

# One Year After Katrina

## The State of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast



**A Special Report by GULF COAST RECONSTRUCTION WATCH  
A Project of the INSTITUTE FOR SOUTHERN STUDIES/SOUTHERN EXPOSURE**



**SOUTHERN  
EXPOSURE**





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# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

## SPECIAL REPORT

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# One Year After Katrina

## The State of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast

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# One Year After Katrina

## The State of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast



### INTRODUCTION

*"To all who carry a burden of loss, I extend the deepest sympathy of our country. To every person who has served and sacrificed in this emergency, I offer the gratitude of our country. And tonight I also offer this pledge of the American people: Throughout the area hit by the hurricane, we will do what it takes, we will stay as long as it takes, to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives. And all who question the future of the Crescent City need to know there is no way to imagine America without New Orleans, and this great city will rise again.*

*"When communities are rebuilt, they must be even better and stronger than before the storm. Within the Gulf region are some of the most beautiful and historic places in America. As all of us saw on television, there's also some deep, persistent poverty in this region, as well. That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday, and let us rise above the legacy of inequality."*

— President George W. Bush in Jackson Square,  
New Orleans, Sept. 15, 2005

One year ago, Hurricane Katrina crashed into the Gulf Coast. It was an event that shook the world, as millions watched in horror—not only at the devastating winds and floods, but also at the shocking failure of national leaders in coming to the region's aid. Unfortunately, for many, the disaster was just beginning.

As the weeks and months passed, the catastrophes of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita—and the failed emergency response—were being followed by another tragedy: In rebuilding and reconstruction, the Gulf Coast and its people were being left behind again.

In February/March 2006, the Institute released *The Mardi Gras Index*, a 36-page report on the state of New Orleans six months after the storms. Drawing on over 135 statistical indicators and examining issues from housing and schools to environmental safety and hurricane readiness, the report concluded that "New Orleans faces deep, fundamental barriers to renewal"—and that without bold, national leadership, the region would continue to struggle to come back.

The *Mardi Gras Index* also found that the people hurt most by the nation's lack of commitment to rebuilding New Orleans were the same people who suffered the most from the storms. The barriers were so great for so many that William Quigley—a Katrina evacuee and law professor at Loyola University in New Orleans—concluded in the report: "There is not a sign outside of New Orleans saying, 'If you are poor, sick, elderly, disabled, a child or African-American, you cannot return.' But there might as well be."



Another six months have passed, and we now stand at the one-year anniversary of the storms. A year after Katrina, how much progress has New Orleans and the Gulf Coast made?

To answer this question, the Institute analyzed over 200 indicators in 13 categories. We have also conducted status reports on key Gulf issues, launched in-depth investigations into the region's economic power brokers and interviewed leading community activists in the Gulf region.

The conclusion is unavoidable and devastating: One year later, New Orleans and the Gulf region still face basic, fundamental barriers to renewal. Further, lack of federal leadership and misplaced priorities are preventing the region from achieving a vibrant future. For example:

Lack of **HOUSING** still keeps tens of thousands of Gulf residents from coming back home. Aid for homeowners in Louisiana and Mississippi was approved 10 months after the storms, and none has been disbursed. Little money has been earmarked for rebuilding rental units—none in Mississippi—and rents are skyrocketing. Eighty percent of public housing in New Orleans is still closed, despite minimal storm damage, and Mississippi residents learned that three coastal facilities will be shut down soon.

Problems continue to plague **SCHOOLS** in the region, making it difficult for many families to return. Only 57 of the 117 public schools in New Orleans before Katrina are scheduled to open in the 2006-2007 school year.

**CONTRACTING SCANDALS** and other special-interest dealings continue to plague the recovery. Institute analysis has found \$136.7 million in corporate fraud in Katrina-related contracts, and government investigators have highlighted contracts worth \$428.7 million that are troubling due to lack of oversight or misappropriation. Altogether, the Institute finds that corporate contracting abuse has cost taxpayers 50 times more than widely-publicized scandals involving individuals wrongfully collecting assistance.

Threats to the **ENVIRONMENT** are exposing residents to a wide range of toxins and making many think twice about returning to the region. Federal officials also have yet to commit the resources to restore coastal wetlands—the region's best defense against future storms.

The stories and statistics in this report show that a broad range of institutions and individuals can be blamed for the region's injustices and glacial pace of renewal. But ultimately, those with the most power and responsibility for taking leadership in resolving these problems—our leaders in Washington—have failed to do so. And in too many cases, they have only made the situation worse.

In the end, our federal leaders must be held accountable for the still-unfolding tragedy of Katrina. Clearly, a bold change of course is required. The lives and livelihood of millions who live in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast—and the over 200,000 still displaced across the country—depend on it.

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch  
Institute for Southern Studies  
August 2006



# **KATRINA'S PEOPLE: Demographics and the Diaspora**

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Demographics Index

Number of persons Hurricane Katrina displaced from Louisiana: **645,000 to over 1.1 million**

Number displaced from Mississippi: **66,000 to several hundred thousand**

Total number of applicants for FEMA Individual Assistance for Katrina and Rita: **2,560,230**

Estimated number of storm-displaced Gulf residents who were ages 65 and older: **88,000**

Estimated number of U.S. communities to which storm victims evacuated: **724**

Average distance traveled by evacuees from Chalmette, a largely white community in St. Bernard Parish, La.: **193 miles**

Average distance traveled by evacuees from the Lower Ninth Ward, a largely African-American community in New Orleans: **349 miles**

Estimated percentage of the New Orleans metro area's pre-storm population of about 460,000 that had returned as of June 30: **37**

Percent of the New Orleans area's pre-storm population that was African-American: **36**

Percent of the New Orleans area's post-storm population that is African-American: **21**

Increase since Katrina in the New Orleans area's pre-storm mean household income of \$55,000: **\$9,000**

Percent decline since Katrina in single-mother households with children in the New Orleans area: **43**

Percent decline since Katrina in Mississippi's Gulfport-Biloxi metro area population: **16.8**

Percent of the Mississippi Coast's pre-storm population that was African-American: **16.7**

Percent of the Mississippi Coast's post-storm population that is African-American: **26.8**

Increase since Katrina in the Mississippi Coast's pre-storm median household income of \$40,090: **\$4,479**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 90

**H**urricane Katrina had an enormous impact on Gulf Coast communities from Alabama to Louisiana, with about 1.2 million people under evacuation orders before the storm made landfall. More than 1,500 people died as a result of the hurricane, and at least 135 are still missing.

Besides killing hundreds of people, Katrina displaced thousands. According to estimates released by the U.S. Census Bureau in June, southern Louisiana today is home to 344,781 fewer people today than before the hurricane. Evacuees were scattered to more than 700 communities throughout the United States, with some landing more than 4,000 miles from home. Life in the diaspora has been difficult for many, with survivors facing problems finding steady jobs and secure housing. Many survivors—both those who left their homes and those who remained behind—are also struggling with serious mental health problems such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

A disproportionate number of those whose lives were devastated by Katrina were poor and African-American people, many of whom faced intensified discrimination in the chaos that followed Katrina. Perhaps nowhere was that more apparent than in what happened on the Mississippi River bridge from New Orleans to Gretna, La. Soon after the storm, largely African-American crowds began to cross the bridge after New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin promised that buses were waiting on the other side. But police from Gretna, the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office and the Crescent City Connection (a division of the state Department of Transportation and Development), blocked their way, even firing shots over the heads of desperate storm victims. That tragic incident sparked one of the first civil rights protests following the storm, when on Nov. 8 activists from New Orleans and other U.S. communities marched across the bridge following a rally at the Convention Center, where thousands of residents had suffered through inhuman conditions in the days after the storm.

The race and class divides exposed by last year's hurricanes continue to manifest in the recovery. While many middle-class people and whites were able to summon the resources to return and rebuild, that task has been more difficult for poor people and people of color. That unfortunate reality is illustrated in statistics that have been released since Katrina showing a decline in the percentage of New Orleans' African-American population as well as an increase in income among those who have returned.

For historically disadvantaged communities throughout the Gulf, Katrina continues to rage a year later.



# An Uncertain Future on the Mississippi Coast

by Joe Atkins

Up and down Division Street in this poor, blighted, ethnically rich section of Biloxi, Miss., the closed storefronts, broken stoplights, piles of rubble, and unlit street corners bear testimony to the ravages of Hurricane Katrina a year ago this month.

Yet the lights are burning inside the Fancy Nails & Spa shop, where three generations of Vietnamese women attend to the lone customer, the only person in the shop who speaks English—that is, except for a teenage girl enjoying her ice cream between quick translations of English to Vietnamese for her family members.

“There are only a few stores open in East Biloxi—two convenience stores, this shop, and a grocery store,” says 28-year-old Takiesha Green, an East Biloxi native, while getting a pedicure. Since Katrina, she has been relocated to a Federal Emergency Management Agency trailer in Gulfport, Miss. “They’re working on casinos, condos, but we haven’t heard anything about homes.”

Green’s hoping soon to upgrade to a mobile home that’ll provide some relief for her and her two teenage daughters from their cramped two-bedroom trailer. “My home was flooded out,” she says. “I was a block from the beach. I’d love to come back—I love East Biloxi. Everybody knew everybody. It’s a small community. But there’s nowhere to live, no place to rent.”

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Tuan Vu, the owner of Fancy Nails, talks to me in English by phone from his home in Ocean Springs, Miss. “People have not fully come back yet, but we are all trying,” he says. “It will take three to five years to get to where we were. People are still very together in the church.”

Indeed, this community’s heart remains in its churches. Around the corner are both Catholic and Protestant churches, as well as a Buddhist temple. Its heart is also in places like the converted office space used by the East Biloxi Coordination Relief and Development Center at the St. John AME Church, where local activist and city councilman Bill Stallworth works.

Stallworth is a no-nonsense, roll-up-your-sleeves-and-get-to-work kind of guy. He speaks with the intensity

and edginess of a combat veteran. “We’re making headway, but we really need a lot more help,” he says. “As you get further away from what happened, everything slows down. People think everything is solved, that we’re taken care of. We are so far from that point it is not even funny.”

One of the big issues facing Stallworth and others up and down the Mississippi Gulf Coast is how to rebuild according to pending guidelines from FEMA. These might require new structures to be built substantially higher above sea level than before to qualify for flood insurance. The new structures could be as much as 22 feet above sea level, compared to 13 feet before Katrina in floodplain areas.

“Once you start doing that, you remove the notion of affordability out of the equation,” says Stallworth, noting that most of the 12,000 or so people who lived in East Biloxi before Katrina made less than \$35,000 a year, and 40 percent of them less than \$16,000. With the new elevation, “you are asking for an increase in \$25,000 or \$30,000 to the cost of the house.”

The issues range widely up and down the coast, as do the questions—from how to restore the devastated tax base in communities like Pass Christian to the “wind vs. water” federal trial in Gulfport pitting insurance companies against thousands of residents who say they were wrongly denied flood claims. The “New Urbanism” of some of the experts brought in by Republican Gov. Haley Barbour’s Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal frightened many residents who feared a wall of high-rise and high-profit condos and casinos would replace the Gulf Coast they once knew and called home.

Reports from Congress and the United Nations have been sharply critical of the Bush administration’s response to the disaster, a response that included opening the post-Katrina floodgates to no-bid contractors who wasted millions of dollars enriching themselves while failing to deliver promised work and goods. The hurricane cost some 40,000 Mississippians their jobs while contractors hired thousands of immigrant workers—many likely undocumented—at bottom-feeder wages to do the backbreaking, extremely hazardous and mainly unregulated work of rebuilding the coast.

Barbour scored well with Mississippians for his quick response to the catastrophe and working of his Washington connections to secure funding for the Gulf Coast. However, he rarely wavered in his politically partisan support of the Bush administration—and the jury remains out as to a final assessment of the state’s role in a rebuilt Gulf Coast.







NEW ORLEANS, FEB. 24, 2006

Common Ground Relief distribution center in the lower Ninth Ward

Robert Kaufmann/FEMA

*The coastal areas of rural Louisiana are home to many American Indians, including about 16,000 members of the United Houma Nation as well as various bands of the Biloxi-Chitimacha. While Louisiana acknowledges these groups as legitimate Indian tribes, the federal government still does not recognize them.*

*As coastal dwellers, Louisiana's Indians were hit hard by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Not only were their homes and communities flooded and in some cases destroyed, but their livelihood as fishers of crab, shrimp and oysters was disrupted. And unfortunately, their lack of federal recognition meant U.S. government aid was slow in coming. The tribes were also excluded from federal relief legislation sponsored by Louisiana's senators.*

*In the absence of government assistance, private relief efforts were critically important to native communities. In the immediate aftermath of the storms, about \$5 million in aid was collected from Indian country—an impressive amount considering that Indian families make about half the median income of the average U.S. family.<sup>(1)</sup>*

*The National Congress of American Indians arrived in the region shortly after the storms, assessing the damage in order to distribute aid to those most in need.<sup>(2)</sup> The Mennonite Disaster Relief Services provided aid to members of the Pointe-au-Chien tribe and surrounding Indian communities in Terrebonne Parish.<sup>(3)</sup> And the Common Ground Collective, a volunteer organization based in New Orleans, also provided assistance, which continues today.*

## Common Ground Aids Houma Region

by Suncere Ali Shakur

**O**n the day that Hurricane Rita struck in September 2005, the Common Ground Collective's Houma project was born.

Rasmus, Malik Rahim, Kobie Maitland and I went on a search-and-rescue mission that evening to an Indian reservation in Terrebonne Parish, but we found flood waters blocking our only route to the reservation. So we pulled over at a gas station on Grand Calliou Road in Houma, La.

People escaping the flood in south Houma and Dulac and Chauvin had packed the parking lot. Many were in tears. There were stories of people losing their children, of caskets of loved ones floating down the interstate. Malik made a call to get three U-hauls filled with relief aid—diapers, pots and pans, water, etc.

The trucks arrived three hours later—really quickly, considering that our base camp was about 85 miles away. We broke open the doors and, in our typical Common Ground fashion, began serving the people crowded around the rear of the the yellow truck. While some people received the aid with tears in their eyes, happiness came from most of those present. After that night, we were taken in by Bennie and his family. Bennie had lost two of his kids in Rita but found them two weeks later. Ever since that night, Common Ground has been in the Houma region.

For four months, we sent between five and seven vehicle convoys to the area seven days a week. After the fourth

month, we had a home for our operations. The Common Ground center in Houma was our first to be run entirely by local residents, and it served over 200 people per day. While the residents were running the main site, the volunteers were out gutting, painting, roofing and returning caskets to grave sites. At residents' request, volunteers also fixed up a local graveyard.

The people in this area survived Katrina and Rita without any help from Red Cross or the Federal Emergency Management Agency for 30 days. Common Ground was the first relief organization to arrive, and we are still there with a community center at 5741 Grand Calliou Rd. We serve free breakfast for the Kids in the Community Program that assists with the rebuilding of this great shrimping community, which represents 30 percent of the U.S. shrimping industry.

There's also a Common Ground community center in nearby Dulac that allows us to provide space for weddings, birthday parties, fundraising events or whatever the community wants, as well as housing for the volunteers working to rebuild this community.

*The Houma/Dulac Common Ground project needs help. We have very limited funds and rely on donations to keep the program going. For more information, contact project coordinator Suncere Ali Shakur at 504-913-8693 or write [mec\\_freebreakfast@yahoo.com](mailto:mec_freebreakfast@yahoo.com).*



# Rethinking Democracy, Rebuilding New Orleans

by Chris Kromm and Elena Everett

*In June 2006, Chris Kromm, executive director of the Institute for Southern Studies, sat down to talk with Khalil Tian Shahyd, a New Orleans native who was studying in Kerala, India at the time Katrina hit. Khalil is now an organizer with the Peoples' Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Committee. He has been active in supporting residents in the neighborhood planning process and working to ensure representation of those who are still displaced.*

**CHRIS KROMM: What are some of the issues facing the neighborhood planning and rebuilding process in New Orleans?**

**KHALIL TIAN SHAHYD:** The city was divided into 13 planning districts. Each district has areas that were hit to a greater or lesser degree by the storm. This is an issue because people [who have returned] are planning for the rest of the district or are taking parts of other neighborhoods into their own.

Currently, the Lafitte public housing development [where residents have not been allowed to return] is at the center of a plan called the "Lafitte Corridor Development" where the city wants to sell property to studio complexes. The Lafitte intersection is the scene of two important cultural events in the city: Fat Tuesday, the black community's Mardi Gras carnival, and the St. Joseph's Day parade.

On Fat Tuesday, the neighborhoods come out for an open-air concert, barbecues and parade. For the St. Joseph's Day parade, the Indian tribes from across the city come together and parade past the housing project. You place a studio complex there and what's that going to do to the cultural center?

Other areas like the Lower Ninth Ward haven't received much planning support. They recently formed the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Empowerment Network and Association to convene voices of the Lower Ninth Ward under one umbrella.

In Tremé, near the hotly contested downtown area and the Iberville housing development, we are working with the Historic Tremé Neighborhood Association. Our hope is that the people of the area will stand up and challenge other plans by saying, "We are the community and this is what we want."

**What are some of the lessons you think we can learn from other national or international models?**

The opportunity I see is a way to rethink how we understand our relationship to city, state and federal government—to rethink democracy. The neighborhood planning process is an opportunity to institute a decentralized participatory planning and budgeting process.

I was in Kerala, India last year. It's an anomaly in international development because the per capita income is about \$360, yet they have high social indicators such as 5 percent illiteracy. In New Orleans we have 40 percent illiteracy. Life expectancy for African Americans here is about 50 or 55. So we're doing much worse in terms of social indicators even though our income is 12 times higher.

In Kerala they use a decentralized planning process in which they trained over 300,000 volunteers to facilitate planning workshops. Each community determines how areas are developed, and the state is mandated to devote 30 percent of their resources to implement these projects. That to me is democracy in action. That's a mechanism to bring in those who have been socially excluded.

Here we have about 45 percent voter turnout, and that by definition is social exclusion. Direct access to budgets and funding would encourage more people to participate in the process, but it takes public education. It has to come from government; it has to come from civil society. We need to create an infrastructure to manage and support that type of public education, and it should be continual. This planning process is a brilliant opportunity to do that.



The Peoples' Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Committee was founded in the wake of Katrina to ensure community voices were heard in the rebuilding and reconstruction of the Gulf.



# Working Together for New Orleans East

by Ana Pardo

*Rev. Luke Nguyen is a pastor at Mary Queen of Vietnam Church in New Orleans East, part of St. Bernard Parish. The Roman Catholic church is at the center—literally—of a huge Vietnamese community in the Versailles neighborhood at Village de l'Est, one of the last parts of New Orleans to dry out after Katrina's floods. Versailles residents have made impressive progress in cleaning up and re-establishing their community. Earlier this year, community leaders formed Citizens for a Strong New Orleans East to combat the newly opened Chef Menteur landfill (see story, page 51) and to give residents a voice in reconstruction efforts. Ana Pardo recently had a chance to talk with Nguyen about the rebuilding effort.*

**ANA PARDO: How would you describe the Versailles community before Katrina?**

**REV. NGUYEN:** Before the storm we had about 7,000 people living here. About 30 percent were fisherman, 30 percent ran grocery shops and another 30 percent were factory workers. The people here came from three main areas of Vietnam in 1975. They knew each other in the north and migrated to the south. Eventually the fall of Saigon pushed them to come and settle here. It's a very close-knit community. People know where you came from, that your father was such-and-such and you came from this great-grandfather.

**When and how did residents begin to come back after the storm?**

I came back on Oct. 2 with a permit and had a peek at the community. We came back with five people—two priests and three other men. First we cleaned up the church and prepared for Sunday Mass. We had our first Sunday Mass on Oct. 9 and gathered about 270 people.

The second week we decided to come back to live, because some of the men were already sleeping here. On the weekends we had begun preparing meals for the people, so on the third week of October I [went] with a big truck to Waveland, Miss. to a distribution site. I asked for chicken to feed the 2,000 people coming to church on the weekend, and they gave me big boxes of chicken, which we packed into a U-haul truck.

That weekend we had 2,000 parishioners come to Mass, even though we had no lights. We made 3,500 eggrolls that day, and after the Mass they were gone right away. That's how you get people to come back. That first weekend, we had 270 people show up, and the second week we had about 600 to 800 people. Then the next week we

saw over 2,000 people, then 1,300 the week after that, and since then we've consistently had 1,500 people at Mass every Sunday. So far we've got 3,000 people from the neighborhood coming to weekend Masses, and that's just the people who come to church.

**How did Citizens for a Strong New Orleans East come out of these efforts?**

It started with the landfill issue. We began to think that it's not just our fight—that all the people who live here will be affected by the landfill. Also there are matters of housing and businesses re-opening, Wal-Mart and Sam's [Club] coming. So we came up with the name Citizens for a Strong New Orleans East to include all the people who live here in Versailles, in Village de L'Est, and now a lot of the communities here are coming together under that name.

**Where is the Versailles community now in terms of rebuilding?**

As of today we have 3,000 people attending Sunday Mass every weekend. Every day we have a morning and an evening Mass attended by 300 to 350 people. Right now people are trying to find jobs. Every house has already been gutted, and people have put new sheetrock in about 97 percent of the homes here.

**A lot of other New Orleans neighborhoods are still a long way from that point. How do you account for the comparative swiftness of the community's recovery?**

I think the church plays a big function. Without the church I don't think we could pull a lot of people together. The church acts as an anchor for the people. They come to Mass every weekend, and after Mass we put together food, and they come together and share a meal. I think the difference lies in having the church as a center. It's a place where people find shelter, both for their spiritual life and their physical needs.

The other difference is that we have a culturally unique community—Vietnamese culture, traditional Asian culture. That culture has always been kind of binding. We differ in many ways, yes, but when it comes to the needs of the community, we put our personal problems aside and work together.



# Hopes for Holy Cross

by Yolanda Carrington

*The Holy Cross neighborhood is part of the famous Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. Before Katrina, it was a mixed but largely working-class, African-American neighborhood where 70 percent of the residents owned their own homes. Since the storm, the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association has played an important role in the rebuilding of the community. Yolanda Carrington recently spoke with the group's director, Pam DeShields.*

## **YOLANDA CARRINGTON: When was the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association formed, and why?**

**PAM DESHIELDS:** It was formed in 1981 by a group of neighbors who wanted to preserve the architecture of the neighborhood and wanted it to become a historic district. They also organized to deal with the [Army] Corps of Engineers' plans to expand the Industrial Canal. They felt a neighborhood organization could deal with the city more effectively. It was an area that was not getting the services it needed—basically because it was below the Industrial Canal.

## **How many members are in the HCNA?**

We had about 100 families pre-Katrina. At this point, we have 40 paid members who reside in the city. There are many more who attend the meetings. Most were homeowners, some were renters.

## **How did Katrina affect Holy Cross?**

Everybody got damage from the storm. The steamboat houses that were built in the early 20th century—they're made to accept floodwater and they're on highest ground in the neighborhood, but even they got water damage. There was storm damage as well as water damage. There was more damage than was shown on the maps, cause they only showed us as getting three or four feet. At my house for example, which was three feet off the ground, I had six feet of water.

[The damage] did affect people differently, because whites—even the working-class whites—had more resources, and for whatever reason they were able to return more quickly. Now, many white folks were older, and they for the most part have not returned, although there are a few people that say that these [older whites] are going to come back once their houses are fixed and the [Mississippi Gulf-River Outlet] is closed and the levees are OK.

African Americans have not been as fortunate. There are far, far fewer African Americans than white people

[back in] Holy Cross. It did affect African Americans disproportionately.

## **How is Holy Cross rebuilding?**

We first want to make sure that this part of the city will be rebuilt. That is a primary focus. We're working with other organizations and individuals and institutions to make sure that it will be rebuilt. There were some questions about the whole Lower Ninth Ward being worthy of being rebuilt. So that is job one.

The second thing is organizing and getting services for people who want to return, finding them and communicating with them. For those who are here, trying to connect them with basic relief and the tools for rebuilding.

The third thing is planning for rebuilding, and that is taking a lot of time and effort. It's really important that folks be involved in the actual process of rebuilding. Getting information is one of our biggest problems. Nobody will give you the real deal. Another thing is providing social services for people who have come back.

## **What challenges does HCNA face?**

All of us have mental health issues—this PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and whatever other mental health problems there are because of what happened. And most of our friends and family are scattered.

## **Do residents feel like they have a voice in the rebuilding efforts?**

Yes. I mean, it's an opposition voice [to the city's plans], but yeah, I think people feel like they have a voice. A voice that's not always heard or that is ignored, but I think that people believe that they do have a voice. We have a voice, and we have allies.

## **What are your hopes for the future of Holy Cross?**

I hope that it will be repopulated with a diverse, mostly African-American people. I hope in the short term that people who lost their homes in other parts of the Ninth will come and live in Holy Cross, and I hope that the other part of our neighborhood comes back. I hope that we can develop an economic infrastructure that we didn't have pre-Katrina and sure don't have now, and I hope it thrives.

I hope that our mission—which is to make Holy Cross the best place in the city to live and raise a family—can be accomplished greenly and sustainably and happily. I just hope for a bright future. I think there is one, but it's not easy getting to it.



# A Place for Women After Katrina

by Elena Everett

*Shana Griffin is resident of New Orleans and an organizer with INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence and Critical Resistance New Orleans. Shana grew up in the Iberville Housing Development and is completing a Master's degree in sociology at the University of New Orleans. She is currently working on the Women's Health and Justice Initiative, which is coordinating with several organizations to open a women's health clinic this September in the historic Treme district of New Orleans. For more information, e-mail whji\_info@yahoo.com.*

**ELENA EVERETT:** There have been a lot of analyses about race and class post-Katrina. How does your organizing philosophy differ and work to address women's issues?

**SHANA GRIFFIN:** I and the women I work with try to organize from an approach that includes an analysis of gender, race, class, citizenship status, sexuality and a critique of privilege. We try to organize from an unfragmented approach, meaning we don't expect people to walk through the door and drop three-fourths of themselves and come in as just a woman or just a black person. We don't exist as just women, we do have a race and we do have a class and ethnic background. It's important to look at things from an intersectionality. In the Gulf Coast, there are reasons why things are unfolding the way they're unfolding.

On TV immediately after Katrina, most of the faces we saw were women—poor black women and their children and their families. If you took any urban area and gave it a 24-hour notice to evacuate, it would be the same population, the same poor black women in the most vulnerable situations.

**What do you see as unique challenges and issues women have been facing in the Gulf post-Katrina?**

One of the biggest post-Katrina challenges is the complete absence of consideration or special provisions to meet the needs of women. So many studies related to disaster or times of war and conflict show that women are one of the most vulnerable populations. Violence against women increases as well as their responsibilities, since they are generally the primary caregivers for the elderly and children. There's been an invisibility [of] the needs of women of color in the Gulf Coast region.

Because of the absence of the gender analysis of many agencies, organizations who identify as women-of-color

organizations have to constantly fight to render ourselves visible. At the same time, we have to justify our existence in the work that we're trying to do.

New Orleans' pre-Katrina population was more than half women. Today when you look at the statistics around housing, health care, even incarceration, women and especially black women are much more vulnerable. In 2003 in Louisiana, 80 percent of new HIV cases were black women. In public housing, the vast majority of tenants were women. I can go on and on. When it comes to the aftermath of natural and man-made disasters, those who are most directly impacted are women.

**How will the initiative and clinic work to address some of those issues?**

The purpose of the clinic is to improve health care access for low-income and uninsured women of color and to promote a holistic and community-centered approach to primary health care. At the same time, we look at the oppression and violence that have an impact on the health status of women and work to improve those situations. It's more than providing health care services—it's also about challenging the conditions that limit our access and our opportunities, such as poverty, racism, gender-based violence, imperialism and war. We see it as more than just a clinic—we want it to be an organizing center that can meet immediate needs while also working for racial, gender, economic and environmental justice.

We see our clinic as a great opportunity to talk to people and discuss why these services and this approach is needed. We have the power to reinvent ourselves and create institutions that are equitable.

Time





HOUSTON, SEPT. 3, 2005

A giant message board helps people locate friends and loved ones at the Reliant Center. Thousands of displaced citizens were moved from New Orleans to Houston as New Orleans was evacuated.

Photo by Ed Edahl/FEMA

## Katrina Evacuees: Homesick but Making Do

by Pam Broom

A feeling of being irreparably detached from my home, New Orleans, grips me one year after Katrina. Now staying in Durham, N.C., I listen to the news, anticipating some mention of the plight of the thousands of us still displaced throughout the country. My lifeline has been calls to my sister and mama in Gretna, La. just about every other day. I ask about local news reports, wondering what if anything is being said about those of us who cannot return.

Before I came to Durham, the colleague who offered her vacant house to my family and me had called ahead to a friend who worked at the local Department of Social Services. I contacted DSS to register for relief assistance, three months of food stamps and emergency health care. It took three weeks of coaxing out a daily rhythm that resembled normality before I could consider a next step.

I realized that I'd brought intact from New Orleans to Durham the spirit of hospitality and making do. I had a desire to comfort, nurture and creatively uncover resources for as many evacuees as I could find. Last October, I began volunteering with the Interfaith Hurricane Relief Task Force of Durham County. The task force had two paid staff—a coordinator, Nicholas McCoy, and a social worker, Winnie Breeden. It involved close to 125 local congregations, and worked in collaboration with the Durham County Commissioners and the Durham mayor as well as the Coalition for Affordable Housing and other community-based groups. First Presbyterian Church served as the staging ground for coordination of basic relief support: housing, clothing, food, information and referrals to social services. Though the task force has served an important role, its organizers were not prepared for the magnitude and duration of resettlement needs of those displaced by Katrina.

One big challenge is actually reaching the estimated 300 to 500 New Orleans and Gulf Coast residents now residing in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area. According to information provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Red Cross, nearly 6,500 evacuees were dispersed throughout North Carolina.

Persistent feelings of isolation, loss, depression and severe mental anguish were common among Katrina survivors. To help, the Katrina Neighbors Support Group was formed in March and has met every other week since then. We have shared stories of home, food and the spirit of New Orleans as a means of bonding. Our Gulf Coast Katrina neighbors talked about missing the close proximity of family members as they struggled to heal. Early on the meetings were taken up by rants about FEMA and insurance failures, but they soon evolved into opportunities to show off favorite dishes and engage in supportive conversation. However, it has been extremely difficult to link to much needed clinical mental health care.

