



A Katrina Reader

Readings by & for Anti-Racist Educators and Organizers

Where There Is Oppression, There Is Resistance

National Anti-racist Organization Calls for U.N. Investigation of Federal Response to Katrina

Organization:

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

Date Published:

09/06/2005

The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, one of the nation's foremost anti-racist training organizations, today called for a full investigation by the United Nations of the federal response to the Katrina catastrophe in Mississippi and Louisiana, and especially in the city of New Orleans.

"This calamity demonstrates how racism manifests itself in every institution in this country," said Ronald Chisom, executive director of the People's Institute, a 25-year old, multiracial organization headquartered in New Orleans. "With the national and international coverage of hurricane Katrina, the world has seen the real face of racism in America. Only an international body will be able to hold accountable the political leaders who had the knowledge but did not act, who had the power, but did not use that power to preserve the lives and human dignity of all people."

Rooted in the culture of New Orleans, The People's Institute is intimately familiar with the history of racism in New Orleans and the south. Although it is a national organization with a national and international network of anti-racist organizers and trainers, The People's Institute feels acutely the impact of Katrina, having lost its offices and the homes of many of its staff.

"We need the United Nations to oversee an international Public Works campaign similar to the post-tsunami rebuilding efforts in South Asia and the Pacific," said Kimberley Richards, Core Trainer with The People's Institute and a citizen of Mississippi. "We must prevent this tragedy from becoming a 'cash cow' to benefit those who have historically profited from war and crisis. We must build with a vision of social justice and economic equity, so that poor people do not end up simply with "services" but without economic power. Only an international body can guarantee that."

Founded in 1980, The People's Institute has provided "Undoing Racism™" workshops and consultations to over 120,000 people of every race, religion, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds throughout the United States as well as internationally in South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, South Africa, and Japan. The organization is committed to assisting community organizers, leaders and organizations deepen their understanding of the systemic, economic and social impact of racism on their lives, their family, and their communities.

"Let's not turn off our TV sets and shrug off the deadly results we have witnessed as someone else's responsibility," urged Ronald Chisom. "Instead of papering over our inequities and pushing poor Black people back into the neighborhoods where other Americans don't have to see them again, we can rebuild a truly equitable New Orleans – a truly humane America."

The People's Institute believes that to accomplish these goals, the people of the United States must examine the roots of our racism, analyze our multigenerational national bias against people of color and its corollary bias in favor of people because they are white. We must critique the effects of decades of neglect suffered by poor people across the country, then transform our institutions, our policies, and our culture.

First, we must let the people flooded out by Katrina come back and be paid a living wage to rebuild their own communities!

Ronald Chisom can be reached at 504-782-6525; Dr. Kimberley Richards can be reached at 504-722-3213. For more information about The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, visit our website at www.pisab.org.

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Dear Incite! Friends & Supporters, plus letter from Shana Griffin

Organization:

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

Author:

Nada Elia, Shana Griffin

Date Published:

09/11/2005

To: [INCITE! mailing list]

From: incite_national@yahoodotcom

Date: Sun, 11 Sep 2005

Dear INCITE! Friends & Supporters:

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence is stunned by the catastrophe and tragic loss in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. In New Orleans and in many other communities along the Gulf, people are experiencing unimaginable devastating conditions. We are especially alarmed for the people who have the fewest resources, who were unable to evacuate New Orleans because of poverty, who were -- and in some cases still are --- trapped without food, water, and medical attention. Because of racism and classism, these people are also overwhelming folks of color, and because of sexism, they are overwhelmingly women of color -- low income and poor women, single mothers, pregnant women, women with disabilities) older women and women who are caregivers to family and community

members who were unable to leave the city. Women living at the intersections of systems of oppressions are paying the price for militarism, the abandonment of their communities, and ongoing racial and gender disparities in employment, income, and access to resources and supports.

As you know, the Historic Tremé Community in New Orleans recently hosted INCITE!'s Color of Violence III conference this past March. Tremé is the first free community established by Black people in the U.S. and is currently home to hundreds of Black women and their families, many of whom are poor. We are deeply hurting for the families and communities that graciously hosted us and who are now facing profoundly tragic circumstances.

We have heard word from most of the sistas who are part of the New Orleans INCITE! chapter, many of whom were able to evacuate. We also received word that one of the COV-3 volunteers had a mother and sister trapped on the 8th floor of New Orleans City Hall at some point – we sincerely hope that they have reached relative safety at this time. An early letter from Shana Griffin, member of the New Orleans INCITE! chapter and the national INCITE! steering committee, is below. Our hearts and prayers go out to them and we want to provide them with as much support and as many resources as we can so that they can mourn this horrible loss, re-connect with those that are missing, and, eventually, rebuild the rich and vital communities that have been devastated. Our thoughts and prayers are also with INCITE! chapters, members, COV III participants and supporters in other areas affected by the hurricane in the Gulf States.

Many of you have thoughtfully written and asked how you can help. At this time, we are asking for donations from our supporters so that we can send money to our New Orleans chapter members who will use it to help people who need it most. We have not given up on our sisters and brothers in New Orleans and other places that have been hit. We are dedicated to pooling our resources and using those resources to continue to organize plans for survival, safety, and justice in New Orleans. Please organize fundraisers in your hometowns and communities and send your donations to the [address below].

Nada Elia

(Nada Elia is a member of INCITE!'s national steering committee and will be organizing the donations to make sure the resources get to New Orleans.) Please make checks out to INCITE and put "New Orleans" in the memo line. Thank you very, very much for your generous support.

That said, we'd like to take this opportunity to express our deep outrage at the federal government's shamefully slow and pathetic response to this disaster. It is clear that the lack of rapid and effective response is based on a racist assessment of the value of the 150,000 mostly Black and poor people – a disproportionate number of whom are women – left behind in New Orleans. Further, INCITE! lays the blame of this disaster squarely at the feet of the U.S. government and particularly with George W. Bush for the following reasons:

1. GLOBAL WARMING

The Bush Administration's willful denial of the existence of global warming has kept this country from taking seriously global warming IS dangerous consequences, one of which is an increase in the severity of hurricanes. Hurricane Katrina, for example, began as a relatively small hurricane off south Florida, but it was intensified to a level five hurricane -- the highest level a hurricane can reach -- because of the unusually blistering sea surface temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico caused in large part by global warming. (Ross Gelbspan, *The Boston Globe*, 8/30/05) However, the Bush Administration, leveraged by the coal and oil industries, relegated global warming to a myth rather than the emergency environmental crisis that it is. Because the impact of Hurricane Katrina had an exceedingly disproportionate impact of devastation on people of color, Bush's failure at addressing global warming is a catastrophic example of environmental racism.

2. WAR ON IRAQ & TAX CUTS FOR THE WEALTHY

Bush's illegal, imperialist, and racist war on and occupation of Iraq – ironically, to enable consumption of more oil, aggravating global warming – as well as tax cuts to wealthy Americans, directly pulled resources away from levee construction and emergency management in New Orleans, as well as from programs and entitlements which could have provided much needed support to poor people and communities in New Orleans. In 2003, as hurricane activity in the area increased and the levees continued to subside, federal funding was specifically redirected away from addressing these problems because of spending pressures of the war on Iraq. In early 2004, as the cost of the war on Iraq soared, President Bush proposed spending less than 20 percent of what was needed for Lake Pontchartrain, according to a Feb. 16, 2004 article in *New Orleans CityBusiness*. At least nine articles in the *Times-Picayune* from 2004 and 2005 specifically cite the cost of the war on Iraq as a reason for the lack of hurricane- and flood-control dollars. (Will Bunch, Editor & Publisher, 8/30/05) The lack of resources to prepare for a disaster like Hurricane Katrina is a tragic example of how imperialism not only devastates communities of color abroad, but also communities of color here at home. This criminal neglect on the part of the government is responsible for thousands more deaths than the 9/11 attacks -- deaths that could have been prevented with adequate funding.

3. STATE-SPONSORED VIOLENCE

It is unconscionable that, while thousands of people are suffering from horrible and deadly circumstances, the media continues to harp on the so-called looting in New Orleans. The constant media coverage of so-called "criminal behavior" instead of the outrageous and criminal lack of response from the federal government is racist and disgraceful.

Though we are also very distressed about reports of violence– including sexual and physical violence against women and children – in the area caused largely by widespread chaos and desperation, we condemn the current mass militarization of the area. There have been numerous accounts of vicious police brutality experienced by men and women who have survived untold horrors only to be subjected to abuse by the law enforcement officials sent to "save" them. Thousands of soldiers from the U.S. Marines and Army are currently in New Orleans to enforce evacuation orders and bring about "law and order." In response to violence in the area, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco shockingly remarked, "I have one message for these hoodlums. These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary." Besides the fact that it is against the law for federal

troops to engage in domestic law enforcement, a militarized response is another piece of a racist pattern of dehumanizing poor people of color. Instead of seeing poor Black people driven desperate by the appallingly weak and unacceptably slow response of the federal government, the media and the government frame these primary victims as criminals or blame them for bringing the circumstances on themselves by "disobeying" mandatory evacuation orders when they had no means to comply.

We demand that there be no further criminalization of survivors of the hurricane as rescue, recovery, and rebuilding efforts go forward. We are particularly concerned about the creation of temporary accommodations -- expected to serve as "home" to evacuees for up to six months which are akin to detention facilities, surrounded by barbed wire, in isolated parts of Utah, Oklahoma and other areas, from which inhabitants will be prohibited from leaving without a "pass" and in which they will be housed in gender segregated housing and prohibited from preparing their own meals. The prison-like conditions of such facilities have been justified by the soldiers guarding them as follows "do you know what kind of people we have coming here?"

We are also concerned about the adequate provision of medication, supplies, and child care to women with disabilities, HIV/AIDS, as well as mothers and elderly women. We are calling for support for survivor-led, women of color driven formations within evacuation facilities and for their demands. We are also calling for support of women's individual and collective efforts to ensure their safety from physical and sexual violence within evacuation facilities while submitting that the existence of such violence is no justification for violent repression of evacuee communities.

We call for support and safety of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survivors of the hurricane, and for respect for the integrity of their families and of their needs in evacuation facilities. We are also deeply concerned for immigrant, and particularly undocumented women, who fear seeking assistance for fear of adverse immigration consequences and deportation. We call for efforts to connect incarcerated women, men, and children with their families, many of whom do not know the location of those dear to them, and for authorities to ensure conditions of confinement that meet international human rights standards. We are asking for charges against those who took food, water, and supplies in an effort to survive be immediately dropped. Finally, we are calling for support of domestic violence survivors who were displaced from shelters, support systems, and places of safety by the storm and may be at greater risk of violence from their abusers under current circumstances.

We demand an organized, rapid, and just response to save the survivors of Hurricane Katrina. We demand a comprehensive plan that is respectful of the value of the people who have been abandoned and responsive to their actual needs for survival and safety. We want immediate action operating from a vision of justice and hope.

We have pulled together a number of analyses of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, information about critical organizing and mobilization of poor people and people of color, letters from sistas from INCITE!, and other ways to help. Please contact us if you have questions, concerns, or resources. Our e-mail is incite_national@yahoo.com and our phone number is 484.932.3166.

In Solidarity,
INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

Peace sisters,

Tears are rolling down my face as I write this e-mail; my family is safe. My son evacuated with my mother and sister on Saturday night. My partner and I left on Sunday morning before the mayor declared a mandatory evacuation out of the city.

I spoke with Kerrie on Monday morning and received a text message from Isabel on yesterday. I e-mailed Janelle and Tara and haven't heard back. My cell phone is not working; I can only receive text messages. I'm in west Louisiana, near the Texas/LA border. I'm having a very difficult time processing the devastation of the city, the displacement of my community, and the thousands of people who were unable to leave the city, many of whom are feared to be dead.

I will update everyone with the whereabouts of Janelle and Tara, who I suspect made it out of the city.
-shana

Grassroots Movement Mobilization and Demand Statement

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Organization: Malcolm X Grassroots Movement
Date Published: 09/13/2005

The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), a national New Afrikan (Black) human rights organization, calls on every sector of the Black community, including civil rights organizations, human rights activists, workers organizations, religious communities and civic and cultural groups to UNITE in solidarity with Our Sisters and Brothers who have survived Hurricane Katrina.

Poor Black people didn't "choose to stay behind," they were intentionally left behind. They were left behind way before Hurricane Katrina hit the shores of the Gulf Coast. The same Black people suffering today as a result of Hurricane Katrina, are the same Black people who were disproportionately suffering from poverty, police terrorism, inadequate healthcare, insufferable housing, hunger and a pathetic education system long before the Hurricane occurred.

This is a critical time in the history of New Afrikan (Black) people. We have been presented with an opportunity to

rebuild a self-determining community, out of what has been a broken existence since our arrival at the shores of this land. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement is committed to rebuilding a self-determining Black nation, one community at a time. We must prepare ourselves, and our communities for the "natural" disasters, infrastructure breakdowns, and acts of "terrorism" as well as war that are occurring with more frequency because of the insatiable drive of United States imperialism.

We seek your solidarity and request your support to meet the immediate needs of our people – to help save, protect and preserve life, while strategically planning for long term self determination. We must connect and organize businesses, organizations and institutions into an economic and social network to create the social fabric that supports self-sustaining communities.

To meet the immediate needs of our people devastated by Hurricane Katrina we are making the following demands upon the United States Government and the Governments of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas and all states upon which Survivors have been relocated. We are asking everyone who supports these demands to add your name to the petition and spread it far and wide to other organizations in and out of our communities to strengthen the mobilization of our people and hold the United States government accountable.

The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement also stands in solidarity with other oppressed peoples affected by Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast region, including the undocumented, the Mexican and Latino communities, the Vietnamese and Asian communities, and the Native American communities. We maintain that the demands articulated herein also be unequivocally be applied to all of these oppressed peoples.

Immediate Demands:

- That the martial law applied to New Orleans and various regions of the Gulf Coast be lifted immediately.
- That the curfews in New Orleans, Biloxi and other cities and regions in the Gulf Coast be suspended immediately.
- The immediate removal of all foreign and domestic mercenary and white vigilante forces currently terrorizing Black and other oppressed communities in the Gulf Coast states, including Texas.
- The suspension of all of the relief and reconstruction contracts unfairly awarded to the cronies of the Bush government like Halliburton and its various subsidiaries.
- Immunity for all survivors charged and/or convicted for crimes of theft, property destruction, and assault.
- Information on the whereabouts and status of all of survivors including incarcerated persons, immigrants, persons relocated and deceased persons.
- Community Control over the relief process, including direct oversight over the relief operations of FEMA and the Red Cross.
- The honoring of all insurance claims resulting from Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath.

Fundamental Demands:

1. The Right of Return.

The Black survivors from the Gulf Coast regions of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama possess the fundamental human right to their homelands, as well as the right to reestablish their lives and rebuild their communities as they see fit.

2. The Right to Organize.

The Black survivors in the Gulf Coast region possess the inalienable right to organize themselves and to control the decision-making processes that effect their welfare and livelihoods.

The Black survivors have the right to form governing councils, labor unions, commercial and community cooperatives, and other institutions that serve the political material interests of New Afrikan (Black) people.

3. The Right to an Income.

The Black survivors have a right to an income provided by Federal and State governments to ensure their overall well being and that of their families and communities.

4. The Right to Living Wages.

Black survivors have the right to be compensated at living scale wages for their labor in the relief and reconstruction processes in the Gulf Coast States.

Black survivors have the right to be provided a living wage in the states upon which they have been relocated.

5. The Right of Access.

Black survivors have the right to control the reconstruction funds and contracting processes of the Federal and state governments.

Black survivors have the permanent right to access all of the lands of the affected Gulf Coast region.

6. The Right to Education and Health Care.

Black survivors have the inalienable right to free quality education and health care including counseling and psychological therapy.

7. The Right of Self-Determination.

Black survivors have the fundamental right to determine the long-term redevelopment of the Gulf Coast region.

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Momma's Mission

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Author:

Trymaine D. Lee, Times Picayune

Date Published:

09/18/2005

Amid the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, one woman stayed with a simple goal: to take care of those who need it the most. Momma D soldiers on in flood-torn Treme. She gives survivors strength to rebuild.

By Trymaine D. Lee
Staff writer for the *Times Picayune*

Diane "Momma D" Frenchcoat rises early each morning and pushes a cart of food and supplies through the sludge-spoiled streets of Treme and the 7th Ward.

She delivers food and hope for the hungry. She serves the delusional and dejected, the junkies and the flood survivors who have remained in the city despite its mass evacuation. Each day, she pushes her cart up and down Esplanade Avenue and Dorgenois, Aubry and North Tonti streets, calling to those too ill or too old or too stubborn to leave the neighborhoods that they've loved for so long.

"You need something to eat?" Frenchcoat yelled to a skinny, shirtless man perched in a second-floor window of a home on Esplanade near Treme Street, earlier this week. "You hungry? You want some food?"

The man peered down from his post to the mud-crusted block below and responded with silence. "You need some food, baby?" Frenchcoat hollered again.

The man stood there for a moment then vanished into the darkness. "So many of them are scared to come out of their homes. But they're hungry, I know they are. So, I just come by every day and let them get used to my voice and hope they come out."

She marches on each day, up and down Treme and St. Philip and St. Ann streets calling out to the frail and the frightened, to those who shutter their windows at the sounds of the military machines grinding on their blocks or hovering above their humbled homes.

Her cart is usually packed with baby formula, deodorant, canned soup and sandwiches. Some of it has been "liberated" from local groceries, she said, where it would have gone to waste in the wake of the hurricane and flood. Some had been given to her by out-of-state soldiers sympathetic to her cause.

"I can't think of a better gift in the face of this tragedy than Momma D," said Lt. Ken Noack, 24, of the 82nd Airborne out of Ft. Bragg in North Carolina. "She's just the sweetest woman."

Noack and his men piled out of a military vehicle Wednesday onto Dorgenois Street, bearing bags of ice.

"With this city being so sad right now, to see her so willing to help brings smiles to our faces, H he said, "the only ones we've had in two weeks."

Noack said Momma D has helped them find dozens of people in need of help. who otherwise might never gotten attention.

Frenchcoat said she has too much work ahead of her to leave the city. And she said she won't be forced out either. Not by New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, not by New Orleans Police Superintendent Eddie Compass and not by any other official pressing people to leave their homes.

"This is me. This is my home," she said, pointing to the brown gravel beneath her feet Wednesday. "This is me to the bone. Why would I leave now?," she said. "Why would I leave my people when so many of them are still here, suffering."

Her graying dreadlocks flowed down the nape of her neck, spilling over her sturdy, sloping shoulders as she spoke of a city she hopes will be reborn from the loins of her people.

Momma D has a loyal following of community activists working to help stabilize Treme from the grass-roots up. They've stayed behind to help their people, their neighbors and themselves.

They call themselves the Soul Patrol, a loosely organized group led by Momma D. The Soul Patrol was on the front lines battling the floods and the hunger following Hurricane Katrina.

In the midst of the crisis, Soul Patrol members said they were about 30 strong. As time went on, the numbers dwindled. Tragedy gripped a few, some losing family members, others physically and mentally worn down.

"I ain't going nowhere," said Soul Patrol member Earl Barthe, 45. "I'm the son of a bricklayer. I'm ready to cut some sheetrock, lay some block, anything to rebuild the city."

Members of the Soul Patrol said they "liberated" nearby McDonogh Elementary 42, where they evacuated hundreds of area residents during the flooding. The fire department then shipped the residents to the Superdome and Interstate 10, said Manuel Mercadel, 48.

"We had facilities there, dry land and a roof for those people," Mercadel said. Mercadel said Frenchcoat has been an inspiration to the entire movement. She's been like a big sister who always has your back and treats everyone as an equal, he said.

"She has a love affair with this city," said Jerome Smith, 64, a fellow activist and friend who said he's known Momma D since the early 1960s. "A love affair that she's had for a very long time." Last week, Smith went looking for Frenchcoat to coax her out of New Orleans to a shelter in Texas. Smith said he had wanted to use her clout to organize the now evacuated young men from the community and prepare them to re-enter the city as a productive work force.

Smith called on Compass to help him find Frenchcoat. Compass, who did not support the idea of residents remaining in the city for any reason, extended the police resources to get Momma D. Smith and a convoy rolled down Esplanade, where the sight of a short woman in dreadlocks and bright yellow waders brought a smile to Smith's face. The two activists met in the middle of the road, embraced and exchanged notes. The pair huddled and whispered.

Momma D had a plan.

"Rescue. Return. Restore," she said, each word seeming to freeze from her lips and hang before falling into the other.

"Can you here what I'm saying, baby? Listen to those words again," she said, leaning closer.

"Rescue, return, restore. We want the young, able-bodied men who are still here to stay to help those in need. And the ones that have been evacuated. We want them to come home and help clean up and rebuild this city. How can the city demand that we evacuate our homes but then have thousands of people from across this country volunteering to do the things that we can do ourselves?"

[This article first appeared in the *Times Picayune* Sunday, September 18, 2005 Metro Section]

Date: Sat, 24 Sep 2005

Subject: needs for momma d and soul patrol

From: catherinejones@riseup.net

MOMMA D & SOUL PATROL: NEEDS LIST

Momma D is a long-time New Orleans resident living at 1733 N. Dorgenois in New Orleans. She stayed in New Orleans for the duration of the hurricane and its aftermath. There is no electricity or running water in her neighborhood. So far she is helping 50 families, more arriving each day.

See her story in the *Times-Picayune* [above].

Soul Patrol is an organization of community members working to assist and protect their neighborhood. Supplies needed:

- Generators
- Charcoal
- Mosquito repellent
- Cell phones with car chargers
- Plastic cups, forks, knives/spoons
- Boxes of soymilk that do not need refrigeration
- Cleaning supplies
- Juice
- Propane grills
- Non-perishable food
- Water
- Flashlights lanterns
- Tents
- First Aid supplies

Soul Patrol needs:

- Big t-shirts (large, x large, 2 x, 3 x) that say "Soul Patrol" that are black, red and green (12 of each size)
- Crocheted hats that are black, red and green (can be found in beauty shops - 50 needed)

Momma D says there is a need for a free clinic in her neighborhood. She is willing to donate a room in her house for this purpose. She also is asking for volunteers to come down to help clean.

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Malik Rahim and medics from SF to DC set up health clinic in New Orleans

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Author:

San Francisco Bay View National Black Newspaper

Date Published:

09/18/2005

Malik Rahim and medics from SF to DC set up health clinic in New Orleans

Dispatches from volunteer medics in Algiers, New Orleans

Sept. 15 - Mayor Ray Nagin announced Thursday that Algiers will be the first of the communities in New Orleans to reopen to residents. While FEMA and the Red Cross will surely trumpet their efforts, the real success of Algiers belongs to those courageous community members who stayed through the storm and activist Malik Rahim who helped to catalyze the bustling Common Ground Relief effort.

Common Ground was the first on the ground relief effort of any kind in Algiers and one of the first along the Gulf Coast. The multiple success stories of Common Ground mutual aid has resulted in donations from Army personnel who wanted to see relief actually get to the community. The FEMA-Red Cross effort, bounded by razor wire, has played a poor second fiddle to the local efforts.

We anticipate an even greater need for relief support when residents begin moving back to the area. To support Common Ground, send donations to Common Ground, PO Box 3216, Gretna, LA 70054. Please pace your donations. Please no clothes or food. More information and online monetary donations are available at the new action website at www.commongroundrelief.org.

A model for getting it together

Sept. 14 - The locally-led, mutually based community relief effort in Algiers is now being called Common Ground Algiers. Currently, more than 40 volunteer medics, doctors, cooks, communications technicians, community organizers and concerned people are directly involved in the Common Ground collective effort.

Emergency services that have been created include a community garbage pick-up program; mobile kitchens to provide free hot meals to anyone in the area; a first aid clinic in a local mosque and a mobile first aid station staffed by doctors, nurses and emergency medical technicians; and bicycles for volunteers and residents to transport aid around the area; and the development of a free school for children.

These efforts could serve as a community-based model for creating both emergency response and long-term infrastructure for people affected by the hurricane and who are in need of these kinds of vital services.

Cracker squads

Cracker squads are groups of white supremacists who are using the slanderous media coverage and storm chaos to terrorize communities of color in Louisiana and Mississippi. One young woman in a Mississippi town relayed to us that a cracker squad had shot Black men in the woods and threatened retaliation for those going public with the story. Similar stories have come in from Algiers, downtown New Orleans and the outlying parishes of Louisiana.

A related threat are the armed mercenaries of Blackwater and other contractors who are patrolling downtown New Orleans. Internet reports indicate they have been particularly brutal in the handling of storm survivors.

They said it: Common Ground Wellness Center

You can't start a clinic here (in the Ninth Ward). That would give people hope. My job is to make their lives as hopeless as possible so they will leave.

- New Orleans Police Department officer
berating relief workers in the Ninth Ward

The administration of this country needs to be put on trial for human rights violations and treason against the people of the Gulf Coast region, as well as negligent homicide for every person left in this region to die.

- Noah, Emergency Medical Technician-B
with the Common Ground Wellness Center

Our number one national priority right now should be to clean up New Orleans and rebuild vulnerable areas in a safe and environmentally sound way. Then, every single evacuee must be offered the opportunity and the resources to return to rebuild their neighborhoods in exactly the same way. We cannot allow evacuees to be forced into becoming refugees.

- Roger Benham,
Emergency Medical Technician-B
with the Common Ground Wellness Center

It's not so much that the government is not responding (with storm relief); they are obstructing the response. They are telling us we can't bring people the basic necessities of life because that would give them hope. It is a question of oppression vs. mutual aid. That is the revolution.

- Jesse, an organizer from D.C.
volunteering in the Common Ground Wellness Center

Report from the Bay Area Radical Health Collective

Sept. 13 - The medics on the ground report that the situation in New Orleans is surreal and extremely militarized, with armed soldiers and police everywhere. Some areas are still underwater or smoldering, and travel after dark is prohibited.

Algiers, a New Orleans neighborhood on the dry side of the Mississippi River, remains largely intact. The neighborhood has running water, and electricity was recently restored. While there is little working infrastructure in New Orleans itself, it is possible to drive to stores in surrounding parishes for medicine, food, and other supplies.

"It's not until you approach New Orleans that you realize there's been a major disaster," reports Michael Kozart, a doctor with the Bay Area Radical Health Collective. "The people who are suffering are actually cut off from the rest of the region."

Medics have established a clinic and relief effort - named Common Ground near the Masjid Bilal Mosque in Algiers and are working with long-time community activist Malik Rahim. Food Not Bombs has set up a kitchen to feed people, and activists are distributing non-medical supplies such as diapers. Those with vehicles have been driving residents to pharmacies in nearby parishes to refill their prescriptions. Communications are described as sporadic, but they've been able to get messages out via cell phone and wireless e-mail.

Days after the initial crew from MayDay-DC set up the clinic, FEMA finally arrived on the scene. Government officials are now providing medical aid, have set up a relief center near the local public hospital, and are supplying some medications - but many residents find their heavily armed presence intimidating.

"The military is running around in humvees with loudspeakers blaring instructions," Kozart says, in an apparent attempt to direct residents away from the grassroots effort. "It feels like they are competing with us for patients."

"The contrast between the ugliness of the militarized government response and the grassroots effort couldn't be more clear," he adds. "Would you rather be escorted by guys with M-16s at the official medical station, or get help from people you know and recognize? It's a totally different paradigm of care."

At the same time, the situation is not without its surprises. One activist in Algiers reports that a renegade National Guard group procured supplies from FEMA to give to the anarchists.

The real need now is for more volunteers, especially those with medical training. There are about nine medics currently working at the clinic and doing house visits. The BARHC team plans to leave at the end of the week, and by then the MayDay-DC team will have been on the ground for nearly two weeks, so there's a need for new

workers to rotate in as these teams rotate out. Incoming activists should expect to be self-sufficient in terms of tents, sleeping bags, and food (though water and food can be purchased in nearby parishes).

Everyone emphasizes the importance of approaching things in a spirit of "solidarity not charity." Community organizers and visiting activists are working together to establish a long-term, locally controlled operation. Food Not

Bombs is setting up a permanent kitchen that residents can use after they leave.

With electricity restored, activists are also working to establish a local independent media center, stressing the importance of bringing in journalists of color to cover the grassroots efforts of the local Black community as they resist government attempts to take over the city.

"This is going to be a long-term thing," says Block. "The people here may be used to living under martial law, since that's what it's always like for them, but it's really disgusting what's going on."

A crossroads of conscience

Sept. 14 – Where is the progressive left during this crisis? In particular, where are the hundreds of groups and individuals that make up the peace and justice movement?

Shocking news continues to flow out of Algiers and other communities that have endured military martial rule, corrupt police, racist "cracker squads" and ethnic cleansing. It was only yesterday that dead bodies were removed from the streets of Algiers. Just today, Food Not Bombs visited communities that have received no assistance at all.

Community activists continue to send out calls-to-action and emergency aid requests. If the progressive left doesn't understand what is happening in the aftermath of Katrina, it can only be from willfully ignoring the disturbing news coming out of the area.

There is both sadness and irony in the lack of mass relief action by the progressive arm of the left. It is sad because thousands of people have courageously faced a powerful storm and years of government negligence only to face a tide of inaction by the very same lefties that preach the end of racism and poverty.

It is ironic that a whirlwind of direct progressive action in the relief area would do more to demonstrate the values and principals of the left than any protest. What could be more embarrassing to Bush than thousands of progressives in the relief area, uniting with local communities and being visible witness to the criminal actions of the government and their corporate profiteers?

More importantly, it is precisely this sort of conscious action that challenges stereotypes and builds solidarity across historic divides. Ultimately, it is the moral and just thing to do.

Though it's been two weeks since Katrina hit this area, a federal relief effort that has been both criminal and racist continues to leave people without food, clean water, medical care or respect. The fluffy media stunts of Bush, FEMA and the military hide the truth on the ground that there are not enough medical personnel, food distribution or will to meet the immense need.

If the massive network of peace and justice organizations, individuals and activists won't meet the need of those who suffer, then who will? And meeting the need involves more than simply writing a check or giving away a box of old clothing. The failure of the government's relief infrastructure means that groups and individuals will have to fill that void by providing mutual aid hand-to-hand, face-to-face, in the relief area.

And with local community leaders making desperate pleas for actual volunteers, one wonders when this need will arrive. This is a historic crisis, and it can only be answered by historic action.

A whirlwind of change as life-altering as Hurricane Katrina must blow through the peace and justice movement in a short period of time. Choosing the right road will take courage and strength. The survivors of this disaster have shown these qualities time and time again. Those of us in the peace and justice movement will dishonor them, and ourselves, by displaying anything less.

Community efforts in Algiers, New Orleans

Sept. 10 – Efforts are continuing by grassroots organizers to preserve the still inhabited community of Algiers in New Orleans. Algiers is located on the west bank of the Mississippi across from downtown New Orleans. It was not flooded in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and remains dry. The neighborhood has running water and electricity, and utility workers are working to get the gas on.

Roger Benham, an EMT from Connecticut who has made his way to Algiers to provide medical aid, reported on the latest developments.

