede hacer su trabajo natural, “la tierra firme ha seguido bajando y, al cabo, este huracán aceleró la vuelta a la situación de hace tres siglos”. Pero, por entonces, no había una gran urbe con poblaciones satélites hasta Biloxi al norte. No obstante, Jakob subraya que “la actual no es peor de las situaciones previsibles. Si el ojo de la tormenta hubiese golpeado un poco más al oeste, las trombas marinas habrían desencadenado un maremoto más violento y veloz sobre Nueva Orleans”.

En lo tocante a consejos, el fundamental sería “no reconstruir la ciudad no sus defensas artificiales, porque el fin es sólo cuestión de tiempo. Cuanto más altas son canales y esclusas, peor será la próxima inundación.”. El propio Servicio Geológico Federal cree que “en menos de cien años, Nueva Orleans no existirá más”. Por supuesto, la verdad desnuda es por ahora social y políticamente intolerable. Por tanto “malgastarán miles de millones –supone Jakob- en la reconstrucción”.

Existe márgenes de compromiso, claro.”Tendría sentido una reconstrucción parcial, selectiva, con un horizonte de 50 a 75 años. Pero debe admitirse que nada podrá evitar por siempre una violenta irrupción de las aguas. Huracanes como Catalina son comunes en la región y el efecto invernadero –ése que el gobierno de George W. Bush niega en aras del “lobby” petrolero- están acentuando su violencia, pues tienden a licuar los hielos polares y a elevar el nivel de todo los mares”.

Lo curioso es que la catástrofe de Nueva Orleans tenga un costado, si se quiere, geopolítico. Las tareas de rescate masivo, en EE.UU., quedan tradicionalmente a cargo de la poderosa y ubicua Guardia Nacional. Pero sus brigadas más selectas están empantanadas en Irak. No es casual que la convergencia de Katrina, el alza de combustibles y las pésimas noticias de Bagdad haya deteriorado la imagen presidencial. El apoyo cede a 43% en general y sube a 58% la desaprobación al manejo de la guerra (mientras, 61% de los sondeos considera que las bajas son inaceptables).

KATRINA...LA TRAGEDIA por Pablo Moctezuma en T E I X I T I A N I , Número 138, Septiembre de 2005

La tragedia del Katrina golpeó a millones de personas en los Estados Unidos sembrando destrucción y muerte y desnudó el "modo de vida americano" como inhumano e incapaz de proveer seguridad y bienestar a la población, pues solo es movido por la ambición del dinero y no por el bien del ser humano.

Desde el jueves 25 de agosto se sabía que el huracán se dirigía a las costas del sureste de Estados Unidos, pero no hubo un plan de evacuación, luego cuando quedaba claro el sábado 27 que el huracán era de la categoría 5 máxima en la escala Saffir-Simpson

y de efectos devastadores no hubo reacción oficial "salvese el que pueda" fue el llamado de las autoridades abandonando a pobres, enfermos y personas impedidas para trasladarse, no hubo ningún plan de protección civil y menos se trató de prevenir el desastre movilizando masivamente recursos para apoyar a la población. El lunes 29 y martes treinta vientos huracandos a una velocidad de 280 kilometros por hora y olas de ocho metros golpearon Lousiana, Mississippi y Alabama, dejando casi 3 millones de damnificados, miles de muertos y decenas de miles de heridos, pero no hubo respuesta alguna del Gobierno Federal hasta el viernes 2 de septiembre.

La respuesta fué tardía, no hubo transporte para evacuar, hicieron falta centenares de helicopteros, no hubo rescate oportuno de personas enterrados y heridos, durante días no se dotó de agua y alimentos a decenas de miles de damnificados, ni mandaron socorristas, murieron muchos bajo los escombros, e innumerables heridos y ancianos que no fueron atendidos, los cadaveres fueron abandonados durante días.

George W Bush suspendió sus largas vacaciones hasta el jueves 1 de septiembre y el viernes 2 se fué a asomar al área devastada para "la foto" y luego regresó a Washington. Sus acciones anteriores ayudaron a potenciar el desastre. Desde hace 3 años desastre previsible, el diario local Times-Picayune lo advirtió en 2002. Pero Bush canceló una propuesta de investigación del cuerpo de ingenieros, redujo en 2003 los fondos federales para control de inundaciones, en 2004 redujo el 80 por ciento el financiamiento solicitado por el Cuerpo de Ingenieros del Ejército para controlar las aguas de la zona, de 2001 a 2005 redujo un 44.2 por ciento en total.

Bush partidario de la ilegal y abusiva "guerra preventiva" no toma ninguna prevención para seguridad de pueblo de EU, aunque siempre hay quien gana, hoy las empresas petroleras tienen ganancias multimillonarias al dispararse el precio de la gasolina. El calentamiento global, cambia el clima y provoca huracanes pero Bush se ha negado a firmar el Protocolo de Kioto para reducir la emisión de gases del país... EUA que más los genera. Por fin de manera tardía el congreso aprobó 10 mil millones para atender la emergencia, mientras para la guerra aprueban más de 400 000 millones de dólares. Atienden y mientras abastecen más de 200 bases militares en el mundo no son capaces de abastecer a los damnificados de su país. Nueva Orleans, la cuna del jazz, fundada por invasores franceses en 1718 que trajeron miles de esclavos negros, ha quedado destruida por la negligencia del gobierno de Bush que no autorizó un presupuesto de 2,500 millones de dolares para reforzar el sistema de diques que se rompió. El alcalde Ray Nagin hizo un "desesperado llamado de auxilio" al gobierno federal para ayudar a la población que no ha podido salir de la ciudad y ante la pasividad de Bush calificó de "criminal" la tardía respuesta. Mientras que cuatro días después del desastre unas 100 mil personas continúan atrapadas en sus hogares anegados y en refugios improvisados. El hambre, el agotamiento y la desesperación por la ayuda que sigue sin llegar provocó brotes de violencia y enfrentamientos con la policía y la Guardia Nacional. Cuando por fin llegan tropas al area devastada en vez de atender a los atrapados, y abastecer a los hambrientos reciben la orden de "tolerancia cero" y "abrir fuego" contra los "saqueadores", en una actitud fascista, pues como distinguir a una familia que desesperada que ha perdido todo y que trata de obtener alimentos de una banda criminal.

Toda la actuación de los gobernantes norteamericanos los han dejado desnudos ante su pueblo y los pueblos del mundo. El movimiento "impeach Bush" para juzgar al presidente por sus crímenes crece y crecerá aún más en los Estados Unidos.

Dear Maureen,

May I bother you once more with this excellent compilation, attached? It would be very good as a resource on the Katrina page, and, if possible a cross link from the Disability page.

Keeping my head above water. Actually I'm thinking several things, large somewhat life shaping things.

1. America needs a new civil rights movement. This event has revealed the depth of the classism/racism. Actually this "ah ha" was sparked by a few of the remarks on list servs from people in India and Bangladesh.

2. We (you and I) really need to network with Walt Peacock, Betty Morrow, and other who have been involved in major studies of recovery and struggles to get recovery planning open to women and minorities, like the post-Mitch work of your former student Sarah. I can't recall her surname. Are you in touch? There is an International Recovery Platform, launched in May in Kobe, that is supposed to digest and make available the whole world's best experience with recovery. Will the U.S. benefit from that? Now that James Lee Witt, I hear, has been hired by the mayor of New Orleans, maybe the answer can be, yes. Can we help?

3. The myth of the U.S. as the "leader" in disaster management and risk reduction is now thoroughly blown away. I think the parallel myth of Japanese practice as a "model" will fall shortly, but that is another story. No more myths. Bangladesh has offered \$1 million in assistance.

Cuba wants to send 1,100 doctors. We need to write something about the need for full sharing of experience across national borders: no MDC vs. LDC leadership myths. The community risk assessment and action planning examples we saw in Cape Town that come from Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, etc. are stunningly good. How can we open the eyes of the arrogant leaders in the U.S. (and other OECD countries)?

All the best,

BEN

In the News: Katrina and People with Disabilities

**Compiled by ADA Watch/NCDR <http://www.adawatch.org/> **
Thanks to Todd Reynolds for sending this compilation to RADIX

**September 1, 2005 **

From Scripps Howard News Service:

Tens of thousands of people with advanced medical needs have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina, and thousands more are hurt or will sustain injuries and illnesses during the long recovery ahead for the four-state zone hammered by the storm.

Yet over much of the affected Gulf Coast region, hospitals, nursing homes and group homes have been left so damaged or cut off from supplies that they must be abandoned. Some 4,800 patients have been evacuated to other cities, or are still trying to get out of the disaster zone in and around New Orleans, officials said.

According to the Census Bureau, 15 percent of New Orleans' residents aged 5 and older have some type of disability, and it appears certain that much of their city won't have any housing to offer them for months, perhaps years.

"I don't think there's any recent precedent for taking care of a large, medically fragile population like that for the length of time they're likely to have to be in temporary shelter," said Patrick Libbey, executive director of the National Association of County and City Health Officials. "We may have to rethink what we mean by the terms 'temporary' and 'interim.' "

****From Star News Services:****

Along the highway, Aleck Scallan, 63, sat in his wheelchair.

A group of police officers in a boat had rescued him from his home, which quickly flooded Tuesday morning, and dropped him off on the interstate on-ramp.

Then, they left. Scallan was left with a frail, elderly companion on a stretch of highway that fell below two giant humps, leaving them in the valley of the concrete slopes.

"Where am I going to go?" he said. "They were supposed to pick us up and take us to the dome."

****From AP reports:****

Around the corner, an elderly woman lay dead in her wheelchair, covered up by a blanket, and another body lay beside her wrapped in a sheet.

"I don't treat my dog like that," 47-year-old Daniel Edwards said as he pointed at the woman in the wheelchair.

"You can do everything for other countries, but you can't do nothing for your own people," he added. "You can go overseas with the military, but you can't get them down here."

****From Reuters:****

Elderly people in wheelchairs tried to make their way through flooded streets in search of help, and entire families were trapped on elevated highways without water in sweltering heat.

"We want help," people chanted at the city's convention center, where thousands of evacuees were told to seek shelter when Katrina pounded the U.S. Gulf Coast on Monday, only to find woefully inadequate supplies of food or water.

Several corpses lay in nearby streets. The body of one elderly woman was abandoned in her wheelchair, covered with just a blanket.

****From the New York Times News Service:****

Another concern, Dr. Irwin Redlener said, is that people may have lost or become separated from the drugs they rely on daily for diabetes, heart disease and other chronic ailments. Pharmacies in the affected areas may have insufficient stocks of vital drugs like insulin for diabetics, creating a need to organize efforts to import and distribute essential medicines in the area. The shortage could go on for months, Redlener said.

Many people who stayed in affected areas probably had disabilities that prevented them from leaving before the hurricane, Redlener said.

****From Newhouse News Service:****

There were people in wheelchairs, people in hospital gowns, people still strapped to gurneys with IVs in their arms. There were amputees, blind people, mentally ill people.

They were people who thought they might not make it.

Albert Hall was one of them. He's got a prosthetic leg and uses a wheelchair. He said as the water rose to the second floor of his 350-unit apartment building, others were able to get up on the roof of the building.

"I couldn't get on the roof with this thing," he said, pointing to his prosthesis. "So I stayed on the balcony. I kept hollering and hollering 'Help, help!' every time a boat came near, but no one could hear me. I was down and crazy with hollering. It was awful. I really thought I was done for."

By the time a police boat picked him up, he was nearly out of insulin.

So was Irene Williams, another one of the evacuees. Diabetes has left her with poor circulation that makes it difficult to walk. And driving wasn't an option for her and her sister.

"We would have liked to go, but we didn't have the funds to go," Williams said. "We're used to storms, though. So we thought we could ride it out."

****From Cox News Service:****

Alone in her one-bedroom house, Fluffy Sparks sat in her wheelchair and did the only thing she could think of when Hurricane Katrina's floodwaters rushed into her home: she prayed.

"I prayed like I've never prayed in all my life," said Sparks, 46.

Unable to leave, she sat terrified as the water slowly rose past her ankles, up her shoulders and finally to her chin.

"I told God, 'I can't believe you're ready for me now. Don't let me die in this water here by myself.'"

Sparks managed to haul herself onto her small kitchen table. Miraculously, the water stopped rising just as it reached the table's top.

"I'm breathing," she said Tuesday morning, sweating in a mud-stained gown while watching a parade of people wading and passing by in small fishing boats on Fremaux Street, which was covered by thigh-deep, but receding, waters. "It was horrible, and it's still horrible, but I'm breathing."

Sparks' terrifying story is just one of hundreds, possibly thousands, that will be shared for generations in Katrina's aftermath.

****From the Globe and Mail:****

"Help!" was the plea from a person in a wheelchair in New Orleans that flashed mid-storm on the BlackBerry of Mark Smith of the Louisiana office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness. "There's nothing we can do for this person right now," he said.

****From the San Francisco Chronicle:****

Adrian Ory, 57, arrived in Houston today with her deaf daughter, Adrian Munguia, 39, and her 10-year-old granddaughter, Angel, who uses a wheelchair that had to be left behind in New Orleans. Angel was lying on a cot under a blanket.

Ory and Munguia live in different apartments near Legion Field in New Orleans, but they were together when the water started rising.

Munguia hadn't wanted to leave.

"She didn't think it would do all this, and I didn't think it would either. So I stayed with her," Ory said.

"That wind started cutting up. It was blowing and blowing. Man, that water started rising — you couldn't see no cars. I opened the front door and it was right up to here," she said, holding her hand chest-high.

"I saw bodies floating by, dogs on top of roofs, dogs swimming."

As the water kept rising, the family escaped to a second-floor hallway, where they shouted for help out of a window and waved towels to attract attention. Eventually they were rescued by a National Guard boat.

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Hurricane Katrina: Winds of Change?

"The U.S. does not need higher levees; it needs another civil rights movement."

Dr. Ben Wisner, Oberlin College, Ohio
bwisner@igc.org

Revised & expanded 5 September 2005

What are the lessons we can draw from the human catastrophe taking place in New Orleans and small towns to the East along the Gulf Coast into the state of Mississippi into Alabama?

Scale and International Solidarity

The scale of the disaster and its knock on effects is enormous. However, we should not forget that at this precise time 1.6 million people have been displaced in China by a typhoon and flooding, while only a short while ago the megacity of Mumbai was engulfed by monsoon rains that its drainage system could not handle. Global sympathy for the U.S. following the Trade Tower disaster turned to ill ease and puzzlement when after one, two, even three years the U.S. government projected the image of a uniquely wounded polity, and it was this very monomania concerning terrorism that so weakened the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that preparedness for and response to hurricane Katrina was weakened.

That said, now refugees from Katrina's impacts are spread over 20 U.S. states, where emergency declarations allow flow of special funds to the host communities from the federal government. Texas alone has received over 200,000.

60 countries have offered the U.S. assistance. It took 5 days for U.S. leaders even to acknowledge this outpouring of compassion. Even then the offers of 1,100 doctors from Cuba and a million of barrels of oil from Venezuela were arrogantly spurned. Bangladesh offered \$1 million in assistance and Afghanistan \$100,000. (See "Disaster Diplomacy" <http://www.disasterdiplomacy.org/index.html>).

Cause and Effect

Along the Gulf of Mexico people have been put at risk because of economic disparities and the priority given to the petro-chemical and gambling/ casino development as well as the retirement home industry. Destruction of the wetlands, greed driven land use and location decisions in a laissez faire environment, disregard for the poor all are evident as Katrina made land fall.

The human tragedy taking place in New Orleans and in many other, less known and unknown communities along the Gulf Coast has deep roots in neo-liberal ideology that favors lax regulations and return to investment with little concern for the social and environmental consequences. Some 1,500 square miles (3,885 km sq) of wetland has been lost over the past few decades that would have reduced the height of the storm surge affecting New Orleans. Contamination from the petro-chemical complexes and transfer points concentrated on shore and off shore has contributed to the death of wetlands. Meanwhile, low income, Black families have been trapped in poverty by the "downsizing" of the federal state. That has meant less money for education, for small businesses, and for decent, low cost housing. 37 million people live in poverty in the U.S. – up for the fourth year in a row. Many of these live in the U.S. South, where the anti-union environment and less stringent environmental and land use regulation have attracted chemical industries. The myth of idyllic seaside retirement has been sold to the elderly in the U.S., and retirement homes have sprouted where more of the Black working poor serve as low wage care givers. Casino gambling has also added non-union, low wage employment – a desperate last resort for communities that are losing their traditional fishing based economies due to over fishing and gross pollution of the Gulf of Mexico.

The root causes of the catastrophe triggered by Katrina are deep. An excellent history of *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* was published by Case Western Reserve historian, Ted Steinberg in 2000. In Latin America disasters such as hurricane Mitch in 1998 are seen as the result of the accumulation over years of failed development and mal-development. The same must be said of Katrina's effects.

Race and Class in America

People have discussed the effects of a direct hit by a large hurricane on New Orleans since hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Camille in 1969. In the aftermath of Camille, during which 256 people died in Mississippi, documentation of racial discrimination in the allocation of recovery resources was first documented, leading to a U.S. Congressional investigation.

Has the social, political, and economic situation changed since then?

There was no plan to use the trains or some other form of mass transport to evacuate the indigent and those without private cars or money. The most recent census showed that in a city 87% Black and 30% poor, there were 112,000 households without private vehicles. This was known, but no provision was made for transport for them out of the city to smaller, well run shelters such as those in Baton Rouge. They were herded like displaced persons (which they were) into the Superdome, whose roof was then ripped open in several places by the wind. I saw images of these refugees, mostly black, being herded by armed national guardsmen who barked and yelled at them. The scene was very humiliating, not at all shelter with dignity and respect as the Red Cross tries to provide. As the days wore on the air conditioning failed, bathroom facilities became filthy, water and food ran short. By the time the decision was made to move these people to the Astrodome and other shelters in Texas and other states, conditions failed to meet international standards for shelter (SPHERE standards: www.sphereproject.org). There were also very limited facilities for people in wheel chairs.

All of this would have been avoided if at least a year ago, after the experience with hurricane Ivan, authorities had taken the needs of the poor and indigent in New Orleans seriously.

(See

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/K/KATRINA_SUPERDOME?SITE=KING&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&SECTION=HOME

on conditions in the Superdome and also

<http://www.polythane.com/library/superd.htm>

on the history of problems with the Superdome roof -- something else that officials in New Orleans seem to have overlooked).

Preparedness and Prevention

Professor Kent Mathewson, a geographer based at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge has tried over the past year since hurricane Ivan to get officials to develop a contingency plan to evacuate the indigent and those without private vehicles on the trains that run through New Orleans. His suggestions have fallen on deaf ears. A church based pilot project also began after Ivan in 2004 that partnered church members without access to vehicles with those that do. This, however, was an independent effort to fill the vacuum in policy at City, State, and Federal level.

Hurricane Ivan last year should have caused a re-doubling of precautionary planning. The night Ivan approached, 20,000 low-income people without private vehicles sheltered in their homes below sea level. A direct hit would have drowned them. A US Army Corps of Engineers computer simulation has calculated that 65,000 could die in the city, in the event of a direct hit by a slow-moving category 3 hurricane. Fortunately, Ivan veered away from the city at the last moment, but still killed 25 people elsewhere in the US south. At present there is no plan for the public evacuation of low-income residents who do not own cars other than the questionable shelter and assured stress and humiliation provided by the "shelter of last resort," the Superdome.

This time, too, things were not as bad as they could have been because of a small westward turn that placed the dangerous Northeast edge of the storm over Mississippi. Will authorities finally get the message and do serious planning for the needs of the poor? Could Katrina be the beginning of demands from below for social justice in the face of the present social and spatial distribution of risk?

Time will tell, but with so much of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agencies resources devoted to planning for terrorism and with cities like New Orleans struggling with financial burdens that neo-liberal ideology leaves them to sort out on their own, I am not optimistic. (On the destruction of FEMA by terrorism monomania of the Bush administration see <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/29/AR2005082901445.html>).

FEMA and other federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers as well as academics and professionals have for a long time considered a direct hit on New Orleans by a slow moving category 3 hurricane or stronger hurricane to be a worst case scenario (see, among other sources, Ben Wisner et al., *At Risk*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge, p. 248 and the *World Disaster Report 2005* to be launched in

October, 2005 by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

Nevertheless, planning for such an event was insufficient, and money for study, maintenance, and upgrading of New Orleans' levee system was cut in the years leading up to this disasters. Similarly, National Guard troops in Mississippi and Louisiana and their heavy vehicles that could have helped with immediate search and rescue and relief were deployed in Iraq.

What is to be Done?

This is in no way an "act of God." In order to learn from this event and prevent even worse ones in a future likely to have even more frequent and more intense hurricanes (due to global warming), policy makers must admit the dead end laissez faire capitalism has let us all into. Non-governmental organizations, faith communities, and activist groups need to mobilize the mass of the population in the affected area to see themselves not as victims of Nature, but victims of a late phase of globalizing capitalism. The affected people will then be in a position to see themselves as agents of their own well being and history and victims no longer as they demand social change.

In concrete terms, there is one project that seems to me a priority.

Many researchers and practitioners all over the world have experience efforts to get recovery planning to occur in a participatory and inclusive manner. Women and people of color and people living with disabilities need to be part of the process in the post-Katrina situation. There was a civil society led struggle over recovery planning in Nicaragua following Mitch. Famously the people in the Peruvian town where anthropologist Tony Oliver-Smith lived refused to move after the 1970s catastrophe there (see his book, *The Martyred City*). Betty Morrow and Walt Peacock know about the struggle by women to get a place at the planning table in Miami in 1992 (described in their book, *Hurricane Andrew*). In May 2005, an International Recovery Platform was created in Kobe, Japan, with the purpose of pooling and making available the best of the world's recovery experience.

We need to tap this rich global and U.S. and make a digest of this experience available in a useful form for NGOs, faith groups like the Louisiana Interfaith Council, advocates like Robert Bullard's network to expose and fight environmental racism (<http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/>).

The U.S. does not need higher levees; it needs another civil rights movement.

*** END ***

Mitigating Social Impoverishment when People are Involuntarily Displaced^{© 1} Theodore E. Downing²

A recent study of resettlement and development revealed that forced population displacement may lead to eight forms of impoverishment: unemployment, homelessness, landlessness, marginalization, food insecurity, loss of access to common property, erosion of health status, and social disarticulation (Cernea 1990). Reconfirmed by a wider World Bank review, (World Bank 1994), each merits preventative measures. This paper deals with the most conceptually intractable of these problems - that of social impoverishment.

Involuntary population displacement may lead to irreversible social and cultural impoverishment. Resettlement rips routine relations of social time and social space, laying bare critical, but often ignored dimensions of culture. What is less clear is "why?" Shamelessly drawing upon my colleagues' work and my experience with resettlement, I offer a proslusion of a theory of social geometry. I argue that involuntary displacement forces people to reexamine primary cultural questions which, under routine circumstances need not be considered. Key among these is "where are we?" The social geometry of a people consists of infinite intersections of socially-constructed spaces, socially-constructed times, and socially-constructed personages. And, for many cultures, the geometry also defines "who are we?" Mitigating social impoverishment begins by reconstructing, in a culturally appropriate manner, the social geometry of the displaced.

Social Impoverishment

Why does involuntary displacement increase the risk of social disorder? When people are refugees from war, famine, or natural disasters - social chaos seems macabrely expectable. But when people are displaced by development projects, social impoverishment seems incongruous, if not grotesque. Provided that relocated persons are granted adequate compensation for lost goods, health care, housing, and humanitarian assistance, involuntary resettlement should be little more than a temporary inconvenience. Relatives, friends, and neighbors are still alive. Families are not permanently fragmented. New economic opportunities may be provided. Community infrastructure may be upgraded. Movable property may be relocated to the new environs, and exposure to natural hazards reduced. In some cases, some people may be wealthier than they were before. To their disappointment, politicians, engineers, and resettlement specialists have discovered that involuntary resettlement sometimes unravels the underlying social fabric. In resettlement after resettlement, similar patterns reappear (World Bank 1994, Cernea 1993b). Vital social networks and life support mechanisms for families are weakened or dismantled. Authority systems are debilitated or collapse. Groups lose their capacity to self-manage. The society suffers a demonstrable reduction in its capacity to cope with uncertainty. It becomes qualitatively less than its previous self. The people may physically persist but the community that was - is no more. Social scientists have not reached agreement on what to call this social phenomena which haunts involuntary resettlement, but I prefer to use Cernea's terminology - social disarticulation (Cernea 1994a).

Discomfort

Despite universal acceptance by resettlement theorists and policy makers that there are social impacts to resettlement and that the negative ones should be avoided, I am uncomfortable with the theoretical underpinnings of resettlement policy, and by extension refugee studies. So-called "social costs" and "social impacts" are mentioned again and again without clearly explaining what is meant by "social." I am equally uncomfortable with the ease with which only economic actions are proscribed to mitigate social impoverishment. Conventional wisdom is synthesized into proscriptive economic action - holding that, social impoverishment, like other forms of impoverishment, can be mitigated by re-establishing disrupted productive activities. Granted that re-establishment of the economy is indispensable to successful economic recovery and poverty abatement, I am still not convinced that destruction of a local economic order is the primary reason for social disarticulations.

Careful examination of the temporal sequencing of resettlement reveals something is amiss. Signs of social disorder appear quite early in the resettlement, often before the loss of productive activities, when relocatees are reaping benefits of the temporary employment boom and indemnifications associated with public works. Conversely, communities which are not being resettled undergo transformations of productive activities all the time without the radical social disorder associated with resettlement. Apart from the very serious socio-political consequences associated with the coerciveness of the decision, the fact that people move from one place to another should not lead to the radical social changes which have been witnessed. Nor should we anticipate social changes greater than those normally observed with voluntary migration, trips to the market, or visits to a relative. Unlike plants, people move about all the time.

My discomfort increased as I struggled with unanswered, apparently unrelated questions which keep reappearing in resettlement after resettlement, and not coincidentally, in studies of recovery from natural disaster (Oliver-Smith 1986). Why do children seem to recover more quickly than adults? Why do some resettled people return again and again to the shores of a lake covering their inundated home and feel a sense of relief from their visits? And why do disaster victims sometimes refuse to move into shelters, preferring to camp at the location of their former homes? Why don't resettlers occupy houses that architects have carefully modeled after their original houses? And why do resettlers and disaster victims often describe their experience "like a dream?" I wondered if a focus upon the political and economic dimensions of involuntary resettlement had led us to ignore subtle, important social dimensions of such events - hidden dimensions that might prove crucial to mitigating social impoverishment and, perhaps, facilitate political and economic restoration.

My discomfort could easily be assuaged if resettlement policy and practice were based on a firm theory of spatial and temporal dislocation which explained why and how social disarticulation occurred. It is not. Fortunately, the building blocks for construction of a powerful theory of social dislocation are scattered about in the form of bits and pieces of observations, concepts, and insights from every conceivable discipline and in all the cracks in between. Outside of the arena of displacement, almost every social scientist worthy of note has probably, at some point, struggled with social definitions of time and space although only a handful have worked on the dysfunctional situation where this order is disrupted.

Social Geometry

For most, culture answers what I prefer to call "primary questions." Primary questions are: Who are we? Where are we? Why do people live and die? What are our responsibilities to others and ourselves? In everyday life, the answers are routinely provided, leaving it up to the individual to focus upon tactical problems. How might I move to a more desirable location, how might I make minor adjustments within my own backyard? Life focuses upon repairing broken doors, collecting firewood, getting from one well-known place to another, gaining access to restricted places/situations by performing routine events such as going to school, paying for admissions, or working for income to facilitate tactical adjustments to life. The routine culture is what social scientists normally describe. In routine culture, people navigate within a space-time continuum in which they chart their positions I within socially-constructed time, socially-constructed space, and among socially-constructed personages. ³

Victims of involuntary resettlement, natural disasters and refugees experience an unexpected destabilization of routines. In rural cultures whose group and self definitions are inexorably interlocked with their knowledge of their local environment, resettlement can devalue their shared survival skills and lead to what Barabas and Bartolome (1992) have called "ethnocide." From the perspective I am proposing, relocates are forced to re-examine their primary cultural questions - where are we? And, for most, this means, also re-examining "who are we?"

Properties of Spatial-Temporal Order

The disruption occurs along multiple dimensions of a culturally arbitrary, but nonetheless meaningful spatial-temporal order. I wish to identify ten salient properties of the social space-time continuum, demonstrate how they appear in displacement situations, and then turn to ways in which this knowledge might be used to mitigate social impoverishment. Although my anthropological training tempts me to draw on exotic spatial-temporal orders (cf. Fabian 1992), I will try to draw my examples from an English speaking-culture.