One year after the hurricane, Katrina neighbors in Durham and other communities face difficulties finding and retaining sustainable employment, and locating and maintaining safe, affordable housing. "I can't get anyone to give me a chance," support group members have repeatedly said. "I've applied at so many places and still can't get a job." There is mounting concern that even with the efforts of the task force, support group and other local community groups, there will not be adequate resources available to meet the needs of Katrina neighbors.

At this juncture, reflection and regrouping is in order. The task force is moderately funded but must address enormous needs. The support group has relied on donations and in-kind contributions. A growing alliance of social justice and grassroots groups are pledging to help with the ongoing needs of Katrina neighbors, but reaching those in distress remains a major problem. The task

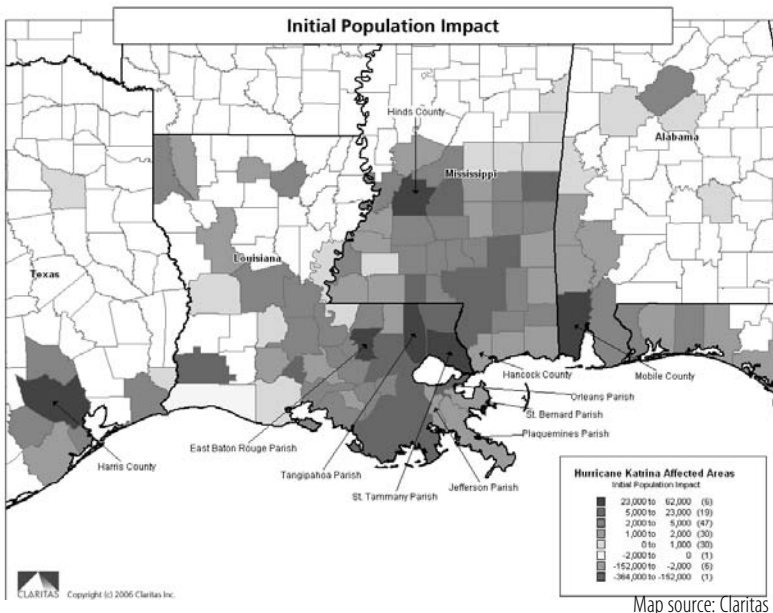


HOUSTON, SEPT. 3, 2005  
A family from New Orleans sheltered in the Astrodome has just found out the whereabouts of a lost grandchild.

FEMA photo/Andrea Booher

force has proposed ideas to enhance outreach such as placing regular public service advertisements in newspapers and other publications as well as on the radio.

For me, this has been a transitional, "making a way out of no way" year. Volunteering and community organizing alongside my Katrina and Durham neighbors has been affirming and therapeutic. Periodic contract work plus FEMA rental assistance has helped to meet my family's needs. In June, I updated my résumé and sent it around the country, ready to take the next step of reestablishing a professional life. Chicago answered. Just about one year to the day of fleeing home in anticipation of Katrina, we will be on the road, moving forward, revived.



# SEARCH FOR SHELTER: Housing



## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Housing Index

Percent of Louisiana mortgages past due as of July 2006: **20**

Percent of Mississippi mortgages past due: **13**

National average for percent of past-due mortgages: **4**

Average rent for a one-bedroom New Orleans apartment before Katrina: **\$578**

Average rent for a one-bedroom New Orleans apartment as of July 2006: **\$803**

Occupancy rate of livable apartments in New Orleans: **99 percent**

Number of mobile homes ordered for the Gulf Coast: **7,737**

Number of smaller travel trailers : **105,927**

Number of storm-affected households holding Federal Emergency Management Agency hotel vouchers: **39**

Number of storm-affected households approved for housing assistance: **946,597**

Minimum percent of New Orleans public housing that is still closed: **80**

Number of homes the Army Corps of Engineers has demolished in Louisiana since Katrina: **1,105**

Minimum number of New Orleans public housing units scheduled for demolition: **5,000**

Months after Katrina that federal money for housing reconstruction was approved: **10**

Total federal funds dispersed so far to rebuild homes: **\$0**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 92

Early this month, John McCusker—a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer with the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*—attempted a strange form of suicide after learning that his insurance company would not rebuild his home. McCusker was Tasered and detained after urging police to shoot him to death.<sup>(1)</sup>

On Aug. 15, nearly one year after winds and rains destroyed homes across the Gulf Coast, a federal judge in Mississippi handed down a devastating and precedent-setting ruling that held that insurance companies were not required to pay claims on homes damaged by flooding.<sup>(2)</sup>

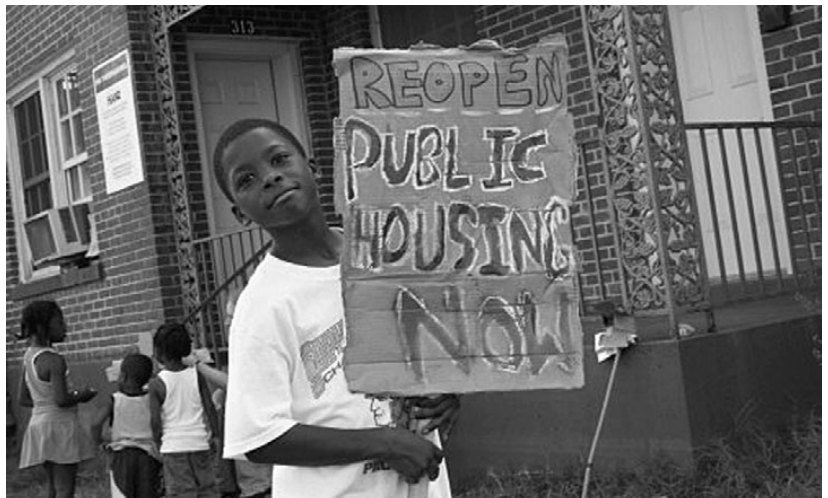
In Mississippi and Louisiana, over 100,000 households continue to live in 240-square-foot trailers and mobile homes issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Untold more live in the flooded cars that dot the region's ravaged landscape.

In New Orleans, thousands of public housing residents have been told that their former homes—many of which received no flood damage—would be demolished. With the city's housing authority planning to rebuild only a fraction of units that existed before Katrina, several dozen residents have pitched tents outside public housing developments in protest. At the same time, rent in New Orleans has skyrocketed, pricing residents out of their former neighborhoods while city hall refuses to discuss rent control.

With the one-year anniversary of the storm approaching, Louisiana says it's ready—almost—to start making grants to homeowners to rebuild through the state's "Road Home" plan.<sup>(3)</sup> Meanwhile, dozens of housing advocates have filed a complaint against the plan, charging that it violates the terms of the federal community development block grants by not providing sufficient resources for low-income households, homeowners and renters.<sup>(4)</sup>

Across the Gulf Coast, the struggle for resettlement—of the right of people to return home and live with dignity—is far from over. In many communities, the battles are just beginning.

Craig Morse





NINTH WARD, NEW ORLEANS, MARCH 2006

Marvin Nauman/FEMA photo

## Still Waiting for Shelter

by Bill Quigley

Bernice Mosely is 82 and lives alone in New Orleans in a double that never flooded before Katrina. On a blazing hot summer day, Ms. Mosely uses crutches to gingerly come down off her porch to open the padlock on her fence. Crutches are essential because she had hip and knee replacement surgery.

Ms. Mosely worked in a New Orleans factory for over 30 years sewing uniforms. When she retired she was making less than \$4 an hour. She now lives off Social Security.

Because her house had never flooded, and because liv-

ing off Social Security kept her budget tight, Ms. Mosely did not have flood insurance. Her neighborhood flooded with seven to eight feet of water. She stayed at her church and was helicoptered out. Her next-door neighbor, who was 89, stayed home to care for his dog and drowned.

Ms. Mosely now lives in her half-gutted house with no stove, no refrigerator, and no air-conditioning. The bottom half of her walls have been stripped of sheetrock and are now bare wooden slats from the floor halfway up the wall. Her food is stored in a styrofoam cooler. Two small fans push the hot air around.

Thousands of people like Ms. Mosely are back in their homes on the Gulf Coast. They are living in homes that most people would consider, at best, still under construction, or, at worst, uninhabitable.

However, hundreds of thousands are not back at all yet—over 200,000 in New Orleans alone.

Tens of thousands are staying in 240-square-foot Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers.

Tens of thousands of others are living in apartments month to month, under continuous threats of FEMA cutoffs.

Homeowners have not received a single dollar of federal housing rebuilding assistance yet. Like Ms. Mosely, they wait.

Renters, who comprised a majority of New Orleans before Katrina, are even worse off. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has kept thousands locked out of their public housing apartments and announced plans to demolish 5,000 homes. Rents have skyrocketed in the undamaged parts of the area, pricing regular working people out of the market.

The statistics tell some of the story. But behind every number there is a real person like Ms. Mosely, still struggling for shelter.

## Stopping the Bulldozers of New Orleans

by Elena Everett

In January, Hurricane Katrina survivors in New Orleans won a settlement securing notification for residents whose homes were targeted for demolition. The agreement requires the city to notify people by publication and mail before taking any property, including rubble.

"Homeowners will have an opportunity to fight if they believe that the city is unjustly forcing them out of their homes and neighborhoods and to retrieve personal belongings," said Judith Browne, co-director of Advancement Project and co-convenor of the Grassroots Legal Network of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund. "Justice

is on the side of the survivors of Hurricane Katrina. We cannot rest until they are treated fairly and with respect."

The class-action settlement came after Mayor Ray Nagin unveiled his "Bring Back New Orleans" plan for redevelopment, which left residents angry over the rush to bulldoze properties when neighborhoods had not yet had the opportunity to weigh in on the redevelopment.

In December 2005, the city announced that it would start bulldozing about 2,500 heavily damaged homes. The plans drew an outcry, as most Katrina evacuees had not yet returned to salvage their belongings. At the same time, cleanup crews were continuing to find bodies, and

it was feared that bulldozers would desecrate the remains of storm victims.

In early January, housing advocates and a legal aid team succeeded in stopping the bulldozers—both physically, in an emergency demonstration that blocked a demolition in the Lower Ninth Ward, and in the courts, by winning a temporary stay for the bulldozers until the Jan. 19 federal court hearing, where the settlement was won.

The suit, titled *Kirk v. City of New Orleans*, was brought by Advancement Project, Loyola Law Clinic and Tracie Washington with the assistance and support of the plaintiff homeowners and the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, ACORN, Hope House, Common Ground Collective, Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Council, New Life Intracoastal CDC, and student volunteers of the Student Hurricane Network.



ACORN

## FEMA Tests Trailers for Toxins

by Sue Sturgis

More than 100,000 people who lost their homes in Hurricane Katrina are living in Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers in Louisiana and Mississippi—and at least some of those trailers contain dangerous levels of formaldehyde, a toxic gas linked to respiratory disorders and cancer.

Months after the problem was discovered through independent testing conducted by the Sierra Club, FEMA ordered air quality tests of its own. The Amos Network, an interfaith community group in Mississippi, also urged comprehensive testing of the trailers after residents complained of health problems.<sup>(1)</sup>

"It makes everybody stuffed up," trailer resident Cynthia Willis told WLOX-TV. "You can't breathe or anything."

In May, Sierra Club reported on the results of indoor air tests in 31 FEMA trailers issued to Gulf Coast storm survivors.<sup>(2)</sup> It found only two trailers where the levels of formaldehyde were at or below the 0.1 parts per million safety limit set by the Environmental Protection Agency and the American Lung Association. The levels in several trailers were more than three times the limit. Some residents of trailers where the testing occurred reported problems associated with formaldehyde exposure such as burning eyes, irritated throat, sinus congestion, persistent coughs and nosebleeds.

Three months after the Sierra Club's report, FEMA asked the Environmental Protection Agency to do its own testing. MSNBC reported. A FEMA spokesperson said his agency requested the tests to be cautious but remains confident in the trailers' safety. However, the spokesperson also acknowledged that FEMA has received 46 complaints of suspected formaldehyde contamination.<sup>(3)</sup>

Formaldehyde is a gas emitted by pressed wood products such as particleboard made using adhesives containing urea-formaldehyde resins. The EPA considers it a suspected human carcinogen.

Reports of respiratory problems among people living in FEMA trailers have led to the filing of at least one lawsuit in Louisiana against the federal government and trailer manufacturers alleging that the temporary housing presents a danger to the health and well-being of residents. The plaintiffs' attorneys are asking the U.S. District Court in the Eastern District of Louisiana to grant the case class-action status, according to MSNBC.

The Sierra Club has advised trailer residents to ventilate their homes using fans, especially when the trailers are new. It also suggests that residents experiencing health problems that could be linked to formaldehyde limit the amount of time spent in the trailer.

"If possible, spend part of the day outdoors, at public facilities such as library or recreation centers, or at the homes of friends and relatives," it recommended.



# **BRICK BY BRICK: Infrastructure**

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Infrastructure Index

Area of the Gulf Coast affected by Hurricane Katrina:  
**90,000 square miles**

Estimated cost of damage caused by Katrina:  
**\$200 billion**

Portion of U.S. Highway 90 through coastal Mississippi washed out by the storm: **29 miles**

Number of people left without power immediately after Katrina: **2.6 million**

Level of electricity hook-up in New Orleans in August 2006, compared to former customer levels: **60 percent**

Of the 368 buses operating in New Orleans before Katrina, number operating as of July 2006: **61**

Estimated cost of Katrina-related damage to sewer systems in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi:  
**\$1.4 billion**

Gallons of water the New Orleans water system loses each day due to breaks caused by Katrina and an underfunded repair budget: **85 million**

Daily cost to the city from the leaks: **\$196,350**

Annual profits that Entergy Corp., the national entity whose subsidiaries provide electricity to most of the Gulf region, reported earning before Katrina: **\$909 million**

Amount Entergy's New Orleans subsidiary requested in federal relief from the Community Development Block Grant program, after declaring bankruptcy following the storm: **\$718 million**

Rate increase proposed by Entergy New Orleans to fund repairs after its request for block grant funding was denied: **25 percent**

Profits reported by Entergy between April and June of 2006: **\$281 million**

Compensation for Entergy CEO J. Wayne Leonard:  
**\$9.5 million annual salary plus \$48 million in stock options**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 90

The 125-mile-per-hour winds and powerful storm surge from Hurricane Katrina tore through the Gulf Coast, obliterating much of the physical infrastructure. Bridges, pipelines, power lines, levees and entire towns were blown down and washed away.

Nearly 1 million people in Louisiana and over 800,000 homes in Mississippi—nearly one-third of the population—were temporarily without electricity.<sup>(1)</sup> Numerous roadways were flooded or damaged, and many evacuations had to be conducted by boat or helicopter.

The Interstate 10 bridge from New Orleans to Slidell, La. collapsed<sup>(2)</sup>, and the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway could carry only emergency traffic for weeks. In Mississippi, a 30-foot storm surge wiped out 90 percent of the buildings along the Biloxi-Gulfport coastline. Coastal Highway 90 and the bridges from Bay St. Louis to Pass Christian and Biloxi to Ocean Springs were destroyed.<sup>(3)</sup>

At its most intense, Katrina obliterated almost every structure within a half-mile of the Mississippi beach, leaving Waveland and Pass Christian with driveways and walkways that led to nowhere.

Utilities and developers have moved quickly to collect state and federal tax incentives for bigger pipelines and other expansion projects. Meanwhile, sections of the New Orleans' Lakeview and Lower Ninth Ward neighborhoods remain without gas and electricity service<sup>(4)</sup>, while the bridge to Bay St. Louis and the one connecting the Vietnamese community in New Orleans East to the rest New Orleans have yet to be rebuilt.

Merle Wolfe/FEMA



# Entergy: The Power of Profits

by Sue Sturgis

To understand how some corporations have tried to take advantage of the public in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, consider the case of Entergy New Orleans. A wholly-owned subsidiary of the Louisiana-based Entergy Corp., ENO provides electricity and natural gas service to Crescent City residents. It's a separate subsidiary from Entergy Louisiana, which serves Louisiana residents outside the east bank of Orleans Parish.

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"The risk of a financial loss from a natural disaster is one that any investor in a private firm must face, and it would be wrong for the taxpayer to bail out those investors after the fact," wrote a White House official.

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If ever there were a company that should have been able to pick itself up by its bootstraps following last year's hurricane, it was Entergy. The year before the storm struck, Entergy earned \$909 million in profits on revenues of \$10 billion. But less than a month after Katrina struck the Gulf, its ENO subsidiary filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy—and immediately sought a taxpayer bailout.

"Federal resources, in addition to reimbursement of certain costs covered by insurance, are critical to restoring

the system and restoring Entergy New Orleans' financial health," the company said in a press release announcing the bankruptcy filing. "Entergy is working with public officials at the federal, state and local levels to try to secure vital government assistance."

The company asked for federal relief from Congress, including a cut of the \$11.5 billion in Community Development Block Grants that Congress approved as part of the Katrina Relief Bill. ENO requested \$718 million in CDBG money, which is being administered by the Louisiana Recovery Authority. The company says this is the amount needed to fix the damage it suffered in the storm.

The Bush administration was unsympathetic to the company's request. "The risk of a financial loss from a natural disaster is one that any investor in a private firm must face, and it would be wrong for the taxpayer to bail out those investors after the fact," Allan Hubbard, chairman of the White House's Gulf Coast Recovery and Rebuilding Council, wrote last year in a letter to an Entergy executive obtained by the New Orleans Times-Picayune.<sup>(1)</sup>

Hubbard suggested that ENO should either tap the financial resources of its parent corporation or ask the utility's bondholders to write down the value of the subsidiary's debt. Another possibility would be to spread the burden of financing repairs to more of the company's rate payers by merging ENO with the Louisiana subsidiary.

Instead, Entergy has decided to make ENO's storm-shrunk customer base pay: The company recently filed a plan with New Orleans City Council to impose a 25 percent rate hike, which would raise its customers' electric and gas bills on average by \$45 a month<sup>(2)</sup>. The council has until Nov. 1 to decide on the proposal. The company is still pursuing CDBG funds as well, though the LRA has not made any promises.

In the meantime, 30 percent of Lower Ninth Ward residents still lack gas service and 8 percent still lack electricity<sup>(3)</sup>, while intermittent power outages remain a fact of life throughout the city. But all is bright at Entergy, which reported \$282 million in earnings on revenue of \$2.63 billion between April and June of this year.<sup>(4)</sup> And Entergy CEO J. Wayne Leonard is living comfortably: His total compensation for 2005 was \$9.5 million, and he still holds \$48 million in exercisable Entergy stock options<sup>(5)</sup>.



CAMERON, LA, NOV. 2005  
A lineman repairs damage from Hurricane Rita.  
MARVIN NAUMAN/FEMA photo

# Massive Water Leaks Imperil New Orleans

by Sue Sturgis

In a cruel irony, the same hurricane that inundated New Orleans a year ago is now draining the city dangerously dry.

When Katrina blew past New Orleans last August, the wind and flooding toppled countless trees whose roots had grown entangled in the city's network of underground water pipes, causing thousands of breaks. The city's Sewerage and Water Board has repaired more than 17,000 leaks to date, but the system continues to bleed about 85 million gallons of water a day—more than two-thirds of what's pumped through the pipes.<sup>(1)</sup> The board's members recently acknowledged that the city will not recover from the storm if the problem isn't repaired quickly.<sup>(2)</sup>

Even before Katrina, New Orleans' aging water system was losing about 20 million gallons a day and provided an average of only about 30 pounds of pressure. Most municipal systems provide about 60 pounds. Since the storm, building managers across New Orleans have been reporting pressures of 20 pounds or less.<sup>(3)</sup>

The lack of pressure caused New Orleans City Hall and the civil court building to close for several days in June when there was not enough water for drinking fountains, restrooms and air conditioners. There are even more serious problems associated with low water pressure, such as sprinklers in high-rise buildings malfunctioning

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The city has repaired more than 17,000 leaks to date, but the system continues to bleed about 85 million gallons of water a day—more than two-thirds of what's pumped through the pipes.

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and firefighters being unable to quell blazes. In addition, some property managers are worried about the potential effect on insurance prices.

The leaks are also costing S&WB dearly: Based on the customer charge of \$2.31 per 1,000 gallons, the agency is losing \$196,350 in revenue daily and \$1.3 million weekly.<sup>(4)</sup>

In hopes of fixing the problem, S&WB earlier this year contracted with Fluid Conservation Systems Inc. of Ohio to search for leaks throughout the 1,600-mile network. The company uses monitors to listen for noise on the pipeline, with the goal of finding and repairing small leaks before they develop into major breaks.

"This proactive approach is a way to reduce the impact on customers and allow a repair which will be less costly, based on not having to react in an emergency mode and possibly requiring a smaller response of staff and equipment," said S&WB Executive Director Marcia St. Martin.

But in the meantime, New Orleans continues to lose water at an alarming rate.

## BellSouth Withdraws N.O. Aid Over Wireless Dispute

by Cailin Deery

Following Hurricane Katrina, many private companies stepped up to help hard-hit areas of the Gulf Coast. However, this corporate generosity sometimes came with strings attached.

Consider the case of the BellSouth Corp. The company pledged to donate a flood-damaged building for the New Orleans Police Department to use as a headquarters after their previous building was destroyed in Katrina's aftermath. However, it withdrew the offer after New Orleans unveiled plans to offer free high-speed Internet access to the recovering city.<sup>(1)</sup>

BellSouth viewed the WiFi plan, short for wireless fidelity, as taxpayer-funded competition that would greatly reduce BellSouth's business in New Orleans.<sup>(1)</sup> The wireless

network was pitched as a way to stimulate recovery and relocation by providing Internet access to homes and businesses.

The BellSouth building in question was flooded and in need of repairs, but 250,000 square feet of usable space remained. Since the hurricane, the N.O.P.D. has been operating out of hotel rooms and precinct stations.<sup>(1)</sup>

Currently, free WiFi is available in a four-square-mile area of New Orleans, concentrated in downtown and part of the French Quarter. Greg Meffert, New Orleans' chief technology officer, says about 1,000 people can access the service.<sup>(2)</sup>

On May 26, Earthlink announced that it would build a WiFi broadband network and expand the service area to 15 square miles.<sup>(3)</sup> The service is scheduled to be available by Sept. 1.



# DEFENDING DEMOCRACY: Politics



## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Politics Index

Turnout for the 2002 mayoral race in New Orleans:  
**46 percent**

Turnout for the 2006 mayoral run-off between Mitch  
Landrieu and Ray Nagin: **38 percent**

Number of registered voters in New Orleans at the time  
of the 2006 elections: **299,073**

Estimated number of registered voters who were still  
displaced by Katrina at election time: **200,000**

Percent of votes that came from displaced residents  
through absentee ballots or in-state satellite polling  
places: **25**

Number of miles roundtrip that hundreds of displaced  
voters in Atlanta traveled to cast their ballots in New  
Orleans: **934**

Approximate amount of dollars in gas the trip would  
cost: **\$115.58**

Number of Mississippi households living in FEMA travel  
trailers and mobile homes as of July 19, 2006: **37,505**

Percent of those living in more spacious  
mobile homes: **12.5**

Number of Louisiana households living in FEMA travel  
trailers and mobile homes as of July 19, 2006: **75,907**

Percent of those living in more spacious  
mobile homes: **4.6**

Cost to government for a mobile home per night: **\$124**

Cost for a travel trailer per night: **\$75**

Percent of Mississippi voters who voted for Bush  
in 2004: **59.45**

Percent of Orleans Parish voters who voted for Bush  
in 2004: **21.7**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 94

*"Out of the rubble of Trent Lott's house—he's lost his entire house—there's going to be a fantastic house. And I'm looking forward to sitting on the porch." —George W. Bush, Sept. 2, 2005*

In the post-Katrina political landscape, the devastation created lucrative opportunities for those who had passed through the government-industry revolving door, as resources were speedily mobilized for some but not others. While ordinary hurricane victims found themselves in desperate straits, former government officials-turned-lobbyists secured millions of dollars of federal money in disaster contracts.

For example, when former Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Joe Allbaugh began his new career as a lobbyist, he worked closely with Barbour Griffith and Rogers, a Republican lobbying firm founded by Haley Barbour, now governor of Mississippi. Days after the storm, Allbaugh succeeded in winning substantial and controversial no-bid contracts for clients AshBritt, The Shaw Group and Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root to remove debris and set up temporary shelters along the Mississippi coast.<sup>(1)</sup>

Barbour himself made no secret of the fact that he was tapping the Washington insider clout he had accrued through his position as former chair of the Republican National Committee and close ties to the Bush administration.<sup>(2)</sup> In the weeks and months following Katrina, Barbour was praised for his quick action and ability to secure resources for the rebuilding of his state. His accomplishments were viewed as particularly impressive compared to the volatile and desperate situation in neighboring Louisiana, where the Democratic leadership passed around blame while encountering difficulty winning substantial federal resources for recovery.

And in New Orleans, tens of thousands of displaced voters were effectively disenfranchised in the city's spring elections while mayoral hopefuls exclaimed in televised debates that they didn't want "pimps" and "welfare queens" to return.<sup>(3)</sup> Much criticism was directed at Louisiana for failing to take a proactive role in ensuring the voices of the displaced would be heard through the ballot box. Several civil rights groups filed suit to delay the municipal elections and to set up satellite voting booths across the diaspora, similar to the ones provided for Iraqi citizens living in the United States for their recent elections. A federal judge denied the motion, however, and left it to grassroots organizations such as ACORN, Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund, the NAACP and Industrial Areas Foundation affiliates to organize and mobilize voters throughout the country.

Stakes remain high as millions of dollars are spent on the recovery. Meanwhile, it has become increasingly clear that political cronyism and connections drastically impact hard-hit communities' access to resources and chances for recovery.



# REBUILDING AND THE BALLOT: Race and Politics After Katrina

by Kristen Clarke-Avery

The recent spring municipal elections in New Orleans were historic in a number of regards. They were the first to be conducted following a major natural disaster and with significant numbers of residents displaced from the city. These elections tested our nation's commitment to ensuring broad levels of equal and open participation in the political process. And ultimately, these elections will figure significantly into the rebuilding and reconstruction process that is now unfolding.

In the weeks leading up to the elections, many black leaders called for satellite voting at strategically placed centers around the country that would have allowed displaced voters to cast their ballots from their temporary places of residence. Given the displacement patterns that emerged following Katrina, satellite voting centers in cities such as Houston; Atlanta; Memphis, Tenn.; Jackson, Miss.; and Dallas would certainly have helped make participation easier for significant numbers of displaced voters.

Although a federal judge was unwilling to order it, the Louisiana legislature could have implemented the satellite voting centers. The legislature voted against this and instead allowed for limited satellite voting in the registrar's offices of 10 parishes around the state.

In addition, notice of all elections changes needed to be

publicized to voters dispersed throughout the country—a difficult task given that many displaced voters were in a constant state of flux. This reality was further complicated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's unwillingness to share updated address lists on the grounds that it would breach privacy restrictions.

The recent elections in New Orleans will serve as a guidepost for future elections conducted under emergency circumstances. With the specter of intensifying international conflict and a world that is increasingly vulnerable to natural disaster, Hurricane Katrina will certainly not be the last tragedy to befall the country. These elections showed that officials are unwilling to take aggressive steps to facilitate voting in such situations. In addition to out-of-state satellite voting centers, a number of other steps could have been taken to make it easier for displaced voters to participate in what were arguably the most important elections in the city's storied history. An extended period of early voting could have been made available at registrar's offices around the country, giving displaced voters a wide window of time to cast their ballots. Pre-addressed, pre-stamped ballots could have been made available at post offices around the country with a verification process established at the Orleans Parish Registrar's Office for all ballots returned by mail.

Problems with mailing lists aside, ballots could have been automatically mailed to all displaced voters, thus eliminating the requirement that voters first



request their ballots and wait for their arrival. Finally, election officials could have conducted extensive voter outreach by making ballots available at FEMA centers and during the well-attended public meetings held around the country to educate displaced voters about the receipt of social services and benefits.

### **Shifting Allegiances, Overcoming Obstacles**

In 2002, Ray Nagin ran a campaign that clearly appealed to white voters and business interests in New Orleans. He received the support of only about 45 percent of the black community, with the majority of African-American voters supporting his opponent, former New Orleans Police Chief Richard Pennington. Nagin's lowest levels of support were in black enclaves of the city such as the Ninth Ward. However, white voters turned out to the polls in high numbers, helping ultimately to tip the scales in Nagin's favor.

Preceding hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Nagin was regarded as serving on behalf of white and monied interests in the city. However, the tide shifted in Nagin's favor in the months following Katrina when it appeared that he was the only viable African-American candidate to throw his hat in the ring for the mayoral race.

Analysts suggested that Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu was the more progressive candidate, whose platform would have likely brought a more immediate impact on poor New Orleanians and increased the likelihood that poor, black voters might be able to make a speedy return to the city. Nagin's victory, however, meant that an African American continued to hold the most powerful position in the city and reduced fears among many displaced black residents that the city would be rebuilt to their

exclusion. Although Nagin came under sharp criticism for his now-infamous "Chocolate City" comment, some black voters interpreted this as a firm, if perhaps belated, promise on his part to maintain the racial status quo.

Nagin's victory reflects the fact that race continues to play a significant role in the political consciousness of the Deep South—a reality that has not been altered by the hurricanes.

African-American voters in New Orleans are deeply concerned about holding on to their political gains and fear that the hurricanes may upset a delicately forged power balance in the city. Many black voters, particularly in the Ninth Ward, cast aside their profound disdain for Nagin out of a desire to keep the city's 28-year old black mayoral legacy intact. Likewise, white voters have seen the mass destruction of the city as an opportunity to rebuild a "new" New Orleans.

Indeed, some white voters, the vast majority of whom are middle or upper class, expressed a desire to see major reform to the social fabric of the city. They saw these elections as a unique opportunity to put a new face on the city—while black voters feared what that face might look like.

With these heightened stakes as a backdrop, and despite the obstacles they faced, many displaced voters endured long bus rides to the city, found their way to an in-state satellite voting center, or cast an absentee ballot in order to ensure their voice would be heard. Although a sizeable number were not able to overcome the obstacles, the political will exercised by many African Americans evidences a real commitment to not only rebuild their homes but to maintain the long-sought political gains that existed before Katrina.

NEW ORLEANS, SEPT. 4, 2005

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, right, and Undersecretary of FEMA Mike Brown, center, meet with Mayor Ray Nagin at the FEMA Urban Search and Rescue task forces base of operations.

Photo by Jocelyn Augustino/FEMA

NEW ORLEANS, MARCH 8, 2006

President George W. Bush and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, right, view flood wall construction in the Industrial Levee Canal during a tour to view reconstruction progress six months after Hurricane Katrina.