"It's our first full day of operating our first aid station," he said. "We're trying to help people help themselves." Benham and four other health care volunteers, including three other licensed EMTs, arrived at midday on Friday with a van full of medical supplies. At the behest of Algiers long time community activist Malik Rahim, they set up the first aid station in the Masjid Bilal mosque on Teche Street.

Benham reported that a number of visitors to the first aid station today were looking for prescription drugs they'd run out of. "Several of them were vets who depend on the VA for their blood pressure medications," he said. "We gave out the meds we're certified to administer. We also went to visit elders in their homes nearby today. On one house call met a 101-year-old woman. She's doing fine."

Benham had abruptly ended our phone interview Friday night. He explained that was because of the rapid approach of a military unit. "That was Civil Affairs," he explained. "They're going door to door doing a census. There's also paramedics with them, and FEMA paramedics as well. They don't quite know what to make of us. They're trying to treat us as community liaisons." The Civil Affairs personnel are Army Special Forces from Fort Bragg, N.C.

"The FEMA medics were upset that we're here, that we beat them to the scene," Benham reported. "They're fire department paramedics, one from San Diego and two from Idaho.

"FEMA's supposed to be setting up a medical aid station as well," he said. "So far they've just set up razor wire. It's

next to a private charity that's been distributing water and food from a warehouse here."

Benham said the electricity had gone on the day before. "Utility workers are trying to get the gas on now," he said. "Some people already have gas. The city water never went off. So some people can boil it already I but the authorities are saying to use bottled water."

Benham said the neighborhood is continuing to be patrolled by the Army's First Cavalry. "The general vibe of the military is OK. Most of the soldiers I talked to are just back from Iraq. They wanted to know how we got (invited) in the mosque. We're using the masalluh (sanctuary), and they committed a no-no by coming in with their weapons. They realized they made a mistake though."

Benham reported that a U.S. Navy amphibious assault ship anchored in the Mississippi River near downtown New Orleans was visible from Algiers.

At this point Benham informed me that FEMA was likely listening in on our call. "They called another of the EMTs I'm with," he said. "They asked him specific questions about a phone conversation he'd had here." Benham then said he had to pause because a loud Sea Stallion military helicopter was flying over.

When our interview resumed, Benham told me that he'd asked a soldier about how people who needed meds but don't have money to buy them could get help. "People who have money and can get a ride can go to drugstores that are operating now in some nearby towns," Benham explained.

"But if you don't have money, the soldier said that you'd be taken to the airport and issued the needed meds. Then though you'll be put on a plane and evacuated from the city. If you have family in a major city they'll take you there. If you don't they'll fly you wherever the plane is going.

"What we need here is an MD who can write prescriptions so people can get meds we're not registered to use."

Benham said he'd seen some Danish journalists in Algiers today, but other than that no media presence since his arrival Friday. "The Danish journalists had been around New Orleans before they came here," he reported. "But this was the only part they'd seen that was still inhabited."

Benham also said that Malik Rahim has organized more people to come to Algiers to provide relief supplies and other support.

Excerpts from dispatches written by Liz Highleyman, Naomi Archer, Michael Steinberg and other writers and posted to www.infoshop.org, www.realreports.blogspot.com, and sf.indymedia.org were compiled for this report.

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Shelter and Safety

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Organization: INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence	Author: Jordan Flaherty	Date Published: 09/20/2005
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Shelter And Safety

Last New Year's Eve, a Black Georgia Southern University student named Levon Jones was killed by bouncers in the Bourbon Street club Razzoo's. The outrage led to near daily protests outside the club, threats of a Black tourist boycott of New Orleans, and a city commission to explore the issue of racism in the French Quarter. Despite widely-publicized advance warning, a 'secret shopper' audit of the Quarter found rampant discrimination in French Quarter businesses, including different dress codes, admission prices, and drink prices, all based on whether the patron was black or white.

"The French Quarter is not a place for Black people," one community organizer told me pre-hurricane. "You don't see Black folks working in the front of house in French Quarter restaurants or hotels, and you don't see them as customers."

Just north of the French Quarter, a few blocks from Razzoo's, is the historic Tremé neighborhood. Settled in the early 1800s, it's known as the oldest free African American community in the US. Residents fear for the post-reconstruction stability of communities like Tremé. "There's nothing some developers would like more than a ring of white neighborhoods around the French Quarter," said one Tremé resident recently. The widespread fear among organizers is that the exclusionary, "tourists only" atmosphere of the French Quarter will be multiplied and expanded across the city, and that many residents simply won't be able to return home.

Chui Clark is a longtime community organizer from New Orleans, and was one of the leaders of the protests against Razzoo's. He now stays in Baton Rouge's River Street shelter. "This is a lily-white operation," he reports. "You have white FEMA and Red Cross workers watching us like we're some kind of amusement." Despite repeated assurances of housing placements from Red Cross and government officials, the population of the Baton Rouge shelters does not appear to be decreasing, according to Clark. "You have new arrivals all the time. Folks who were staying with families for a week or two are getting kicked out and they got no where else to go."

I went to the River Road shelter as part of a project initiated by Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children to help displaced New Orleans residents reconnect with loved ones who are lost in the labyrinth of Louisiana's corrections system.

Everyone I met was desperately trying to find a sister or brother or child or other family member lost in the system. Many people who were picked up for minor infractions in the days before the hurricane ended up being shipped to the infamous Angola Prison, a former slave plantation where it's estimated over 90% of the inmates currently incarcerated will die within its walls. Most of the family members I spoke with just wanted to get a message to their loved ones, "Tell him that we've been looking for him, that we made it out of New Orleans, and that we love him," said a former East New Orleans resident named Angela.

While Barbara Bush speaks of how fortunate the shelter residents are, in the real world New Orleans evacuees have been feeling anything but sheltered. One woman I spoke with in the River Street shelter said that she's barely slept since she arrived in the shelter system. "I sleep with one eye open," she told me. "Its not safe in there."

According to Christina Kucera, a feminist organizer from New Orleans, "issues of safety and shelter are intricately tied to gender. This has hit women particularly hard. Its the collapse of community. We've lost neighbors and systems within our communities that helped keep us safe."

Where once everyone in a neighborhood knew each other, now residents from each block are spread across several states. Communities and relationships that came together over decades were dispersed in hours.

Kucera lists the problems she's heard, "there have been reports of rapes and assaults before evacuation and in the shelters. And that's just the beginning. There are continuing safety and healthcare needs. There are women who were planning on having children who now no longer have the stability to raise a child and want an abortion, but they have no money, and nowhere to go to get one. Six of the thirteen rape crisis centers in Louisiana were closed by the hurricane."

One longtime community organizer from the New Orleans chapter of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence has written, "We.. have to have some form of community accountability for the sexual and physical violence women and children endured. I'm not interested in developing an action plan to rebuild or organize a people's agenda in New Orleans without a gender analysis and a demand for community accountability."

We are already unsettled, and now Hurricane Rita threatens a new wave of evacuations. Astrodome residents are being out on buses and planes. While communities continue to be dispersed, some New Orleanians are staying and building. Diane "Momma D" Frenchcoat never evacuated out of her Treme home on North Dorgenois Street, and has been helping feed and support 50 families, coordinating a relief and rebuilding effort consisting of, at its peak, 30 volunteers known as the Soul Patrol.

"I ain't going nowhere," one Soul Patrol member told the New Orleans Times Picayune newspaper in a September 18 article about Momma D. "I'm the son of a bricklayer. I'm ready to cut some sheetrock, lay some block, anything to rebuild the city."

Asked about her plan, Momma D had these words, "Rescue. Return. Restore. Can you hear what I'm saying, baby? Listen to those words again. Rescue, return, restore. We want the young, able-bodied men who are still here to stay to help those in need. And the ones that have been evacuated, we want them to come home and help clean up and rebuild this city. How can the city demand that we evacuate our homes but then have thousands of people from across this country volunteering to do the things that we can do ourselves?"

Community organizers like Momma D in Treme and Malik Rahim, who has a similar network in the Algiers neighborhood, are the forces for relief and rebuilding that need our help. The biggest disaster was not a hurricane, but the dispersal of communities, and that's the disaster that needs to be addressed first.

Yesterday a friend told me through tears, "I just want to go back as if this never happened. I want to go back to my friends and my neighbors and my community." Its our community that has brought us security. People I know in New Orleans don't feel safer when they see Blackwater mercenaries on their block, but they do feel security from knowing their neighbors are watching out for them. And that's why the police and national guard and security companies on our streets haven't brought us the security we've been looking for, and why discussions of razing neighborhoods makes us feel cold.

When we say we want our city back, we don't mean the structures and the institutions, and we don't mean 'law and order,' we mean our community, the people we love.

And that's the city we want to fight for.

Jordan Flaherty is an organizer with the Service Employees International Union and an editor of Left Turn Magazine. This is his sixth article from New Orleans. To see the other articles, go to www.leftturn.org. You can contact Jordan at NewOrleans@leftturn.org

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The Partner with a Katrina Family Network

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Organization:

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

Author:

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

Date Published:

09/29/2005

A Grassroots Effort to Join Families and Share Resources

The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

The People's Institute co-founder, antiracist organizer Jim Dunn, used to say that grassroots organizers rely on networks because a net that works can sometimes be the only thing that makes a difference. Hurricane Katrina has shown us that we are more interdependent than we may have thought. The Partner with a Katrina Family Network is an effort to strengthen ties between families directly impacted by the hurricane and those indirectly impacted, in order to build human networks, share resources, and facilitate a healthy, just interdependence of communities across the country.

What Does it Mean to be a Partner with a Family Surviving Katrina?

- You are willing to commit to a period of partnership with your partner family, during which you stay in regular contact, and work together with them to assess needs and provide solutions;
- You are willing to connect with your family, friends, neighbors, and/or coworkers in order to build support for your partner family;
- You are willing to give financial and other kinds of support;
- You are willing to follow the lead of your partner family, in the spirit of self-determination, self-sufficiency, and interdependency.

What Does it Mean to be a Family Surviving Katrina in Partnership with a Family Wanting to give Support?

- You are willing to be in communication with the family that wants to redistribute its resources;
- You are willing to be forthcoming with your needs, with no shame or greed;
- You are willing to direct this partnership in the way that works for your family, addressing difficulties should they arise, and helping your partner family be as useful as they can;
- You are willing to receive the support provided and use it to assist you to become interdependent and self-sufficient.

How to Become a Partner to a Katrina Family: 8 Steps

- **Build Your Partnership Team.** This may consist of your family, your extended family, a group of friends, co-workers, neighbors, etc. The members of your team agree to work together to offer assistance to the Katrina family. Commit to a period of partnership. We recommend six months to a year.
- **Identify a Liaison.** Choose one person who will be the prime liaison with the displaced family, the partner team, and the Network organizers.
- **Become Partners with a Katrina Family.** Contact the Network in order to be matched with a Katrina family. In some cases it will be possible to identify a family in your region~ in others you will be networked with someone in a different part of the country.
- **Family Contact and Needs Assessment.** Upon receiving your family name, contact the family immediately. Remember that they have been displaced since the end of August/early September, and are anxious to get settled as quickly as possible. Find a time when they can tell you at length about their situation. Do the needs assessment together. Remember to tell them a little bit about your family and the other members of your team, and the amount of time you have committed to staying in contact and assisting with their resettlement.

Here is a general guide to the kinds of information that will be useful.

- **Family.** Who is in their family? Get names, ages, health statuses, etc. Some may be very close to extended kin, who mayor may not be with them. Find out who is in their circle of concern. Who else do they know in their area?
- **Shelter.** How settled are they? Are they in need of immediate relocation? What are their options so far?
- **Employment.** Are they looking for work? What kind? Do they need job contacts, clothing, equipment, supplies, or materials?
- **Auto.** Do they have a car? Need a car?
- **Furniture.** Are they in need of furniture? Do they have transportation to pick up furniture? What about other household items: linens, kitchen appliances, cookware, etc. Make a priority list.
- **Clothing.** Do they need more clothing? Sizes, styles, colors? Take climate into account. What are they willing to take donated, and what do they want to buy new?
- **School.** Are the children already registered for school? How is it going? Do they need school supplies?
- **Children's Items.** Children's toys, books, games.
- **Health.** Do they have any pressing health concerns? Health Insurance? Access to prescription, doctors, medication?
- **Paperwork.** Do they need help with paperwork (FEMA forms, insurance forms, health insurance forms, change of address, etc.). Any legal needs?
- **Contact.** Phone? Email access? When and how can they contact you?
- **Partner Brainstorm.** Call your team together quickly after your initial call. Share the needs assessment, and be as creative as possible.

Ways to Help

- **Financial Contributions.** How much money can you give up front? Do you want to make a bi-weekly pledge? Some partner teams may decide to make sacrifices during the period of partnership and save that money for the family (e.g. fewer meals out a month, carpooling, etc).
- **Gift Certificates.** Gift cards to Target, Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Sears, etc. can be invaluable, are easy to provide long distance, and allow families to make their own purchasing choices. Ask about other stores in their area that they would like to buy from. If you know other people who want to provide support without going through an organization, buying gift cards for your partner family can be an easy way of participating.
- **Local Contacts.** If you live in the same area as your Katrina family, you may choose to meet with them in person. Being close by means you can collect items listed above and drop them off. You can give people a tour of the area, brainstorm job contacts, provide help getting a car, etc.
- **Local Contacts From Afar.** If you are partnering with a family that is not in your region, we bet it will take far fewer than six degrees of separation to find connections between your partner team and someone in your Katrina family partner's region. Does anyone on your team know anyone who knows anyone in that area? Can you invite them to be a local liaison? Having a local contact can be useful for job connections, furniture or moving assistance, visits, help getting to know the area, etc.
- **Advocacy.** Many businesses – cell phone companies, utility companies, airlines, Amtrak, etc – are providing assistance to evacuees by waiving late fees, freezing loan payments, changing flights without change fees, etc. Sometimes these allowances are not granted, but must be requested (you have to ask to know!). This can be time consuming, stressful, and require comfort speaking with authorities. You can offer to make these calls on behalf of your partner family.

- **Material and Emotional Support.** While the most pressing needs at the outset are material, such as shelter, security, food, income, etc., there will be other kinds of needs, and other ways you can support your partner family. Some might be as simple as calling often and regularly (reliably) just to check in, listen, and let them know that they are not forgotten. You may also help them to network with other communities and/or support services, etc.
- **Regularity and Consistency.** Establish some structure to support you, and to help maintain consistency. Examples might include deciding how often (at a minimum) you'll be in touch with the family; identifying times in the day when it's easier for you to work on related tasks; coming up with ways that your whole family can be involved together; deciding how you will stay connected as a team and work together.
- **Get out of the Box.** Be creative about ways to support your partner family, and also yourself during this relationship. Share your process and the stories you are hearing from the family with people in your community. Contact your local newspaper. Write a letter to community groups in the area in which your family partner has relocated.
- **Stay in Touch with the Partner Network.** The Partner with a Katrina Family Network can be an important source of support for partnering families during this time. We'd like to hear how it's going~ problem solve with you if there are difficulties, and document the fruits and difficulties of strengthening our network in this way.

Principles of Partnering for Families with Resources: Reminders, Reflections, Guidelines

- **Forging New Kinds of Relationships.** Becoming a partner to a family undergoing tremendous upheaval is likely a new experience. Your Katrina family partner is undoubtedly experiencing some form of post-traumatic stress, and cycling through many emotional states all the time: grief~ anger~ confusion~ overwhelm, hopelessness, exhaustion, etc. As you build your relationship with them, you too will likely experience a range of emotions. The more awareness you bring to these states, the less derailing they will be. In addition to the difference in your current circumstances and emotional trajectories, there may be other kinds of cultural differences that emerge along the way, which may not even be recognizable to you or the family you are partnering with.
- **Self-Determination.** One of the primary objectives of this relationship is for both partners to nurture self-determination for the family surviving Katrina. One of the ways to achieve this goal is to start with it. While the relocating family is undergoing a crisis, they are still to be the leaders of this partnership process.
- **Commitments.** As a partnering team you don't have to do more than you commit, but we ask that you keep the commitments you do make. Pay attention to what you offer, and do not promise casually.
- **Active Listening.** While team partners may be moved to offer a lot of advice to their partner families, the much more useful contribution, in most cases, is active listening. Recently dislocated families may need to think out loud, vent, express a range of emotions, worry, troubleshoot, weigh options, etc. Many of the people closest to them are going through the same dislocation and are not available. Active listening means not offering solutions, not trying to change their mood, not leading the conversation. It's ok not to know what to say. When in doubt, you don't have to say anything at all. The most important thing is perseverance and staying in relationship.
- **Mutuality and Strengthening Human Networks.** The partnership relationship feeds all its members. It is also a paradox. On one hand it is not directly for and about the partners with resources. Being able to provide real service to other human beings means being self-reflective and accountable about the psychological motives that may arise in the course of this kind of relationship, such as heroism or valor. On the other hand, the relationship does offer something to each member of the partnership. The partners with resources may not be able to put into words at the beginning what exactly they are getting in return, but as the relationship develops, this will become more clear. Remaining unconscious of the mutuality of the relationship leads to feelings of superiority, condescension, judgmentalness, etc. In a paraphrase of an Aboriginal saying, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

The Partner with a Katrina Family Network: Mission Statement and Contact Information

The Partner with a Katrina Family Network is a process established by organizers and friends of The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, some of whom have themselves been displaced by Hurricane Katrina. The Network seeks to join families and resources in order to strengthen antiracist human networks, nurture self-determination, rebuild community, and insure the equitable distribution of resources.

Coordinators of this network volunteer their time and there is no overhead. For information about partnering, either as a person or family dislocated by Katrina or a person, family, or cluster interested in assisting, please contact us:

- Kimberley Richards, Ph.D., Farrell, PA / New Orleans, LA.
- Rachel Luft, Ph.D., New Orleans/ Bozeman, Montana. [rachel.luft@sbcglobe1.net~ 504.250.3237] Note: This is a New Orleans phone number and you may get a busy signal or "all circuits are down" recording. If you keep trying in quick succession you should get through within ten seconds.
- Pat Callair, LCSW. Greensboro, North Carolina. [LBCallair7@ao1.com; 919.260.0955]
- Bonnie Cushing, LCSW. Montclair, New Jersey. [bonniecushing@ao1.com; 973.746.1640 or 973.746.0806]

About The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

The People's Institute was founded in 1980 by long-time community organizers Ron Chisom of New Orleans and Jim Dunn of Yellow Springs, Ohio. It has been based for most of its history in the city of New Orleans until its displacement by Hurricane Katrina. The People's Institute was created to develop more analytical, culturally-rooted, and effective community organizers. Over the past twenty-five years The People's Institute Undoing Racism TM/ Community Organizing process has impacted the lives of nearly 100,000 people both nationally and internationally. Through this process, it has built a national collective of anti-racist, multicultural community organizers who do their work with an understanding of history, culture, and the impact of racism on communities.

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Organization:
Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition

Date Published:
10/08/2005

PEOPLE'S HURRICANE RELIEF FUND & OVERSIGHT COALITION (PHRF)

(Initiated by Community Labor United)

Fall, 2005*
(*Retyped for cws Legacies Reader on line
Nov. 2007)

NOTHING ABOUT US
WITHOUT US IS FOR US

OUR TOWN OUR HOME OUR LIVES

"The people of New Orleans (and the Gulf Coast) will not go quietly into the night, scattering across this country to become homeless in countless other cities while federal relief funds are funneled into rebuilding casinos, hotels, chemical plants, and the wealthy white districts of New Orleans like the French Quarter and the Garden District."

(Founding statement of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition)

BACKGROUND

On Saturday September 8, a group of New Orleans community activists and supporters from around the country met in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to plan a people's response to the crisis caused by, and the preexisting conditions highlighted by Hurricane Katrina. The meeting was called by Community Labor United (CLU), a seven year-old coalition of progressive community based organizations in the New Orleans area.

The purpose of PHRF is that every displaced person be allowed to return to his or her home, participate in the reconstruction process, and call for transparency of the billions of dollars appropriated by Congress for relief and reconstruction.

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CALL FOR SELF DETERMINATION IN RELIEF, RECOVERY, RECONSTRUCTION

Our Town, Our Home, Our Lives

We, New Orleans and Gulf Coast Region Survivors of Hurricane Katrina, and our friends, families, supporters, in the wake of the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States, call on the world community to support our demands for determining our own future.

Katrina put a spotlight on the horror of racism, poverty and environmental abuse in America. The relief, recovery and reconstruction of our communities will show the will, the heart and soul of the people of this country. What has happened here must also force attention to all neglected communities in this rich land. It must never happen again.

We were abandoned by the officials whose job it is to care for the people. We insist on playing a central role in all aspects of putting our lives back together, individually and collectively. We, the displaced people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, can and will take charge of our own recovery and rebuilding and we demand the appropriate support from the government.

From the bottom of the flood rivers, the corners of the prison-like shelters cramming thousands of stunned human beings without information, rights, care, from the front porches and church parishes of emptied out neighborhoods, from the toxic fumes and the thirst, from the pulled apart families, the coughing, terrified children, in spite of the military and private security vehicles, from the wrench of no-home, from the horror, love and generosity of friends and strangers far and wide; the stories fill the air like seeds. And the building begins. We claim our stories, our healing, our future.

We insist on government accountability. We insist on our full participation.

We offer solidarity to those around the world experiencing wreckage from natural disasters, compounded by, preceded by, poverty and discrimination. We welcome, and are heartened by the true solidarity from all corners of this vast country and the world.

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We are committed to building and maintaining a coordinated network of community leaders, organizers and community based organizations with the capacity and organizational infrastructure to help meet the needs of people most affected by Katrina, to facilitate an organizing process that demands local, grassroots leadership in the relief, return and reconstruction process in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

We will work together with all who share the goal of self determined relief, recovery & reconstruction. We call on friends, allies, those working for a new New Orleans and Gulf Coast to pledge to work together in respect and shared communication for the highest level of harmony.

We call on all to engage with us in a process of imagination, discipline, accountability, possibility and building.

GOALS & DEMANDS

The People's Hurricane Relief Fund & Oversight Coalition demands that the government:

- * Provide funds for all displaced families to be reunited;
- * Allocate the \$50 billion for reconstruction to the victims of the hurricane in the form of a Victims Compensation Fund;
- * Accept representation on all boards that are making decisions on spending public dollars for relief and reconstruction;
- * Place displaced workers and residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in public works jobs, offering union wages;
- * Publicly account for and show the entire reconstruction process.

WORK

- ___ * Documentation of all evacuees, their whereabouts and condition;
- * Meeting the healthcare needs of evacuees, both physical and emotional;
- * Legal advocacy, exploration of human and civil rights abuses, wrongful deaths, and other legal issues;
- * Finding teachers and educators to work with our displaced children;
- * Assisting in support for all those still in shelters and those moving out of shelters, monitoring of conditions, publicizing the abuses and advocating on behalf of all evacuees;

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- * Collecting the stories of displaced New Orleanians and Gulf Coast residents, articulation of the vision for the new New Orleans;
- * Finding experts to test the air, water and soil in preparation for reconstruction;
- * Finding engineers, architects and solar experts to advise and participate in reconstruction;
- * Coordinating with artists and performers to interpret and share our stories, work with our communities in the process of 'art as transformation'.

WORK GROUPS

Arts & Culture/Story Collection
Education
Health Care
Environmental Health
Finance/Fundraising
Internal Communications
Legal
Media
National Solidarity
Reconstruction
Safety, Justice & Accountability
Supplies
Volunteer Coordination

(For more information, see archives of
www.peopleshurricane.org;
www.peoplesorganizing.org

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Attachment	Size
PHRF FALL 2005.cwk	34.49 KB

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'ACORN Katrina Survivors Association Will Unite Displaced Residents to Work for a Just Recovery

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Organization:

ACORN: Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

Date Published:

10/18/2005

ACORN member Paul Fernandez hangs a 'No Bulldozing' sign in front of a home located in New Orleans' Ninth Ward.

On October 18th, ACORN announced the formation of the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association (AKSA) -- the first nationwide organization of displaced New Orleans residents and other Katrina survivors. The AKSA will unite members of our displaced communities in order to demand more effective relief efforts and a voice in the rebuilding process.



"We want to return to our homes, and take part in rebuilding our communities," says Tanya Harris, a former resident of the Lower 9th Ward and a leader of the AKSA. "Right now, too many decisions are being made without us at the table."



Harris and 1,600 New Orleans residents from across the country came together to form the Survivors Association, whose launch was announced today in a national phone-in press conference.

The ACORN Katrina Survivor Association plans to reach a total of 100,000 members in the next year. In the coming months, The AKSA will use public pressure, direct action, and dialogue with elected officials to win a platform that includes:

- Respect and a voice -- Our voices need to be at the center of developing and implementing relief and reconstruction programs.
- Right of return -- The people of New Orleans will not be kept out by deliberate attempts to change the make-up of the city, or by neglect, which gives the richer and more powerful first access to choices and resources.
- The means to take care of ourselves and our families -- Survivors need help with housing, healthcare, income from unemployment, and assistance for those who've helped us.
- Rebuilding the right way -- Reconstruction should include good and affordable housing, living wage jobs, and good schools for our children.
- Recovering together -- The Hurricane should not be used as an excuse to cut health care and food assistance programs that help families across the country.
- Accountability and honesty -- An independent investigation is necessary so we can understand what went wrong and how to protect ourselves in the future.

The AKSA will continue and expand the organizing that local ACORN chapters have accomplished since Katrina first hit, which has already resulted in some notable actions and victories:

- On October 7th, the Houston ACORN Hurricane Survivor Committee brought together survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and their host families to confront Houston FEMA Director Tom Costello about a lack of response to the needs of the survivors.
- In negotiations a week later, FEMA agreed to a number of reforms to make services more accessible, including a shuttle bus to their service center, translated materials, and extending benefits to Rita survivors.
- Displaced New Orleans ACORN members have organized in shelters in Baton Rouge and other part of Louisiana, advocating for a "right to return" to New Orleans.
- On October 15th, Louisiana ACORN members staged a caravan into the Lower 9th Ward to claim their right to return and placarded hundreds of homes with signs stating "Do Not Bulldoze."

In the coming weeks, the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association will conduct public events in Washington, D.C. and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and other cities around the country to build support for a recovery and rebuilding plan that reflects the needs and dreams of Katrina survivors. Read more at www.acorn.org/katrina.

Attachment	Size
acorn.jpg	103.74 KB

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Floodlines: Catherine Jones' Blog

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Author: Catherine Jones	Date Published: 10/25/2005	Link: http://www.floodlines.blogspot.com/
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A post-Katrina blog which I'm cautiously restarting, mostly as a testament to the increasing complexity of life in this city, as well as an homage to the thousands of unsung people who are pouring their hearts and souls into fighting for justice and equality as we rebuild.

Monday, November 28, 2005

Photos

here's a link to the first set of photos i took... pardon the awkwardness with my new digital camera :)
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/33985017@N00/sets/1469457/>

posted by catherine at 8:26 PM

Friday, November 25, 2005

Sometimes things do go right

Every day for the past few months, I've seen people's stuff out on the street. Every day. Sofas, photographs, laundry, musical instruments; I'm sure you're sick of me talking about it. Sometimes, the stuff is all soggy and moldy and turned inside-out and you know it got flooded out with everything else. Lots of times, though, everything is intact and there's a big "For Rent" sign in front of the house, and I wonder.

A few weeks after I got back, it was a beautiful Saturday and lots of people had started returning to my neighborhood to clean out their houses. In less than an hour, I'd talked to three different people who had all gotten evicted by their landlords. One landlord even told her tenant, an older Black gentleman who'd been living in the place for 15 years, and doing all the renovations for free (!), that she wanted him out so she could make more money.

"That's cold," he told me. "Where does she think I'm gonna go?" He ended up moving to Baton Rouge; he says there's nothing for him here anymore.

We keep hearing stories of people coming back to find all their stuff out on the street with no notice at all. The 73-year-old neighbor of some friends in Treme who went out of town one night and came back to find everything thrown, shattered, into the street. He ended up setting up a camp on the curb outside his house because he had nowhere else to go, and that night the temperatures started dropping. Cold, cold, cold.

Until very recently, there were hardly any tenant protections in New Orleans, and people were reluctant to fight evictions anyway, because they didn't know if it was worth the hassle. One of my neighbors said he wasn't going to fight his landlord in court even if he was in the right, because he couldn't afford a lawyer, and didn't know where to find one, and wasn't sure he'd win anyway, and it still didn't resolve the fact that he needed to find someplace new to live.

Sometimes, though, things do go right.

A few days ago, team of lawyers from the [People's Hurricane Fund](#) and [New Orleans Legal Assistance \(NOLAC\)](#), as well as other groups, won a major victory that now makes it impossible for Katrina survivors to get evicted without adequate due process. They will be mailed eviction notices and their trials can't even be scheduled until 45 days later. And FEMA is obligated to provide information to protect survivors.

Wow!

And then, the next day, FEMA, after tremendous public outcry from evacuees in hotels around the country, pushed back its deadline for evacuees to move out of FEMA-subsidized hotel rooms, giving people breathing room to look for a place until January 7.

These are 2 major victories! And they wouldn't have happened without people organizing together to improve their conditions: hurricane survivors and grassroots organizations creating a strong voice to demand real justice and accountability. What potential we have in this moment, I keep thinking.

Let's keep our voices up, y'all: right now it may be all we've got.

posted by catherine at 12:02 PM

Wednesday, November 23, 2005 The camera, the love and the recipes

Yesterday I got back from Washington, DC. It was the first time I'd left Louisiana since I'd returned here, about five days after the storm. I was strangely apprehensive about leaving. I know this storm has made us weird down here: I am used to people cooking huge pots of red beans for strangers on the neutral ground; I am not used to eight different kinds of toothpaste in Walgreens. What would it mean for me, I wondered, to go to a place where people take the subway to work, and don't talk to each other, and then go home, or maybe stop for groceries or a beer on the way? Could I function in a place that wasn't so marked, as we are here, by such deep collective grief?

And of course I had those moments of culture shock: looking at my friend's enormous pile of junk mail in her entryway; being amazed that I could recycle my Arizona tea can at a party; getting snapped at by a shopworker when I pocketed a tiny perfume bottle that I'd really assumed was free. (In New Orleans right now, you can find huge crates of bottled water, and dry food, and hot meals, and cleaning supplies, and toiletries, and blankets and coats and pants and baby clothes and diapers, almost anywhere. I kind of forgot that in the real world, if there's stuff in a big bin, you can't just walk up and take it.)

And of course there were all those reminders that DC is a functioning city: garbage, for example, does not consist of furniture and electrical wire and sheetrock and decaying animals. It can fit into cans that people organize neatly on their curbs. And it doesn't get picked up by tractors and bulldozers, but by garbage trucks. And every single billboard has an advertisement on it. And every single streetlight works, and the mail comes, and there are no 1-800-GOT-JUNK? signs on the telephone poles, and the power lines don't lean down over the sidewalks like nooses. But I knew about all that. I had been expecting it, and it was somehow less weird than I'd thought it would be to see so much intact-ness.

Here's what I wasn't expecting: the love, the camera, or the recipes.