Multi-dimensionality. Most cultures command a vast repertoire of concepts and coordinates of time and space which overshadow the mechanistic, equal interval measures (Bock 1968, Sutro and Downing 1988, Hall 1959, Low 1992, Turner 1990). Within the narrow temporal confines of measuring the time of day, Frake (1993) observes great variation in how societies slice time. Culturally specific interval time systems include variations in the numbers of minutes in an hour, Canonical hours, Jewish hours, astrological signs, Saint Day cycles, and Greek hours. The evolution of Western technology is tightly linked with a struggle to create mechanical analogues of socially meaningful time.

Recent first-hand, cross-cultural evidence has revealed rich variations in constructions of time, especially among indigenous peoples (Layton 1994). These constructions need not depend upon a written tradition. To highlight only the most obvious constructions, consider festival calendars, planting and harvesting calendars, weekly marketing calendars, and so on). In many societies, the organization of time has become a major political resource and its control varies with competing elements of a society (de Pina-Cabral 1994, Males 1994, Elazar 1994, Rutz 1992).

Space and time are socially defined and ordered in many ways. Time may be linear (1993, 1994, 1995) containing within it sets of repetitive, cyclical orders (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.., night/day, lunar cycles, and so on). Temporal- spatial orders may be shared with larger groups (a national festive calendar, Mexico City as the capital), or regional (market days and regional fairs), local (patron saint's days, unique historical events, harvest calendars) and even familial (wedding anniversaries). Social geometry shows properties of inclusion both temporally (e.g. second, minute, hour, day, year) and spatially (e.g. yard, neighborhood, barrio, town, county, state, nation, continent). Orders may also be temporally sequential (baby, child, teenager, adult, old and spatially sequential (gate, courtyard, entrance, house). Complex orderings may involve a sequential intersection of time, space and personages (baptism, confirmation, first communion, marriage). In brief, it follows that societies have many social geometries - alternative logic constructs of order. A social spatial-temporal continuum may be simultaneously "occupied." For example, a person might be in Mexico City, at the doorway to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and having a birthday. Intangibility. Cultural spaces and times are often intangible, but real. They need not occupy the physical universe familiar to an engineer. Imagined spatial orders have more meaning, power, and importance in the role of human experience than concretely experienced social orders (Riley 1994). We do not need anthropological fieldwork in the third world in order to understand this. Millions of Christians share familiarity with places to which they have never been and may never reach - Calvary and Heaven. Social groups can be expected to hold special rights to times and places - an ownership as socially recognized and often more respected than a legal title.

Behavioral ordering. Patterns of social behavior are associated with culturally recognized spaces and times - be they tangible or not. The particular configurations of the geometry create order in the form of finite expectations for social actors and action. They provide human beings with productive rules for acting appropriately in different situations (Hall 1959, Bock 1968). Catholics, for example, expect a Mass at the hinge of a socially-constructed time (Sunday, weddings, funerals, political transitions), place (altar in the Church), and personage (Priest). Remove any of the three element and something is amiss. Economists quickly learn this when they try to provide rural resettlers with a subsidy for crop losses as a protection against social disorder. Harvest is not simply an output of a commodity. It is the association of familiar people at a particular place in biotemporal cycle.

Prioritization. Social geometries are also prioritized. Profound differences have been detected between ordinary and extraordinary spatial and temporal orders (Altman and Low 1994). Times and places, just like people, are frequently ranked with some being more valued than others (weekends > workdays, and Sunday > Monday in Christian societies). Prioritized orders often validate fundamental social values and beliefs. For example, the highest valence possible in the Catholic spatial-temporal order occurs when a high valence time in their religious calendar - Easter, intersects a high valence place in their spatial order - the Vatican, and a high valence personage in the social organization - the Pope. The high valence geometry - Easter/Vatican/Pope is linked to the expectation of a message for Peace and Hope directed to the World and a High Mass. Barring the Apocalypse, a thousand Easters from now, the intersection of three dimensions should recreate the same sense of awe among the faithful, and tangibly demonstrate the eternalness of the Church.

As groups are threatened with forced relocation, they experience unparalleled disruptions of routine behaviors. The spatial-temporal geometry fails to answer primary cultural questions. Undoubtedly, there are many possible social responses to this situation. One that I have identified is what might I call the "high frequency accentuation" hypothesis. In response to a threat, the group increases the frequency of heretofore occasional, high priority events - attempting to bind the community together. . In June of 1994, I had the opportunity to observe support for my hypothesis in a community being relocated by the Zimapan hydroelectric project. Before relocation, each year people from the small Catholic community of La Vega moved their village patron saint from one private household to another and celebrated a special mass. Immediately following resettlement, the saint began weekly rather than annual visits, moving from one relocated household to the next as the community struggled to reaffirm and reestablish its identity. Whether or not high frequency accentuation actually mitigates social impoverishment needs further testing.

Moral ordering. Social status and moral correctness is usually associated with access or exclusion of certain kinds of people to certain places at certain times. Highly structured inclusion (and exclusion) of categories of people to particular places at particular times is the essence of sacredness. In the Southwestern US, Brasil, and among the aborigines of Western Australia, anthropologists have found indigenous peoples use spatially anchored narratives for moral teachings (Low 1994, Fabian 1992, Basso 1984). In these cases, spatial attachment need not necessarily require or even be related to legal ownership of place. Gender, age and rank specificity. Perhaps the most obvious finding of social geometry is that specific behaviors and expectations are associated with people of different age, sex and rank being and not being in particular places at particular times. Gender differences change over a lifespan (that is, with time). In US culture, Marcus found that men are "more likely to replay childhood patterns in terms of layout and form of the house, while women are more likely to do this in relation to furniture or movable objects " (Marcus 1994). A key element of enculturation, the process of learning a culture, involves distinguishing the spatial-temporal appropriate behaviors of sex, age, and rank (Pellow 1994, Douglas 1973). Pellow (1994), following Giddens (1984), has shown how the urban courtyards in Accra, Ghana provide a place for multiple settings in which social conduct is chronically reproduced and newcomers, particularly women, may learn urban forms of interaction and gain new identities.

Imbeddeness. Forming the basis of routine interaction, social geometries are often as conservative as they are arbitrary. The seven day week is the most obvious example of an artificial, mathematical rhythm disassociate with nature that set the cadence for most of the world's cultural activities. Three of the great religions may differ on what day of the week the cycle peaks, but they share conservative agreement as to the number of days in a week. In both the French or Russian Revolutions, unsuccessful and, for some, fatal attempts were made to change the number of days in a week (Zurubavel 1985).

Imbeddedness is also evident within the lifespan of individual members of the culture. Research on environmental memories has discovered the near universality of fondly remembered childhood places, representing the intersection of culturally constructed time and place (Marcus 1994). In more mobile societies, continuity of environmental memories is more rooted in things - movable, storable, shippable - rather than in attachment to a concrete physical space. This finding is particularly important for those

working on urban resettlement. Attachment to objects filled with memories substantially increases with age (Marcus 1994, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Resettlement practice, but not theory, has long recognized the need for special consideration of more elderly in a society, who seem more likely to show higher mortality and anomie (Ault 1994).

Dissatisfaction with existing orders. Resettlement practitioners are learning that one-for-one restoration of existing spatial arrangements may not necessarily mitigate social impoverishment. Existing spatial and temporal arrangements are not always optimal. Witness how some people periodically rearrange their person space. At the resettlement which recently took place at the Aguamilpa hydroelectric dam in Western Mexico, architects and anthropologists worked side by side to design four different house types which followed traditional indigenous, Huichol design principles (Guggenheim 1993:221). Guggenheim reports "the families hated the new houses." The designers assumed that the Huichol wanted traditional thatched roofs. In response, a Huichol noted that "thatch may look very refreshing and folkloric for you who comes from far away, but you don't have to live with scorpions falling into your soup every time you sit down to dinner." Thatch was the best material that they could afford. At the Zimapan hydroelectric dam, I discovered that, at the last minute, several male heads of households hastily rearranged meticulously planned, spatial layouts of houselots in a new community to decrease contact with their mother-in-laws! Nor can one expect intra-society uniformity of satisfaction. Environmental memory research has found that some people choose to reproduce the essence of their childhood spatial arrangements in adulthood, while others choose to create a contrasting environment.

Attachment to space and time. Attachment to space and time can be a powerful binding force for displaced social groups. Oliver-Smith's (1986) work on the cultural responses in aftermath of a 1970 Peruvian earthquake is an exemplar of the widely reported bereavement and symbolic importance of attachment to place and its role in reconstruction of community identity. Similarly, Setha Low (1994:169) notes that

"the longing of exiled people and refugees to return to their homeland, and the importance of the symbolic existence of that homeland (as in the case of Israel), suggests that loss or destruction of place is as powerful an attachment as its presence."

In a comparable matter, attachment to time, a particular constructed history, may be equally powerful force for binding people to one another. Evidence of this is emerging in exciting new research on the values indigenous peoples attached to cultural constructs of "their past" (Layton 1994). Temporal-spatial identification systems may be unexpected quite extensive and subtly - extend beyond small settlements. Recent work in southern Mexico shows that culturally constructed time may be encoded into the landscape and take on concrete architectural form. Archaeologist working at the famous ancient city of Monte-Alban found that the length of adjacent ball-courts and the distances between ceremonial sites were proportionate to the ratio of number of days in the Zapotec astronomical and ceremonial calendars (Peeler and Winter 1993). In a display of genius foreshadowing modern relativity, the Zapotecs have architecturally united their organization of space and time.

Control, manipulation and recreation. Landscape architect studies have shown that control over meaningful space; manipulation of that space by means of construction, subtle changes, decoration, modification, and the recreation of previous settings in the

future - help people define who they are. In urban areas, for example, the ability of the resettled person to re-create the interior of their home in a new apartment, and to find a parallel in the layout of rooms, increased their chances of positively adjusting to a move (Marcus 1994).

Observational Support

If socio-temporal order gives a society predictability, sets priorities, and meaning, its destruction may render social life chaotic, unpredictable and meaningless. Involuntary relocation overloads a society with uncertainties and disorder. In large scale infra-structure projects, such as hydroelectric dams, spatial-temporal dislocation can begin months before the physical relocation. As construction work begins, the routine order of daily life and the landscape is fractured by unscheduled high explosives, creating a demonstrable uneasiness among the population (Inga-Lill Arronson, personal communication 1993). . From the perspective of social geometry, social dislocations accompany involuntary resettlement may change some of the spatial temporal dimensions which define a peoples identity, threaten intangible spaces and moral order, modify behavioral orders, set new priorities and have a differential impact on people depending on their age, sex and rank. Hopefully, resettlement may offer some or all of those being resettled an opportunity to correct dissatisfactions with the previous order. Lets look at six discernible patterns.

Relocated and disaster struck communities show what some might consider an irrational attachment to inexact, prioritized spatial-temporal orders. In Central Mexico, three adjacent riverine mestizo peasant communities near the Zimapan dam were relocated to a nearby arid, riverless plateau. Potable water was piped in from 23 kilometers away and no water was available for irrigation. Early in the project, resettlers were permitted to rename the principal street in their new town. To the surprise of outside observers, they named their principal street River Boulevard. The local resettlement team reported serious conflicts between rival community claims over who had the right to live on the right bank of "River street," in a position identical to their previous location. A few months later, they selected the new name for their arid, hilltop community: Bella Vista del Rio (BeautifulView of the River). But the river is no where in sight.

Cernea offers another example of ingenious solutions to spatial-temporal distortion. In Fugian Province, China, involuntary resettlement gave Chinese peasants families a rare opportunity. Young people from large, extended families could obtain new houseplots, but the issue became "where?" In the local social geometry, house sites adjacent to the main road were more valuable. Only a few could have choice locations and the potential for internal conflict was evident. The dissatisfaction was rectified by the peasants, who revamped their lottery system to permit the drawing of a cluster of 2-3 housesites (Cernea, personal communications Nov. 1994). The element of chance, which plays a powerful role in social geometry, was reintroduced into an over-structured, planning exercise.

The power of the continuum - the attachment to prior conceptions of socio- cultural space - has been witnessed again and again in disasters. Following the devastation of Hurricane Andrew in 1990, families in Homestead, Florida preferred to camp among the ruins of the homes rather than accept government shelter - often maintaining

precisely the same spatial arrangements in the streets that were present in their now obliterated apartments. A comparable attachment was witnessed following the 1978 Mexico City earthquake, when families camped in front of the rubble of their fallen apartment houses - in some cases maintaining the same spatial referents which they had to their neighbors. Something is occurring which goes beyond a rudimentary defense of what might remain of one's property.

It follows that re-establishment of spatial-temporal prioritization and order is an important part of the recovery process. An American television network's videotape crew followed one of the 200,000 families left homeless by this hurricane - the Lucketts (ABC 1992). The Lucketts are an extended, 65 person matriarchal clan who, before the disaster, occupied 16 homes in Homestead, Florida. Homeless, without belongings, they were temporarily relocated in a High School Auditorium. The Lockett clan's women concentrated on reestablishing the routine organization of the family, focusing on the children. The women stressed that it is important that the children be fed "three meals a day, bath, and get to bed on time." At the shelter, each part of the family organized a small, personal space. The children's behavior in their socially defined space was of considerable concern as the mothers struggled to establish where they perceived the children should and should not go within the school auditorium and yard. They made in an unstated contract with the relief officials. The matriarch told the interviewer "if the children don't get out of line...don't go where they're not supposed to...then we won't get kicked out into the streets." Re-establishment of temporal priorities was evident when the entire gymnasium of relocatees joined in celebrating what might normally be an insignificant familial ritual - a birthday party, as a human-scale temporal regularity returned to an incomprehensible large disaster.

Social geometry provides insights into another problem. Following Hurricane Andrews, the Lockett matriarch stumbled through the ruins of what, a week before, was her home. She described her post-relocation situation "like a dream in which you wake up." In June 1994 in Central Mexico, I listened to a distraught young wife describing her loss following our visit to a mountain top where we watched a new reservoir slowly flood what had been, for many generations, her family's home. Using almost identical words, she describe her feelings "like a dream. Someday I will wake up." In both cases, the women's expressions are more than metaphors. In human experience, dreams are thoughts disoriented in time and space (Friedlander 1940). They represent another geometry which is divorced from the elaborate, ordered conscious geometries which characterize waking life. From the perspective of social geometry, both women's descriptions were correct.

The spatial-temporal order influences which segments of a population will be affected by social dislocation. This sometimes yields unexpected results. Investigations following the devastating 1976 Guatemala earthquake uncovered an unusual age-specific mortality pattern. Eighty percent of the children casualties occurred to the penultimate child in the birth order (Kates 1973). Rural, Indigenous Guatemalans suffered heavy casualties. In this culture, it is common for the youngest child to sleep next to the mother and the penultimate child sleeps with the elder brothers and sisters. The quake struck at 3:05 am on 4 February. The youngest were protected by the parents when the quake hit, but the weakest child, the penultimate child, was the most exposed to danger. Consequently, the socio-spatial and socio-temporal sleeping patterns exposed a particular segment of the population to higher mortality.

For sometime, I was puzzled by the apparent resiliency of children to involuntary resettlement and natural disasters. Within days of the disaster, the children of the Lockett clan gleefully played basketball in the relocation camp. Within two weeks of what, to the adults, was a traumatic relocation in Zimapan, Mexico - adults locked themselves in their new suburban style houses, complete with satellite dishes, while children played tag in the new town's streets. I was mistaken. I was not witnessing resiliency, but support for the theory of social geometries. Children have rudimentary spatial-temporal orders (times: play, eat, and rest//space: home, neighbors, street) unaffected by the more complex orders that they will ultimately learn to respect and value. It is a quality which Hotchkiss (1967) identified as the non-person status of a child which permits them almost unrestricted freedom of egress and ingress and, he argues, makes them ideal spies. It is the same quality which makes them more resilient to relocation, since they are less tied to the complex of learned social geometries of adults.

Policy and Other Implications

For over fifteen years, development anthropologists and sociologists - lead by their colleagues in the World Bank - have painstakingly crafted a policy framework to mitigate the harmful economic and social impacts of involuntary resettlement (Cernea 1993b, Kardam 1993).⁴ An architect of the policy and Senior Advisor on Social Policy at the World Bank notes that resettlement policy has been enhanced by the feedback between theoretical assumptions about change and lessons gleaned from development projects (Cernea 1993b). As feedback and theory have changed, the policy frameworks have been updated and refined (World Bank 1994). Identification of the eight forms of impoverishment, mentioned at the onset, is a relatively recent example of this knowledge-based policy.

At this point, the theory of social impoverishment seems to be edging ahead of policy development. Presently, resettlement policies pay minimal attention to mitigating spatial dislocation and almost no attention to relieving temporal dislocation. World Bank policy (OD 4.30 para. 7) and OECD guidelines propose identical language - "reducing dispersion, sustaining existing patterns of group organization, and retaining access to cultural property (temples, pilgrimage centers, etc.) if necessary through the relocation of that property (OECD 1991)."⁵ In the realm of want-to-be policies, the American Anthropological Association Whitepaper on Involuntary Resettlement goes further, introducing an element of temporality - reducing social costs by making the move as quickly as possible and avoiding temporary holding facilities (AAA 1991). In light of the preceding discussion, it is apparent that the policies are culturally naive. Practice supports this judgement. A simple decision to displace a population to a location proximate to that of origin does not necessarily reduce human and social costs (Lightfoot 1979).

On the positive note, resettlement practitioners who are directly responsible for resettlement operations as well as many of those who are displaced are well aware of the dislocation problems that I have identified in this discussion. Some have, with minimal theoretical or policy guidance, forged solutions of their own. In Western Mexico, for example, Huichol resettlers worked with anthropologists to record not just sites being inundated, but to create a symbolic reference map for the new sites (Guggenheim 1993:224). In Zimapan, Mexico, the centrality of the bandstand (kiosk)

to community life was recognized and each of the three communities was provided with a spatial area for performing recurring temporal events. Government engineers wisely postponed a scheduled relocation until after the annual village festival and organized a new festival was introduced to celebrate the founding of the new town. The relocation was stressful, but peaceful. Comparable sensitivity is reported on the successful resettlement at the Costa Rican Arenal Hydroelectric project (Partridge 1993).

Drawing policy lessons from these isolated cases is risky. The sensitivity of people to social and temporal displacement varies markedly between as well as within groups. Some show minimal disorientation. Others become almost culturally dysfunctional. This variation forces policies to identify at high risk groups. It appears that peoples with long-standing relationships to their environment, especially rural indigenous populations, will be more likely to need special attention.

The combination of theoretical findings and development experience strongly suggests that social impoverishment of displaced people can be mitigated by intentionally repairing fractured social geometries. The solution requires resettlement policy step outside the narrow arena of economic rehabilitation and technological fixes. It requires solid, innovative ethnographic work to complement aerial photography, conventional mapping, demographic surveys, and socio-economic censuses. And it requires close scientific collaboration between the displaced and the cultural analyst which could never be accomplished in a windshield visit to a relocation area.

Positive actions to reduce social impoverishment include:

1. Field Reviews. Policy development will emerge from the interchange of the rich, on-going research into spatial-temporal organization and the growing practical experiences of resettlement projects. Cases of development-induced displacement should be reviewed to uncover serendipitous or intentional actions which helped people reestablish their social geometry. How did they find (new?) answers to primary cultural questions, especially "where are we?" and "who are we?" The results of this rich experience should be codified into systematic social knowledge.

2. Social geometric analysis. A cross-culturally applicable, rapid assessment methodology must be developed to discover the social geometries of people into the project planning and execution. Minimally, the method would i) identify and prioritize the times and places which people regard as critical to their society, ii) identify intra-group differences which are likely to be effected by social dislocation (e.g. religious, gender or class differences), and iii) find areas of dissatisfaction which might provide a potential ray of hope for planning a future following displacement. The methodology might adapt techniques used to study "attachment to space" to the analysis to understand the social geometric matrix of time/space/person. Likely remodeling candidates for creative adaptation are spatial memory studies, environmental autobiographies, role playing, behavioral mapping, and favorite place analysis as well as more formal ethnographic methods.

3. Theory building. Much work remains to refine the theory of social geometries, starting with a synthesis of over a century of insightful intellectual efforts to understand spatial-temporal organization which is disbursed throughout many disciplines.

4. Open dialogues. Awareness of the social impoverishment problem may increase by encouraging in-house discussions and workshops within development agencies and non-governmental organizations. Those to be displaced must also be provided an opportunity to examine and search for ways to protect what might be an heretofore hidden dimension of their culture.

5. Refinement of operational indicators for project performance. Social impoverishment indicators of spatial-temporal disruptions should provide "early warnings" of more serious social and economic dysfunction in a displaced population. Development and monitoring of social geometric indicators may be injected into project cycles. This would include explicit recognition of the threat of social impoverishment and planning for its mitigation. At minimum, operations would include pre-resettlement social geometry surveys and plans to mitigate social impoverishment in culturally acceptable ways, with full participation of members of the affected population in both initial study and the reconstruction.

6. Determination of Rates of Return. It is highly probable that minimizing social impoverishment and economic impoverishment are mutually reinforcing actions. A review might be undertaken to determine if the rates of return of projects which resolved socio-temporal disruptions were than the higher rates of return of those that did not, in a fashion comparable to the classic World Bank study by Kottak (1991).

Conclusion

Each year, another 10 million people become involuntarily displaced and risk social impoverishment (World Bank 1994). Social impoverishment occurs when the displaced are unable to answer the primary cultural question - where are we? For many, the answer to this question also defines "who are we?" Reconstruction of the lives of the displaced demands carefully, coordinated economic and social action. It requires a theory capable of explaining how displacement leads to social impoverishment. I advocated a theory of social geometry, finding that the answers to primary questions are encoded in the linkage of socially-constructed places, socially-constructed time, and socially-constructed personages. This linkage provides a framework for routine and ritual activities. Weaken the framework and social impoverishment becomes likely. Reconstruct it and increase the likelihood of meaningful reconstruction of the lives of the displaced.

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1. In Understanding Impoverishment: The Consequences of Development-Induced Displacement. In C. McDowell (ed.). Oxford and Providence, RI : Berghahn Press. 1996. Pp.34-48.
2. My appreciation to Thomas Weaver, Edward Hall, Michael Cernea, Scott Guggenheim, Inga-Lill Arronson, Anthony Oliver-Smith, Rohn Eloul, and Gilbert Kushner for comments on an earlier version.
3. Social geometry requires the social scientists to remove their disciplinary blinders which needlessly limit their field of view to social organization.
4. By 1995, the policy framework has been extended to only a few other international donors (BID and OECD) and countries.
5. It remains an untested proposition that the sacredness of a site is linked to its geographic coordinates. Certainly major conflicts in Jerusalem could be resolved if it were possible to move or relocate temples and pilgrimage centers (the physical structures) without regard to their physical location!

Natural Hazards Observer
Vol. XXIX No. 2 November 2004
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Disasters Waiting to Happen . . . Sixth in a Series

What if Hurricane Ivan Had Not Missed New Orleans?

Author's Note: This column was originally intended to be the final disaster in the "Disasters Waiting to Happen" series. As I was developing the hypothetical situation depicting a devastating hurricane striking New Orleans, Louisiana, the disaster waiting to happen threatened to become a reality: Hurricane Ivan, a category 4 hurricane (with 140 mph winds) fluctuating to a category 5 (up to 155 mph winds), was slowly moving directly toward New Orleans. Forecasters were predicting a one-in-four chance that Ivan would remain on this direct path and would be an "extreme storm" at landfall. In reality, the storm veered to the north and made landfall east of Mobile Bay, Alabama, causing devastation and destruction well into the central Gulf shoreline and throughout the Southeast and the Mid-Atlantic states.

What if Ivan Had Hit New Orleans?

New Orleans was spared, this time, but had it not been, Hurricane Ivan would have:

Pushed a 17-foot storm surge into Lake Pontchartrain; Caused the levees between the lake and the city to overtop and fill the city "bowl" with water from lake levee to river levee, in some places as deep as 20 feet; Flooded the north shore suburbs of

Lake Pontchartrain with waters pushing as much as seven miles inland; and Inundated inhabited areas south of the Mississippi River.

Up to 80 percent of the structures in these flooded areas would have been severely damaged from wind and water. The potential for such extensive flooding and the resulting damage is the result of a levee system that is unable to keep up with the increasing flood threats from a rapidly eroding coastline and thus unable to protect the ever-subsiding landscape.

Evacuation Challenges

Researchers have estimated that prior to a big one, approximately 700,000 residents of the greater New Orleans area (out of 1.2 million) would evacuate. In the case of Hurricane Ivan, officials estimate that up to 600,000 evacuated from metropolitan New Orleans between daybreak on Monday, September 13 and noon on Wednesday, September 15, when the storm turned and major roads finally started to clear.

To aid in the evacuation, transportation officials instituted contraflow evacuation for the first time in the area's history whereby both lanes of a 12-mile stretch of Interstate 10 were used to facilitate the significantly increased outbound flow of traffic toward the northwest and Baton Rouge. The distance of the contraflow was limited due to state police concerns about the need for staff to close the exits. And, although officials were initially pleased with the results, evacuees felt the short distance merely shifted the location of the major jams.

These feelings were justified by the amount of time it took residents to evacuate up to 11 hours to go the distance usually traveled in less than 1.5. For many who evacuated into Texas, total evacuation time frequently exceeded 20 hours. Since the storm, a consensus has developed that to alleviate this congestion much more secondary highway coordination is necessary throughout the state, contraflow needs to be considered for much greater distances, residents who are able and willing to evacuate early must be doubly encouraged to do so, families with multiple cars need to be discouraged from taking more than one unless they are needed to accommodate evacuees, and all modes of transportation in their various configurations must be fully considered for the contributions they can make to a safe and effective evacuation.

The major challenge to evacuation is the extremely limited number of evacuation routes, which is the result of the same topography and hydrology responsible for the area's high level of hurricane risk. The presence of the Mississippi River, several lakes and bays, and associated marshes and swamps necessitates very expensive roadway construction techniques that are generally destructive to the environment, making the addition of more arteries increasingly challenging. This problem of limited evacuation routes also plagues the rest of the delta plain of southeast and south central Louisiana.

The fact that 600,000 residents evacuated means an equal number did not. Recent evacuation surveys show that two thirds of non-evacuees with the means to evacuate chose not to leave because they felt safe in their homes. Other non-evacuees with

means relied on a cultural tradition of not leaving or were discouraged by negative experiences with past evacuations.

For those without means, the medically challenged, residents without personal transportation, and the homeless, evacuation requires significant assistance. The medically challenged often rely on life support equipment and are in such fragile states of health that they can only be moved short distances to medically equipped shelters. While a large storm-resistant structure with appropriate equipment has yet to be constructed or retrofitted, the Superdome was used to shelter nonevacuees during Ivan.

Residents who did not have personal transportation were unable to evacuate even if they wanted to. Approximately 120,000 residents (51,000 housing units x 2.4 persons/unit) do not have cars. A proposal made after the evacuation for Hurricane Georges to use public transit buses to assist in their evacuation out of the city was not implemented for Ivan. If Ivan had struck New Orleans directly it is estimated that 40-60,000 residents of the area would have perished.

Unwilling to merely accept this reality, emergency managers and representatives of nongovernmental disaster organizations, local universities, and faith based organizations have formed a working group to engage additional faith-based organizations in developing ride-sharing programs between congregation members with cars and those without. In the wake of Ivan's near miss, this faith-based initiative has become a catalyst in the movement to make evacuation assistance for marginalized groups (those without means of evacuation) a top priority for all levels of government.

To the Rescue

If a hurricane of a magnitude similar to Ivan does strike New Orleans, the challenges surrounding rescue efforts for those who have not evacuated will be different from other coastal areas. Rescue teams would have to don special breathing equipment to protect themselves from floodwaters contaminated with chemicals and toxins released from commercial sources within the city and the petrochemical plants that dot the river's edge. Additionally, tank cars carrying hazardous materials, which constantly pass through the city, would likely be damaged, leaking their contents into the floodwater and adding to the brew. The floodwater could become so polluted that the Environmental Protection Agency might consider it to be hazardous waste and prohibit it from being pumped out of the leveed areas into the lake and marshes until treated.

Regional and national rescue resources would have to respond as rapidly as possible and would require augmentation by local private vessels (assuming some survived). And, even with this help, federal and state governments have estimated that it would take 10 days to rescue all those stranded within the city. No shelters within the city would be free of risk from rising water.

Because of this threat, the American Red Cross will not open shelters in New Orleans during hurricanes greater than category 2; staffing them would put employees and volunteers at risk. For Ivan, only the Superdome was made available as a refuge of last resort for the medically challenged and the homeless.