White House photo by Eric Draper

JACKSON, MISS., APRIL 14, 2006

At a press conference, Gov. Haley Barbour and Homeland Security Secretary, Michael Chertoff, discuss preparedness for the 2006 hurricane season.

George Armstrong/FEMA



# MAKING A LIVING: Economy

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Economy Index

Number of jobs eliminated in the Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina: **230,000**

A year after Katrina, percent by which New Orleans' workforce has shrunk: **30**

Unemployment rate among Hurricane Katrina evacuees who are now back in their original homes: **4.2**

Unemployment rate among evacuees who aren't back in their original homes: **23**

Date in June 2006 that unemployment assistance was terminated for all Katrina evacuees: **23**

Number of unemployed evacuees who were cut off the rolls on that date: **64,000**

Number of small businesses that were operating in the 77 counties worst hit by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: **145,000**

Percent of New Orleans small businesses destroyed by Katrina: **60**

Out of 28,540 disaster loan applications submitted to Small Business Administration from the Gulf Coast, number processed by December 2005: **10**

By May 2006, number of loans the SBA had approved from Louisiana: **11,400**

Number of businesses that had actually received checks: **4,200**

Estimated number of Latino workers that moved to the Gulf Coast after Katrina: **100,000**

Percent of construction workers in New Orleans estimated to be undocumented Latinos: **25**

Percent of undocumented workers in the Gulf that report difficulty receiving payment for their work: **28**

Amount of wages contractors had not paid to workers that were eventually recovered by the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance: **over \$700,000**

Percent of undocumented workers in Gulf that report not being given protective equipment while working with hazardous substances or in dangerous conditions: **19**

Number of U.S. Immigration and Customs Office personnel dispatched to the Gulf in September 2005, including officers for "detention and removal" of undocumented workers: **725**

Number of bilingual staff the U.S. Department of Labor had in Louisiana and Mississippi to investigate abuse of workers, as of May 2006: **5**

A hurricane the size of Katrina would cause economic damage anywhere, but the consequences were magnified in the Gulf Coast. The region's key role in national energy production, the devastation of the urban center of New Orleans and the disruption of the Mississippi River, a major transportation artery, ensured that Katrina's economic damage would be uniquely deep and lasting.

Estimates of total economic damage range from \$150 billion to \$200 billion, with the bulk being from lost structures and equipment.<sup>(1)</sup> Over 130,000 businesses establishments were directly damaged by Katrina, causing nearly \$4 billion in lost revenues, while many more were hurt indirectly by the region's economic downturn.<sup>(2)</sup>

Particularly vulnerable were the 145,000 small businesses—many connected to the tourist industry—operating in the 77 counties impacted by the storms. Sixty percent were driven out of business in New Orleans alone.<sup>(3)</sup>

Federal policy compounded an already bad situation. Small businesses were largely left out of recovery contracts, receiving 1.5 percent of the \$1.6 billion allocated by October 2005.<sup>(4)</sup> The Small Business Administration also came under scathing criticism for being too slow in distributing disaster loans; the SBA had processed only 10 percent of the 28,540 disaster loans submitted by December 2005.<sup>(5)</sup> In April, SBA chief Hector Barreto resigned amidst charges that the agency had "failed entrepreneurs impacted by Hurricane Katrina."<sup>(6)</sup>

Yet those affected most by the hurricanes have been workers—both those displaced by the storm, and those who came to the region to join the region's rebuilding. Katrina destroyed thousands of jobs. In New Orleans, the labor force is 30 percent smaller than it was a year ago. Those displaced by the storms are having the hardest time finding work: Nearly one out of four hurricane evacuees are jobless.<sup>(7)</sup>

Katrina also attracted a massive influx of new workers to take part in the region's rebuilding. Nearly 100,000 Latino laborers entered the Gulf workforce. By one estimate, 25 percent of construction workers in New Orleans are undocumented Latinos.<sup>(8)</sup> Contractors immediately took advantage of this vulnerable work population. A study based on interviews with 700 workers in New Orleans found rampant wage theft, firings without cause, unsafe working conditions and police harassment.

As the report concludes, "New Orleans is being rebuilt on the backs of underpaid and unpaid workers perpetuating cycles of poverty that existed pre-Katrina, and ensuring its existence in the newly-rebuilt city. Exploitation and exclusion are deeply immoral grounds upon which to reconstruct and repopulate the city."<sup>(9)</sup>

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.

Sources on p. 93



# Finding Family in City Park

*With many labor protections stripped by the Bush administration in the wake of the storms, people who came to work on Gulf rebuilding projects faced near-lawless and dangerous conditions. The large influx of immigrant laborers also fostered tensions between Latino, African-American and white workers. A focal point of this volatile situation was "Tent City" in New Orleans' City Park, where hundreds of workers lived in a muddy field. But this excerpt from a recent report reveals how exploitive conditions didn't cause workers to lose their sense of humanity and solidarity. Titled "And Injustice for All: Worker's Lives in the Reconstruction of New Orleans," the report was published by the Advancement Project, National Immigration Law Center, and the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition in July 2006.*

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, construction workers from across the United States traveled to New Orleans. Several hundred of these workers lived on Scout Island, part of the City Park in the heart of town. The workers in New Orleans' "Tent City" were recruited from across the country with the promise of steady jobs, fair pay and free rent. Instead, workers were charged \$300 a month in rent to live in tents, which they had to purchase. They had no heat, no electricity and no light. They paid \$5 to take cold showers.

On Feb. 20, 2006, the workers of Tent City met in the dark and shared their common concerns by flashlight. After the meeting, two workers met to have an extended conversation. Deidre Ward, an African-American woman from Florida, invited us to her campfire. Aurora Sanchez, a Mexican woman, sat with her and they exchanged stories. What follows is a record of their interaction.

## **Aurora Sanchez**

Aurora Sanchez is from Chiapas, Mexico. Her daughter had a hip replacement, and the costs of surgery drove the family deep into debt. So Aurora's husband crossed the border to work. Two years later, Aurora joined him in Maryland.

One day [after Hurricane Katrina], Aurora was at work at a canned fruit factory when a man arrived looking for people to come with him to New Orleans. "He offered us trailers, \$15 an hour, \$18 overtime." So they went to New Orleans.

"When we arrived at the location that we had been given [a supermarket chain] we were told that workers from the Carolinas had already arrived, and they didn't need us anymore."

Aurora and her husband retreated to their car, pulled into a supermarket chain parking lot, and lived there for

three weeks. Then one day the police noticed them, and told them to leave by 6 p.m. "They told us they would call immigration on us at 6:30 p.m. At 6:30 they arrived and screamed at us. We told them we didn't have anywhere to go."

They drove around that night until they found Scout Island, an area of City Park. A woman told them they could camp here and gave them a tent.

Finally, they found a job fixing up a house. They worked for two weeks and were paid. A woman at a day labor location offered them a place to stay for \$100 every three days. "At least you'll have a roof over your head," she said, but they couldn't afford it.

"My husband and I will never forget what happened to us here, how we were treated. If anyone from this country ever came to my house in Mexico they would always be welcome: food, a bed, our house would be open. But we've come here, far from home, and we are treated so badly. Is it because everyone is rich here?"

## **Deidre Woods**

Deidre "Deedy" Woods is from Pensacola and is a survivor of Hurricane Ivan. She lost her trailer house and obtained a FEMA trailer, but the time ran out and she found herself homeless.

She was staying with family members when she received a phone call about work in New Orleans. She was guaranteed \$1,500 a week and rent-free living on the campsite, with a tent, heat, free showers and three hot meals a day.

So Deidre relocated to New Orleans. But the promises were empty. She is charged for rent, had to purchase a tent, pays \$5 a day for showers and spends \$100 a month on laundry; and even worse, there were no jobs.

When Deidre arrived in New Orleans, she drove around for days looking for work. Finally, she met a man who told her about a contractor who would pay her \$125 a day. Actually, she was paid \$10 an hour. She left that job and found another—for 10 days she worked from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. inside the supermarket, where Aurora and her husband were living in their car in the parking lot.

## **Working, Fighting, Living**

The supermarket is a hub of contractor hiring. Deidre went from job to job. She only lasted 10 days at the supermarket. Then she went to work for a woman who was a subcontractor. She worked for this woman for a week, but did not get paid at the end of the week.

"I had to hunt the woman down to get my paycheck." She finally obtained her paycheck the following Wednesday.

Aurora worked for a company that refused its workers breaks. One day a man from the company said that there was going to be an inspection, and that the workers had to say they were getting regular breaks. Aurora told him that she would tell the truth: There was generally only one break, and never longer than half an hour—and sometimes none at all.

When the inspector came, Aurora told the truth. In response, the boss fired all the workers on the spot. So they left, and Aurora and her husband found a job with another contractor ... but [this contractor] is only employing them three days a week.

Deidre also worked for this contractor. A few weeks ago she had the flu, but she went to work anyway. That day she was holding up a sign for a Bobcat. It started to rain, and Deidre felt worse and worse. She had diarrhea, and was vomiting in the rain—and she was still holding a sign for the Bobcat.

"I told them I was sick, I was throwing up, I needed a break. The foreman said, 'Get your black ass back here and hold that sign: if [the higher tier contractor] sees me ride a Bobcat without a sign, I'm going to lose my license.'" And she did.

Finally there was a lunch break. Deidre was still standing in the street holding the sign. It was still raining. And the foreman and his wife went down to the end of the street and had lunch.

"Instead of telling me it was lunchtime, they are just sitting there laughing and eating." Deidre threw her sign down, disgusted, and walked home. "The next day when I got to work [the foreman] said, 'Give me your badge.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'Because you left the Bobcat standing in the middle of the street with no sign,' which was a lie." But they fired her anyway.

### Reflections and Invitations

Deidre talked about that rainy afternoon as if in a trance. "They left me, standing there. And I am still holding that sign. And I am telling them, 'Look at me. I'm throwing up. I can't hold my diarrhea in.' And they park their Bobcat and sit there laughing and eating their lunch."

Aurora closed her eyes. "We'll never forget what happened to us here in New Orleans."

Deidre: "Look at who is here. Ninety percent of the people who live in the park came here to better ourselves. I went through Hurricane Ivan, and I lost my trailer, and when I got that phone call I thought I could come and make some money, and also help out the people here. I know what a hurricane is.

"But I am not benefiting from being here. I am spending more money than I am saving. I'm paying rent. Paying for bathrooms. Paying for laundry. Every time it rains I have to wash all of my clothes. We are living in a toxic dump. That swamp over there has [three inches] of sludge standing on it. I have a cough, I don't know what it is. My nose has been bleeding since I got here. I can't hold my bladder long enough to get to the bathroom. I'm going to get an X-ray done when I go back home; I am getting sick.

"The Hispanics have it worse. They are bringing in the Hispanics to clean up the city while it's still toxic."

Aurora said that she and her husband were trying to pay off the debt of their daughter's hip surgery. But now their daughter would have to have another surgical procedure and they would have to find more work somewhere.

As we got up to leave, Aurora turned to Deidre and said, "I want to say this to you in English but I can't, so I will tell you through an interpreter: I know that our situations are the same. My tent is right over there and you are always welcome. Whatever we have, we have food, water—you're always welcome."

Deidre said: "Same here. My tent is right over here. And if I'm not here just let people know you're a friend of Deedy's."



NEW ORLEANS, DECEMBER, 2005  
Construction projects line New Orleans streets.

Robert Kaufmann/FEMA



# Justice for the Gulf's Immigrant Workers

by Chris Kromm

*Vicky Cintra is the organizing coordinator of the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance, an organization founded five years ago by Executive Director Bill Chandler to fight the abuse of immigrants in the state. Before Hurricane Katrina, MIRA!—an acronym that means “look!” in Spanish—focused on advocacy and legislative policy work. Since the storm, however, the state has experienced an explosion in the number of immigrant workers coming for clean up and reconstruction jobs. Many have faced exploitation, which MIRA! has been working to stop by organizing and empowering the immigrant community to stand up for its rights. In June 2006 Chris Kromm, executive director of the Institute for Southern Studies, sat down with Cintra to learn more about MIRA!’s work.*

**CHRIS KROMM: What are some of the biggest issues immigrants have faced since Katrina?**

**VICKY CINTRA:** Many people have not been getting paid. When a disaster of this magnitude hits, you’d think the first thing a president would do would be to make sure people have adequate food, water, medical supplies and temporary housing. But one of the first things President Bush did was to repeal the Davis-Bacon Act, which literally took away any kind of protective worker rights and prevailing wages.

**Who were some of the worst offenders?**

Kellogg Brown & Root—a subsidiary of Halliburton—hired Tipton Friendly Rollins, who hired Kansas City Tree, who hired Karen Tovar Construction Services of North Carolina, who hired 106 workers for anywhere from two to five weeks—and then tried not to pay them.

A company by the name of LVI Environmental Services Inc. did all kinds of atrocious things to employees. Before the hurricane hit, Cosmotec out of Houston began recruiting workers for the Belle Chase Navy base in Louisiana and the Seabee Navy Base in Gulfport, Miss. They would promise them \$12, \$15 an hour and per diems—none of that was true. Some people were getting three cookies a day as food. They were living out in the elements, weren’t getting per diems, weren’t getting food and certainly weren’t getting \$15 an hour. They weren’t even getting proper dress and equipment to remove asbestos and other toxic waste.

**You’ve had successes in taking on some of these companies.**

Sure. Mississippi is the only state that does not have a labor department, so we have to rely on the U.S. Department of Labor. We handed the KBR investigation to the Department of Labor on Oct. 20, and by Feb. 23 we recovered \$141,000 for 106 workers who thought they would never see that money. People came from Florida, North Carolina and Texas to come pick up their checks. We’ve also collected thousands of dollars from contractors inside the different hotels and casinos. In all, we’ve collected over \$700,000 for workers.

**In New Orleans, one of the issues we came across was anti-immigrant sentiment because of the influx of workers involved in the rebuilding. Has that been a problem here?**

You’ve got to come to a point where you stop blaming the workers and start blaming the right people. It’s not the workers’ fault that President Bush suspended the Davis-Bacon Act, which opened the door for contractors to exploit the workforce and pay literally anything that they wanted. It’s not the workers’ fault that the Department of Homeland Security said that for 45 days after the storm employers wouldn’t be required to fill out the I-9 form, which verifies employment eligibility for the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

When the workers are recruited, they are not told, “You are going to come to the United States to take away jobs from people, to be paid \$7 an hour to pick up toxic waste, and to die in 20 years.” These workers are told, “We’re going to pay you \$15, \$18, \$20 an hour. You’re going to get a place to live, and we’re going to pay for it. You’re going to get a \$20 to \$30 per diem. You’re going to get safety equipment, and we’re going to take care of you.”

We’ve really got to stop blaming the workers and start redirecting that anger to those that really deserve it: our government, the Halliburtons, the Kellogg Brown & Roots.



# Creating a Climate for Abuse

Since Hurricane Katrina, evidence has mounted of widespread mistreatment of workers, small businesses being left out of rebuilding efforts, and other inequities in the reconstruction process. The federal government made several key decisions in the wake of the storms that stripped away key protections designed to avoid these problems that have hampered the region's economic renewal:

## **Suspending Enforcement of Job Safety and Health**

**Standards:** On Aug. 30, 2005, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration suspended enforcement of job safety and health standards in a number of counties and parishes affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.<sup>(1)</sup> These regulations remained suspended in Mississippi until June 28, 2006, and have still not been resumed in the hardest-hit parts of Louisiana, including New Orleans.<sup>(2)</sup>

**Suspending Employer Sanctions:** On Sept. 5, 2005, the Department of Homeland Security suspended sanctions for employers who failed to verify the work authorization of their employees as required under federal immigration law.<sup>(3)</sup> DHS reinstated this requirement on Oct. 21, 2005.<sup>(4)</sup>

**Suspending Wage Laws:** On Sept. 8, 2005, President Bush suspended provisions of the Davis-Bacon Act, which requires that federal construction contractors pay no less than the prevailing wage rates for private construction workers in a particular area of the United States<sup>(5)</sup>—allowing contractors to cut the pay of construction workers below the region's already low levels.<sup>(6)</sup> In addition, contractors were no longer required to maintain records on wage rates paid for specific work, facilitating wage discrimination and fraud. Under pressure from labor unions and other advocates, the prevailing wage provisions of Davis-Bacon were reinstated—but still do not apply to any contract started during the suspension period.<sup>(7)</sup>

**Climate of Fear for Workers:** After loosening sanctions against contractors hiring undocumented workers, on Sept. 8, 2005, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced it had deployed more than 725 personnel to the Gulf, including 100 officers from "Detention and Removal Operations." ICE also sent "eight Special Response Teams comprised of highly trained armed personnel from the Office of Investigations and Detention and Removal Operations."<sup>(8)</sup>

**Suspending Affirmative Action:** On Sept. 9, 2005, the U.S. Department of Labor suspended Executive Order 11246, which requires federal contractors to submit written affirmative action and nondiscrimination plans.<sup>(9)</sup> Thus, federal contractors were not required to monitor the diversity of their workforce, or identify and eliminate barriers to equal opportunity. Under intense pressure from civil rights, grassroots, and black commerce and small business organizations, the suspension was lifted on Dec. 9, 2005.<sup>(10)</sup>

**Small Business Administration Delays:** By Dec. 2006, of the 28,540 loan applications received by the SBA from the Gulf Coast, only 10 percent had been processed and only 3 percent received approval.<sup>(11)</sup> As of May 2006, the SBA had denied approximately 11,500 Louisiana loan applications and approved about 11,400, but had distributed only 4,200.<sup>(12)</sup>

*Excerpted and updated from the report "And Injustice for All: Worker's Lives in the Reconstruction of New Orleans," published by the Advancement Project/National Immigration Law Center/New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition in July 2006.*



# **POWER BROKERS: Contracts and Corporations**

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Contracts and Corporations Index

Minimum value of contracts federal agencies have awarded to private companies for work related to Katrina and Rita: **\$9.7 billion**

Amount given out by FEMA for storm-related contracts: **\$3.4 billion**

Percent of those contracts awarded with little or no competition: **80**

Year that Landstar Express America, a Florida trucking company, received the federal contract for providing evacuation buses for national disasters: **2002**

Days after the mayor of New Orleans declared a mandatory evacuation that Landstar ordered buses: **2**

Days after Hurricane Katrina struck that evacuation buses arrived at the New Orleans Convention Center: **4**

Amount the Federal Supply Service paid Skyland Equipment Co. for a Combat Assault and Tactical Vehicle: **\$88,584.24**

Amount the Federal Supply Service paid Lamson and Goodnow Manufacturing Co. for each of three steak knives, described as "scimitars": **\$92.28**

Minimum amount the Department of Homeland Security's Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement paid for "Armed Guard Services Related to Hurricane Katrina Efforts": **\$33,332,250**

Amount Bechtel overbilled because of a "computation error" in which preventive and corrective maintenance for trailers was billed twice: **\$48 million**

Amount of the federal contract, the bulk of which was awarded to the Shaw Group, whose lobbyist is former FEMA director Joe Allbaugh, for tarping roofs—despite charging three times more than Alabama competitor Ystuenta: **\$330 million**

Amount awarded to West Virginia pastor Gary Heldreth to set up a base camp for first responders in flooded St. Bernard Parish, which he used instead to purchase cars and real estate and to transfer cash to family members: **\$5.2 million**

Value of Corvette Heldreth gave his son to avoid paying a government lien: **\$50,000**

Amount that AshBritt, with help from the lobbying firm founded by Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, received from the Army Corps of Engineers for debris removal in Mississippi: **\$580 million**

Minimum amount Ashbritt has been sued for nonpayment by several Mississippi companies across the hurricane reconstruction zone: **\$9.5 million**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 90

When Hurricanes Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast last year, it created a grim disaster for the region's residents but a golden opportunity for some private contractors.

Politically connected corporations such as Bechtel, Halliburton and The Shaw Group soon landed lucrative deals providing services for storm-related cleanup and reconstruction—in some cases with the help of lobbyists who formerly served as officials for the same government agencies handing out the contracts.

Many of these recovery contracts were awarded without adequate competition or oversight. At the same time, regional companies in desperate need of help were often cut out of the contracting process. Even a Department of Homeland Security official admitted that "we are very apprehensive about what we are seeing."

While much media attention has focused on relatively small-scale wrongdoing perpetrated by individuals seeking assistance, corporations have committed fraud on a much larger scale. Our own analysis found a total of at least \$136.7 million in corporate fraud in Katrina-related contracts. At the same time, government investigators say contracts worth \$428.7 million were plagued by problems including lack of proper oversight and misappropriations.

These problems with contracting fraud didn't arise with Katrina but are issues of long-standing concern: An internal report by the Department of Homeland Security in 2004 found that, although Federal Emergency Management Agency staff were supposed to review their contracting operations each year to promote full and open competition, no such review had been done since 1992.

The storm has revealed an existing system of political patronage that benefits a small number of private corporations while often worsening the suffering of the disadvantaged.



# Profiting from Disaster

## Fraud, scandal and greed has crippled the Gulf recovery—but made some very rich

by Jordan Green

It had been over three weeks since Katrina made landfall, but when David Bailey and his group of Virginia firefighters arrived in St. Bernard Parish to help, it looked like the storm had only hit days ago. “The whole parish is a soup bowl,” said Bailey, battalion chief with Chesterfield Fire and EMS. “It’s under sea level.”

St. Bernard, a mostly white, working-class community immediately east of New Orleans, was hit by the infamous “wall of water” that forced residents to hack through their attics to survive after a storm surge combined with breaches in the Industrial Canal and Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet to inundate the community.

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How West Virginia Pastor Gary Heldreth and codefendant Kerry Lynn Farmer got a \$5.2 million contract remains unclear. “About the closest thing I have done to this is just organize a youth camp with my church,” Heldreth admitted.

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Given the level of destruction, the Virginia volunteers were astonished to discover members of the St. Bernard Fire Department already working full-tilt. Local firefighters, many who had lost their homes, were taking four- or five-day shifts and then rotating out to recuperate and join families evacuated further from the coastline.

“I don’t know how they held up like they did,” Bailey said. “Your family’s devastated and you’re still making the rescues. They saved a lot of lives.”

But soon after Bailey’s team arrived, another group entered the picture, seemingly out of nowhere. On Sept. 18, the Federal Emergency Management Agency awarded a \$5.2 million contract to Gary Heldreth, a West Virginia pastor, and his company, Lighthouse Disaster Relief, based on the company’s assurances that it could set up a base camp within 48 hours to support 1,000 first responders in St. Bernard Parish. The results were disastrous.

“[Lighthouse] billed the entire \$5.2 million in advance of beginning work in violation of the contract terms, and upon receipt of the proceeds began spending them at an incredible pace, buying cars and real estate, withdrawing large cash withdrawals, and transferring tens of thousands of dollars to family members,” a federal lawsuit would later allege.

Around Oct. 2 Lighthouse finally opened the camp, but that only happened because FEMA brought in firefighters

to help Lighthouse finish the job, the government contends. “Even with this assistance, the base camp was not sufficient to perform the contract,” the government investigators charge. “While the contract provided for a camp able to house and feed 1,000 emergency workers, the camp was never able to support more than 400 people.” The company argues the project’s failure is the result of a mix-up in FEMA’s orders.

How Heldreth and codefendant Kerry Lynn Farmer got into the hurricane relief business remains unclear. “About the closest thing I have done to this is just organize a youth camp with my church,” Heldreth admitted on the PBS program “NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” only two days after the camp opened.

While Heldreth insists his company did nothing wrong, a federal judge has upheld a court order to garnish \$1.5 million from Lighthouse bank accounts. Heldreth tried another tack to avoid repaying the government: Following a May 19 hearing, court documents allege, the pastor gave his son a \$50,000 Corvette on which he had previously agreed the government could place a lien. Following the transfer, government lawyers were led to believe Heldreth and his son were no longer speaking to each other.

### Profiteering, Big and Small

A year after Hurricane Katrina ripped a path of destruction and tragedy across the Gulf Coast, much of the public debate is dominated by reproach toward evacuees and other ordinary people who defrauded the government through false emergency assistance claims.

A recent U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study estimates improper or fraudulent payments related to hurricanes Katrina and Rita might have come to as much as \$1.4 billion. According to the New York Times, one hotel owner in Sugar Land, Texas, rang up \$236,000 in false billings. And then there were the infamous words of Juvenile, a New Orleans rapper: In the first cut on his latest album, after observing that “We starvin’, we livin’ like Haiti without no government,” he says “Everybody need a check from FEMA, so he can sco’ him some cocaina. Get money!”

But opportunism and ill-gotten riches have hardly been the exclusive preserve of gangsta hip-hoppers or small-time scam artists. While the government’s Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force has focused attention on fraud by emergency assistance recipients, instances of corporate contract and procurement fraud have been documented at 50 times that amount.

A review of congressional testimony and other docu-

ments by Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch found a total of at least \$136.7 million in corporate fraud in Katrina-related contracts. In addition, government investigators have highlighted contracts cumulatively valued at \$428.7 million that they found troubling because of lack of agency oversight or misappropriation.

Some of the contractors failed to meet their obligations, and charged the government for work that was never performed. Taking advantage of inadequate oversight, some private companies inflated costs. It was also the case that the government, most notably FEMA under the leadership of former Director Michael Brown, withheld crucial resources from the hardest hit areas of the Gulf Coast, and failed to establish efficient supply lines and points of distribution for ice, water, meals-ready-to-eat and other essentials. The contractors could lay the blame at the feet of the feds, and vice versa.

In truth, both parties are part of the same machinery—a system where players move in and out of government, awarding contracts as government officials one moment, and the next acting as high-powered consultants for the companies pursuing work with those same agencies. When Katrina laid waste to the Gulf Coast, the government agencies and private contractors seemed to occupy the same insider Washington milieu, where human suffering was an abstraction and tending to relationships around the public trough claimed first priority.

### Fiddling While the Contractors Fail

"I am most haunted by what the [New Orleans] Superdome became," FEMA public affairs officer Marty Bahamonde told the Senate Homeland Security Committee on Oct. 20. "It was a shelter of last resort that cascaded into a cesspool of human waste and filth. Imagine no toilet facilities for 25,000 people for five days. People were forced to live outside in 95-degree heat because of the horrid smell and conditions inside. Hallways and corridors were used as toilets, trash was everywhere, and amongst it all, children—thousands of them. It was sad, it was inhumane, and it was so wrong."

But FEMA was unable to help at the Superdome. That's because the agency's personnel withdrew on Thursday, Sept. 1, when the National Guard warned of an impending riot and said they could not ensure officials' safety.

The tragedy at the Superdome was exacerbated by the failure of evacuation buses to show up for six days. Brown said he did not request the buses until Tuesday or Wednesday. Landstar, a Florida-based trucking company, had been awarded a emergency transportation contract worth at least \$284 million, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense.<sup>(4)</sup> But the buses wouldn't show up until Saturday [see story, page 41].

Despite the death and deprivation experienced by Katrina evacuees at the Superdome and later at the Convention

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**While the government's Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force has focused attention on fraud by emergency assistance recipients, instances of corporate contract and procurement fraud have been documented at 50 times that amount.**

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Center as they waited for the buses to arrive, the U.S. Department of Transportation applauded Landstar's performance. "The drivers, dispatchers and other employees of Landstar are among the unsung heroes of Katrina," National Response Program Manager Vincent Pearce told Congress. "In a chaotic environment, they brought thousands of buses and trucks when and where they were asked to. They have earned the thanks and appreciation of the Department of Transportation and, we hope, yours as well."

New Orleans was not the only place where hurricane survivors were let down by private contractors and their government backers. By Wednesday night, FEMA employees discussed how, despite earlier promises, deliveries of ice and other commodities to Camp Shelby near Hattiesburg, Miss. were expected to fall woefully short—less than 15 percent of amounts requested by state emergency responders, congressional investigators later discovered.

A Georgia company, Americold, had been tasked by FEMA three days before Katrina made landfall with moving ice from a warehouse in the Atlanta suburbs to various other warehouses across the Gulf, earning \$26 million dollars. A GAO report the following March found that FEMA ordered double the amount of ice needed, and did not



NEW ORLEANS, MARCH 2, 2006

The "Sensation," one of the ships provided by Carnival Cruise Lines for emergency housing—at a cost of \$740,000 for six months. Florida Gov. Jeb Bush e-mailed FEMA after Katrina hit recommending Carnival's services; the company's advertising director Ric Cooper had donated \$115,000 since 2002 to support Jeb and George W. Bush's re-election.

Marvin Nauman/FEMA photo



have enough distribution points established to get it to people in need.

Tonda Hadley, a Homeland Security auditor in Dallas, found that Clearbrook, an Alabama company, overcharged the government by \$3 million while contracted to provide food and lodging at seven base camps for first responders across Louisiana.

The Shaw Group, a Baton Rouge company with close

connections to the Bush administration, charged the government three times as much as an Alabama competitor, Ystuenta, for work covering damaged homes with tarps as part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' "blue roof" program, according to a report by the New Orleans Times-Picayune. The Army Corps of Engineers' program cost taxpayers a total of \$330 million.

The Shaw Group has earned more than half a billion dol-

*Even before Katrina made its Gulf Coast landfall, the usual suspects stepped up to claim their share of federal contracts. In return for political connections and years of generous campaign contributions, the disaster profiteers have raked in millions, secured by savvy former government officials-turned-lobbyists who are all too familiar with the players and the game. Meanwhile, these contracts, which went primarily to companies outside the Gulf, have been fraught with waste, overcharges and fraud.*

## Profiles of Disaster Profiteers

by Elena Everett

### AshBritt Inc.

*\$580 million for debris removal in Mississippi*

This Pompano Beach, Fla. firm spent years cultivating its relationship with the federal government, contributing tens of thousands of dollars to the Republican Party and, more recently, hiring a powerful firm to lobby the Army Corps of Engineers on "disaster mitigation."

In 2005, Ashbritt hired the lobbying firm of Barbour Griffith & Rogers, which was founded by Republican Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, and paid the firm \$40,000 to lobby the Corps and Congress. AshBritt is currently being sued for nonpayment by several companies across the Mississippi coast (see "Profiting from Disaster," p. 34).

*Also on the AshBritt lobbyist payroll: Joe Allbaugh, the Bush administration's former Federal Emergency Management Agency director.*

### Fluor Corp.

*\$1.4 billion for temporary housing*

The Fluor Corp. is a multinational industrial construction company with clients such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron and several gas and oil consortiums from Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan.