I'd decided to take a train, partially because it was so much cheaper than flying, and partially because I wanted to look out a window for 24 hours and watch the land change. I had all these visions of myself sitting alone on a train gazing out of a window for hours and hours, not doing anything, not thinking anything. I knew it would be exactly what I needed.

Here's what really happened on the train: 20 minutes after pulling out of New Orleans, my whole car started talking. Everybody. About the storm, obviously: it's become a sort of dysfunctional security blanket for us. It gives us definition and purpose. We don't go anywhere without it, tucked, barely visible, into our back pockets.

But not only about the storm, not only about houses, jobs, relatives, schools. Not only about jail and being evicted and not being able to find the doctor. No, not only about those things. We talked about grandparents, holidays, the games we used to play as kids. We talked about cooking for about three hours. We got into arguments about how long it takes to learn how to make good red beans. A 23-year-old cook was going back to Pittsburgh, where his fiance' and three-week-old son were waiting for him. He'd found a job in Pittsburgh restaurant, where he'd convinced them to let him cook "real New Orleans" food. Now the restaurant is making all kinds of money.

"Yes, indeed," the 90-year-old great-aunt across the aisle kept saying. "Yes, indeed. But I bet it's cold up there."

"Baby, it's cold everywhere," the old man said in front of her, buried in his jacket.

Once people found out I was in medical school, that was it. "Congratulations!" people told me. The seat next to me was never empty again. "But I'm not a doctor yet," I kept saying over and over again. "I don't care, baby!" everybody said as they showed me their rashes, told me about allergies and headaches.

Then I started speaking in Spanish with a construction worker from Panama. He had gotten on the train with paint still drying on his clothes. He was going up to Atlanta to get his truck and his five roommates to come down here to work. After that all the Spanish speakers on the train made a little corner in the lounge car. Deep into the night we drank hot chocolate and talked about food and kids and immigration policy and how to fix cars.

No alone-time on that train. That was ok. Privacy might be nice sometime, but I guess now's the time for us to be together. "This is what's happening to me now," I thought, surrounded on that train by so many beautiful people.

"I am so, so grateful." --

The reason I went to DC in the first place was to meet with other national leaders of the American Medical Student Association (AMSA), a joyously progressive and dynamic group of medical students from across the country. I was really apprehensive about the meeting, because I'm so aware, even back in New Orleans, of how much my own capacity for doing work has shrunk in the past few months. I was worried about being around people who can function at a really high level. (And if you think medical students in general are super-high-functioning, try spending some time with these brilliant, committed, activist medical students. Whoa.) Energy is dizzying to me these days. I was worried I wouldn't be able to keep up with folks, and that people might think I was a slacker.

But then I got there, and spent the next few days being crushed in all these enormous hugs the AMSA people are sort of famous for. There is so much love among these folks. And so much commitment to social justice.

And here's what else: AMSA is serious. They are totally committed. We spent a huge part of the time there talking about how to be strategic about ending healthcare disparities based on race. This is an enormous national organization of medical students, taking on institutionalized racism in the healthcare system as a number-one priority! That's huge!

I spent so many moments, maybe while I should have been trying to catch up (!), looking at all these people who are doing so much amazing work, and thinking, "if this is the future of medicine, we might have a chance."

At the end, they gave me a digital camera.

A digital camera!!

I'd been talking to someone about how I usually hate cameras, how I feel like they interfere with memory and how they have the capacity to intrude upon the lives of the people you're filming; but how right now I feel like I really need one. I feel this huge sense of responsibility to communicate to people what's really happening here, and I think I need to be taking pictures. The next thing I knew, Wanda and Rachel had organized with all the other national leaders to collect money... and they got me a camera!!

Nothing like that kind of gift to keep you accountable. Expect pictures soon.

posted by catherine at 9:56 AM

Wednesday, November 16, 2005 No Losing Us

Today my mother called me to say that a family friend, a well-respected doctor, had killed himself last night. He had lost most of his patients after the storm and was struggling to rebuild his practice. Everyone knew he was depressed. I played with his kids when I was little: I remember rolling Hot Wheels through their kitchen, grabbing CapriSuns from their overflowing pantry. He hung himself in their house. All those closets we used to play hide-and-seek in.

He hung himself. After my mom told me that I couldn't breathe. I sat down on someone's pale blue steps in the middle of Dauphine Street and I couldn't even cry.

He was a good person and a good doctor. He will be missed.

Fittingly, perhaps, I went to the All-Saints' second-line this afternoon. Irvin Mayfield was playing trumpet and, as expected, lots of tourists and media showed up. At the beginning I had that "where are all the locals?" feeling that still marks so many of our cultural events. Where were we, in the midst of all those TV cameras? There are so many cameras marking our lives these days, it is hard to tell where we are sometimes. It was a little too much for me. I went into the St Louis No.1 and walked alone among the graves, the evening sun turning all those decaying tombstones silver.

Then the music started and I walked back out onto Basin Street and then I could see us. There we were! Suddenly I felt so silly: there is no losing us, even amongst all these strangers.

There is no losing us.

The sun hung low over the empty Iberville projects and the St Louis No.1, and the music started, and all the New Orleans people started dancing like we have for centuries. The way we move our feet, even the streets know it's us.

Here are my people: Mostly, we are not the ones with video cameras. We are not wearing Mardi Gras beads. We are not the ones not dancing. We do not say to each other, "Irvin Mayfield is a really good trumpeter." We do not say, "Such a shame, all the devastation," or "Martha will be so sorry she missed this."

Here are my people: the ones who did not have time to change after work. The ones who have come to the second-line in coveralls and scrubs, and chambermaids' dresses and hardhats, and Burger King T-shirts and security-guards' uniforms and cook's pants and even some people in all-white haz-mat suits. The ones who are back, the ones who never left, the ones who are here. The mothers carrying babies and groceries. The friends embracing wildly on corners saying, "how'd y'all make out?"

This is what we say to each other:

"I didn't get any water but my mama, she got about six feet of water."

"Girl, I never thought I'd see you here!! I thought y'all went to Dallas!"

"Everybody's over by my sister's house and she about to kill us all."

"I lost my house and my job but I'm ok. How you doing?"

"Baby, this is my first second line since the storm. I'm all right!"

Here are my people: the ones shivering on this first cold day; we are the ones who bundle up when it becomes 54 degrees out. We are the ones drinking '40's out of paper bags, the ones who know all the words to all the songs, the ones who know how to dance and walk at the same time. The old people pushing walkers and still keeping time!

Did I say there is no losing us? Even amongst all those strangers, all those cameras, all that water? Even amid all that distance? Even though we have been scattered to the four corners of this huge planet, even though I have seen so many of you for the last time? Did I say there is no losing us? Even with everybody's baby pictures

decaying on the neutral ground, and all our refrigerators standing out on the curb with the magnets still on them, and all the trophies and trumpets and graduation suits warped and stiff and moldy, piled on sidewalks for miles and miles and miles?

Did I say there is no losing us? Did I say it?

Look around you. Listen. Here we are. We are everywhere. We are even in the air we breathe.

posted by catherine at 5:47 PM

Monday, November 14, 2005

How we hold each other, and how we don't

I had another amnesia moment today, in the Walgreens on Decatur Street. I didn't realize until I got inside that it was the first time since the storm that I'd been inside a fully-stocked chain store, and I suddenly had no idea why I was there. For a long time all I could do was wander down the aisles, gazing at the neat rows of deodorants and Tylenol. Finally the manager came up to me and asked me if I was ok. I told him it was the first time I'd been a store so well organized; I was feeling mystified and trying to remember why I'd gone in.

His face softened. "Lotsa people are having that," he said, and put his hand on my shoulder. "You just let me know what you need, baby. I'm here for you." As soon as he said that I remembered: barrettes and a Sharpie marker. I started to feel a little normal again.

Right after Walgreens I went to the A&P on Royal, where some shelves are so bare you can see the rust that happened even before the hurricane. Yellow collard greens wilt onto the produce shelves; there isn't any lettuce. "This is more like it," I thought, before I even realized it.

It seems like everywhere I go, everyone's talking about the cops. Since the time I got pulled over a few days ago, I have been stopped by police two more times. Once they said they were checking the licenses of people who were driving around "in this neighborhood" and once a sheriff waved me over to the side of the road because he said I was speeding. Probably I was. Again, I didn't get a ticket. He even said something like, "I wouldn't give a ticket to a person like you."

Wow. A person like me? What on earth does this sheriff know about me, besides what I look like?

Two days before that, my friend Greg, who is Black, was arrested while he was watching the police arrest someone else, next door to the clinic in Algiers. They never told him what he was being charged with, and they took hold of his shirt collar and banged his head against the windshield of the car, again and again.

We have a patient named Mr Ross who comes to the Central City clinic every day we're there, so we can check his blood pressure, and so he can remind me to call FEMA, and so he can tell us stories of what Central City was like when he was growing up here, back in the '40s. His mother owned lots of apartment buildings in the neighborhood, and one day we were sitting on the corner and he pointed to a building a few blocks away that now has an entire wall missing, desks and bedroom sets still arranged for the whole world to see. "If my mama was alive," he said, "I would have found me some tools already, and fixed that whole place up for her. She liked to keep her places nice."

"Your pressure's amazing!" we say, every single time he comes. But he still comes every day. "Y'all are basically the only people I have to talk to anymore," he told me the other day.

Yesterday my friend Joanna was talking about how people just come up to her on the street and start talking. So many people's networks are completely disrupted, especially people who are poor. One of her neighbors said she was the first person he'd talked to in three days. He told her everything. I wonder if this is what it's like when you get older, when all your friends die and you don't have the desire or energy to build new relationships. Will we become a city of mourners, sitting alone on stoops watching other people's lives parade by? All these broken hearts we wear on our sleeves.

posted by catherine at 11:04 AM

Wednesday, November 09, 2005

This is real, and a step toward justice

I keep having conversations with people about how "surreal" everything is right now. On so many levels, it's true: we're running a free integrative medicine clinic out of a mosque; we set up other clinics in churches and parking lots and baseball diamonds; military police patrol the streets in Humvees; people have dinner in fancy restaurants like nothing ever happened. There are so many day spas open uptown! Huge parts of the 7th Ward still don't have power. My block is still lined with drowned cars and upside-down refrigerators. I spent a large part of this afternoon lugging huge vessels of water to my house so we could flush toilets; a house in my parents' neighborhood has a sign out front that says, "Cox! When can we get our cable back?" The animal rescue people are still out in full force. I really wonder what they do all day.

But I'm not sure about the word "surreal." On some level it seems like too much luxury for us to declare that ultimately this is anything but real.

Today I gave a ride to a man who had been walking all day. He walked from the Greyhound station all the way to his house in the Lower 9th ward; he looked at his house for 20 minutes, couldn't take it anymore, and walked back. Water had gotten up to the roof. The military had kicked in his front door and everything was all over the place. So many people talk about how it's one thing to come to the knowledge from far away that you've lost everything; to see it before your eyes is another thing entirely. He won't come back, he says. He will get a job in Baker, Louisiana (right outside Baton Rouge); his wife and 12-year-old daughter are in Texas, where they will stay so his daughter can finish out the school year. He only wishes he could be with them at the end of a long day. His daughter is growing up too fast.

Yesterday we went to the March on Gretna, which was organized in protest of the time during the hurricane when hundreds of weary African-American people tried to cross the Mississippi River Bridge to safety and were turned away by armed police with guard dogs. The police shot at the people and sent them back to New Orleans, which was flooding, and which had no food or water or electricity or medical care. People had to go back to the Convention Center, where they made orderly stacks of bodies in corners and on sidewalks as the people died.

Over 100 people crossed the bridge yesterday, but still I felt surrounded by ghosts. I have never been more conscious of the people who weren't there: all these families scattered to the winds, picking up new lives in Texas and Wyoming and Ohio. It seemed fitting to me that the most beautiful aspects of this march were the drivers in the opposing lanes of traffic: a driver of an 18-wheeler who couldn't stop honking, who kept yelling over and over, "I feel y'all, man! I just feel y'all!" The backs of pickup trucks full of work crews, shouting and cheering, their fists up in the air.

posted by catherine at 9:16 PM

Friday, November 04, 2005: Littering, and what we remember

Yesterday at the clinic I had a patient who couldn't remember the name of the street he used to live on. The Times-Picayune had a big story in the Living section today about short-term memory loss. I find myself gazing at people and wondering where I've met them before. The other day, a woman drove by the clinic and said, "I can't find the Winn-Dixie anymore! I've been living in this neighborhood my whole life, and I don't even know where the grocery store is."

I remember one of my first patients ever since the storm, a woman from Chalmette who spent twelve days tied to a steeple. She says the only way she could survive was by forgetting many, many of those days. "I lost nine days of my life," she told me. "That's why I'm here now."

What does it mean that so many of us have forgotten some of the things that used to define our world; things like numbers and names and addresses, places, people? What has taken up that space in our minds? How, and why, and what, must we remember now, in order to keep surviving?

I dressed up as fire for Halloween and it was all right. People danced on Frenchmen Street until about one-thirty in the morning, when the National Guard actually tried to enforce a Last Call in this 24-hour city. On the way home from the street party, our friend L. got stopped by the police because some paper fragments of her costume fell onto the sidewalk. They were wearing pig noses and she thought they were joking. They ended up arresting her for littering and she spent that night and most of the next day in jail.

Littering! On my block there are twelve refrigerators, with contents that have been rotting since August. There are bales of electrical wire; there are heaps of sofa cushions, moldy mattresses, soggy shirts and trousers. There are warped bookshelves, their contents spilling out into the street. There are entire trees, shattered and dusty. There are broken chairs rattling on the curb like kindling. There are the bones of animals. How can anyone be arrested for littering here, in this whole desert city full of garbage?

Our other friend, M., spent most of the night trying to figure out how to get L. out of jail, a disaster even when New Orleans is functioning normally, but in this case it involved even extra questions, like, Where is jail these days? She asked about 8 cops and no one knew, since a few days ago they'd closed down the Greyhound station they had been using as a makeshift jail. After over an hour of searching, she found what they're using as jail these days, a garage in the Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff's building. Court is a cubicle in the garage, where thirty male prisoners, shackled at the ankles, sat on the floor awaiting their hearings. No one had seen a lawyer. Our friend L didn't have any water for almost 24 hours since she'd been in jail, even though in the court next to the judge there was a crate of Ozarka bottles. L asked the judge for one but the judge said, "Those aren't for you. Those are for the staff."

Our friend M says this experience brought home to her how the prison system doesn't only lock up its inmates, but all their loved ones too. She felt like she couldn't leave the jail at all, because maybe that would be the time they'd decide to let L out, or give out some tiny bit of information. She, too, felt captive. All that time she spent waiting for L to get out, she couldn't read or talk on the phone or do anything. She slept and looked around a lot. All she wanted was a hot shower and some food that wasn't peanuts.

Today the thing about this Halloween arrest story that sticks with me is its ordinariness. It is not abnormal in New Orleans, especially for people who are poor or people of color, to be picked up off the street at the drop of a hat. Parents are used to the idea that children may not come home one day. Even in privileged circles, jail is seen as a weird inevitability: Tulane Medical School gives out the name and number of a lawyer to help out any students who may run awry of the law.

Even still, though, I don't know if I can imagine rich white people getting arrested in this city for littering. (L is Mexican). Another friend talks about how anytime she is in the car with her African-American boyfriend after dark, they get stopped by police. There has only been one night since the hurricane where they didn't get stopped.

Today I made an illegal left turn off Rampart onto Esplanade. I've been doing it every day since the storm. Today, a cop pulled me over and explained that I'd made an illegal left turn. When he was going through my license and registration, he found out that my license plate was also expired, my insurance card was out-of-date, my registration was expired, and I didn't have a brake tag. He said he'd only cite me for the brake tag, and if I got a new one before my court date (which is not until January!), the charge would probably be dropped. When he gave me the ticket he'd written, he said, "I made your court date a long while away. That way you'll have plenty of time to get your brake tag taken care of. I know things here hard right now, with the hurricane and everything."

posted by catherine at 6:46 PM

About Me

Name: catherine

I am a New Orleanian first and foremost. I am a medical student; I am madly in love with my family and friends and the young children and glorious elders in my life; I go on long runs and short road trips and glittery costumed escapades... but really, the love of my life is New Orleans. I am a daughter and granddaughter of this city: this land is the blood in my veins. I am dedicated to struggling inside and outside New Orleans for racial and economic justice, and high-quality accessible healthcare, and the weaving back together of fractured communities, and the right of all people to be home.

Monday, October 31, 2005: "Natural Disasters Don't Discriminate"?

Today is Halloween, which means that in addition to trucks full of National Guard and contractors, the streets are also teeming with superheroes on bikes and winged angels driving pickup trucks. Tonight I hope we are all out in force, costumed freaks dancing our demons away.

The other day I spent five hours at the FEMA station with Yogi, an 82-year-old African-American man who lives across the street from the clinic. We were both there to find out what happened to our checks, which were supposed to have been mailed out weeks ago. I know so many rich white folks who got their checks back in September. Some even got two. Neither Yogi nor his son have gotten anything yet; meanwhile they don't have a phone and depend on the Red Cross and neighbors for some of their meals. And they are better off than most in the neighborhood.

The FEMA office is a cryptic maze of desks and folding chairs, and depending on what you're there for, they assign you to a different row of folding chairs. Every time someone gets up to go see a caseworker, everyone else in the chairs behind them has to get up and move one spot closer to the top of the line. Every time we had to move, all the old folks had to heave up their tired bodies, gather possessions, maneuver walking sticks, readjust to the new seat. We are all used to moving too much these days. From three seats back I could hear Yogi's rusty bones creaking like old doors.

There's a big poster on the wall there that says, "Natural disasters don't discriminate." I spent a good part of my five hours wondering who put that poster there, and why. Do they want us to scrape our minds for any trace of logic to convince us that we are all equal here, that the people who waded through floodwaters, and lost relatives, and waited under a scorching sun for days with no food and water, and who are even now being prohibited from seeing their houses, and who are even now being stopped by police and arrested with a force and exuberance greater than I have ever seen before, even here, are not overwhelmingly poor and Black? And that so much of this, and the racism that allows it to exist, is not actually the result of disaster but the cause of it?

After being herded around the FEMA office for so long, Yogi felt like he needed to thank me for taking him on this errand. He and his son cooked an unfathomably huge meal for me at their house. They're worried that the hippie cooks at the clinic don't know how to cook mustard greens properly, so they made me bring my leftovers back to everyone else. They put an enormous amount of greens and cornbread and rice and potato salad into a plastic Betty Boop bowl, covered it in foil, and told me to make sure everyone got a taste of what "real greens" are like.

After work on Saturday I ran, in my work clothes, to a street parade with the Box Of Wine Krewe. It started in the Treme and ran to MiMi's in the Marigny. The Soul Rebels brass band played, improvising lyrics to traditional songs so the refrains now said, "Where's my FEMA check?" I was one of the only ones not in costume, among a horde of pirates, dominatrixes, and various abstract renditions of hurricane loss. Along the route I picked up branches and streamers and scraps of yellow Caution tape so that by the end of the evening I was a tree/majorette. I felt more at home than I ever would have if I'd stayed in my unadorned hoodie. Being in costume is really really important in New Orleans. By the end of the evening, the dominatrixes were whipping the National Guard's humvees and all these individual Guard people kept coming over to us and saying things like, "Man, we really wish we could come party with y'all.. maybe after our shift? how long y'all gonna be out here for?"

Then I went to see the Rebirth Brass Band play at Tipitinas. I've been seeing Rebirth play since I was about thirteen and it's been a while since I was blown away by one of their shows. But that night it was beautiful. The majority of the crowd was local Black folks; it was the first time since I've been back in New Orleans where I've been around so many Black folks just hanging out. I mean, hundreds of people, singing along to all the songs. Leaning over the balconies, arms outstretched. Dancing on chairs and tables, pushing over the stage and dancing on speakers, so many people dancing on the stage you couldn't tell who was the band and who wasn't. It was one of my most welcome-home moments yet, all these hundreds of sweaty people in this familiar space, each and every one of us making that music.

The next morning I took a long walk through the Bywater, where there are still streets that have things like, "Mom bad legs please help now" spray-painted on them. People walking dogs and watering flowers amidst all these piles of sticks that used to be someone's house. There's one silver warehouse there that I used to love, shiny in its decay. Now strips of the corrugated metal have been peeled away and you can see straight through it, all the way to the Mississippi River Bridge, silent and gleaming like church towers in the white morning.

posted by catherine at 10:09 AM

Thursday, October 27, 2005: Axes

At dinner tonight we talked about axes. What it means to grow up thinking you need to have an axe in the house in case you need to chop your way out the roof one day. I don't know if that ever happened in my childhood, even though in New Orleans we always lived inside the shadow of some looming storm. Growing up white and middle class, I think I always had an assumption that even if a major disaster hit, we'd somehow be safe. That if they sent out the lifeboats, we'd be first to get on. Crazy how that kind of reality can get ingrained in your brain, even at six; how it colors the world decades later, when you find out it's true.

Today we set up a little shot station and first aid center at the Israelite Baptist church and everyone we saw said they wouldn't have gone anywhere to get a shot if they hadn't been walking right by on the way home from work. I'm glad to be there, even if there's not a whole whole lot we can do for people yet.

I'm going to a potluck tonight. I'm bringing cereal and soy milk. Usually that wouldn't cut it at a potluck, but tonight I think it'll be ok. No grocery stores are open past six, and everyone's contributing whatever they've got in their measly fridges. So nice to have anything, even if it's Cheerios, to bring to a party.

Walked home tonight thru the French Quarter after it had gotten dark. It's full of men, now, different than usual. These guys are from places like Ohio and Jersey; they're cops and firefighters and Army Corps of Engineers people. Mainly white. They're making lots more money in our city than most folks from New Orleans ever thought of making. These men don't whistle and catcall from across the street, they walk over from the well-lit bars and try to start drunken conversations. I feel eerie on a whole 'nother level, like I'm a stranger in a new place, learning the codes of how to protect myself all over again.

And meanwhile there are all these other workers here, the ones who don't unwind on Bourbon Street after a long day. Most evenings some of us have been going to different hotels and work sites where large numbers of mainly Latino workers are staying, sometimes imprisoned by their bosses. Sometimes we have to set up our clinic a few

blocks away, because the bosses won't allow medical workers into the areas where the workers are. People sneak off in the dark to get medical care; they return to the barely-lit hotels two by two with herbs and aspirin. They sleep four or five hours; the next day they've started working again long before sunrise.

posted by catherine at 8:57 PM

Wednesday, October 26, 2005: new ghosts

Every day there are new ghosts.

Yesterday i spent the afternoon walking around my old neighborhood, almost crying. Little things would make me almost cry: a violin in a yard, encased in mold. My neighbor's studio window, with "New Orleans, I love you so much!" spray-painted across it. I don't know if he's back, or if he's coming back, ever. I feel ok about crying on the street these days, but yesterday, every time i was about to give in and let myself do it, i'd run into an old neighbor and we'd have the How'd Y'all Make Out conversation. Did you leave, where'd you go, how's your family, how's your place, where are you staying now, listen to the crazy thing I did the other day. These days, I have that conversation so many times, it's almost mundane. Lost the house, job's in Lafayette but the kids are in school in Baton Rouge, so-and-so moved to Dallas, forever. I always brace myself for the news. No one ever says, "I'm great! How are you doing?" Weeks ago our reunions were joyous, screaming affairs in the middle of streets. We were so glad to see each other alive. The National Guard and the Animal Rescue workers would gaze at us in awe as we'd jump into each other's arms from all the way down the block. Now the quantity of stories has become overwhelming. Sometimes I want to just walk on by and not listen. But for some reason I always stop.

Today we went to the Israelite Baptist Church in Central City to talk about setting up a free clinic there a couple of days a week. Reverend Larry was amazing; he brightened my whole day. The church does a whole host of programs, everything from an exercise ministry to a drug program called "Sons of Blood and Thunder." For the past three Sundays they've had services without electricity, and every week over 100 people showed up. Rev. Larry explained to us that everything they do, they do it for the community, whether people are religious or not. No one has to be a part of the church to participate in the activities the church does. They've even set up a nonprofit to do things like distribute condoms and talk to teenagers about sex and drugs, since it's hard to do those kinds of things through the church itself. We said we'd be happy to do the clinic in whatever space they had available, that we were good at making do, having set up clinics in parking lots and baseball diamonds, and Rev. Larry said, "Y'all are my kinda people." I think I'm still smiling from when he said that.

After we left, Molly said. "I'd always heard organizing in New Orleans is about relationships, and I think I'm starting to see how that works." It's been really amazing to see other people here willing and ready to learn about how organizing works here, people being conscious that there is a long and rich history of amazing work here. I feel like a big part of my job is to help translate that reality to people, help people slow down and listen and be respectful of the place they've come to. Every time I get in the car with folks from out of town, I hear myself saying things like, "this didn't always used to be a Wal-Mart. This was the St Thomas housing project until just a few years ago, and there was hella organizing going on back here." People need to know that if they are coming to rebuild my city.

Thinking a lot about what it means for me to be "rebuilding" this city as a healthcare worker and someone committed to racial and social justice. I think I'm coming to an understanding of how I need to balance actually being out there and doing work, because there's always more people needing healthcare than there are ways to fill that need-- even here! in this city where so many people still aren't around--and also being conscious and strategic about what kind of healthcare there needs to be. Feeling excited about building relationships with grassroots anti-racist healthcare providers in the city, like the St Thomas Health Clinic; feeling like this is a time where anything is possible and where healthcare itself can be an amazing force in the struggle for racial justice in this broken city.

Driving home tonight I felt like I was in the middle of a checkerboard. The Quarter lit up like Disneyworld; poor black neighborhoods a few blocks over so dark I couldn't even see the street in front of me. The whole city like that: housing projects so desolate you can hear the doors, loose from their hinges, creaking in the breeze like songs. Who's here, who's not. Who gets to come home, who doesn't. At night I feel us all here, lost together, wandering through that dark.

posted by catherine at 10:38 PM

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'Roadtrip for Relief.' Call for 300 volunteers to gut houses in the 9th Ward

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Organization:	Date Published:	Link:
Common Ground Collective	11/01/2005	http://www.commongroundrelief.org/node/19

During the winter holidays, Common Ground Collective will coordinate the Holiday Roadtrip for Relief. During our first convergence of volunteers, we cleaned out over 30 homes, the streets around our distribution center, a community center and a women's center. Thanks to the work of all of you, we now have power in all of our 9th Ward locations, an open media center and internet lab, and a 22 minute documentary that will be released next week.

I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude toward each of you for donating supplies, hard labor, and your creative energy into our projects. Thanks also for enduring the difficult moments along our journey to restoring and rebuilding New Orleans. We have taken your suggestions very seriously, and have now initiated community-led programs in all of our project areas.



During the entire winter holiday season, we will offer food and basic shelter to all volunteers able to arrange transportation and to work within one of our many programs in and around New Orleans.



We need help! Returning residents are offered little or no help from governmental agencies during this difficult period. Huge areas of the city remain without power, and mountains of trash and debris continue to litter the city. Police and military vehicles remain on constant patrol, and a curfew remains in place, poised for selective enforcement.

Common Ground is working with these communities to provide the support needed for residents to return. Our work includes legal teams, food, water and cleaning supply distribution, free medical aid, a community newspaper, anti-eviction work, a women's center, free internet labs, a community radio station, clean up crews, construction crews, environmental restoration and roof repair teams.

By traveling to the New Orleans area and lending a hand, you can offer a sense of hope to returning residents. With your cash donations, you can offer direct support to any of our many programs. By collecting supply donations in your local communities, you can provide the tools necessary to help rebuild New Orleans sustainably, effectively and with justice.

Check the website in the coming days for a new design, updates and for downloadable tools like sample donation letters, wish lists, flyers and more. For information about volunteering during the Holiday Roadtrip for Relief, please email commongroundvolunteers@gmail.com

">commongroundvolunteers@gmail.com or call our volunteer information line at (504) 218-6613.

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Demands of the Hurricane Evacuees Council/Bay Area

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Author: Hurricane Evacuees Council/Bay Area
Date Published: 11/01/2005

Demands of the Hurricane Evacuees Council/ Bay Area

Sign on to Support!

November 2005

WE DEMAND REAL HOUSING

- * stop all evictions of people from hotels and other housing; stop all threats of eviction by the Red Cross, FEMA and other government bodies;
- * more resources for housing which must be provided immediately; extend the time that FEMA is paying for housing; no hierarchy based on how housing is provided(?); resources should not be distributed based on income (former or present); permanent housing must be prioritized by FEMA, not hotels/motels; hotels, motels and trailers should be provided on a temporary basis as needed, to be replaced by permanent housing;
- * stop moving people from room to room at the hotels; housing to include basic essentials including kitchen facilities and refrigerators; people should have immediate access to decent clothing, furniture and other necessities for the home;

WE DEMAND THE INFORMATION WE NEED

- * wide circulation by all city agencies, FEMA and non-governmental organizations of what resources and services evacuees are entitled to; all evacuees and those providing services to evacuees must have copies; resource lists should include city agencies, what they are responsible for providing, a person's name to call and emergency contact number;
- * wide distribution of a list of where to get free or discounted meals;
- * community-based networks who are providing help should have access to information of where evacuees are;

WE DEMAND HELP WITH TRANSPORTATION

- * free of cost Muni bus and Golden Gate transit system passes, BART tickets, and Amtrak tickets for evacuees and their children; Para-transit should be made available to anyone who needs it;
- * access to California drivers licenses;

WE DEMAND THE MONEY AND RESOURCES WE ARE ENTITLED TO

- * in the richest country in the world, all evacuees must get at least the \$4350 they were promised and entitled to (an initial \$2000 per family for evacuees and then an additional \$2350 for housing costs from FEMA); no discrimination based on former or present income; many people did not get this money, others got different amounts;
- * the money from the debit cards that was taken out must be given back (the Red Cross gave people \$660 in Houston TX and many people report having between \$300-360 taken away from them upon arrival in San Francisco);

* immediate access to Cal-works/welfare, food stamps, medical care and housing for all survivors;

* legal and other services and aid must be made available to evacuees;

WE DEMAND WORK FOR THOSE WHO WANT IT

* everyone who can and wants to should have the opportunity to have a job/waged work at a decent wage; all evacuees must have immediate access to an income including for their unwaged caring and survival work; companies who owed people for their work before the hurricane should pay this money now; the federal government should fine employers who show discrimination against hiring evacuees;

WE DEMAND QUALITY FAMILY CARE

* access to free quality childcare, elder care; care and support for people with disabilities; family members who are caring for children, the elderly and those with disabilities should be paid and receive other resources for that work;

WE DEMAND NO DISCRIMINATION

* no discrimination based on sex, race, age, economic, background, immigration and other legal or social status, sexual orientation, disability, etc;

WE DEMAND FULL ACCOUNTABILITY

* accountability and transparency for all monies from government and non-governmental organizations that is supposed to help or be handed to evacuees; how much did the Red Cross, United Way, FEMA, the City of San Francisco and other Bay Area cities receive for evacuees' relief; how much money has come in and how is it being spent; how much of it is going to salaries and other administrative costs and how much gets to evacuees?