The Aftermath

In this hypothetical storm scenario, it is estimated that it would take nine weeks to pump the water out of the city, and only then could assessments begin to determine what buildings were habitable or salvageable. Sewer, water, and the extensive forced drainage pumping systems would be damaged. National authorities would be scrambling to build tent cities to house the hundreds of thousands of refugees unable to return to their homes and without other relocation options. In the aftermath of such a disaster, New Orleans would be dramatically different, and likely extremely diminished, from what it is today. Unlike the posthurricane development surges that have occurred in coastal beach communities, the cost of rebuilding the city of New Orleans and the dramatically damaged infrastructure would reduce the likelihood of a similar economic recovery. And, the unique culture of this American original that contributed jazz and so much more to the American culture would be lost.

Accepting the Reality

Should this disaster become a reality, it would undoubtedly be one of the greatest disasters, if not the greatest, to hit the United States, with estimated costs exceeding 100 billion dollars. According to the American Red Cross, such an event could be even more devastating than a major earthquake in California. Survivors would have to endure conditions never before experienced in a North American disaster.

Loss of the coastal marshes that dampened earlier storm surges puts the city at increasing risk to hurricanes. Eighty years of substantial river leveeing has prevented spring flood deposition of new layers of sediment into the marshes, and a similarly lengthy period of marsh excavation activities related to oil and gas exploration and transportation canals for the petrochemical industry have threatened marsh integrity. Sea level rise is expected to further accelerate the loss of these valuable coastal wetlands, the loss of which jeopardizes the fabric of Louisiana communities by threatening the harvesting of natural resources, an integral part of coastal culture. Concerted efforts by state and federal agencies are underway to develop appropriate restoration technologies and adequate funding to implement them.

The Future is Now

These solutions may not be able to overtake the speed of coastal loss. Strong storms not only threaten human lives, but also the physical coast itself. National hurricane experts predict more active and powerful hurricane seasons in the Atlantic basin for the next 10-40 years. The hurricane scenario for New Orleans that these converging risks portend is almost unimaginable. Hurricane Ivan had the potential to make the unthinkable a reality. Next time New Orleans may not be so fortunate.

Shirley Laska
Center for Hazards Assessment, Response and Technology
University of New Orleans

Dear all,

This morning the "New York Times" reports a deadly fire in Egypt. It seems to have been handled by the Egyptian authorities in a way that reminds me of the U.S. federal response to Katrina -- confusion, little information available for the affected, highly visible use of heavily armed military. I was struck by a quote by one of those grieving, "They don't care about us," referring to the government (<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/07/international/africa/07egypt.html?th&emc=th>).

Over the past week we have read and heard statements that echo that perception of national government by the speaker in Egypt.

This brings to mind Ulrich Beck's book, "The Risk Society," and the question of what the basis of legitimate authority of the nation state is, or should be, in the 21st Century. A few years ago I published in the U.N. Chronicle and elsewhere an appeal for development of an international treaty that would assert protection from avoidable harm in extreme natural events to be a duty of the nation state. I suggested that this protection should be seen as a positive human right (<http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2000/issue4/0400p6p.htm>).

That was 2001. By 2005 the forces of economic globalization and neo-liberal ideology in the U.S. and many other countries have further eroded support for a "rights driven" approach to human development. The "culture of prevention" has been reinterpreted in the U.S. as a matter of individual responsibility. "Lean government," and "less government" have become uncriticized standards that are being exported and imposed on poor countries as part of debt forgiveness conditionality.

Meanwhile the phrase "good government" and "governance" is on every lip in U.N. agencies, donor country aid agencies, NGOs, and was heard echoing through the conference rooms on Port Island, Kobe, Japan during the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005.

What all of this suggests to me is that the political aftermath of Katrina is not simply "political" in the short term sense of electoral challenge, "spin," and Congressional investigations. The situation in the U.S. and elsewhere raises fundamental questions about the function and legitimacy of the nation state. Beck's inspiration is Jurgen Habermas, a great political philosopher. One of his seminal works was, indeed, entitled, "Legitimation Crisis."

Ben Wisner
bwisner@igc.org

The Katrina page is a valuable addition to "Disaster Diplomacy." However, I hope that the page is a first approximation that will be further nuanced and serve as a base line for monitoring future developments.

On the page as it stands tensions around economic and trade issues are not singled out explicitly. Ilan writes more generally of "significant sources of conflict or recent political disagreement." It would be good to look more closely at the kinds of geopolitical and economic conflicts subsumed in this general statement.

Also, one might ask if in the future such positive offers of assistance have any impact on the negotiating climate and resolution of such disputes and conflicts. This is a broader question (and one, of course, more difficult to answer) than simply whether assistance gestures are likely to be reciprocated.

Once more -- a very good start and a valuable addition.

Ben Wisner
bwisner@igc.org

-----Original Message-----

From: Ilan Kelman <ilan_kelman@hotmail.com>
Sent: Sep 11, 2005 11:01 AM
To: radix@ecie.org
Subject: [Radix] Katrina Disaster Diplomacy

Dear Radix,

A Hurricane Katrina Disaster Diplomacy page has been created at <http://www.disasterdiplomacy.org/katrina.html>. Comments, contributions, and corrections would be welcome. Countries which are traditionally friendly with the U.S.A. (e.g. Canada, the U.K., Saudi Arabia, and Yemen) are currently not listed, but I would be happy to add those if the wider applicability of disaster diplomacy might be relevant. Countries which are traditionally unfriendly with the U.S.A. but where the status might be changing (e.g. China and India) are listed.

Thank you to George Kent for his disaster diplomacy suggestion which now appears as a section on "Discrimination in Disaster Aid" at <http://www.disasterdiplomacy.org/casestudies.html#discrimination>. The research and practice question would be how culture, race, ethnicity, or religion of the parties involved does or does not affect disaster diplomacy. Again, comments, contributions, and corrections would be welcome.

And continuing thanks to Radix, Ben Wisner, and Maureen Fordham for continuing to provide a forum and impetus for these discussions,

Ilan

This mailing list is provided by ECIE.ORG for RADIX
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Radix - Radical Interpretations of Disaster:

http://online.northumbria.ac.uk/geography_research/radix/

I am forwarding this to the Radix list because it would be best to have one consolidated conversation about the code idea.

Aloha, George

Begin forwarded message:

From: George Kent <kent@hawaii.edu>

Date: September 10, 2005 12:29:31 PM HST

To: lkc+@pitt.edu

Subject: Re: [Radix] Katrina, "good governance", a legitimization crisis of the state

Louise, I'm not sure I agree. To draw an analogy, pressing for clear articulation of human rights, and formal commitments to them, is worthwhile, in my view, even if the implementation mechanisms are weak.

In the Katrina case, there may have been some established standards, but who knows what they are? Part of the reason for elaborating a code is to let the general public and interested civil society organizations know what standards they can use to hold their governments accountable. The act of publicly discussing such a code can be useful even if it is not finally implemented.

To put this another way, political work is sometimes useful even when it is not ultimately successful. I don't see any down side to pressing for a code.

I take that back. The major down-side risk is that if you set minimum standards, governments might have diminished motivations to exceed that standard. That can be a serious problem. One way to deal with this is to make sure the code does not set overly modest standards.

Aloha, George

On Sep 10, 2005, at 11:47 AM, lkc+@pitt.edu wrote:

Hi George, Ben and friends,

Developing an international code is a good basic idea, but only as good in practice as the capacity to implement and enforce it.

There was no lack of "standards" for response to the Katrina/flood disaster. There was a newly revised National Response Plan approved and sitting on FEMA's shelves; there was a National Incident Management Plan that had been rehearsed with very expensive exercises, one two years ago in New Orleans with a Category 4 hurricane as the incident.

What we have seen in New Orleans is colossal failure of government to act -- at all levels -- when surely the resources, knowledge, standards of performance were available.

Regrettably, we cannot "mandate" effective leadership, which was regrettably missing in this disaster -- again, at all levels of operation.

The difficult task is enabling a community to take action to assess the risks to which it is exposed, marshal the resources to mitigate the risk, and engage the wider society in this process.

Cheers,
Louise

/snip/

++++
Professor George Kent
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Skype ID: geokent

New book: Freedom from Want: The Human Right to Adequate Food
<http://press.georgetown.edu/detail.html?session=f80018376d1010423757bebf973d493c&cat=1&id=1589010566>

I hope Tim won't mind my sharing this exchange with the Radix list--so that we are all in one conversation about the code idea.

Aloha, George

Begin forwarded message:

From: George Kent <kent@hawaii.edu>
Date: September 10, 2005 7:56:24 AM HST
To: tim.symonds@shevolution.com
Subject: Re: [Radix] Katrina, "good governance", a legitimization crisis of the state

Tim, the code is something that ought to be in place before disasters, as an instrument that facilitates more effective disaster planning. It would be put into place during calm times, not crisis times.

The code should be relevant for both natural and "man-made" disasters, but politically it would be easier to orient it mainly toward natural disasters. People are willing to talk about probabilities of, say, floods, but not of genocide or other crimes against humanity.

A code at the global level would be mainly a statement of principles that must be respected in disaster preparedness work. It would not give operational details. For example, it could say provisions must be made for evacuating disabled people in the event of a disaster, but the code would not say how.

Make sense?

Aloha, George

On Sep 9, 2005, at 10:18 PM, Tim Symonds wrote:

Dear George, could the international code you propose be adapted for people in a region hit by human-made disaster such as the Balkans, Liberia, Sudan etc?

Cheers!
Tim

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From: No title defined
[mailto:GENDER-AND-DISASTER-NETWORK@listserv.tamu.edu] On Behalf Of
George Kent
Sent: 10 September 2005 01:34
To: GENDER-AND-DISASTER-NETWORK@listserv.tamu.edu
Subject: Re: [Radix] Katrina, "good governance", and legitimation crisis of the state

In the message copied below, Ben reminds us of an article he published in 2000 advocating a human rights approach to disaster protection. Years ago, fruitful discussions on this list led me to sketch out similar ideas, in "The Human Right to Disaster Mitigation and Relief," Environmental Hazards, Vol. 3 (2001), pp. 137-138. <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~kent/disaster.pdf> Both of us recognized that, in the face of anarchic global politics, it would be difficult to establish any clear entitlements to protection at the global level.

What about at the national level? I had proposed an International Code of Standards on Disaster Mitigation and Relief. Why not start with a National Code of Standards on Disaster Mitigation and Relief?

In my human rights oriented approach, I would say such a code should establish that every individual under the jurisdiction of the United States government is entitled to at least a specified level of protection. If that protection was not available, the individual would have the right to sue or to seek some other form of legal relief.

Do we have anything like that in place now? If not, why not?

Perhaps a good way to start down this path would be to begin discussing a draft of such a national code.

Aloha, George

On Sep 7, 2005, at 4:28 AM, bwisner@igc.org wrote:

Dear all,

This morning the "New York Times" reports a deadly fire in Egypt. It seems to have been handled by the Egyptian authorities in a way that reminds me of the U.S. federal response to Katrina -- confusion, little information available for the affected, highly visible use of heavily armed military. I was struck by a quote by one of those grieving, "They don't care about us," referring to the government (<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/07/international/africa/07egypt.html?th&emc=th>).

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This brings to mind Ulrich Beck's book, "The Risk Society," and the question of what the basis of legitimate authority of the nation state is, or should be, in the 21st Century. A few years ago I published in the U.N. Chronicle and elsewhere an appeal for development of an international treaty that would assert protection from avoidable harm in extreme natural events to be a duty of the nation state. I suggested that this protection should be seen as a positive human right (<http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2000/issue4/0400p6p.htm>).

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Habermas, a great political philosopher. One of his seminal works was, indeed, entitled, "Legitimation Crisis."

Ben Wisner
bwisner@igc.org

As Ben suggests, it would be good to study existing national or local standards when drafting new national or global codes. A global code would establish a common standard for all nations. Each nation would be expected to follow it, but would be free to add additional provisions, provided they did not contradict the global standards.

Let me suggest one element that should be present in all codes.

On September 9, 2005 a letter to the editor in the Honolulu Advertiser asked:

DOES O'AHU HAVE PLAN FOR EVACUATION?

How well are we equipped on O'ahu to deal with a natural disaster and its aftermath and recovery? Are we learning (and preparing) to deal with a possible evacuation of this island on a massive scale? The good people of the tsunami-stricken regions in Indonesia were not prepared. Nor were the fine folks in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

I've been in Honolulu for more than seven years and can't recall a serious civil defense/natural disaster exercise involving the public. Is there a comprehensive disaster response plan? If so, does it have the money, staffing and resources needed to make it effective? Is it practiced? Exactly where are we as a state, county and city on this issue? I'd like answers.

/unquote/

In a national code on disasters, one of the most basic entitlements could be information. We should be entitled to information about the current status of planning and of facilities. Even if the code does not require specific plans and facilities, it could, at the very least, require information about the status of planning and facilities. Who would argue against that sort of requirement?

The law could require generalized information for the entire jurisdiction, or it could require information tailored to specific individuals, including, for example, information on the location of the individual's nearest evacuation site. The particulars of the information requirement would have to be worked out.

In Hawai'i, the Board of Water Supply mails a leaflet to all residents every year specifying details about water quality in their particular locations. So far as I know, there is no legal requirement that any specific quality standards are met, but there is a legal requirement that we are informed about the status of our water quality.

Requiring that governments at least provide information about the status of disaster planning could be a good start on getting a national disaster code into place. It certainly could play a strong role in building disaster planning consciousness in both the general public and the government.

Aloha, George

Víctimas de Katrina en manos de Pat Robertson

ABN 07/09/2005

Apenas una semana después de que el gobierno de Estados Unidos se distanciara de la postura del tele-evangelista Pat Robertson, quien llamó a asesinar al presidente venezolano Hugo Chávez, Washington autorizó a la organización caritativa dirigida por ese predicador a colaborar con las víctimas del huracán Katrina.

El 29 de agosto, el día en que Katrina impactó en el sudoriental estado de Louisiana, la Agencia Federal de Administración de la Emergencia (FEMA, por sus siglas en inglés) incluyó a Operation Blessing (operación bendición), de Robertson, en su lista de las 24 organizaciones humanitarias autorizadas para canalizar la ayuda a los damnificados.

Operation Blessing, que en el pasado había sido investigada por desviar las donaciones a intereses mineros en África de Robertson y a gastos políticos, fue ubicada en el tercer puesto de la lista, detrás de la Cruz Roja Internacional y de la red de bancos de alimentos America's Second Harvest (segunda cosecha de Estados Unidos).

La organización de Robertson supera en la nómina a importantes grupos religiosos de asistencia estadounidenses, como Church World Services y Catholic Charities USA.

Portavoces del FEMA no supieron explicar por qué Operation Blessing aparece tan arriba en la lista, de la que había sido discretamente removida hace tres años cuando se conocieron las primeras denuncias sobre desvío de fondos.

"Parece que fue puesta en una lista de grupos caritativos, muchos de los cuales integran la alianza Organizaciones Nacionales Voluntarias Activas en Desastres (NVOAD, por sus siglas en inglés)", que coordina las respuestas a las crisis, señaló el periódico The Congressional Quarterly, dedicado a informar sobre las discusiones en el Congreso legislativo.

Operation Blessing no integra la NVOAD, "pero debe haber obtenido el apoyo del FEMA a través de algún otro canal", añadió.

Por su parte, el periódico New York Daily News, en un artículo titulado "Desastre usado como recompensa política", sugirió que ese canal son los vínculos de Robertson con el gobernante Partido Republicano.

También señaló que la ubicación prominente de Operation Blessing en la lista del FEMA le asegura que circule en otras nóminas de agencias recomendadas para canalizar donaciones.

El gobierno del presidente George W. Bush redujo a la FEMA a una pequeña oficina dentro del Departamento de Seguridad Nacional luego de los atentados terroristas del 11 de septiembre de 2001 en Washington y Nueva York.

La agencia ha sido duramente criticada por su actuación antes, durante y después de Katrina.

Una de las mayores críticas a la FEMA es que sus principales puestos de dirección están ocupados por socios políticos republicanos, como su director, Michael Brown, con poca o ninguna experiencia en administración de desastres.

Robertson, quien procuró sin éxito ser candidato presidencial por el Partido Republicano en 1988, ha sido el principal representante de la derecha cristiana durante más de dos décadas como presidente de la Coalición Cristiana.

Con la ayuda de su asesor político Ralph Reed, la Coalición ganó mucho control en el sur, el medioeste y el suroeste durante los años 90.

Robertson, de 76 años, renunció a la presidencia de la Coalición en 2001.

Robertson y su compañero Jerry Falwell, fundador de la organización Mayoría Moral, desataron una polémica a fines de 2001 cuando atribuyeron los atentados del 11 de septiembre al liberalismo y la homosexualidad en Estados Unidos.

A pesar de la controversia, la Organización Sionista de Estados Unidos otorgó a Robertson el Premio de Amistad del Estado de Israel por su apoyo a la causa israelí.

El predicador evangélico discrepó a comienzos de año con Bush, cuando éste respaldó el llamado "plan de desvinculación" del primer ministro israelí Ariel Sharon, por el cual retiró sus tropas y a los colonos judíos de Gaza.

El mes pasado, Robertson sugirió en su programa televisivo "Club 700", por la cadena Christian Broadcast Network, que la Agencia Central de Inteligencia (CIA) de Estados Unidos debía asesinar a Chávez porque estaba convirtiendo a Venezuela en "una plataforma para la infiltración comunista y el extremismo musulmán en todo el continente".

Robertson señaló que matar al mandatario venezolano sería "mucho más barato que comenzar una guerra".

"Tenemos la capacidad de sacarlo, y creo que ha llegado el momento de que ejercitemos esa capacidad. No necesitamos otra guerra de 200.000 millones de dólares para deshacernos de un dictador. Es mucho más fácil realizar una serie de operaciones encubiertas", agregó.

Sus afirmaciones provocaron de inmediato un escándalo internacional. Venezuela lo acusó de hacer "declaraciones terroristas" e incitar el odio, mientras que el Departamento de Estado calificó sus dichos de "inapropiados". Incluso varios líderes de la derecha cristiana se distanciaron de su postura.

"Ha traído la vergüenza sobre todos nosotros", dijo el presidente de la conservadora Convención Bautista del Sur, el pastor Albert Mohler.

Robertson luego ofreció una disculpa, señalando que "sacar" a Chávez no necesariamente significaba asesinarlo, sino también podía ser secuestrarlo.

Pero no sólo las declaraciones de Robertson debieron haber frenado la decisión de la FEMA de incluir a Operation Blessing en su lista.

The Congressional Quarterly informó que la organización cristiana, fundada en 1978, fue investigada en el oriental estado de Virginia a mediados de los años 90 por el desvío de donaciones para refugiados ruandeses a los negocios mineros de Robertson, que compartía con el entonces dictador de Zaire (ahora República Democrática del Congo), Mobutu Sese Seko.

La investigación terminó cuando el fiscal general de Virginia, que había recibido 35.000 dólares de parte de Robertson en apoyo a su campaña política, suspendió las acciones.

En 2002, Operation Blessing estuvo vinculada a varios proyectos para búsqueda y explotación de oro acordados entre Robertson y el dictador de Liberia, Charles Taylor.

Pero Taylor fue declarado criminal de guerra por el Tribunal Especial para Sierra Leona patrocinado por la Organización de las Naciones Unidas, y debió exiliarse en Nigeria. El propio Bush había pedido su renuncia, lo que provocó la molestia de Robertson.

"Estamos socavando a un presidente cristiano, bautista, para permitir que los rebeldes musulmanes tomen el país", dijo en su programa Club 700.

Robertson también tuvo problemas con la Comisión Federal de Elecciones, que demandó a su Coalición Cristiana en 1996 por promover en forma ilegal a varios candidatos republicanos, violando una ley de impuestos.

El televangelista ha advertido en más de una ocasión que el liberalismo y el secularismo en Estados Unidos recibirán castigos divinos en forma de huracanes y otros desastres.

En 1998 alertó que la sudoriental ciudad de Orlando, en el estado de Florida, podría ser destruida por celebrar el mes del orgullo gay.

"Ustedes están justo en el camino de peligrosos huracanes, y yo no agitaría esas banderas ante el rostro de Dios si fuera ustedes", afirmó entonces.

También se adjudicó haber salvado la ciudad de Virginia Beach -su sede de operaciones-- de una serie de huracanes en 1985 y 1995, gracias al "poder de la oración".

Katrina Recovery Planning: Will the "Good Old Boys" or the People Decide?

The following article by Naomi Klein in the Guardian Unlimited raises a point that is central to the concerns of many RADIXists: participatory recovery planning (and its nemesis). Who will decide what a new New Orleans looks like, feels like, what livelihoods it supports, how it works?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/katrina/story/0,16441,1566200,00.html>

After hurricane Andrew in 1992, there was a similar struggle over how Miami would be rebuilt (see Walter Peacock et al., "Hurricane Andrew," New York: Routledge, 1997). Similarly after hurricane Mitch in 1998, civil society in Nicaragua demanded a role in recovery planning, and they insisted that "recovery" was not just about the built environment but an opportunity to rethink Nicaragua's entire approach to economic and social development. As Klein relates, during the recovery from the Indian Ocean tsunami, there have also been winners and losers along predictable lines.

What can be done to lobby for and to support a fully inclusive, participatory planning process in New Orleans and the other areas affected by Katrina -- one that would tap the ideas and visions of poor people, working people, women, people of color, immigrants, the elderly, people living with disabilities, children and youth?

In May in Kobe, Japan, an International Recovery Platform was established as a central clearing house for the best practices in comprehensive disaster recovery from all over the world. Will the U.S. make use of this accumulated experience?

Comment

Power to the victims of New Orleans

With the poor gone, developers are planning to gentrify the city

Naomi Klein

Friday September 9, 2005

[The Guardian](#)

On September 4, six days after Katrina hit, I saw the first glimmer of hope. "The people of New Orleans will not go quietly into the night, scattering across this country to become homeless in countless other cities while federal relief funds are funnelled into rebuilding casinos, hotels, chemical plants. We will not stand idly by while this disaster is used as an opportunity to replace our homes with newly built mansions and condos in a gentrified New Orleans."

[Article continues](#) ▾

The statement came from Community Labor United, a coalition of low-income groups in New Orleans. It went on to demand that a committee made up of evacuees "oversee Fema, the Red Cross and other organisations collecting resources on behalf of our people. We are calling for evacuees from our community to actively participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans."

It's a radical concept: the \$10.5bn released by Congress and the \$500m raised by private charities doesn't actually belong to the relief agencies or the government - it belongs to the victims. The agencies entrusted with the money should be accountable to them. Put another way, the people Barbara Bush tactfully described as "underprivileged anyway" just got very rich.

Except relief and reconstruction never seem to work like that. When I was in Sri Lanka six months after the tsunami, many survivors told me that the reconstruction was victimising them all over again. A council of the country's most prominent businesspeople had been put in charge of the process, and they were handing the coast over to tourist developers at a frantic pace. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of poor fishing people were still stuck in sweltering inland camps, patrolled by soldiers with machine guns and entirely dependent on relief agencies for food and water. They called reconstruction "the second tsunami".

There are already signs that New Orleans evacuees could face a similarly brutal second storm. Jimmy Reiss, chairman of the New Orleans Business Council, told Newsweek that he has been brainstorming about how "to use this catastrophe as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change the dynamic". The council's wish list is well-known: low wages, low taxes, more luxury condos and hotels.

Before the flood, this highly profitable vision was already displacing thousands of poor African-Americans: while their music and culture was for sale in an increasingly corporatised French Quarter (where only 4.3% of residents are black), their housing developments were being torn down. "For white tourists and businesspeople, New Orleans's reputation means a great place to have a vacation, but don't leave the French Quarter or you'll get shot," Jordan Flaherty, a New Orleans-based labour organiser told me the day after he left the city by boat. "Now the developers have their big chance to disperse the obstacle to gentrification - poor people."

Here's a better idea: New Orleans could be reconstructed by and for the very people most victimised by the flood. Schools and hospitals that were falling apart before could finally have adequate resources; the rebuilding could create thousands of local jobs and provide massive skills training in decent paying industries. Rather than handing over the reconstruction to the same corrupt elite that failed the city so spectacularly, the effort could be led by groups like Douglass Community Coalition. Before the hurricane, this remarkable assembly of parents, teachers, students and artists was trying to reconstruct the city from the ravages of poverty by transforming Frederick Douglass senior high school into a model of community learning. They have already done the painstaking work of building consensus around education reform. Now that the funds are flowing, shouldn't they have the tools to rebuild every ailing public school in the city?

For a people's reconstruction process to become a reality (and to keep more contracts from going to Halliburton), the evacuees must be at the centre of all decision-making. According to Curtis Muhammad of Community Labor United, the disaster's starkest

lesson is that African-Americans cannot count on any level of government to protect them.

"We had no caretakers," he says. That means the community groups that do represent African-Americans in Louisiana and Mississippi - many of which lost staff, office space and equipment in the flood - need our support now. Only a massive injection of cash and volunteers will enable them to do the crucial work of organising evacuees - currently scattered through 41 states - into a powerful political constituency. The most pressing question is where evacuees will live over the next few months. A dangerous consensus is building that they should collect a little charity, apply for a job at the Houston Wal-Mart and move on. Muhammad and CLU, however, are calling for the right to return: they know that if evacuees are going to have houses and schools to come back to, many will need to return to their home states and fight for them.

These ideas are not without precedent. When Mexico City was struck by a devastating earthquake in 1985, the state also failed the people: poorly constructed public housing crumbled and the army was ready to bulldoze buildings with survivors still trapped inside. A month after the quake, 40,000 angry refugees marched on the government, refusing to be relocated out of their neighbourhoods and demanding a "democratic reconstruction". Not only were 50,000 new dwellings for the homeless built in a year; the neighbourhood groups that grew out of the rubble launched a movement that is challenging Mexico's traditional power holders to this day.

And the people I met in Sri Lanka have grown tired of waiting for the promised relief. Some survivors are now calling for a people's planning commission for post-tsunami recovery. They say the relief agencies should answer to them; it's their money, after all.

The idea could take hold in the United States, and it must. Because there is only one thing that can compensate the victims of this most human of natural disasters, and that is what has been denied them throughout: power. It will be a long and difficult battle, but New Orleans's evacuees should draw strength from the knowledge that they are no longer poor people; they are rich people who have been temporarily locked out of their bank accounts.

• A version of this column was first published in the [Nation](#)

Meditation on "disasters waiting to happen" should be informed by consideration of those disasters that have long been underway but are nevertheless ignored. like global warming or global hunger. Why is it that three thousand deaths due to terrorism at a single point in time result in the mobilization of far more resources than the deaths of ten million children every single year?

Aloha, George
Radixers --

In his email a few minutes ago, Ben used the phrase, "racial discrimination in the allocation of recovery resources." It reminds me of another interesting story about

racism in humanitarian assistance, in refugee camps, reported by the Los Angeles Times:

Miller, T. Christian, and Ann Simmons. Relief camps for Africans, Kosovars worlds apart. Los Angeles Times, May 21, 1999.

That story can be accessed at <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9905/msg00276.html> and several other places on the web.

It might be useful to create a space on the disaster diplomacy website to collect such stories of discrimination in humanitarian assistance.

It would fit nicely under the heading there, "Based on Disaster Type or Issue."

Of course the point is to invite more systematic research on the issue, and thus begin to address it. I keep hoping that someone will look at the entire global system of humanitarian assistance and assess the degree to which it is influenced by racism.

Aloha, George

++++
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New book: Freedom from Want: The Human Right to Adequate Food
<http://press.georgetown.edu/detail.html?session=f80018376d1010423757bebf973d493c&cat=1&id=1589010566>

Benny is correct that it is important to focus on "real failures" so we can be "better prepared".

I was trying to do precisely that in my earlier message when I shared the empirical results of in depth interviews with 220 municipal level emergency managers in the constituent cities and jurisdictions of the 6 megacities in our UNU project. We also interview more than 150 civil society (NGO) representatives.

An issue that emerged was mutual lack of trust. That represents a "real failure" and it has very practical implications for what Benny refers to as "welfare of disaster victims." Lack of trust underlies bad communication and poor coordination. Municipalities were cut off from information about marginal groups of people that is vital for planning. This

applied across the board, in Tokyo and Los Angeles as well as the other megacities.

I would be surprised if much the same was not true in New Orleans prior to Katrina.

For the sake of communal peace on this important discussion list, I'd like to agree to disagree with Benny about whether the vast literature concerning marginality, subaltern groups, "weapons of the weak", parallel economies, retreat of the state, benign neglect, etc., etc. has "practical" relevance. I happen to think it does, and as an aid to organizing all this data from sociology and anthropology, I also happen to think that political and social philosophy provide frameworks. Benny disagrees. Peace. Fine. Let's move on. There is a lot of work to do.