It has several former government officials on its payroll including Kenneth J. Oscar, former acting administrator for the Office of Federal Procurement Policy in the White House Office of Management and Budget under the Clinton administration.

Fluor's political action committee has contributed nearly \$1 million toward political campaigns since 2000, primarily for Republican candidates.

### Carnival Cruise Lines

*\$236 million for "pass through expenses" and temporary housing onboard three cruise ships*

The Miami-based company provided cruise-ship cabins that went primarily to New Orleans police officers and their families, at a cost to taxpayers of \$240,000 per family for six months of housing.

Carnival is incorporated in Panama to avoid U.S. taxes, but it has contributed \$347,500 to both the Republican and Democratic parties since 2000.

The company's advertising director, Ric Cooper, began lobbying for the contract even before Katrina hit. Soon after the storm, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush sent an encouraging e-mail regarding Carnival's bid to then-FEMA director, Michael Brown. Cooper has donated \$115,000 to Republican Party committees since 2002 to support Jeb and George W. Bush's reelection campaigns.<sup>(2)</sup>

### The Shaw Group Inc.

*\$950 million for temporary housing, blue-tarp roofing and delivery services*

This politically connected company was immediately awarded \$100 million after Katrina, but when controversy erupted FEMA announced it would terminate the contract and rebid the remainder of the work. Several months later, however, Shaw's existing contract was increased to \$500 million, and in August 2006 it was again increased—to \$950 million.<sup>(3)</sup>

Shaw's executive vice president, Edward Badolato, served as deputy assistant secretary for security affairs at the Department of Energy as well as senior consultant to the President's Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection.

*On the company's lobbyist payroll: Allbaugh, the Bush administration's former FEMA director.*

lars from Katrina-related work from contracts awarded by the Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA. The company, a major contractor in the Iraqi reconstruction, acted fast after Katrina made landfall. On Sept. 21 the Shaw Group hired Charles Hess to head its hurricane recovery program and oversee its indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity FEMA contract. Hess had recently left a position as head of the Army's contracting office for Iraqi reconstruction. He had also directed FEMA's emergency response division.

More help came from Joe Allbaugh, a former FEMA director and director of Bush's 2000 election campaign, who helped the company develop contract bids for Katrina reconstruction jobs. The Hill and other media outlets have reported.

### **Bypassing Gulf Business**

Other instances of fraud and overcharging appear to have taken place because the government awarded advance

contracts to large, out-of-state companies that had little notion of how to do business in areas hit by the hurricane.

Immediately after Katrina struck the Gulf, Paul Adams, a Yazoo City, Miss. businessman who specialized in setting up temporary classrooms, called his suppliers and the Mississippi Department of Education, anticipating that students would be displaced. Told by the department that FEMA would supply temporary trailers to house the students, he eventually discovered that the Army Corps of Engineers was obligated to give the work to Akima, an Alaska native corporation.

Adams alleges in a lawsuit that he tracked down 450 temporary classrooms, and submitted a bid to Akima as a subcontractor, which in turn used the information to win a contract with the Army Corps of Engineers. Later Akima Senior Project Manager Al Cialone went to Florida to inspect the trailers—and then purchased them directly, cutting Adams out of the deal, according to the lawsuit.

#### **Landstar Express America Inc.**

*\$286 million for trucking and busing services*

Landstar was the company responsible for the tardy evacuation from the New Orleans Superdome and Convention Center, which resulted in the deaths of at least 34 people—including several babies who died of dehydration<sup>(1)</sup> (see "Katrina busing fiasco" pg 47).

Company chairman Jeffrey Crowe recently headed the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, whose political action committee regularly contributes to the GOP. The U.S. Department of Transportation approved payments on the Landstar contract without issuing written orders or otherwise recording them in ways to allow adequate oversight.

#### **Kellogg, Brown & Root (now KBR)**

*\$168.9 million to fix pumps and repair military bases*

The Army Corps of Engineers awarded millions to this Halliburton subsidiary. Halliburton—for whom Vice President Dick Cheney served as chief executive from 1995 to 2000—has come under investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission for its accounting practices and was charged \$2 million in 2002 for over-billing on another KBR government contract.

The KBR PAC has contributed nearly \$200,000 to Republican candidates and causes since 2000.

*Among its lobbyists: former FEMA director Allbaugh.*

#### **Bechtel Corp.**

*\$575 million for temporary housing*

A recent Defense Contract Agency audit found that Bechtel was double-billing for trailer maintenance at an overcharge of \$48 million over the life of the contract.<sup>(4)</sup> The company is currently the subject of a review by the state of Massachusetts over its handling of the Boston urban construction project known as "The Big Dig," which is currently about \$1.6 billion over budget.

On the Bechtel payroll sits J. Bennett Johnston, U.S. Senator from Louisiana from 1972 to 1997 and author of the Energy Policy Act of 1992.

The PAC for Bechtel and its related companies has contributed more than \$1.34 million to Republican and Democratic candidates since 2000.

#### **CH2M Hill Inc.**

*up to \$530 million for debris removal, support for emergency operations, setting up temporary classrooms, portable buildings and temporary housing<sup>(5)</sup>*

This Colorado-based company offers engineering, construction and operations services with a special focus on hazardous-waste cleanup and waste-treatment design. CH2M Hill has also been awarded contracts in the West Bank and Palestinian territories, Iraq, Honduras, Russia and Kuwait.

There are six lobbying firms working on behalf of the corporation. Since 2000, CH2M Hill and its affiliate PAC have contributed \$926,704 to Republican and Democrat campaigns and party committees.

*Unless otherwise noted, information on companies' political donations and history comes from Taxpayers for Common Sense's "Profiles of Selected Katrina Contractors" and the Center for Public Integrity.*



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## Some contracts are subcontracted three or four times, each company in the middle taking a cut—and creating an environment ripe for abuse.

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The deal troubled the GAO. It reported to Congress in May that “the Corps accepted Akima’s proposed price of \$39.5 million although it had information that the cost for the classrooms was significantly less than what Akima was charging. ... We believe the Corps could have, but failed to, negotiate a lower price.”

David Machado, a staff engineer with Necaise Brothers Construction Co. in Gulfport, Miss., also expressed frustration about getting cut out of reconstruction work in his home state in testimony before the House Government Reform Committee.

“We have all felt the injustice,” he said. “From truck drivers to chainsaw operators, we have had to scrape and claw to be afforded an opportunity to rebuild the very place we call home.”

Necaise Brothers is one of about a half-dozen subcontractors that have filed suit against AshBritt, complaining that the politically connected Florida company withheld payment or “looted” work from smaller firms. AshBritt has been sued for a total of at least \$9.5 million by companies that have crossed its path in the hurricane reconstruction zone along the coast of Mississippi. Perhaps that should come as no surprise considering that the company landed contracts valued at more than half a billion dollars from the Army Corps of Engineers between September 2005 and March 2006.

AshBritt appears to have benefited from the fact that local companies that would otherwise have been given preference for federal contracts under the Stafford Act—passed in 1988 to revitalize communities struck by disaster by using local businesses to clean up debris—were demobilized by the hurricane.

The company also enjoyed some help from high-placed friends. Among them was Mike Parker, a lobbyist who had formerly served as assistant secretary of the Army Corps of Engineers, according to The Hill. The company has also engaged the lobbying services of Barbour Griffith & Rogers, a lobbying firm founded by Mississippi’s Republican governor, Haley Barbour, according to a report by the Washington-based Center for Responsive Politics.

### **The Bottom of the Contracting Chain**

If local companies suffered a disadvantage in the scramble for reconstruction work, immigrant workers—many of whom were drawn to jobs like welding in Gulf shipyards before the storm—fared much worse.

As a result of a shaming campaign, the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance in Jackson has recovered more than \$700,000 in back wages owed to immigrant workers by companies contracted to rebuild the Mississippi coast. When the alliance traced the withheld wages up through several tiers of subcontracting, they found that two companies, Mississippi-based W.G. Yates & Sons and Houston-based KBR (then a division of Halliburton Co.), together managed the majority of the jobs where immigrants were exploited.

“What happens a lot of times with the contractors is they do not speak Spanish, so they get someone who’s bilingual to be crew leaders,” said Bill Chandler, executive director of MIRA. “The workers think they’re contractors. The crew leaders—generally, they’re the ones who have not been paid. Often times they’re just as abandoned as anybody else.”

Some contracts are subcontracted three or four times, each company in the middle taking a cut—and creating an environment ripe for abuse. “Halliburton doesn’t actually do any work,” Chandler said. “There are several layers of subcontractors. From our standpoint, they have to pay the workers; it’s up to them to recover the monies up the food chain.”

The alliance helped recover \$430,000 in back wages for workers employed in projects overseen by W.G. Yates & Sons. The company has won \$2.6 million in Katrina-related contracts from the Army Corps of Engineers. Members of the Yates family gave \$15,000 to Republican candidates during the 2004 election cycle and during the early months of 2005. Among the top recipients were the Republican Party of Mississippi and the state’s two U.S. senators.

Then there’s Houston-based KBR, a company that ironically has also been contracted by the Army Corps of Engineers to expand immigrant detention facilities. MIRA recovered \$141,000 in back wages for 106 workers for a project that involved KBR on Feb. 22. KBR’s parent company, Halliburton, has long thrived on political connections. An oil-services company formerly headed by Vice President Dick Cheney, Halliburton favored Republican candidates by a ratio of 9-to-1 in the 2004 election, pouring \$189,000 into Republican races.

“It’s blatant racism,” Chandler said. “Here you have Latinos and other immigrants who are people of color, they don’t speak English and they may not be familiar with the ins and outs of laws. Further, if they’re undocumented they’re afraid to say anything, and the contractors know this.”

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, it exposed more than poverty, environmental fragility and compromised infrastructure: It laid bare a national system of political patronage that has enriched a handful of powerful corporations and deepened the despair of those on society’s margin.



# GO Zone Giveaways

by Sean Reilly

“This important bill will help the citizens of the Gulf Coast continue to put their lives back together and rebuild their communities in the wake of the devastating hurricanes that hit the region earlier this year.”

That was President Bush talking last December at a signing ceremony for the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005. Hustled through Congress in 10 days, the act provides billions of dollars in federally subsidized financing and tax breaks to stimulate reconstruction in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

But a funny thing happened on the road to economic renaissance. The legislation allows the states to issue up to \$15 billion of tax-free “GO Zone” bonds on behalf of companies seeking to build or renovate. So far, however, many firms are seeking the loans for ventures only loosely connected to the devastation from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

In Louisiana, for example, the first projects to get a preliminary go-ahead included several in Baton Rouge, well upriver from New Orleans. Among them were a new office building and parking garage for The Shaw Group, a politically connected engineering firm that’s received almost \$950 million in hurricane-related federal business, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In Alabama, applicants for GO Zone financing don’t have to show any link to hurricane recovery. Improving quality of life or stimulating economic development may be enough. Of the 19 projects green-lighted thus far, only two are directly tied to Katrina, the *Mobile Press-Register* reported. Others include an aircraft assembly plant planned before the storm and a Mexican restaurant in Tuscaloosa, a drive of several hours from the coast.

As of June 2006, the Mississippi Business Finance Corp. (MBFC) had granted preliminary approval to some 90 projects. Fewer than half of the ventures are in the three waterfront counties raked hardest by Katrina. The biggest chunk—\$400 million—is for defense contractor Northrop Grumman, whose three Gulf Coast shipbuilding operations are already in line for hundreds of millions of dollars in direct federal aid.

The GO Zone program is a type of “private activity” financing, where states and other public entities issue bonds on behalf of individual businesses. While those firms are responsible for repayment, the interest is exempt from federal income tax. Investors are willing to settle for a lower interest rate, thus reducing borrowing costs. The loser will be the U.S. Treasury, which could be out \$1.6 billion by 2015, according to a cost estimate

from the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office.<sup>(1)</sup>

The three states have until 2010 to put their GO Zone bonds to work. But at the current clip, the risk is that the money will be exhausted by the time businesses that could truly benefit are ready to proceed, according to Philip Mattera with Good Jobs First in Washington, D.C. In a recent report, he urged states to make the bonds “work for those in most in need.”<sup>(2)</sup>

Such chiding irks some state officials, who note that inland communities were also hurt by the storms. “Congress passed what they passed,” said MBFC Executive Director Bill Barry. “We traveled with it.”

Indeed, lawmakers designed the program with a liberal hand. In Mississippi, 49 counties—about two-thirds of the state—are eligible for GO Zone financing. In Louisiana, projects in 31 out of 68 parishes can qualify. Under a compromise reached after the outcry over initial priorities, the state has set aside half of its GO Zone bond allocation for ventures in the 13 hardest-hit parishes. But that will still leave almost \$4 billion in cheap money on tap for the other 18.

For all three states, the program offers a huge increase in the volume of private activity financing that federal guidelines normally allow. Its supporters argue that it’s needed.

Ultimately, however, the question is whether much of the money will aid projects that would have occurred anyway. If so, critics say, the program risks becoming little more than an industry giveaway.

“It would be deeply surprising if there was not enormous waste,” said Alan Peters, professor of urban and regional planning at the University of Iowa.

Recent history is not encouraging. The GO Zone program is modeled on the Liberty Zone program created to help New York City rebound from the 9/11 attacks. The first commercial project approved to use Liberty Bonds was an office complex in downtown Brooklyn—not lower Manhattan.

In a report released two years ago, the General Accounting Office (now the Government Accountability Office) concluded that the Liberty Zone’s benefits to New York were “unclear and likely to remain unknown.”<sup>(3)</sup>



# Casino Interests Hit the Jackpot in Post-Katrina Development

by Tim Shorrock

As tens of thousands of Katrina victims continue to live in dilapidated trailers and thousands more remain stranded in states as far away as Utah and Georgia, multinational corporations loaded with cash are forging ahead with business projects with questionable benefits for the stricken people of the Gulf Coast.

The casino industry is a prime example. Thanks to a bill passed last year by the Mississippi legislature lifting a 16-year ban on land-based casinos, gaming giants like Harrah's Entertainment and Donald Trump's Entertainment Resorts Inc. are pouring millions of dollars into huge, luxurious casinos that will transform the coastal city of Biloxi into the gaming and entertainment capital of the South.

Despite Katrina's terrible impact, the hurricane gave the gambling industry an "opening to muscle through a law change that before was unthinkable in this Bible Belt state wary of casino expansion," the Wall Street Journal points out.<sup>(1)</sup>

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All of these gambling projects will take advantage of the \$3 billion in tax breaks for Gulf Coast investors that Congress included in the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act passed in 2005.

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That story goes back to 1990, when Mississippi lawmakers legalized gambling based on the understanding that casinos would be built only on barges along the Gulf or on riverboats plying the Mississippi River. That was the only way to convince religious conservatives, who oppose gambling, that the industry would not expand throughout the state.

But companies cleverly exploited loopholes in the law and rapidly became the dominant force in Mississippi's economy. In the gambling town of Tunica just south of Memphis, for example, casinos were built on dry land adjacent to, but not quite on, the Mississippi River. The companies then dug ditches that brought the river to their entranceways so their casinos could be classified as "river boats" and meet the terms of the law. By the fall of 2005, the casinos in the Delta and along the Gulf were contributing more than \$300 million a year to the state's tax coffers.

The floating casinos on the Gulf were disasters waiting to happen. During Katrina, nearly all of them were destroyed,

their remains blown across Interstate 90 and scattered along the shore. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, the state's gaming commission joined with Harrah's and other operators to press the legislature to pass their long-sought change in the law and allow these structures to be rebuilt on solid land.

In a special session called by Republican Gov. Haley Barbour in September 2005, casinos were given the right to build out to an 800-foot area adjacent to a coast or waterway. That technical change alone has generated nearly \$3 billion in investment.

Harrah's is now sinking more than \$1 billion into a huge casino resort and hotel complex in Biloxi. MGM Mirage, its chief rival, has invested \$500 million to restore the Beau Rivage, the largest casino on the Gulf Coast. Trump has seized the opportunity to expand his casino empire beyond Atlantic City, committing an unspecified amount to a casino and real estate project in Hancock County along Interstate 10. That highway is fast-becoming Main Street in this new gambling Mecca, drawing companies such as Pinnacle Entertainment Inc., Isle of Capri Casinos and the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation.

New Orleans may also get into the act. In late July, the city's Levee Board opened negotiations with Atlantis Internet Group Corp. of Nevada for a proposed \$200 million hotel and gambling complex along the shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

All of these projects will take advantage of the \$3 billion in tax breaks for Gulf Coast investors that Congress included in the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act passed in 2005. Sen. Trent Lott, an indefatigable defender of Mississippi business interests, tried to include casinos in the bill. He failed, but the final \$8 billion package provided lucrative tax credits to companies investing in Gulf Coast hotels and shopping centers even if their owners are gaming companies.

As a result, the Beau Rivage may claim more than \$50 million in write-offs, the *Washington Post* reported last year.<sup>(2)</sup> That was too much for Rep. Frank R. Wolf, a Virginia Republican, who urged President Bush in a letter to "do the right thing and make sure federal resources go to the poor, the needy and the vulnerable and not the gambling interests who already have insurance to cover catastrophic events like hurricanes." Bush ignored him, however, and signed the bill as presented to him.

To be sure, the casinos are big employers: The Beau Rivage, for example, will have more than 3,800 people on staff when it opens at the end of August, making it the

largest single employer on the Gulf. While these jobs will undoubtedly pump economic life back to the region, the mega-casinos will also lure thousands of low-income workers, who will risk millions of dollars in their sweat

equity in slot machines, poker and blackjack. Sadly, most of their money flows one way—into the coffers of the state and the pockets of wealthy investors.

# Katrina Bus Fiasco Reveals Contracting Weaknesses

by Sue Sturgis

**A**fter a federal contractor failed to promptly provide buses to rescue Hurricane Katrina survivors from New Orleans, a watchdog agency investigated—and uncovered a system of woefully inadequate controls to ensure the government gets services it pays for.

In 2002, Landstar System of Jacksonville, Fla. won a five-year contract from the Department of Transportation to shuttle people and relief supplies during national emergencies worth at least \$289 million.<sup>(1)</sup> Landstar is a politically-connected corporation that's risen to the top of the U.S. transportation industry without actually owning any trucks. Chairman Jeffrey Crowe is the former head of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and served on Florida Gov. Jeb Bush's advisory group on military base closures.<sup>(2)</sup>

Government auditors say Landstar waited until 18 hours after Katrina hit to order 300 buses to evacuate residents, and it ordered those buses from a subcontractor, Carey Limousine. Carey then passed the job off to another subcontractor.

Meanwhile, some storm victims waited as long as six days to be rescued from nightmarish conditions at the Superdome, Convention Center and Interstate 10. But the botched rescue effort still cost taxpayers \$137 million—plus a \$32 million overcharge later discovered by auditors.

Landstar points out that it got several buses to New Orleans just hours after getting an order from the government. However, that was two days after the storm hit. The company also rejected allegations that it overcharged taxpayers, arguing that the money was part of advance for its work, though it repaid the disputed amount.

Audits have found a pattern of sloppy oversight by the Federal Aviation Administration, which administered the DOT-Landstar deal. In January, the DOT Inspector General released an audit that randomly reviewed task orders issued by the FAA against the Landstar contract. The IG found that the contracting officer accepted price quotes from the contractor even though no documentation had been provided to show that a price comparison between suppliers had been conducted.

In June, the DOT IG issued another audit of payments for emergency disaster relief transportation services. It

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Government auditors say Landstar waited until 18 hours after Katrina hit to order 300 buses to evacuate residents, and it ordered those buses from a subcontractor, who then passed the job off to another subcontractor. Meanwhile, some storm victims waited as long as six days to be rescued from nightmarish conditions.

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discovered that FAA contracting officers relied on documentation provided by the contractor to verify that transportation services had been provided as billed.<sup>(3)</sup>

Despite the problems with its performance, business is booming for Landstar. The company reported fiscal 2005 revenue of \$276 million related to the disaster relief contract. And in April, DOT presented a plaque to Landstar President and CEO Henry Gerken honoring the company's service to Gulf Coast residents.<sup>(4)</sup>

"The government knows it can count on us to be there in times of need," Gerken said.



NEW ORLEANS, SEPT. 4, 2005

Charter buses wait to be summoned into the New Orleans Airport. Due to contracting mix-ups, evacuation buses didn't make it to many of the city's hardest-hit areas until days after the storm.

Photo by Win Henderson / FEMA photo.



# SCHOOL SQUEEZE: Education

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Education Index

Number of Louisiana students in private and public schools displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: **247,000**

Number of Mississippi students displaced: **125,000**

Number of schools damaged in both states: **715**

Number of schools completely destroyed in Mississippi: **30**

Percentage of New Orleans schools damaged by Katrina: **83**

Estimated number of students expected to enroll in New Orleans public schools in fall 2006: **26,000**

Percent of the school system's pre-Katrina population that number represents: **43**

Number of New Orleans public schools before Katrina: **117**

Number of New Orleans public schools scheduled to open for 2006-2007 school year: **57**

Amount given to Louisiana by U.S. Dept. of Education for charter schools since Katrina: **\$44.8 million**

Amount given for traditional public schools damaged by the storm: **\$0**

Number of employees who lost jobs in Orleans Parish school system's post-Katrina downsizing: **7,500**

Average starting salary for public school teacher in Orleans Parish pre-Katrina: **\$29,494**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 91

**T**housands of schoolchildren across the Gulf Coast were displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The storms hit just before the start of the 2005-2006 school year, making the affected students some of the disasters' youngest victims.

In the areas of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana affected by Katrina, there were 419 rural schools with nearly 220,000 students, most eligible for federally subsidized meals and about one-third of them African-American.<sup>(1)</sup> In Bogalusa City, La.—a community 50 miles from the nearest hospital—roofs on all five school buildings were badly damaged.<sup>(2)</sup>

The federal government is responsible for paying 90 percent of the cost to repair or rebuild storm-damaged schools, with state and local governments contributing the rest. To date, FEMA has spent at least \$385 million on schools, temporary classrooms, and books and supplies for students in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, but some school administrators have raised concerns over whether the spending is adequate.<sup>(3)</sup>

In New Orleans, an issue of concern for many parents of public school children is the post-storm increase in controversial charter schools. Of the 57 schools slated to open in Louisiana's State Recovery School District this fall, only five are traditional public schools overseen by an accountable and elected school board. The other 53 are charter schools, which receive both federal and state dollars but operate with more autonomy and, some say, little accountability to the local communities they serve.

Some education officials are enthusiastic about the trend. Orleans Parish school board president Phyllis Landrieu has called the charter phenomenon "a cause for celebration" that gives students and parents a wide choice of educational options.<sup>(4)</sup>

The government is also embracing charters. Since the storms, Louisiana charter schools have received at least \$44 million dollars in federal assistance. Furthermore, state legislation passed last year allowing Louisiana to take control of local school districts also eases restrictions on charter schools, a move that could further damage an already struggling public education system.<sup>(5)</sup>

With the school year getting underway, Louisiana is still hiring new teachers for the Recovery District. Meanwhile, parents forced to shop among the myriad new charter schools are encouraged to think of themselves as consumers in a brand-new marketplace.<sup>(6)</sup> The educational experiment underway leaves many wondering what the future holds for Gulf Coast children.



# Chaos and Hope in New Orleans Schools

by Aesha Rasheed

Standing on the steps of a flood-devastated and dilapidated elementary school in eastern New Orleans in July, a dozen public school children outlined their dreams for decent schools. "The schools didn't even need to be the best," they said. "Just schools where we can learn."

The children, part of the recently formed Kids Rethinking New Orleans ("Rethink" for short), told disturbing stories about the conditions they have endured in the city's public schools, from absent textbooks to overcrowding. High on their list of suggestions for better schools: clean bathrooms with toilet paper and soap.

Their tales were testimonies to the old problems that have plagued New Orleans schools for generations, while the mud-coated and moldering building behind them bore witness to the host of new obstacles now hampering the city's education system.

A year after Hurricane Katrina damaged 80 percent of New Orleans public schools, only about half of those schools are scheduled to open by August 2006. Most of the city's schools are now under the authority of the Louisiana Department of Education, which after the storm moved to take over 102 of 117 public schools. With most of the buildings still in need of serious repair and all of the district's 4,000-plus teachers laid off, only 56 schools are slated to open this fall.

Of the schools that are opening, 34 are charter schools operated by a dizzying array of independent chartering organizations including universities, community organizations and parent groups. The Louisiana Department of Education plans to open another 18, and the Orleans Parish School Board—the panel elected to oversee the city's public education system—will directly operate just five.

Proponents of this web of charter, traditional, state-managed and locally managed schools argue that families returning to New Orleans will be greeted with new and better choices for their children's education. No longer bound by school attendance zones, students may attend any school where they are accepted.

But the maze of choices means a host of new problems and confusion for families already struggling through massive change in the city's housing and medical infrastructure. Even before the school year gets underway, the complications are daunting. Parents who have been able to return to the city must dart from school to school, juggling widely varied application and entrance policies. The 57 schools set to open have 10 different starting dates ranging from mid-July to early September. While some efforts are underway to encourage greater coordi-

nation among school operators, the 15 different school-governing authorities are not obligated to participate in these efforts.

Critics of the grand experiment in urban education underway in New Orleans warn that the school morass will serve to further disadvantage the city's most vulnerable youth. Well-off parents will be first in line to enroll their children in the best-resourced schools, while poor families still struggling to secure housing and jobs will be left with few choices.

Perhaps even more troubling is evidence that the Bush administration views New Orleans as a staging ground for plans to dismantle urban education systems across the country. Over the past year, more than \$48 million in federal money has been channeled to charter schools in New Orleans. That has raised concerns that federal officials want to fuel a charter-based system, since similar amounts have not been allocated for traditional public schools.

New Orleans teachers' union officials view the creation of mass numbers of charter schools in New Orleans as a direct attack on collective bargaining rights. Louisiana schools are not required to negotiate with teachers' unions, but New Orleans was one of only a few school districts in the state where teachers had won collective bargaining rights. That agreement was nullified for schools under state takeover, and the Orleans Parish School Board voted in June not to extend its agreement with the United Teachers of New Orleans, so even teachers working in the handful of district-run schools do not have the protection of a union contract.

"It is also an insult to every teacher who has worked in the district under a collective bargaining contract, especially to the several hundred teachers who returned this year to resume classes under the most overwhelming conditions imaginable," said Brenda Mitchell, union president. "I don't believe they will take this sitting down."

In fact, several former school employees filed a lawsuit against the state and local education officials in August challenging the firing of more than 7,500 school system employees in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Within the chaos, there are reasons to hope that communities that have banded together in the wake of tragedy can seize opportunities to build a deeper relationship to their schools. The uncertainty and confusion surrounding New Orleans public schools have also spurred renewed focus on public education and discussion of how best to organize communities around school equity.

Some of the charter schools working to open this fall are the result of true community collaboration. Most of them

are reconfigurations of schools that existed before the storm as traditional public schools. Control of these schools was stripped from local education authorities and then granted to local organizations to reopen as charters. State law explicitly prohibits for-profit groups, such as the notorious Edison Schools Inc., from operating one of these schools and specifically requires chartering organizations to prove collaboration with the local community. As a result, several schools are being created with deep community involvement such as Martin Luther King Jr. School in the Lower Ninth Ward and Treme Charter Schools Association, which was founded by Community United to Reform Education, a

group that worked with A.P. Tureaud Middle School in the Treme neighborhood before the storm.

Rethink is one of a handful of organizations interested in launching monitoring projects to ensure schools are offering quality education. The students promised to deliver school report cards which will measure such factors as quality of lunch fare (are there more than “greasy burgers”?) to whether students feel teachers care about them.

“The [children’s] stories need to be told,” said Ashley Nelson, who is working with the Rethink students. “And adults need to listen.”

## COMMUNITY VOICES

# Gutting Public Education in New Orleans

*Less than a month after Katrina devastated New Orleans, the city’s already struggling public education system was dealt a devastating blow by the Louisiana state legislature. In October, state lawmakers voted to take over New Orleans public schools, a process that allowed the Orleans Parish School Board to fire 7,500 school employees from their jobs, including nearly 4,000 teachers. No advance notice was given before the decision was made public, so most of these employees only learned about their terminations through the media or from family and friends who had access to media information.*

*To add insult to injury, under the state-administered Katrina recovery school district, control over many New Orleans public schools was granted to charter organizations. In addition, federal Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced that \$24 million dollars of federal funds was granted to Louisiana by the Department of Education for the express purpose of supporting charter schools, while traditional public schools received nothing. Parents and teachers alike express grave concerns about the future of public education and what the current push for charter schools means for standards, fairness and accountability in education.*

*On June 20, veteran New Orleans educator Joe DeRose, communications director for the United Teachers of New Orleans, spoke with Amy Goodman of the Democracy Now! news program. They discussed the mass firings and the diversion of public education funds to private charter schools. This is an excerpt from that interview, online at [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org).*

**AMY GOODMAN: Can you start off by telling us about the firing of the teachers? I don’t think most people in this country understand they were all fired.**

**JOE DeROSE:** Exactly. You’re right. Every teacher in New Orleans was fired. There were 7,500 school employees, everybody from cafeteria workers, truck drivers and cus-

todians to teachers, and there were about 4,000 teachers. Solid middle-class employees, career professionals who had dedicated their careers to helping try to educate the children in one of the neediest cities in the country, a city with one of the highest poverty rates, as everybody saw in the days immediately following Katrina.

They were treated with utter disrespect. There was no notification that they would be fired until one day in October, when the school board called a press conference, notified us about an hour before that they were going to have such a conference. Therefore, most people found out that they were being terminated on the 5 o’clock news. Those who didn’t have TVs or weren’t still living in the city found out in the newspaper the next morning or by phone calls from friends and relatives who were in touch with the media.

**And so what happened through this year? And what percentage of the public schools—are we talking over 90 percent of the schools are African American?**

Yes, it’s probably closer to 95 percent. And we also have a class division within the city, where many African Americans of means, middle-class African Americans, were able to send their children to Catholic schools. So New Orleans public schools were left with really the most impoverished students, and they were also in the buildings with terrible conditions, a school system that was not really adequately supported. There was not enough money. Nobody has ever determined how much money is needed to properly educate children in the state of Louisiana, for one, and certainly not in the city of New Orleans. If people had seen before Katrina the conditions of these schools, they would have been appalled.



**So what happens now? How many public schools have been opened? And what does the Spellings announcement mean for the tens of millions of dollars going into charter schools?**

Well, as far as the number of schools that are opened, before Katrina there were about 116 schools that were run by the Orleans Parish School Board. Now there are four. There are about 25 schools that have been given charter status by the Orleans Parish School Board, and another 88 or 90 or so that have been taken over by the state and will be run under what's called the Recovery School District, under the direct authority of the state.