For more info or to send back the form, contact: Hurricane Evacuees Council/Bay Area
Box 14512 San Francisco CA 94114 or call/fax to 415-626-4114 sf@crossroadswomen.net

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New Orleans and Women of Color: Connecting the Personal and Political

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Organization: INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence	Author: Janelle L White, INCITE! New Orleans	Date Published: 11/01/2005
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There has been much reporting on the catastrophic impact of Hurricane Katrina, particularly the natural destruction and inaction of the state which only served to further expand the devastation of the region. Most of this writing and media coverage has been produced by those from outside the area impacted by Katrina. And more specifically, although there has been progressive, mainstream media coverage and analysis generated by residents of New Orleans, it has not been by those born and raised in the Crescent City. I recognize this because the silence from the most marginalized communities impacted by Hurricane Katrina, particularly women of color, continues to be deafening. When writing about the "other" or when conveying information from an outsider's position, regardless of one's intentions, it is extremely easy to further marginalize a community. Others end up speaking for them and of them, instead of with them and in support of them. Therefore, it is necessary now more than ever that we hear from those of the Gulf Coast region who have arguably never received popular attention.

As a black, lesbian feminist, academic, organizer, and currently displaced six year resident of New Orleans, I realize I represent a confluence of both privilege and minority status. That is my personal frame of reference and describes where I fit in the relations of power. As a displaced black New Orleanian, I am now part of yet another diaspora. This distinction links me to a specific racial! ethnic and geographic community, while it painfully denotes our severed new world.

My Account - The Personal

About a week after I left New Orleans, I wrote my evacuation account to share with friends and loved ones. I started by condemning the racialized and callous state/federal response to the victims and the despicable labeling of the people in my community as 'looters.' But most of what I conveyed was about the immense psychological and emotional trauma associated with such incalculable loss. I recounted listening to a radio station, while driving through Alabama with four close friends in caravan to the safety of my mother's home. The radio announcer reported that a 'worse case scenario' for New Orleans would mean an estimated 40,000 people dead. Tears flowed.

I also wrote of how a friend who had been on life support before the hurricane died two days after the storm came ashore, how her lesbian life partner was not allowed to stay with her at the hospital, and how she had no idea when she might be able to claim her partner's body. I told how my ex-partner, who evacuated to Alabama with us, after a week of not knowing her family's fate, finally found that her 84 year-old mother, two brothers, sister and nephew had been evacuated to Houston.

I recalled some of the popular media images that still break my heart: hungry, dehydrated children and adults in the Superdome and at the New Orleans Convention Center-uncertain if or when they will be evacuated; elders who died sitting in their wheelchairs at their designated 'shelters' with notes left on their bodies with names of next of kin to contact; people having to make a decision to leave their pets behind, or not be evacuated themselves, or children having their dogs snatched away from them, because they can't board evacuation buses with them. Dead bodies piled next to sites where individuals are boarding buses for evacuation. Knowing that not even the most

basic medical services were provided to those at the designated New Orleans evacuation shelters.

I began to consider how racism and class exploitation shape the state response to this disaster. And I realized that few individuals were discussing the specific impact on women, specifically women of color. It was a statement issued by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, a national organization of radical feminists of color organizing to confront violence against women of color and their communities (of which I support at the local level) that was the first text I read regarding this issue.

Violence Against Women of Color – The Political

Like many progressive / radical organizations, INCITE! recognizes that because of the intersection of classism and racism those trapped in New Orleans were overwhelmingly people of color. In addition, they acknowledge that because of the existence of sexism, women of color are overwhelmingly represented within this population. Furthermore, INCITE! distinguishes these women also as "low-income and poor women, single mothers, pregnant women, women with disabilities, older women and women who are caregivers to family and community members who were unable to leave New Orleans."

Reports of women and girls who were trapped in New Orleans experiencing sexual and physical violence are common. At times this violence was perpetrated by officials of the state-police, National Guard, FBI. This form of state sponsored violence is not at all surprising as it is a weapon of oppression utilized globally to suppress and maintain power and control over marginalized communities. However, some gender violence was perpetrated by men and boys of the New Orleans community. This is the more difficult abuse to speak of, especially for women of color, as we have no desire to aid further in stereotyping, demonizing, and criminalizing men and boys of color, particularly men and boys of African descent. Nonetheless, it is a painful truth that must be spoken. The bottom line that this catastrophe painfully demonstrates is, yet again, how women and girls of color are at the intersection of violence perpetrated upon marginalized communities, both by external social forces and by those within our communities.

Detailing this differential impact of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina on women of color is not at all about playing what a close friend refers to as the "oppression Olympics" (i.e. arguing that one particular group is more oppressed, exploited, marginalized than another). It is about recognizing a distinct experience faced by women and girls of color as they are uniquely confronted with both race and gender based oppression.

Connecting the Personal and Political

In generating a macro-level political understanding of this disaster in relation to other issues of social justice—such as global warming, the war on Iraq, environmental racism, police brutality, or violence against women—I urge us to start with the personal experiences of those impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Political analysis stemming from accounts of those affected has the potential to spur the development of more enduring coalitions. In addition, it motivates individual and collective healing and empowerment. The Sociology Department of the University of New Orleans is supporting such efforts by offering online and on-site credit courses that ask students—many of whom are natives of New Orleans, students of color, and the first in their families to attend college—to document their own hurricane narratives and then collect histories from family and community members. This is just one way the experiences and views of marginalized, neglected communities are revealed. My hope is that these Katrina narratives can structure on-going and emergent political organizing.

Furthermore, I urge us to detail the diversity of experiences of those impacted by Hurricane Katrina. I worry that too often individual experiences are being generalized, overly condensed, flattened, or entirely lost in a desire to create or support a particular ideology, be it anti-racist, feminist, anti-capitalist or environmentalist. For example, the issue of violence against women of color demands we simultaneously confront violence that is state sponsored and violence perpetrated against women of color by men of color who are part of our communities. This means the full range of accounts of women's experiences of sexual and physical violence must be detailed. A radical response to such abuses of power—one that challenges all forms of oppression—is one that is uncompromising about holding all perpetrators accountable and, at the same time, does not further bolster the prison industrial complex or the criminalization of men of color.

Efforts to end violence against women of color will be futile if we only address violence perpetrated on a community, but fail to confront those abuses perpetrated within a community by its own members.

The Intensity of Loss and Magnitude of Hope

As I write, my ex-partner and close friend, a black woman born and raised in New Orleans, is watching her 84 year-old mother die as a result of the state's malevolent response to evacuating the city of New Orleans. And, as I write, 40,000 people have been estimated dead in the earthquake devastating Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. Such intensity of loss is overwhelming. I also write with knowledge that I am in community with women like Shana Griffin – self-described black feminist, young mother, social activist, and sister INCITE! member; she was born and raised in New Orleans and is currently displaced like so many of us. Within days of being uprooted by Hurricane Katrina, Shana was on record specifying that progressive activism surrounding the recovery of New Orleans must be driven by the most marginalized members of New Orleans and must center an analysis of race, class and gender. I can fortify my grieving heart and soul with her thoughtfulness, resolve, resilience and her continued organizing efforts and those of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund.

Audre Lorde wrote that we—those of us facing oppression—were never really intended to survive. So, survival in the face of such tremendous injury is resistance. This understanding prompts me to reach out for hope; it does glimmer here and there.

Janelle White is an INCITE! New Orleans Chapter member and has been active in the movement to end violence against women and girls for the last 15 years. She is currently residing in Oakland, California and teaching online for the University of New Orleans. She can be reached at [jwhite\[at\]uno\[dot\]edu](mailto:jwhite[at]uno[dot]edu). To read INCITE!'s statement of solidarity visit www.incite-national.org.

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Update From Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children

Organization: Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children
Date Published: 11/13/2005

We know that this update is long overdue and appreciate your patience in our getting it out.

First of all, we want to thank everyone again for all your support. We especially want to thank everyone who has sent love, clothes, and other donations to Flora, Marcy and others. We also want to give special thanks to those who donated computers, office supplies, fax and copy machines and furniture to help get our Lake Charles office off the ground.

It has not been an easy month. Our staff and members continue to struggle with the aftermath of both Katrina and Rita -- houses are destroyed, jobs are gone, offices are barely functional, loved ones need to be buried. Grieving and rage seem to be part of all of our daily realities as we try to fully comprehend what has happened and vision where we will go now that all has changed. Grief is both for our members and allies whose lives were lost, and for all of us whose homes are gone, whose lives as we knew them will never be the same.

We also grieve for a nation who has already lost interest in our struggle, a country that had an opportunity to rise up and declare an undying committment to eradicating the racism and greed which nourished these disasters, but somehow just hasn't. And we are rageful at a city and state who intend to rebuild the city of New Orleans without us and indeed exclusive of us. A city which continues to glorify the police and sheriffs despite proof that they left people to die in the city's jail and plainly killed others who were trying to escape the flood waters. A city that approves of contractors who exploit migrant workers - hiring them to do dangerous and hazardous clean up and then refusing to pay the promised wage or anything at all for weeks at a time. A state that allows for thousands to be evicted everyday with no dispute because those being evicted neither know nor can attend the hearing from their new "evacuation location" - but will arrive back home eventually to find a new lock on the door and their belongings on the corner with the rest of the trash on the street. A city and state that imply over and over that the city will be a better place without the poor and the Black despite the truth that New Orleans was built by poor people of color and destroyed by greed and racism.

We are not hopeless, we know our day will come. And we will still be here. We wont grieve and rage forever, but for now, our hearts are still heavy.

One thing that gives us hope is getting back on our feet. Our new Southwest LA office is located at 188 Williamsburg Street, Lake Charles, LA, 70605. Thanks to everyone who helped us, it is a beautiful office space and has most of what we need to keep on! We still need some desks and chairs and phones, but we have what we need to keep doing the work. Come visit us! For those who are wondering about our central city office, we still have our office space in New Orleans and Gina is working from there half time as the city gets back to its feet.

FFLIC was also finally able to meet as a staff and put together a new plan with priorities. We now have two main directives along with our ever-present organizing and juvenile justice reform work: 1) to locate every one of our members from the affected areas and as much as we can assist them with whatever their particular needs may be; and 2) work with other coalitions to document and bring attention to the stories and experiences of the survivors. This information and attention can be used to build demand for an independent investigation into the disasters and also ensure that the reconstruction of New Orleans not continue without the voices, desires and dreams of the people of New Orleans.

We have located many folks already and have distributed thousands of dollars to those who needed it. We have gathered clothes and furniture donations for our members. We are hosting a workshop this week on Human Rights Documentation for those of our members interested in interviewing and documenting survivors' experiences. We have travelled from DC to Los Angeles to Chicago to Atlanta and throughout Louisiana speaking and marching and talking and organizing in the hopes that that a unified coalition might evolve to lead us in this struggle and resistance. We have begun to work with a growing coalition of lawyers and organizers focused on ensuring that the reconstruction of New Orleans does *not* include a 7000 bed prison in its center, does *not* include a corrupt and brutal police force and does *not* include 2 dilapidated and dysfunctional juvenile detention centers.

We could go on and on but know that folks have much to read and do. Below are reports from our staff for folks who are wanting more detail about what our days and nights are like. Please know that we appreciate each and every one of your all's support and solidarity. We are still accepting donations: under the updates is a list of our and our members' wants and needs. All donations can be sent to our new office address. Thank you and much peace, Gina, Grace, Kori & Xochitl, FFLIC Staff

Grace, our Lake Charles organizer wrote the following update after a day of calls and searching for our members (*names have been changed):

"Mary* is living in a little camping trailer, with a leaking roof, in her driveway. They have received their Fema, Red Cross and food stamps. She was very excited to hear about FFLIC opening it's doors here next week. She told me Rhonda* and her family had to move and have gone to Philadelphia to start a new life. There apartment complex was next door to Vera's* and is torn up. Ms. Dana's* son, Steve* has run away twice in the last two weeks from Youth Challenge, been gone since Tues and she has no word on him. She has received her Fema and Red Cross but has yet to get her food stamps. I told her where to go and she is going to try next week. She is down mentally and struggling with Steve. She needs help financially and I will meet with her on Wed of next week. She is ready to get back to court and is very excited about the new office. She said Damon*, one of theboys she was working with when she was thrown out of court, was beaten badly by a guard that we know from JDC during the evacuation to Baton Rouge, in front of a van load of other kids being evacuated.

Miss Paula* is in very poor shape. Her son lost it 2 weeks ago. He was in a psychiatric hospital when he smashed his eyeball out with his hand and they have transferred him to a mental hospital in another parish. She is spending an enormous amount of money traveling all the way there to see him. She says he is completely out of it and the stress and fear I sensed from her end scared me. She seems close to losing it herself. I am meeting her tomorrow afternoon after she sees him to eat supper and see what support I can offer. I think we should also offer help financially for the cost of fuel and meals. What do you all think?

Carol* is at her breaking point after returning to find her newly remodeled house ready for the bulldozer. Her lodge that she rented out washed away and her mobile home she rented out with the roof gone.

All in Hackberry, one of our hardest hit areas near the coast. She says there is no way she could think of going to work now.

As I told all of you yesterday Vera* is ill and down mentally as well.

I have a doctor's appointment on Monday morning but after that I am going back to work hard. Everyone's need is just so great we must get things moving right away and I sense a place for all to come and support one another is a vital need at this time.

I was also thinking maybe we should hold a support group meeting and let folks just talk in the next two weeks and provide a good old FFLIC fried chicken dinner and plan for just for a couple of hours of sharing. Maybe Sat. the 29th in the early afternoon or the following Sun? This is what makes us FFLIC is coming together in the time of need and loving one another, plus it would give folks something to look forward to instead of just surviving day to day. Plus those that could help get things ready, it would give them a sense of purpose and things to do. How do your calendars look? I can handle all of the arrangements, alongside our members. Just need your time.

This has been an exhausting and heartbreaking day.

These are our people and their hurt is so real. I have finally stopped feeling sorry for myself and am seeing work much clearer than I have in a long time.

These folks have suffered so much. I found it hard to keep from breaking down and crying with them but God gave me the strength to offer them solace and support. This feeling I have now is similar to what I felt like coming home as the destruction I was seeing became worse and worse along the roads bringing us home. But now it is about our people and their hearts and their souls and I feel compelled to leave the whole mess I have here and go help others. This is the true damage of Rita and Katrina and there is no accounting for that in Bush's tallying of damages to the Gulf Coast. There is no account for this pain and hardship. Our fund will not be able to help these folks with this but it can ease their other worries and bring some peace to them that maybe what pulls them through.

Gina, Kori and Xochitl I love you all and am thankful to all of you for the support and love I receive from each of you. More thankful than any of you may ever know. We must take what we have between us and share it within our circle quickly, as I know where some of these folks are and I have been there. I have no doubt in my heart that without the folks of the JJPL and FFLIC I would have never had been able to get through those hours of darkness in my life that I believe most of the folks I have mentioned in this email are facing tonight. This is the unwritten part of our mission, the giving of ourselves in the hard times, that will draw folks in and make us stronger.

It is this need and giving that has created the LC FFLIC group that has remained united for so long. My plea is that you will come quickly and as wholeheartedly as possible. "

Co-Director, Gina wrote the following when she returned home for the first time:

"Ok, I'm writing this while I'm drinking the biggest daiquiri I could find on the westbank. It is with great sorrow and devastation I'm writing this email. I just came from my house and well, I thought I would be prepared for what I would find. There is nothing that prepared me for what I would see there. I knew I had 5-6ft of water but the level of grossness was completely overwhelming. As I drove into the deserted city, I was shocked at the level of devastation found there. Trees downed everywhere, electrical pole and lines spewn through the streets and absolutely no one in the streets other than military personnel. Cars and boats thown everywhere.

As I made it to my home, I expected to see my clothes and shoes all ruined, but as I approached my driveway I found my iron fence laying on the ground (mind you I could never open it cause I didnt have a key). The water line was above my sister and my moms cars and my bedroom door had rotted so it had given way and was ajar. I walked into what was my newly painted room, by yours truly, to find the paint peeling, clothes and shoes everywhere and my mattress still dripping wet. I dont need to discuss the stench. In my den, my sofa, dining table and refridgerator were thrown all over the floor, my wine and the cabinet over sink completely thrown on the floor. all the books that I have collected over the years, ruined. Ok, you guys know I'm generally a "whatever" kind of person and I had already seperated myself from the material things but when I realized just how many of my photo albums I left behind I just lost it. I cant believe all of the memories of my children and my older dearly departed family just gone. When you pick up the albums they just crumble in your hands. I thought they were up high enough but obviously I was wrong. My foyer walls are now decorated with mold and mildew. I cant even imagine this house to be livable again. I didnt want to bring Jessica with me, but its a good thing she came as she at least had the foresight to go and get the clothes out the dirty clothes hamper as all of my things and the boys things are lost. I guess I am homeless and clotheless. This is unbelievable. I'm not sure how I will recover from this emotionally. It's not even about the material things really, but knowing that each and every one of those items represented a moment in time that I will never get back, time shopping with a friend that I havent seen in years perhaps. Lord, I dont know how people will deal with this. I keep thinking about Ms. Collins* and other people whose entire house was under water. How will we ever rebuild this city..that is everywhere outside of the french

quarter, garden district and downtown!!! To think as I look down my block and for miles on end that homes look this exact same way and hundreds of people will return to find the same thing. Those of you that pray and even those of you that dont please do so this time for me and my children and families all across the gulf coast."

For those who would like to continue to support FFLIC in our work, please send all donations to 188 Williamsburg Street, Lake Charles, LA, 70607. We cant tell you how much we appreciate you!

Needs:

Clothes for Ms. Lecia, a member of the Lake Charles Chapter of FFLIC whose family lost everything:
Woman size 26/28 and 11/12 shoe; man size 36 pants 17neck shirt or Large; 11 shoe; woman size 24 and 11/shoe; man size 48 pant and 3x or 19 1/2 neck shirt and 12 shoe
Please send to: Hotel Ramanda Inn, 2700 Hwy 82E, Greenville, MS 38701 and send us an email to let us know

For other members:

calling/phone cards
gift cards from places that sell furniture, clothes or gas

For our office:

folding chairs for meetings
office chairs
picture frames & other office decorations
a microwave
a coffee pot
a vacuum cleaner
a tv/vcr combo for video showings
tape recorders for use in documentation
children's books, toys and play area items

For the FFLIC Hurricane Relief Fund:

cash and check donations that will be used to help our members rebuild their homes and their lives

EMAIL CONTACT FOR FFLIC: Xochitl Bervera –
xochitl@mediajumpstart.org">xochitl@mediajumpstart.org

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

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Community and Resistance

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Author: Jordan Flaherty
Date Published: 11/26/2005

A couple months before New Orleans flooded, I remember walking through my neighborhood on a beautiful weekend afternoon and hearing music.

I followed the sound a couple blocks, to where about thirty people, all of them Black, followed a few musicians through the streets. They were mourning the death of a loved one, New Orleans-style. Most folks were wearing custom t-shirts with a picture of the deceased. Next to the photo were the words "sunrise" along with the date of his birth, and "sunset," above the date of his (recent) death -- he was 20. Also on the shirt were the words, "No More Drama."

On the back, the shirts were individualized, with the relation of the wearer to the deceased. One woman's shirt said "momma." A few teenagers had shirts that said "cuz." A small child's shirt said "daddy."

Despite their loss, they were dancing through the streets. When the band finished their final song, everyone danced their hearts out. I don't know what else to say, except that's how we do it in New Orleans, and the image of those people mourning through celebration sticks with me as I see New Orleans today, struggling with so much loss and tragedy.

Cornel West, who has visited New Orleans often, said shortly after the city was flooded, "New Orleans has always been a city that lived on the edge, with Elysian Fields and cemeteries and the quest for paradise. When you live so close to death, behind the levees, you live more intensely, sexually, gastronomically, psychologically. Louis Armstrong came out of that unbelievable cultural breakthrough unprecedented in the history of American civilization. The rural blues, the urban jazz. It is the tragicomic lyricism that gives you the courage to get through the darkest storm. Charlie Parker would have killed somebody if he had not blown his horn. The history of black people in America is one of unbelievable resilience in the face of crushing white supremacist powers."

More than anywhere else in the US, New Orleans is a city where people live in one neighborhood their whole lives, where generations live in the same community. According to a recent census, of all US cities, New Orleans ranked second in the percentage of its population born in the state, at 83 percent. (Santa Ana, Calif., was first; Las Vegas last.) 54 percent of the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward had been in their homes for 10 years or more, far above the national average.

All of this is to say that New Orleans is not just a tourist stop. New Orleans is a unique culture, one that is resilient, and with a history of community and resistance. And, despite everything, resistance continues.

The People's Hurricane Fund has been doing direct outreach and organizing in cities across the US for their People's Tribunal and March for Justice, scheduled for December 8-10 in Jackson, Mississippi and New Orleans. They have organized communication centers in Jackson and New Orleans with plans for centers in Houston, Baton Rouge and

Atlanta.

On a national level, organizations such as colorofchange.org have mobilized thousands of people to pressure politicians, and the Congressional Black Congress has worked to keep this issue alive, both through legislation, and through joining protests, as Georgia Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney did by showing up for a march from New Orleans to Gretna a few weeks ago.

Meanwhile, just days after DC organizers announced plans for a protest at FEMA headquarters, FEMA officials announced that they were pushing back the date after which they would stop paying for hotels for Gulf Coast evacuees from December 1 to December 15. Continued pressure from across the US caused them to move the date again, to January 7.

Here in New Orleans, volunteers with the Common Ground Collective have set up neighborhood distribution centers with food and supplies, have served hundreds of people in their free health clinic, setup a media center complete with a community radio station, and embarked on a project to rehabilitate houses in the Ninth Ward. This week, hundreds of volunteers have arrived to continue this work, most of them staying on mattresses on the floors of warehouses and houses, sometimes thirty or more to a room.

Any convergence of hundreds of mostly young and white activists in a overwhelmingly Black community is bound to bring skepticism and controversy, and Common Ground has received criticisms from some local organizers. However, Common Ground in many ways represents a big step forward for the global justice movement. Rather than coming in, leading a protest, and leaving, activists were invited by Malik Rahim, a longtime community organizer, and have followed through and done real work in communities. They have been true to their commitments, and have shown by example that people with a vision of radical change and social justice can put FEMA or Red Cross to shame.

Finally, yesterday saw a major legal victory in the struggle for housing.

According to the statement from the New Orleans Grassroots Legal Network, lawyers representing a range of organizations, "brought suit against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, FEMA, Orleans Parish, and Jefferson Parish on behalf of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, UNITE-HERE Local 50-2, SEIU Local 21, ACORN New Orleans, and individual tenants being victimized by landlords post-Hurricane Katrina. Because of the immense pressure that has been placed on the government and the landlords by the people, Plaintiffs were able to achieve the following result from this lawsuit:

(1) All evictions in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes are immediately stayed -- meaning, all eviction proceedings in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes stop immediately against residents who are not in the area and whose whereabouts are unknown to landlords.

(2) Under the judge's order, FEMA is required, upon request, to provide to the Orleans and Jefferson Parishes, current contact information for the tenants who landlords are seeking to evict. Upon this contact information being provided by FEMA, the Parishes have to provide written notice of eviction to the tenants at the tenants' most current addresses. Tenants then have at least 45

days from the date of the mailing of the notice respond to the eviction action.

"This victory means that displaced people have an almost two-month reprieve from having to face loss of their personal property and their homes. This victory also means that for the first time FEMA has finally agreed to provide information to protect survivors. This is huge.

"But overall, this case is just another step that the Grassroots Legal Network has taken to bring recognition that people who have suffered the worst impact by the natural and government disaster of Hurricane Katrina have a right to return to their homes. This victory also provides an opportunity for political and social rights activists to organize with grassroots people to assert pressure on those in power to respect their humanity."

All of this leaves me feeling, for the first time in a while, that all of this fighting really does mean something, and New Orleans lives on.

Jordan Flaherty is a union organizer and an editor of Left Turn Magazine. This is his eleventh article from New Orleans. You can contact Jordan at NewOrleans@leftturn.org Jordan's previous articles from New Orleans are at <http://www.leftturn.org/articles/SpecialCollections/katrina.aspx>

Based on conversations with organizers and community members, Left Turn Magazine has compiled a list of grassroots New Orleans organizations focused on relief, recovery, social justice and cultural preservation that need your support. The list is online at <http://www.leftturn.org/Articles/Viewer.aspx?id=689&type=W>

Other Resources for information and action:

Reconstruction Watch -- <http://www.reconstructionwatch.org/>
United Houma Nation -- <http://www.unitedhoumanation.org>
Saving Our Selves coalition -- <http://www.sosafterkatrina.org>
Miami Workers Center -- <http://www.theworkerscenter.org/>
Common Ground -- <http://www.commongroundrelief.org>
Peoples Hurricane Fund -- <http://www.communitylaborunited.net>
Resource for Journalists -- <http://www.katrinainfonet.net>
justice fro New Orleans -- <http://www.justiceforneworleans.org/>
New Orleans Housing Emergency Action Team -- <http://www.no-heat.org/>

Great commentary and first-hand reports from New Orleans:

Catherine Jones' Blog from New Orleans is at: <http://floodlines.blogspot.com/>
Abram Himmelstein's Blog from New Orleans is at: <http://blogs.chron.com/exile/>
Walidah Imarisha's blog from New Orleans (and elsewhere) is at:
<http://www.livejournal.com/users/badsis/>

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Angry Hurricane Evacuees Sue Feds

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A few short months after the nation's greatest natural disaster, Hurricane Katrina, followed by Hurricane Rita, the news media are reporting that donor-weary Americans are moving on with their lives and preparing for the holidays.

That reality flew in the face of members of the Hurricane Evacuee Council-Bay Area, who experienced disinterest and insensitivity from about 60 percent of the spectators who rushed past them to get to the tree lighting ceremony in Ghirardelli Square on Friday.

The majority of celebrants ignored evacuees' request for support of their demands for justice, which include proper housing, access to information concerning resources, help with transportation, job referrals, quality family care, no discrimination, full accountability and the money and resources the federal government promised.

One broadcast news reporter summed up the callous attitude of the general public in one short question: "What do you say to people who say, 'Gee, it's been three months; they (evacuees) should have jobs by now,'" she asked.

The answer is: Evacuees are neither looking for a handout nor for anyone to take care of them. What they are looking for is the U.S. government to accept responsibility for the "man-made" disaster that forced the evacuation of thousands: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the New Orleans Levee Board, a state-appointed body, fiddled while New Orleans' levees crumbled. They'd known for years that the levees could blow at any time.

What has also been underreported is that the majority of evacuees are taxpaying Americans, who worked and paid more than their share of local, state and federal taxes.

Seeking justice in the courts

The recent spate of legal actions around the poor treatment of evacuees - from attempts to evict thousands to demands for equal justice and compensation comparable to that received by others, for example, 9-11 victims - is typical of the fighting spirit of southerners, especially Black southerners, who do not tolerate injustice.

Hurricane evacuees in the Bay Area and elsewhere aren't taking the shoddy treatment lying down. Now into court come 13 plaintiffs in a class action lawsuit filed Nov. 10 in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

The legal team consists of attorneys from the San Francisco-based Equal Justice Society, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law based in Washington, D.C., and Schulte, Roth & Zabel LLP, a New York law firm. John K. Pierre, Southern University law professor, is the local counsel on the lawsuit. Attorney Steve Ronfeldt of the Public Interest Law Project in Oakland and attorney Eva Patterson, president and CEO of the Equal Justice Society, also worked on the complaint.

The lawsuit, the first filed against FEMA regarding its response to Katrina, says the agency violated - and continues to violate - federal law by failing to provide timely aid to victims of Hurricane Katrina living in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

"There is no excuse for this failure by FEMA or for its refusal to fulfill its mandate," said John C. Brittan of the Lawyers Committee. "Without judicial oversight, there is little chance that the victimization will cease or that FEMA will come through with the services it is legally obligated to provide."

The suit specifically seeks a judicial order to force FEMA to "obey the laws put into place to address the problems associated with this kind of tragedy ... Hurricane Katrina was an act of nature, but its inhumane consequences were predicted and, thus, avoidable."

The legal brief spelled out FEMA's 2004 participation in "Hurricane Pam," a hypothetical emergency preparedness drill based on a massive storm that would produce the same damage Katrina ultimately did:

"FEMA and its leadership did not heed the warnings of Hurricane Pam or implement any of the precautions it called for that, at a minimum, would have mitigated some of the heartbreaking personal anguish and suffering that continues to this day. ... Federal law requires FEMA to provide assistance to disaster victims with, among other things, financial assistance to rent housing, or by supplying them with a trailer or mobile home. This assistance is guaranteed by the Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act," the brief states.

"More than two months after Hurricane Katrina struck, thousands of disaster victims still have not received their desperately needed assistance from FEMA and, as a result, continue to be victimized and to suffer harm each and every day, this time at the hands of their own federal government."

Additionally, the Stafford Act allows victims to be housed for 18 months from the date the president declares a disaster, and assistance may be extended beyond that time.

Can Equal Justice Society and co-counsel win in court?

It's long been common knowledge that the federal government has legal immunity from various types of legal action. Therefore, the question becomes: Can any one person or group successfully sue the federal government? And if so, can EJS and its co-counsel win the pending class action lawsuit while a judge who can hear the case, in the Eastern District, is found?

"Several of the available judges in the Eastern District sustained personal damage to their homes and lives, which may constitute a conflict of interest for any judge hearing the case. As such, the case is on hold until a neutral jurist can be found," says attorney Charles Ogletree, EJS chairman and Harvard University law professor.

"The federal government always had immunity from lawsuits. The difference here is that the feds went on the record saying it would do everything necessary to address the plight of the victims. There was talk of spending \$200 billion and compensation comparable to that given during the 9-11 tragedy.

"Since that time, less than one third of the promised funds have been used. What makes this case is that it has exceptional merits. Survivors are asking President Bush to keep his promise. It will be an uphill battle (winning the case), but it is one we are ready for," Ogletree added.

Evictions stopped!

Meanwhile, attorneys in New Orleans got busy in an effort to stop thousands of Katrina refugees from being evicted by landlords in Orleans and Jefferson parishes. Their successes add to the optimistic outlook of many that the courts may, indeed, provide justice.

The Grassroots Legal Network along with the Loyola Law Clinic, the Advancement Project, the People's Advocacy Center and New Orleans Legal Assistance Center brought suit against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, its component FEMA and the Orleans and Jefferson parishes on behalf of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, UNITE-HERE Local 50-2, SEIU Local 21, ACORN New Orleans and individual tenants

being victimized by landlords post-Hurricane Katrina.

Last Tuesday, they won a stay of all evictions until 45 days after FEMA mails a notice to each of the evacuees. This was a victory on two counts: Evacuees threatened with eviction will have a little time "to rescue their possessions and decide whether they wish to return to their homes," Bill Quigley, a lead attorney on the case, explains. And the agreement also forces FEMA to divulge to the courts the evacuees' current addresses. Previously, FEMA had refused all requests, even from the state of Louisiana.