BEN

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-----Original Message-----

From: "Peiser, Benny" <B.J.Peiser@LIVJM.AC.UK>

Sent: Sep 8, 2005 11:46 AM

To: NATURAL-HAZARDS-DISASTERS@JISCMail.AC.UK

Subject: nation state

I very much doubt that there is an existential crisis of the nation state, particularly not in democratic countries that tend to address societal or economic problems or those caused by natural disasters by way of throwing incompetent governments out of power. Obviously, every large-scale disaster triggers a severe crisis, but in most cases these are short-term and, if handled effectively, overcome fairly quickly. I suggest that people interested in the welfare of disaster victims should focus on the real failures that have occurred during the Katrina tragedy so that emergency managers and relief organisations are better prepared for all the future disasters that are inevitable. I fail to see how a philosophical debate about the nation state can benefit anyone affected by recent or future disasters.

Benny Peiser

VIEWPOINT: Katrina doesn't compare to the tsunami

02 Sep 2005

Source: AlertNet

Sun sets on the partially blacked out city of Mobile, Alabama, after Hurricane Katrina.

REUTERS/MARC SEROTA

Perspective is essential in assessing these two very different disasters, warns commentator and consultant Nick Cater.

"This is our tsunami" was one official's comment after Hurricane Katrina swept into the United States and left hundreds – possibly thousands -- dead.

Whatever the comment's intent, it suggests an unfounded comparison that recalls the harsh journalistic maxim that the news value of one death on your doorstep is the equivalent of thousands in a distant land. This latest disaster may be a tragedy costly in lives and dollars, but the tsunami was far, far worse in human terms.

True, one similarity exists: as in most disasters, both these events sought out the most vulnerable - old, young, poor, isolated - to kill them in greater numbers, destroy more of their resources and make their recovery tougher than that of the rich and powerful.

Then the differences begin. Hurricanes are a frequent hazard for U.S. Gulf states and Katrina came with plenty of warning so its toll appears far smaller than the hundreds of thousands killed and millions left injured, homeless and destitute by the sudden Indian Ocean tsunami.

Certainly, the disaster relief billions sent to Asia will soon be surpassed by the state aid, private insurance and charity funds available for a smaller crisis in one corner of a wealthy country with good communications, and lacking the conflict that has complicated recovery in Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Unlike the totally unexpected tsunami and the sometimes disorganised multinational relief operation, the survivors in Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama had the hours of warnings from well-funded U.S. meteorological and early warning systems, and the advantage of the coordination by a single organisation, the Federal Emergency Management Authority, though the initial response has been poor.

HELP TO EVACUATE

Many of those killed or displaced took too little notice of warnings, having experienced previous alerts that proved less serious in reality. How to refresh communication strategies to ensure urgency among those at risk is a constant challenge for disaster preparedness programmes worldwide.

From the elderly and infirm to the disabled and isolated, other victims and survivors may not have been offered timely, suitable assistance to enable them to leave. The

poorest would have been loath to risk their meagre resources by abandoning homes and possessions, even if they had someone who would offer them shelter.

U.S. officials will have to consider what more they could have done to save those lives, perhaps with better targeting of assistance.

Unlike many disasters in the developing world, it seems unlikely that the myth of immediate health threats from corpses will mean that any of the Katrina dead are buried without an effort to identify them.

But another disaster "myth" - of unleashed criminality - looks accurate, with widespread looting among the displaced in the States and in parts of the tsunami zone, though perhaps both reflect more about inequalities in fractured societies than the behaviour of disaster survivors in general.

In the politics and economics of geography, the differences persist. Asia's coastal inhabitants lack choices about where to live, and few can afford insurance to share their risks. By contrast, the people of New Orleans can and should abandon their city's unsustainable location below sea levels, since only multi-billion dollar coastal and river defences prevent its demise.

AVOID SENDING OLD DRUGS

Insurance and reinsurance companies will bear most of Katrina's massive losses and rebuilding costs, encouraging people to remain where nature has declared it untenable, especially with the growing risks of global warming that U.S. President George Bush denies.

Over Katrina, Bush has offered decisive action and positive messages, unlike his shocking early behaviour after the tsunami, when he tried to outflank and undermine United Nations coordination efforts.

Bush used his first media statement to commit significant resources and declare that for charities, cash was the priority. He even gave out the web address of the American Red Cross for online donations, thus hopefully diminishing the usual tide of time-consuming calls and unhelpful gifts of old clothes or out-of-date drugs.

But if the relief effort does not begin to achieve significant results fast, Bush will discover two hard disaster rules: first, that they expose and exploit vulnerabilities in societies - from oil dependency to the lack of relief forces because thousands are at war overseas - and second, that the quality of disaster response can have harsh political and economic consequences.

There is one final difference between Katrina and the tsunami. After the 9/11 terrorism, millions of dollars were sent from all over the world to benefit often some of the world's richest people. While many affected by Hurricane Katrina are among America's poorest, the country's wealth, if fairly shared, should leave absolutely no need for overseas financial contributions to any relief operation.

Meanwhile, Katrina's tsunami comparison has already been reported across the U.S. and around the world.

It seems unfortunate but inevitable that in future many will recall these two significantly different disasters as being of similar impact, complete with the

implication that, like that crude news maxim, in today's world, one American life is worth thousands of any other country's inhabitants.

Any views expressed in this article are those of the writer and not of Reuters.

World lines up to help after Katrina

05 Sep 2005 15:55:46 GMT

Source: Reuters

(Updates with Ireland, Spain)

Sept 5, (Reuters) - Hurricane Katrina has devastated New Orleans and U.S. Gulf Coast states, killing hundreds of people and possibly thousands, and drawing support pledges from rich and poor, traditional friends and foes of the United States.

The United States, a major world donor itself, last week let it be known it would accept help from a variety of nations.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice decided "no offer that can help alleviate the suffering of the people in the afflicted area will be refused."

Some 60 nations have offered help, from longtime American friends such as Japan, Germany, Canada, France and Britain as well as Cuban President Fidel Castro, who is willing to donate doctors and medicine. The Venezuelan government, frequently criticised by the Bush administration, has also offered help.

Thailand, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, countries that suffered their own devastation during the tsunami on Dec. 26, also offered support.

International organisations and religious institutions also offered help ranging from medical teams to tents to cash donations. They include NATO, the Organization of American States, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Health Organisation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Cor Unum, the Vatican's central charity organisation. The United Nations has offered to help coordinate international relief.

Following is a list of some of the aid offered.

ASIA

AUSTRALIA: "We're going to provide A\$10 million and the bulk of that money, if not all of it, will go to the American Red Cross," said Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer.

CHINA: China offered \$5 million in aid for victims. If needed, the government is also prepared to send rescue workers, including medical experts, officials said. State-controlled CNOOC, the country's top offshore oil and gas producer which was forced to drop a bid for Unocal after opposition from U.S. Congress, said it would match donations from its employees.

JAPAN: Will provide \$200,000 to the American Red Cross to assist victims, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said. Japan will also identify needs in affected regions via

the U.S. government and will provide up to \$300,000 in emergency supplies if it receives requests for such assistance, the ministry said.

SINGAPORE: The Singapore Armed Forces, responding to requests by the United States Texas Army National Guard, has sent three Chinook helicopters to Fort Polk, Louisiana, to help in relief efforts. The government said the Chinooks will help to ferry supplies and undertake airlift missions.

THAILAND: Thailand has offered to send 100 doctors and nurses to hurricane-ravaged New Orleans. "We have made the offer to them and they have accepted and said thank you," Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said.

SOUTH KOREA: Will send \$30 million in aid, which includes private donations. Will dispatch a 50-person rescue team and if the U.S. needs foreign troops, parliament will discuss whether to send South Korean soldiers.

BANGLADESH: Offered \$1.0 million donation as humanitarian aid, the foreign ministry said.

SRI LANKA: Will donate \$25,000 to the American Red Cross.

AMERICAS

CANADA: Defence Minister Bill Graham has indicated that three warships and a coast guard vessel are being loaded with relief supplies and 1,000 personnel. They will be ready to travel to Louisiana as required in the coming days.

CUBA: Cuban President Fidel Castro offered to fly 1,100 doctors to Houston with 26 tonnes of medicine to treat victims.

MEXICO: Is sending 15 truckloads of water, food and medical supplies via Texas and the Mexican navy has offered to send two ships, two helicopters and 15 amphibious vehicles.

VENEZUELA: President Hugo Chavez, a vocal critic of the United States, offered to send cheap fuel, humanitarian aid and relief workers to the disaster area.

EUROPE:

BRUSSELS: The European Union and NATO said they had received official requests from the United States to provide emergency assistance for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. The United States has asked for first aid kits, blankets, water trucks, and 500,000 prepared meals, the EU executive Commission said.

The Commission's Civil Protection Mechanism will coordinate member states' offers and U.S. needs. An EU field coordinator will be appointed this week.

AUSTRIA - Crisis team in Houston, Texas. Dirty water pumps, 300 camp beds.

BELGIUM - Three medical teams, civil engineering team, diving team.

BRITAIN: Britain is sending 500,000 military ration packs to areas hit by Katrina. Medical experts, marine engineers and high-volume pumps, various engineers.

DENMARK - Water purification units.

FINLAND - Thirty-member search and rescue team.

FRANCE: Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin said France was ready to offer help. "We have rescue teams based in the Caribbean and we are naturally ready to provide aid to the Americans, and that is what we have told them," he said. Paris has readied 300 tents, 980 field beds and other material.

GERMANY: Over the weekend, Germany sent two German army Airbus planes to the United States, loaded with a combined 25 tonnes of food rations. America has asked for logistical specialists, pumps, drinking water, water filters, generators, emergency dwellings, blankets and medical aid.

IRELAND - Initial assistance of 1 million euros.

ITALY: Has offered to send aid and evacuation specialists, Italy's civil protection unit said. Authorities have prepared two military transport planes to fly amphibious vessels, pumps, generators, tents and personnel to New Orleans and other areas.

LUXEMBOURG - Prepared 1,000 camp beds, 2,000 blankets.

MALTA - Material and cash. No details.

NETHERLANDS: Will provide teams for inspecting dykes and for identifying victims if there is a formal request from the United States. It will also send a frigate from Curacao to New Orleans shortly to provide emergency assistance, the government said.

ROMANIA - Two teams of medical experts.

RUSSIA - Will send three planes on either Monday or Tuesday. The planes will carry medical dressings, food, tents, blankets, drinking water and portable electricity generators.

SWEDEN - First aid kits, blankets, meals ready to eat, two water purification plants plus instructors. Equipment to restore cell phone net in disaster areas.

SPAIN: Is prepared to grant any formal U.S. request for gasoline stocks, an Industry Ministry spokesman said. Also organising delivery of items such as military-type meals, batteries and medicines.

SWEDEN: The Rescue Authority said it was on stand-by to supply water purifying equipment, healthcare supplies and emergency shelters if needed.

MIDDLE EAST

IRAN: Offers to send humanitarian aid to a country that has labelled it part of the "axis of evil." "The victims have complained about the lack of timely assistance and we are prepared to send our contributions to the people through the Red Crescent," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi.

ISRAEL: Sending health and defence officials to the U.S. to help coordinate aid.

QATAR: Pledged \$100 million in aid to the disaster victims, the official QNA news agency reported.

SAUDI ARABIA: Saudi Refining, a Houston-based subsidiary of state oil firm Saudi Aramco, will donate \$5 million to the American Red Cross to support relief efforts.

KUWAIT - Wealthy OPEC nation Kuwait is donating \$500 million worth of oil products and other humanitarian aid, news agency KUNA reported.

BAHRAIN - Pledged \$5 million to aid hurricane victims.

INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES, ORGANISATIONS

RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT: The Geneva-based International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is sending some 80 disaster experts from more than 10 countries in response to a call from the American Red Cross. They will support volunteers providing food and shelter, the Federation said.

COR UNUM: Pope Benedict announced he had asked the Vatican's central charity organisation, Cor Unum, to coordinate Catholic aid for hurricane victims. "We have all been pained in the last few days by the disaster caused by the hurricane in the United States of America, particularly in New Orleans," Benedict said.

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations announced the United States had accepted its aid offer and said its staff will be based at the USAID Hurricane Operations Center, where international assistance is being coordinated. They "are ready to provide emergency staff and a wide variety of relief supplies as and when necessary," the U.N. statement said.

(For more news about emergency relief visit Reuters AlertNet <http://www.alertnet.org> email: alertnet@reuters.com; +44 207 542 2432)

James Lewis raises many very important and difficult questions. I have admired his work since 1975, when we first met. His very thoughtful reflection on Katrina both reinforces that admiration and makes me ponder what we have achieved over the last 30-40 years in the business of risk reduction.

I have just three immediate thoughts to offer for now, in no way exhausting the rich echoes of James' questions.

First, the U.S. was under the Clinton administration better at dealing with natural hazards. As others in this discussion list have commented, there has been a massive erosion of FEMA since Bush took power, accelerated by FEMA's absorption into the "Homeland Security Borg".

However, an aspect of the weakening of FEMA that has not much been discussed is that under its then director, James Lee Wit, FEMA was more visible academically on an international scale. FEMA learned from good practices in other countries and shared, for example, it's experiences with Project Impact and other forms of mitigation. On the destruction of FEMA see a recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle by Mark Sandalow

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/09/11/MNG40EM00T1.DTL&hw=fema&sn=042&sc=265>

Second, the rest of the world may be in the process of overtaking the U.S. in hazard management. The messages this list and the Gender and Disaster Network list have been getting from south Asia and especially Bangladesh need to be taken very seriously. There are lessons to be learned both about "living with floods" and also about preparedness at neighborhood and town level.

Third, and finally, it is very difficult to make an impact on U.S. policy in an environment that is very hostile to science in the first place. This is the administration that redacted and edited Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) studies that showed very hazardous levels of air pollution caused by the collapse of the World Trade Towers and other EPA reports on global warning. This doesn't mean we should give up trying to impact U.S. federal policy, but it does mean that we should diversity the audience for professional advice and results of research. Two complementary audiences come to mind. One is local government in the U.S., bypassing the federal level. The second is civil society. In other messages I have discussed the growing demand for inclusive, participatory recovery planning in the aftermath of Katrina. The civil society groups making such demands (e.g. trade union affiliated Community Labor United, for example) may be able to benefit from what we, as professionals and practitioners, have to offer. (See, for example, the "Peoples Hurricane Fund" <http://www.qecr.org/index.html> & Community Labor United <http://www.uslaboragainstawar.org/article.php?id=9094>, as well as a recent article by Naomi Klein: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katrina/story/0,16441,1566200,00.html>).

At official levels, so far, in the U.S. there has been little or no discussion of a "bottom-up" approach to recovery planning that would complement a more conventional city and regional planning "top-down" approach (see, for example, the resource section of the American Planning Association's Katrina page: <http://www.planning.org/katrina/index.htm>).

Ben Wisner
bwisner@igc.org

-----Original Message-----

From: James Lewis <datum@GN.APC.ORG>
Sent: Sep 12, 2005 4:45 AM
To: NATURAL-HAZARDS-DISASTERS@JISCMAIL.AC.UK
Subject: Another great divide ?

Today, in the UK "Observer", I have read the interviewed but passionate observations of Princeton's Cornel West on "exiles from a city and from a nation"... "New Orleans was Third World long before the hurricane":

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,1567216,00.html>

and, notwithstanding the White Paper by the Association of State Floodplain Managers (David Crichton 10/09/05: did Gilbert White finally succeed with the Corps of Engineers?), I am left wondering how much of the comment conveyed on this network has any chance of reaching and maybe influencing US policy and implementation. I am sharing therefore, to a very limited extent, Martyn Garvey's frustration (10/09/2005), though I hasten to add for those who do not know, I am one who has worked in the field, many of them and with many others, hopefully towards reductions in the numbers of bodies that Martyn would like to see us all logging.

Recent reference to Henry Quarantelli and Russell Dynes, as further examples, coincided with thoughts re the volumes of hazards research that have emanated from the US for more than fifty years, not to mention the mountains of US\$ that have paid for it, which would suggest that if any country should have gotten itself organised for its disasters it would be the USA. Did I assume too much, not that many years ago, in my reading of it (and brief participation with it) ?

Does the fact that Cornel West is interviewed for a newspaper published outside of the USA, and a UK prof writes to the Washington Post (published or not, their website will not reveal) indicate a communication blockage or embargo between US academics and US policy makers and implementers ? Do Nat-Haz-Dis / Radix correspondents in the US write as well to their local and national politicians and to their national newspapers, or via other avenues, as vociferously as they do to the network - or does the climate of fear extend to that as well ?

If it does, it is a cause of the colossal canyon that appears to exist between US research and US practice. Seemingly half the country is saying how it should be while the other half does, or doesn't do, what it wants - perhaps not a new phenomenon and one not unique to the US, but one of the tasks now of reconstruction surely has to be bridges across that canyon - another great divide ?

James

WAR ON TERROR: Four Years After 9/11

The quest for national security NATURAL DISASTER'S MARK: In Hurricane Katrina's wake, some question whether battle against terrorism is the right fight

Marc Sandalow, Washington Bureau Chief
Sunday, September 11, 2005

Washington -- Four years ago this morning, the nation's priorities changed.

As rescuers tore through the rubble of the World Trade Center and Pentagon, President Bush vowed that fighting terrorism would be the central focus of his presidency.

The nation has twice gone to war; more than 2,000 American soldiers have died, and many more Iraqis and Afghans have been killed. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been spent; security barriers have been erected; air travel has become an ordeal; and Americans have adjusted to a new way of life.

And since the late summer of 2001, not a single terrorist has struck the United States.

Instead, on the fourth anniversary of the nation's worst terrorist attack, America is confronting an even deadlier calamity, brought on by Mother Nature.

Hundreds -- perhaps thousands -- are dead along the Gulf Coast. Billions of dollars will be spent rebuilding New Orleans and the surrounding area, and the Bush administration is preoccupied with another form of disaster.

The cruel irony has prompted some to question whether the country's obsession with terrorism has left it vulnerable to other disasters. Rather than credit the administration for staving off terrorist attacks, many believe that unreasonable fears borne from the Sept. 11 attacks drove the country, and its leaders, to overreact to the terrorist threat and divert precious resources from the near-certain catastrophes of nature.

Financier George Soros told 1,000 participants in a Washington terrorism conference last week that the so-called war on terrorism has "done more harm than good. ... It has diverted our attention from other vital" missions.

Even those who remain exceedingly worried about terrorism found reason for concern after watching the response to Hurricane Katrina, which -- unlike a terrorist attack -- came with a few days' warning.

"This provides vivid insights into what (a terrorist) situation might be like," said retired Col. Larry Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell. "It makes me even tenfold more worried -- if that's possible -- than I was before."

Much has been written about the lasting legacy of Sept. 11 as it relates to the nation's foreign policy, politics and psyche. But the timing of Hurricane Katrina has also prompted a conversation about the cost of focusing on terror.

"This terrorism paranoia has (created) unbalanced priorities," said Ben Wisner, an adviser to the United Nations on disaster risk, and a visiting professor at Oberlin College in Ohio.

"People have been taught like Pavlov's dogs; when the terrorism bell rings ... people salivate. They become hyper-aware of it to the extent that they don't pay attention to other risks," Wisner said.

"We live in a continent with very severe winters, hot summer, volcanoes, coastline, hurricanes, earthquake. ... The fact is these natural hazards affect people every year and in the aggregate kill a lot of people. We have to be concerned with the big picture."

For the past four years, terrorism has been the big picture in Washington. The administration's focus on war and terror was evident as Katrina blew through the Gulf Coast. The day the storm devastated New Orleans, Bush left his vacation home in Texas and flew to California, where he delivered a speech on the war in Iraq.

"After September the 11th, 2001, we've taught the terrorists a ... lesson," Bush said at the Naval Air Station in San Diego.

"America will not run in defeat, and we will not forget our responsibilities. We have brought down two murderous regimes. We're driving terrorists from their sanctuaries. We're putting the terrorists on the run all across the world."

As Bush spoke these words, tens of thousands of New Orleans residents were trying to cope without food, phones or police protection.

The federal government's inability to react more swiftly has prompted many to blame the war in Iraq for draining the nation's resources. The military fiercely denies the charge.

Of the 1.4 million men and women in uniform and another 600,000 in the reserves or National Guard, roughly 140,000 are serving in Iraq, and another 62,000 are in the Gulf Coast, according the Pentagon.

"We do not have a shortage of capacity," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told Sean Hannity on the Fox News Channel. "Whoever's raising that question ... doesn't really understand the situation."

Yet it is not in dispute that the nation's emergency preparation and response since Sept. 11 has been aimed primarily at potential terrorist attacks.

Hundreds of billions of dollars have been allocated for homeland security, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency lost its Cabinet level status as it was subsumed by the new, anti-terrorism, Department of Homeland Security.

"It's pretty clear that most of this activity was not focused on major natural disasters ... and was really focused more on the problems associated with terrorist attacks," said Richard Falkenrath, former deputy homeland security adviser and deputy assistant to President Bush.

Although its budget has grown, many blame the emergency agency's diminished bureaucratic standing for its slow response to the hurricane disaster.

"**FEMA** has proven to be a shell of what it once was and has been unable, and seemingly unwilling, to provide the direct and immediate resources necessary in the aftermath of the most devastating natural disaster in American history," said Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La.

However, some analysts say a shift in the nation's attention is not the same as neglect. The consequences of a terrorist attack and a natural disaster hold more similarities than differences.

"These aren't two separate problems. In many instances, the responses are the same," said Francis Fukuyama, a professor of International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

"This country is big enough and strong enough to prepare for both," said former New Hampshire Sen. Warren Rudman, who, along with former Colorado Sen. Gary Hart,

chaired a commission that warned of the dangers of terrorism before the Sept. 11 attacks.

"What we found out with Katrina is that the country is still unable to deal with disaster," Rudman said in an interview. "God forbid this happens in San Francisco."

The breakdown of communications alone -- it took New Orleans police 48 hours to receive working telephones -- is enough to make many experts wonder how another city would deal with a major terrorist attack.

"If we do this badly at mobilizing national resources to deal with catastrophic events that we can actually model, and we actually had four or five days warning -- good Lord, how could we respond to a nuclear attack?" Wisner asked.

Some say the lesson to be learned is that America is confronting the wrong enemy.

After four years without an attack on U.S. soil, some believe the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks may have been the result of a "perfect storm," a freakish combination of able attackers, missed intelligence and bad luck.

Another conclusion is that there are some events -- whether at the hand of man or nature -- that are simply too large for government to handle in a manner that most Americans have come to expect.

"This just shows you that we really need to put more resources on prevention," said James Steinberg, director of foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institution. "No matter how well we plan, you can't plan for everything. The big lesson is that there are limits to our response."

That is not a conclusion that many find settling, especially after the efforts since Sept. 11, 2001.

"Our country is not so ready to respond to the uber-disasters as we'd like to be, four years after 9/11," Falkenrath said.

In Insight

War to end all wars: The United States' strategic reorganization since Sept. 11 has not gone nearly far enough -- and has not stopped the spread of terrorist cells.

E-mail Marc Sandalow at msandalow@sfchronicle.com.

Displaced New Orleans Community Demands Action, Accountability and Initiates A Peoples Hurricane Fund

Community Labor United
September 6th, 2005

Dear

Friends:

For those of you wishing to donate to progressive community based African American led New Orleans organizations I can recommend this group. Curtis Mohammed and Bob Moses have a long history of struggle in LA and MS. Curtis also has a union history and has done some excellent work building a base with community and labor in NO. Recently they have done some excellent work building a national progressive educational change coalition.

See the info on them attached to see what they are doing and how you can support them.

best
gene bruskin

Displaced New Orleans Community Demands Action, Accountability and Initiates A Peoples Hurricane Fund

Not until the fifth day of the federal governments inept and inadequate emergency response to the New Orleans disaster did George Bush even acknowledge it was unacceptable. Unacceptable doesn't begin to describe the depth of the neglect, racism and classism shown to the people of New Orleans. The governments actions and inactions were criminal. New Orleans, a city whose population is almost 70% percent black, 40% illiterate, and many are poor, was left day after day to drown, to starve and to die of disease and thirst.

The people of New Orleans will not go quietly into the night, scattering across this country to become homeless in countless other cities while federal relief funds are funneled into rebuilding casinos, hotels, chemical plants and the wealthy white districts of New Orleans like the French Quarter and the Garden District. We will not stand idly by while this disaster is used as an opportunity to replace our homes with newly built mansions and condos in a gentrified New Orleans.

Community Labor United (CLU), a coalition of the progressive organizations throughout New Orleans, has brought community members together for eight years to discuss socio-economic issues. We have been communicating with people from The Quality Education as a Civil Right Campaign, the Algebra Project, the Young Peoples Project and the Louisiana Research Institute for Community Empowerment. We are preparing a press release and framing document that will be out as a draft later today for comments.

Here is what we are calling for:

- We are calling for all New Orleanians remaining in the city to be evacuated immediately.
- We are calling for information about where every evacuee was taken. We are calling for black and progressive leadership to come together to meet in Baton Rouge to initiate the formation of a Community Oversight Committee of evacuees from all the sites. This committee will demand to oversee FEMA, the Red Cross and other organizations collecting resources on behalf of our people.
- We are calling for volunteers to enter the shelters where our people are and to assist parents with housing, food, water, health care and access to aid.
- We are calling for teachers and educators to carve out some time to come to evacuation sites and teach our children.
- We are calling for city schools and universities near evacuation sites to open their doors for our children to go to school.
- We are calling for health care workers and mental health workers to come to evacuation sites to volunteer.
- We are calling for lawyers to investigate the wrongful death of those who died, to protect the land of the displaced, to investigate whether the levies broke due to natural and other related matters.
- We are calling for evacuees from our community to actively participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans.
- We are calling for the addresses of all the relevant list serves and press contacts to send our information.

We are in the process of setting up a central command post in Jackson, MS, where we will have phone lines, fax, email and a web page to centralize information. We will need volunteers to staff this office.

We have set up a Peoples Hurricane Fund that will be directed and administered by New Orleanian evacuees. The Young Peoples Project, a 501(c)3 organization formed by graduates of the Algebra Project, has agreed to accept donations on behalf of this fund. **Donations can be mailed to:**

(to give on the internet, see the message below)

The Peoples Hurricane Fund

Vanguard Public Foundation

383 Rhode Island St., Ste 301

San Francisco, CA 94103

or visit www.qecr.org.

If you have comments of how to proceed or need more information, please email them to Curtis Muhammad (muhammadcurtis@bellsouth.net) and Becky Belcore (bbelcore@hotmail.com).

Thank you.

This gives you a way to donate on-line to the People's Hurricane Fund, set up by Community Labor United (CLU). A key organizer is Curtis Muhammad, former SNCC organizer.

?And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them." - Barbara Bush after touring the refugee camp at the Houston Astrodome. ^[1]

The Government Botched It So Far, Now Let the People Who Have Suffered Have a Say

Give Voice to the New Orleans Families and Communities Whose Lives Are Now Changed Forever

Help give the evacuees a voice.

[Click here](#) to give to a community-based group organizing those hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina.

Dear Betty,

We've all watched in horror as events unfolded in New Orleans, and one lesson is clear: The people left behind to suffer were left behind because they didn't have the power that richer and whiter Americans take for granted. People in shelters were treated like animals. Government officials separated families. Thousands were simply left to die in the floodwaters.

It is time to give voice to the community--now a diaspora--hardest hit by the hurricane. TrueMajority is working with Community Labor United (CLU), a coalition of community groups that for nine years has worked in what are now the hardest-hit neighborhoods of New Orleans.

Already the leaders of CLU have set up a People's Hurricane Fund that will be directed and administered by New Orleanian evacuees. Money donated to this fund will pay to coordinate activities directed at helping the evacuees in the shelters today, reuniting and rebuilding families tomorrow, and making sure the reconstruction of New Orleans meets the people's needs down the road. They need your help right now. Please [click here](#) to help this group speak for the people President Bush wouldn't listen to.

Americans have been generously giving to relief organizations such as the Red Cross to provide the food, clothing, and shelter that evacuees need right now. This charity is necessary and welcome. But in the coming days and months, these victims will need more than that. Government agents will make profound decisions about where victims will live, where their children will go to school, what kind of services they will receive, who gets hired in the reconstruction, and ultimately whether their neighborhoods are even rebuilt and they can ever return home. Today these people are without a voice; Community Labor United is ready to be that voice.

TrueMajority has agreed to accept donations on behalf the People's Hurricane Fund and transfer 100 percent of the proceeds to CLU. To give, just click this link:

<https://secure.truemajority.org/03/clu>

By working together, we can empower the hardest-hit victims of Hurricane Katrina.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

September 5, 2005, 3:30 p.m. CST

Press conference:

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

4:00 p.m. CST outside the Reliance Center at Kirby and McNee

New Orleans Black Community Leaders Charge Racism in Government Neglect of Hurricane Survivors

Press conference to announce plan to save lives and demand role in rebuilding effort

HOUSTON – A national alliance of black community leaders will announce the formation of a New Orleans People's Committee to demand a decision-making role in the short-term care of hurricane survivors and long-term rebuilding of New Orleans.