There was a long delay in opening any schools, and there is a strong feeling, which we think is valid, that there was a concerted effort to not reopen the schools. The very first announcement given by the state superintendent of

Education at the first meeting of the state board after the hurricane—he announced the schools in New Orleans [and] in St. Bernard Parish would not open for the rest of the year. The president of United Teachers of New Orleans made an impassioned plea to re-evaluate that decision, that there were people who were living in the city whose houses were not damaged that deserved an education, and that there were people who would want to come back to the city that needed some hope that there would be schools open.

...Now, going to Spellings's announcement that more money is going to be provided for charter schools. This reinforces the belief that charter schools were a primary objective of post-Katrina New Orleans in the eyes of many officials. We've got to ask—where was the federal help in the pre-existing school system?

Robert Kaufmann/FEMA





# Helping Her Own: First Mother Keeps Education Donation in the Family

by Yolanda Carrington

Hurricane Katrina has provided an opportunity for some well-off Americans to promote their own financial interests. Among them are members of America's first family.

In March, former First Lady Barbara Bush donated an undisclosed amount to the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund, the charitable foundation founded by former Presidents Bill Clinton and Barbara's husband, George H.W. Bush. But Mrs. Bush raised more than a few eyebrows when she instructed that her entire donation be spent on educational software produced by Ignite Learning Corp.—a company owned by her son Neil.<sup>(1)</sup>

Barbara and Neil Bush presented the donated software to Houston-area schools this past winter. Titled "Curriculum on Wheels," it provides multimedia curricular content to students in a user-friendly format.<sup>(2)</sup> Eight Houston-area schools that have enrolled large numbers of

Hurricane Katrina evacuees have installed the COW program, according to the Houston Chronicle.

In 2004, the Houston school district came under fire when it expanded the COW program through private donations, the paper reported. At the time, the school board agreed to accept \$115,000 in donations from businesses and individuals who specified the money be spent on Ignite. The deal raised conflict of interest concerns because Neil Bush and company officials helped solicit the contributions for the Houston Independent School District Foundation, a charity that raises money for the city's schools.

A Bush family spokesperson defended Mrs. Bush's earmarked donation for Katrina survivors. "Mrs. Bush is obviously an enthusiastic supporter of her son," Jean Becker told the Chronicle. "She is genuinely supportive of his program [and] honestly felt that this would be the best way to help the [evacuee] students."

Robert Kaufmann/FEMA



Above and right: Marvin Nauman/FEMA



# **A FRAGILE GULF: Environment**

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Environment Index

Percent of children at a Metairie, La. preschool who failed hearing tests due to health problems from Katrina "crud": **75**

Amount of oil spilled in Louisiana from damaged tanks and other production facilities during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: **10.5 million gallons**

Amount spilled from 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster in Alaska: **11 million gallons**

Estimated portion of oil spilled by Katrina recovered through cleanup efforts: **50 to 70 percent**

Amount of oil spilled at Murphy Oil Co. in St. Bernard Parish: **1 million gallons**

Portion of flood sediment samples analyzed after Katrina and Rita in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas that exceeded federal limits for arsenic: **90 percent**

Number of New Orleans neighborhoods where high lead levels were found in post-Katrina testing: **10**

Number of those neighborhoods where the elevated lead levels are believed to be directly attributable to Katrina: **0**

Minimum percentage of inner-city New Orleans children with high blood lead levels before Katrina: **20**

Estimated cost to clean up lead-contaminated New Orleans properties by bringing in clean dirt and planting grass: **\$290.4 million**

Estimated annual cost of New Orleans' lead poisoning in damage to society as a result of problems related to health, education and crime: **\$76 million**

Depth of pit dug into wetlands of New Orleans East for the unlined Chef Menteur storm-waste landfill, in an area where the water table lies 1 to 4 feet below the surface: **30 feet**

Distance between Chef Menteur landfill and Vietnamese-American community Village de l'Est, where 1,000 families live and tend traditional gardens using water from a nearby canal: **2 miles**

Portion of hazardous materials that authorities would be "lucky" to remove from the post-Katrina waste stream, according to an Environmental Protection Agency official: **20 to 30 percent**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 91

**D**raining a vast area from the Appalachians to the Rockies, the Mississippi River has long served as the nation's sewer, carrying America's waste to its final dumping ground in the Gulf of Mexico. Agricultural pesticides, industrial dreck and the toxic byproducts of the Gulf's oil-refining industry have all made their way into the waters over the years, settling to the bottom as sediment.

When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita blew ashore last August, they scooped up sediment from the Gulf and nearby waterways and dumped it over everything in their path. The storms also damaged oil and gas facilities, releasing millions of gallons of petroleum pollutants into nearby communities, and resulted in the spilling of countless gallons of household pesticides, solvents and other hazardous substances.

Mixing with the numerous flood-related sewage spills, the chemicals formed a toxic, bacteria-laden crud whose dust still coats many Gulf communities. The pollution is taking a toll on the health of residents and those who came to help rebuild. Doctors have reported an influx of patients seeking treatment for what's come to be known as "Katrina cough," a respiratory malady caused by exposure to molds and other allergens. There are also long-term health threats associated with the toxins that might not appear for years or even decades.

Environmental and health advocates say it would be relatively easy to clean up the sediment, which doesn't need to be excavated. Heavy-metal contamination can be remedied by covering tainted soil with clean dirt and planting grass. Unfortunately, there are only a handful of efforts underway to remediate post-Katrina environmental problems, and almost all are small-scale efforts led by private landowners and volunteers.

Despite the billions spent on reconstruction, federal, state and local governments have largely ignored the storms' poisonous aftermath. In some cases, officials have even contributed to the problem, as seen in New Orleans' rush to open an unlined landfill for storm debris in sensitive wetland areas near eastern New Orleans, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's issuance of trailer homes contaminated with formaldehyde. Consequently, a year after Katrina and Rita, the threats to environmental health still loom large over the Gulf.





CHALMETTE, LA, SEPT. 18, 2005

A massive oil spill that threatens this town in St. Bernard Parish resulted when a oil tank owned by Murphy Oil was forced from its foundation by Hurricane Katrina's massive storm surge. Below: An oil spill caused by Hurricane Katrina covers the streets of Chalmette.

Bob McMillan/ FEMA Photo



## Storms Unleashed Oil-Spill Disaster

by Sue Sturgis

**W**hen Hurricane Katrina's floodwaters swept through St. Bernard Parish southeast of New Orleans, they dislodged an enormous above-ground storage tank at the Murphy Oil Refinery in Meraux. The tank ruptured, releasing more than 1 million gallons of crude oil that poured over a containment levee into nearby neighborhoods. It was one of the worst residential oil spills in U.S. history.

A year later, residents are still grappling with the aftermath.

Murphy faces a class action lawsuit filed last September, which was certified by a federal judge as a class action suit earlier this year.<sup>(1)</sup> That suit is currently in the discovery process.

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**The cost of cleaning up the Murphy spill is estimated as \$1 billion. And the Murphy disaster was just one of at least 595 spills that released oil, gas and other contaminants into Gulf Coast ecosystems in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and Rita.**

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To date, the Arkansas-based company reports reaching settlements with the occupants or owners of about 2,500 residences in Meraux and Chalmette. Regulatory agencies say the affected area includes about 6,000 homes. However, Murphy argues that it includes only 2,900 residences while plaintiffs say as many as 10,000 were affected.

The company has denied any wrongdoing. But some experts have faulted it for not filling the near-empty tank

before the hurricane hit, a standard safety practice at oil refineries.<sup>(2)</sup>

Murphy has also come under fire for misleading victims in its pursuit of settlements. Last year the judge in the case ordered the company to stop providing misleading information during settlement discussions. Among other things, he ordered Murphy to disclose that an environmental testing firm involved in the case is a paid consultant for the company and not a government agency.<sup>(3)</sup>

Financial analysts and attorneys have estimated the cost of the ongoing cleanup of the Murphy spill at \$1 billion.<sup>(4)</sup> And the Murphy disaster was just one of at least 595 spills that released oil, natural gas and other contaminants into Gulf Coast ecosystems in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.<sup>(5)</sup>

Sampling of the Murphy spill sediment by the Environmental Protection Agency has detected polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, diesel and arsenic at levels that surpass Louisiana's screening levels for long-term health effects.<sup>(6)</sup> Contact with the chemicals can cause acute skin problems and has also been linked to long-term health problems, including cancer.

Meanwhile, the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has advised affected residents against moving back into homes with visible oil contamination.<sup>(7)</sup>

# In New Orleans, Uproar Continues Over Katrina Waste Dump

by Ana Pardo and Sue Sturgis

The Chef Menteur storm-debris landfill opened for business in New Orleans East in April, and controversy over the project has raged ever since.

Nagin used his special emergency powers granted after last year's storms to allow the landfill to open in a wetlands area near Village de l'Est, a predominantly Vietnamese-American community that was hit hard by Katrina. The project met with vociferous opposition from environmentalists and nearby residents.<sup>(1)</sup>

Chef Menteur is designated as a construction and demolition ("C&D") debris site, meaning the landfill is not required to have a protective liner. That worries the landfill's neighbors and environmental advocates, who point out that Louisiana expanded the definition of C&D debris after Hurricane Katrina to include hazardous materials such as chemically treated wood.

Critics are also concerned that materials other than those allowed by state law have been making their way into the 30-foot-deep pit, posing a potential for groundwater and surface water contamination. Many of Village de l'Est's 1,000 Vietnamese-American families use the water from an adjacent canal to irrigate their vegetable gardens.

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality claims that the walls and bottom of the pit are solid clay and thus offer protection from leaching. However, a decade-old permit application for the site showed core samples containing significant amounts of silt and sand.

LDEQ also maintains that the risk of hazardous materials being dumped at the Chef Menteur site is insignificant, and that current sorting practices are adequate in keeping hazardous waste out of the landfill. But Rev. Vien Nguyen of Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, which has been a key player in organizing opposition to the dump, contends that the measures in place aren't enough.

"We went in one day at the beginning of the process," Nguyen says. "Despite the fact that they had already combed over the surface, we were still able to find some things that were quite alarming, among them a canister of copier developer, batteries and some bags labeled hazardous waste."

Citizens for a Strong New Orleans East—a grassroots community group headquartered at Nguyen's church—and the Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN) assembled an independent panel of experts to assess the landfill's toxicity. Landfill opponents also published reports calling for a more vigilant sorting process to prevent the dumping of hazardous materials as well as continuous

pumping to prevent contaminated water from escaping to nearby waterways.

In a July 21 letter to Nagin, LDEQ assistant secretary Chuck Carr Brown warned that closing the Chef Menteur landfill would hamper the removal of debris from devastated areas of the city.<sup>(2)</sup> But LEAN attorney Joel Waltzer argues that the operation is driven more by economics than necessity. He points out that Nagin issued the landfill permit on the same day Waste Management signed a contract giving 22 percent of the proceeds from Chef Menteur to the city. Waltzer also notes that the site charges \$5 per cubic yard while the other two area landfills, Highway 90 and Gentilly, charge \$2.50 and \$3.50 respectively.

A day after the dump opened, LEAN filed for a temporary injunction, which a judge denied. LEAN, along with other environmental, religious and civil rights groups, responded with a raucous protest at New Orleans City Hall on May 10, leading Nagin to suspend landfill operations for three days.

Then in August, LEAN and the Sierra Club filed suit against the state, claiming regulators lacked the authority to expand the type of wastes allowed to go into C&D landfills. Chef Menteur was one of the three facilities cited in the suit, along with Old Gentilly, also in New Orleans East, and Industrial Pipe in Plaquemines Parish.<sup>(3)</sup>

The latest twist: Mayor Ray Nagin's administration ordered Waste Management to shut down the site by Aug. 15, saying the company had failed to apply to the City Council for a conditional-use permit to continue operations.<sup>(4)</sup> The Houston-based trash giant responded by asking a federal court to bar Nagin from closing the facility until the huge piles of garbage left by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are gone, but the court rejected its request.<sup>(5)</sup>

However, the fight may not be over yet: Waste Management may still go through normal channels to get a permit from the city.

Meanwhile, Nguyen remains optimistic about the eventual closure of Chef Menteur. "I hope [officials] have enough sense to see that support for the movement is growing faster than anyone could have anticipated," he says. "If they go ahead and shut it down, it's one less thing for them to worry about."



# Tracking the Toxic Storm

by Sue Sturgis

*Wilma Subra has been studying the environmental health of the U.S. Gulf Coast for decades. An environmental chemist and CEO of the Subra Co. in New Iberia, La., Subra has served as a technical advisor to citizens' groups and government agencies, and she currently chairs the Gulf Coast Hurricanes Workgroup of the Environmental Protection Agency's National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, which will soon release final recommendations on environmental justice issues related to hurricanes Katrina and Rita.*

*Subra has extensively investigated "Cancer Alley," the 85-mile corridor along the Mississippi from Baton Rouge to New Orleans where chemical plants and petroleum refineries ooze mil-*

*lions of pounds of pollution into the air and river every year. Much of that pollution washes out to the Gulf of Mexico, where it settles to the bottom as sediment. When Katrina and Rita hit last year, their powerful storm surge picked up that sludge and spread it over everything in their path—a ubiquitous layer that Subra has likened to cake batter. Soon after the storms, Subra began testing the sediment for toxics. What she found alarms her.*

*Of the numerous samples she's analyzed from Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, 90 percent have exceeded the EPA's allowable limits for arsenic—a known carcinogen that's been linked to skin cancer as well as cancer of the lungs, bladder, liver, kidney and prostate. Inhaling or ingesting arsenic can injure pregnant women or developing fetuses,*



NINTH WARD, NEW ORLEANS, SEPT. 16, 2005.

The foul-smelling floodwater that inundated Gulf Coast communities after Katrina was contaminated with industrial and household waste as well as sewage.

MARVIN NAUMAN/FEMA photo

and a mother can pass the chemical to her child through breast milk. There's also evidence that long-term exposure to arsenic may lower children's IQ.

With the anniversary of the storms approaching, Sue Sturgis interviewed Subra about her work, her findings and her concerns about the current and future health of Gulf Coast residents.

**SUE STURGIS: Tell us about the environmental testing you've done since Katrina.**

**WILMA SUBRA:** I tested the sediment sludge that came onshore with the tidal surge. These sediment sludges were from the water bodies that had been contaminated throughout most of the 1900s, a lot of it prior to the Clean Water Act. The storm scooped up this contaminated sediment sludge from the water bodies and just laid it over the land. In some areas, it was an inch thick, in some areas six inches thick, and in some areas it was six to eight feet thick. It was deposited on the surface of everything. When it started drying out, it became easily airborne.

I went out within 48 hours of Katrina hitting and started doing damage and needs assessment and testing of sediment. The [Natural Resources Defense Council] funded some specific sampling work in New Orleans. Prior to that, I had sampled all along the coast of Louisiana, and then over on the western shore of Mobile Bay and back through Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Then Rita hit, so I sampled from central Louisiana to the Texas coast. I did a lot of damage assessment in Texas, but not sediment testing. That's because Rita's eye came in on the Louisiana-Texas border—Texas was on the left-hand side of the eye, and you only had the tidal surge in the upper right-hand side. All of the data I collected is on the Louisiana Environmental Action Network Web Site.<sup>(1)</sup>

**The public has heard conflicting information about environmental contamination in the Gulf. Many environmental health advocates say the problem is serious, but regulatory agencies insist there isn't any danger.**

Nobody has a problem with any of my data. It's all in the interpretation. The agencies are saying that there are no short-term health risks. However, if you go on the EPA's Web page, they say there's no short-term health risks, but they also say that you should not come in contact with the sediment sludge, and if you have to come in contact with it, you need to wear protective clothing, respirators, gloves and booties. So on one hand, they're saying it's not a problem. On the other hand, they're saying don't come in contact with it unless you protect yourself.

I think it has a lot to do with resources. It's a huge geographic area. As I just described, it's from Mobile Bay all the way to the Louisiana-Texas border—everywhere the storm surge came in. It would be a huge cleanup job. There have been different discussions that the [Federal



NEW ORLEANS, SEPT. 1, 2005

The New Orleans resident walks through toxic mud on his way home in search of salvageable items.

Andrea Booher/FEMA

Emergency Management Agency] would be responsible, and that no, FEMA doesn't take care of the toxins—that's for the agencies or the [Army] Corps [of Engineers]. Every time we try to figure out who it is we need to talk to about removing it, we get that kind of response.

Have you seen the list of health impacts we put together?<sup>(2)</sup> They started with the first responders going in and rescuing people and they're continuing today. There are skin rashes, and skin infections that don't respond to normal antibiotic treatment. That's because in my analysis I'm finding both gram-positive and gram-negative organisms. When you go to a doctor, he gives you antibiotics for one or the other, not both, so that's why the sores aren't responding. And then the respiratory illnesses—the asthma, the bronchitis. And it's turning into chronic bronchitis. People that I talk to will say, "Oh, well, that's why I'm always sick, why I'm always coughing." The doctors say most of these people aren't coming in to them. Well, most of the people don't have access to the doctors right now.

**What are the contaminants you're finding that people should be most concerned about?**

The most prevalent chemical is arsenic. It's present in excess of what the state and federals have established as screening levels. It's prevalent throughout the sediment. It's from old industrial discharges, old pesticide applications. And it's an element, so it doesn't degrade.

I'm also finding barium and chromium and lead. They're not above acceptable levels, but they add to the cumulative impact. I'm finding a lot of petroleum hydrocarbons. Everyone has gasoline in their sheds, in their lawn mowers. This is a coastal community, so there are lots of boats. And there are lots of petroleum pro-





NEW ORLEANS, SEPTEMBER 2005

Mud builds up in areas flooded by New Orleans. Much of the leftover sediment contains dangerous elements scooped up from the floodwaters.

Jocelyn Augustino/FEMA



BILOXI, MISS., SEPTEMBER 2005

Mud, oil and other contaminants coat this pool.

Mark Wolfe/FEMA

duction and storage tanks.

And then I'm finding a huge amount of bacteria—coliform, because of the untreated sewer that's been discharged, and salmonella, *staphylococcus aureus*, lots of yeast, lots of mold. The agencies have told me, "Oh, when the sludge dries, these organisms will die—they will no longer be viable." Well, even in the driest, dustiest, windblown sediment sludge, they're still very viable. We've been in sort of a drought situation, but we still have enough rain and dew to have some moisture content.

Around July 7, [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] released a report about the health impacts that they had observed in September in the evacuation centers and in health care centers.<sup>(3)</sup> They looked at Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas, because a lot of people evacuated to Arkansas, and they were find-

ing the same types of things. They were finding asthma, cardiovascular problems, skin rashes, respiratory illnesses. That's what doctors are still seeing.

Then there's the mental illness. I don't get into that, but the interesting thing is, a report recently came out of Pensacola. They had Ivan in September 2004, more than 22 months ago. And the mental health problems are just huge. People lost everything. They're trying to come back, and it's very difficult. It's the stress. So that's what this area has to look forward to.

August is going to be horrible, because everybody's talking about what we're going to do for the anniversary. It's just bringing it all back. It's sort of stopping people from moving forward for this time period while they reflect back.

### **A lot of the reporting on hurricane-related environmental contamination has focused on New Orleans. What are residents facing in rural coastal communities?**

In Alabama, 100 percent of the samples exceeded allowable arsenic levels. In Louisiana, we have a different standard, but the majority of samples exceeded even that standard. It's the same sediment sludge with basically the same chemicals all the way across from Mobile Bay westward to the Louisiana-Texas border. Plus, most of the rural coast doesn't have a levee system, so when the storm surge came in, it went inland many, many miles. It went up all the rivers and bayous, scooped up those sediments, and deposited them on the land.

Now the grass is starting to grow back, and the weeds, at least the salt-tolerant ones. So people are going out and mowing their lawn. And when they mow the lawn, it flings the sediment back up into the air. You can be exposed to it as you're mowing your lawn.

### **Are there any initiatives underway to remove the contaminated sediment?**

A lot of people who have resources have hired contractors to remove it. It's easy to remove because it's on the surface and not something you have to dig up. You can basically scoop it off. Those people have removed it and paid to have new soil brought in.

There are a few bio-remediation trial sites going on in the greater New Orleans area. Common Ground is doing a number of those. But for the most part, the people who don't have resources just have to deal with it. And it's in their homes. When they started cleaning them out, they became exposed to that. We worked through LEAN and other groups to provide the Tyvek suits and respirators for Common Ground, so the people that came in would have that available to them. We also worked with a lot of church groups from all denominations, who also have resources to provide the protective gear.



**It sounds like the efforts to address the toxic sediment are private or nonprofit, not governmental.**

Were it not for the [non-governmental organizations] and the church groups—they're the ones that have been the most involved in this area.

**Have the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and other state agencies been helpful?**

Every time I go out in the field, I call LDEQ and say, "This is what I saw today—it really needs to be addressed." But EPA was much more responsive if I'd see something, like leachate coming out of the landfills. They'd go in and do the sampling.

In Mississippi they've been a lot more responsive. They're not removing the sediment either, but they've been a lot more responsive to the community's needs and requests.

As chair of NEJAC, I noticed quite a difference in [EPA] Region 4's response in Mississippi and Alabama versus the Region 6 response in Louisiana and Texas—not so much in what they did or didn't do, but in the help the state agencies needed. Region 4 said they deal with hurricanes all the time, and the state agencies were much more prepared. The EPA came in there and assisted the state agencies, whereas in Louisiana they came in to really do the work because the state agency was overwhelmed.

**Given the current environmental situation in the Gulf, what do people there need to know?**

They need to be aware that the sediment sludge is contaminated, and to take appropriate precautions when in areas that this material is located. Everyone is aware that the houses that were flooded grew huge quantities of mold, and a lot of people are wearing respirators when they go in to gut the houses. But they aren't as aware of the sediment sludge. We don't want people to become ill because they came down to the coast to help the people who were injured by the hurricane.

**That makes me think of the rescuers following 9/11—it's just now that a lot of the health problems from their exposure to toxic dust are manifesting.**

That's the other piece that's not being attended to—one's doing tracking of the people that were exposed and then establishing a mechanism to correlate that with health impacts, whether short-term or long-term. Again, that's a huge financial burden. In addition to the people from the area, there are all these people who came in as responders, and other people are coming in to help. Nobody's tracking them. If we didn't learn anything else from 9/11, we should have learned that.

The long-term impacts correlate to the chemicals, such as increased rate of spontaneous abortions and miscarriages, increased rate of infertility, lung disease and chronic bronchitis, and then of course cancer.

**Which certainly can take awhile to manifest.**

Ten years from now, when you're diagnosed with cancer, a doctor's not going to ask you, "Were you in the hurricane-affected area?"



1NEW ORLEANS, SEPTEMBER 2005

Neighborhoods were coated with mud from Katrina's floodwaters.

Jocelyn Augustino/FEMA



# Energy Companies Seize Post-Katrina Chaos to Push Gulf Gas Plan

by Tim Shorrock

Less than a year after Hurricane Katrina, a consortium of energy companies is close to winning government approval for two projects that have sparked strong objections from Gulf Coast environmental groups.

Specifically, Chevron Corp. and Gulf LNG of Houston are pushing to win state and federal permits for a pair of gas terminals in Mississippi that could make the region one of the nation's premiere routes for imported liquefied natural gas (LNG).

The projects could begin construction as early as November and, after completion, will provide about 100 jobs to the region.

That's a pittance compared to the labor-intensive casino industry, which is slated to bring thousands of jobs to the region over the next few years. But the trade-off, industry and government officials say, will be the transformation of the Gulf into a regional energy gateway for a nation desperate for alternative sources of fuel.

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They hope to transform the Gulf into a regional energy gateway for a nation desperate for alternative sources of fuel.

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At a time of tightening energy supplies and growing concern over global warming, LNG is widely seen as less harmful to the environment because it releases less heat-trapping carbon dioxide than coal or petroleum. It is produced by cooling natural gas extracted from fields in Qatar, Indonesia, West Africa and elsewhere to extremely cold temperatures, transforming it into liquid and dramatically reducing its volume. The liquid gas is carried on special tankers to its final destination, where it is unloaded, turned back into gas, sent through pipelines and burned to produce electricity.

But the new LNG terminals, when completed, will vastly increase shipping traffic along the crowded Mississippi Sound, adding some 300 giant tankers a year to the area's already busy maritime traffic. They will also eat up precious marsh space along the coast and disturb millions of tons of sediment, much of it toxic, which must be dredged to create channels for the giant tankers. According to the Department of Energy, U.S. demand for LNG will

rise from 3 percent of total supply in 2005 to 15 percent by 2025. In fall of 2005, however, there were only five LNG terminals in operation in the lower 48, including one in the Gulf and another in Puerto Rico. In contrast, Japan, the world's leading LNG importer, has 28 operating terminals. The Bush administration wants to change that ratio: Since 2001, 15 new LNG projects have been approved by the business-friendly Federal Energy Regulation Commission (FERC), and at least 20 more are in the planning stages.

The largest concentration of LNG terminals will be along the Gulf Coast (see the map at [www.ferc.gov/industries/lng/indus-act/terminals/exist-prop-lng.pdf](http://www.ferc.gov/industries/lng/indus-act/terminals/exist-prop-lng.pdf)). The Chevron and Gulf LNG projects will be located in Pascagoula, Miss., home of the giant Northrop Grumman naval shipyard and one of the nation's largest oil refineries, also operated by Chevron.

For projects so fraught with environmental risk, FERC and the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources have moved with remarkable speed to approve the new projects. Last May, FERC released a draft environmental impact statement concluding that building and operating the two LNG terminals "would have limited adverse environmental impact" as long as the companies adopted proper safety precautions.

A month later, FERC sponsored a meeting in Pascagoula to receive public comment on the two LNG projects. One of those testifying, environmental activist Paula Vassez, argued that the projects would negatively affect wetlands, fisheries and air emissions. "Jackson County, Mississippi, is being asked to eat the pollution so Chevron can make more money," she said.

The state marine resources office held its own hearing on the dredging and wetlands issues affecting the Gulf LNG project in late June. John McCutchen, chief operating officer for what the company calls the "Gulf LNG Clean Energy Project," provided details of the planned terminal. It will include a 62-acre dredged berth area to accommodate tankers. The liquid gas will be off-loaded into 260,000-cubic-meter LNG storage tanks and go through a series of pumps and vaporizers to change the LNG back to gas. The gas will then be fed into three interstate pipelines for delivery to Florida and other inland markets.

Like the FERC event, the marine resources hearing was sparsely attended. The government's zeal to push these

projects forward while the region is still recovering has frustrated groups opposed to the LNG projects, who say local citizens are too absorbed with their own survival to attend hearings. "They don't have time to be citizen activists the way they used to, and keep an eye on everything that's going on," complained Becky Gillette, the co-chair of the Mississippi Chapter of the Sierra Club.

In testimony before the marine board, Gillette discussed the potential danger to the public of catastrophic fires from marine accidents or terrorist actions targeting LNG vessels. "I think it would be wrong to expect Pascagoula to take two of these LNG ports on when there's no other communities in the country that have a large population that is based next to one of these LNG plants," she said. "This is simply not a risk that people elsewhere are willing to accept." Six of the eight witnesses at the hearing opposed the projects, including activist Vessey, who asked the state commissioners to delay any decision on dredging to conduct further soil testing at the proposed LNG site.

On July 9, the state's marine resources office gave Gulf LNG the green light to start dredging more than 60 acres of the Bayou Casotte Ship Channel and fill in more than 15 acres near the site of its planned facility.

"Soon we hope to receive a final environmental impact statement by FERC, followed by permits to construct and operate the facility," Gulf LNG spokesman Scott Wagner told Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch. There are "no significant environmental issues" that need to be addressed, he said.

Gulf LNG is partly owned by Sonangol, the Angolan state-owned energy company that will supply 100 percent of the natural gas the company will import through the terminal. Sonangol's LNG fields are being developed by a consortium of companies that include Chevron, British Petroleum, TOTAL and Exxon Mobil.

The Houston investors behind the terminal are not well known, and hope to stay that way. Asked about the primary owners of Gulf LNG, Wagner described them as a "small group of investors." But he would not identify them by name, saying "they like to remain low-key." In fact, the project is headed by McCutchen, Dee Osborne and Joseph Peacock.

All three men used to work for Crest Investment Corp., a company owned by Jamal Daniel, a Syrian-American

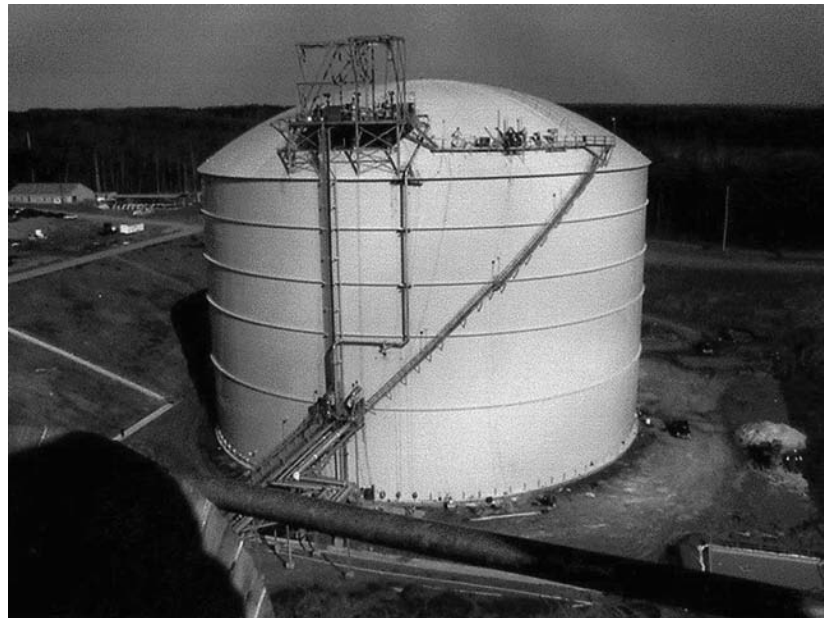
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## The government's zeal to push these projects forward while the region is still recovering has frustrated groups opposed to the LNG projects, who say local citizens are too absorbed with their own survival to attend hearings.

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businessman based in Houston. Daniel has close ties to the Bush family and is an adviser to New Bridge Strategies, a Washington lobbying firm once associated with Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour. Daniel was recently identified as the single largest donor to Barbour's 2005 election committee in Mississippi.