EJS turns up the heat

"The federal government's performance in the wake of Hurricane Katrina constitutes one of the great racial justice tragedies of our time. The class and color lines drawn by this disaster are undeniable," Equal Justice Society leadership said in the civil rights organization's Nov. 17 petition.

"The petition is calling for action by Congress, the president, FEMA, Homeland Security, and the United Nations," explained attorney Kimberly Thomas Rapp, public policy director for EJS.

Seizing on the First Amendment right to petition the government, the document was delivered to the White House, congressional leadership, the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and the acting director of FEMA. The petition was also presented to several United Nations agencies, including the Commission on Human Rights and the office of three Special Rapporteurs on Racism, Internal Displaced Persons and the Right to Adequate Housing.

The petition to the federal government calls for "bold action" in the wake of the nation's worst hurricane. The 14-point demands include a call to President Bush to reorder national priorities and restore funding to federal agencies responsible for fortifying the nation and administering relief programs.

Professor Charles Ogletree added validity to the buzz that government has a vested interest in keeping New Orleanians – particularly those who are poor and Black – from returning home, when he made this statement to Katrina evacuees: "Our biggest concern is that they (government, FEMA, private sector) don't scare you into not coming back. Then we'll have the Donald Trumps and Donald Ducks taking over property that rightfully belongs to homeowners."

Email CC at campbellrock@sfbayview.com

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For a Former Panther, Solidarity After the Storm

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Author: Michelle Garcia
Date Published: 12/04/2005

NEW ORLEANS – Malik Rahim, a granddaddy with a broad face and long gray dreadlocks, leans across his wooden kitchen table and with a low Nawlins growl lets you know what he thinks local pols did for racial harmony.

"I'm *far* from being a Republican, but I got to call it the way it is," he says. "They had a shoot-to-kill order on African Americans in this city with an African American mayor."

He catches himself.

"Let me rephrase that: A *so-called* African American mayor and a so-called African American police chief. They sat here and allowed this governor to declare martial law on *African Americans*."

In the days after Katrina drowned the city, Rahim, 58, sat on his front porch in Algiers, a working-class district of bungalows, churches and smokestacks that lies across the Mississippi River from downtown New Orleans, and watched mostly white militias patrol the streets with rifles and pistols. Then came the National Guard, carrying their M-16s, and Gov. Kathleen Blanco's order to "shoot and kill" the "hoodlums."

This is New Orleans, he says, where the fabric of history is woven with the likes of Jim Crow and the Dixiecrats. "Here's that plantation mentality," he roars. "New Orleans was a city that was ran by old money, old plantation money, so they never gave a damn about blacks."

But, a visitor across the table asks, what about the plans for rebuilding? The promises from New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and Blanco to help folks, poor folks, reclaim their lives?

"You can't [urinate] down my back and tell me it's rain," he says, a chuckle ripping through his thick chest. "That's what they're doing and they think that people won't understand what they're doing. No, you ain't [urinating] on me."

Some people might dismiss Rahim as another angry black man in New Orleans. Or conclude he's just another aging former Black Panther with an abundance of Southern gumption. You might even acknowledge some truth in the reasoning offered up by Blanco's spokesman, Denise Bottcher, who notes that although a lot of the reports of violence turned out to be overblown, "there was lawlessness," and "at the time and place you have to respond to protect people's lives." Race, she says, played no part in the governor's actions.

The stone-cold reality for Rahim is that his spare bedrooms and the parlor are now stuffed with about a dozen portable generators and trailer-size tents cover his back yard to house a slew of idealistic, mostly white, young people.

Common Ground Collective

Rahim, a Green Party candidate for City Council in 2002, is the nucleus of Common Ground Collective, a grass-roots recovery effort of volunteers parachuting into the city from points across the nation. Rahim's late mother's home, which survived the storms intact, has become the epicenter of the effort to deliver water, food, ice and medical care to the city's poorest.

Common Ground volunteers in search of a bare-knuckles approach and a movement to inspire them meet up with those who have lost patience waiting for officialdom to help them. More than 300 volunteers have cycled through

the house. Before Thanksgiving, caravans with even more volunteers set out for the South to participate in a massive holiday rebuilding effort.

Doctors from New York, San Francisco and Indonesia canvass the neighborhoods, some on bicycles, offering front-porch medicine for those who can't make it to the 24-hour clinic the group runs at a mosque. Labor crews hammer blue tarps onto the roofs, the post-Katrina emblem of survival. Volunteers live and work at food distribution centers in some of the poorest sections of New Orleans.

Jonathan Arend, 32, a medical resident at Montifiore Hospital in the Bronx, rushed back to his hometown two days before Hurricane Rita doled out even more punishment. Arend recalled that locals such as Swampwater Jack, who lives across the street from the clinic, stayed away from the medical centers with National Guardsmen stationed out front and instead preferred to have his asthma checked at home, where he could show off photos of the gators he had shot down in the bayou.

"There was so many bizarre sets of circumstances and unnatural and outlandish things that were going on," says Arend. "The fact that you see a white guy riding a bicycle in a white coat and stethoscope was just part of the mix."

Sam Zellman doesn't mention race as he pours lighter fluid into his Zippo and flips it shut inches away from his blond Mohawk. A burly man, Zellman ditched his job at a restaurant in Paw Paw, Mich., to haul refrigerators and trash from damaged houses.

"Sitting at work making food for yuppies and listening to it on NPR -- after a couple of days of this I'm like, I gotta come down," says Zellman, who spent a month at the collective after he gave up on being deployed by the Red Cross. "Some of us want a better world, and this is kinda pushing on the rock together. If it's us, or anarchists or the church folks, we have common goals, common short-term goals."

Inside the kitchen, Rahim traces this mobilization to an era of resistance and rebellion.

"I was trained for this," says Rahim, his eyes intent. "I'm not doing nothing but what we were doing in the party," he says. "The mold abatement I had done with the pest control program. Our feeding program. It was part of our breakfast program."

When Rahim was in his early twenties and still went by the name Donald Guyton, he returned from Vietnam and joined the Black Panthers, a national militant liberation movement dedicated to battling racism and not averse to using violence. The FBI deemed the Panthers a threat to domestic security and put the group under surveillance.

The Black Panther Party in New Orleans

In New Orleans in 1970, the Panthers set up operations in a house next to the bleak, sprawling public housing complex named Desire. Throughout the Lower Ninth Ward, pocked with poverty, neglect and thugs, the young men and women in their berets earned the admiration of many by chasing away the drug dealers. They offered social services -- free breakfasts and tutoring programs.

"They really started doing what the establishment was not," says Bob Tucker, then a young aide to Mayor Moon Landrieu who now owns an engineering firm. "When you look at what the Ninth Ward was, you have urban renewal, which was really urban removal, and Hurricane Betsy," a Category 4 storm that had ravaged the area five years before.

But there were tensions and suspicions. Local police eyed the militants warily.

On September 14, 1970, the Panthers unmasked two undercover cops. The police claimed they were beaten. The next day, when police descended on the Panthers' headquarters, a 30-minute gun battle broke out. One bystander, shot by police, died.

Police arrested Rahim, then the chapter's defense minister, and 13 other Panthers. Most were charged with attempted murder.

As Rahim and other Panthers sat in jail on \$1.5 million bond, their comrades squared off with police in what became known as the Showdown in Desire. A bloody denouement loomed -- until hundreds of public housing residents filed out of their homes and stood between the police and the Panthers, forming a human shield. A court later acquitted Rahim and the Panthers.

With the Panther Party dissolving in New Orleans, he bolted to San Francisco, served five years in prison for armed robbery and devoted three decades to prisoner and poverty rights causes, converting to Islam in 1989. Just a few years ago, he returned to the South to care for his mother before she passed away.

Within some circles Rahim is revered as a voice of consciousness, if not some good old rabble-rousing, says Tucker, who became chairman of the city's transit system. Beneath the provocative rhetoric, Rahim is a man driven by "a heart the size of New Orleans," says Tucker, who organized an anti-violence effort with him a few years ago.

Not the Standpoint of a Victim

"He talks about race because race is alive and well in the city and the country; he doesn't talk about it from the standpoint of a victim," Tucker says.

After New Orleans rumbled with unrest in the chaotic days after Katrina, Rahim unleashed his outrage in an essay in the San Francisco Bay View, an African American online weekly. "This is criminal," he began, and concluded with "You don't want to see black people live." The editors circulated his fiery words among community radio programs and activist groups. Within days volunteers began appearing at Rahim's door.

And this time, says Rahim, the solidarity that defused rising racial tensions was white. "If it wasn't for the work the courageous young men and women are doing here in New Orleans, we would be in it," he says, scanning the volunteers lounging in his back yard. "Because that's what stopped it, when they start seeing young whites sitting on my porch protecting me."

Rahim strolls across the front porch on a sultry evening looking for a meeting of his lieutenants, laughing and joking. Instead he runs into a newlywed couple from the neighborhood who dropped by to say goodbye before a young soldier ships off to Iraq. There are bear hugs for everyone. A long-haired young man follows Rahim while

blowing a Pan-like wooden pipe.

Rahim has decided to run for mayor. There are too many poor people, too many African Americans too easily forgotten, he says; his long-shot campaign is about them.

Rahim then considers his battalion of mostly white volunteers and his racial critique. Might this be a paradox? To which, he cues up another rap.

"America is drunk on prosperity"

"Right now America is drunk on prosperity. What we're showing is these conditions do exist. The demonization of young African Americans is unjust and we can make a change," he says, then pauses, considers his words and adds: "Not one that is based upon overthrowing anything."

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Justice After Katrina: The People Must Decide! Flyer

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Organization:

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition

Date Published:

12/08/2005

See Following Page

Legal Victory Stops Property Demolition – People of New Orleans 9th Ward Win Restraining Order Against City

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Author:

Cassandra Burrows

Date Published:

12/28/2005

Link:

http://www.peoplesorganizing.org/arch_legal.html

Kirk v. City of New Orleans, filed December 28th; the people of New Orleans 9th Ward won a temporary restraining order against the city of New Orleans to prevent bulldozing and demolition of property until a full hearing can be held on January 6th.

Lawyers Bill Quigley and Judson Mitchell of the Loyola Law Clinic, Judith Browne and Ishmael Muhammad of Advancement Project and Grassroots Legal Network, and New Orleans Lawyer Tracie Washington headed the lawsuit filed on behalf of individual homeowners from New Orleans, The Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Council, New Life Intracoastal CSC, The People's Hurricane Relief Fund, Louisiana ACORN, and Hope House. "We won't rest until the survivors rights are protected," explained Bill Quigley.

The suit was filed in response to an announcement by city officials that 2,500 homes would be demolished beginning immediately and 3,000 more would soon follow. The city has not included homeowners in this decision nor properly notified individuals that their homes are slated for demolition. Those filing the suit hope that the city will work to resolve these issues before the full hearing on January 6th.

"There can be no justice in the rebuilding process unless the residents and homeowners can fully participate. The restraining order is a major victory for the people of the 9th Ward, who want to be heard," stated Ishmael Muhammad, Advancement Project Staff Attorney.

"The people of New Orleans will see justice after all," explained Judith Browne, Co-Director of Advancement Project, "The government failed them before and during the hurricane but we will make sure that they see justice in the end. We stopped the evictions and now we must protect property rights and ensure the right to return."

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'Fire on the Bayou': African American leaders oonverge on New Orleans

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Organization:

SF Bayview

Author:

CC Campbell-Rock

Date Published:

01/11/2006

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Fighting the Theft of New Orleans: The Rhythm of Resistance

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Organization:

Black Commentator

Author:

Glen Ford and Peter Gamble

Date Published:

01/19/2006

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http://www.blackcommentator.com/167/167_cover_fighting_no_theft.html

The People's Hurricane Relief Fund &
Oversight Coalition
Presents

Justice After Katrina: The People must decide!

Save the dates

Jackson, MS
December 8th & 9th
National Gulf Coast
Survivors Assembly

New Orleans, LA
December 10th
Day of Return
March for Self-Determination

The People's Hurricane Relief Fund is made up of Gulf Coast residents, organizations and supporters from around the country and the globe who are working to see that our area is reconstructed with:

- 1- Our input**
- 2- Respect to our families**
- 3- Sustainable improvements in jobs, wages, housing, education and health**
- 4- Justice for those who have suffered at the hands of the neglectful U.S. government.**

Join us in the struggle to be a part of the solution!

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT THE PEOPLE'S HURRICANE RELIEF FUND

1.888.310.PHRF (7473)

info@communitylaborunited.net; www.communitylaborunited.net; www.katrinaaction.org
You can get information on: individual legal issues, immediate needs, supporting groups and actions, registering for the National Gulf Coast Survivors Assembly and March.



1/11/06

'Fire on the Bayou': African American leaders converge on New Orleans

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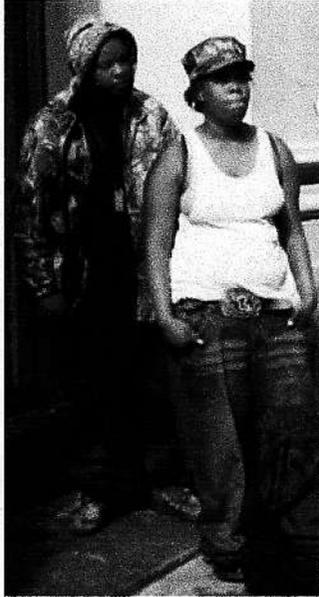
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Pen pals

Wanda's picks

Spiritual News

by CC Campbell-Rock



African American leaders from all over the United States and from as far away as Canada are meeting for the Institute of the Black World 21st Century-sponsored Martin Luther King Holiday Weekend Initiative, entitled "The Struggle Against Racism and Inequality in New Orleans: National Days of Return and Action," set for Jan. 12-14 in the beleaguered Crescent City.

The gathering will be the first of its kind and magnitude held in post-Katrina New Orleans, and many are expecting to exit with a redevelopment plan for New Orleans based on evacuees' input, something that is missing in current deliberations by Mayor C. Ray Nagin's Bring Back New Orleans Commission.

Katrina evacuees Brandon Washington, left, and Creshe Green, who had just returned to New Orleans a week ago, were evicted Monday from their New Orleans hotel despite FEMA's deadline extension. A judge ordered the hotel to let them return to their rooms.

Photo: Bill Haber, AP

Commission to "shrink the footprint" of New Orleans.

In short, the conclave will fire off the biggest salvo to date of the response of evacuees and supporters, who adamantly oppose the plans of the Urban Land Institute, Mayor Nagin and developers and bankers on the mayor's Bring Back New Orleans

A total of 29 organizations will come together in the African "village" tradition to discuss, analyze and plan the city's future through the eyes of evacuees. To that end, there will be plenty of fiery words for the powers that be in the city that care forgot.

The conference's primary sponsor is the Institute of the Black World 21st Century. Local co-sponsors include the African American Leadership Project, the Millions More Movement Local Organizing Committee, the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. The national co-sponsors are the Progressive National Baptist Convention, National Black Environmental Justice Network, Hip Hop Caucus, Black Voices for Peace and the Black Family Summit of the Millions More Movement.

Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, Progressive National Baptist Convention President Rev. Dr. Major Jemison, Ron Daniels of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century,

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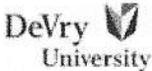
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Congresswoman Maxine Waters and other luminaries are expected to attend.

Perhaps the greatest catalyst for the Martin Luther King Holiday Weekend Initiative are news reports confirming that the Urban Land Institute suggested that certain neighborhoods, primarily African American communities, should not be rebuilt, especially if homeowners take too long to return to and fix up their homes.

More inflammatory, especially to African American evacuees, was the BBNO Commission's recent decision to give residents one year to return, and, if certain neighborhoods are not fully populated in that time, those who did return may be asked to leave and the communities left to be developed at the discretion of the mayor's BBNO Commission.

Aside from the commission being comprised primarily of white businessmen, more troubling is the fact that decisions are being made without the fair representation of members from communities at the heart of the "footprint" debate.

"The purpose of the initiative is to continue to focus national attention on the Hurricane Katrina disaster and its impact on hundreds of thousands of New Orleanians and people in the Gulf region. "The initiative also seeks to vigorously support the struggle of our brothers and sisters for the 'Right to Return' home with justice, equality and dignity," according to the agenda.

Activities include a Rebuilding and Redevelopment Conference, an Official Congressional Hearing of the Sub-Committee on Housing-House of Representatives of the United States, the Martin Luther King Jr. Ecumenical Right of Return Service, tour of New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward, Town Hall Meeting, a march, demonstration and rally, and the Millions More Movement Black Family Summit.

Ron Daniels, founder and CEO of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century, has been to New Orleans several times in the past few months. He was there at the meeting called by Rev. Jesse Jackson last October, he participated in the March Across the Gretna Bridge called by the Hip Hop Caucus and he worked on Haitian relief efforts prior to the onslaught of hurricane season.

"I thought it was important to do something around Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s notion of a 'bounced check, a promissory note,'" Daniels said of Dr. King's prophetic words, in which the slain civil rights martyr said that America gave the Negro a check that came back marked insufficient funds.

"The promissory note issued by the federal government in the wake of Katrina, a mostly man-made catastrophe, came back marked NSF. Katrina exposed the raw, naked face of race and class in New Orleans," Daniels continued.

"We have to draw the line in the sand. Not only African Americans but progressives must ensure that people come back. We cannot allow them to carry out ethnic cleansing. They've been trying to get

rid of African Americans for a long time, whether intentionally or as a byproduct of this hurricane," he added.

Daniels said groups such as the National Black Farmers and other freedom fighters will be present to focus upon the agenda before Congress.

"There are certain moments when we have to galvanize around a particular issue. If the nation can find billions of dollars for the demonic suction of war, there should be no problem in helping evacuees. There should be no artificial deadlines. We must make sure that Katrina victims are not forgotten," Daniels affirmed.

"Katrina has paved the way to ethnic cleansing - Black removal, no matter how you look at it. We're planning for a huge mobilization to keep Katrina on the agenda," said Mtangulizi Sanyika, project manager, African American Leadership Project, co-convenor of the Millions More Movement Local Organizing Committee and former adjunct professor at Dillard University.

The educator said prominent leaders such as Dr. Ed Blakely, an international builder who ran for mayor of Oakland and the current chair of Urban Regional Planning at the University of Melbourne, Australia, Phil Thompson, M.I.T. housing expert, and Abul Rasheed, a development practitioner, will be on hand to critique the Mayor's BBNO redevelopment set for release this Wednesday.

Prior to returning to New Orleans to care for his mother, who passed in November, Sanyika taught Bay Area college students.

"People are planning and making decisions without us. We're trying to reverse that trend. We must keep the Katrina issue in the national debate. We're concerned that Dr. King's legacy of struggle and fighting for justice will be forgotten, if we don't carry on the work," Sanyika explained.

"We're trying to make sure that King's legacy is not co-opted into nothingness," said Pastor Tom Watson of Watson Memorial Teaching Ministry. Watson was cursed at by Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee when the minister spoke about the way Jefferson Parish deputies fired 100 rounds into a truck, killing a Black teenage suspected of having stolen the truck.

Hotel evictions reversed

Meanwhile, on Friday, Jan. 13, at 10 a.m., Judge Michael Bagneris will preside over a hearing regarding a request by evacuees, initially booted out of the Quality Inn Maison St. Charles in New Orleans, for permanent relief. New Orleanians and hurricane evacuees Pauline Powell, Aretha Powell, Kevin Laroque, Velma Willis and April Johnson were ordered to leave the hotel before the first FEMA deadline, Jan. 7.

In fact, FEMA declared in December 2005 that the temporary housing deadline was extended to Feb. 7. It is unclear whether the hotel got that message; however, the news was widely published and available on FEMA's website.

The upcoming hearing is a continuation of the temporary restraining order won on Jan. 7 by lawyers Tracie L. Washington, William P. Quigley and R. Judson Mitchell Jr. of Loyola University New Orleans School of Law and Judith Brown, Ishmael Muhammad and Miles Granderson of the Advancement Project in Washington, D.C.

Washington and Quigley, both civil rights attorneys, are reputedly the most ardent defenders of New Orleanians' civil and human rights. Many of the cases they have worked on - from educational injustices to freeing incarcerated justice advocates - they have taken on pro bono.

"On Tuesday and Wednesday of this week (Jan. 3-4), defendant notified plaintiffs in this action and several other residents of Quality Inn Maison St. Charles that they would be evicted from their homes, without adequate notice or due process to appeal this abrupt decision," the attorneys wrote.

After hearing from both sides, Judge Bagneris ruled: "It is hereby ordered, adjudged, and decreed that defendant Quality Inn Maison St. Charles and all of its employees, agents and contractors are enjoined and prohibited from evicting and/or discharging any evacuee residing at the hotel as a result of the hotel's participation in the Short-Term Lodging Program operated by FEMA. Moreover, any such evacuee previously discharged and/or evicted this date must be allowed to return to their rooms at the hotel immediately."

With Mardi Gras parades set to begin, last week's judgment had to have hit area hotels, wishing to get rid of evacuees to make room for high-spending tourists, like a ton of bricks.

If events go as projected, there will be plenty of "fire on the bayou" and, perhaps, a sea change in the way evacuees have been tossed out and about. "The nation is on trial," Daniels concluded.

For more information on the MLK Initiative, contact the Institute of the Black World 21st Century at 1 (877) 424-8404 or info@ibw21.org. CC Campbell-Rock, a native New Orleanian, veteran journalist and Katrina evacuee, is the new editor of the Bay View. Email her at campbellrock@sfbayview.com.

COVER STORY



by **bc** Publishers
Glen Ford and Peter Gamble



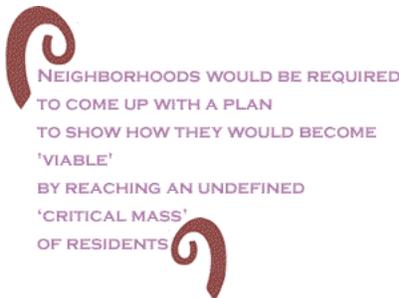
"I don't think it's right that you take our properties. Over my dead body. I didn't die with Katrina." – Lower 9th Ward resident Caroline Parker.

"Joe Canizaro, I don't know you, but I hate you. I'm going to suit up like I'm going to Iraq and fight this." – New Orleans East resident Harvey Bender, referring to the author of the city commission's "rebuilding" plan.

The overwhelmingly Black New Orleans diaspora is returning in large numbers to resist relentless efforts to bully and bulldoze them out of the city's future. "Struggle on the ground has intensified enormously. A number of groups are in motion, moving against the mayor's commission," said Mtangulizi Sanyika, spokesman for the African American Leadership Project (AALP). "Increasing numbers of people are coming back into the city. You can feel the political rhythm."

Mayor Ray Nagin's commission has presented residents of flood-battered, mostly African American neighborhoods with a Catch-22, carefully crafted to preclude New Orleans from ever again becoming the more than two-thirds Black city it was before Hurricane Katrina breached the levees. Authored by Nagin crony, real estate development mogul and George Bush fundraiser Joseph Canizaro, the plan would impose a four-month moratorium on building in devastated neighborhoods like the lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East. During that period, the neighborhoods would be required to come up with a plan to show how they would become "viable" by reaching an undefined "critical mass" of residents.

But the moratorium, itself, discourages people from rebuilding their neighborhoods – just as it is intended to do – thus creating a *fait accompli*: residents will be hard pressed to prove that a "critical mass" of habitation can be achieved.



"It's circular reasoning," said the AALP's Sanyika. They talk about "some level of neighborhood viability, but no one knows what that means. What constitutes viable plans? What kinds of neighborhoods are viable? Everywhere you turn people are trying to rebuild, but there is this constraint."

The commission is empowered only to make recommendations, but with the help of corporate media, pretends their plan is set in stone. "They keep pushing their recommendations as though they are the gospel truth," said Sanyika, who along with tens of thousands of other evacuees has been dispersed to Houston, five hours away. "There is confusion as to all of these recommendations, issued as if they are policy. The Times-Picayune contributes to that confusion. None of this is a given."

Activists believe the way to play this situation is for residents to forge ahead on their own. "Trying to figure out the logic of that illogical proposal is a wasted effort – all you're going to do is wind up going in circles," said Sanyika. He emphasizes that the commission's recommendations are not binding on anyone – certainly not on the majority Black city council, which claims authority in city planning matters. They're not buying the nonsense. "The city council has rejected it. Nagin says 'ignore it.' I think it's dead in the water," said Sanyika.

The city council has attempted to block Nagin's collaboration with corporate developers – a hallmark of his tenure – voting to give itself authority over where to place FEMA trailers. (Only about 5,000 of a projected 25,000 trailers arrived, say community activists.) Nagin vetoed the bill, but the council overrode him. The council has also

endorsed equitable development of neighborhoods, rather than shrinking the city. "We [the African American Leadership Project] are developing a **resolution** to that effect," said Sanyika. Odds are that it will pass – but the question is, who wields power in post-Katrina New Orleans, where only one-third of the city's previous population of nearly half a million has returned?

It is in this context that one must view Mayor Nagin's **statement** to a mostly Black crowd gathered at City Hall for a Martin Luther King Day march, on Monday: "I don't care what people will say – uptown, or wherever they are. At the end of the day, this city will be chocolate.... This city will be a majority African American city. It's the way God wants it to be. You can't have New Orleans no other way. It wouldn't be New Orleans."

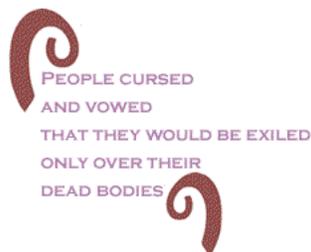
Ray Nagin is probably the most disoriented person in the country, these days – the fruit of his own venality, sleaziness, and opportunism. A corporate executive, sports entrepreneur and nominal Democrat, he contributed to the Bush campaign in 2000 (Democrats dubbed him "Ray Reagan") and endorsed a Republican candidate for governor in 2003 (see **BC November 20, 2003**). Now he doesn't have a clue as to where the power lies or where his base is centered. "Nagin is playing a game, trying to have it both ways," says the AALP's Sanyika – but his options are shrinking as fast as the city envisioned by his buddy, Joe Canizaro, with whom he habitually worked hand in hand, but whom he now tells Blacks to "ignore."

Who's in charge in New Orleans?

Canizaro is clearly the center of gravity on the "mayor's" commission which, although **integrated**, is essentially a corporate concoction. The commission's slogan, "Bring New Orleans Back," is a euphemism for bringing the city "back" to the days before Black rule by erecting multiple barriers to the return of Black residents. Of course, even when Black mayors hold titular office in New Orleans, Canizaro's crowd runs the show. His **bio**, posted on the commission's website, shows Canizaro to be the major domo of the city's real estate, development, banking, and pro-business political machinations. Canizaro is also a Trustee and former Chairman of the **Urban Land Institute**, the planning outfit that is determined to turn Black neighborhoods into swamp.

Since shortly after New Years, the commission has been feverishly working to appear to be an empowered governmental entity, tasking **subcommittees** to present reports and recommendations several days a week on Government Effectiveness, Education, Health and Social Services, Culture, and Infrastructure. What Black New Orleans had been waiting for was presentation of the **Urban Planning Committee** Final Report, Wednesday, January 11. An overflow crowd at the Sheraton Hotel hissed Mayor Nagin and booed the hated Canizaro. Others cursed and vowed that they would be exiled only over their dead bodies.

"Four Months to Decide" read the headline of the Times-Picayune, on the day of the official unveiling of the commission's recommendations, a blueprint for the displacement of hundreds of thousands. In the packed hotel spaces, residents alternated between rage and deep anxiety at the ultimatum. "I don't think four or five months is close to enough time given all we would need to do," said Robyn Braggs. "Families with school-age children won't be able to even return to do the work necessary until this summer."



Cities with 25,000 or more displaced New Orleans residents include Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, Memphis, and Baton Rouge. Others are scattered to the four winds. Their children will be enrolled in far-flung schools until the June deadline.

Former New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial, currently president of the National Urban League, called the commission's scheme a "massive red-lining plan wrapped around a giant land grab." With the situation so uncertain, and time so short, homeowners will have difficulty settling with their insurance companies in time. Said Morial:

"It's cruel to bar people from rebuilding. Telling people they can't rebuild for four months is tantamount to saying they can't ever come back. It's telling people who have lost almost everything that we're going to take the last vestige of what they own."

And what about renters, who made up well over half of residents? Such people have no place in George Bush's "ownership society" – especially if they are Black. Bush put his smirking stamp of approval on the corporate plan during an oblivious visit to New Orleans, last week. "It may be hard for you to see, but from when I first came here to today, New Orleans is reminding me of the city I used to visit."

Apparently, the president doesn't read newspapers because he is blind – except to the cravings of his class. Bush's Gulf Opportunity Zone Act provides billions in tax dodges for (big) business, while the threatened permanent depopulation of Black New Orleans would eliminate the possibility of return for the nearly 8,000 (small) Black businesses that served the neighborhoods.



Self-styled Black capitalists take note: this is the nature of the beast. Bush fronts for a class for which Katrina is not a catastrophe, but an opportunity. They believe devoutly in "creative chaos" – the often violent destruction of the old, so that new profits can be squeezed from the rubble. Through their Catch-22 ultimatums, they are deliberately inflicting additional "creative chaos" on the displaced people of New Orleans. The fact that the victims

are mostly Black, makes it all the easier. Or so they assume.

The Resistance

Grassroots community groups, along with platoons of non-native volunteers, are refusing to acquiesce to the greatest attempted urban theft in American history. At a conference organized by Mtangulizi Sanyika's African American Leadership Project and affiliated organizations, progressive urban planners explored ways to make the new New Orleans a better place for the people who live there, rather than for ravenous corporations and new populations. The experts included Dr. Ed Blakely, of the University of Sydney, Australia; MIT's Dr. Phil Thompson, housing aide to former New York Mayor David Dinkins; and Abdul Rasheed, who helped rebuild the flood ravaged Black town of Princeville, North Carolina after a hurricane in the Nineties.

The coalition also held a **Town Hall** meeting attended by leaders of 15 national organizations, including Dr. Ron Daniel's Institute of the Black World, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, and movers and shakers from the Progressive Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention USA. National co-sponsors included the Hip Hop Caucus, Black Voices for Peace, the Black Family Summit of the Millions More Movement, and the National Black Environmental Justice Network (NBEJN).

(Dr. Robert Bullard, of the NBEJN-affiliated Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark-Atlanta University, has published the grim but very useful **report**: "A Twenty-Point Plan to Destroy Black New Orleans.")

Neighborhood groups are mobilizing to confront the racist/corporate onslaught. "Every other day some major event is happening," said Sanyika. Various groups held marches during MLK weekend, carrying signs such as "We're Back," "Stop Displacement," and "Rebuild With People."

On February 7th, a National Mobilization of progressive forces will descend on the U.S. Capitol in Washington to pressure Congress to halt the juggernaut of expulsion and give substance to the people's Right to Return. Although there are literally thousands of large and small Katrina-related projects operating throughout the nation, many of the New Orleans organizers are handicapped by the fact of their own displacement. A great moral and political challenge presents itself to Black and progressive America: Will they rise to the occasion in the face of a real, imminent, well-defined crisis – as opposed to the general conditions addressed by the Million Man and Millions More rallies? February 7th will be a test of Black political resolve and cohesion. And there will be many more.