Community Labor United (CLU), a New Orleans coalition of labor and community activists, has put out a call to activists and organizations across the country to work on a "people's campaign" of community redevelopment. Organizing efforts will take place across hundreds of temporary shelters.

The population of New Orleans is 67 percent black and over 30 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, reflecting the current demographic of hurricane survivors displaced all over the South.

While the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the White House, and Governor Blanco attempt to regain the public's trust by evading the question of who's to blame, a short and long-term plan for New Orleans hurricane survivors has remained in a political vault of silence.

"This is plain, ugly, real racism," states Curtis Muhammad, CLU Organizing Director. "While some politicians and organizations might skirt around the issue of race, we in

New Orleans are not afraid to call it what it is. The moral values of our government is to 'shoot to kill' hungry, thirsty black hurricane survivors for trying to live through the aftermath. This is not just immoral this has turned a natural disaster into a man-made disaster, fueled by racism."

Leaders of CLU, in alliance with nearly twenty other local organizations and several national organizations will discuss their plan at a press conference on Tuesday, September 6, 2005, at 4:00 p.m. CST outside the Reliance Center at Kirby and McNee. The coalition will announce:

- The formation of the New Orleans People's Committee composed of hurricane survivors from each of the shelters, which will:
 1. Demand to oversee FEMA, the Red Cross, and other organizations collecting resources on behalf of the black community of New Orleans
 2. Demand decision-making power in the long-term redevelopment of New Orleans

- Issue a national call for volunteers to assist with housing, healthcare, education, and legal matters for the duration of the displacement.



Tax-exempt donations for the People's Committee and the national coalition can be made out to: Young People's Project, 440 N. Mills St., Suite 200, Jackson, MS 39202 or visit www.qecr.org.

Community Labor United is a coalition of progressive organizations in New Orleans formed in 1998. Their mission is to build organizational unity and support efforts that address poverty, racism, and education. CLU organized in the areas hardest hit by the hurricane.

Curtis Muhammad is a veteran Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizer and co-founder of CLU.

For more information, please contact:

Curtis Muhammad

Community Labor United (CLU)
muhammadcurtis@bellsouth.net

Becky Belcore
Quality Education as a Civil Right (QECR)
bbelcore@hotmail.com

Becky Belcore
Volunteer Organizer
Louisiana Research Institute for Community Empowerment (LaRICE)
bbelcore@hotmail.com

APA's Response to the Devastation from Hurricane Katrina

We now know that the devastation from Hurricane Katrina in our Gulf Coast states represents our nation's greatest disaster in the last 100 years. Since the San Francisco earthquake and fire, the Galveston hurricane and flood, and the Chicago Fire of 1871, we have not experienced losses of such magnitude. The media reports from New Orleans and communities in coastal areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama only begin to convey the ongoing human misery.

We at APA are working with our chapter leaders on a coordinated response and assistance program so that all members of APA can assist in a manner that meets their own personal and financial situations. Many members in the impacted areas, of course, are dealing with personal losses or job-related responsibilities.

First, I continue to urge everyone to be as generous as possible in order to meet the most immediate needs of victims and those assisting them. You may want to pause now and make a contribution:

Red Cross: www.redcross.org

Salvation Army: www.salvationarmyusa.org

FEMA charity tips: www.fema.gov/rrr/help2.shtm

You may also wish to consider a gift that will be used exclusively to support the planning efforts that will be undertaken by APA and our Chapters in Louisiana and Mississippi. While we will be coordinating pro bono efforts of members, those efforts, and others, will require financial support. Tax-deductible donations to the Planning Foundation should be noted as "Katrina relief."

Second, from chapter leaders we have been able to learn more about the situation and discuss the contributions that we, as planners, might make now and in the coming months.

This Week

APA is providing this "Katrina" section of our website that will allow us to continue to add both educational materials and functions. Soon we will have a resume posting section for members and others who wish to provide pro bono services. Many of our members have experienced floods, wildfires, earthquakes, and other disasters and can offer valuable assistance to their colleagues and communities in these states.

We have added a collection of research materials and articles available on the web.

[Click here](#) for a comprehensive list of resources

[Click here](#) for a list of planning-related news coverage of Katrina

We will also continue coordinating our efforts with other professional organizations and associations.

As planners at the local level are making contacts with local representatives of senators and members of Congress, our Policy staff here in D.C. will be making contacts as well.

We know that many of our members have been directly affected and may need housing or jobs. We are coordinating our efforts with local planners and will be adding a section to the website so that we can begin to match those needs with offers of assistance.

This Month

We are modifying our "Safe Growth" workshop offered as part of the AICP Training series so that it emphasizes disaster recovery and reconstruction a bit more. We are inviting federal agencies to send staff since they will be asking many staff to assist in various efforts and many of those staff will not have had training or experience in disaster planning.

[Click here](#) for information about the AICP Workshops

A Disaster Recovery Audio/Web Conference will be held Monday, September 19, 2005, from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time. The faculty will include planners who are international experts in this area. The conference will focus on emergency permitting, visioning the next steps, rebuilding local businesses, historic preservation, and FEMA long-term recovery planning.

[Click here](#) for full details on the special audio/web conference

At APA's Leadership Meeting in Buffalo in late September, we will be continuing conversations regarding APA's assistance and the various ways in which members can contribute to recovery and reconstruction efforts.

Next Month

We will provide [a workshop at the Louisiana Chapter Conference](#); Mississippi planners are also expected to attend. Faculty will be staff and members that have provided assistance in places such as Australia, Sri Lanka, Japan and several countries of Latin America as well as the U.S. The Louisiana Chapter will make contacts with other

organizations whose members would benefit from attendance at the workshop. Other conference sessions will also address the issues facing communities.

We will continually update information on the web and on list serves as we have new information. As you make personal contact with your colleagues, please let us know how they're doing and how members and the association might assist them and their communities. Please keep your ideas coming at PublicInfo@planning.org; we will continue to review possibilities with members in the affected areas. I think that our members throughout the country can make very meaningful contributions given the extent of the devastation.

Many, many members have sent e-mails, called, or become engaged in list-serve discussions. I have been impressed with the passion, commitment, generosity, and humanity that is so evident. It is again obvious that we all went into planning to make a difference. We will do everything we can to see that our members' ideas and skills are made available as communities recover and rebuild.

Thanks for your generosity,

Paul Fain

Exiles from a city and from a nation

Cornel West

Sunday September 11, 2005

The Observer

It takes something as big as Hurricane Katrina and the misery we saw among the poor black people of New Orleans to get America to focus on race and poverty. It happens about once every 30 or 40 years.

What we saw unfold in the days after the hurricane was the most naked manifestation of conservative social policy towards the poor, where the message for decades has been: 'You are on your own'. Well, they really were on their own for five days in that Superdome, and it was Darwinism in action - the survival of the fittest. People said: 'It looks like something out of the Third World.' Well, New Orleans was Third World long before the hurricane.

It's not just Katrina, it's povertina. People were quick to call them refugees because they looked as if they were from another country. They are. Exiles in America. Their humanity had been rendered invisible so they were never given high priority when the well-to-do got out and the helicopters came for the few. Almost everyone stuck on rooftops, in the shelters, and dying by the side of the road was poor black.

In the end George Bush has to take responsibility. When [the rapper] Kanye West said the President does not care about black people, he was right, although the effects of his policies are different from what goes on in his soul. You have to distinguish between a racist intent and the racist consequences of his policies. Bush is still a 'frat boy', making jokes and trying to please everyone while the Neanderthals behind him push him more to the right.

Poverty has increased for the last four or five years. A million more Americans became poor last year, even as the super-wealthy became much richer. So where is the trickle-down, the equality of opportunity? Healthcare and education and the social safety net being ripped away - and that flawed structure was nowhere more evident than in a place such as New Orleans, 68 per cent black. The average adult income in some parishes of the city is under \$8,000 (£4,350) a year. The average national income is \$33,000, though for African-Americans it is about \$24,000. It has one of the highest city murder rates in the US. From slave ships to the Superdome was not that big a journey.

New Orleans has always been a city that lived on the edge. The white blues man himself, Tennessee Williams, had it down in *A Streetcar Named Desire* - with Elysian Fields and cemeteries and the quest for paradise. When you live so close to death, behind the levees, you live more intensely, sexually, gastronomically, psychologically. Louis Armstrong came out of that unbelievable cultural breakthrough unprecedented in the history of American civilisation. The rural blues, the urban jazz. It is the tragicomic lyricism that gives you the courage to get through the darkest storm.

Charlie Parker would have killed somebody if he had not blown his horn. The history of black people in America is one of unbelievable resilience in the face of crushing white supremacist powers.

This kind of dignity in your struggle cuts both ways, though, because it does not mobilise a collective uprising against the elites. That was the Black Panther movement. You probably need both. There would have been no Panthers without jazz. If I had been of Martin Luther King's generation I would never have gone to Harvard or Princeton.

They shot brother Martin dead like a dog in 1968 when the mobilisation of the black poor was just getting started. At least one of his surviving legacies was the quadrupling in the size of the black middle class. But Oprah [Winfrey] the billionaire and the black judges and chief executives and movie stars do not mean equality, or even equality of opportunity yet. Black faces in high places does not mean racism is over. Condoleezza Rice has sold her soul.

Now the black bourgeoisie have an even heavier obligation to fight for the 33 per cent of black children living in poverty - and to alleviate the spiritual crisis of hopelessness among young black men.

Bush talks about God, but he has forgotten the point of prophetic Christianity is compassion and justice for those who have least. Hip-hop has the anger that comes out of post-industrial, free-market America, but it lacks the progressiveness that produces organisations that will threaten the status quo. There has not been a giant since King, someone prepared to die and create an insurgency where many are prepared to die to upset the corporate elite. The Democrats are spineless.

There is the danger of nihilism and in the Superdome around the fourth day, there it was - husbands held at gunpoint while their wives were raped, someone stomped to death, people throwing themselves off the mezzanine floor, dozens of bodies.

It was a war of all against all - 'you're on your own' - in the centre of the American empire. But now that the aid is pouring in, vital as it is, do not confuse charity with justice. I'm not asking for a revolution, I am asking for reform. A Marshall Plan for the South could be the first step.

- Dr Cornel West is professor of African American studies and religion at Princeton University. His great grandfather was a slave. He is a rap artist and appeared as Counsellor West in Matrix Reloaded and Matrix Revolutions.

Interview by Joanna Walters, in Princeton, New Jersey

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[How you can help \(Federal Emergency Management Agency\)](#)
[KatrinaHelp.info](#)
[American Red Cross](#)
[Louisiana Office of Emergency Preparedness](#)
[US National Hurricane Centre](#)
[Louisiana State University Hurricane Centre](#)
[US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#)

Local media

[New Orleans Times-Picayune](#)
[Baton Rouge Advocate](#)
[South Mississippi SunHerald](#)
[World News Guide: Alabama](#)
[World News Guide: Mississippi](#)
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Thinking and acting beyond New Orleans and much more politically is an excellent suggestion. I am grateful to Ilan and Tim. The suggestion brings to mind two things (and my apologies for cross posting).

First is Haresh Shah's well know lament after the earthquake in Gujarat (2001) that with so much knowledge, experience, science, and technology, professionals are still failing to "go the last mile" with implementation. Since Haresh's now famous, short paper -- one that has probably circled the globe several times electronically -- I have been involved in many discussions (in Colombia, South Africa, Japan) about the obstacles to implementing what we know. In most of these discussions my interlocutors shy away from the "political" obstacles -- such as we've seen now in the case of New Orleans. So I fully and enthusiastically support the suggestion of not just doing studies of disasters-waiting-to-happen, but expending the "great deal of energy... to generate publicity" the two previous writers suggest. Moreover, these studies have got to be participatory in nature, involving from the start civil society, and, especially, many women and young people.

Second, I would add Mumbai to Ilan's list. Although the flooding that killed more than 1,000 people a short time ago was not caused by a cyclonic storm, there are many similar aspects of that tragedy. Monsoon flooding has been getting worse and worse as the city grows and the old drainage infrastructure is not able to keep pace. Maintenance of the drainage system also seems to have been neglected.

I would be grateful if list members who know more about the Mumbai situation would enlighten us.

Flooding in cities -- whatever the natural trigger event --is a major threat to much of humanity and has enormous knock on effect at the level of regional, national, and sometimes even international economic relations. Osaka, Japan's second largest city, depends on technological systems such as flood gates to keep water from a possible earthquake-generated tsunami out of its immense underground shopping areas and transportation hubs. Will these system fail? In a New York Times article yesterday an expert was quoted as puzzled that the point in the New Orleans levee system that failed was one that had recently been reinforced. All such systems may fail (see Charles Perrow, "Normal Accidents," 2nd edition, Princeton University Press, 1998).

Ben Wisner

bwisner@igc.org

-----Original Message-----

From: Ilan Kelman <ilan_kelman@HOTMAIL.COM>

Sent: Sep 2, 2005 10:56 AM

To: GENDER-AND-DISASTER-NETWORK@listserv.tamu.edu

Subject: Re: Beyond New Orleans

To my mind, the disaster-prevention community could make a huge contribution if in every region a survey is made of disasters-in-waiting AND a great deal of energy is used to generate publicity where it can be effective, possibly far away in the nations' capitals, to give at least some chance to preventive measures being undertaken by the political class.

I wish to echo this sentiment, in particular using Katrina as an excuse to raise the profile of cities which could suffer similar fates, such as London and Dhaka, New York and (I believe but I might be wrong) Kinshasa. It is too late for New Orleans. It is not too late for the others.

My concern is that, when I have tried to speak about disasters-in-waiting, little impact results. When our colleagues spoke about New Orleans as a disaster-in-waiting, little impact resulted. Even when we speak about Darfur or Dhaka or Kinshasa as disasters-in-progress (at the appropriate times), little impact results. 300,000 people had just died in tsunamis across a dozen countries when the Chancellor of the United Kingdom Offered whatever money it would take to help them and backed up his words with the staggering sum of one million pounds--the same amount of money required to fire a single cruise missile into Baghdad.

In the weeks before Katrina formed, I had been spending time with journalists trying to construct a scenario for a major inundation of central London. Aside from <http://www.floodlondon.com> minimal scientific information appears to exist on such a situation. Government agencies seem to be unwilling to consider this scenario--after all, the Thames Barrier will protect the city. Some government officials have publicly stated blatant falsehoods, such as the senior civil servant who claimed that no one would die during the next major east coast storm surge. I challenged him in the public forum to justify this contention, backing up my statements with evidence, and was effectively told to stuff it.

And did I mention that New Orleans is safe?

To those of us in the more affluent countries, how dare we go to less affluent places and work through technology and knowledge exchange, capacity building, and institutional strengthening? Our own countries are a mess.

Belize has a better national disaster management plan than the U.K. India has disaster-related NGOs which teach me far more than certain academics in the U.S.A. and Australia. What does it take, whether you are in Lilongwe or Leeds, Wellington or Speightstown, to make our species think ahead of disaster?

I fully agree with Tim's words. How do we do so?

Ilan

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Maxine

This first hand report from New Orleans last week was received today from a friend; it is so powerful and honest I think the members of this listserv will want to know this.

Phil Olson
Sept 5, 2005
by Phil Gasper:

Two friends of mine--paramedics attending a conference--were trapped in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina. This is their eyewitness report.

PG

Hurricane Katrina-Our Experiences by Larry Bradshaw, Lorrie Beth Slonsky

Two days after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the Walgreen's store at the corner of Royal and Iberville streets remained locked. The dairy display case was clearly visible through the widows. It was now 48 hours without electricity, running water, plumbing. The milk, yogurt, and cheeses were beginning to spoil in the 90-degree heat. The owners and managers had locked up the food, water, pampers, and prescriptions and fled the City. Outside Walgreen's windows, residents and tourists grew increasingly thirsty and hungry.

The much-promised federal, state and local aid never materialized and the windows at Walgreen's gave way to the looters. There was an alternative. The cops could have broken one small window and distributed the nuts, fruit juices, and bottle water in an organized and systematic manner. But they did not. Instead they spent hours playing cat and mouse, temporarily chasing away the looters.

We were finally airlifted out of New Orleans two days ago and arrived home yesterday (Saturday). We have yet to see any of the TV coverage or look at a newspaper. We are willing to guess that there were no video images or front-page pictures of European or affluent white tourists looting the Walgreen's in the French Quarter.

We also suspect the media will have been inundated with "hero" images of the National Guard, the troops and the police struggling to help the "victims" of the Hurricane. What you will not see, but what we witnessed, were the real heroes and sheroes of the hurricane relief effort: the working class of New Orleans. The maintenance workers who used a fork lift to carry the sick and disabled. The engineers, who rigged, nurtured and kept the generators running. The electricians who improvised thick extension cords stretching over blocks to share the little electricity we had in order to free cars stuck on rooftop parking lots. Nurses who took over for mechanical ventilators and spent many hours on end manually forcing air into the lungs of unconscious patients to keep them alive. Doormen who rescued folks stuck in elevators.

Refinery workers who broke into boat yards, "stealing" boats to rescue their neighbors clinging to their roofs in flood waters. Mechanics who helped hot-wire any car that could be found to ferry people out of the City. And the food service workers who scoured the commercial kitchens improvising communal meals for hundreds of those stranded. Most of these workers had lost their homes, and had not heard from members of their families, yet they stayed and provided the only infrastructure for the 20% of New Orleans that was not under water.

On Day 2, there were approximately 500 of us left in the hotels in the French Quarter. We were a mix of foreign tourists, conference attendees like ourselves, and locals who had checked into hotels for safety and shelter from Katrina. Some of us had cell phone contact with family and friends outside of New Orleans. We were repeatedly told that all sorts of resources including the National Guard and scores of buses were pouring in to the City. The buses and the other resources must have been invisible because none of us had seen them.

We decided we had to save ourselves. So we pooled our money and came up with \$25,000 to have ten buses come and take us out of the City. Those who did not have the requisite \$45.00 for a ticket were subsidized by those who did have extra money. We waited for 48 hours for the buses, spending the last 12 hours standing outside, sharing the limited water, food, and clothes we had. We created a priority boarding area for the sick, elderly and new born babies. We waited late into the night for the "imminent" arrival of the buses. The buses never arrived. We later learned that the minute they arrived at the City limits, they were commandeered by the military.

By day 4 our hotels had run out of fuel and water. Sanitation was dangerously abysmal. As the desperation and despair increased, street crime as well as water levels began to rise. The hotels turned us out and locked their doors, telling us that the "officials" told us to report to the convention center to wait for more buses. As we entered the center of the City, we finally encountered the National Guard. The Guards told us we would not be allowed into the Superdome as the City's primary shelter had descended into a humanitarian and health hellhole. The guards further told us that the City's only other shelter, the Convention Center, was also descending into chaos and squalor and that the police were not allowing anyone else in. Quite naturally, we asked, "If we can't go to the only 2 shelters in the City, what was our alternative?" The guards told us that that was our problem, and no they did not have extra water to give to us. This would be the start of our numerous encounters with callous and hostile "law enforcement".

We walked to the police command center at Harrah's on Canal Street and were told the same thing, that we were on our own, and no they did not have water to give us. We now numbered several hundred. We held a mass meeting to decide a course of action. We agreed to camp outside the police command post. We would be plainly visible to the media and would constitute a highly visible embarrassment to the City officials. The police told us that we could not stay. Regardless, we began to settle in and set up camp. In short order, the police commander came across the street to address our group. He told us he had a solution: we should walk to the Pontchartrain Expressway and cross the greater New Orleans Bridge where the police had buses lined up to take us out of the City. The crowd cheered and began to move. We called everyone back and explained to the commander that there had been lots of misinformation and wrong information and was he sure that there were buses waiting for us. The commander turned to the crowd and stated emphatically, "I swear to you that the buses are there."

We organized ourselves and the 200 of us set off for the bridge with great excitement and hope. As we marched past the convention center, many locals saw our determined and optimistic group and asked where we were headed. We told them about the great news. Families immediately grabbed their few belongings and quickly our numbers doubled and then doubled again. Babies in strollers now joined us, people using crutches, elderly clasping walkers and others people in wheelchairs. We marched the 2-3 miles to the freeway and up the steep incline to the Bridge. It now began to pour down rain, but it did not dampen our enthusiasm.

As we approached the bridge, armed Gretna sheriffs formed a line across the foot of the bridge. Before we were close enough to speak, they began firing their weapons over our heads. This sent the crowd fleeing in various directions. As the crowd scattered and dissipated, a few of us inched forward and managed to engage some of the sheriffs in conversation. We told them of our conversation with the police

commander and of the commander's assurances. The sheriffs informed us there were no buses waiting. The commander had lied to us to get us to move.

We questioned why we couldn't cross the bridge anyway, especially as there was little traffic on the 6-lane highway. They responded that the West Bank was not going to become New Orleans and there would be no Superdomes in their City. These were code words for if you are poor and black, you are not crossing the Mississippi River and you were not getting out of New Orleans.

Our small group retreated back down Highway 90 to seek shelter from the rain under an overpass. We debated our options and in the end decided to build an encampment in the middle of the Ponchartrain Expressway on the center divide, between the O'Keefe and Tchoupitoulas exits. We reasoned we would be visible to everyone, we would have some security being on an elevated freeway and we could wait and watch for the arrival of the yet to be seen buses.

All day long, we saw other families, individuals and groups make the same trip up the incline in an attempt to cross the bridge, only to be turned away. Some chased away with gunfire, others simply told no, others to be verbally berated and humiliated. Thousands of New Orleaners were prevented and prohibited from self-evacuating the City on foot.

Meanwhile, the only two City shelters sank further into squalor and disrepair. The only way across the bridge was by vehicle. We saw workers stealing trucks, buses, moving vans, semi-trucks and any car that could be hotwired. All were packed with people trying to escape the misery New Orleans had become.

Our little encampment began to blossom. Someone stole a water delivery truck and brought it up to us. Let's hear it for looting! A mile or so down the freeway, an army truck lost a couple of pallets of C-rations on a tight turn. We ferried the food back to our camp in shopping carts. Now secure with the two necessities, food and water; cooperation, community, and creativity flowered. We organized a clean up and hung garbage bags from the rebar poles. We made beds from wood pallets and cardboard. We designated a storm drain as the bathroom and the kids built an elaborate enclosure for privacy out of plastic, broken umbrellas, and other scraps. We even organized a food recycling system where individuals could swap out parts of C-rations (applesauce for babies and candies for kids!).

This was a process we saw repeatedly in the aftermath of Katrina. When individuals had to fight to find food or water, it meant looking out for yourself only. You had to do whatever it took to find water for your kids or food for your parents. When these basic needs were met, people began to look out for each other, working together and constructing a community.

If the relief organizations had saturated the City with food and water in the first 2 or 3 days, the desperation, the frustration and the ugliness would not have set in. Flush with the necessities, we offered food and water to passing families and individuals. Many decided to stay and join us. Our encampment grew to 80 or 90 people. From a woman with a battery powered radio we learned that the media was talking about us. Up in full view on the freeway, every relief and news organizations saw us on their way into the City. Officials were being asked what they were going to do about all those families living up on the freeway? The officials responded they were going to take care of us. Some of us got a sinking feeling. "Taking care of us" had an ominous tone to it.

Unfortunately, our sinking feeling (along with the sinking City) was correct. Just as dusk set in, a Gretna Sheriff showed up, jumped out of his patrol vehicle, aimed his gun at our faces, screaming, "Get off the fucking freeway". A helicopter arrived and used the wind from its blades to blow away our flimsy structures. As we retreated, the sheriff loaded up his truck with our food and water. Once again, at gunpoint, we were forced off the freeway. All the law enforcement agencies appeared threatened when we congregated or congealed into groups of 20 or more. In every congregation of "victims" they saw "mob" or "riot". We felt safety in numbers. Our "we must stay together" was impossible because the agencies would force us into small atomized groups.

In the pandemonium of having our camp raided and destroyed, we scattered once again. Reduced to a small group of 8 people, in the dark, we sought refuge in an abandoned school bus, under the freeway on Cilo Street. We were hiding from possible criminal elements but equally and definitely, we were hiding from the police and sheriffs with their martial law, curfew and shoot-to-kill policies.

The next days, our group of 8 walked most of the day, made contact with New Orleans Fire Department and were eventually airlifted out by an urban search and rescue team. We were dropped off near the airport and managed to catch a ride with the National Guard. The two young guardsmen apologized for the limited response of the Louisiana guards. They explained that a large section of their unit was in Iraq and that meant they were shorthanded and were unable to complete all the tasks they were assigned.

We arrived at the airport on the day a massive airlift had begun. The airport had become another Superdome. We 8 were caught in a press of humanity as flights were delayed for several hours while George Bush landed briefly at the airport for a photo op. After being evacuated on a coast guard cargo plane, we arrived in San Antonio, Texas.

There the humiliation and dehumanization of the official relief effort continued. We were placed on buses and driven to a large field where we were forced to sit for hours and hours. Some of the buses did not have air-conditioners. In the dark, hundreds if

us were forced to share two filthy overflowing porta-potties. Those who managed to make it out with any possessions (often a few belongings in tattered plastic bags) we were subjected to two different dog-sniffing searches.

Most of us had not eaten all day because our C-rations had been confiscated at the airport because the rations set off the metal detectors. Yet, no food had been provided to the men, women, children, elderly, disabled as they sat for hours waiting to be "medically screened" to make sure we were not carrying any communicable diseases.

This official treatment was in sharp contrast to the warm, heart-felt reception given to us by the ordinary Texans. We saw one airline worker give her shoes to someone who was barefoot. Strangers on the street offered us money and toiletries with words of welcome. Throughout, the official relief effort was callous, inept, and racist. There was more suffering than need be. Lives were lost that did not need to be lost.

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Ben et al.,

Building on the general traffic regarding participatory recovery planning for New Orleans, I want to pass along an interesting suggestion for using Christopher Alexander's concept of a "Pattern Language" in a wiki-like way to encourage participatory revision of rebuilding plans toward a consensus community view or vision. See the message below which was originally posted on the GreenBuilding mailing list.

Even beyond New Orleans, this might have some very relevant applications for risk reduction action planning, particularly as a framework for following up community level risk assessment. Personally I tend to think of this type of systems approach more as establishing some simple rules for risk reduction from which more complex dynamics will flow, but the pattern analogy works nicely as well -- particularly in this rebuilding / Design context. Basically taking community risk mapping to the solutions or design level.

The wiki suggestion is also very interesting as a tool for aggregating and building consensus from a range of inputs within a broad group – not perfect but still interesting. [Wikis are essentially web pages that can be edited collaboratively. For an example see the Wikipedia page on Hurricane Katrina.]

Overall no definitive proposals but some intriguing ideas.

-Ian

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[Greenbuilding] Rebuilding New Orleans
<http://listserv.repp.org/pipermail/greenbuilding/2005-September/029420.html>

David Foley contact at hollandandfoley.com
Tue Sep 13 11:33:54 EDT 2005
Previous message: [Greenbuilding] Green New Orleans vs Netherlands
Messages sorted by: [date] [thread] [subject] [author]

Interesting discussion. Here's one point of view, for what it's worth.

Let's assume New Orleans will be rebuilt. One could argue that it shouldn't be, but that's not likely. Then the question is, how shall it be rebuilt? Will it rely on massive engineering in an ultimately futile attempt to triumph over natural forces? Will vegetation give way to paved sprawl, as happened especially over the last decade? Will the wetlands, mangroves, coastal islands and riparian buffers be destroyed, as they have been since WW2? Or will the rebuilding be smarter this time?

I know that one point of view is that building New Orleans at all is a mistake, should never have happened, is human idiocy ignoring Nature's lessons, and so on. But I think this is academic - an argument not likely to convince many. Meanwhile, in the real world, New Orleans will be rebuilt. If that's true, what mistakes in the city's past should not be repeated in its future?

I think what's need is a way to move beyond general descriptions, philosophical stances and general hand waving, and start thinking about real instructions. The kind of instructions I'm thinking of are called "Patterns. "The idea of "Patterns" was first proposed by Christopher Alexander and his colleagues in the 1970's. They wrote a groundbreaking book called "A Pattern Language." It's a collection of observations about what makes human settlements livable, viable, life-affirming, pleasant, functional, etc. The Patterns are described as a context, an analysis, evidence and a general solution. The solution is an instruction: it is specific about what you must do to make that solution come into being. Yet each Pattern is general enough to be repeated without ever being exactly the same - that allows local adaptation instead of cookie-cutter sameness.

The Patterns are linked, from large scale to small. They follow that kind of sequence - it's important to get larger-scale Patterns in place to help the small ones happen. The Patterns range from region to metropolitan area to city to neighborhood to individual building.