So it was hardly surprising to read, in a press release distributed by Gulf LNG last year, that the governor had endorsed the LNG projects in Pascagoula. The Chevron and Gulf LNG terminals, Barbour said, will "address a growing demand for energy in the U.S. and would position Mississippi as a leader in the supply of clean and reliable energy to the region."



LNG terminals, like this one under construction, could soon be erected around the Gulf Coast.

CREDIT: Federal Energy Regulatory Commission



# VITAL SIGNS: Health

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Health Index

Number of hospitals in Orleans Parish before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: **22**

Number operating as of August 2006: **11**

Number of months it took for New Orleans resident Janette Trembus to receive a letter saying her mother's neurologist had moved to another state, after a failed attempt to refill her mother's Parkinson's medication: **2**

Percent of New Orleans-area doctors no longer submitting claims to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana: **75**

Number of years the Charity Hospital system provided health care for the disadvantaged and uninsured: **270**

Number of years New Orleans residents will have to wait for the opening of a \$1.2 billion complex medical complex meant to replace Charity Hospital: **5**

Number of HIV/AIDS patients served by outpatient clinics in the Charity Hospital system before the storms: **3,500**

Number currently receiving care: **1,200**

Out of nine before Katrina, number of rural clinics lost by Coastal Family Health Care, a nonprofit serving the uninsured in Mississippi: **4**

In September, days that federal officials said it would take to help Coastal rebuild three of their clinics: **12-18**

As of May, number that had been rebuilt: **0**

Number of calls involving mentally ill people that the New Orleans Police Department Mobile Crisis Unit receives each week: **180**

Number of psychiatric in-patient beds in the New Orleans area prior to the hurricanes: **450**

Number available as of August 2006: **80**

Estimated number of post-traumatic stress disorder cases in the state of Louisiana this year: **300,000**

Number of years John McCusker, a Pulitzer-winning photographer, worked for the New Orleans Times-Picayune before he was arrested trying to force local police to kill him after he found out insurance wouldn't cover the cost of rebuilding his home: **20**

Approximate percent increase in New Orleans' suicide rate since Katrina: **300**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 93

**H**urricanes Katrina and Rita left health care systems across the Gulf Coast severely crippled. In New Orleans, half the hospitals remain closed, and most of those that have reopened were among the city's smaller facilities.

Emergency-room visits are on the increase, with people waiting longer to seek medical attention and then, when unable to put it off any longer, facing a packed waiting room. The problem has been exacerbated by the influx of laborers, many of whom are undocumented Latinos seeking vaccines for infectious diseases they're at risk of contracting from the flooded structures they're gutting—vaccines their employers are not supplying.

Many doctors have abandoned the region. People needing prescription refills run into roadblocks at the pharmacy counter, discovering that their physician has pulled up stakes and moved elsewhere.

The availability of specialized services such as pediatric care, cancer treatment and HIV/AIDS programs has diminished. These services are less of a restoration priority for the existing care providers because they represent a smaller portion of the population's needs.

Mental health services have also been significantly affected. Less than one-fifth of New Orleans' inpatient psychiatric beds have been restored while mental health problems, such as depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome, are rampant.

Restoration of services is happening slowly, and the way health care works in the city is changing. There are no plans to rebuild much of the area's unique need-based care infrastructure. However, there are plans to create an expensive new system and suspend federal regulations regarding Medicaid services. The end result could very likely be less than friendly to the city's poor and uninsured.



NEW ORLEANS, SEPT. 3, 2005  
Evacuation helicopter at the New Orleans Airport.

Win Henderson / FEMA



# Dissolving Barriers: New Orleans' Latino Health Outreach Project

by Catherine Jones and Jennifer Whitney

The sun is still below the horizon when we arrive. Three cars, many boxes of supplies, five to 10 people wearing scrubs, most of us women. Hazily, as the coffee is still kicking in, we begin to set up treatment stations on the hoods of cars and the beds of pickups. The parking lot we're in and the one across the street are sparking with activity as around 100 people, mostly men, mostly Latino day laborers, look for work in the still-devastated city of New Orleans.

The men gather, ask each other what vaccines they should get, share information about employers who don't pay, tell us about their families back in Texas or Veracruz or Bahia. A regular comes by to show us how much better his leg is doing, and to ask for some more vitamins. Someone else drops by to invite us to his daughter's *quinceañera*, her 15th birthday party. Several people come for their final dose of hepatitis B vaccine; we've seen them off and on for six months.

These Latino Health Outreach Project clinics are always busy, as is every functional health care provider in this city, from the first aid stations to the emergency rooms. The terrifying reality in New Orleans these days is that there is virtually no public health infrastructure, and so our scrappy little clinic in the parking lot is, for some of our patients, the option they feel safest with. Never mind the fact that we can't dispense medication, rarely have a doctor onsite, can't do lab work, or even full physical exams. We're here every Wednesday, we speak our patients' languages, we don't ask about immigration status (or even last names), and we do our best to respect the dignity of each of them.

In the second week after Katrina hit, the Common Ground Free Clinic opened in Algiers. At the time, it was one of only two places offering health care in the region. We quickly realized that among the many gaps in the city's public health care infrastructure was a source of culturally competent, bilingual health care for pre-Katrina Latino residents, as well as the vast numbers of recently arrived workers.

We began setting up clinics on sidewalks and parking lots in areas where mostly Latino workers were staying. Within a few weeks, more providers were added, including MDs, nurse practitioners, acupuncturists and herbalists. We now do one clinic a week early morning at a day-labor pick up site in downtown New Orleans, one in a church in suburban Kenner, where we do limited primary care and family medicine, and we occasionally hold clinics at other sites.

In addition to providing health care, we are committed to improving our patients' access to health care across the city, supporting struggles for justice for immigrants and working people, and building relationships with organizations that have a history of working in New Orleans' Latino community, as well as with post-storm initiatives dedicated to supporting residents' right of return.

Like most organizations that began in New Orleans after Katrina, we are facing significant questions as we try to determine the future of our work and how it fits into the service-vs.-organizing paradigm. Do we see our clinics ultimately as an organizing tool or as a valid source of primary health care? Can we legitimately be both?

In addition to these challenges, over the last few months workers near our day laborer clinic have been targeted by increasing police and [immigration control] harassment and arrest. Partially because of that, among other reasons, workers are fanning out to other neighborhoods. This dispersal means that a single mobile clinic can't serve the majority of day laborers in New Orleans, and that day laborer organizing itself will become more challenging.

Meanwhile, we continue to face challenges finding reliable health care providers for our primary care clinic in the church, which still lacks lab services and other elements that could greatly increase continuity of care for our patients. Neither of these clinics is ultimately the best option for patients who need more in-depth services, such as acute care, women's gynecological and prenatal care, specialty care, or long-term monitoring.

We're realizing that these realities are forcing us to make decisions about where to direct our limited resources. At first, we thought we'd have to do one of two things: invest more time and resources into our church clinic, making it a viable source of bilingual health care, or shore up the mobile clinics and focus on using them as support for worker-led organizing. Now we're realizing that our ultimate path probably won't fit firmly into either category.

Right now a feasible option for us is to continue to build up our mobile clinics while maintaining a presence in Kenner. We are beginning to build up a base of translators and patient advocates who can accompany our patients to emergency rooms, prenatal care appointments, and specialists. Focusing more on the mobile outreach clinics also means that we can begin to more concretely use these clinics as an organizing tool. We have seen the interest among our patients when we have done safety and environmental health trainings while we distribute protective gear for workers involved in mold remediation,



demolition and house gutting. We see this as a concrete capacity-building tool, a necessary service and a bridge to connect health issues with labor organizing. We're excited to expand that to include consistent legal trainings, wage-claim support, and more.

Ultimately, we see our work as one component of a large, vibrant, multifaceted movement for racial and economic justice in the Gulf Coast and beyond.

*This is a shortened version of an article that originally appeared in Left Turn magazine, Summer 2006.*

# Feds' Disaster Plans Still Neglect Nursing Home Residents

by Sue Sturgis

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast last year, it took a disproportionate toll on the elderly, with people age 60 and older accounting for 64 percent of the more than 1,400 storm-related deaths.<sup>(1)</sup> Katrina also revealed serious shortcomings in the evacuation plans of facilities that care for the most vulnerable elderly: nursing homes.

At St. Rita's Nursing Facility in St. Bernard Parish, La., 34 residents and caregivers died after owners Salvador and Mable Mangano allegedly turned away two buses parish officials had offered before the storm. The couple then reportedly failed to call on an ambulance company they had contracted with to evacuate patients. The Manganos were eventually charged with negligent homicide and are awaiting trial.<sup>(2)</sup>

Twenty-two people also died at Lafon Nursing Home of the Holy Family in eastern New Orleans, and three residents of eastern New Orleans' Ferncrest Manor Living Center died as a result of an evacuation involving school buses that lacked air-conditioning and water.<sup>(3)</sup>

Unfortunately, a year after the disaster, flaws in emergency plans that contributed to these deaths still have not been fixed, according to a report released in July by the Government Accountability Office. Titled "Disaster Preparedness: Limitations in Federal Evacuation Assistance for Health Facilities Should be Addressed,"<sup>(4)</sup> the study examined the challenges faced by nursing homes and hospitals during hurricanes as well as gaps in federal emergency plans.

The GAO found that facility administrators faced several challenges, including deciding whether to evacuate, obtaining needed transportation, and maintaining outside communication. Although facilities had contracts with transportation companies, competition for the same pool of vehicles created supply shortages. In addition, hurricane damage to the local infrastructure impaired communication. For example, one Florida nursing home was unable to communicate with local emergency managers.

Perhaps even more worrisome, the GAO found that the National Disaster Medical System—a partnership of four

federal agencies led by the Department of Homeland Security—fails to address the evacuation of people not in need of hospital care, such as nursing home residents. In addition, DHS' National Response Plan—the basic framework for how the federal government helps states and local governments during disasters—also fails to address the evacuation of nursing home residents.

Another shortcoming of the NDMS is that it's designed to evacuate persons from a designated mobilization center, such as an airport. That leaves nursing homes and hospitals to make their own arrangements for moving patients to the NDMS mobilization center.

GAO recommended that DHS, NDMS, and others clearly state how they will meet the needs of nursing home residents during evacuations, and how the federal government will assist state and local governments with transporting residents and patients from nursing homes and hospitals to NDMS mobilization centers.

"As with the Katrina response, we can't let confusion and gaps in responsibility get in the way of the effectiveness of the response," U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), chair of the committee that oversees Medicare and Medicaid, said in a statement<sup>(5)</sup>. "I urge the Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies that are involved to plug the gaps in our evacuation system to ensure that some of the most frail and vulnerable among us are not left behind."



NEW ORLEANS, SEPT. 3, 2005  
An evacuee from New Orleans after hurricane Katrina waits to receive medical attention.

Photo by: Liz Roll



# Disabilities, Disasters and Discrimination

by Sue Sturgis

Almost everyone affected by Hurricane Katrina suffered mental trauma. However, the storm's impact was especially devastating on people who were already suffering from psychiatric disabilities—and the widespread discrimination suffered by those survivors made their situation even worse.

That was the finding of a paper released in July 2006 by the National Council on Disability, the federal agency charged with advising Congress and the President on improving the lives of people with disabilities. Titled "The Needs of People With Psychiatric Disabilities During and After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita," the paper urged federal, state and local governments to enact sweeping changes to prevent a repeat of the problems experienced after last year's storms.

"Some of these challenges were unavoidable," observed NCD chairperson Lex Frieden. "As one government official said, 'No one ever planned for what happens when your social service infrastructure is completely wiped out.' Nonetheless, many of the problems could have been avoided with proper planning."

Among the NCD's findings: people with psychiatric disabilities were discriminated against during evacuation, rescue and relief operations in violation of federal law; poorly managed evacuations resulted in the loss, mistreatment and inappropriate institutionalization of the psychiatrically disabled; and people with psychiatric dis-

abilities were not included in disaster planning or relief and recovery efforts.

According to the paper, some Katrina survivors with psychiatric disabilities reported that the Federal Emergency Management Agency excluded them from its trailers because of concerns that their psychiatric disabilities made them dangerous—despite assurances from mental health professionals that they were not. FEMA gave rental assistance to individual families but rejected requests to reimburse church groups that provided housing to former residents of group homes for people with psychiatric disabilities. In addition, some American Red Cross shelters excluded the psychiatrically disabled.

The report issued a number of recommendations to prevent such problems from happening again. For one, federal, state and local emergency plans should require that emergency services and shelters be accessible to people with disabilities, including people with psychiatric disabilities. In addition, evacuation plans should track the transfer of residents of group homes and psychiatric facilities, maintain contact between people with psychiatric disabilities and their caretakers and prevent the inappropriate institutionalization the psychiatrically disabled.

*For a full copy of the report, visit [www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2006/peopleneeds.htm](http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2006/peopleneeds.htm).*

## Storm Sparks Revamp of Louisiana Medicaid

by Sue Sturgis

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast last year, it took a heavy toll on Louisiana's unique safety-net system for delivering health care to the poor and uninsured. Now, at the urging of the Bush administration, that system is undergoing a major overhaul—and the outcome could serve as a blueprint for the nation.

In most states, local governments bear responsibility for providing care to the uninsured. In Louisiana, however, that task falls to state government. Louisiana State University operates 10 state-funded hospitals and more than 350 clinics that primarily serve the uninsured. The hub of the system—the Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans, which includes Charity and University hospitals—was devastated by the storm. That left a gaping hole in the city's health safety net, as nearly three-

quarters of patients served by MCLNO were African American and 85 percent had annual incomes of less than \$20,000.<sup>(1)</sup>

Hoping to repair that broken system, Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt and Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco on July 17 launched an initiative to reform New Orleans-area health care. They created the Louisiana Health Care Redesign Collaborative, a 40-member group that includes state officials, health care and insurance industry representatives, patient advocates and other health care experts.

The collaborative promises nothing less than a revolution in the state's health care system. As Gov. Blanco announced when launching the group, "This day marks the start of a process that stands to fundamentally alter the way we care for our people."<sup>(2)</sup>



By Oct. 20, the collaborative plans to present a waiver application for Medicaid and Medicare rules in Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes, with a goal of eventually expanding a new system to the entire state.

Leavitt sees the waivers as a way in which high-quality, accessible, patient-centered care can be delivered by ambulatory and community-based centers, thus reducing the current over-reliance on hospital emergency room care. The collaborative provides "the opportunity to transform a storm-wrecked system into a shining model of care," Leavitt said.<sup>(3)</sup>

The waiver would allow Louisiana to selectively ignore some federal regulations, such as where care is delivered, and limit the number of beneficiaries eligible for services.

This would affect what the New Orleans Times-Picayune called the "politically explosive question" of what to do with the Charity system, which is mandated to serve the city's poor.<sup>(4)</sup> A post-hurricane study of Louisiana's health care system prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Louisiana Recovery Authority has called for a dramatically reduced role for LSU in managing the state's public hospital network.<sup>(5)</sup> The LRA has endorsed that report.

The results from waiver programs in other states have not always been encouraging, however. In 2003, for example, what's now the Government Accountability Office found that waivers had resulted in problems with quality of care in 11 of the 15 state programs it examined—including failure to provide necessary services to beneficiaries.<sup>(6)</sup>



NEW ORLEANS, SEPT. 1, 2005  
New Orleans Airport  
Photo: Michael Rieger/FEMA

NEW ORLEANS, OCT. 6, 2005  
Win Henderson / FEMA



# LAW AND ORDER: Justice System

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Justice Index

Number of prisoners evacuated from the Louisiana Gulf after Katrina: **8,500**

Approximate number of those who needed indigent defense counsel: **7,000**

Number of children held or moved to the Orleans Parish Prison during Katrina: about **150**

Number of days the children went without food and water before being evacuated in handcuffs and shackles from the flooded prison: **3 to 5**

Depth of water the handcuffed children had to wade through to get to the bridge, most without life preservers: **over 5 feet**

Number of New Orleans public defenders before Katrina: **39**

Number of New Orleans public defenders laid off after the storm: **31**

Number of New Orleans prisoners whose trial dates have never been set or have been delayed, or who have never seen an attorney: about **6,000**

Average time people sat in a New Orleans jail before seeing an attorney: **over 1 year**

Days after Hurricane Katrina that New Orleans Judge Arthur Hunter plans to start releasing defendants whose trials have been delayed if the city does not fix its public defender system: **365**

Number of New Orleans public defenders recommended by the U.S. Department of Justice: **70**

DOJ's recommended salary: **\$54,000**

Current average annual salary of a New Orleans public defender: **\$29,000**

Money in Louisiana's budget earmarked for public defenders: **\$0**

Number of states that earmark money for public defense: **49**

In the days after Katrina, the images of survival broadcast around the world often depicted the people of New Orleans as thieves and killers. Since then, there have been two clashing visions for the future of the city.

One is of "security," exemplified by Gov. Kathleen Blanco bringing in the National Guard, saying, "...they have M-16s and they are locked and loaded... These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary, and I expect they will."

The other vision is of justice and human rights. This vision involves restoring good jobs, health care and housing, rather than minimum-wage jobs, crumbling infrastructure and police and prisons for those who step out of line.

Before the floodwaters began receding, the incarceration of suspected looters was the first city function to restart. Due process and civil liberties were almost nonexistent for new arrestees, who were put in cages in a makeshift prison at a Greyhound bus station, with no access to phones or lawyers.

These post-Katrina excesses fit pre-Katrina patterns. Louisiana has the highest rate of incarceration in the country, and Orleans Parish Prison was the nation's eighth-largest jail, with a population predominantly from low-income communities and communities of color. According to a pre-Katrina report from the Metropolitan Crime Commission, 65 percent of those arrested in New Orleans are eventually released without ever facing charges. Many inmates would have been released by the Monday after the storm, but instead they were abandoned in their cells during the flood and subjected to a heavily armed "rescue" by state prison guards that involved beatings, mace and being left in the sun with no water or food for several days.

Since the storm, Louisiana's broken criminal justice system has further deteriorated. With its public defender system in shambles, the backlog of cases has grown to nearly 6,000. A New Orleans judge is now issuing subpoenas to Blanco, charging that the Louisiana system is unconstitutional. He is also threatening to start releasing inmates on Aug. 29, 2006—the one-year anniversary of Katrina—if immediate and fundamental changes are not made.



# Abandoned in the Storm

*In the chaos that followed Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans' juvenile justice system abandoned 150 children who were locked in the Orleans Parish Prison, the city's adult detention facility, according to a report by the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana. Created with the support of the Southern Poverty Law Center, JJPL is an advocacy organization based in New Orleans that works to reform juvenile justice in Louisiana.*

*"Treated Like Trash: Juvenile Detention in New Orleans Before, During and After Hurricane Katrina" documents the horrific conditions endured by the incarcerated youth, who were trapped in sewage- and chemical-contaminated floodwater and left without food and water for as long as five days. The following first-person accounts by the youth were taken from the report, which is available online at [www.jjpl.org](http://www.jjpl.org).*

**C.K., a 16 year-old boy,** reported "I was locked in my dorm with two other boys until the water was half way up the wall. ... [We] tried to save our clothes and shoes by keeping them on the top bunk where we sat."

**D.B., a 15 year-old boy,** stated, "[There were] 50 kids locked up together in Dorm 4. A lot of them were brought from lockdown. There weren't enough beds for everyone. The water started rising—it reached the middle of my thigh—and kids started jumping on the racks [beds]. Kids started to fight once the water started rising. I got jumped and hit in the eye. R.J. got hit hard in the face and he started bleeding. No one got any medical care."

**K.C., a 16 year-old boy,** told us, "The night of the storm, [we] were placed in some kind of a dorm on the first floor. There were about 40 of us in the dorm room. The lights went out [and] water started coming in. ... [We] had to get on top of [our] beds to get out of the water."

**C.M., a 16 year-old boy,** stated, "A few hours after the storm hit, the water started rising. That night the water started coming out of the toilet and the drains. It smelled like straight swamp water. I was crying and thinking about my people because right before the power went out we saw what was happening on the news and saw the Ninth Ward flooding. Kids were really upset because most of them were from the Lower Ninth."

Children held on the second floor ... reported seeing the water rise below them. **E.G., a 16 year-old boy,** said, "The downstairs ... started flooding around 5 [p.m.] ... You could see the water out the window. When the flooding started, the food stopped coming."

**T.J., a 17 year-old boy,** stated, "The guards let us out [of our cells] once to walk around, but then there was a fight. While I was walking around, I went to the window and looked out. I could see floating trucks. The water rose for a couple of hours until it hit the stairs. Then we were trapped. ... [E]veryone started panicking."

**T.G., a 16 year-old boy,** shared, "I didn't leave my cell for two straight days. The toilet backed up and I covered it with half a mattress, it smelled so bad. Our whole section stank of human waste."

Several boys reported having suffered physical symptoms from hunger. **H.J., a 16-year-old** stated, "Guards kept saying food was coming. Kids were throwing up. ... I was sick and dizzy a lot of the time." **T.G., a 16-year-old,** shared, "Kids were going crazy, shaking their cells for food and water. ..." **R.S., a 16-year-old,** stated, "We went five days without eating. ... Kids were passing out in their cells."

**E.G., a 16-year-old boy,** told us "The water looked like it had a lot of oil in it. It had rainbows in it and lots of trash." **A.F., a 16-year-old boy,** stated "We were so thirsty, we drank the contaminated water."



Prisoners were evacuated to a bridge several days after the Orleans Parish Prison flooded.

Jackson Sun-Herald

# Safe Streets/Strong Communities Reforms N.O. Justice

by Jordan Flaherty

When the floodwaters from Hurricane Katrina began to rise, the 7,000 prisoners in Orleans Parish Prison, the New Orleans city jail, were abandoned.

Ursula Price, an organizer and investigator with Safe Streets/Strong Communities—a grassroots coalition of organizations seeking to reform New Orleans’ criminal justice system—has met with several thousand hurricane survivors who were imprisoned at the time of the storm. Her stories are chilling.

“I grew up in small-town Mississippi,” she said. “We had the Klan marching down our main street, but I’ve never seen anything like this.”

In March 2006, Safe Streets/Strong Communities issued a report based on more than a hundred interviews with prisoners who had been locked up since before Katrina. They found the average number of days people had been held without trial was 385. One person had been locked up for 1,289 days. None of them had been convicted of any crime.

“I’ve been working in the system for the while. I do capital cases and I’ve seen the worst that the criminal justice system has to offer,” Price said. “But even I am shocked that there has been so much disregard for the value of these people’s lives.”

According to the testimony, incarcerated people described their attorneys as “passive,” “not interested” and “absent.” Interviewers were told that “attorneys acted as functionaries for the court rather than advocates for the poor people they represented. ... [T]he customs of the criminal court excused—and often encouraged—poor policing and wrongful arrests. The Orleans Indigent Defender Program acted as a cog in this system rather than a check on its dysfunction.”

In the months since its founding, Safe Streets/Strong Communities has combined a strategy of political pressure,

legal support, and grassroots organizing that involves working directly with the incarcerated, formerly incarcerated and their family members. In its first months, the group has already succeeded in radically transforming the city’s indigent defense board from a corrupt and negligent home of cronyism to a body staffed with criminal justice reform advocates.

## How to Build a Truly Safe Community

*Born in the hurricane’s aftermath, New Orleans’ Safe Streets/Strong Communities Coalition has articulated the following goals for the city’s criminal justice system:*

### **Goal 1: Transform the New Orleans Police Department**

End corruption, misconduct and abuse;

Create a department accountable and transparent to the community it serves;

Create a department that improves community safety, supports crime prevention, and practices effective responses to crime.

### **Goal 2: Transform the Orleans Parish Jail System**

Close Orleans Parish Prison and replace it with a physical structure and living conditions that are safe and humane for everyone;

Ensure that detention is only used to protect public safety or ensure court appearance;

Build, expand and support alternatives to incarceration;

Ensure that the operation, control and budgeting of the jail system is transparent and accountable to the community it serves and is not used as a mechanism for political power and patronage.

### **Goal 3: Transform the New Orleans’ Criminal Court System**

Ensure that the indigent defender system is politically independent, is adequately and equitably funded, and operates as a model client-centered defender system;

Ensure that courts are fair, efficient, and effective;

Ensure that the court system prioritizes and supports effective alternatives to incarceration.

Safe Streets strongly believes that there is a way to make the streets safer without an over-reliance on punishment, jails and brutality. There can be safe streets and strong communities free from violence for everyone in New Orleans, regardless of race or economics. Safe Streets also knows that this moment is a unique opportunity for a bold transformation of a badly broken system. Working with the impressive collection of organizations and individuals who have come together to seize this opportunity, we will pursue our goals strategically and build a public safety system worthy of the people of New Orleans.



# SOUL OF THE GULF: Culture

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Arts and Culture Index

Number of cultural workers employed in New Orleans pre-Katrina: **15,000**

Number of New Orleans cultural workers who lost their jobs due to Katrina: **11,000**

Estimated minimum number of New Orleans cultural workers who were displaced by Katrina: **4,000**

Per-day tourism sector losses to Louisiana and Mississippi as a result of Katrina: **\$44.7 million**

Annual earnings of New Orleans' cultural sector pre-Katrina: **\$300 million**

Estimated uninsured losses to New Orleans' cultural sector from the storm: **\$80 million**

Estimated number of working musicians in New Orleans pre-Katrina: **2,500**

Estimated number of musicians in New Orleans post-Katrina: **250**

Estimated percent of New Orleans musicians who have returned to the area: **10**

Percent of New Orleans cultural institutions that remain closed from storm damage: **75**

Number of homes currently available at Habitat for Humanity's Musicians' Village: **75**

Of the 61 applications from New Orleans-area musicians, percent immediately turned down between February and May 2006 due to credit problems: **50**

Number of musicians approved for housing in the Musicians' Village as of July 2006: **6**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 94

A critical process for any rebuilding of the U.S. Gulf Coast post-Katrina is the full restoration of its arts and cultural sector. The region boasts one of the richest cultural legacies anywhere, internationally recognized for its music, literature, cuisine and dynamic heritage. The rich history of the Gulf is reflected in the arts and culture of its ethnically and linguistically diverse population. Mahalia Jackson, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Robert Johnson, Jean Toomer, Fats Domino, Tennessee Williams and Branford Marsalis are just some of the creative pioneers who called this region home.

Because of its centrality to the service and tourism industries, the heritage and cultural sector is critical to the region's overall economic health. In New Orleans alone, this sector helped pull in about \$5 billion a year in tourism revenue. Thousands of residents earned their livings as writers, musicians, visual artists, proprietors of artistic venues, filmmakers, architects, and curators of museums and historic sites.

Many of the region's cultural workers were displaced throughout the United States as a result of Katrina and Rita. The displacement fractured key social and communal networks that sustained and supported cultural workers, networks that are vital to the health and success of creative persons and communities.

GNOTCC, Ron Calamira



# Restoring Mississippi's Gulf Coast Culture

by Joe Atkins

A month or so before Hurricane Katrina hit, I drove down the beautiful Mississippi coastline between Mobile and New Orleans, and I wondered at the grand old homes that had survived more than a century of storms, fires and the wrecking ball that claimed giant hotels like the Pine Hills, Buena Vista, Edgewater and Mexican Gulf.

Those homes are now part of the blackened, water-logged rubble that still scars the landscape along Highway 90. Even Beauvoir on Beach Boulevard, the last home of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, suffered such severe damage that \$10 million would be needed to fix it. Its insurance company thus far has roughly paid only \$181,000 toward repairs.

Beauvoir's owners, the Mississippi Division of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans, have joined thousands of others in filing a lawsuit against their insurers.

However, Beauvoir was just one of hundreds of historical structures destroyed or severely damaged by Katrina, a lingering blow to one of the South's most culturally rich areas.

"It took out most of the buildings we associate with the Mississippi Gulf Coast," said author and freelance writer Alan Huffman. "It's a defining moment on the coast right now. Everything that's going to be on the coast is taking place now."

Huffman said the region lost more than 350 buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. "In the rush to rebuild the coast, there's no guarantee that some won't just come in and impose their vision."

According to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Biloxi's West Beach Historic District lost 19 of its 66 buildings. Another 125 of the nearly 700 buildings in the Beach Boulevard Historic District in Bay St. Louis were destroyed. Pass Christian's Scenic Drive Historic District lost 50 of its 130 buildings. These numbers don't include the hundreds of other seriously damaged structures.

Huffman and others worry that some of the great diversity and the artistic core that were always at the heart of the Gulf Coast may be lost forever as political and business leaders work together to rebuild the region.

Mary Anderson Pickard, daughter of the famous Gulf Coast artist Walter Anderson, remembers what it was like to see for the first time what remained of her Ocean Springs home after Hurricane Katrina.

"It is such a strange thing to live in a place—all my life essentially—and to find it beaten and torn and destroyed as if it had been bombed. It's as though you have been beaten and torn yourself."

The artist and writer, whose late father became world famous for his paintings and pottery, said the hurricane's effects on art, artists and culture along the Mississippi Gulf Coast were profound. "I lost 40 years of journals, drawings, photographs of my children, which just breaks my heart," she said. "Since the storm, I dig around in the mud, find jewelry, pottery that my father decorated."

Mississippi Arts Commission Executive Director Malcolm White said that art is often the stepchild in recovery efforts. "Our greatest concern is that art will be considered something extra," White said. "We believe it is essential, a major component of the DNA of the Mississippi Gulf Coast."

Many don't realize the richness of the culture along the Gulf Coast, Pickard said. "The Gulf is a diverse place—Vietnamese, Slovenian, Italian. Bay St. Louis was an extension of New Orleans. I somehow feel you've got to consider the difference of the people who live on the coast."

Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour's 42-member blue-ribbon Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal considered plans and visions for a rebuilt coast that included a Gulf Coast-style "Monte Carlo" replete with planned communities, high-rise condos, seafood parks and a new coastal rail line.