Meanwhile, New Orleans in some ways resembles a poignant scene from bygone wars, when lists of the dead were published on public walls. The "**Red Danger List**" is posted in local papers, designating properties that are "in imminent danger of collapse" and, therefore, subject to demolition without the consent of the owners. To date, over 5,000 buildings have been red tagged.

The "**Flood Map**" is a kind of municipal schematic of a cemetery, delineating the parts of the city that will be caused to die. Residents on the wrong side of the lines will be unable to get flood insurance, which certainly means no meaningful investment can occur in those areas. The map was last published in 1984, and is now being updated.

You can be sure that Black folks are not in charge of the mapping.

Katrina has shown us many things. One, is the hollowness of the purely electoral Black strategy (and its cousin, lobbying) that followed the shutdown of mass movements after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. It is a great irony that, while we rant at FEMA's inability (or unwillingness) to respond to the Katrina crisis, Black America finds itself desperately searching for the "people power" tools to effectively counter the post-Katrina aggression.

The citizens of New Orleans are paying the cost for the mistakes of the late Sixties and early Seventies, when aspiring electoral and corporate officeholders convinced Black folks that mass movements were no longer necessary. Progress would trickle down from the newly acquired heights. Popular political capital could be wisely invested in the few, the upwardly mobile.

What we got was chicken-with-his-head-cut-off Ray Nagin and his many counterparts in plush offices across Black America. We must invent Black Power all over again, under changed conditions. New Orleans in its present state is the worst possible place to start – but that's where we're at.

BC Publishers Glen Ford and Peter Gamble are writing a book to be titled, Barack Obama and the Crisis in Black Leadership.

Mtangulizi Sanyika, of the African American Leadership Project, can be contacted at Wazuri@aol.com

">Wazuri@aol.com.

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People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition, 'VOLUNTEER PACKET'

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Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition (PHRF/OC) Volunteer Packet

March 2006

PHRF COALITION

New Orleans

**1418 N. Claiborne
New Orleans LA
70116**

**504-301-0215
Spring Break 2006**

March Schedule

**Mondays- arrive NOLA,
orientation 7:30 PM**

Tuesdays- begin work

Friday Night- social

**Saturdays 2 PM - depart
NOLA**

Important Numbers

**PHRF OFFICE
504-301-0215**

**Coordination
Ishmael 404-664-3009**

**Reconstruction:
Salam 601-918-6453**

**Surveys/ Canvassing:
Saad 510-290-2150**

Legal: Jen Lai 858-776-9123

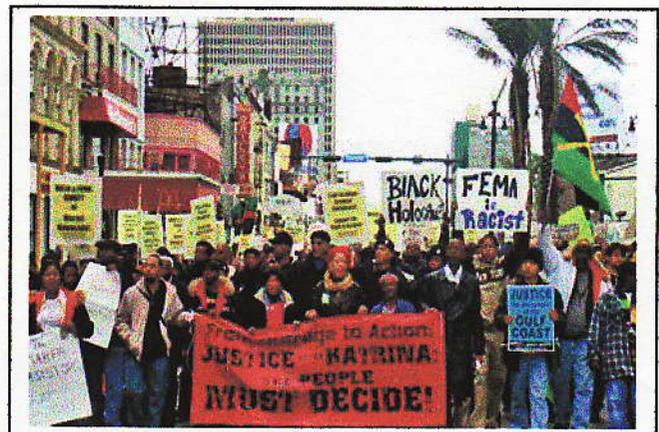
**Office administration:
Kanika 678-362-7752**

My advisor/ team leader

Contact:

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People's Hurricane Relief Fund & Oversight Coalition

New Volunteer Orientation Packet

1. Purpose:

- a. To orient you to the PHRF work to help build a movement led by the survivor's of this natural disaster turned man-made tragedy of Hurricane Katrina.
- b. To enable you to better communicate to the people of New Orleans the mission and history of PHRF.
- c. To help you understand the realities of race and class exposed by Katrina.

2. Process:

- a. Orientation session: 1. Brief discussion of packet, Description of past efforts and events. 2. Current struggles and programs. 3. Living Arrangements and Office upkeep.
- b. Breakdown of PHRF: Peoples' Assembly, Interim Coordinating Committee (ICC), Survivor Councils and solidarity committees, Workgroups, coalition members and supporters.
- c. Workshop/discussions: 1. Racism- this is to orientate an out of town volunteer, not sure of how to interact with the working and middle class black masses of the city and vice-versa. In addition, to discuss the impact of racism on our own psyche and life. 2. Sexism- an ongoing process to eliminate sexism from our internal surroundings and our interactions in the community. In addition, fighting off the sexism that is engrained in the movement itself. 3. Class- discussion to better understand the impact of the power structure/system in New Orleans and America as a whole. These issues will be a consistent struggle that must be discussed on a continuous basis.
- d. Assignments: On a weekly basis. Explanation and set-up of accountability/debrief process. Input is encouraged at all phases of this process.

This Orientation Process is to better acquaint you with the politics and social intricacies of New Orleans to maximize effective organizing on the ground. This is a movement to develop leaders from the most unsuspecting places. The ruins of the City have fostered a new level of rebellion in the hearts of the "survivors" of Katrina. Our mission is to build a political movement among survivors and their supporters to fight for a just relief and a just re construction by tapping into the natural leadership of the neighborhoods and merge them with the traditional organized leadership to build a United Front. The very presence of volunteers in our office speaks to the necessity of that ideology to materialize.

We encourage and challenge all new volunteers to read and study the PHRF website. All the information you will need and seek is there. We encourage involvement in all processes of PHRF especially the work group process.

WELCOME!!!

About PHRF

PHRF is working to build a People's movement – a movement of grassroots persons disproportionately impacted by Hurricane Katrina and the dehumanizing treatment they received from local, state, and federal officials.

By grassroots, we are referring to those members of our community who are: (1) surviving families of people who perished; (2) surviving families of those who are still missing family members; (3) survivors of the Superdome & Convention Center; (4) survivors of those left on the interstates & the Crescent City Connection; (5) survivors of sexual and law enforcement violence; (6) homeowners in the 9th ward (both upper & lower); (7) renters who are being evicted and; (8) low income displaced people/survivors of the New Orleans and Gulf Coast Region.

Primary Goals of PHRF:

- To build and maintain a coordinated network of community leaders, organizers and community based organizations with the capacity and organizational infrastructure that can help to meet the needs of people most impacted by Hurricane Katrina and government neglect
- To facilitate an organizing process that will demand local, grassroots leadership with national and international support. Foster people of color leadership, particularly black leadership, with the support of a multi-racial alliance. Place special emphasis on the involvement of women, people of color, poor, gay, lesbian, queer, and transgender populations, immigrants, indigenous, youth, and people with disabilities in the relief, return and reconstruction process in New Orleans.
- Create and maintain an ongoing space for networking and strategizing between organizers and volunteers
- Facilitate return/rebuild process and ensure local, grassroots leadership and participation in every phase. Ensure mechanisms by which those who want to return to home to New Orleans are able to, regardless of economic, geographical, or citizenship status prior to displacement.

Since Hurricane Katrina, PHRF has held two strategic planning sessions: one on September 8, Baton Rouge, LA, and the second on September 30 through October 2, at Penn Center, SC. Out of these sessions, goals and demands were identified and an Interim Coordinating Committee (ICC) was formed. The ICC consists of 10 members meeting weekly on budget, staff and activities planning and implementation.

Also from these meetings, **Work Groups** and **Caucuses** were formed that identified goals and are working to implement comprehensive strategies.

For Work Group and Caucus contacts or a list of coalition members and supporters please visit www.communitylaborunited.net

Background (CLU)

An Effort to Build Unity in a Grass Roots New Orleans Community: Background and Development of Community Labor United

At 9AM on the third Saturday in September in 1998. The multi-generational groups of about 165 people hustling toward the Student Center definitely weren't students. They represented many of the progressive community organizations in New Orleans gathered in the dining hall on the campus of Dillard University for the inaugural meeting an organization that would come to be called Community Labor United, (CLU). We didn't attract much attention because multi-generational, multi-racial groups of community people aren't unusual on the stately, Reconstruction era black campus.

After a non-sectarian "Spiritual Reflection," by one of the ministers from SCLC, famed New Orleans saxophonist, Donald Harrison Jr. opened the meeting with a moving solo rendition of Amazing Grace. Since that day, each time we convene we begin with spiritual reflections and a cultural presentation.

There were Welfare Mothers; a wide spectrum of unions active in New Orleans; Civil Rights, criminal justice and school reform organizations; women's rights, environmental justice and peace organizations; religious, arts and cultural organizations; academics, social and economic development researchers and activists of every type. It was the broadest assembly of progressive, grass roots organizations and activists in New Orleans in recent memory. It was frankly understood as an initiative of black, grass ROOTS community organizations with support from their multi ethnic allies.

The question that brought us together was: Can we work together to achieve common goals; do we need unity in our community? On both counts the answer was a resounding yes. Relying on the principle of grass roots, bottom up organizing and coalition building that the Mississippi Council of Federated Organizations, (COFO), was based on, CLU was born. This is a crucially important factor in the city which has been dominated by the presence of African people since it was founded in 1720. Until "Katrina," New Orleans was officially 67.5% black. But governance and policy have always been dominated by an arcane, largely corrupt, white, quasi-aristocracy, including the last 30 years during which black elected officials have held prominent posts.

CLU devoted its first three months to developing the following Principles of Unity:

We are community leaders, labor leaders, and cultural workers committed to ending the exploitation of oppressed peoples everywhere.

We believe that all people have the right and responsibility to determine their destiny.

Our organizations and unions are committed to building a society where the realities of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation are not barriers to human progress.

We are committed to building a society where the bottom line interests of corporations and the rich are not balanced on the backs of workers and the poor.

We are committed to building local, regional, national, and world economies that are democratic, just, ecological, and do not exploit labor, culture, and natural resources.

We are committed to building an organization of organizations and individuals, focused on educating, organizing, and mobilizing the masses within our organizations and communities from the bottom up.

We believe in the prospect of multiracial and trans-generational efforts to develop our communities.

"Start where you are with what you've got. Dig deep. Be radical."
(Paraphrased from the often quoted advice of Ms. Ella Baker)

The People's Declaration: Survivors Assembly Demands

Identified by

survivors on December 9, 2005

We demand the local, state and federal government make conditions possible for our immediate return. This includes the following:

1. The Nagin Administration must make temporary housing such as apartments, hotel rooms, trailers and public housing developments available for us while we rebuild our homes.
 2. The government must put an end to price gouging, stop all evictions and make rents affordable.
 3. Local residents must take the lead in rebuilding our communities and must be hired to do the rebuilding work.
 4. There must be immediate debt relief for debt associated with this disaster.
 5. Quality public education and childcare must be provided for our children.
 6. Quality affordable health care and access to free prescriptions must be provided.
 7. The government must immediately clean up air, water and soil to make it safe and healthy for people to return home.
- We demand that the government provide funds for all families to be reunited and that the databases of FEMA, Red Cross and any organizations tracking our people be made public.
 - We demand accountability for and oversight of the over \$50 billion of FEMA funds and the money raised by other organizations, foundations and funds in our name.

- We demand representation on all boards that are making decisions about relief and reconstruction. We also demand that those most affected by Hurricane Katrina be part of every stage of the planning process.
- We demand that no commercial Mardi Gras takes place until the suffering of the people is lifted.

We are calling for survivors and supporters to participate in organizing efforts to make these demands heard!

Principles and Agreement of Unity

Agreement and commitment to work in a united front for justice and community based reconstruction of the gulf south.

This United Front Agreement was developed by members of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition, a coalition of progressive community organizations and individuals who, together and separately, are working toward the comprehensive reconstruction of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. We are stronger together than we are apart.

We are committed to building and maintaining a coordinated network of community leaders, organizers and community based organizations to meet the needs of people most affected by Hurricane Katrina, to facilitate an organizing process that demands local, grassroots leadership in the relief, return and reconstruction of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. We are living in a historic moment that offers the possibility, despite the devastating circumstances, of igniting a movement as broad and as deep as any that we have seen in this country. We understand that the work done now must be done in a way to bring hope to neglected communities throughout the country and the world.

We stand in solidarity with those around the world experiencing wreckage from natural disasters, often preceded and compounded by poverty and discrimination. We welcome the support of individuals and organizations in the United States and around the world.

Our commitment is to work together with those who share the goal of self-determined relief, recovery and reconstruction. We call on friends, allies, those working for just and representative Gulf Coast to pledge to work together toward common goals in the spirit of mutual respect.

Our most serious work is just beginning. After the headlines of the past months fade, our communities must be reconstructed and built anew. It is a long term struggle for which we must be prepared. Our work must be sustained and our communities must also be sustained. In order to accomplish this long-term effort we must build our work together on the basis of the following broad principles:

We all have a right and responsibility to support leadership that comes from and is selected by the people whose interests are at stake.

We believe that all people regardless of realities of race, gender and sexual identity, class and nationality have the right and responsibility to determine their own destinies through democratic processes of their own design and that such as all displaced people have the right to return to their

homes.

All workers, regardless of nationality are entitled to equitable and just wages, but we also recognize that people from the affected region deserve priority consideration. We are committed to building local, regional, national and world economies that are democratic, just, ecological, and do not exploit labor, culture and natural resources.

We are committed to building an organization of organizations and individuals focused on educating, organizing, and mobilizing the masses within our constituencies and communities from the bottom up. We will collaborate on programs, plans and joint activities whenever possible, but participation in the united front work is not meant to pre-empt or co-opt the work of the individual members. The programs and plans of the united front organization are subject to the collective decision of the general membership.

We agree to work collectively by:

- >Sharing our processes
- >Sharing our plans
- >Sharing our gifts, skills and talents
- >Communicating ideas
- >Finding resolutions to challenges
- >Being accountable for our efforts

The United Front Agreement, after organizations have had a chance to review and sign the documents, will be distributed widely as a symbol of the decision to work together and support one another in the coming years for the empowerment of the communities of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

Organization Name if applicable:

Signature (please print your name next to the signature)

Address (please include city, state and zip) Date

This is a living document. It will be modified as needed with the agreement of signors.

Women's Caucus Terms of Reference

Women's Caucus of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition.

Terms of Reference, agreed to at the first conference call meeting of the Women's Caucus (October 20, 2005) and updated to reflect the decisions of the meeting.

1. Why we are coming together as women.

In this period people are dealing with the traumas of Katrina and the outrageous, demeaning treatment they received at the hands of those in charge of the country, it is our job as women to support these efforts for Reconstruction of communities, relationships, families, homes, education and other services, etc. To do this, we work to make visible the work that women in particular are and will be doing:

- to care for and save the lives of families and communities;
- to rebuild the lives and relationships which have been devastated by a combination of the storm, the lack of resources with which to deal with the storm, and the brutality of the treatment victims received, all shaped by racism, sexism, ageism and class prejudice generally against those of us with least;
- making this work visible helps to prevent the greedily ambitious from building careers, businesses and bank accounts on the backs of the suffering and the unwaged work, and at the expense of the relief of our suffering and of overwork.

If this work is not made visible by women, with the support of men who know how much work women always do in emergencies – including in the daily emergency of lack of cash and resources – then this work will be hidden and the real work of Reconstruction will be attributed to corporations which will be paid handsomely for what women are doing at the cost of their own lives and without payment.

Because of the global coverage of Katrina, the world has witnessed this ecological disaster and the grave deficiencies of the government resulting in great suffering and many deaths of its people. Therefore we will make the hard work visible not only in the US but in the world, which has not been told of the struggle to Reconstruct which the people of the Gulf, beginning with women, are now waging.

2. We are accountable to:

- the women in the community who are doing this work in the Gulf, and to ensure that this creative and life-saving caregiving, done under the most difficult circumstances, is visible in all calculations of what is to be done and who is to receive help, support and a say in the Reconstruction which must happen now;
- the women and families who are now scattered and must make their way back to their communities. We will leave no stone unturned to ensure that this mass re-entry takes place, and that the work this entails is counted and supported;
- the organizations the community is building in its own self-defence.
- grassroots women, children and men in the Gulf Region impacted by Hurricane Katrina as well as Hurricane Rita.

3. We demand accountability from:

- professionals who are not to come to the Gulf and dictate what 'should' be done on the basis of what they know, but must listen to what the community knows and wants, and work with and for the community to achieve that;
- those who fundraise in the name of the community but who may not have the habit of upfront financial accountability;
- government departments and officers who are already taking this opportunity to profiteer and claim our soil and our cities, towns and villages for further profit-making;
- employers who intend to pay everyone, especially women, less even than the low wages in the Gulf before Katrina.

Who We Are:

We are a network of women active in or supportive of PHRF. Our focus is grassroots women, beginning with Black, Latina, Native American, Asian, Immigrant and other low-income women, and with those who are already involved in community-based relief and reconstruction efforts. We are politically non-aligned. Our work and policies are part of PHRF and are not dominated or directed in any way by political parties. We aim to involve both older and younger women. Racism, separatism, anti-immigrant views and practice, ageism, homophobia, discrimination based on disability have no place in the Caucus. We will value all the work that all women do, waged and unwaged, including survival and other caregiving work, from single mothers on welfare, to married housewives, to women who have been criminalized, to homeless and other women pushed to the edge, as well as the work of those of us carrying the double day (unwaged and low-waged work).

Process:

- We will work by consensus to the degree possible, if not, by majority vote.
- Decision Sheets will be taken at all our meetings and circulated to all participants as appropriate.
- A time keeper will be delegated for all meetings.

Color of Disaster in New Orleans

Fact Sheet for Challenging Racism Workshop

(Important note: Knowledge brings responsibility. We offer this Fact Sheet to arm you with information to use as you take responsibility for challenging racism in all aspects of your life.)

Population of New Orleans before September 2005:

- 500,000 = total population
- 67.9% of New Orleans population was African American

Pre-Katrina: Evidence of Systematic/Institutional Racism

Poverty in New Orleans is disproportionately Black:

- 18.4% of total population are poor
- 35% of African American population are poor
- New Orleans had the 7th worst poverty rate in the country.
- More than 90,000 people in New Orleans had incomes of less than \$10,000 a year.
- Only 5% of whites had no access to a car, but 27% of African Americans had no access to a car.

- Nearly 50,000 poor people in New Orleans lived in areas where the poverty rate approached 40%. In these segregated neighborhoods, low quality schools and access only to low-paying jobs feed the prison-industrial complex with new recruits. For example, the majority of jobs available to the 20,000 African American residents of the 9th Ward —like the jobs available in many of the world's neo-colonies—were for household cleaners, bellhops, busboys and others who serve tourists

Denial of Right to Quality Education and health Care:

- New Orleans has a 40% illiteracy rate.
- Over 50% of African American 9th Graders won't graduate from high school.
- Louisiana has the 3rd lowest rank in the country for teachers' salaries.
- 83,000 or 19% have no health insurance. Before Katrina, the state decided to close Charity Hospital, the only full-service hospital in the City that treated poor people.

After Katrina: Evidence of Racism

Population of New Orleans:

- 140,000 = total population as of February 2006
- 35-40% of New Orleans population is now African American

Disaster disproportionately impacts African Americans, beyond the problem of poverty:

- While about 35% of African Americans in New Orleans live below the poverty line, 73% of the African American population was displaced by the storm.
- The neighborhoods with the highest proportion of African American people sustained the worst damage. Six months after the storm, the 9th Ward is the only community that remains a ghost community, unoccupied, where nearly all homes on vast swaths of land are still piles of rubble. The contrast with white sections of the city is stark.

Demonization and dehumanization of Black people resulted in preventable death, destruction and misery:

- FEMA called off its rescue operations after three days because of "security concerns". The media reflected and re-enforced anti-Black hysteria by labeling white people as "flood victims looking for food" and Black people as "looters."
- FEMA diverted resources that might have been used for rescue into providing "security" against desperate residents seeking only food and shelter.
- Thousands of people traumatized by the floods had to wait five hours in the rain outside the Superdome—where they expected sanctuary- to be searched.
- Residents had to go through criminal record checks before Red Cross Centers would admit them.
- FEMA, Red Cross and other officials forced evacuees onto buses, forcefully separating families, shipping them to different cities. Evacuees who had lost nearly all their possessions to the flood, were then forced to abandon what they had left and take only one bag with them on the buses.
- Shoot-to-kill "looters" resulted in the death of scores of people. During the first four days after the Storm, white vigilantes had carte blanche to kill Black people. At least 18 are known to be murdered by these vigilantes. Graffiti remains: "looters will be shot".

- Thousands of African American residents who attempted to leave New Orleans, by crossing the Gretna Bridge to higher ground were forced back into the flood by gun toting white vigilantes.
- Curfew was only enforced against Black people. The 9th Ward is still subject to curfew which is arbitrarily enforced.

Denial of the Right of Return and Citizenship: The Governments'/Developers' Strategy for "Ethnic Cleansing" to get African Americans out of New Orleans and stay out.

- Bush's Housing and Urban Development Secretary told the *Houston Chronicle*, "New Orleans is not going to be as Black as it was for a long time, if ever again."
- The President of the region's major real estate firm, Arthur Sterbow of Latter and Blum, told Reuters, "We were one of the 25 most underpriced (housing) markets in the US. We were as far away from what they called a housing bubble as you can get. Now we've had three record-breaking months in a row." Rents have tripled.
- FEMA, in collaboration with the New Orleans city government, is delaying the distribution of 1000's of trailers that would provide housing in New Orleans while people reconstruct their homes.
- Profiteers like Haliburton charged \$3000 per roof to put up tarps while paying undocumented workers sub-standard wages to do the work. Low-income homeowners in the 9th Ward and other African American communities have yet to receive assistance in making their homes habitable.
- The government is taking no responsibility for redesigning the levee to withstand a Level 5 Hurricane. Instead, developers promote "greenspacing" low lying areas to provide – in the guise of sound ecology—a rationale for preventing the residents of the 9th ward and other low-lying areas from returning.
- It is not possible for the hundreds of thousands of African American New Orleanians who are dispersed around the country to vote. A number of organizations have called for postponement of the April 22 election to ensure the right to vote of all New Orleanians.
- The longer people are kept away by deliberate neglect that makes their former homes uninhabitable, the less likely they will ever return.

For more info check:

Michael Eric Dyson. *Come Hell or High Water*. Basic Civitas Books, 2006.

www.katrinaaction.org

www.commongroundrelief.org

Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. www.gnadc.org

www.communitylaborunited.net

Times Picayune Daily Newspaper. www.nola.com

Prepared 2/18/2006 by Arlenesreport@yahoo.com for Catalyst Project www.collectiveliberation.org

For Cleanup and Reconstruction Volunteers

The PHRF local Reconstruction Workgroup is involved in the process of helping residents save their communities from developers, land grabbers, and the various government systems that wish to change the racial makeup of New Orleans. In order to accomplish this mission, residents need to reoccupy their threatened neighborhoods immediately. The reconstruction workgroup determined four areas that must be addressed in order to return. They are: a home to stay in, a school to send their children to, some type of healthcare if they get sick, and a way of generating income to sustain their lives.

The first step in this process is to have a place to stay. In order to immediately return home, we must check and /or repair the foundation, roof, outside house walls, replace windows & doors, make sure electricity, plumbing, and heat are restored to the home. That will allow residents to return, hang sheetrock, and paint the inside while staying in the home instead of a hotel, shelter, or out of town.

To rebuild a home, it must first be gutted out i.e.: remove damaged furniture, appliances, sheetrock, ceilings, light fixtures, damaged wood, etc. It must also have mold remediation performed on it and let the wood have a chance to dry out before rebuilding. This is the first phase of the physical rebuilding of a community. There is not a whole lot of skill needed but is very labor intensive. We need your help in starting this rebuilding project that will demonstrate to the world that we can rebuild our own communities with the genius and skill that already exists within it. Thank you in advance for your dedication and support.

Health and Safety Precautions

Home cleanup, debris removal and gutting can be tedious and potentially dangerous work. It is best to be prepared by following the procedures outlined in cleanup handouts and in work orientation.

Doing sheetrock (drywall) removal and home cleanout can be dusty. Respirator and other personal protective equipment (PPE) are a MUST.

Always wear an N95 respirator (or better) for cleanup or ripout jobs. Using a respirator makes you lungs and heart work harder. ***If you have a lung or heart condition, wearing a respirator may be harmful for you.*** If medical conditions prevent you from wearing a respirator, you cannot protect yourself from breathing harmful contaminants in the air. ***If you have facial hair, you may not be able to wear a respirator.*** The edge of a respirator must form a tight seal against your skin.

You should conduct a “seal check” every time you put on a respirator. This will help you make sure it fits and is properly positioned on his face. If you are wearing a disposable N95 respirator, firmly cover the mask with the palms of your hands. Inhale and exhale more strongly than usual. If you do not detect any air flow in or out around the edges of the respirator, the respirator fits properly. (If the mask has an exhalation port, be sure to cover the port when you breathe out.) You should use a new disposable N95 respirator each day.

Be sure to wear gloves, safety glasses, and other protective gear when doing cleanup work. As an additional safety precaution please make sure you are up to date on a Tetanus shot or get one before arriving.

Work in crews, or at minimum, use the buddy system. If you have an accident while performing cleanup work, please let the crew leader know immediately. For emergencies, call 911.

For those doing Cleanup, please review additional information, such as NYCOSH’s “How to use a respirator”: A fact sheet for Katrina and Rita Cleanup Workers www.nycosh.org/environment/wtc/naturalcatastrophes_index.htm, NYCOSH’s “Katrina & Rita Cleanup Workers Mold Factsheet” also at www.nycosh.org, PHRF’s “We have the Right to Return to Healthy Communities” and Common Ground’s guide for house gutting.

Below are a few concrete tasks supporters of the People's Reconstruction Movement of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast can and should take on when you return back to your communities. It is critical to this movement that solidarity workers go back to your own communities and build concrete support for the self-determination of African American, Native American, and other oppressed peoples impacted by hurricane Katrina, expose the criminal negligence of the US government before, during and after the storm, and educate folks about the historical legacy of colonialism, racism, class exploitation, and imperialism.

1. Fundraise:

The grassroots organizations that have developed to help the survivors organize themselves or to provide them with direct relief, such as the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition, need money and other resources to build a movement capable of ensuring New Orleanians right of return to their homes.

2. Support the Peoples demands for Reconstruction and Justice developed by the Katrina Survivors' Councils.

3. Campaign in your community for people from New Orleans right to vote. Demand satellite voting in every city and state. Currently at least 70% of African American New Orleanians are disenfranchised.

4. Set up student solidarity committees that access capital and human resources from your school and educate others to support the movement.

- Work with established solidarity committees to support the demands of survivors councils and grass roots organizations of people of color in New Orleans

5. Take Political Action

- Reject all proposed reconstruction plans from government officials that dispossess residents of their land and livelihood. Be on the alert for plans to establish "greenspace" in the Lower 9th Ward and other areas once home to African American people.
 - Pressure Congress to hold the Federal government accountable for their negligence and human rights abuses. Support the International Tribunal.
 - Pressure Congress to build levees to protect the people of New Orleans against Level 5 Hurricanes.
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Daily Schedule/ Notes:

Clear the way back to public housing

I

Organization: Survivors' Village
Author: M. Endesha Juakali
Date Published: 03/15/2006
Link:
http://www.survivorsvillage.com/endesha_editorial.htm

I am a native New Orleanian living in Natchez, Miss., due to the evacuation of my neighborhood. My community is the area bounded by Bayou St. John, the London Avenue Canal, Mirabeau Avenue and DeSaix Boulevard. The anchor of this community is the St. Bernard Public Housing Development, where I grew up and where I worked before the storm.

When I left this community, six days after Katrina, I remember looking down from Interstate 610 at St. Bernard Avenue. My entire community was underwater to the rooflines, except for the public housing area. Hundreds or thousands of men, women and children had been saved from the storm and the flood, not by the politicians and the power elite of the city, but by the solid construction and multiple floors of the housing development.

When leaders had fled in terror, abandoning the people, the bricks and mortar had saved them. The people of our neighborhood have always thought that in times of hurricanes and floods the "bricks" would protect them, and they were correct.

Lately, the politicians and the media have been discussing who should and shouldn't be allowed to come home. Those without jobs are deemed undesirable. It appears that some people have given up on ridding New Orleans of poverty; now they just want to declare war on poor people. But every citizen has an absolute right to return to his neighborhood unconditionally -- job or no job.

The politicians were not stuck in their homes for days without power, food and water. They were not in the Superdome, the Convention Center, on the interstates and bridges. They were not on the buses and sleeping on the cots at the Astrodome and at the many other shelters around the country. How dare they tell the people what to do now? The people were left to their own devices to survive the crisis. We will come back using our own devices.

Then we will fight to share in the resources that are available for the redevelopment of these communities. The first career opportunity for all New Orleanians should be to rebuild their own communities.

I have been to more than 20 cities since I left my home with a shattered soul. I have learned two major lessons from my travels. First, there is no place like home. Second, every evacuee I've met in the many cities wants to come home. They just need somewhere to live.

I've been home three times in the past three months, and each time it has been for a protest or march calling for the city to find decent housing for the working poor to live. Why must we protest for safe, decent and sanitary housing when most of the public housing stock suffered less damage than the private stock?

In my area, the public housing development is the cornerstone to the repopulation of the entire community. With the private housing stock totally devastated, the key to the return of many people is for HUD to fulfill its mission to provide housing for the people who need it, regardless of their employment status.

Some might question repopulating the St. Bernard because it had problems, such as crime, poor schools, poverty and unemployment. It might interest those critics to know that in my travels, I've encountered people who questioned rebuilding New Orleans for the same reasons. I tell them that New Orleans was not perfect, but it wasn't all bad, and now is our chance to make it better. The same goes for the St. Bernard.

Furthermore, poor families today need public housing for the same reason my mother needed it when she moved me and my six brothers and sisters into a three-bedroom apartment in the St. Bernard. At age 7, I saw my life improve suddenly and dramatically. Instead of spending nearly every penny on rent, my mother was able to provide us with enough food, occasional new clothes along with hand-me-downs, and separate bedrooms for the boys and the girls.

I maintain an undying love for the people of my neighborhood. What one loves, he should be willing to fight for. I am willing to fight for the right of the people who were left to drown in the St. Bernard to return, if they wish, to their homes -- with or without a job.

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M. Endesha Juakali is the former chairman of New Day Black[®] Community Development Corp. in the St. Bernard public housing development. His e-mail address is ujuakali@yahoo.com

Since flooding in the wake of Hurricane Katrina forced residents to leave, the St. Bernard public housing development has been a place of deserted yards, empty porches and bare trees.