Patterns are never finished. They're open to criticism, refinement and improvement. New ones can be written to cover new circumstances. In that way, a Pattern Language is very much like a genetic code. But Patterns also demand intellectual rigor. They require empirical evidence, observation, and the willingness to favor evidence over ideology. Most important, a Pattern is expressed as an instruction for creating something tangible in the real world. Principles are important, but by themselves they don't generate anything. For that, you need instructions.

For more on Patterns, read the book or visit:

<http://www.patternlanguage.com/leveltwo/patternsframegreen.htm?/leveltwo/./apl/twopanelnlb.htm>

[IOD - a better link may be --

<http://www.patternlanguage.com/leveltwo/patternsframegreen.htm?./apl/twopanelnlb.htm>

The internet has given us a fantastic opportunity. What if there were a web site dedicated to writing a Pattern Language for a new, ecologically viable, humane, ractical New Orleans? What if it were like a "wiki", where people are encouraged to revise Patterns until they reflect a consensus? What if this were a place where the people of New Orleans could have a voice? What if this Pattern Language reflected the views of enough people that government officials had to take it seriously?

Assuming New Orleans is rebuilt - and I'm sure it will be - its reconstruction will be guided by something. That something is often the "mental model" of a few powerful people. Otherwise, it's the mindless multiplication of individual choices overlooking the common good. What if there were instead a set of instructions, ranging in scale, open-source, democratic, transparent, changeable, with the overall goal of a viable, healthy city? Wouldn't that be an improvement on the alternative?

- David Foley --

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Previous message: [Greenbuilding] Green New Orleans vs Netherlands

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More information about the Greenbuilding mailing list

For Immediate Release

Contact: Ajamu Baraka

September 13th 2005

404 588-9761

U.S. Human Rights Network calls for authorities to meet their legal and moral obligations to "Internally Displaced Persons" in the wake of Hurricane Katrina

Continued relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina have been marked by as much official confusion and disarray as was evident in the immediate response. Competing interests combined with poor planning and a disjointed response from public and private agencies have underscored conflicting views about priorities, funding and other crucial details. A clear vision of what should happen next, however, can be readily gained by applying a human rights framework to the debate. Such a framework already exists: the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

The principles identify the internationally recognized rights and guarantees of "internally displaced persons - people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes and communities due to a number of factors, including natural disaster - and distinguish them from "refugees" or "evacuees." "This is not a mere question of semantics," says Ajamu Baraka, executive director of the U.S. Human Rights Network,

“but an essential definition that establishes the obligations of government to protect and defend the rights of the Gulf Coast residents who have been dispersed across the country.”

The U.S. Human Rights Network, a coalition of more than 170 human rights organizations across the country, is strongly urging that federal, state and local authorities apply the U.N. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to all future Katrina-related discussions and actions. It is important to note that the United States has consistently upheld the U.N. principles when similar circumstances have arisen in other countries. “If the fundamental rights of displaced people apply in countries far less able to cope with such disasters as Hurricane Katrina,” Baraka says, “they certainly apply here.”

One of the most contentious issues currently emerging is the fate of the large numbers of people, largely poor and African American who may want to return to their homes and communities yet may not have the resources to do so. But as the U.N. principles clearly state, “Authorities have the duty and responsibility to assist returned and/or resettled internally displaced persons to recover, to the extent possible, their property and possessions which they left behind or were dispossessed of upon their displacement.” Low- and middle-income property owners will have particular difficulty meeting their financial obligations and will require protection from creditors; speculators are already targeting the most vulnerable and desperate property owners, offering cash for their holdings at pennies on the dollar. “The sharks are circling,” says Jaribu Hill, executive director of the Mississippi Workers’ Center for Human Rights, a USHRN member, “and we must ensure that they are not allowed to feed.”

The extent to which various aspects of the recovery should be funded will be a topic of much debate among policymakers, especially given the federal deficit and competing economic needs. But the rights of the displaced must be viewed as a separate and overriding issue, and their plight must not be compounded by letting them fend for themselves once the dust has settled. This will be especially important to remember after Katrina has faded from the media spotlight. “If we accept that it will take years to rebuild New Orleans, we must also accept that it will take no less time to rebuild the lives of the displaced from New Orleans and throughout the Gulf Coast,” Hill says.

In fact, the problems the displaced will face in the future may well dwarf what they’ve already been through. Assessing and then meeting the individual needs of several hundred thousand people scattered in dozens of states will be a difficult and time-consuming task, the magnitude of which argues strongly for a coordinated response that must begin now. This ought to include a role for anyone with expertise in displacement issues, including the U.N. High Commission on Refugees and other international agencies. Regardless of the mechanism, alternatives to dumping the entire recovery burden on FEMA or other ill-equipped agency must be explored.

"Without a coordinated plan that specifically addresses critical long-term issues," Baraka says, "the likelihood will only increase in coming months that the most overless victims of Katrina will be left with nothing."

Missing from the press conferences and official statements to date has been any commitment to another of the U.N. principles: that the victims of Hurricane Katrina have the ability to decide for themselves how to reconstruct their lives. As the principles state unequivocally, the displaced have an inalienable right to participate in decisions about their future, and any recovery plan in Katrina's aftermath must therefore include substantive input by those who have the most at stake. "This is not a courtesy that can be discarded if it becomes inconvenient," says Hill, "but an absolute necessity."

For more information on the U.S. Human Rights Network, contact executive director Ajamu Baraka at 404 588-9761

From: Ian.ODonnell@ifrc.org [mailto:Ian.ODonnell@ifrc.org]
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Subject: "Pattern Language" for Rebuilding New Orleans

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Overall no definitive proposals but some intriguing ideas.

-Ian

1. Introduction

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, there has been an astonishing amount of activity in web-based initiatives responding to the consequences of the disaster. Examining the characteristics of the response of the technology community to Hurricane Katrina¹ tells us much about the way the web has shaped social responses to disaster, raises some interesting issues about the impact of ICT in disaster response, and points towards what might happen in future.

2. Disasters Old and New

The communications revolution and the growth of the mass media has already changed our perceptions of disasters and the communities they affect. Even 20 years ago, coverage of the Ethiopian famine (and the global response, including the well-documented Live Aid event) was facilitated by communications improvements in such a way as to become imprinted on the minds of a generation. It is not, strictly speaking, accurate to call this a revolution; similar events had taken place in a previous generation, in the form of coverage of the war and famine in Biafra in the late 1960s, and popular responses such as George Harrison's [Concert for Bangladesh](#) in 1971. What had changed by the 1980s was the scope and scale of the coverage, and the subsequent level of public awareness and engagement.

It was clear following the Indian Ocean tsunami that the information revolution was in the process of similarly changing the way in which we respond to disasters. This was demonstrated by the rise of [web-based fund-raising](#); Christian Aid raised over £700,000 online in nine days, amounting to nearly four times as much as it raised through donations over the phone. The spread of broadband, improvements in satellite telecommunications and the availability of imagery has made possible GIS and cartographic projects that would not have been possible five years ago.² The rise of the open source movement has led to initiatives such as the [Sahana](#) project, an attempt to develop a suite of web-enabled applications for disaster response organisations.

What lessons can be drawn from what we have seen in the response to Hurricane Katrina? This paper is intended to generate discussion, based on conclusions that have

1 Specific references are given in footnotes: URLs are hyperlinked within the text itself.

2 "Better the Devil we Know: the Opportunity Costs of Humanitarian GIS" (unpublished), Paul Currión July 2005

particular relevance for the Sahana project and other, future initiatives to develop dedicated platforms and applications for disaster response.

3. Discussion Points for Future Response

For a variety of political and logistical reasons, government response to the hurricane was perceived to be woefully slow by the public. There will be an ongoing public dissection of those reasons for a long time, and we are interested in the reasons only so much as they impact on the use of the US' considerable technology capacity. However the perception of delay itself is relevant, since it spurred a large number of people to action who might otherwise have remained nothing more than engaged observers.

Amongst these people were what we can refer to as the 'first responders' of the wired world; those individuals and organisations who are tightly tuned to the web, and who consequently pick up on breaking news earlier than the general population. It has already been documented how [bloggers](#) can break news more quickly than the mainstream media; much discussion has been devoted to how this will impact on the collection and dissemination of information – and how this will affect the traditional journalistic virtue of objectivity. During Hurricane Katrina, blogs such as [Ernie the Attorney](#) and [Queer and Loathing in America](#) reported their experiences – once the bloggers had access to the web – while others were set up to capture information more actively, as with [The Interdictor](#) or the [Slidell Hurricane Damage Blog](#).

Outside the immediate area, first responders read their emails, spoke to friends and colleagues by phone, and later watched and listened to broadcast media bring the news. One characteristic of these first responders as a group is that many of them are also early adopters, tending to be evangelists for new technologies, particularly where those technologies have social applications. For the first time, first responders were able to use these skills in order to respond to the impact of a major disaster. The result was a large-scale mobilisation of existing resources to meet a pressing and immediate need – the transmission of news from the disaster area to the 'outside world'.

This transmission went beyond passive reporting of events, however, which is a requirement well served by the mainstream media. The distributed, interactive nature of the internet meant that these first responders were able to take an active role in two key areas of this response: immediate shelter needs and family tracing. A [huge number of attempts to build web-based listings](#) of individuals affected by the hurricane sprung up – some of them more successful than others, but all of them the result of private or charitable rather than government initiatives. Even the Red Cross – traditionally the market leader in family tracing – was caught out, their service just one of many.

By 3 September, a small group of first responders³ decided to address the problem of multiple data streams, and the [PeopleFinder](#) project was born. A massive volunteer data scraping, cleaning and entry effort was organised at short notice and a consolidated database began to be built, outside the traditional, centralised institutions for this kind of response such as FEMA or the Red Cross. Hugh McLeod, author of the

3 David Geilhulfe, Ethan Zuckerman and Jon Lebowsky.

Gaping Void blog, commented that it was “interesting to watch how the information is self-organising.”⁴ In fact, the information was far from self-organising; it was the web-based response that became self-organising. The PeopleFinder meme, supported by a tightly-linked network of bloggers became a centre of gravity for missing lists, generating very quickly its own data standard, the [People Finder Information Format \(PFIF\)](#) – a very basic specification, but a tremendous effort and a step forward. It seems likely that PFIF will continue in development and may become a useful standard for general adoption.

Although many of the first responders described above are also innovators in the technology field, apart from the development of the PFIF, it is hard to see significant innovation in the response. What we did see was innovative uses of existing platforms (such as [Wikis](#)), applications (such as [Google Maps](#)) and services (such as [Craigslist](#)), as these well-known, accessible and user-friendly tools were used to build knowledge bases to support the response. At the core of all these responses was a single resource: the relational database. This clearly demonstrated that the primary requirement for any aspect of disaster response is data.

It was unsurprising, and indeed appropriate, that there was little innovation to be seen. It was unsurprising because there simply was not time to engage with recently developed technologies, or to deploy experimental tools. It was appropriate because using a disaster response as a test site for new technologies is practically risky and ethically questionable – what is required are proven technologies that will save lives. The result was to fall back on the everyday tools that were already available; another lesson from the hurricane response was that, in one of the most technologically advanced nations on earth, the most useful tools were the ones that were easily to hand.

So what were the applications and services that were put to use? In tracking the coverage of the hurricane response, the resources online fell into a limited range of categories. Blogs gave individuals the opportunity to publish news and opinion in real-time to a broad audience independently of the mainstream media. This made them perfect for broadcasting requests for assistance, pointing people in the direction of other resources, and providing running commentary on the unfolding disaster. Wikis provided quick and simple content management that a large number of people can contribute to. As always, [Wikipedia](#) had excellent [coverage of the hurricane](#); more interestingly, Wikis were used to organise information about a variety of projects – the [Katrina Help Wiki](#)⁵, the [Hurricane Katrina Help Page](#), [Think New Orleans](#) – and to create ad hoc portal sites for the general public.

The most obviously useful application, however, were the Message Boards provided by sites such as [Craigslist](#) or [NOLA.com](#). These fell into two sub-categories: family tracing, and shelter offers. Family tracing provided either requests for information about individuals, or information about the individuals themselves, in order to reassure or reunite families and friends. Shelter offers were a simple co-ordination tool, ensuring needs for assistance and offers of assistance to be matched up; this was later extended to some basic services, such as cleanup equipment, on Craigslist.

4 “[Lists Lists Lists](#)”, Hugh McLeod, 4 September 2005

5 Initiated by Dina Mehta and veterans of another online initiative, [the South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami Blog](#)

Perhaps the most interesting development, however, was the wide availability of geographic information, particularly using facilities such as [Google Maps](#) and [Google Earth](#). Geographic information is extremely powerful in shaping the direction of any response, and some data looked to be genuinely useful – both [general information](#), and more specialised datasets, such as [damage assessments](#) (Google Earth), [shelter maps](#) (Google Maps) and [remote sensing imagery](#) (NOAA). Users were actively encouraged to adapt this data for their own needs; it is increasingly obvious that Google will play an important role in familiarising a wider audience with the visualisation of data, and consequently pave the way for more widespread acceptance of GIS.

There are two caveats to this optimistic view. First, the level of geographic information seen during the hurricane was very basic – orientation rather than analysis. We need to invest in developing more useable analytical tools for a general audience, using better graphical interfaces such as Google's, and to ensure that there are data models for humanitarian GIS work. It is also worth remembering that the the coverage of remote sensing and the quality of geographic information is better in the US than anywhere else on the globe, raising questions over how soon those services might be replicated in other locations. The only solution to this problem is greater investment in improving the global coverage of baseline geographic data; if we accept that geographic information is vital, not just for disaster response, but for a wide range of human endeavours, we must also accept that it requires more funding to map the earth.

In addition, useful as these services were (particularly to somebody like me, who was following the response from the other side of the Atlantic), they were limited in their scope – limited by the reach of the internet. Evelyn Rodriguez, a blogger who survived the Indian Ocean tsunami, spoke from experience when she pointed out that “survivors in most immediate need... are rarely going to be in any position to get online... I just don't see online resources as the highest priority for a survivor as it's not likely we're safely at our keyboards on a broadband connection when and after disaster strikes.”⁶

So who are these resources useful for? Evelyn Rodriguez again has the answer: “online information immediately in the aftermath is mostly going to be useful for other family members trying to sort out information and the general public.” To a large extent, these services were provided on the basis of assumed needs. Ethan Zuckerman, one of the movers behind the PeopleFinder project, noted himself that “[c]omputer programmers are naturally inclined to solve problems with code,”⁷ and many of the services fit into the wired world view that technology can solve most (if not all) of the world's problems.

It will be some time before we are able to evaluate the success, or even the utility, of these services. In terms of adding value to the response, were they worth the investment? Did their impact extend beyond providing an outlet for the humanitarian spirit of those involved with them? Were many families going to the web to trace their

6 “[International Blogging For Disaster Relief Day](#)”, Evelyn Rodriguez, 2 September 2005

7 “[Recovery 2.0 - thoughts on what worked and failed on PeopleFinder so far](#)”, Ethan Zuckerman, 6 September 2005

relatives in New Orleans? With no available statistics, it is impossible to answer any of these questions, but two things are clear. One is that technology has its limits; the other is that, despite these limits, it makes it possible for people to contribute where they have no other opportunity, and that in itself is valuable for empowering individuals.

On the ground, however, people's concerns were different. On 3 September, a CBS reporter visited the area in an army helicopter delivering MREs, only to be told by residents of the town of Pass Christian, "[w]e have food. We need fuel to power our generators. We can be self-sufficient if they would just get us some fuel." Further on, in the town of Kiln, the same message, with one resident explaining that "no one blames the Army National Guard for delivering the wrong items; it's more a matter that there is a disconnect between the providers and those in need."⁸ The question of co-ordination, while not explicitly spoken about, clearly plagued the entire response – both governmental and non-governmental – to the hurricane.

Such was the importance attached to communications (and such was the chaos of the early response) that a number of conspiracy theories began to circulate: radio signals were being [jammed](#), groups trying to establish a radio station in the Astrodome were [shut down by the authorities](#). Radio communications and Internet provision became the subject of mainstream media coverage, as community-based organisations and private citizens tried to provide these facilities in adverse circumstances. Despite their efforts, there appeared to be no effective public information system operating in the affected areas and, judging from television reports, updates on the situation (or directions towards assistance) did not appear to reach those in need.

This failure to transmit information to those who truly needed it spoke to the weakness of all the initiatives described above. Inspiring as they are, they are also fragmented and un-coordinated, much like every other humanitarian response that I've been involved with, if I'm honest. The result is inefficient, and means that we don't meet the needs of people and communities as quickly and appropriately as we should. It's too late for the people of New Orleans – just as it was too late for those affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami – but we need to start asking the difficult questions now. It is my hope that the impact of Katrina will lend momentum to existing projects and generate new initiatives that can be used in future disasters.

On a personal note, it has been an interesting experience following some of the technical blogs – particularly those involved in [PeopleFinder](#) (mentioned above), [ACT](#) (who set up a community internet centre in the Astrodome), [Recovery 2.0](#) (who are already thinking about readiness for the next disaster), and a multitude of others. They've been dealing with exactly the same issues that we've been dealing with in the field for the last decade – massive amounts of uncleaned data, lack of interoperability between systems, problems establishing basic infrastructure – and I can feel their frustration.

The only difference is that the US has the resources to put behind these initiatives and the logistics to make them happen, something that isn't generally true when we deploy

⁸ "[Reduced to Matchsticks](#)", Cynthia Bowers, CBS, 3 September 2005

to locations such as Aceh or Darfur. We need the momentum generated by Hurricane Katrina to have a multiplier effect, so that the initiatives that come out of it also benefit the rest of the world. This means we have to learn (something that the humanitarian community is painfully bad at) in order to make sure that we don't end up fighting the last war, developing tools that are wonderful if you are in a developed country with resources to spare but useless if you are anywhere else in the world.

4. Conclusion

Based on the points raised above, there are three key questions that we should all be asking, as new technologies – and particularly web-based services – empower us to take action.

1. Are there ways of rapidly developing network organisations to co-ordinate these initiatives, without destroying the volunteer spirit, spontaneity and inventiveness of the decentralised approach? This is the perennial problem with co-ordination; the Katrina response may point us in useful directions that we could apply to common services in other humanitarian situations.
2. What lessons can we learn from the Katrina response, and how can we ensure that those lessons are turned into actions? Which tools worked, and which didn't? For example, did internet and telephone connectivity make a significant difference, or was it a diversion from the real needs of those trapped in the Astrodome? These questions should be asked in a spirit of open enquiry, and not in order to denigrate the efforts of those who worked so hard to set up those projects.
3. What's missing from the picture painted above? From my perspective, what's missing are report of how ICT was used in what we usually think of as humanitarian activities – shelter management, distribution of food or non-food items, health services, etc. Doubtless there are applications being used in these aspects of the response, particularly by larger organisations such as the Red Cross, but it was hard to identify them from a distance. There needs to be an analysis of the gaps in the technology – what applications were needed, but weren't available? What solutions were explored for rapid connectivity needs, either static or mobile?

Despite the terrible cost, the hurricane response will be a valuable learning experience, and those involved on the ground should do their best to document it. Some writers have already started thinking about these issues. The obvious starting points are tools to manage data, no matter where that data is coming from; standards, protocols and operating procedures that mean systems can speak to each other. The next step is applications, scaleable, flexible and interoperable, that can be placed anywhere and operated easily in environments with varying levels of connectivity and computer literacy. And, finally, future developers should always bear in mind the words of tsunami survivor Evelyn Rodriguez, quoted above: "In an emergency, think: Cheap. Simple. Ubiquitous."

5. About the Author

[Paul Currion](#) is a consultant on information management for humanitarian operations, working in a locations including Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia and the Indian Ocean tsunami region. He is currently carrying out a global assessment of the ICT needs of international NGOs, research for the Swiss Government's ICT4Peace project,

and development of open source software with the Sahana project. An unedited list of Hurricane Katrina references is at <http://del.icio.us/paulcurrion/katrina>.

David Foley contact at hollandandfoley.com

Tue Sep 13 11:33:54 EDT 2005

Previous message: [Greenbuilding] Green New Orleans vs Netherlands

Messages sorted by: [date] [thread] [subject] [author]

Interesting discussion. Here's one point of view, for what it's worth.

Let's assume New Orleans will be rebuilt. One could argue that it shouldn't be, but that's not likely. Then the question is, how shall it be rebuilt? Will it rely on massive engineering in an ultimately futile attempt to triumph over natural forces? Will vegetation give way to paved sprawl, as happened especially over the last decade? Will the wetlands, mangroves, coastal islands and riparian buffers be destroyed, as they have been since WW2? Or will the rebuilding be smarter this time?

I know that one point of view is that building New Orleans at all is a mistake, should never have happened, is human idiocy ignoring Nature's lessons, and so on. But I think this is academic - an argument not likely to convince many. Meanwhile, in the real world, New Orleans will be rebuilt. If that's true, what mistakes in the city's past should not be repeated in its future?

I think what's need is a way to move beyond general descriptions, philosophical stances and general hand waving, and start thinking about real instructions. The kind of instructions I'm thinking of are called "Patterns." The idea of "Patterns" was first proposed by Christopher Alexander and his colleagues in the 1970's. They wrote a groundbreaking book called "A Pattern Language." It's a collection of observations about what makes human settlements livable, viable, life-affirming, pleasant, functional, etc. The Patterns are described as a context, an analysis, evidence and a general solution. The solution is an instruction: it is specific about what you must do to make that solution come into being. Yet each Pattern is general enough to be repeated without ever being exactly the same - that allows local adaptation instead of cookie-cutter sameness.

The Patterns are linked, from large scale to small. They follow that kind of sequence - it's important to get larger-scale Patterns in place to help the small ones happen. The Patterns range from region to metropolitan area to city to neighborhood to individual building.

Patterns are never finished. They're open to criticism, refinement and improvement. New ones can be written to cover new circumstances. In that way, a Pattern Language is very much like a genetic code. But Patterns also demand intellectual rigor. They require empirical evidence, observation, and the willingness to favor evidence over ideology. Most important, a Pattern is expressed as an instruction for creating something tangible in the real world. Principles are important, but by themselves they don't generate anything. For that, you need instructions.

For more on Patterns, read the book or visit:

<http://www.patternlanguage.com/leveltwo/patternsframegreen.htm?/leveltwo/./apl/twopanelnlb.htm>

[IOD - a better link may be --

<http://www.patternlanguage.com/leveltwo/patternsframegreen.htm?./apl/twopanelnlb.htm>

The internet has given us a fantastic opportunity. What if there were a web site dedicated to writing a Pattern Language for a new, ecologically viable, humane, practical New Orleans? What if it were like a "wiki", where people are encouraged to revise Patterns until they reflect a consensus? What if this were a place where the people of New Orleans could have a voice? What if this Pattern Language reflected the views of enough people that government officials had to take it seriously?

Assuming New Orleans is rebuilt - and I'm sure it will be - its reconstruction will be guided by something. That something is often the "mental model" of a few powerful people. Otherwise, it's the mindless multiplication of individual choices overlooking the common good. What if there were instead a set of instructions, ranging in scale, open-source, democratic, transparent, changeable, with the overall goal of a viable, healthy city? Wouldn't that be an improvement on the alternative?

- David Foley --

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VIEWPOINT: Katrina turns tables on U.S. aid

13 Sep 2005

Source: AlertNet



This NOAA satellite image shows Hurricane Katrina hours after making landfall on the Louisiana coast.

Larry Minear, director of the Humanitarian and War Project at Tufts University's Feinstein International Famine Centre, says Americans have a lot to learn from the global reaction to Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane Katrina has turned the world's preeminent aid donor into an aid recipient. Normally on the dispensing end of financial and technical assistance, the United States has now received offers of aid in cash and kind valued at \$1 billion from some 100 countries and international organisations.

The offers range from \$500 million in crude oil and cash from Kuwait to \$25,000 from Sri Lanka, itself still recovering from December's tsunami. Bangladesh, itself no stranger to hurricanes, has offered technical assistance and \$1 million in cash. Cuba has pledged 1,100 doctors, Venezuela food, potable water and eye care, Canada 1,000 relief personnel and four naval and Coast Guard vessels.

This stunning role reversal of more than a half-century of aid relationships offers Americans, who pride themselves on their generosity, an opportunity to reflect upon their own vulnerability and on changes needed in U.S. foreign aid policies.

For starters, post-Katrina aid from abroad, like the outpouring following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, conveys welcome international solidarity. Cataclysms can strike any nation, even the sole remaining superpower.

Contributions from poor countries will be accepted, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said, because "it is very valuable to give to each other and to be able to do so without a sense of means".

President George W. Bush initially expressed his view that the United States could take care of itself. But his administration had soon requested 500,000 meals-ready-to-eat (MREs) from the European Union and air transport support from NATO.

Being on the receiving end of aid flows is awkward. A dozen relief flights a day from abroad are now touching down across the South. The world's number one food producer and exporter suddenly finds itself requesting MREs. Mexican troops are providing assistance, their first time on U.S. soil since the Mexican-American war of 1848.

Not all the gifts are unsolicited or without strings. Iran's offer of 10 million barrels of crude oil is conditional on a waiver of U.S. trade sanctions, for example. The State Department is turning down all offers with strings.

POLITICAL POINTS

As a foreign aid donor, the United States knows well the temptation to try to score political points with assistance.

To its credit, the Ronald Reagan administration insisted that emergency assistance be provided to famine-ridden Ethiopia under military strongmen Mengitsu Haile Mariam in the mid-1980s because "a hungry child knows no politics". Yet Reagan and other U.S. presidents have often tied the granting or withholding of emergency assistance to short-term foreign policy objectives.

U.S. aid now flows more generously to Afghanistan than to more desperate African countries, and Iraq now upstages Niger in per capita U.S. assistance. Despite the humanitarian principle that emergency aid should be granted solely according to need, aid is often used to applaud or embarrass, to reward or sanction.

In fairness, certain political factors cannot be entirely divorced from the aid process. "Katrina was more than a natural disaster," commentator James Carroll has written, adding that it was also a "political epiphany", laying bare the structures of vulnerability caused by poverty, race and class.

These underlying factors cry out for attention, although the political pressure for change can be diffused by the outpouring of sympathy for the survivors.

International experience confirms that when humanitarian aid substitutes for political solutions, it becomes overextended and leaves the structural underpinnings of need unaddressed.

Former President Bill Clinton may be right in saying that now is not the time for national soul-searching on what went wrong that set the stage for the tragedy. But the necessary post-mortem should not be delayed too long.

HARDSHIP AND HAVOC

Katrina should also lead to a review of U.S. policies that create hardship and havoc in other countries.

“Out in the world, where Americans go to war and perform humanitarian missions, chaos is taken to be a part of indigenous conditions,” says analyst Peter Canellos. Yet American military and economic power has implicated this country deeply in some of that chaos.

Moreover, the signature element in American aid over the years has been food assistance, which often helps U.S. farmers while discouraging their counterparts in the developing world.

U.S. policymakers now make sport of the United Nations, which itself offered assistance post-Katrina and which, for all of its weaknesses, anchors the current system of global humanitarian aid. Reflecting upon the Katrina experience, perhaps the United States will take international law and institutions more seriously.

Finally, the killer hurricane underscores the need for accountability in aid efforts. Although the administration was quick to claim that the federal government was meeting the needs of the inundated, the judgment of the beneficiaries rather than the appraisals of policymakers deserves to be the ultimate arbiter.

This is difficult enough to accomplish when the recipients are citizens of a democracy such as the United States. As international aid groups are realising, it is even more difficult, but equally necessary, when from Darfur or Mogadishu the dispossessed have little say in donor capitals such as Washington or aid agency headquarters in New York or Geneva.

Katrina has lots to teach the American people and their policymakers regarding the importance of human solidarity and of a more mutual U.S. role in global humanitarian action.

VIEWPOINT: Will Katrina bring winds of change?

08 Sep 2005

Source: AlertNet



Sunset is seen over a fully evacuated Superdome stadium, where thousands of people stayed while waiting to be evacuated after Hurricane Katrina hit, in New Orleans September 7, 2005. New Orleans police will try to force Hurricane Katrina's survivors to leave the fetid city on Wednesday as the political storm grows over the botched response to the crisis and cost estimates rise to as high as \$150 billion.

REUTERS/CARLOS BARRIA

Ben Wisner, a hazards specialist with the Environmental Studies Programme at Oberlin College, Ohio, says what the United States needs is not higher levees but another civil rights movement.

What are the lessons from the human catastrophe taking place after Hurricane Katrina?

It wasn't just the winds and floodwaters that put people at risk along the Gulf of Mexico. The human tragedy in New Orleans and many lesser known communities along the U.S. Gulf Coast has deep roots in a neo-liberal ideology that favors lax regulation and a return to massive investment in petro-chemical and other industries with little concern for social and environmental consequences.