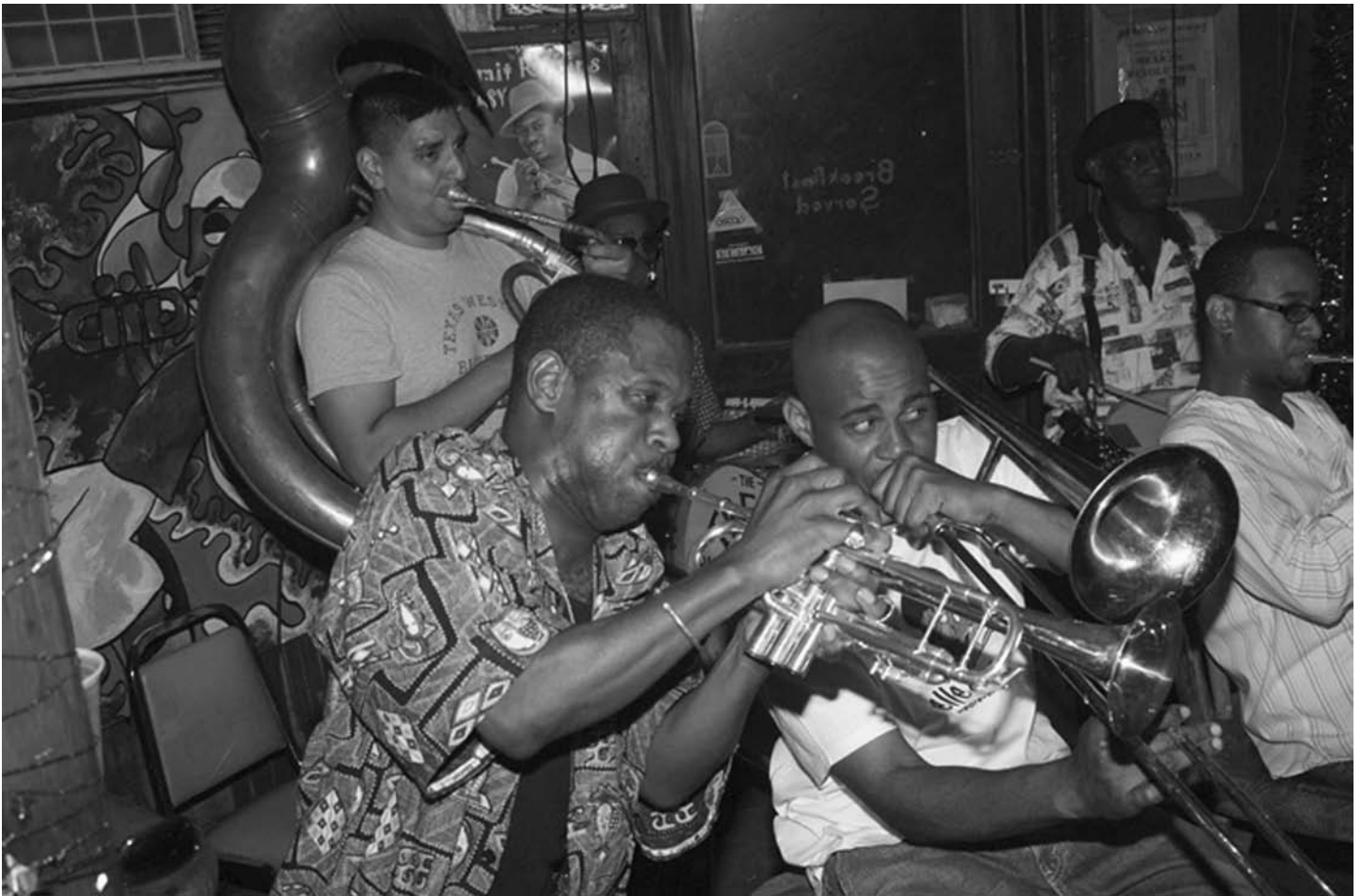
"I fear soulless condos blocking off access to the water, the seaside far more luxurious than most of us could afford," said veteran journalist and former Boston Globe correspondent Curtis Wilkie, who now teaches journalism at the University of Mississippi. "I want the coast to return to at least a semblance of what it was. I hope we don't have a Disneyworld there."



FORT JACKSON, LA, NOV. 1, 2005  
A worker removes a pre-Civil-War document  
from its display case.

Marvin Nauman/FEMA





NEW ORLEANS, JUNE 2006  
Treme Brass Band at Vaughn's  
New Orleans Indymedia

## They Got It Bad

by Katy Reckdahl

**H**ot 8 Brass Band snare drummer Dinerral Shavers grew up in the Lower Ninth Ward, a couple blocks from the levee. After Katrina, his mom's house floated an entire block. He seemed the perfect candidate for Habitat for Humanity's Musicians' Village. But when he and most of band mates applied, all of them were turned down. "We were told to straighten out our credit," he says.

Seven members of the Rebirth Brass Band lost their homes after Hurricane Katrina. Not one has applied for the Musicians' Village, says leader and tuba player Phil Frazier. "I think a lot of musicians have bad credit, so they're just not messing with it," he says.

Habitat started getting the Upper Ninth Ward site ready at the end of February, just after Mardi Gras. The first 75 homes are going on the site of the now-demolished Joseph

Kohn Middle School, a 5.5-acre parcel of land purchased from Orleans Parish Public Schools in January. Jim Pate, head of New Orleans Area Habitat, says that they're hoping for musicians in anywhere from a third to half of these houses.

Between February and May, Habitat received 61 applications. About 50 percent were denied outright or were incomplete. The others are either moving slowly through Habitat's next two phases or are stalled, most often because of missing paperwork. The refusal rate may seem high, says Pate's colleague Sarrah Evans, but typically Habitat families are denied at a much higher rate, more like 80 to 90 percent.

Out of the six officially accepted musicians, half are traditional New Orleans musicians: bassist Peter Badie Jr., singer-harmonica player J.D. Hill, and Mardi Gras Indian queen Cherise Harrison-Nelson. The others are musicians from other idioms: Latin bandleader Fredy Omar,



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When Habitat for Humanity gave a presentation to musicians on how to apply for a house, “You could feel the room get collectively more gloomy as the presentation went on. It was obvious that they felt they had no way of qualifying.”

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world-rock drummer Boyanna Trayanova (from the band Saaraba), and singer Margaret Perez.

Most musicians first heard about the Village in December, after Connick and Branford Marsalis stood with Mayor Ray Nagin and announced the project. The partnership was a logical one, since Connick has long been a loyal supporter of New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity. For the past six years, he’s been the organization’s single largest contributor.

“You could’ve called the Treme neighborhood a musicians’ village before it got too expensive,” says Tanio Hingle, the leader of the New Birth Brass Band who sent in his application a few months ago but hasn’t heard anything. He remembers how musicians would practice in each other’s backyards when he was a youngster. He believes that, if Habitat accepts more musicians, it could easily create a new spot, where musicians and their families would live side by side, socialize, and jam.

Cherise Harrison-Nelson grew up in the Upper Ninth Ward hearing musicians play and Mardi Gras Indians practice. “That was the Guardians of the Flame’s stomping ground down there,” she says. “On Mardi Gras mornings,

my dad, my brother, and my son all came out of the house at 3630 N. Johnson, two blocks away from the Musicians’ Village,” she says. As an adolescent, she attended Kohn School. During that time, she spent long hours sitting on the school’s bike rack by the corner of Johnson and Alvar. After she signed her paperwork with Habitat, she asked for that corner. Her house will be built there, where the bike rack once stood.

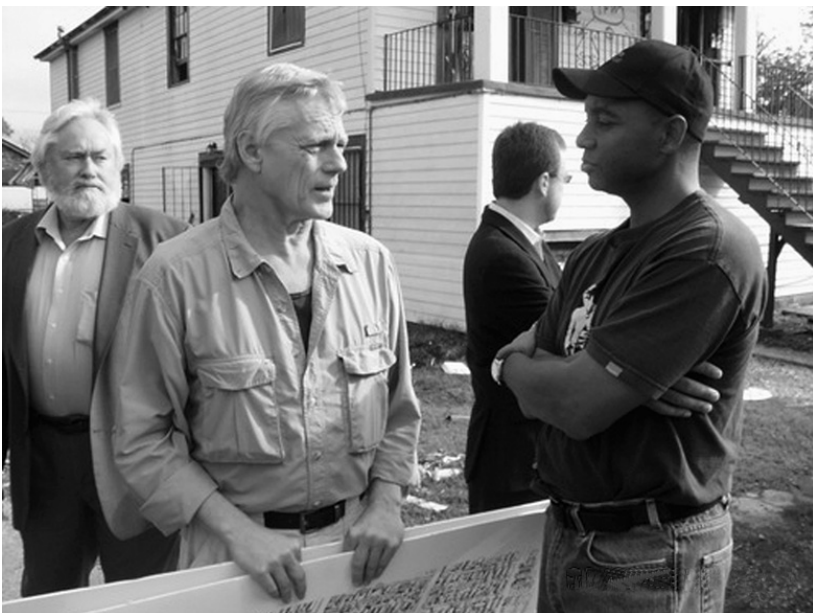
Harrison-Nelson, currently the counsel queen for her late father’s gang, the Guardians of the Flame, believes that musicians and Indians and social and pleasure club members need to hear about the Village in their communities in language they understand. So she organized a housing fair at the Backstreet Cultural Museum on St. Claude Avenue. “We had tables set up for people to talk one-on-one. And in the back, we had beer, chicken, and finger sandwiches,” she says. Habitat got 25 applications, Evans says, although there’s no word yet on how many of those were accepted.

Musicians’ Village houses are designed with two, three, and four bedrooms and—in response to the severe post-Katrina flooding—they are built high off the ground, 5-foot, 7-inch up. The average mortgage payment is about \$500 a month. That’s attractive to Dinerral Shavers, the Hot 8 drummer, who right now is paying “sky-high-ass rent”—\$950 a month for a two-bedroom place. That mortgage payment seems reasonable for most working musicians, says Hingle. “The \$500 ain’t no issue because most people are paying in that much in rent right now,” he says.

He may be 81, but Peter “Chuck” Badie, Jr. heads down to the Musicians’ Village a few days a week to lay block and frame houses in the hot sun. “It ain’t nothing nice to be laying concrete at my age, and I got to hit the bandstand tonight, sugar,” he says. “Clearly we need a lot more musicians if we’re going to fill 70 homes and we have six,” says Habitat for Humanity’s Sarrah Evans. Lately, she’s been telling musicians to call her if they get a denial letter; she promises to explain step-by-step how to re-apply.

It’s daunting, says Bill Taylor from the Tipitina’s Foundation. He watched, a few months ago, as Evans gave a PowerPoint presentation at Tipitina’s for the project. “You could feel the room get collectively more gloomy as the presentation went on,” says Taylor. And then the came the handout—the list of the dozen or so required documents, including copies of all paycheck stubs of 1099s for all jobs within the past year, tax returns and W-2s for the past two years, and proof of divorce or marriage. “They went through that list and a handful of musicians walked out,” says Taylor. “It was obvious that they felt they had no way of qualifying.”

Musicians with bad debts wonder if they can get some assistance paying off their bills so that they can become eligible for a house. What, they ask, about the \$1.2 million raised for the project from benefit concerts and



NEW ORLEANS, 2006  
Jim Pate talks with Branford Marsalis at Musicians’ Village  
New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity

recordings such as Hurricane Relief: Come Together Now, and Our New Orleans: A Benefit for the Gulf Coast? Or the \$1.5 million matching grant from the Dave Matthews Band?

That money is already earmarked for housing, to keep the price of the houses low, says Habitat head Jim Pate.

Chuck Badie's tattooed arm is proof of the three years he spent in the Pacific during World War II, on the U.S.S. Delaware. After returning home, he attended the Gruenwald Music School on the GI Bill, then waited lunchtime tables and played music in the city's finest clubs for \$15 a night, then the union-scale wage for black musicians.

In 1953, Badie moved his family into a seven-room house in the Lower Ninth Ward, at Charbonnet and Johnson. By 1977, he'd paid off the mortgage. And it was plush, he says, with a sofa where he often sat to read and a matching sofa chair that he'd only sat on two or three times. Then there were the photographs covering the walls. The 8-by-10 of his father, Peter Badie, Sr., who played alto sax with Percy Humphrey. And photos of himself and his bass, traveling the world. The one taken in Brussels, Belgium, with Lionel Hampton, whose orchestra he played in for four years. Other shots in other cities with Dizzy Gillespie, Sam Cooke, Roy "Good Rockin" Brown, Louis Jordan, Dave Bartholomew, and fellow AFO executive Harold Battiste. "To me, they're pictures I know I'll never see again. They're gone—everything's gone in that house," says Badie.

A house, he says, is more than just a place to live. When a man owns a house, he puts his heart and soul into it, he says. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy was tough; his house took on eight feet of water. But he dug in and worked and was back there in two months.

This time, he knew he'd never walk inside again. "When I saw the house, I knew it was destroyed," he says. As he stood there, looking at his house for the first time, a network news crew approached. They wanted to interview him. "I told them, 'This is what I just lost; I can't talk about it.' It was like I had just lost a loved one and someone comes up and asks me how do I feel."

Badie knows that his fellow jazz musicians, especially the younger ones, dream of owning homes of their own. But they're having trouble getting into the Musicians' Village, he says. "A musician saw me in the club, asked me to put in a good word for him with Habitat for Humanity. I told him, 'Go up there all the time and hang with them. Stay in their face.' I pray for him," says Badie. "I pray for all of them."

*This story by Katy Reckdahl originally appeared in the July 2006 issue of OffBeat Magazine. OffBeat has focused on the New Orleans and Louisiana music community for almost 20 years. OffBeat is read by subscribers all over the world. Subscriptions and information are available by calling 504-944-4300 or by logging onto [offbeat.com](http://offbeat.com)*

## Organizations Assisting Musicians Displaced by Katrina

### **AMERICAN FEDERATION OF MUSICIANS NEW ORLEANS LOCAL 174-496**

*union representing New Orleans musicians*  
2401 Esplanade Ave.  
New Orleans, LA 70119  
(504) 947-1700  
[www.neworleansmusicians.org](http://www.neworleansmusicians.org)  
[office@neworleansmusicians.org](mailto:office@neworleansmusicians.org)

### **ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ORLEANS**

*nonprofit supporting New Orleans cultural workers*  
25 Baronne St., Suite 1712  
New Orleans, LA 70112  
Phone: (504) 523-1465  
[www.artscouncilofneworleans.org](http://www.artscouncilofneworleans.org)  
[mail@artscouncilofneworleans.org](mailto:mail@artscouncilofneworleans.org)

### **BACKBEAT FUND**

*an initiative to preserve the artistic and cultural heritage of New Orleans by supporting artists*  
Phone: 1-800-417-2014  
[www.backbeatfund.org](http://www.backbeatfund.org)  
[info@backbeatfund.org](mailto:info@backbeatfund.org)

### **JAZZ FOUNDATION OF AMERICA**

*assists jazz and blues musicians in crisis*  
322 West 48th Street, 3rd Floor  
New York, NY 10036  
Phone: (212) 245-3999  
[www.jazzfoundation.org](http://www.jazzfoundation.org)

### **KATRINA'S PIANO FUND**

*provides replacement instruments for musicians*  
400 Main St.  
P. O. Box 1537  
Greenfield, MA 01302  
[www.katrinaspianofund.org](http://www.katrinaspianofund.org)

### **MUSIC MAKER RELIEF FOUNDATION**

*Supports musicians of the U.S. South*  
Eno Valley Station  
P.O. Box 72222  
Durham, NC 27722-2222  
(919) 643-2456  
[www.musicmaker.org](http://www.musicmaker.org)

### **MUSICIANS FOUNDATION**

*provides emergency financial assistance to professional musicians for meeting current living, medical and allied expenses*  
75 Sixth Ave., Suite 2303  
New York, NY 10001  
Phone (212) 239-9137  
[www.musiciansfoundation.org](http://www.musiciansfoundation.org)  
[info@musiciansfoundation.org](mailto:info@musiciansfoundation.org)

### **NEW ORLEANS MUSICIAN'S CLINIC**

*provides affordable health care to musicians*  
2020 Gravier St., Room 729  
New Orleans, LA 70112  
504-568-3712  
[www.wwoz.org/clinic](http://www.wwoz.org/clinic)

### **NEW ORLEANS MUSICIANS HURRICANE RELIEF FUND**

*provides assistance to musicians through fundraising initiatives*  
828 Royal St. #833, New Orleans, LA 70116  
Phone: (800) 957-4026  
[www.nomhrf.org](http://www.nomhrf.org)  
[info@nomhrf.org](mailto:info@nomhrf.org)

### **NOLAGIGS.ORG**

*list of venues for working musicians*  
[www.nolagigs.org](http://www.nolagigs.org)

### **PROJECT HEAL (HELPING EMPLOY ARTISTS LOCALLY)**

*an initiative of Acadiana Arts Council*  
P.O. Box 53762  
Lafayette, LA 70505  
(337) 233-7060  
[www.acadianaartscouncil.org](http://www.acadianaartscouncil.org)  
[info@acadianaartscouncil.org](mailto:info@acadianaartscouncil.org)

### **TIPITINA'S FOUNDATION AND CO-OP**

*a resource center for musicians*  
New Orleans: 501 Napoleon Ave.,  
New Orleans, LA 70115  
Phone: (504) 895-TIPS  
Shreveport: 700 Texas St.,  
Shreveport, LA 71101  
Phone: (318) 934-0000  
Alexandria: 325 DeSoto St.,  
Alexandria, LA 71301  
[www.tipsevents.com/foundation/office.htm](http://www.tipsevents.com/foundation/office.htm)



# **THE NEXT STORM: Hurricane Readiness**

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Hurricane Readiness Index

Number of major hurricanes expected to hit the U.S. in 2006: **3 or 4**

Probability one of those storms will hit the Gulf Coast: **26 percent**

Katrina's category at landfall, and category New Orleans levees were reputedly built to withstand: **3, 3**

Percent of New Orleans flooded by Katrina: **80**

Cost of Army Corps of Engineers' work to repair New Orleans' levees to pre-Katrina specs: **\$800 million**

Minimum depth of flooding expected in some areas of New Orleans if a tropical storm hits today: **5 feet**

Minimum number of New Orleans' 22 pumping stations that have failed since Katrina due to flood damage: **5**

Year by which corps' repair schedule will put city's pump system at full health: **2007**

Sections of New Orleans' official evacuation plans that address pump operators: **0**

Amount by which every mile of coastal wetlands reduces storm surge: **1 foot**

Amount of coastal wetlands Louisiana loses each year: **35 square miles**

Louisiana's national rank for annual wetlands loss: **1**

Distance Louisiana's coastline is expected to move inland in some places by 2040: **33 miles**

Height of some portions of a controversial new levee system the corps has proposed for the La. coast: **60 feet**

Length of time after last year's storms before the Red Cross arrived in some hard-hit rural Gulf communities: **1 month**

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 94

**A** year after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast, the region is still not fully prepared to face another severe storm, despite billions of dollars spent already by the U.S. government.

In Louisiana, the federally built levee system that broke down so dramatically during Katrina remains vulnerable to failure. Though the Army Corps of Engineers has spent at least \$800 million to bring New Orleans' protective system back to where it was before the Category 3 hurricane struck, the agency recently released maps showing that a tropical storm could still flood some city neighborhoods with as much as five feet of water. And the agency's plans to protect the region from storms stronger than Katrina remain controversial, as they rely on massive structures that are costly to build and difficult to engineer on ever-shifting coastal lands.

At the same time, efforts to make the region less susceptible to storm damage have not received the attention they demand. For example, plans to close the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet—a corps-built shipping shortcut from New Orleans to the Gulf that dramatically increases storm surge into the city—are just getting underway despite the long-standing warnings of experts. And efforts to restore Louisiana's disappearing coastal wetlands, which are so critical to moderating storms' impact, remain piecemeal and underfunded.

Meanwhile, questions remain over whether the organizations responsible for assisting disaster victims have learned their lessons from problems experienced in Katrina's chaotic aftermath. Following last year's storms, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Red Cross came under fire for a response that was slow and at times insensitive to victims' needs—and the problems have not been fully fixed. In June, the watchdog Government Accountability Office released a report that gave the agencies low grades for their coordination of post-Katrina relief work. Even more worrisome, the report also faulted the organizations for failing to make the necessary changes to prevent similar difficulties the next time disaster strikes.

Until the federal government summons the political will to tackle these serious issues, the Gulf Coast—indeed, the entire nation—remains very much at risk.



# The Big Uneasy: New Orleans Remains Unprepared for Another Storm

by Sue Sturgis

**H**urricane season officially opened on June 1, and storm forecasters monitoring the situation recently delivered some good news for U.S. Gulf Coast residents.

Experts at Colorado State University have downgraded their initial forecast for this year from seven hurricanes, with five of them being intense storms at Category 3 or higher, to five hurricanes, three of them intense—though that’s still above the long-term average of six hurricanes, two of them intense. The CSU researchers also downgraded the probability of a major storm striking the Gulf Coast from 47 percent to 26 percent, slightly below average for the last century.<sup>(1)</sup>

But even a milder-than-expected hurricane season could spell serious trouble for the still-recovering Gulf—and especially for the vulnerable New Orleans area, where the 350-mile system of protective levees and floodwalls surrounding the below-sea-level city is still not ready to face another big storm.

The system was designed to protect the region from a Category 3 hurricane, which is what Katrina was when it made landfall. The protective system was obviously inadequate then, and it’s still plagued with problems today.

Following Katrina, the Army Corps of Engineers—the federal agency with primary responsibility for building and maintaining the region’s storm-defense infrastructure—launched a \$800 million Task Force Guardian project to repair the city’s faulty levees and floodwalls.

NEW ORLEANS, FEBRUARY 2006

Dismantling of the barge grounded at the levee break in the Lower Ninth Ward.

Robert Kaufmann/FEMA



But that effort has suffered delays and setbacks.

For example, in the Lower Ninth Ward—a largely African-American community that was devastated by Katrina’s floodwaters—the corps built 4,000 feet of new levee and strengthened the floodwalls. However, the rebuilt eastern wall of the Industrial Canal, where a breach inundated the area, is now higher than the old wall on the canal’s west side. As a result, a major storm would cause the western side to overflow first, sending floodwaters into the city.<sup>(2)</sup>

Earlier this month, with Tropical Storm Chris creeping toward the Gulf, construction crews used dirt to shore up weak links in the sheet-pile wall near Lake Pontchartrain.<sup>(3)</sup> The work was supposed to have been completed earlier, but was delayed due to rain.

The corps had initially planned to strengthen those areas by replacing sheet piles with steel panels and other engineering improvements. However, that work was not carried out because the corps failed to finish the required process of first documenting how it would spend the money allocated by Congress for post-Katrina rebuilding. A \$20 billion recovery bill approved by Congress this summer includes \$3.4 billion for levee, floodwall, pump station and canal-closure improvements.<sup>(4)</sup>

The corps has also run into other problems in its effort to shore up the region’s storm defenses. In August, it announced plans to improve designs for a floodwall east of Harvey Canal by building it to 15.5 feet, about four feet over previous designs—and putting the top of the floodwall four feet above a set of gates being installed across the canal.<sup>(5)</sup> Corps engineers are considering various ways of rectifying the discrepancy.

And last month, the corps released maps requested by U.S. Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) showing that rain from tropical storms could flood some New Orleans neighborhoods with as much as 5 feet of water when new floodgates are closed at the entrances to three drainage canals. The floodgates were designed to keep storm surges from Lake Pontchartrain from backing up into canals—but they would also keep rainfall from draining back into the lake.<sup>(6)</sup>

“It confirms exactly what I feared,” said Vitter. “Large areas of the metro area, that may have had minor street flooding before, will now have two to three feet on top of that—significant home flooding—because of the corps’ failure to build adequate pumping capacity for this hurricane season.”<sup>(7)</sup>

As Vitter points out, the flooding threat is exacerbated by New Orleans' troubled system of drainage pumps. To keep low-lying areas of the city from flooding during storms, New Orleans Water and Sewerage Board operates a system of 22 massive pumps. But in the post-Katrina flooding, many of the pumps' electric motors were damaged, and there was no concerted effort by the corps or any other agency to test and repair the system. As a result, at least five pumps have failed so far this year in relatively light rainstorms.<sup>(8,9)</sup>

Last month, the corps reduced its goal for pumping capacity at the damaged London Avenue Canal in case it has to close the canal's floodgates to block storm surge. There have been similar problems at the 17th Street Canal, where the Corps has twice missed targets for increasing pumping capacity.<sup>(10)</sup>

Compounding problems at the pumping stations is the fact that Mayor Ray Nagin's new blueprint for evacuating residents in case of a storm does not include instructions for sheltering or rescuing the city's pump station employees, who were left to fend for themselves during Katrina. Some have said that, in the absence of such a plan, they would refuse to work during the approach of a major hurricane.<sup>(11)</sup>

### Future Protections Uncertain

Meanwhile, the corps' plans to protect New Orleans and south Louisiana against a potential Category 5 storm are proving controversial.

Last month, the corps released an interim report that calls for building what is essentially a continuous levee across the state's coast that would stand as high as 60 feet in places. But experts with Environmental Defense, the National Wildlife Federation and the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center said the wall is a waste of money and time that could be better spent on more focused protection of population centers as well as coastal restoration projects that would reduce storm surge.<sup>(12)</sup>

Coastal restoration is an enormous problem facing Louisiana. Over the past century, the state has suffered a net loss of 1.2 million acres of coastal wetlands and continues to lose about 35 square miles per year—the fastest loss rate in the nation. This makes the state more vulnerable to hurricane damage, since wetlands help reduce storm surge, absorb wave energy and lessen the effects of daily wave action. Every mile of coastal wetlands is estimated to reduce storm surge by about a foot.<sup>(13)</sup>

Louisiana's wetlands are being converted to open water largely as a result of human activity. Ironically, the building of flood-control levees has worsened wetlands losses by preventing the Mississippi River from overflowing its banks and depositing fresh sediment. Canals dug in the wetlands—many of them connected to offshore oil and gas operations—have eroded marshes and provided



NEW ORLEANS, APRIL 2006  
Construction underway at the 17th Street Canal.

Marvin Nauman/FEMA photo

a conduit for saltwater, which in turn kills vegetation needed to stabilize the land.

If the current rate of loss continues, an additional 800,000 acres will disappear by 2040. The Louisiana shoreline will move inland as much as 33 miles in some places.

In 2004, the corps worked with the state of Louisiana and other stakeholders to craft a restoration plan known as the Louisiana Coastal Area project. Even before Katrina, it was estimated that a comprehensive plan to repair and restore the state's wetlands and barrier islands would take \$14 billion and 30 years. The LCA offered a more modest 10-year, \$1.9 billion scaled-down plan, but the funds to implement it still have not been appropriated.

There have been some positive developments recently for coastal restoration efforts, however. Last month, more than \$100 million in stalled wetlands restoration projects got back on track after Louisiana officials reached an agreement that lets the government off the hook for any resulting damage to the oyster industry. Work on the projects is expected to begin early next year.<sup>(14)</sup>

Also last month, the Senate passed a \$12 billion water bill that included \$1.1 billion in coastal recovery funds, which still need to be appropriated. In addition, the measure creates an independent council that will review corps' projects for their worthiness, something the agency's critics have long called for.<sup>(15)</sup>

Congress is also planning to expand operations that will further imperil the Gulf's wetlands. The Senate this month voted to open 8.3 million acres of federal waters in the central Gulf of Mexico to oil and gas drilling, and the House has called for an even greater expansion into waters that were previously off limits.<sup>(16)</sup>

Consequently, Louisiana's wetlands—and the inland communities they protect—remain very much at risk.



# The Strange Life and Death of 'Mr. Go'

by Sue Sturgis

Louisiana environmental advocates recently won some important battles in the long war to shut down the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet—but now they're fighting a new plan to put a landfill on its banks.

MR-GO—dubbed “Mr. Go” by locals—is a 76-mile shortcut from the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans' inner harbor. Completed by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1965 at a cost of \$92 million, the structure was designed to allow ships to avoid the twists and turns of the Mississippi and to accommodate deep-draft vessels that couldn't fit through the Industrial Canal's locks.

The 36-foot-deep waterway, now so silted that it's virtually unusable, proved environmentally ruinous. MR-GO has destroyed more than 20,000 acres of wetlands and altered the ecology of thousands more acres.

Even before Hurricane Katrina, environmentalists and others called for closing the structure, which essentially serves as a “hurricane superhighway” into the city. Computer models suggest that MR-GO boosted Katrina's storm surge by two feet.<sup>(1)</sup> Levees along the structure broke in about 20 places, leading to the flooding of St. Bernard Parish and New Orleans East. MR-GO is also suspected of contributing to breaches along the Industrial Canal.

NEW ORLEANS, JAN. 11, 2006

High school students demonstrate in Jackson Square for levee repairs to protect their city.

Photo by Greg Henshall / FEMA

In May, the Senate passed an emergency supplemental appropriations bill to provide \$12 billion to Louisiana—including \$3.5 million to close MR-GO and mitigate wetlands losses caused by the structure. The legislation went to a House-Senate conference committee, where the provisions de-authorizing MRGO were preserved at the urging of U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.).

Then in July, the Senate passed the Water Resources Development Act authorizing \$2.6 billion in navigation, hurricane protection and coastal restoration projects for Louisiana—including an additional \$360 million toward closing MR-GO. An amendment to the legislation would also create an independent panel to review all corps flood control projects costing more than \$40 million. The amendment's author, U.S. Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.), cited the corps' failure to close MR-GO as evidence of the need for such review.<sup>(2)</sup>

But with these victories comes a new fight for environmentalists: The corps' plan for MR-GO's closure includes the construction of a landfill on 200 acres of wetlands where MR-GO intersects with the Intracoastal Waterway. Newport Environmental Services is seeking a permit from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and the corps for a construction and demolition waste facility to accommodate the enormous amount of trash created by the storm<sup>(3)</sup>.

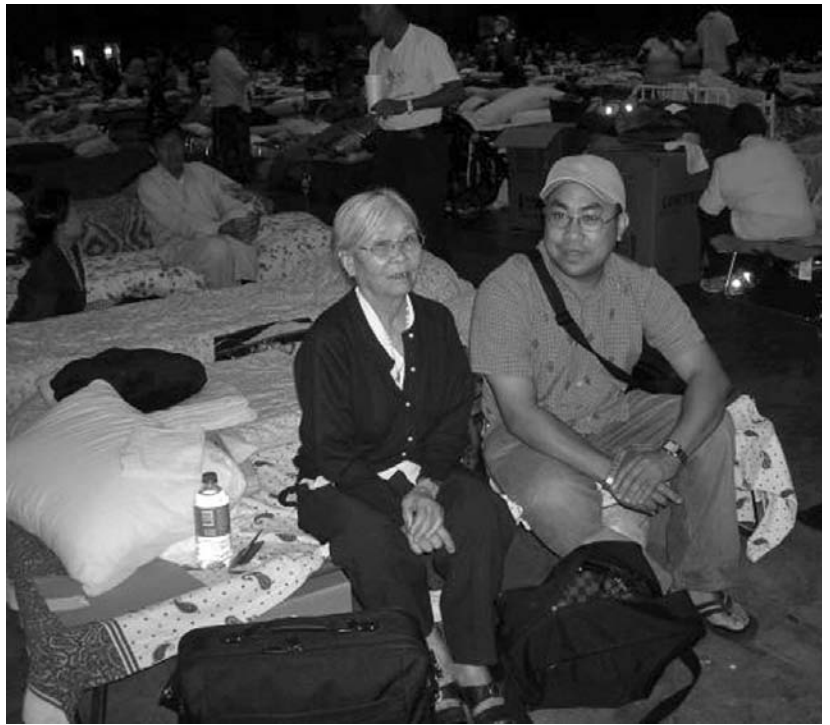
“I think everybody joked about using ‘white goods’ to close the MR-GO,” Sierra Club Delta Chapter Chair Leslie March told New Orleans CityBusiness<sup>(4)</sup>, “but this proposal comes dangerously close to making that a reality.”