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Lower Ninth Ward residents win right to clean up and open MLK School

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Organization: Common Ground Collective **Author:** Kerul Dyer **Date Published:** 03/19/2006 **Link:** <http://www.commongroundrelief.org/node/75>

Police Back Off From New Orleans School Clean Up

by Kerul Dyer



New Orleans --In an historic act of solidarity, around 85 students and organizers from across the country risked arrest today by entering Martin Luther King Elementary School in the devastated Lower 9th Ward. Outside the school, a crowd of around 300 gathered wearing Tyvek suits and respirators, holding hand painted signs and chanting to oncoming traffic. In an ongoing effort to rebuild New Orleans, residents of the Lower Ninth Ward requested that these supporters clean the school out.

Yvonne Wise, who advises Common Ground as a leader in the Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward Community Council, addressed a crowd press conference before the young people entered the school. "We appreciate the students coming out and supporting our effort to open this school, we want our schools open." Frustrated by lethargic governmental agencies, Wise said that if the government can't get the schools open, residents must take things into their own hands. "If the schools aren't open, the people can't return home," says Wise.

Among the supporters present, a member of the School Board for District 7, Reverend Torin Sanders, spoke, as well, "This is another way to keep the people from returning to the Lower 9th" said Sanders, "everyone has the right to return." Without schools open, families who own homes in this neighborhood cannot return to rebuild their homes or their lives.

After raking the leaves and debris littering the entrance to the school, the crowd of volunteers pounded their tools on the pavement, as police observed from across the street. The students made their way into the building, and began sweeping and scooping piles of mud and debris from the lobby, carefully avoiding personal effects and sensitive items, such as plaques and framed pictures that had fallen from the walls in the storm. Among odd findings, an 8 inch dead fish was found in the starwell leading up to classrooms.

Of the 117 public schools operational before Hurricane Katrina hit, only 20 are open. No plans exist to open schools in the Ninth Ward, giving residents no opportunity to rebuild their community.

About a half an hour into the demonstration, 150 Howard University students, a Historically Black University famous for long standing political organizing efforts in the DC area, joined the crowd. The students echoed the chant with residents, "No, Child, Left Behind!" After a half day of work cleaning up MLK Elementary, volunteers are taking a lunch break and plan to work for the rest of the afternoon.

Common Ground Collective has hosted over 2000 students during the Second Freedom Rides Alternative Spring Break. Students have been responsible for gutting over 100 homes in the last 10 days. Common Ground, founded by Malik Rahim on September 5, 2005, operates five distribution centers, three primary care clinics, a bioremediation and garden project, a biodiesel processing facility, a legal committee defending the rights of New Orleanians, a tool lending library, a women's shelter and Kids and Community Education Project.

CG works closely with residents, advocating for their needs with the simple motto of, "solidarity, not charity."

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Malik Rahim and Common Ground: Paving the way home to New Orleans

[Printer-friendly version](#) • [Email this article to a friend](#)

Organization: Common Ground Collective **Author:** C.C. Campbell-Rock **Date Published:** 03/22/2006

"My greatest fear is that if a pandemic crisis hit this country and we have to depend on the governor, the mayor or the president to help us, what will happen to our people? "

Malik Rahim, Common Ground Collective.

I have been tracking a grass roots initiative in New Orleans, called the [Common Ground Collective](#). Malik Rahim, the founder, was "the keynote speaker at the ANSWER Coalition's "Stop the War" march and rally in San Francisco on March 18th". With hurricane season 2006 just around the corner, the group is launching their "Are You Prepared Campaign" in order to "teach people" in the hurricane impacted areas " how to rebuild and, if necessary, how to evacuate". The story, work, and vision of Malik Rahim and the Common Ground is beautifully covered by SFbayview.com. You can read the article [here](#).

Here are a few of the group's agendas:

- Establishing conversation initiatives with the New Orleans community. One item on their agenda is hurricane resistance homes.
- Advocating for the restoration of the wetlands
- Hosting construction workshops focused on "rebuilding energy efficient homes, solar power and organic gardens". Through these workshops they are " taking the unemployed and giving them skills training in all aspects of the construction trades" so they " can then rebuild their own homes and work in the industry".
- The group hosted "1100 college students who have forsaken the usual Spring Break party ritual to go down to New Orleans to help in the rebuilding effort"
- Deploying a legal committee to fight " landlords who are forcibly evicting people, jacking up rents or, worse, selling their properties to speculative developers".
- guttled out at least 500 homes, treated hundreds of residents at its health clinics, brought thousands of volunteers to the Crescent City and distributed cleaning supplies and food to all who asked.
- established a pre-school and day care program which will evolve, over time, into an elementary school, then a high school.

Common Ground is currently negotiating for space in which to host a series of concerts. The fundraisers could add a much needed infusion of money with which to continue Common Ground's work. Donations are always welcomed. Contributors can call the non-profit organization at (504) 368-6897 to make a donation or contribute online at www.commongroundrelief.org.

As an activist I am keenly watching how Katrina issues and challenges are raising up a new breed of visionaries. I am also tracking how New Orleans based initiatives are interacting with other causes, such as "Stop the War".

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PHRF Reconstruction Committee Field Work Group Critique of the Bring New Orleans Back Proposal

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Organization:

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition

Author:

PHRF Reconstruction Committee

Date Published:

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Our general critique of the "Bring New Orleans Back" plan commissioned by Mayor Nagin is based on residents' major concerns about the right to return, community-based economic development, neighborhood planning, greenspacing, and levee reconstruction.

The People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition (PHRF/OC) is a coalition of more than 100 civil society organizations within New Orleans and around the country supporting citizen and community involvement in the redevelopment planning and implementation process. The Policy Field Work Section of the PHRF/OC Reconstruction Committee took on the task of reviewing existing redevelopment plans and proposing alternative plans and democratic, community-based economic development strategies. PHRF/OC/s highest priority is ensuring the right of return to all of the Survivors displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

Survivors' right of return includes addressing a process to make it possible for survivors to return as soon as possible, and attending to their immediate needs in New Orleans and in the Diaspora (clean up, environmental justice, temporary to permanent housing, transportation, jobs, health care, education, child care). The right to return also requires environmental reconstruction including toxic clean up, environmental sustainability planning, and reconstruction of the levees to withstand Category 5 level hurricanes. In addition, the survivors' right to return must address the racial/ethnic and class biases in existing plans. The "build at your own risk" and "greenspace" plans, for example, are thinly masked ethnic-cleansing, "Negro removal" plans in the guise of environmental sustainability and free enterprise individualism. As such they are unacceptable.

Principles and Values: We use the following values to evaluate plans and strategies for rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

*Anti-racist and oppression framework for policy and planning is essential. Any successful plan must address issues of race, class and gender discrimination. No plans that fail to address and challenge the underlying and historic racial inequities will work.

*Human Rights and Human Development perspectives emphasize the dignity of all human beings, and include cultural, economic, social and political rights. We evaluate the human development concerns of New Orleans residents and place human rights policy at the center of the analysis. We utilize a people-centered human development approach emphasizing a process of enlarging people's choices and building human capabilities to enable them to: live long and healthy lives, have easy access to information, have a decent standard of living, and participate in the life of their community and the decisions that affect their lives. Economic and environmental sustainability, prosperity for all, and democratic participation are essential.

*Equity Planning for all New Orleans Survivors and neighborhoods focuses our analysis on equal access and opportunity to rebuild as well as the equality of the outcomes of rebuilding strategies. Such a strategy also recognizes that variations in neighborhoods and their needs exist – some neighborhoods deserve more attention than others. Many of the neighborhoods that were the products of racial segregation and historically underserved by governmental and economic institutions were also the same neighborhoods to suffer the greatest devastation

from the failure of poorly constructed levees. Equitable development also focuses redevelopment planning around policies and strategies that protect human rights and reduce racial, ethnic, national and gender inequalities.

Overview of Bring New Orleans Back Commission Sub-Committee Reports:

The Bring New Orleans Back Commission's "Action Plan for New Orleans" consists of a set of sub-committee reports and presentations. The reports covering City Planning, Transit, Economic Development, Culture, Health and Social Services, Education, Criminal Justice System, and Government Effectiveness were developed with limited input from city residents and with little consideration of the specific needs that would be required to enable people to return to the city. The legitimacy of the proposal (which is on its way to the state for approval to be submitted to the federal government for funding, according to WGNO news 3-21-06) is of issue. The board is appointed not elected; the plan has no basis in law; the City Council was circumvented; and no public hearings were held.

The BNOB proposal is a corporate model that only superficially, if at all, addresses the specific needs of African Americans, women, the working class, immigrants, or the disabled. The report accepts stated conservative estimates (from the Rand Corporation) that only about half of the city's population are expected to return by 2008 and only a third by September 2006. A newer study by Professor Jeff Shadow of LSU-Shreveport suggests that African Americans have and will return faster than previously estimated. The Shadow report also estimates that by September 2006 the total population will be 273,010 (versus the 181,000 projected by the Rand study). This suggests that more resources and emphasis should be placed in areas that will allow and enable greater numbers of the population to return sooner. Therefore many of the assumptions underlying the plan are based on erroneous projections about a smaller city. The plan demonstrates a consistent bias toward special interests in the corporate, tourism, and real estate sectors at the expense of families who have been in the city for centuries. Their needs for affordable housing, good jobs, education, day care, social services, mental health services, and women-specific issues are being deliberately ignored. Large scale displacement of low income residents and communities of color, and the shoring up of pre-Katrina level racial and economic inequality will be the results of the current BNOB proposal.

Our general critique of the "Bring New Orleans Back" plan commissioned by Mayor Nagin is based on residents' major concerns about the right to return, community-based economic development, neighborhood planning, greenspacing, and levee reconstruction.

RIGHT OF RETURN: There is no plan outlining the right to return. There are no provisions for how to bring people back, how to finance it, or how to address their social, mental and physical health needs. Economic development is not actually addressed for survivors: there is no planning for affordable housing, jobs programs, or community-based development.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: The economic development proposals address bringing back pre-Katrina industries and tourism, and the "infrastructure" needed to rebuild downtown. The report does not include provisions for democratic participation or mechanisms for ensuring accountability in the design, financing, and implementation of policies. The transportation plan, along with other infrastructure plans, repeats the thinking that led to the Katrina disaster; services are once again denied to those communities most dependent upon transportation and other public services. The report is solely industry-focused and disregards the city's historically rooted communities and neighborhoods. The report does not mention livable wages or state a goal of creating sustainable livelihoods for residents. It focuses on creating a business-friendly environment rather than incentives to bring local businesses and workforce back. The report is also based on the assumption that only certain populations are coming back and then proceeds to develop priorities based on this assumption. Finally, this model of development focuses on assisting historically privileged areas, sectors, and individuals. It exhibits values and intentions that are racially, class, gender, and culturally biased.

CRESCENT CITY RECONSTRUCTION CORPORATION: This CCRC board is a dangerous precedent that would remove home rule and governance rights from citizens and the City Council. Without oversight, they would have control over eminent domain decisions, the "greenspacing" plan, economic employment decisions, and would coordinate the denial of services to the most devastated zones under the "build at your own risk" policy.

GREENSPACING: While promoting the policy of build at your own risk, the revised plan did not abandon the green space program that would turn major African American communities into parks, open spaces, and amusement parks, etc. Predominantly whiter and wealthier areas further below sea level are not included in this program. There was no explanation of why some neighborhoods, like Lakeview, which is actually lower than the 9th Ward, were selected over others. Even if people build at their own risk, this will not prevent the Crescent City Authority from using eminent domain to accomplish the greenspace policy. "Greenspacing" as proposed is essentially predatory "greenwashing" of neighborhoods – using ecological and new urbanism language to "whitewash" or mask ethnic cleansing and removal policies. Ecological solutions do not have to be race and class biased, nor should they destroy Black neighborhoods and communities.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS: The deadline for submitting neighborhood plans, even if extended to June 30th, does not recognize the fact that many neighborhoods are just now returning – some people were actually prevented from returning – and need time to organize themselves. The short deadlines allow those neighborhoods that were least damaged and often wealthier and whiter to make the most critical decisions about the reconstruction of the city. The neighborhoods most damaged, which were predominantly Black and mixed income are being left without a voice. Moreover, many of the proposed neighborhood boundaries include a variety of neighborhoods and dilute the individual, cultural and ethnic character and history of the small communities within them. There is not a fair or democratic procedure for creating, submitting, or implementing neighborhood plans. In addition, the Neighborhood Center Model does not recognize existing assets, public spaces and community hubs. Racial and class inequalities are being produced daily by national professional organizations and major universities assisting in the further displacement of devastated communities in favor of wealthy neighborhoods and gentrification projects.

BUILD AT YOUR OWN RISK: Legal action is being considered by the PHRF/OC legal team and others to challenge the "build at your own risk" policy as a taking of property. By denying services to neighborhoods outside the shrunken footprint, it makes insurance, mortgages, and other necessities almost impossible to obtain. It makes it impossible to return for people reliant upon the basic necessities of education, health care, fire protection, sanitation and police services. This is essentially a "land grab", and raises the question of taxation without representation. That is, being taxed for services not received.

LEVEES: While the plan suggests building levees to withstand Category 5 hurricanes, the US Army Corp. of

Engineers is being used to restore the levees to “pre-Katrina” status, and there are no written operational plans to improve them. The US Army Corp. of Engineers has failed to dam the Industrial Canal at Seabrook Bridge (since 1965). The best plan for storm protection is not “common sense” as the plan mentions. We need an adequate system of levees and canals that works with nature’s processes. Many residents will not consider returning until this is accomplished. The longer this takes, the less likely some people will ever return. Thus, displacement becomes permanent.

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Boat People

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Author: Eric Tang **Date Published:** 04/01/2006 **Link:** <http://www.colorlines.com/article.php?ID=28>

With the health of survivors deteriorating, and many feeling as if they could not hold on, Father Nguyen then contacted anyone and everyone he knew who could possibly send for help, including concerned community members who were quick to post the story online. The priest’s message: “We’re stuck. We can’t hold out much longer. Get us out.”

Maybe it was a window of just a day or two, but as the very first news reports of broken levees and massive flooding came in, there was a moment when it was yet unclear who, exactly, the overwhelming victims of Katrina were to be.

But within this brief moment, there were those who could perhaps anticipate what was to come—those who knew a thing or two about New Orleans, and could glimpse the fast approaching horizon. Perhaps they went online and Googled the words “race” and “Katrina,” just to see if their worst predictions were being confirmed on the Web.

At the time, they would have found exactly zero news links that placed race front and center in the discussion of the disaster. By August 31, almost 48-hours after Katrina hit New Orleans, even the centrist-punditry of the highly-trafficked online Slate questioned why their colleagues “demurred from mentioning two topics that must have occurred to every sentient viewer: race and class.” But in the first few hours of the event, an impromptu Internet search yielded an unexpected report—that of hundreds of Vietnamese Americans, most of them elderly, who were stranded in a church in the Versailles section of New Orleans. The area is home to approximately 10,000 Vietnamese residents, virtually all of them once refugees of war who were abandoned by U.S. forces in the wake of the North Vietnamese victory of 1975. Now, they were holed up in Lavang church, finding themselves again seeking refuge—this time from a different sort of abandonment. Although the flood waters had risen to over 10 feet, Father Vien Thi Nguyen discovered that a phone line in a neighboring residential house was working. Several calls were placed to state emergency services, but no firm commitment was made for the group’s rescue. With the health of survivors deteriorating, and many feeling as if they could not hold on, Father Nguyen then contacted anyone and everyone he knew who could possibly send for help, including concerned community members who were quick to post the story online. The priest’s message: “We’re stuck. We can’t hold out much longer. Get us out.”

Model Minority Resurfacing?

Before long, Katrina would take its place as one of the worst ecological and racial catastrophes in U.S. history. Under the most tragic circumstances, the Black poor—who at the time comprised 67 percent of New Orleans—took center stage in the national media. And here the corporate media pulled no punches, working feverishly to promulgate all of the core “underclass” tropes: Poor Blacks, unable to do anything for themselves, laying blame on a government rescue (read: hand-out) that never arrived; Armed and dangerous thugs looting and preying on their very own.

Yet, as the facts surrounding FEMA’s astounding failure began to surface, it took more than “tales from the underclass” to deflect sole blame from the powerful. So the spinmeisters began to “go positive” by telling stories of the people who did get out—and who did so without the least bit of government assistance.

It took three very long days, but all those stranded at Lavang Church were eventually rescued. As the entire city was evacuated by the National Guard, and as the corpses were slowly recovered, it seemed that the Vietnamese community had suffered relatively few fatalities. To date, the number of Vietnamese confirmed fatalities remains a mystery, with unofficial reports ranging from one to dozens. (Recovery officials have yet to offer a race and ethnic breakdown of the body count).

Local and national presses were thus quick to enlist the Vietnamese as symbols of survival amid despair, running stories of the peculiar virtues of the Vietnamese—their uncanny ability to “get out” by drawing upon a combination of ethnic solidarity, war-tested survival skills and their trusted shrimping boats. Such reporting soon eclipsed that of the abandonment experienced by those in Versailles. The headlines and articles insisted on more optimistic themes: “We will rebuild;” “We never expected anything from government;” “We’ve been through worse.” Thus, from Katrina’s toxic flood waters resurfaced the model minority, a much-needed elixir for those unable to stomach the hard truths coming from the regions’ hardest hit Black communities.

A Precarious Living

But the truth about the over 35,000 Vietnamese residents who live in the impacted areas is that they will most likely never return to the communities they once knew. Beyond New Orleans and its surrounding communities, the Vietnamese have also been uprooted from Gulf Port, Louisiana; Bayou Labatre, Alabama; and Biloxi, Mississippi. Fifteen thousand of these displaced residents had relocated to Houston alone, a city that is home to one of the largest Vietnamese ethnic enclaves in the United States. They leave behind, perhaps forever, the shrimping industry that has been an economic backbone for the community for nearly three decades, employing up to 15 percent of the adult Vietnamese working population. Now, shrimping has all but vanished, literally overnight, due to the ecological and infrastructural devastation wrought by Katrina.

An additional 45 percent of the Vietnamese population in the New Orleans area was employed by the area's hotels and casinos. With redevelopment plans for the tourism industry still uncertain, there's little to suggest that the Vietnamese will return seamlessly to their previous positions.

Unlike Chinatowns, Koreatowns, or even the "Little Saigons" of Southern California and Houston, the Vietnamese communities of the impacted gulf areas, particularly in the more rural Bayou Labatre and Biloxi, do not conform to the spectacle of ethnic entrepreneurship expected from an Asian immigrant enclave. Thus, hope-filled assurances of Vietnamese residents rebuilding anew are cut short by the fact that much of the business property was never theirs to begin with.

Finally, there is a large segment of the affected Vietnamese population that consist of the working-poor and property-less, those whose poverty and welfare participation rates in places such as Biloxi and Bayou Labatre have rivaled that of any other race or ethnic group in the region. Over 19 percent of the population of Mississippi lives in poverty, making it the poorest state in the nation. And Biloxi—home to approximately 2,000 Vietnamese—is among the poorest of the poor. Katrina was something of a final death blow for the community. "There are very few options [left] for the residents of East Biloxi," said Alejandro Rosales of Oxfam America who was sent to the region to assess the damage. "They are in limbo. They don't know what to expect, or what to plan for." With hundreds of Vietnamese families from East Biloxi having relocated to Houston, the chances of their return home seem slim. "All the evacuees who are now in Houston want to go back home. They all want to rebuild. But everyone's return is just not realistic," remarks Huy Bui whose group, the National Association of Vietnamese American Services Agencies (NAVASA), is leading a national effort to resettle or return displaced Vietnamese families. "They're not all going back. But people haven't accepted this reality yet."

An L.A. Retrospective

Given these circumstances, model minority talk is irrelevant. But, as the Korean American community learned 13 years ago during the civil unrest in Los Angeles, the economic and political reality of an Asian community is less important than the ideological representations that community can be enlisted to serve. Back in 1992, after Los Angeles burned following the acquittal of four white officers who were caught on tape savagely beating a black man, the elder President Bush tried to argue that the devastation was not about the "great cause of racial equality," but merely the opportunism of desperate looters. But for such a depoliticizing move to effectively take hold, Bush and his fellow conservative leaders needed to support their claims with counter narratives and images—representations of hard-working people protecting private property, thus overshadowing the case against white supremacy.

And none served so impressively as the image of the well-armed Korean merchant who was protecting his store from looting and destruction at the hands of ultra-violent Black youth. In what seemed like countless media images, the Korean merchant was portrayed as upholding the spirit of entrepreneurship amid chaos and lawlessness.

It would take the courageous efforts of those in the Korean-American community, particularly its activists and its artists, to counter these representations, and to call for a more complex reading of the situation. Indeed, what the Korean-American community sorrowfully refers to as its Sai-I-Gu was not only about the destruction and loss of property, but of the deep racial segregation of Los Angeles, of purposeful neglect on the part of the National Guard to prevent the destruction, and most importantly, of an attempt to bridge future unity between Blacks and Korean Americans.

Shifting Winds

Stories of Vietnamese up-by-the-boot straps self-sufficiency in the wake of Katrina could easily have served to ease the pressure on FEMA, bolstering the agency's rationale that the role of the federal government is merely supplemental to that of the states. And that, in turn, the states' role is supplemental to that of individual responsibility. Considering the intractable conservative line that has dominated Vietnamese-American politics for the past 30 years, the community was poised to serve such a role. Since 1975, as the first wave of Vietnamese refugees arrived to the United States, consisting primarily of the erstwhile "elites"—those who worked alongside the U.S. command in Saigon and were selected for immediate evacuation—Vietnamese-American politics has been characterized by an abiding loyalty to U.S. government, a no-nonsense anti-communism and a deep distrust for those who seek to shift the community toward socially progressive trends. Though first-wavers arrived penniless and struggled to overcome the heartbreaking resettlement process, and even as second and third waves of refugees from the more impoverished and rural areas of Vietnam began to outnumber them during the late '80s and '90s, the political conservatism of the first arrivals has rarely been tested.

But then on September 29, 2005, only a month into the Katrina aftermath, a surprising thing occurred. Several community leaders came together for a Congressional briefing on the hurricane's impact on Vietnamese Americans of the gulf. In the process, they sent a clear message to U.S. lawmakers that the community would not so easily march in lock-step with the Bush administration or any other political power broker promoting personal responsibility over government accountability. In an article appearing in the October 2005 issue of *Pacific Citizen*, Tram Nguyen of Boat People SOS—a Houston-based Vietnamese service agency that co-convened the Congressional briefing along with NAVASA—stated: "Because there wasn't the initial outcry for help, the government thinks that we can handle it from here out. The first two to three weeks [after Katrina], we handled everything on our own, but to be honest, without the proper funding our annex office will close at the end of October." Recognizing that federal government has no long-term plan in place for the displaced, NAVASA, Boat People SOS and the National Congress of Vietnamese Americans have issued a three-phase plan for returning the displaced to their hometowns. According to Bui, the first two phases include immediate relief over the next year, requiring government assistance for housing, income, food and employment. The last phase calls for government to take responsibility in rebuilding people's homes or permanently relocating families.

A Hand's Off Approach

Driving through Biloxi, Chuong Bui paused to stare at a concrete staircase that once led up to an apartment building that no longer stands. The image of stairs leading nowhere stays etched in his mind, reminding him of the hurricane's sheer devastating power. Bui 26, is part of the Viet Bay Area Katrina Relief fund, a group of mostly young Vietnamese American activists from California's Bay Area who have organized relief efforts, including two relief contingents to the gulf. For Bui and his fellow travelers, the disaster simply "strikes too close to home," echoing the hardships and isolation that his own family felt upon their original refugee resettlement in the United States over 25 years ago. Having just returned from a relief contingent, Bui's main concern is for the poorer and

more rural areas of Mississippi and Alabama. What's more, according to Bui, FEMA and the Red Cross are only now delivering direct relief. "Nobody's thinking about the long-term. Our goal was to go down there so we could do some assessment that nobody else was doing."

Picking up the slack while at the same time calling for greater long-term public accountability is also a theme being sounded among the Vietnamese community leaders of Houston, some of whom have shouldered the bulk of the initial resettlement work with minimal help from the Feds. "The first month [of resettlement] was terrible. The federal government's response was not positive," says Anh-Lan Nguyen, chair of Houston's Vietnamese Culture and Science Association, one of the community groups delivering front-line support to the evacuees. "Most of the people who needed the most help in the beginning from FEMA didn't get it, especially those with LEP [limited English proficiency]. We had to fight for more assistance." The looming fear is that the government will continue to assume a hands-off approach toward Vietnamese evacuees, leaving to Houston's Vietnamese leaders the challenge of integrating the displaced.

"We're maxed out," says Nguyen, who these days is working with local officials to resettle displaced Vietnamese children into the Houston-area public schools. "We're doing the best we can. But we can't sustain it. Eventually [the federal government] has got to do more."

Yet few signs point towards a comprehensive, long-term federal support plan for the Vietnamese, or any other racial or ethnic group for that matter. Moreover, an initial government count suggested that 99 percent of the evacuees sent to the Houston area were Blacks. That the 15,000 Vietnamese who wound up in the same city were not included in this count suggests that the feds may consider the Vietnamese migration a matter of personal networks and private sponsorship, residing outside the jurisdiction of government accountability. Nguyen even recalls how during the first days of the resettlement, several Vietnamese were turned away from Houston shelters: "You [Vietnamese] can take care of your people fine," she recalls a stressed-out shelter director telling her.

"Yes, we're very good at taking care of our own," remarks Nguyen. "That's our strength. And it's now become our weakness."

Getting Out

Still, the fact remains that many Vietnamese escaped when others did not. This alone, it seems, should reinforce some claims that the model minority is more than just myth. Take, for instance, the family of Nick Luong, a 13-year-old who along with his parents lost his home in Biloxi but saved their boat, using it to ride out Katrina and then as temporary shelter in the days following the storm. Nick's story, reported by the Associated Press, represents that ineluctable spirit of survival so attractive to those seeking something to redeem from the disaster. At the same time, it can serve as an indirect shot against those who did not get out—those who, according to ex-FEMA chief Michael Brown, are responsible for their own deaths and losses because they simply "did not heed the evacuation warnings." He added snidely, "When evacuation warnings go out, people should realize it's for their own good." But a closer look at the fate of those who escaped—particularly the vaunted shrimpers who apparently drew upon their seamanship to evade Katrina's path—reveals that "getting out" is not all that it seems.

Anh Hoang, a shrimper from Louisiana, had spent over a month in a Broussard shelter when in October a UC Berkeley student film crew arrived to the gulf region to document the plight of Vietnamese survivors. During an interview, Hoang described to the filmmakers his life since Katrina: "Many people have homes to come back to because theirs are not badly damaged. I could not come back because mine was totally flooded, twice, not once. My boat was wrecked, my home was flooded. My property was gone, but I am still alive."

Hoang's home was damaged once during Katrina and again during Rita. He was a shrimper because when he came to the United States in 1981, there were no other opportunities available to him. Racism had locked him and other Vietnamese out of the formal labor market. Racial violence also followed him into the trade, as white shrimpers, at times with the support of groups such as the Klan, terrorized Vietnamese competitors. But shrimping was all he could turn to. "I came to the U.S. alone," says Hoang. "I started empty handed, and now I am empty handed again."

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Malik Rahim and Common Ground: Paving the way home to New Orleans

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Organization: Common Ground Collective	Author: CC Campbell-Rock	Date Published: 05/22/2006
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See Following Page

Dissolving Barriers: New Orleans Latino Health Outreach Project

Organization: Latino Health Outreach Project	Author: Catherine Jones and Jennifer Whitney	Date Published: 06/26/2006
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The sun is still below the horizon when we arrive: three cars, many boxes of supplies, and five to ten people wearing scrubs, most of us women. Hazily, as the coffee is still kicking in, we begin to set up



3/22/06

Malik Rahim and Common Ground: Paving the way home to New Orleans

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Spiritual News

by CC Campbell-Rock

While politicians do battle with grassroots organizations, civil rights attorneys and community activists over the soul of New Orleans and the right of the displaced to return, Common Ground Collective, the first grassroots group to tackle the rebuilding process, continues to expand on its mission of paving the way for New Orleanians to return home.

"We are less than 90 days away from hurricane season, so we're launching our 'Are You Prepared Campaign,'" said Malik Rahim, founder of Common Ground.

Rahim, the keynote speaker at the ANSWER Coalition's "Stop the War" march and rally in San Francisco March 18, added, "We're asking universities to establish evacuee centers. We are building a preparedness kit."

The former Black Panther and community organizer said the focus of the hurricane preparedness campaign is to teach people how to rebuild and, if necessary, how to evacuate "without being dependent on an antiquated levee system or local, state and federal government."

"Our levee system is a failure. We don't need levees. We need a storm protection system," Rahim continued. "One thing we've learned: We can't control nature. We're asking people to rebuild and rebuild smart."

"We're communicating with the community. We're discussing hurricane resistance homes. We noticed that the wood houses in the Lower Ninth Ward looked like toothpicks, but houses build of bricks and cinderblocks are still standing. We need homes made of those materials, elevated homes. But all of these are moot issues until the wetlands are restored," said Common Ground spokesperson Sakura Koné.



Revolutionary journalist Kiilu Nyasha was with New Orleans' Common Ground Collective cofounder Malik Rahim and his son Malik at Friday's opening night reception for the "Black Panther Rank and File" photo exhibit that is showing until July 2 at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. Since September, 4,500 people have volunteered with Common Ground, serving and working in solidarity with 65,000 Katrina survivors! Malik says that what he learned as a Panther guides the work of Common Ground. Both Kiilu and Malik have practiced the principles of the Black Panther Party every day of their lives.

Photo: JR

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Sakura Koné and his children – from left, Mzilikazi Koné, Sakura Koné, Sundjata Koné and Nzinga Koné – in a photo taken a couple of years ago near the Presidio in San Francisco. Sakura is now the spokesperson for the Common Ground Collective in New Orleans.

However, rebuilding smart is undergirded by the principle that man has to “co-exist with nature, not fight against it,” Koné added. “That’s the focus and skills of our construction workshop. We have a vision. We’re looking at rebuilding energy efficient homes, solar power and organic gardens. We don’t want to repeat the errors of these clowns who are running the government.”

Common Ground’s construction co-op is also operative. “We’re taking the unemployed and giving

them skills training in all aspects of the construction trades. They can then rebuild their own homes and work in the industry,” he added.

“Right now, Ray Nagin put out that you can rebuild – but rebuild at your own risk. If I had run for mayor, I’d be condoning an election that is criminal at best and immoral at the very least,” Rahim answered when asked why he declined to run for mayor.

“We (the U.S.) made more of a commitment to the Afghans, Iraqis and Mexicans. We made sure they had more of an opportunity to vote than Americans. Do we have satellite polls, which can be easily done?” he asked.

“I didn’t run for mayor because I hope to lead a recall on every person that gets into office. It’s just, once again, this state showing how much it cares about Black people. We have to make sure the whole election is exposed for what it is.”

But nothing can dampen the exuberance being felt by the group, as Common Ground plays host to at least 1,100 college students who have forsaken the usual Spring Break party ritual to go down to New Orleans to help in the rebuilding effort.

“We have over 1,000 people, students of all colors – Blacks, Whites, Asians, people from Ivy League to community colleges. It’s such a good feeling to see the youth contribute to the restoration of New Orleans,” Rahim affirmed.