About 1,500 square miles (3,885 km sq) of wetland has been lost over the past few decades that would have reduced the height of the storm surge affecting New Orleans. Contamination from the petro-chemical complexes and transfer points concentrated on-shore and offshore has contributed to the death of wetlands.

Meanwhile low-income, black families have been mired in poverty by the "downsizing" of the federal state. That has meant less money for education, for small businesses and for decent, low-cost housing.

Thirty-seven million people live in poverty in the United States - many in the south, where an anti-union ethos and lax environmental and land-use regulations have attracted chemical industries.

The myth of idyllic seaside retirement has also been sold to elderly Americans, and retirement homes have sprung up. More of the black working poor serve as low wage care givers.

Casino gambling has also added non-union, low wage employment – a desperate last resort for communities that are losing their traditional fishing-based economies due to over-fishing and gross pollution of the Gulf of Mexico.

The root causes of the catastrophe triggered by Katrina are deep. In Latin America disasters such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998 were seen as the result of years of failed development and mal-development. The same must be said of Katrina.

Race and class

People have discussed the possible effects of a direct hit by a large hurricane on New Orleans since Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Camille in 1969. After Camille, which killed 256 people in Mississippi, evidence of racial discrimination in the allocation of recovery resources was first documented, leading to a U.S. Congressional investigation.

Has the social, political and economic situation changed since then?

There was no plan to use trains or some other form of mass transport to evacuate the indigent and those without private cars or money.

The most recent census showed that in a city 87 percent black and 30 percent poor, there were 112,000 households without private vehicles. This was known, but no provision was made to transport the poor to smaller, well run shelters outside New Orleans such as those in Baton Rouge.

Instead, survivors were herded into the Superdome, whose roof was then ripped open in several places by the wind. I saw images of these refugees, mostly black, being herded by armed national guardsmen who barked and yelled at them.

The scene was humiliating and far removed from the ideal of providing shelter with dignity and respect that is at the heart of the humanitarian ethic.

As the days wore on the air conditioning failed, bathroom facilities became filthy, water and food ran short.

By the time the decision was made to move these people to the Astrodome and other shelters in Texas and other states, conditions failed to meet international standards for the provision of shelter. There were also very limited facilities for people in wheel chairs.

All this would have been avoided if at least a year ago, after the experience of Hurricane Ivan, authorities had taken the needs of the poor and indigent in New Orleans seriously.

Preparedness and prevention

Kent Mathewson, a geographer at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, has tried over the past year since Hurricane Ivan to get officials to develop a contingency plan to evacuate the indigent and those without private vehicles on the trains that run through New Orleans. His suggestions have fallen on deaf ears.

A church-based pilot project also began after Ivan in 2004 that partnered church members without access to vehicles with those that do. But this was an independent effort to fill the vacuum in policy at city, state and federal level.

Hurricane Ivan last year should have caused a re-doubling of precautionary planning. The night Ivan approached, 20,000 low-income people without private vehicles sheltered in their homes below sea level. A direct hit would have drowned them.

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers computer simulation had calculated that many thousands could die in the city in the event of a direct hit by a slow-moving category 3 hurricane. Fortunately, Ivan veered away from the city at the last moment, but still killed 25 people elsewhere in the U.S. south.

This time, too, things were not as bad as they could have been because of a small westward turn that placed the dangerous northeast edge of the storm over Mississippi.

But will authorities finally get the message and do serious planning for the needs of the poor? Could Katrina be the beginning of demands from below for social justice in the face of the present social and spatial distribution of risk?

Time will tell. But with so many resources at the disposal of the U.S. Federal Emergency Agency (FEMA) – part of the Homeland Security Department – devoted to the “war on terrorism”, I am not optimistic.

FEMA and other federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers, as well as academics and hazard professionals, have for a long time considered a direct hit on New Orleans by a slow moving category 3 hurricane or stronger to be a worst case scenario.

But planning for such an event was insufficient, and money for study, maintenance and the upgrading of New Orleans' levee system was cut in the years leading up to this disasters.

Similarly, National Guard troops in Mississippi and Louisiana who could have helped with immediate search and rescue were deployed in Iraq, along with their heavy vehicles.

What's to be done?

This was not an "act of God". To learn from this disaster and prevent worse to come as global warming makes hurricanes more frequent and intense, policymakers must face up to the dead end that laissez faire Capitalism has let us all into.

Non-governmental organisations, faith communities and activist groups need to mobilise the mass of the population in affected area to see themselves not as victims of nature but victims of a late phase of globalising Capitalism. The affected people will then be in a position to see themselves as agents of their own wellbeing and victims no longer as they demand social change.

In concrete terms, there is one project that seems to me a priority.

Planning for recovery needs to occur in a participatory and inclusive manner. Women, people of colour, people living with disabilities and children and youth need to be part of the process in the post-Katrina situation.

In May 2005, an International Recovery Platform was created in Kobe, Japan, with the purpose of pooling and making available the best of the world's experience in post-disaster recovery.

We need to tap this rich source of global knowledge and make a digest of this experience available in a useful form to NGOs, faith groups and activists.

The U.S. does not need higher levees. It needs another civil rights movement.

WRAPUP 2-Louisiana towns rebound, sick and aged hit hard

14 Sep 2005 15:18:34 GMT

Source: Reuters



An Air Force plane from the 910 Airlift Wing disperses chemicals to control mosquitoes and flies in New Orleans September 13, 2005. Health officials dispersed chemicals to minimize the risk of diseases carried by insects in a step toward making the city habitable again.

REUTERS/CARLOS BARRIA



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REUTERS/CARLOS BARRIA



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REUTERS/CARLOS BARRIA

By Kieran Murray

NEW ORLEANS, Sept 14 (Reuters) - Three Louisiana towns allowed people to come home on Wednesday for the first time since Hurricane Katrina struck, as officials from a nursing home and a hospital defended their handling of sick and aged patients who died after the storm.

As the Gulf Coast struggled to recover from the Aug. 29 hurricane, the death toll rose to 648 in Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida. Louisiana Attorney General Charles Foti filed criminal charges against the operators of a nursing home where 34 patients died after they were trapped by the storm's floodwaters.

The cities of Gretna, Westwego and Lafitte, all suburbs of New Orleans, told residents they could come back at daybreak.

"Essential services such as electricity, sewerage and water are improving daily but are still not up to standard. Commercial establishments, such as grocery stores, gas stations and pharmacies are scarce but are beginning to open. Therefore, if you have the means to stay away for a longer period of time it would be advisable for you to do so," said a notice on the Web site of Jefferson Parish, where the towns are located.

Aaron Broussard, president of Jefferson Parish, said the key to reopening areas for habitation and business was restoring sewage services.

Fewer than 400,000 electricity customers still lacked power 16 days after Hurricane Katrina pummeled the U.S. Gulf Coast in Louisiana and Mississippi, according to area utilities and the U.S. Department of Energy.

About 319,000 of the homes and businesses in Louisiana, or 29 percent, remained without power, while Mississippi had about 84,000 customers still with no service.

Foti said on Tuesday that the owners of a nursing home in St. Bernard Parish had been arrested and charged with 34 counts of negligent homicide.

"Thirty-four people drowned in a nursing home when it should have been evacuated. I cannot say it any plainer than that," Foti said.

The owners, Mable and Salvador Mangano, turned down an offer from local officials to take the patients out by bus, and did not bother to call in an ambulance service with which they had a contract, he said. They were each released on \$50,000 bonds on Wednesday.

EVERY DEATH TO BE PROBED

Foti vowed to investigate every death at every hospital and nursing home that was not from natural causes.

James Cobb, a lawyer for the owners, said they did all they could and had told family members that they could remove the patients if they wanted.

"What people have to understand is, you're presented with a horrible choice," he said. "You take people who are on feeder tubes, who are on oxygen, who are on medications and you put them on a bus to go 70 miles (112 km) in 12 hours? People are going to die, people are going to die, we know that."

In another development, the owners of a New Orleans hospital where 44 bodies were found said they were those of critically ill patients who died in stifling heat after power was cut to the flooded building but before it could be evacuated.

Tenet Healthcare Corp. <THC.N> said no one still alive was left behind at Memorial Medical Center in New Orleans when help finally came.

"During more than four days with poor sanitation, without power, air-conditioning and running water, and with temperatures in the building approaching 110 degrees (43 C), some patients simply did not survive despite the heroic efforts of our physicians and nurses. We believe that most were very sick adult patients," the company said in a statement.

President George W. Bush, addressing the United Nations General Assembly, thanked other countries for coming to the aid of hurricane victims.

"In Alabama and Mississippi and Louisiana, whole neighborhoods have been lifted from their foundations and sent crashing into the streets. A great American city is working to turn the flood waters and reclaim its future.

"To every nation, every province and every community across the world that is standing with the American people in this hour of need, I offer the thanks of my nation," he said.

Bush, who has taken responsibility for the slow federal government response to the disaster, returns to the devastated region on Thursday and will address the nation in the evening.

In New Orleans, bodies were still being recovered and many neighborhoods remained flooded by water that surged through broken levees after the storm hit.

The storm likely will be the costliest natural disaster in American history, with high-end estimates at \$200 billion. The U.S. Congress has approved \$62.3 billion so far for relief.

Medical teams search for epidemics after Katrina

13 Sep 2005 13:23:34 GMT

Source: Reuters

NEW ORLEANS, Sept 13 (Reuters) - Investigators searching for evidence of epidemics following Hurricane Katrina found plenty of stomach upset but no serious outbreaks -- yet.

"We haven't seen anything that jumps off the page," said Dr. Carolyn Tabak. "But there are illnesses that seem to be occurring in greater numbers."

Tabak, a pediatrician at the National Center for Health Statistics in Hyattsville, Maryland, is helping lead a team of researchers who will decide if any epidemics have followed the flood and damage caused by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

In addition to the widely expected stomach upset caused by dirty water, skin infections appeared frequently, she said..

"Rashes are not uncommon here, anyway," added Edward Weiss, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention epidemiologist from Atlanta. "I think the main illness we are seeing here is the dysentery, the diarrhea."

The CDC says 19 people have become ill from *Vibrio* bacterial infections and five have died in the region after Katrina. Three have died from *Vibrio vulnificus* and two from *V. parahaemolyticus*, the CDC said.

Both organisms are common in Gulf waters and usually only sicken people who already have immune weaknesses.

One hospital, East Jefferson General Hospital, is reporting cases of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, a bacterial infection that resists many antibiotics and can be hard to treat. But Weiss said MRSA, usually seen as a skin infection, has become common in many places.

NO EXPECTATIONS

The CDC did not expect to see any serious, deadly epidemics after Katrina hit, and not even after some of the levees that hold back Lake Pontchartrain north of the city failed, flooding some areas with up to 20 feet of sewage- and chemical-filled water.

"Although infectious diseases are a frightening prospect, widespread outbreaks of infectious disease after hurricanes are not common in the United States," the CDC said in a statement.

But Tabak and her colleagues were there to track what does happen, record it, and warn local medical professionals if anything unusual does seem to be happening.

On Tuesday the CDC team visited one of four working hospitals in the New Orleans area -- the West Jefferson Medical Center. It stayed dry through the flood and suffered minimal hurricane damage, although it lost power and many of its staff have been working without a break since the storm hit Aug. 29.

On its grounds the Federal Emergency Management Agency has set up a Disaster Medical Assistance Team in tents on the front lawn to screen all cases going into the hospital.

They have asked the doctors, nurses and technicians to fill out detailed forms so they can classify cases by illness or injury, and whether a rescuer or volunteer, or a survivor, was treated.

Volunteer Tom Lowe, a registered nurse from New York, hands Tabak a thick stack of handwritten medical records.

"We will compare this to pre-hurricane data," Tabak said. They are hoping to retrieve the hospital's emergency room records from the week before the hurricane to make a good comparison.

"We have to know the baseline before we can know whether there is an epidemic," she added.

Because most routine disease is not monitored in the United States, and because disease patterns vary in different parts of the country, what may appear to be an epidemic to a physician from the Northeast may in fact be normal for the muggy Gulf states, she said.

Katrina numbers illustrate storm's toll

13 Sep 2005 22:03:21 GMT

Source: Reuters

Sept 13 (Reuters) - Hurricane Katrina displaced 1 million people and could cost as much as \$200 billion, according to some estimates. Here are some facts about the impact of the worst natural disaster in U.S. history and the relief and recovery effort on Tuesday.

- * More than 640 people were confirmed dead, mostly in Louisiana, where there are 423 and Mississippi with 218. Katrina also caused scattered deaths in Alabama and Florida.
- * Some 1 million people were displaced by the storm along the U.S. Gulf Coast. About half of those are from New Orleans, where nearly all 450,000 residents were evacuated.
- * About 40 percent of New Orleans was still flooded. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has set Oct. 8 as its target date to have the city dry enough for engineers to begin working on infrastructure, even if some pockets of water remain.
- * The American Red Cross was housing more than 207,000 evacuees in 709 shelters across the country. It has served over 5.9 million meals and raised over \$578 million for relief.
- * The Federal Emergency Management Agency said it has distributed \$690 million in relief aid to more than 330,000 households in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.
- * At least 1,700 children separated from their families after the storm are listed on the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Web site.

- * The storm could be the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history, with estimates ranging up to \$200 billion.
- * Total housing, commercial and public property losses by Katrina total about \$100 billion, said the National Association of Realtors.
- * Congress has approved \$62.3 billion for hurricane relief.
- * 400,000 jobs could be lost, the Congressional Budget Office said. The Louisiana Labor Department has collected 119,000 unemployment claims in the state and 60,000 collected in other states.
- * The Pentagon said there were 72,614 military troops providing relief support, 45,871 of them National Guard.
- * More than 3,800 animals have been rescued in Louisiana and Mississippi, the Humane Society said.
- * Power had been restored to all of Entergy Corp's customers in Mississippi while 265,046 customers in Louisiana remained without electricity.

Corps Scrambles to Stop Another New Orleans Flood

USA: October 4, 2005

NEW ORLEANS - High tides due to gusty winds threatened renewed flooding in storm-ravaged New Orleans, the US Army Corps of Engineers said on Monday, but steps were being taken to prevent it.

The Corps said it was closing two canals where levee breaches poured water into the city after Hurricane Katrina and adding sandbags to temporary levee repairs already in place.

Strong east winds had pushed tides higher than normal, the Corps said in a statement, and water already was spilling over a 20-foot-wide levee breach in Terrebonne Parish near the town of Montegut 60 miles (96 km) south of New Orleans.

Helicopters were placing sandbags in that break and also in others in adjoining Plaquemines Parish, it said.

Powerful Katrina, which struck Louisiana and Mississippi on Aug. 29, fractured levees that protect New Orleans from Lake Pontchartrain and flooded 80 percent of the low-lying city.

Temporary repairs were made and most of the water had been pumped out when Hurricane Rita hit the Texas-Louisiana border on Sept. 24. Rita's storm surge pushed water over the levees and into parts of New Orleans once again.

REUTERS NEWS SERVICE

Hi everyone,

I returned home definitely a different person. My experience was overwhelming on all levels and I have yet to really get a grip on it all.

The devastation consumes all your senses. The debilitating heat heightening the dangerous smell, the barking of dogs from inside buildings where you can't see them, the darting of cats out of your reach, the intense concentration of everyone to locate any animals despite bumping against bodies of loved ones with your wader boots, and the grateful frenzied licks of dogs finally in the boat.

Rescue happened during the day by ex military, farmers, engineers, vet techs...anyone who was willing to risk it. At around 10pm 2am, the trucks full of animals would pull in and unload in the darkness except for two standing lights aimed at the truck. As every terrified animal was brought off, the first thing they heard was "you're in a better place now little one" and then they were touched, walked, checked by the vets and calmly talked to before returning to their crates to stabilize until morning. They were placed inside large enclosures with other animals in their crates facing each other. In the morning, they are walked, fed, watered, checked again by the vets and introduced to their new housemates and allowed to play, sleep, or whatever they need, including lots of holding and loving by the volunteers. There were 400+ dogs there, 100+ cats, including newborn kittens, bunnies, turtles, snakes and even an emu.

I brought home a golden retriever with chemical burns and allergies so intense that her eyes, ringed with grey, were almost swollen shut. I will never know her full story but she was picked up on the street 13 days after the storm hit on a bridge completely wet.

True to every breed I encountered there, including the pit bulls, as soon as you started talking and touching them, the wag, wag of the tail would begin. They hadn't seen people or been touched for going on 20 days when I was there. I am amazed at the resilience of the animals. Besides swimming in toxic water with the effects of that presenting with chemical burns, diarrhea, hair loss, dehydration, emaciation and exhaustion, they were still alive and eager to eat, drink and play.

I found Biloxi's, or Loxi for short, owners 2 nights ago by calling and calling on her rabies# to a shelter that had no computer access. They manually looked thru hundreds of papers to find the owners. I talked with them and they couldn't believe their dog was in Colorado with a pack of 5 other dogs. As I continued talking with them, I realized Loxi had been a yard dog, not allowed in the house and neglected. In fact, they left her in the backyard two days before the storm hit and when they returned they "just figured she was out and about". She didn't know how to use stairs when I brought her home and has no manners (as of yet!).

I called Best Friends and they contacted them. The end result was them relinquishing her to me for a full adoption. She's laying next to me as the sun rises, happy and snuggled up with one of the cats. Seems like such a small rescue with so many out there but I'm grateful as is she.

The people there are risking their lives to do this. I know. I fell in the water and developed a raging eye infection my doctor couldn't figure out. It's different rescuing animals. It's heart work with souls that could easily be forgotten without repercussion.

Thanks for listening.

Take care,

anne

In this sort of unambiguous violation of rights, the best we can do is call on the Department of Justice to conduct an investigation? Where are the mechanisms of accountability?

Aloha, George

Begin forwarded message:

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

New Orleans: Prisoners Abandoned to Floodwaters

Officers Deserted a Jail Building, Leaving Inmates Locked in Cells

(New York, September 22, 2005) - As Hurricane Katrina began pounding New Orleans, the sheriff's department abandoned hundreds of inmates imprisoned in the city's jail, Human Rights Watch said today. Inmates in Templeman III, one of several buildings in the Orleans Parish Prison compound, reported that as of Monday, August 29, there were no correctional officers in the building, which held more than 600 inmates. These inmates, including some who were locked in ground-floor cells, were not evacuated until Thursday, September 1, four days after flood waters in the jail had reached chest-level.

"Of all the nightmares during Hurricane Katrina, this must be one of the worst," said Corinne Carey, researcher from Human Rights Watch. "Prisoners were abandoned in their cells without food or water for days as floodwaters rose toward the ceiling."

Human Rights Watch called on the U.S. Department of Justice to conduct an investigation into the conduct of the Orleans Sheriff's Department, which runs the jail,

and to establish the fate of the prisoners who had been locked in the jail. The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, which oversaw the evacuation, and the Orleans Sheriff's Department should account for the 517 inmates who are missing from the list of people evacuated from the jail.

Carey spent five days in Louisiana, conducting dozens of interviews with inmates evacuated from Orleans Parish Prison, correctional officers, state officials, lawyers and their investigators who had interviewed more than 1,000 inmates evacuated from the prison.

The sheriff of Orleans Parish, Marlin N. Gusman, did not call for help in evacuating the prison until midnight on Monday, August 29, a state Department of Corrections and Public Safety spokeswoman told Human Rights Watch. Other parish prisons, she said, had called for help on the previous Saturday and Sunday. The evacuation of Orleans Parish Prison was not completed until Friday, September 2.

According to officers who worked at two of the jail buildings, Templeman 1 and 2, they began to evacuate prisoners from those buildings on Tuesday, August 30, when the floodwaters reached chest level inside. These prisoners were taken by boat to the Broad Street overpass bridge, and ultimately transported to correctional facilities outside New Orleans.

But at Templeman III, which housed about 600 inmates, there was no prison staff to help the prisoners. Inmates interviewed by Human Rights Watch varied about when they last remember seeing guards at the facility, but they all insisted that there were no correctional officers in the facility on Monday, August 29. A spokeswoman for the Orleans parish sheriff's department told Human Rights Watch she did not know whether the officers at Templeman III had left the building before the evacuation.

According to inmates interviewed by Human Rights Watch, they had no food or water from the inmates' last meal over the weekend of August 27-28 until they were evacuated on Thursday, September 1. By Monday, August 29, the generators had died, leaving them without lights and sealed in without air circulation. The toilets backed up, creating an unbearable stench.

"They left us to die there," Dan Bright, an Orleans Parish Prison inmate told Human Rights Watch at Rapides Parish Prison, where he was sent after the evacuation.

As the water began rising on the first floor, prisoners became anxious and then desperate. Some of the inmates were able to force open their cell doors, helped by inmates held in the common area. All of them, however, remained trapped in the locked facility.

"The water started rising, it was getting to here," said Earrand Kelly, an inmate from Templeman III, as he pointed at his neck. "We was calling down to the guys in the cells under us, talking to them every couple of minutes. They were crying, they were scared. The one that I was cool with, he was saying 'I'm scared. I feel like I'm about to drown.' He was crying."

Some inmates from Templeman III have said they saw bodies floating in the floodwaters as they were evacuated from the prison. A number of inmates told Human Rights Watch that they were not able to get everyone out from their cells.

Inmates broke jail windows to let air in. They also set fire to blankets and shirts and hung them out of the windows to let people know they were still in the facility. Apparently at least a dozen inmates jumped out of the windows.

"We started to see people in T3 hangin' shirts on fire out the windows," Brooke Moss, an Orleans Parish Prison officer told Human Rights Watch. "They were wavin' em. Then we saw them jumping out of the windows . . . Later on, we saw a sign, I think somebody wrote `help' on it."

As of yesterday, signs reading "Help Us," and "One Man Down," could still be seen hanging from a window in the third floor of Templeman III.

Several corrections officers told Human Rights Watch there was no evacuation plan for the prison, even though the facility had been evacuated during floods in the 1990s.

"It was complete chaos," said a corrections officer with more than 30 years of service at Orleans Parish Prison. When asked what he thought happened to the inmates in Templeman III, he shook his head and said: "Ain't no tellin' what happened to those people."

"At best, the inmates were left to fend for themselves," said Carey. "At worst, some may have died."

Human Rights Watch was not able to speak directly with Orleans Parish Sheriff Marlin N. Gussman or the ranking official in charge of Templeman III. A spokeswoman for the sheriff's department told Human Rights Watch that search-and-rescue teams had gone to the prison and she insisted that "nobody drowned, nobody was left behind."

Human Rights Watch compared an official list of all inmates held at Orleans Parish Prison immediately prior to the hurricane with the most recent list of the evacuated inmates compiled by the state Department of Corrections and Public Safety (which was entitled, "All Offenders Evacuated"). However, the list did not include 517 inmates from the jail, including 130 from Templeman III.

Many of the men held at jail had been arrested for offenses like criminal trespass, public drunkenness or disorderly conduct. Many had not even been brought before a judge and charged, much less been convicted.

+++++

Professor George Kent
Department of Political Science
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USA

Important read. The sad result of the "securitization" of disaster response.
M

This was printed in a Section newsletter of the American Public Health Association. There's a credit to its original source in the end. I was only going to skim it, but it's fascinating and a quick read.

Hurricane Katrina - A First-Hand Account

Larry Bradshaw and Lorrie Beth Slonsky are paramedics from California, SEIU Local 790, who were attending an EMS conference in New Orleans at the time Katrina struck. Sept. 6, 2005, 11:59

Two days after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the Walgreen's store at the corner of Royal and Iberville streets remained locked. The dairy display case was clearly visible through the widows. It was now 48 hours without electricity, running water, plumbing. The milk, yogurt, and cheeses were beginning to spoil in the 90-degree heat. The owners and managers had locked up the food, water, Pampers, and prescriptions and fled the city. Outside the Walgreen's windows, residents and tourists grew increasingly thirsty and hungry.

The much-promised federal, state and local aid never materialized, and the windows at Walgreen's gave way to the looters. There was an alternative. The cops could have broken one small window and distributed the nuts, fruit juices, and bottled water in an organized and systematic manner. But they did not. Instead, they spent hours playing cat and mouse, temporarily chasing away the looters.

We were finally airlifted out of New Orleans two days ago and arrived home yesterday (Saturday). We have yet to see any of the television coverage or look at a newspaper. We are willing to guess that there were no video images or front-page pictures of European or affluent white tourists looting the Walgreen's in the French Quarter. We also suspect the media will have been inundated with "hero" images of the National Guard, the troops and the police struggling to help the "victims" of the Hurricane. What you will not see, but what we witnessed, were the real heroes and sheroes of the hurricane relief effort: the working class of New Orleans. The maintenance workers who used a fork lift to carry the sick and disabled. The engineers who rigged, nurtured

and kept the generators running. The electricians who improvised thick extension cords stretching over blocks to share the little electricity we had in order to free cars stuck on rooftop parking lots. Nurses who took over for mechanical ventilators and spent many hours on end manually forcing air into the lungs of unconscious patients to keep them alive. Doormen who rescued folks stuck in elevators. Refinery workers who broke into boat yards, "stealing" boats to rescue their neighbors clinging to their roofs in flood waters. Mechanics who helped hotwire any car that could be found to ferry people out of the city. And the food service workers who scoured the commercial kitchens improvising communal meals for hundreds of those stranded. Most of these workers had lost their homes, and had not heard from members of their families, yet they stayed and provided the only infrastructure for the 20 percent of New Orleans that was not under water.

Day 2

On Day 2, there were approximately 500 of us left in the hotels in the French Quarter. We were a mix of foreign tourists, conference attendees like ourselves, and locals who had checked into hotels for safety and shelter from Katrina. Some of us had cell phone contact with family and friends outside of New Orleans. We were repeatedly told that all sorts of resources including the National Guard and scores of buses were pouring in to the city. The buses and the other resources must have been invisible, because none of us had seen them.

We decided we had to save ourselves. So we pooled our money and came up with \$25,000 to have 10 buses come and take us out of the city. Those who did not have the requisite \$45 for a ticket were subsidized by those who did have extra money. We waited for 48 hours for the buses, spending the last 12 hours standing outside, sharing the limited water, food, and clothes we had. We created a priority boarding area for the sick, elderly and newborn babies. We waited late into the night for the "imminent" arrival of the buses. The buses never arrived. We later learned that the minute they arrived in the city limits, they were commandeered by the military.

Day 4

By day 4 our hotels had run out of fuel and water. Sanitation was dangerously abysmal. As the desperation and despair increased, street crime as well as water levels began to rise. The hotels turned us out and locked their doors, telling us that the "officials" told us to report to the Convention Center to wait for more buses. As we entered the center of the city, we finally encountered the National Guard. The Guards told us we would not be allowed into the Superdome as the city's primary shelter had descended into a humanitarian and health hellhole. The guards further told us that the city's only other shelter, the Convention Center, was also descending into chaos and squalor and that the police were not allowing anyone else in. Quite naturally, we asked, "If we can't go to the only two shelters in the city, what is our alternative?" The guards told us that that was our problem, and no, they did not have extra water to give to us. This would be the start of our numerous encounters with callous and hostile "law enforcement."

We walked to the police command center at Harrah's on Canal Street and were told the same thing, that we were on our own, and no, they did not have water to give us. We

now numbered several hundred. We held a mass meeting to decide a course of action. We agreed to camp outside the police command post. We would be plainly visible to the media and would constitute a highly visible embarrassment to city officials. The police told us that we could not stay. Regardless, we began to settle in and set up camp. In short order, the police commander came across the street to address our group. He told us he had a solution: we should walk to the Pontchartrain Expressway and cross the greater New Orleans Bridge, where the police had buses lined up to take us out of the city. The crowd cheered and began to move. We called everyone back and explained to the commander that there had been lots of misinformation and wrong information and was he sure that there were buses waiting for us. The commander turned to the crowd and stated emphatically, "I swear to you that the buses are there."

We organized ourselves, and the 200 of us set off for the bridge with great excitement and hope. As we marched past the Convention Center, many locals saw our determined and optimistic group and asked where we were headed. We told them about the great news. Families immediately grabbed their few belongings and quickly our numbers doubled and then doubled again. Babies in strollers now joined us, as well as people using crutches, elderly clasp walking walkers and other people in wheelchairs. We marched the two to three miles to the freeway and up the steep incline to the bridge. It now began to pour down rain, but it did not dampen our enthusiasm.

Approaching the bridge

As we approached the bridge, armed Gretna sheriffs formed a line across the foot of the bridge. Before we were close enough to speak, they began firing their weapons over our heads. This sent the crowd fleeing in various directions. As the crowd scattered and dissipated, a few of us inched forward and managed to engage some of the sheriffs in conversation. We told them of our conversation with the police commander and of the commander's assurances. The sheriffs informed us there were no buses waiting. The commander had lied to us to get us to move. We questioned why we couldn't cross the bridge anyway, especially as there was little traffic on the six-lane highway. They responded that the West Bank was not going to become New Orleans, and there would be no Superdomes in their city. These were code words for, "if you are poor and black, you are not crossing the Mississippi River and you are not getting out of New Orleans."