Vietnamese-American survivors were relocated to Austin, San Antonio, and Fort Chaffee, Arkansas.

Mary Queen of Vietnam Church website



## Leaving Immigrants Behind

*Vicky Cintra is the organizing coordinator of the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance, an organization that fights the abuse of immigrants in the state. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, MIRA! witnessed serious instances of discrimination against immigrants in the Red Cross centers. Elena Everett and Chris Kromm interviewed Vicky from her office in Biloxi in June.*

"They would ask Latinos seeking emergency cash assistance for the birth certificates, drivers' licenses and Social Security cards of every member in the family," Cintra recalled. "People who went through the worst disaster in the history of the United States often lost those documents, including U.S. citizens, but the Red Cross was targeting the Latino population."

Consequently, some immigrants were unable to get needed assistance. Latinos were also kicked out of Red Cross shelters based on the assumption that they must be out-of-state workers and therefore ineligible to stay, Cintra said.

Immigrants faced difficulties in dealing with the Federal Emergency Management Agency as well. "FEMA handed out thousands of fliers saying that if you were an immigrant and didn't qualify on your own for assistance, but if you had a child who qualified by being a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident alien, that the entire household would qualify," Cintra reported. "So people flocked to qualify. But as a result, five of them were arrested for immigration violations."

Immigrants who did not speak English were also at a disadvantage when it came to getting disaster readiness information. For example, FEMA gave Cintra door hangers with evacuation details in Spanish, so she called the number listed.

"They hung up on me when I spoke Spanish," Cintra said. "And WLOX [an ABC TV news affiliate serving coastal Mississippi] put out a booklet telling people what they need to do in case of another hurricane, and it was all in English."

Cintra also hasn't seen FEMA or the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency putting out enough information in Vietnamese, another language spoken by many coastal residents. And she's worried that it's going to be hard to bridge a cultural gap that agencies are reluctant to acknowledge exists.

For example, Cintra attended a training session for the Red Cross and asked what the organization has done to ensure its shelter managers are more culturally sensitive in future hurricanes. How will they make sure volunteers don't evict people improperly, or that storm survivors aren't being ordered to produce lost documents when they have immediate concerns that need to be addressed?

"The Red Cross response was like, 'Oh, well, that wasn't our fault—that was law enforcement,'" Cintra said. "It's time someone took responsibility. How can you tell me you're going to learn from your mistake when you haven't even accepted that you have made one?"



*In the days after Katrina, when rescue helicopters appeared over the skies of New Orleans, the employees of Blackwater USA were among them. Based in Moyock, N.C., Blackwater is best known as the mercenary army that guarded Paul Bremer when he headed the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. Taking the initiative to fly to New Orleans after the storm, Blackwater soon garnered contracts for guarding hotels, businesses and residences.*

*The Department of Homeland Security also hired Blackwater to guard Federal Emergency Management Agency distribution points, raising concerns about the militarization of aid: the prospect that, rather than being rescued by trained and accountable civil servants, survivors of disasters will be met instead with armed employees trained for conflict.*

## It's in the Black(water)

by Jeremy Scahill

Tens of thousands of Hurricane Katrina victims remain without homes. Financial resources, desperate residents are told, are scarce. But at least New Orleans has a Wal-Mart parking lot serving as a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center with perhaps the tightest security of any in the world. That's thanks to the more than \$30 million Washington has shelled out to the Blackwater USA security firm since Katrina hit.

Under contract with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Protective Service, Blackwater's men are ostensibly protecting federal reconstruction projects for FEMA. Documents show that the government paid Blackwater \$950 a day for each of its guards in the area. Several of the company's guards stationed in

New Orleans said they were being paid \$350 a day, leaving Blackwater with \$600 per man, per day to cover lodging, ammo, other overhead—and profits.

According to Blackwater's government contracts, from Sept. 8 to Sept. 30, 2005 the company was paid \$409,000 for providing 14 guards and four vehicles to "protect the temporary morgue in Baton Rouge, LA." That contract kicked off a hurricane boon for Blackwater. From September to the end of December 2005, the government paid Blackwater at least \$33.3 million—well surpassing the amount of Blackwater's contract to guard Ambassador Paul Bremer when he was head of the U.S. occupation of Iraq. And the company has likely raked in much more in the hurricane zone. Exactly how much is unclear, as attempts to get information on Blackwater's current contracts in New Orleans have been unsuccessful.

"We saw the costs, in terms of accountability and dollars, for this practice in Iraq, and now we are seeing it in New Orleans," says Illinois Democrat Jan Schakowsky, who has been one of Blackwater's few critics in Congress. "They have again given a sweetheart contract—without an open bidding process—to a company with close ties to the administration."

Schakowsky and a handful of other Congress members entered the report into the Congressional Record during hearings on Katrina and cited it in letters to DHS Inspector General Richard Skinner, who then began an inquiry. In letters to Congressional offices in February, Skinner defended the Blackwater deal, asserting that it was "appropriate" for the government to contract with the company.

Skinner admitted that "the ongoing cost of the contract ... is clearly very high" and then quietly dropped a bombshell: "It is expected that FEMA will require guard services on a relatively long-term basis (two to five years)."

Two to five years? Already most of the 330 federally contracted private guards in the hurricane zone are working for Blackwater, according to the Washington Post. Another firm, DynCorp, is also trying to grab more of the action, offering its security services for less than \$700 per day per guard.

Schakowsky charges that the internal DHS review of the company fails to address the major issues stemming from deploying private forces on U.S. streets. In testimony this past September Schakowsky said, "Ask any American if they want thugs from a private, for-profit company with no official law-enforcement training roaming the streets of their neighborhoods. The answer will be a resounding NO."

Hiring Blackwater, says Schakowsky, "may be legal, but it is not a good deal for taxpayers and Gulf region residents in particular."

*This is an excerpt of a longer article that originally appeared in The Nation online on May 22, 2006.*



NEW ORLEANS, SEPTEMBER 2005  
A Blackwater Security guard (right) talks with soldiers from the Army National Guard about security at Disaster Medical Assistance Team center.

MARVIN NAUMAN/FEMA photo

# Red Cross Addresses Post-Storm Missteps

by Sue Sturgis

While the survivors of Hurricane Katrina and Rita struggled last year to find food and housing, help was slow in coming—and poor coordination between the American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency was at least partly to blame.

That was the finding of a June report from the Government Accountability Office, the watchdog arm of Congress.<sup>(1)</sup> It was commissioned by Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), chair of the Senate Finance Committee.

“The report leaves the impression that when the next hurricane hits, leaving people hungry and homeless, FEMA and the Red Cross will be haggling over who’s supposed to provide food and shelter,” Grassley said.<sup>(2)</sup>

The National Response Plan created after the 9/11 attacks requires FEMA and the Red Cross to cooperatively manage the federal response to domestic disasters. Katrina was the first time the plan was put into action.

Following the storm, the Red Cross—the nation’s largest and oldest disaster-relief organization—took on 200,000 new volunteers and collected \$2 billion in donations.<sup>(3)</sup> However, there were widespread complaints that help was slow in coming to victims, or in some cases never arrived.

Residents of New Orleans as well as rural Gulf Coast communities reported spending hours trying to call the Red Cross only to get busy signals. And people from the small, predominantly Native American communities southwest of New Orleans reported that the organization didn’t begin providing supplies until nearly a month after Rita hit.<sup>(4)</sup>

Some Red Cross volunteers were also criticized for poor treatment of African Americans and Latinos, and for stealing relief supplies and engaging in other acts of fraud and criminal behavior.

This wasn’t the first time the Red Cross has come under fire for poor performance following a disaster. In the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, the organization was widely criticized for a plan to spend money collected for the victims’ families on other purposes. In the subsequent uproar, CEO Bernadine Healy resigned, and the organization backed away from the alternative spending plan.<sup>(5)</sup>

Two months after Katrina, amidst mounting criticism of the organization, Marsha Evans resigned as president and was replaced by Interim President Jack McGuire. But the problems in the Red Cross’s response to the disaster went deeper than personnel issues.

In its report, GAO found disagreement between FEMA and the Red Cross about where the charity should direct



Kaufmann/FEMA



Win Henderson / FEMA

its requests for FEMA assistance. “Because of the lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, the agencies spent time during the response effort trying to establish operations and procedures rather than focusing solely on coordinating services,” the report said.

GAO recommended that FEMA and the Red Cross work to reach agreement on 2006 hurricane season operating procedures, and it called on the Red Cross to implement staffing strategies that would improve working relationships and retention of institutional knowledge.

The charity and government agency have begun meeting to work out their coordination problems. In May, they signed a memo of understanding to better define their roles when disaster strikes.<sup>(6)</sup>

And in June, the Red Cross released a report on how it plans to improve its hurricane response work. It expanded on the organization’s previously announced steps to improve service delivery, diversity and accountability in hopes of preventing similar problems from occurring after the next big disaster.<sup>(7)</sup>



**THE WORLD IS  
WATCHING:  
Human Rights**

## KATRINA ONE-YEAR INDEX

### Human Rights Index

Number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide: **25 million**

Number of persons displaced by Katrina from Louisiana: **645,000 to 1.1 million**

Number displaced from Mississippi: **66,000 to several hundred thousand**

Number of IDPs in Afghanistan since war began in 2001: **153,000**

Number of IDPs in Bosnia-Herzegovina: **182,000**

Number of people displaced or left homeless by the May 2006 Indonesian earthquake: **600,000**

Number of IDPs due to December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami: **about 1 million**

Number of countries contacted by the U.N. Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons in 2005, to intervene "on situations raising concerns of a more general nature": **4\***

Number of such countries outside of Africa: **1**

Number of United Nations Guiding Principles on the human rights of internally displaced persons: **30**

Minimum number of these principles could apply to human rights violations from Hurricane Katrina, according to one international law scholar: **16**

Number of languages these principles have been translated into: **40**

Number of the four International Conventions on Human Rights, on which the Guiding Principles are based, that the United States has ratified: **1**

*\*Botswana, Sudan, United States, Zimbabwe*

Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch/Institute for Southern Studies, August 2006.  
Sources on p. 95

There are two international human rights treaties the United States has ratified and is bound to enforce: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified in 1992, and the International Convention on the Elimination of Race Discrimination— together, viewed as the international "Bill of Rights."

In July 2006, a delegation from the U.S. Human Rights Network led a delegation to Geneva to document U.S. violations of the ICCPR, including obligations to protect life and property, and uphold principles of non-discrimination.

"The unnecessary loss of life resulting from Hurricane Katrina and the discriminatory nature of evacuation plans for New Orleans Parish constitute human rights violations," said Network executive director Ajamu Baraka. "The facts are simple: The U.S. knew of the threat to life from Hurricane Katrina and its associated flooding in New Orleans, but it failed to protect the lives of its residents."<sup>(1)</sup>

Before ratifying the ICCPR in 1992, however, the U.S. Congress attached various "reservations, understandings and declarations" limiting the application of the treaty within this country—including for Hurricane Katrina. Human rights groups charge this contributes to the image that the United States believes it is above international human rights obligations.

There are other non-ratified human rights agreements that human rights scholars say could apply to Hurricane Katrina, including the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, developed in 1998 to address the over 50 million people worldwide who have been internally uprooted by disasters and conflict. The U.N.'s Guiding Principles are targeted at "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence" for a variety of causes—including "natural or human-made disasters."<sup>(2)</sup>

As Frederic L. Kirgis, professor of law emeritus at Washington and Lee University, points out, the Guiding Principles focus on three areas. One is protection against displacement—officials taking all the measures they can to "protect victims from immediate . . . and known risks." The second is protection during displacement, including, "at a minimum, ensuring equal access to food, shelter, water, housing, clothing and health care." And lastly, the principles seek protection after displacement, including tasking authorities to "establish the conditions and means for internally displaced persons to return voluntarily."<sup>(3)</sup>

Following the testimony of several U.S. and international human rights groups, in late July the 18-member U.N. Human Rights Committee condemned the United States for its treatment of poor people and blacks, both of whom it found to be "disadvantaged" by Hurricane Katrina.

The committee went on to say, "In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, [the U.S.] should increase its efforts to ensure that the rights of poor people and in particular African Americans are fully taken into consideration in the reconstruction plans with regard to access to housing, education and health care."<sup>(4)</sup>



# Katrina and Human Rights

by Adrien Katherine Wing

Even though I felt sorry for the people of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, there was one place that I hoped was flooded by the hurricane. It was my great-great-grandfather's house. Why would I want my ancestor's house to be flooded?

My ancestor was Confederate Gen. Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, who fired on Fort Sumter, starting the Civil War. He lived in New Orleans at 1113 Chartres St. after the war, from 1865 to 1867. He was a glorious war hero to Southerners, even though their side and their cause had lost. Because of Beauregard's heroic status, the home that he rented was restored to its antebellum glory in the 20th century and is now a tourist attraction known as the Beauregard-Keyes House.

I had always hated the fact that through my veins coursed the blood of a general who fought to preserve a way of life that had enslaved my other ancestors. So in September 2005, I hoped that his house was buried deep beneath the floodwaters—tourist attraction no more. But it was located in the French Quarter—the high ground. This house was spared, while the modern-day descendants of so many slaves who lived on the low ground lost everything.

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**As a society, we must vigilantly monitor the long-term human-rights status and treatment of the Katrina victims wherever they may be located.**

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There is one part of Beauregard's legacy that I have accepted. His family originally came from France, and my family, the black descendants, have always learned French. My study of French turned into a career as an international lawyer and, now, a law professor. So when I saw dark-skinned people wading through floodwaters after Hurricane Katrina, I looked at the tragedy with the eyes of an international lawyer. Some commentators called Katrina victims "refugees." After all, they did resemble the poor, homeless, and hungry unfortunates in such places as the Sudan. Nonetheless, because the evacuees did not flee outside their national boundaries, they are technically called "internally displaced persons" under international law.

The United Nations developed the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in 1998. Those principles do not rise to the level of a binding treaty that nations are obligated to follow. It should be noted, however, that many of the rights mentioned in the principles are binding on the United States because the same concepts appear in the binding treaties. Furthermore, in 2005 the United

Nations General Assembly stated that it recognized the principles as an "important international framework for the protection of internally displaced people."

Under Principle 1, internally displaced people are entitled to the full rights that all other persons in the country enjoy. The principle does not limit itself to citizens but applies to all persons. This is important because there were thousands of permanent residents, lawful temporary residents and undocumented people in the areas affected by Katrina. Undocumented immigrants were eligible for short-term disaster relief. Yet the Department of Homeland Security made it clear that such people would have no immunity from deportation. Many were detained, and deportation proceedings were started against them.

Under Principle 3, it is the primary obligation of the national authorities to implement the rights afforded to internally displaced persons. While local authorities would certainly be involved, the ultimate responsibility in the United States would be on the federal level. It is clear that in the case of Katrina, a disproportionate number of black people and poor people could not, and many still cannot, exercise those rights because of government failures at the local, state and federal levels.

According to Principle 4, certain groups are especially entitled to protection, including children, pregnant mothers, persons with disabilities and the elderly. Once again, it is evident that our government failed these specially protected groups. How many newborns died in the aftermath of the hurricane? How many pregnant women miscarried? We heard of the tragic story of a nursing home where the bodies of 34 elderly people were found, and cases where the elderly would not leave their homes and died as a result.

Under Principle 6, displacement should also not last longer than required. Yet, there are numerous examples of people waiting many months for Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers, which could provide temporary housing as they rebuild or repair their homes.

Principle 7 makes clear that the authorities are supposed to provide proper accommodations with adequate safety, nutrition, health and hygiene. The failure of the government to provide transportation to relocate people before the hurricane struck was one failure related to this principle. Even days later when transportation was brought in, the people on the buses did not have proper food or water, nor were they told where they were going. According to Principle 7, family members should not be separated. Yet, many family members remained separated for months.

Internally displaced persons also have a right to dignity



and physical and mental integrity under Principle 11. I remember the images of dead bodies lying for days in front of distraught and hungry black people. It is hard to imagine the nightmares that the children who witnessed such horrors are having. Are they getting psychotherapy or other proper medical treatment?

Under Principle 11, people also should be protected against gender-specific violence, such as rape and assault. Yet there were apparently various incidents of this kind, both inside and outside of the convention center and the Superdome.

Principle 16 is one of the most touching. Under that principle, the displaced have a right to know the fate of missing relatives, and the state should collect and identify remains and return them to the next of kin. Months after the disaster, there are still many unclaimed remains and more than several thousand missing persons. The media, rather than the government, have often taken the lead in locating missing persons and, sadly, helping to match survivors with remains of loved ones.

Under Principle 18, displaced persons are also entitled to an adequate standard of living. The principle quantifies this vague term by stating that, at a minimum, the authorities should provide access to food, shelter, water, housing, clothing and health care.

Medical care is of special concern under Principle 19. Many people did not have the proper access to medication for their chronic conditions. Moving from place to place or living in crowded temporary housing cannot be conducive to appropriate medical care. Additionally, many people must be experiencing mild to severe depression because they may have lost everything—including family members. Their psychological needs could be the most pressing, yet least likely to be treated. Principle 19 also mentions the special needs of women, including reproductive care and counseling for victims of sexual abuse.

Principle 20 concerns the responsibility of the government to provide necessary documentation to displaced people. How many people have not been able to get the documents they need to start new lives? To start most jobs, one must show proof of work authorization: a U.S. birth certificate or passport, or a foreign passport and work visa, for example. To rent an apartment, identification must be provided in most instances. Documents such as marriage licenses, voter cards, driver's licenses, birth and death certificates, and child support and divorce records could all be needed for people transitioning to new communities.

Principle 21 states that no one should be arbitrarily deprived of property or possessions. It appears that landlords may have unceremoniously dumped people's belongings on the street without attempting to find the tenants, in order to rent the apartments out for higher prices. Moreover, there is great fear that the city of New Orleans



WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 2005

New Orleans Indymedia

may bulldoze properties without giving proper notice.

Principle 22 states that there should be no discrimination in the right to vote or to participate in community and public affairs. Fall elections in New Orleans were postponed until the spring. Many are worried about the ability of evacuees to vote in person or by absentee ballot.

Principle 23 concerns the right to education. Ironically, many evacuees may get a better education now that they have abandoned the failed New Orleans school system. On the other hand, problems have occurred in the Houston schools, as local students resent the New Orleans students. How many of these New Orleans children will be neglected in classes there because they are just too far behind their peers? How many teachers will mistake depression for stupidity and ignore them?

The final area that the principles cover is protection after displacement: return, resettlement and reintegration. Principle 28 requires the government to help establish the conditions necessary to allow displaced persons to either return to their areas or residence or be resettled voluntarily. The displaced themselves are supposed to participate in the planning and management of their return. Many people now forced to live outside the Big Easy are worried that they and their needs are being excluded from the redevelopment plans for the area.



How effectively have all levels of government helped all the evacuees keep in touch?

According to Principle 29, the displaced are not to be discriminated against in the provision of services, whether they return home or live elsewhere. Unfortunately, it appears that after an initial groundswell of sympathy in many places, the evacuees may have worn out their welcome. Race, class and cultural differences coupled with preexisting stereotypes have led to discrimination at many levels.



Survivors Village

The authorities are also supposed to help the displaced recover their property and possessions. If this is not possible, the authorities must “provide or assist those persons in obtaining appropriate compensation or another form of just reparation,” according to Principle 29. Many homeowners lost everything but did not have proper insurance coverage for flooding. Will the federal government make the insurance companies pay up anyway, or cover the losses from federal funds? If a bank foreclosed on a devastated property after the initial three-month hiatus on collecting mortgage payments, is the federal government stepping in to prevent that or to cover the payments? Many people were renters and lacked insurance that would cover this disaster. Will the government step in to replace their valuables or prevent them from being evicted or rent-gouged?

The Guiding Principles provide a comprehensive framework for all levels of government in the United States still grappling with providing services in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As a society, we must vigilantly monitor the long-term human-rights status and treatment of the Katrina victims wherever they may be located. National, state and local governments must be made to live up to their various domestic and international legal obligations over the years to come.

## U.N. Principles of Internal Displacement

from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

### Who are internally displaced persons?

According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, internally displaced persons (also known as “IDPs”) are “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border.”

### What rights do internally displaced persons have?

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, created in 1998, restate and compile existing international human rights and humanitarian law germane to the internally displaced and also attempt to clarify gray areas and gaps in the various instruments with regard to situations of particular interest to the internally displaced.

The Guiding Principles note that arbitrary displacement in the first instance is prohibited (Principles 5-7). Once persons have been displaced, they retain a broad range of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights,

including the right to basic humanitarian assistance (such as food, medicine, shelter), the right to be protected from physical violence, the right to education, freedom of movement and residence, political rights such as the right to participate in public affairs and the right to participate in economic activities (Principles 10-23). Displaced persons also have the right to assistance from competent authorities in voluntary, dignified and safe return, resettlement or local integration, including help in recovering lost property and possessions. When restitution is not possible, the Guiding Principles call for compensation or just reparation (Principles 28-30).

### Whose responsibility is it to protect and assist internally displaced persons?

As a crucial element of sovereignty, it is the governments of the states where internally displaced persons are found that have the primary responsibility for their assistance and protection. The international community’s role is complementary.

At the international level, no single agency or organization has been designated as the global lead on protection and assistance of internally displaced persons. Rather, all are called upon to cooperate with each other to help address these needs pursuant to the “collaborative approach.”



# Testimony to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights

*On July 17, 2006, New Orleans-based Rev. Lois Dejean delivered testimony to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights in Geneva, charging that the government of the United States was negligent and discriminatory in its response to Hurricane Katrina. Reverend Dejean serves as interim director of the Gert Town Revival Initiative.*

My name is Lois Dejean and I'm here at the United Nations in Geneva with a large and diverse coalition of organizations and individuals who, like me, are struggling to protect human rights in the United States.

My children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are among the hundreds of thousands of Hurricane Katrina survivors who—to this day—have no place to call home. In the aftermath of Katrina, displaced Gulf Coast residents are abused by the police, face restrictions on their right to vote, lack health care, are denied employment opportunities, and are subjected to a hostile and broken educational system.

Right now, we have scores of communities in New Orleans and across the Gulf Coast region that look like Hurricane Katrina passed yesterday. Because this situation is so dire, people are hopeless—the suicide rate is three times higher than the national average.

In the Gulf Coast, we are facing a variety of racist governmental actions that are denying our basic human rights. Our government built a substandard flood control system that caused 80 percent of the predominantly African-American city of New Orleans to flood and 1,588 people to die. These deaths could have been prevented.

Before Katrina occurred, our government knew that the majority of African Americans and the poor would not be able to evacuate because they don't have vehicles or the money to pay for a hotel room. But our government only prepared an evacuation plan that just helped predominantly white people who have cars and the wealth to live away from their homes. This caused so many people, including me and my family, to be trapped in a flooding city without food, water or medical help.

When the flood waters poured into the city, my family and I were kicked out of a New Orleans hotel where we had sought shelter. Our lives meant nothing to the hotel owner, but more importantly our lives meant nothing to our government. However, news reporters and volunteers were able to get to the Gulf Coast region long before government agencies did.

On the streets of the United States of America, people, including the elderly and babies, died waiting for a gov-

ernment rescue. We are in the hurricane season right now, and our government has failed to develop an effective hurricane evacuation plan. And for all this suffering, the United States government refuses to recognize any obligation to establish a victims' assistance fund to adequately compensate us for our devastating losses.

Our government also went out of its way to restrict the voting rights of African Americans—even though it must protect our voting rights under federal law and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The U.S. government refused to set up satellite voting places in the cities where we were displaced, but during the last several years it didn't have any trouble setting up satellite voting places for Iraqis, South Africans and Armenians who were living in the United States and wanted to vote in their home-country elections.

The government scattered Gulf Coast residents to just about all 50 states, as far as Alaska and Hawaii. But, if you wanted to vote in the spring 2006 elections in New Orleans, you had to find a way to get to Louisiana to vote in person, or you voted by mail or fax through a long and drawn-out process that had no guarantee that your vote would be counted.



GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, JULY 2006  
Rev. Lois Dejean of the Gert Town Revival Initiative testifies on human rights violations under Katrina.

U.S. Human Rights Campaign



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**The U.S. government refused to set up satellite voting places in the cities where we were displaced, but didn't have any trouble setting up satellite voting places for Iraqis, South Africans and Armenians who were living in the United States and wanted to vote in their home-country elections.**

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The U.S. government is using all sorts of tactics to deny African Americans and the poor the human right to housing. Sixty percent of the people in New Orleans are renters who can't come back because the landlords have tripled the price for rental homes and apartments. I was evicted from the house I was living in for 28 years. Three of my children and six of my grandchildren lost their homes and everything in them. While our government has supported controls on rent increases in places like New York City, it has refused to do so in our Gulf Coast communities.

People who lived in government-subsidized housing literally have been locked out of their homes—there is steel fencing with barbed wire circling public housing which suffered little or no hurricane damage. U.S. government officials have publicly stated that the city of New Orleans will have fewer African Americans and they have gone so far as to plan new housing developments that will force out a significant majority of African-American public housing residents.

Government officials have also broken housing agreements to displaced African Americans that threaten them with homelessness at the end of this month. On July 31, 2006, the government will cut off all housing support to tens of thousands of people, including my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. I am appalled that this United States of America can be so heartless.

All that I have said to you is only the tip of the iceberg of injustices we are suffering on the Gulf Coast at the hands of our government. You can't experience all that I have and believe for one moment that the United States government is protecting the civil and political rights of Gulf Coast residents.

At this United Nation's Committee on Human Rights session, I've learned that the international community has more concern for the human rights of Americans—all races, all backgrounds, all socio-economic levels—than our own United States government does.



Milvirtha Hendricks, 85, waits in the rain with other flood victims outside the convention center in New Orleans, in this Sept. 1, 2005 file photo

CREDIT: AP Photo/Eric Gay.

# Katrina Directory

*In collaboration with the New Orleans Network ([www.new-orleansnetwork.org](http://www.new-orleansnetwork.org)), Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch has compiled a directory of organizations working for change in the Gulf Coast.*

*New Orleans Network compiled the list of New Orleans-led community organizations. It is by no means comprehensive, but is a cross-section of groups, designed to provide some guidance to those interested in working on these issues.*

*The following are some of the organization featured in the Reconstruction Watch Katrina Directory at [www.reconstructionwatch.org](http://www.reconstructionwatch.org).*

## Greater New Orleans Area

A Fighting Chance  
Advocates for Environmental Human Rights  
African American Leadership Project  
Agenda for Children  
Alliance for Affordable Energy  
Artspot Productions  
Ashe Cultural Arts Center  
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now  
Central City Partnership  
Citizens for a Strong New Orleans East  
Common Ground Relief Collective  
Common Ground Health Clinic  
Communities in Schools  
Critical Resistance New Orleans  
Good Work Network  
Greater New Orleans AFL-CIO  
Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center  
Guardians of the Flame Cultural Arts Collective  
Hispanic Apostolate of the Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans  
House of Dance and Feathers  
Mondo Bizarro  
INCITE!  
Katrina's House of Care  
KIDsmART  
Latino Health Outreach Project  
Loyola Law School Clinic/Justice for New Orleans  
Neighborhood Gallery  
Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans  
Neighborhood Planning Network  
Neighborhood Story Project  
New Orleans Food and Farm Network  
New Orleans Kid Camera Project  
New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation  
New Orleans Neighborhood Development Collaborative  
New Orleans Network  
New Orleans Outreach  
New Orleans Worker Resource Center  
NO/AIDS Task Force  
People's Environmental Center  
People's Institute for Survival and Beyond  
People's Hurricane Relief Fund & Oversight Coalition  
People's Organizing Committee  
Plan B

Porch Cultural Organization and Center  
Safe Streets/Strong Communities  
Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force  
Twomey Center for Peace through Justice  
United Front for Affordable Housing  
The Vietnamese Initiative for Economic Training  
YA/YA Inc. (Youth Aspirations/Young Artists)  
Youth Empowerment Project  
Zeitgeist Multi-disciplinary Arts Center / Barrister's Gallery

## Louisiana Organizations

All Congregations Together  
American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana  
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana  
Common Cause Louisiana  
Family and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children  
Four Directions  
Jeremiah Group  
Louisiana Environmental Action Network  
Louisiana Federation of Teachers  
United Houma Nation

## Mississippi Organizations

Amos Network  
Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
M.I.R.A  
Mississippi Sierra Club  
Mississippi Workers Center  
Moore Community House/MS Low-Income Childcare Coalition  
Southern Echo  
Turkey Creek Community Initiatives

## Gulf Coast and Southern Organizations

Deep South Center for Environmental Justice  
Green Project  
Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch  
Gulf Restoration Network  
Institute for Southern Studies  
Moving Forward Gulf Coast  
Project South  
S.O.S. After Katrina

## National Organizations and Diaspora Groups

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now  
Brookings Institute  
Center for Social Inclusion  
Color of Change  
INCITE!  
Katrina Information Network  
National Hip Hop Caucus  
People's Hurricane Relief Fund & Oversight Coalition  
People's Organizing Committee  
Policy Link  
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Student Hurricane Network  
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Thousands of survivors gathered on bridges to escape flood waters, often waiting several days for evacuation.

FEMA/ Marty Bahamonde





## ABOUT GULF COAST RECONSTRUCTION WATCH

**GULF COAST RECONSTRUCTION WATCH** — [www.reconstructionwatch.org](http://www.reconstructionwatch.org) — was launched in October 2005 to document and investigate the rebuilding of the Southern Gulf in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Through original reporting, in-depth features, voices from community leaders, and other unique coverage, Watch aims to promote a more democratic and accountable reconstruction in the South.

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