Our small group retreated back down Highway 90 to seek shelter from the rain under an overpass. We debated our options and in the end decided to build an encampment in the middle of the Ponchartrain Expressway on the center divide, between the O'Keefe and Tchoupitoulas exits. We reasoned we would be visible to everyone, we would have some security being on an elevated freeway and we could wait and watch for the arrival of the yet-to-be-seen buses.

All day long, we saw other families, individuals and groups make the same trip up the incline in an attempt to cross the bridge, only to be turned away. Some were chased away with gunfire, others were simply told no, others were verbally berated and humiliated. Thousands of New Orleaners were prevented and prohibited from self-evacuating the city on foot. Meanwhile, the only two city shelters sank further into squalor and disrepair. The only way across the bridge was by vehicle. We saw workers stealing trucks, buses, moving vans, semi-trucks and any car that could be hotwired.

All were packed with people trying to escape the misery New Orleans had become. Our little encampment began to blossom. Someone stole a water delivery truck and brought it up to us. Let's hear it for looting! A mile or so down the freeway, an army truck lost a couple of pallets of C-rations on a tight turn. We ferried the food back to our camp in shopping carts. Now secure with the two necessities, food and water, cooperation, community, and creativity flowered. We organized a clean-up and hung garbage bags from the rebar poles. We made beds from wood pallets and cardboard. We designated a storm drain as the bathroom and the kids built an elaborate enclosure for privacy out of plastic, broken umbrellas, and other scraps. We even organized a food recycling system where individuals could swap out parts of C-rations (applesauce for babies and candies for kids!).

This was a process we saw repeatedly in the aftermath of Katrina. When individuals had to fight to find food or water, it meant looking out for yourself only. You had to do whatever it took to find water for your kids or food for your parents. When these basic needs were met, people began to look out for each other, working together and constructing a community.

If the relief organizations had saturated the city with food and water in the first two or three days, the desperation, the frustration and the ugliness would not have set in. Flush with the necessities, we offered food and water to passing families and individuals. Many decided to stay and join us. Our encampment grew to 80 or 90 people. From a woman with a battery powered radio we learned that the media was talking about us. Up in full view on the freeway, every relief and news organization saw us on their way into the city. Officials were being asked what they were going to do about all those families living up on the freeway? The officials responded they were going to take care of us. Some of us got a sinking feeling. "Taking care of us" had an ominous tone to it.

Unfortunately, our sinking feeling (along with the sinking city) was correct. Just as dusk set in, a Gretna Sheriff showed up, jumped out of his patrol vehicle, aimed his gun at our faces, screaming, "Get off the fucking freeway." A helicopter arrived and used the wind from its blades to blow away our flimsy structures. As we retreated, the sheriff loaded up his truck with our food and water.

Once again, at gunpoint, we were forced off the freeway. All the law enforcement agencies appeared threatened when we congregated or congealed into groups of 20 or more. In every congregation of "victims" they saw "mob" or "riot." We felt safety in numbers. Our "we must stay together" was impossible because the agencies would force us into small atomized groups.

In the pandemonium of having our camp raided and destroyed, we scattered once again. Reduced to a small group of eight people, in the dark, we sought refuge in an abandoned school bus, under the freeway on Cilo Street. We were hiding from possible criminal elements but equally and definitely, we were hiding from the police and sheriffs with their martial law, curfew and shoot-to-kill policies.

Air-lifted

The next days, our group of eight walked most of the day, made contact with the New Orleans Fire Department and were eventually airlifted out by an urban search and

rescue team. We were dropped off near the airport and managed to catch a ride with the National Guard. The two young guardsmen apologized for the limited response of the Louisiana guards. They explained that a large section of their unit was in Iraq, and that meant they were shorthanded and were unable to complete all the tasks they were assigned.

We arrived at the airport on the day a massive airlift had begun. The airport had become another Superdome. We eight were caught in a press of humanity as flights were delayed for several hours while George Bush landed briefly at the airport for a photo op. After being evacuated on a coast guard cargo plane, we arrived in San Antonio, Texas.

There the humiliation and dehumanization of the official relief effort continued. We were placed on buses and driven to a large field where we were forced to sit for hours and hours. Some of the buses did not have air-conditioners. In the dark, hundreds of us were forced to share two filthy overflowing porta-potties. Those who managed to make it out with any possessions (often a few belongings in tattered plastic bags) were subjected to two different dog-sniffing searches.

Most of us had not eaten all day because our C-rations had been confiscated at the airport because the rations set off the metal detectors. Yet, no food had been provided to the men, women, children, elderly, and disabled as they sat for hours waiting to be "medically screened" to make sure we were not carrying any communicable diseases. This official treatment was in sharp contrast to the warm, heartfelt reception given to us by the ordinary Texans. We saw one airline worker give her shoes to someone who was barefoot. Strangers on the street offered us money and toiletries with words of welcome. Throughout, the official relief effort was callous, inept, and racist. There was more suffering than need be.

Lives were lost that did not need to be lost.

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where the article was first published. Karen Valenzuela, CHPPD member, read the article on a labor management listserv and suggested that it may be of interest to members.

-

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Scattered in a Storm's Wake and Caught in a Clash of Cultures

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By ISABEL WILKERSON

Published: October 9, 2005

SALLISAW, Okla. - Word spread fast after the evacuees arrived. Everyone wanted to see one up close. Soon, the gravel driveways wending through the grounds of the old church mission were backed up with trucks and minivans filled with locals bearing bottled water or leftover clothes or just wanting to talk to the Louisiana people, tell them how sorry they were for what had happened to them.

The Methodists brought cribs. A dentist sent a box of toothbrushes. A Presbyterian was recruiting for the choir. Members of the Sequoyah Memorial Hospital Auxiliary showed up to take the evacuees shopping at Wal-Mart. A beautician wanted to do their hair. And someone donated a box of formal wear that, the volunteer sorters noted, the evacuees were not likely to need anytime soon.



Monica Almeida/The New York Times

A displaced family from Louisiana looked out on their interim backyard, in a remote area of eastern Oklahoma. [More Photos >](#)

IN A STRANGE LAND

From New Orleans to Sallisaw

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Monica Almeida/The New York Times

Dejawhn Riggs could often be found reading a hot rod magazine in his dormitory. [More Photos >](#)

In the beginning, it seemed that wherever the Louisianans went, people stopped them on the street, figuring that because they were black, they must be from the hurricane. A man went up to one of them, Gerald Cooper, a former merchant mariner, and said, "Here, put this in your pocket," as he stuffed a \$20 bill into Mr. Cooper's hand.

"It was like we were a fad," Mr. Cooper said.

In the chaotic first weeks after Hurricane Katrina, several vanloads of Louisiana exiles, including Mr. Cooper, arrived disheveled and sleep-deprived at the old mission grounds here, miles from the edge of nowhere in the middle of eastern [Oklahoma](#).

They were among the tens of thousands of people forced out of the Gulf Coast and into unaccustomed holding places where no one knew quite what to make of them. They had suddenly become nomads in their own country - pitied, gawked at and shuffled from place to place, stuck in the middle of a long journey that would take them through several states merely to get to this way station from which to plot the rest of their lives.

In time, they found themselves caught in a web of red tape and cultural miscues, clashing with locals over the tiniest of things, like how to cook grits or season meat, or over the life-and-death question of why they did not get out of harm's way in time.

Tensions rose, and by the end of the month, the Louisianans, grateful though they were, could not wait to get out. And the local people, well-meaning and overwhelmed, were just as relieved to see them go.

An Odyssey Begins

Their time at the mission would become both an object lesson in the psychic strains of disaster recovery and a laboratory for the challenges of sheltering victims so different from their caregivers.

This particular colony of exiles, thrown together at random, was first delivered by bus and military cargo plane to Fort Chaffee, an old Army base in westernmost [Arkansas](#), which became a kind of Ellis Island, some 9,000 evacuees passing through its gates the first week after Hurricane Katrina. There, Red Cross workers assigned them to vans that would spirit them even farther away.

It was as if they had been hurled into another galaxy, a stubbled land of raccoon woods and Andy Griffith towns, Indian smoke shops and creased-faced cowboys in pickup trucks.

As they passed from Arkansas into Oklahoma, the evacuees made little comment to their cheerful Presbyterian drivers, too exhausted to register an opinion. The convoy exited the highway at the billboard that said "Jesus" in big cursive letters. It passed Hog Creek and the tractor supply shop and rumbled along unmarked roads.

The land was becoming sparser and drier. They had passed the last traffic light miles ago. There were no other cars on the road and no more stop signs or signs of life other than cows resting under the locust trees. They had seen no other black people since leaving Arkansas. Now they saw no people at all. Some of the evacuees began to grow fearful.

"Where is they taking us?" Nitayu Johnson, a hotel maid with a young daughter, remembered thinking. "They trying to slave us. They going to make us pick cotton. We gon' die."

In fact, they were bound for Dwight Mission, an old church outpost whose log cabins and stone dormitories were used as a boarding school for Indian children decades ago, and which now serves mainly as a campsite for local church groups.

There were 19 people in the first wave of arrivals, dominated by a blustery clan whose patriarch, Louis Green, a widower, was once a pool shark who had made a living breaking players with more money than sense in the pool halls of Louisiana.

Mr. Green, 65, arrived with 5 of his 19 children, 5 of his 29 grandchildren and four smaller households who had banded together with his family for protection in a fetid school gymnasium outside New Orleans in the darkest days during and after the storm.

Soon afterward, Eugene and Helen Johnson arrived, a retired couple, unrelated to Nitayu Johnson, who had lost each other at the Superdome when Mrs. Johnson, in the early stages of dementia, never made it back from a trip to the restroom.

Homesick, Mr. Green's daughter Serrita picked at her cornflakes, while her 2-year-old son, Terrell, splashed milk out of his Cheerios. Charles Johnson stabbed at his dry sausage and rice over dinner. They were missing sweet cornbread, stuffed bell peppers, gumbo, pickled pigs' lips.

It was all some of them could do to sit on the other side of the kitchen and watch what was coming out without getting an apron and a skillet themselves. Someone found them hot sauce, and nearly a month into their stay, the cook finally got the hang of the red pepper requirements and made some faux jambalaya with a gallon of hot sauce that nobody but a Louisianan could eat. But few were around to try it because they had already given up.

Eugene Johnson told his wife not to meddle. "That's they kitchen," he said. "What they doing is all right."

For her part, the cook, Maxine Moore, was doing the best she could. She could work only part time and only on certain days. She was a single mother raising three disabled children, holding down another full-time job and driving 300 miles round trip to get there from her hometown, Possum Holler.

Oklahomans just eat differently from Louisianans, Ms. Moore said: "Rednecks and cowboys are meat-and-potatoes people."

Meanwhile, Mr. Riggs, the college student, was missing not just the food. "I hate not being able to get me a shot every now and then," he said.

Somehow, the visitors had to find a way to coexist until they could figure out where to go next. The quieter people sequestered themselves on the more secluded second floor. They took rooms at opposite ends from one another for privacy's sake.

They did not all get along and did not pretend to. The upstairs people had little patience for the spirited cacophony of the extended Green family, whose sniffing little ones skittered down the corridors, dodging piles of donated clothes and accumulated trash while a mix of Ashanti and Ray Charles bounced between multiple boomboxes.

Mr. Cooper and Ms. McNeely, the former merchant mariner and his wife, kept their distance, and the elder Mr. Johnson made a point of letting Mr. Phelps, the mission director, know he was not raised like the Green children.

As for the Greens, they were a world unto themselves, and took pains to make it clear that they were working people who were accustomed to doing as they pleased.

"I had money in the bank and a big-screen TV," Mr. Green said. "I didn't wear nothing but Austin Reeds."

He walked with a limp owing to a fall he took at the racetrack, and slept on a brown plaid sofa in his street clothes in the dormitory's living room. His room was where the building's only television was. He did not want anyone to sit on his bed, meaning the sofa, so most residents did not feel comfortable going in there. It was hard for anyone to watch the grainy images of Dr. Phil or college football, knowing Mr. Green was sitting there feeling invaded.

"Whose name it is on the door?" he would ask anyone who took liberties in his space.

With his gray stubble and baseball cap, he made it his business to root out slovenly habits and had regular run-ins with the people on the second floor.

"You done left your trash by the stairs," Mr. Green once said to Nitayu Johnson, a second-floor resident.

"You a damn lie," she shot back at him.

They had all become an accidental family, and everyone was going stir crazy. One day ran into another.

"After we eat," Mr. Cooper said, describing his day, "we go straight up our room and lay across the bed. We be looking at the clock and say, man, it's just seven o'clock. We trying to figure out how to go to sleep at seven o'clock. You read, you talk, you thinking you burned off an hour, and it's just 15 minutes."

Mr. Cooper was dying for a newspaper to know what was going on in the world since he could not watch the news in the living room. In the next room, Charles Johnson was arguing with his grandfather over the date.

"We don't know what day it is," the younger Mr. Johnson said. "We don't know what time it is. We don't know nothing."

"They do so tell us the time," the elder Mr. Johnson said, defending the mission. "And I got a calendar in my bag somewhere to look up the day it is."

Everyone was trying to figure out the next step, hoping it would be permanent or at least the last stop before their return to New Orleans. They had to think about where they knew people, where they could get work, where relatives and friends were going. Some were stuck in their decision-making because they had not yet heard what had become of certain loved ones.

The elder Mr. Johnson still had not reached his sons. Nitayu Johnson had an aunt who had been airlifted to [Texas](#). But the aunt was in a shelter, too, and did not know where she was going next. So Ms. Johnson did not know whether to join her aunt in Texas or wait for her to get settled somewhere else. All she knew was she was not staying in Oklahoma.

The Greens were trying to make the best of it in the area. They had decided to settle in Arkansas, in Fort Smith, the biggest town near the mission, about an hour's drive east, partly because of the complexities of moving so many people somewhere else at once. But they were having a hard time finding a place to live. The sheer number of evacuees who had come through Fort Chaffee after the storm meant a lot of competition and red tape.

Meanwhile, the Green daughters were hearing that evacuees were getting all kinds of help in Atlanta. Their older sister, Phoebe, had fled there with her family before the storm and had already settled in a house in the suburbs.

Suddenly, the decisions people had made in the fateful hours before and after the storm, which shelter they had happened upon to ride it out, who had happened to pick them up from their rooftop and the destination of a bus or plane they had happened to

be shuffled onto, began to hit them, and the Greens began to feel they were in a less fortunate position. Whenever a lead in Arkansas fell through, as was often the case, all they could talk about was getting to Atlanta.

The elder Johnsons were more determined than anyone to get to their home in the engulfed Lower Ninth Ward. They never considered not going back. They did not let other cities or states distract them. They never veered from a decision to get to San Antonio, near some of Mrs. Johnson's relatives, and to plot a course home from there.

Mr. Cooper and Ms. McNeely, both in their 50's, were equally focused. They were talking about going to New York. A place called Schenectady. Somewhere near Albany, Mr. Cooper said. He had a contact there and knew he could find work.

It was a purely practical choice, and he was grateful to have it. But he was grieving the loss of the familiar.

"You were in your little world," said Mr. Cooper, a lean man with a shaved head and a salt-and-pepper beard. "You know where to go and what to watch out for. You know the people you can count on and the people to leave alone.

"Now you got to make new friends, build up new trusts, learn to blend in," he continued. "If I was a young man, I would never go back. But we just young enough to where we can start over and just old enough to where a few more years down the road we couldn't adjust."

He did not arrive in Oklahoma with Schenectady on his mind. "You uprooted," Mr. Cooper said. "It takes you a while to figure out what the hell happened to you. It's going to take months to realize, My life was wiped out."

But after a few days, he had had a chance to think. He remembered the Episcopal priest he had worked for in New Orleans who had moved to Schenectady years ago. The priest said he would always have a job there if he wanted to come.

One day, he was sorting through some scraps of papers in his room at the mission. "I said, 'I wish I could find his number,' " Mr. Cooper recalled. "As I was dumping some trash out, a piece of paper with his phone number fell out. It was telling me to go to Schenectady."

He paused and looked down. "We was comfortable," he said. "My little job was right up the street. We were around friends. We had family. In Schenectady, there's no family, only one friend. But Schenectady is just slow enough to where we can be comfortable and fast enough to where we can be happy."

His face brightened, as if he was trying to make himself feel better about the move.

But he was worried about his wife. Ms. McNeely was so frail that she was having trouble getting up the steps. Diabetes had taken all her teeth. "She can't take too much cold," he said, "but I guess she gon' have to learn to live with it."

The Hunt for a Home

In time, two groups formed at the mission: those who were looking to stay in the area, and those who were not. Those who were staying had first dibs at getting into Fort Smith whenever a van showed up.

One morning as the van prepared to leave, Charles Johnson climbed aboard. He said he wanted to go into town with the group looking at houses. He was not looking at houses. He was biding his time until he could get to Texas. On this day, he just wanted to see traffic and people again. He wanted to go for the ride.

Mr. Green hit the ceiling. "Go for a ride?" he said. "This ain't no excursion. This ain't no picnic. We going to do business."

Marquita Carter, an evacuee whom the Greens had taken under their wing during the storm, looked down her handwritten list of rentals in the dog-eared folder she carried with her everywhere. "Here's a triplex with a washer and dryer hookup that's newly renovated," Ms. Carter told Kandice Green, one of Mr. Green's daughters, who was reserving judgment.

Somewhere between the abandoned Texaco station and the battered sign to Badger Lee Baptist Church, spontaneous chirping broke out all over the van. The cellphones were in receiving range again.

"We back in civilization!" Ms. Carter said.

Day after day, armed with the federal Section 8 vouchers given to hurricane victims, the Greens searched for apartments. Some places looked to be falling apart. Some looked fine but had a deposit already or did not take Section 8. One day, they found the perfect arrangement: a brick duplex, newer construction, with plenty of space.

"Daddy, this is beautiful," the Green daughters said as they picked out rooms.

"I finally feel hopeful," Ms. Carter said.

Mr. Green said he would take it. His voucher would cover the \$750 rent for his unit, and his daughters' vouchers would take care of theirs.

But the next day, they found out the vouchers were of little use. The local housing authority would not permit the Greens to use the vouchers to rent the duplex because it said the units were overpriced. With the arrival of several thousand evacuees to a town of 80,000, landlords were jacking up the rents all over town, the authorities said.

"They think just because these people have vouchers, they can charge New Orleans prices," said Michael Fuchtman, a counselor at the Fort Smith-Sebastian County Housing Authority. "We had a lady charging \$980 for a three-bedroom house that would normally go for half that. That was a total no way."

Later that day, Kandice Green and Ms. Carter ran into trouble with two apartments they thought were theirs.

"We'll need a credit check and a criminal background check," Cyndi Glass, the resident manager, said. "Any felonies, we can't rent to you. It's going to take three days to get that information back from Louisiana."

With the stacks of other applications on Ms. Glass's desk, the apartments would probably be rented by then.

"Well, it's not my fault," Ms. Glass said. "It's not your fault. It's nobody's fault. We've been told not to veer from the policy."

Ms. Carter got up and left. She was insulted at the very suggestion that she was a felon. "I wanted to climb behind that desk and knock that woman out," she said.

After so many near misses, the two women were heartbroken.

On the ride back to the mission, they sat slumped in their seats, quiet. Ms. Carter rubbed her eyes. Kandice Green stared out the window at the cows and hay bales in the pasture.

The happiest evacuees at the mission were the Johnsons - Eugene Johnson, in particular. A slightly built man of 72, he was so happy to have found his wife and to have a bed to sleep in, it did not much matter where it was so long as it was not his house in the Ninth Ward.

"This is my world right in here," Mr. Johnson said of his corner of a dorm room, a double mattress on the bottom bunk with donated suitcases filled with donated clothes neatly stacked in the corner.

But when he rested his eyes during breaks in the day, he relived his regrets, second-guessing himself on the minutest decisions.

Perhaps they could have fled sooner if he had not set the radio on the dresser. It ran on batteries, and they were depending on it for news after the television went out. But the dresser tilted over, and the radio fell in the water. They ended up being rescued through a vent in the roof.

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Then he "misplaced" his wife, as he put it. When the Superdome was emptied, he had no choice but to do as he was told: board the plane to San Antonio and hope she made it there, too. But she didn't.

Their eventual reunion did not quiet his mind. "I be laying here 'fore I fall asleep," he said. "I be thinking about things. You think about little things, what I have to do when I get back. What I'm gon' find. I think about my sons. I haven't talked to them, but I know they safe."

"My mind is on what I'm gon' do when I get back," he continued. "I want to find her wedding band. I had some silver dimes I want to find."

"And my mink coat," Mrs. Johnson interjected.

"Oh, you can forget about that," he said. "You can just put that out your mind."

A New Subject Matter

Life began to stir every morning at 6:00 when the five little girls in the group roused themselves to go to school. They got up in the dark, hours before they would have back home, to board a yellow bus to a little country school in Marble City, Okla., about five miles down the road.

The teachers and principal were overjoyed at their arrival. The school had lost half its student population in the last generation as people had left the strip-mining and cattle country for better jobs elsewhere.

The school had been hoping for maybe a hundred new students from the storm, but fate had brought them only five. They arrived a month into the school year, and there was no telling how long they would attend. Still, there was an assembly to announce that children from Louisiana were arriving. Teachers warned their students not to talk about the hurricane unless the new students brought it up first.

The children piled quarters and nickels on the new students' desks for them to buy soda pop with. Despite the warnings, one student could not help asking Corille Johnson if she had come from the "tsunami."

Corille did not talk much about the hurricane in class or with other students. She clung to her teacher, Amy Blalock, and sat in the third row right next to the teacher's desk.

When the math lesson rolled around, it was as if everything was normal again. Corille was good in math and became one of the children, like Sam and Winter and Dakota, who kept their hands in the air when numbers were on the blackboard.

"Ooh, I know, I know!" she said, her arm stretched high.

Things were different in reading.

They were studying nouns. The children were to give examples of nouns. The other children said "school" or "gym."

"Her nouns were 'Convention Center' and 'Superdome,' " Mrs. Blalock said.

In art, Corille drew pictures of a tornado and said, "This is what happened to New Orleans."

"And every once in a while, out of the blue," Mrs. Blalock said, "she'll blurt out, 'We don't know where my brother is.' "

By late September, Mr. Green was rethinking his game plan. He was coming off another empty-handed day of looking. He had tried to make himself feel better about Arkansas, but things were not working out.

"I'm thinking about New York," he said. "Or [California](#). Or [Indiana](#). I'll just get me a ticket and get on out of here. This always was a rotten state for blacks. I remember when old Orval Faubus blocked the school doors in Little Rock."

A white Arkansan sitting on a nearby bench overheard his ranting. "I think Fort Smith is one of the best places you could live in this country," he said.

"Yeah?" Mr. Green said. "What factories they got here?"

"Whirlpool," the man said. "Planters Peanuts."

Mr. Green, still steaming, seemed not to hear him. "I knew this was a rotten state," he said.

The local man got up. "We've treated those people terrific over here," he said, and walked away.

With each passing day, Mr. Green could feel the sympathy draining away. His daughter Serrita had a run-in at the bus station when she went to pick up her two oldest

children, who were with their father during the storm. A man looked at them and said, loud enough for them to hear, "Why didn't they just get out?"

Serrita had to keep from cursing the man. Her family had done exactly what the authorities had told them to do. They rode out the hurricane in a school gymnasium and still found themselves vagabonds. "We would love nothing more than to go back to our homes," she said.

They were beginning to feel that because of the growing impatience of the locals, the conflicting government relief rules and the competition from other evacuees, everything was conspiring against them. To add to their anger and disappointment, they were hearing rumors that the governor and the president had told businesses to do everything they could to help them get situated, but they did not see where that call was being lived up to.

Kandice Green called her sister Phoebe in Atlanta. "They straight up look you in the face," she began, "and say, 'I don't care what the governor say, I don't care what the president say, you not getting it.' "

Each day, as he rustled up church vans to get them into town or made canned spaghetti they chose not to eat, Mr. Phelps, the mission director, had mainly one thing on his mind: how much this was costing and how he would get reimbursed from the Federal Emergency Management Agency or the Red Cross or whoever had the authority.

The electric bill for running the dormitory in September would be \$400 or \$500. And his wife, Sue, the part-time office manager, had been putting in 30 extra hours a week. "That's a cost I hope we can recoup," he said.

There was also the cost of the part-time cook and the salary and benefits for Allison Beavers, the program director, who seemingly took care of everything, including consoling the babies and helping to navigate the housing bureaucracy.

"It's a real energy taker," Mr. Phelps said. "It's not our job to do this. It's not that we don't want to do it, but it's also important to get a thank you back. All it would take would be one thank you."

Everything had taken up more of his time than he had anticipated. "I spent four hours trying to coordinate transportation for Serrita's two children from Louisiana on the Greyhound bus," he said. "Four hours. That's not in my schedule."

Generosity Wearing Thin

Just as the needs grew more complex, the help began to wane. "Everybody was pumped up the first week," Mr. Phelps said. "We had lots of volunteers in the beginning. Now the sense of dropping everything to come help is not as great as at the beginning. Volunteers are driving great distances and having to pay their own gas and tolls. I don't think it's our responsibility to give, give, give and not see motivation on the evacuees' level."

Every so often, the frustration on both sides came to a boil.

Mr. Phelps approached Mr. Green in the cafeteria one morning after a typically low turnout and asked if his daughters were up at the dorm. They needed to get into town for their children's immunization shots.

"I don't know," Mr. Green said. "I'm here and they're there. They grown. I don't tell them what to do. They got minds of their own."

"Well, they're your relatives," Mr. Phelps said, "not mine."

Mr. Phelps walked back to the kitchen, and Mr. Green rolled his eyes.

It was clear as the fourth week approached that the arrangement could not last much longer. "We want to get them placed so they can go on with their lives," Mr. Phelps said, "and we can go on with ours."

He said as much to Mr. Green when he asked what he was doing to find an apartment. To Mr. Phelps, the Greens were not looking hard enough, and the options were becoming fewer because other evacuees were taking what was left.

"Why are you waiting?" Mr. Phelps asked. "You have to be out there looking. If you're sitting there waiting for something to be handed to you, it's not going to happen."

"Look," Mr. Green told him, "I want to get out of here just as bad as you want me out of here."

Later that week, after another discouraging visit to the housing authority, Mr. Green was so fed up, he told Mr. Phelps, "If I'm not out of here by Wednesday, get me a bus ticket anywhere."

It was going on an entire month since the day they had arrived. Pressure was brewing on the Gulf Coast from a new wave of evacuees from Hurricane Rita. Those at the mission who had figured out where they were going next began peeling off.

The Johnsons were told that the Red Cross was arranging for them to fly to San Antonio. Word came that Mr. Cooper and Ms. McNeely were going to have to travel to

Schenectady by bus. It could take a day and a half. There was a question as to whether Ms. McNeely could make it and how to keep her insulin refrigerated all that time. "It's 26 stops," she said. "But to get up out of here, I'll get my insulin and I'll chance it."

The Johnsons had to leave the mission in a hurry. They would be staying in a Motel 6 off the expressway in Fort Smith. With more evacuees headed their way, Mr. Phelps said, there was a fear they might not get a room close to the airport if they waited too much longer.

When it was time, Jim Potts, a volunteer in a T-shirt with the letters "CIA" printed on it, for "Christ Is Alive," drove up to take them away.

"Oh lord, this is a mess," Mrs. Johnson said as her husband wound down the steps loaded with donated luggage to yet another temporary destination not of their choosing and still not home.

Mr. Cooper, baseball cap on backward, lighted a cigarette and stood watching them load up the red church van, which said "New Beginnings."

Mr. Johnson went from person to person on the porch and hugged everyone. His eyes welled up.

"All right, brother, you be good," Mr. Cooper said.

"I'm a miss you, man," Mr. Johnson said to his floor mate. "I'm a miss all of y'all."

He turned to Nitayu Johnson, who lived at the opposite end of the hall. "I'll see you, babe," he said. "I'll see you again."

He walked across the porch. "Take it easy," he told Mr. Harris, Mr. Green's wordless father-in-law, who barely looked up.

As the driver turned on the engine, Charles Johnson blew Corille, Nitayu's daughter, a kiss. Nitayu did not turn in her seat. Mr. Harris just sat hunched over in his metal folding chair, a cigarette burning between his fingers.

"I'll see you, man," Mr. Cooper said. "I'll see you when we get home."

Corille went running alongside the van. She waved both arms in the air as it rolled along the dirt path and onto the concrete road beyond. She slumped as she walked away and headed back to the dorm, neither she nor anyone else knowing when their turns would come or where they might lead, or, more important, when Mr. Cooper's words might be true for them all.