Howard University sent 200 students, Florida A&M, Hampton Institute, Xavier and Dillard and Southern universities, New York University, Georgetown University and the University of California system, among many other campuses, have sent hundreds of students to take part in the biggest civic project in the states.

Koné said Common Ground has arranged entertainment for the students, who deserve to unwind after working long hours, day after day. “They are enjoying musical groups, poetry slams and comedians, among other entertainment activities, some of which is being done by students themselves.”

Additionally, Common Ground's legal committee scored a victory recently in its effort to prevent landlords from evicting tenants. "The legal committee has gotten evictions delayed until March 28. We are fighting landlords who are forcibly evicting people. They are throwing (tenants) out, jacking up rents or, worse, selling their properties to speculative developers."

Since its inception in September 2005, Common Ground has gutted out at least 500 homes, treated hundreds of residents at its health clinics, brought thousands of volunteers to the Crescent City and distributed cleaning supplies and food to all who asked.

Only six months old, the not-for-profit organization is putting a holistic vision in play. The group has established a pre-school and day care program which will evolve, over time, into an elementary school, then a high school.

A skirmish with police last week only made organizers of the Common Ground more determined to move on with its education agenda. At least 100 volunteers took over the Martin Luther King School for Science and Technology in the Lower Ninth Ward, while another 500 stood outside.

"We went to clean it up and restore it to working condition," said Koné. He said the organization got involved in the school after watching parents beg the Orleans Parish School Board and elected city officials to re-open the school.

Common Ground members were prepared to go to jail in their effort to help the parents and students.

"The cops stood and watched us," Koné said. After the group finished cleaning the school, Common Ground received a call from Cecil Picard, Louisiana's education superintendent. He commended the group on the "fine work" they had done, but "We'll take it from here," Picard added.

They were told that if they didn't vacate the premises, Common Ground would be sued. "The next day, the police pushed us out," Koné explained.

However, Common Ground's continuous negotiations with key Orleans Parish School Board members paid off when, on March 21, the school board adopted a resolution recognizing the community's desire for reopening the school and Common Ground's commitment to preparing the school for students' return.

"The Louisiana Department of Education, the Lower Ninth Ward Residents and Common Ground, with the support of the Orleans Parish School Board, will work to develop a plan in the next week to prepare for the basic opening (including inventorying of school contents, gutting, cleaning and mold remediation) of the Martin Luther King site for use by the community for educational purposes," according to the resolution posted on Common Ground's website, www.commongroundrelief.org.

"Our intention is to secure the approval from all necessary parties to open the school for community use in the immediate future and for the complete reopening of the school as quickly as feasible."

Families interested in enrolling their children in MLK Science and Technology Elementary School can call (504) 240-2111 for more information.

Rahim said he is more worried now about a pandemic crisis than a hurricane. "My greatest fear is that if a pandemic crisis hit this country and we have to depend on the governor, the mayor or the president to help us, what will happen to our people?"

Common Ground is currently negotiating for space in which to host a series of concerts. The fundraisers could add a much needed infusion of money with which to continue Common Ground's work. Donations are always welcomed. Contributors can call the non-profit organization at (504) 368-6897 to make a donation or contribute online at www.commongroundrelief.org.

CC Campbell-Rock, a native New Orleanian, veteran journalist and Katrina evacuee, is now the editor of the Bay View. Email her at campbellrock@sfbayview.com.

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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 about one hundred people, mostly male 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, and tell us about their families back in Texas, Veracruz, or Bahia. The wind picks up, sending gravel dust swirling around us, and people chase after Band-Aids and alcohol swabs that took flight in the gust. 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 fifteenth 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 (LHOP) clinics are always busy, as is every functional health care provider in this city, from the first aid stations to the ERs. 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 is safest. Never mind the fact that we can't dispense medication, rarely have a doctor on-site, and 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.

Healthcare needs

In the second week after Katrina hit, the Common Ground Free Clinic opened in Algiers, an unflooded neighborhood on the west bank of the Mississippi River. At the time, it was one of only two places offering healthcare in the region. A few weeks later, some of us began assessing health care needs in the flood zones. We quickly realized that among the many gaps in the city's public healthcare infrastructure there was a source of culturally competent, bilingual healthcare 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 Latino workers were staying. Initially, the clinics consisted of two people giving tetanus shots and over-the-counter medications. Within a few weeks, more providers were added, including MDs, nurse practitioners, acupuncturists, and herbalists. We now do one clinic a week in the early morning at a day labor pick-up site in downtown New Orleans, one in a church out in suburban Kenner where we do limited primary care and family medicine, and we occasionally hold clinics at other sites.

In addition to providing healthcare, we are committed to improving our patients' access to healthcare across the city, supporting struggles for justice for immigrants and working people, and building relationships with organizations who have a history of working in New Orleans' Latino community as well as with post-storm initiatives dedicated to supporting residents' right of return. At every step we charge ourselves to remain accountable to and take leadership from local people and organizations of color.

Before the storm, there were few Latinos in the city. As one national day laborer organizer points out, "New Orleans and Pittsburgh were the only two cities of their size in the country where race was almost entirely a Black and white issue. Both had remarkably small Latino populations." New Orleans and its outlying areas were seven percent Latino, but the city proper had only three percent prior to the storm.

New context

Meanwhile, nine months after Hurricane Katrina, almost sixty percent of New Orleans' original residents have yet to return, as much of the city still lacks basic services. The planning and reconstruction continue to move forward without their input. This diaspora of New Orleanians still scattered across the US tends to be overwhelmingly African-American and lower income than those who have made it back. They have no assurance there will be housing, schools, hospitals, or utilities—not to mention childcare, employment, and protection from future flooding—if they are to be able to return.

With such a large sector of the local labor force unable to contribute to (and benefit from) the reconstruction of the city, it is no surprise that workers are arriving in droves from other states and countries to seek employment. They are Black, Asian, white, and Latino; they come from places as diverse as California, Texas, Colorado, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, Brazil, and Mexico. These new workers have arrived in a city with few Spanish speakers, little awareness of immigrants' needs and issues, and with five times as many agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE—formerly the INS) as agents from the Department of Labor who, in theory, enforce labor laws.

In this new context, organizers see this situation as a historic opportunity to build a multiracial workers' justice movement uniting (mostly local) African-Americans and (mostly newly arrived) Latinos. Soon after the storm, the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition, a diverse group of organizers, advocates, residents, and service providers based in New Orleans' Latino and African-American communities, started planning a multiracial workers' center to use organizing as a way to build bridges across racial lines in a city where people of color are beginning to be pitted against one another.

We are excited to be a part of this coalition because it allows our work to concretely support organizing for workers' and immigrants' rights in New Orleans, even as we maintain our role as healthcare providers, not organizers.

In a way, we envision our clinics as a tool to help dissolve the barrier between service provision and organizing that commonly exists. In the absence of a functioning workers' center where service provision, advocacy, and organizing would take place, our clinics are a potential focal point for just such a hybrid of activity, support, and leadership development. For now, the day laborer clinics serve as an excellent connection point between our patients and the organizers from the Worker Justice Coalition. At times, organizers have come to our clinics to hand out know-your-rights materials or talk with workers about upcoming events. We'd love to see our clinics serve as a steady point of contact between workers and organizers as the work of the Coalition grows.

Significant questions

Like most organizations that began in New Orleans after Katrina, we are struggling with our own transition from a stopgap emergency response crew to a rooted, long-term community organization. We are facing significant questions as we try to determine the future of our work and how it fits into the service-versus-organizing paradigm. Do we see our clinics ultimately as an organizing tool or as a valid source of primary healthcare? Can

we legitimately be both? How does our vision for our clinics coincide with our patients' needs and their understanding of our work? How does our limited capacity affect what we can provide?

We also find ourselves challenged by our relationship to the Common Ground Clinic, the free clinic out of which LHOP began, which is now one part of a much larger organization of primarily white volunteers, mostly from outside New Orleans. In the months after the hurricane, Common Ground has received significant feedback from local, people of color–led organizations concerning accountability to the larger struggle in New Orleans, as well as a need to examine racism within the organization.

In recent months some Common Ground volunteers, with enormous support from local African–American organizers from the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond and white allies from San Francisco's Catalyst Project, formed an anti–racist working group, which has begun to do an incredible amount of work shifting the organization to a more accountable focus. LHOP coordinators work closely with the anti–racist working group, and although the Common Ground Clinic and others hold us up as a model within the organization of accountability and local leadership, we recognize how far we still have to grow.

In addition to these challenges, over the last few months workers near our day laborer clinic have been targeted by increasing police and ICE harassment and arrest. Partially because of this, 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.

Organizing tool
Meanwhile, we continue to face challenges finding reliable healthcare 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. Finally, neither of these clinics are ultimately the best options 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 healthcare for Latinos in the Greater New Orleans area; 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.

It's been important for us to make these decisions in light of our strengths and limitations, the relationships we have with patients and other providers, and an awareness of the larger picture of healthcare and community organizing, especially among Latinos and low–income working people in New Orleans. Right now a feasible option for us is to continue to build up our mobile clinics while maintaining a presence in Kenner. In addition, since we know that many of our patients have medical needs that stretch beyond the capacity of primary care, 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. Most likely, this will begin happening in our health and safety trainings. 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.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Catherine Jones and Jennifer Whitney are Louisianans who coordinate the Latino Health Outreach Project. Catherine is a third–year medical student, and Jennifer is a Wilderness EMT and a massage therapist. We would like to thank our volunteers, advisors, and mentors, and everyone who has given us their time, money, resources, support, or advice. Most of all we thank our patients, whose dedication and generosity continue to humble and inspire us.

To volunteer, donate, or get more information, please go to <http://www.cghc.org/lhop.html> or write us at lhopa@lycos.com

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Rethinking New Orleans Schools

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Author:	Date Published:	Link:
Jordan Flaherty	08/09/2006	http://www.wiretapmag.org/stories/40078

As post–Katrina New Orleans becomes a battleground over private vs. public schools, students organize to be a part of the debate.



On Friday, July 21, 19 New Orleans public school students gathered to speak about their vision for improved city schools. They stood outside Sherwood Forest Elementary, a flooded and devastated public school in a still mostly desolate New Orleans East neighborhood.

In front of the assembled crowd, they opened the door to the school, showing hallways filled with trash and the unmistakable smell of mold and neglect. Aaron Danielson, a middle school student, told the assembled crowd, "People often think that kids want impossible things but we only want things that are essential, like good teachers, better

books and enough supplies."

The students were part of *Rethink*, a project organized by education advocates that is aimed at bringing youth voices into evaluating and shaping the future of New Orleans' schools. The students told bleak stories of the problems facing their schools. "We have to share a desk, we have to share books," Shannon Taylor, 16, explained.

"A friend graduated school, and she never owned a book sack, because the school never gave her books."

The kids and organizers of Rethink are just some of the voices in a wide-ranging cacophony taking place in New Orleans' schools, a struggle in which everyone seems to be speaking for what they claim are the best interests of New Orleans' children.

By highlighting the voices of city youth, the Rethink project has taken an important step towards reframing the debate and highlighting the severity of the issues faced. They also placed demands on school board officials for a continued role for youth in evaluating their own schools.

Battleground in a national fight over charter schools

Post-Katrina New Orleans has become a battleground in a national fight over competing visions for the future of urban education. Last September, with the city evacuated and all the schools closed, with no parents or students or teachers around, suddenly anything became possible. Instead of making gradual changes to an existing system, there was no system, and virtually no rules or limits on what could be changed. "It's almost a blank slate for whatever agenda people want to bring," confirms New Orleans-based education reform advocate Aesha Rasheed.

Days after New Orleans was flooded, the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank based in Washington, D.C., was already advocating for vouchers and "market solutions" to the city's education problems. Late last year, President Bush **announced** the allocation of \$488 million to help families displaced by Katrina place students in private schools. Critics viewed it as a back-door approach to get public funding for private schools and would essentially create the first national school voucher plan. Charter school advocates, opponents of teachers unions, and many national education activists on the right and left have joined the fray.

Before the storm and displacement, New Orleans had 128 public schools, 4,000 teachers and 60,000 students. The system was widely regarded as in **crisis**. Three quarters of eighth-graders failed to score at the basic level on state English assessments. In some schools, the high school military recruiting program was a mandatory class, mostly because funding wasn't available for other programs. Ten school superintendents in ten years had been fired or quit. Many parents, especially white parents, had pulled their kids out of the system -- almost half of the city's students were enrolled in private schools and parochial schools. Advocates accused the school system of functioning as little more than a warehousing program for Black youth.

The deeply rooted racial and class inequalities New Orleans faces date back to at least the Jim Crow era. Soon after New Orleans schools integrated after the historic *Brown v. Board of education* court decision, white parents began pulling their kids out of the public schools and with them much of the tax base that had funded these schools. For decades after, the schools steadily declined.

A blank slate for remaking schools

Now, the post-Katrina school system has already been radically reshaped. A mostly public school system prior to the storm has **become** a mostly charter system. While the city's private schools saw almost 90 percent of their students return in spring 2006, only 20 percent of public school students returned. A total of 25 schools have reopened with just four run by the local school board, 18 are charters, and three are run by the state. Most former public school students remain displaced.

It is true that Louisiana has not rushed blindly into charters. The process **began** in 1995, around the same time much of the country started exploring the idea. Although chartered schools have expanded greatly post-Katrina, the state gave charter school contracts to a fraction of the organizations that applied, initially approving only six out of 44 proposals for next year. Still, the overall transformation has been radical, with a total of more than 30 out of 35 of schools opening this fall transformed to charters.

For public school advocates, the radical transformation of New Orleans' education system has created a new field of concerns. They worry that the transformation is taking place without much public input and consent. The new administrations running the schools are often inexperienced and unprepared to take over the New Orleans system. "They say this is an experiment," Tracie Washington, NAACP lawyer and education advocate, explains, speaking about the plans of advocates of charter schools. "Tuskegee was an experiment. We have reason to be suspicious of experiments," Washington adds referring to a notorious **clinical study** conducted in 1932 on mostly poor African-American men without their consent.

The performance record of charter schools nationally is mixed at best. The U.S. Department of Education **study** in five states last year found that in those states 79 percent of the charter schools met state standards in student testing, compared with 94 percent of public schools.

The new transformation also changes the balance of power in the school system, radically altering the role of the school board and superintendent, who used to oversee 125 schools and currently oversee just five. Charter schools are unaccountable to the board other than in some basic standards.

The question of the role of the teachers' union -- previously the largest and perhaps strongest in the city -- is another contentious issue tied up in the dispute over charters. The school board voted in the fall to lay off all but 61 of the 7,000 employees, and in June let the teachers' union contract expire with little comment and no fanfare. Those rehired at charter schools return without their union.

For some, the union represents a cog in a broken system. For others, they represent an important black-led political base advocating for justice within the education system. "Elites of the city may prefer the teachers don't come back because they represent an educated class of black New Orleans, with steady income, seniority, job protection," Jacques Morial, community advocate and brother of former mayor Marc Morial, said at a recent forum.

"There is an access barrier," Rasheed confirms. "In the old New Orleans, charters were an island in a sea of city schools. That's no longer the case. There's currently a big group of kids that don't have a school. Some think its one or two thousand. That's a lot considering only 12,000 total returned (in the spring semester)."

Pre-Katrina, thousands of kids every year didn't pre-register for any school -- they simply showed up at their neighborhood public school on the first day, and the school found them a place. Now, most of those neighborhood schools don't exist, and those that do are no longer obligated to place students who just show up. Add to that the fact the no one knows just how many students will be back for the fall semester -- recent estimates place the number at 30,000 -- and you have a recipe for chaos.

Issue of charter schools crosses traditional partisan lines

Nationwide, the fight over charter schools has crossed traditional boundaries of left and right, with many progressives supporting charter schools as a potential tool for community control of schools, and an opportunity to try education strategies that would not be possible through the common bureaucracy of public schools.

Opponents see charter schools as a back-door strategy used by conservatives to undermine public schools, and to create a two-tiered "separate but equal" hierarchy within the public school system. Others accuse the charter schools of refusing to take most "special needs" students, although local charter school advocates insist that isn't the case.

The struggle over what form the education system will take is also fundamental to the larger issue of who will return and when. At neighborhood meetings throughout the city and its diaspora, parents are anxious. In Houston and Atlanta, displaced parents are asking if their kids will have a school if they return. Without these fundamental questions answered, these concerns and uncertainties become another reason for parents to not return to the city.

Whatever path is taken, to truly improve the system we need much more funding and resources than the city has received. "The problems in New Orleans' education system are so huge, so widespread, so longstanding, it defies simple solutions," Mtangulizi Sanyinka project manager of New Orleans' African American Leadership Project adds.

Many youth who have not returned face unresolved trauma in a hostile new environment. Of the 560 evacuee children in one large evacuee camp outside Baton Rouge, only 190 were still attending when the school year ended. "The kids in Houston don't like us. They treat us funny. I just want to come home," says Yasmond Perry, a displaced 13-year-old from the Calliope housing projects.

For the students who have returned, their future is unclear. Many still do not know what school they will be attending in the fall. Few will be returning to the same school they left, or to their former classmates. Melissa Augustine, another student involved in Rethink, listed the basic things she and other students want -- clean bathrooms, qualified teachers, books and school supplies, and healthy food. "We should not have to ask for these things," she declared. "We deserve them."

Whether the school system becomes charter-based or public, it is these fundamental questions that remain unresolved.

To find out more about New Orleans Rethink, you can view a short [video](#) that the students recently produced.

Jordan Flaherty is an editor of Left Turn Magazine and a community organizer. He lives in New Orleans.

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One Year After Katrina: The State of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast

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Organization: Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch	Author: Chris Kromm and Sue Sturgis	Date Published: 08/15/2006
Link: http://reconstructionwatch.org/images/One_Year_After.pdf		

Attachment	Size
One_Year_After.pdf	3.76 MB

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Commemorating Katrina: More than 50 events planned to honor and heal

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Author: New Orleans Network	Date Published: 08/21/2006	Link: http://neworleansnetwork.org/
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> > This Calendar of whats up this week in New Orleans is brought to you by your friends at www.neworleansnetwork.org.

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> Dear Nola:

> The one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's landfall and the devastating levee breaches that flooded most of New Orleans and took so many lives is fast approaching. Over the next week New Orleanians will gather to honor our dead and reflect on all we have endured over the past year.

>

> New Orleans Network has compiled a list of more than 50 events planned around the one-year anniversary of Katrina. We'd like to particularly draw your attention to two events coming up this week and the community-driven commemoration march on August 29th.

>

> This Tuesday at 4 p.m. you can join levees.org (<http://www.levees.org>) at the Hale

> Bogg's Building as they release a report card on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Then on Friday the African-American Leadership Project will kick off a series of activities leading up to the anniversary with a panel discussion from 7 to 9 p.m. at Ashe' Cultural Arts Center.

> On August 29th, about 30 local organizations have worked with People's Hurricane Relief Fund to plan a

commemoration march beginning with a 10 a.m. ceremony at Jourdan and N. Galvez (site of the L9W levee breach). The march will proceed to Congo Square and end with reflections from families who lost loved ones and community leaders.

>
> Those are just a few of the more than 50 events planned to commemorate our tragedies and rally against the continuing injustices. Read on to learn about many other events or visit the anniversary section of our site at <http://www.neworleansnetwork.org/anniversary>. While you are there, you can also check out the calendar to get a glimpse of other meetings and community events on tap for the week.

>
> Thanks for all your help building this resource.

>
>
>
> AUGUST

>
> 8/16, 8/21–22, 8/29–Spike Lee's cable-TV documentary about New Orleans devastation by failed levees, described by one network executives as "one of the most important films HBO has ever made," will be hosted by the New Orleans Arena on August 16 at 7pm, five days before it airs on the cable network. An estimated 10,000 seats will be made available for the event, which Lee is expected to attend. You can get tickets for FREE on ticketmaster.com. The two-part TV premiere of the four-hour film, titled "When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts," will be Aug. 21 and 22. And four hours will repeat on Aug. 29, the one year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's landfall.

>
> 8/21–8/24 – NAACP Housing Hearings and Public Action Event will occur in several cities including New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lafayette/Lake Charles, on the North Shore and Wash, D.C. with possible satellite meetings in Houston and Dallas. NAACP will take public testimony and comments on housing issues and rights to return. On the last day there will be a public action in Wash, D.C. to gather information and demand response to problems from federal officials.

> Coordinator: NAACP Gulf Coast Advocacy Center
> Contact: Tracie Washington, twashington@naacpnet.org
>twashington [at] naacpnet.org

>
> TUESDAY, AUGUST 22

>
> 8/22 – Levees.org will observe the worst engineering disaster in U.S. history with the release of a report card on the performance of the U.S. Corps of Engineers since August 29, 2005, the date of Hurricane Katrina's landfall. At the event the group will also unveil a commemorative poster made up of photos of flag-draped flooded homes. The event begins at 4 p.m. on Aug. 22 in the courtyard of the Hale Bogg's Building at Magazine and Poydras streets.

> Coordinating group: Levees.org (<http://www.levees.org>)
> Contact: Sandy Rosenthal – (504) 616.5159 or sandy@levees.org">sandy [at] levees.org

>
> WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23

>
> 8/23 – New Orleans Council on Aging: Katrina Theater
> The performance will feature employees and seniors of the New Orleans Council on Aging in recognition of the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. The event begins at 10 a.m. at the council's temporary headquarters at 2020 Jackson Ave.

> Coordinating group: New Orleans Council on Aging
> Contact: Howard Rodgers – 504.827.7843 or primemin3@aol.com">primemin3 [at] aol.com

>
> 8/23–8/28 – "HEAR ME NOW! Reflections One Year After Katrina–Rita" The National Coalition on Black Civic Participation will kick-off a five day listing tour of the Gulf South with a press conference at 10 a.m. on Aug. 23 at Loew's Hotel (300 Poydras Ave).

> The tour, which will provide an outlet for Gulf Coast women to talk about their experiences and outline their current needs will travel through five cities in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi.

> The tour itinerary:

> Aug. 24: Mobile, Ala.

> Aug. 25: Gulfport, Miss.

> Aug. 26: New Orleans, La.

> Aug. 27: Lafayette, La.

> Aug. 28: Jackson Miss.

> Coordinating group: National Coalition on Black Civic Participation

> Contact: Leslie Watson Malachi, 202.256.8531, 202.659.4929 or leslie5560@aol.com">leslie5560 [at] aol.com

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> FRIDAY, AUGUST 25

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> 8/25 & 8/26 – One Year Later: What Have We Learned
> Loyola Center for Environmental Law and Land Use host this daylong conference and tour.
> Conference: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday, Aug. 25 @ Loyola University School of Law (526 Pine St.)
> Tour: 9 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 26 @ Holy Name Church (6363 St. Charles Ave.)
> Coordinator: Loyola Center for Environmental Law and Land Use
> Contact: 504.865-2011

>
> 8/25–8/29 – The African–American Leadership Project is planning a series of commemorative events and collaborating with People's Hurricane Relief Fund as part of the United Front to Commemorate the Great Flood, a coalition of more than 30 New Orleans–based grass–roots organizations.

> 8/25 – National Dialogue: What We learned from Katrina – panel discussion, 7 – 9 p.m. @ Ashe' Cultural Arts Center

> 8/26 –Hands around the Dome – An Umoja Circle around the Superdome followed by a march to the Convention Center in memory of the lives lost during Hurricane, 12 – 3 p.m. @ the Superdome and Convention Center

> 8/27 – Ecumenical Interfaith Worship Service, 2 – 4:30 p.m. @ Watson Teaching Ministries

> White Buffalo Day and Katrina Observance, 4:30 p.m. @ Congo Square in Louis Armstrong Park
> 8/28 – Katrina Lecture Series featuring Dr. Ivan Van Heerden, author of “The Storm” and deputy director for the LSU Hurricane Research Center with possible appearance by Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, author of “come Hell or High Water,” 7 – 9:30 p.m. @ Ashe’ Cultural Arts Center.
> 8/29 – Great Flood Commemoration March from Lower 9th Ward to Congo Square in conjunction with the United Front to Commemorate the Great Flood (a coalition led by People’s Hurricane Relief Fund), 10 a.m. assemble at Jordan and N. Galvez streets
> – Closing Event: Let the Circle Be Unbroken featuring the premier of “Unmasking New Orleans” (a DVD from The Final Call) and town hall meeting on the future of New Orleans 6:30 – 9:30 p.m. @ Ashe’ Cultural Arts Center
> Coordinator: African–American Leadership Project (in collaboration with United Front to Commemorate the Great Flood)
> Contact: Mtangulizi Sanyinka, wazuri@aol.com">wazuri [at] aol.com

>
> SATURDAY, AUGUST 26

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> 8/26–ACORN’s Tour of Hope will leave Saturday, August 26 at 2:00 p.m. from 1024 Elysian Fields in New Orleans. The tour bus will stop at locations in the neighborhoods where non–profits and others have made contributions to save the community and return residents. For reservations on the bus, contact ACORN 800–239–7379 x 127. To trail the bus in your own vehicle, please contact 800–239–7379 x 127.
> ACORN’s Katrina Memorial Event will be held Saturday evening, August 26 at 6:00 p.m. Reservations required: Contact 800–239–7379 x 127 for more info.

>
> 8/26 The New Orleans City Council is inviting the youth of New Orleans to participate in “the Children’s Village of Healing – Nurturing What Eyes Have Seen and Ears Have Heard” from 2 to 5 p.m. at Duncan Plaza, across from City Hall. Children will express their feelings through arts – painting, poetry, dance and creative writing. Artist Dixie Moore will lead the children through a Katrina mural project. Author Laverne Dunn will lead a creative writing workshop. Many community organizations that serve children will be providing informational materials and children’s activities. They include Children’s Hospital, Agenda for Children, the Parenting Center, the Children’s Museum, Total Community Action, Healthy Start, the Umoja Committee, the New Orleans Public Schools Homeless Education Program, the Children’s Defense Fund, the state Department of Social Services Office of Family Support, O. Perry Walker, the Ashe Cultural Cen
> ter and the Greater New Orleans Chapter of the Louisiana Association for the Education of Young Children.
> Coordinator: New Orleans City Council

>
> 8/26 A Candlelight Ceremony for Katrina Victims will begin at 8:30 p.m. at Algiers Point. At this event sponsored by Councilman James Carter a candle will be lit for each person who died as a result of the storm and flood.

> Coordinator: Councilman James Carter
> Contact: New Orleans City Council at 504.658.1000

>
> 8/26 – Rising Tide Conference

> Daylong conference with panel discussion about Hurricane Katrina, the immediate aftermath of the storm and flood and the role of bloggers in the struggle to rebuild to be held at the New Orleans Yacht Club (403 N. Roadway St.)

> 8:00 – 9:00: Keynote Address: Christopher Cooper and Robert Bloch, authors of Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security.

> 9:15 – 10:15: Panel Discussion: Personal Viewpoints moderated by Mark Moseley, including bloggers who stayed through the storm.

> 10:30 – 11:30: Think New Orleans by Alan Gutierrez.

> 1:00 – 2:00: Panel Discussion: New Orleans Politics moderated by Peter Athas.

> 2:15 – 3:15: Panel Discussion: Influence of Journalists and Bloggers moderated by Maitri Venkat–Ramani and Mark Folse, with NOLA.Com editor Jon Donley.

> 3:30 – 4:30: Panel Discussion: Bloggers & Neighborhood Associations moderated by Morwen Madrigal and Peter Athas with blogger/neighborhood activists representing the Gentilly, Mid–City, Northwest Carrollton and B neighborhoods.

> Contact: Mark Folse 504.872.0091 or 701.200.6424 (cell phone for day of event)

>
> SUNDAY, AUGUST 27

>
> 8/27 – Members of the Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Council will hold a Memorial Tribute to the Victims of Hurricane Katrina at 1 p.m. at the corner of Claiborne Avenue and Tennessee Street.

>
> 8/27 – Katrina Memorial Concert

> A free Katrina Memorial Concert commemorating the one–year anniversary of the catastrophe and featuring several of the area’s most distinguished musicians, including sopranos Phyllis Treigle, Thais St Julien, Cyril Hellier, Libbye Hellier and Melissa Brocato; flautist Louis Hackett; and organists James Hammann, Marcus St Julien and Brian Morgan. The New Orleans Musica da Camera will also perform. Composers heard will include Stephen Adams, Jacques Berthier, Joseph Gelineau SJ, George Frideric Handel, Nicola A Montani, Gerald Near and Ethelbert Nevin.

> The concert begins at 3 p.m. at the Church of Our Lady of Good Council (1235 Louisiana Ave.)

> Contact: Brian Morgan, (504)710.0891 or brianjaemorgan@aim.com">brianjaemorgan [at] aim.com

> OLG rectory at (504)891–1906 or [olgc@archdiocese–no.org](mailto:olgc@archdiocese-no.org)">olgc [at] archdiocese–no.org.

>
> 8/27 – New Orleans is the Soul of her People

> Poet Brenda Marie Osbey and others from the William Faulkner Society will present works. Event also features a concert by Davell Crawford and other gospel singers. Concert begins at 4:30 p.m. at St. Louis Cathedral followed by reception and book signing in the Cabildo.

>
> 8/27 – Baton Rouge Community Worship: A community gathering of "Remembrance, Thanksgiving, and Hope" on the anniversary week of Hurricane Katrina will be held on August 27, 2006 at 4:00 pm at First United Methodist Church, 930 North Blvd, in downtown Baton Rouge. This worship service of light will help remember those who

have suffered loss in the tragedy of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, express our unity in prayer and spirit with all those in need, and to lift up the hope of God who brings light out of darkness and hope out of despair. We remember those who lost loved ones, those forced to evacuate, those who are homeless, those serving in rescue and relief, those in the medical profession, those in leadership, and others. We gather to give thanks to God for guiding and sustaining us through difficult days and nights.

> Baton Rouge Training Event: "Best Practices Used in Disasters" is a community training event which precedes the Aug. 27 worship. The training begins at 2 p.m. in the same location as the 4 p.m. worship (First United Methodist Church). Teams are invited to come to learn the best practices for shelters, food distribution, donations, volunteers, and handling a crisis. Register by August 23 at 225-343-8270 or online:

<http://www.volunteerbatonrouge.org>

> Coordinator: Greater Baton Rouge Federation of Churches and Synagogues

>

> MONDAY, AUGUST 28

>

> 8/28 Town Hall Meeting sponsored by the NAACP Gulf Coast Advocacy Center

> Panel discussion about the city's redevelopment and lack of progress moderated by Michael Eric Dyson.

Participants include NAACP President/CEO Bruce Gordon, America's Second Harvest President/CEO Vicki B. Escarra, New Orleans Council President Oliver Thomas, State Sen. Diana Bajoie, Xavier University President Dr. Norman Francis, Loyola University Professor Bill Quigley, and other invited elected officials and policy makers.

> 6 to 8:30 p.m. @ Xavier University Student Center (1 Drexel Dr.)

>

> 8/28 - KaBOOM!'s Week of Play

> KaBOOM!'s and its partners, The Home Depot, Playworld Systems and Hands On Network, will build ten playgrounds in the Gulf Coast during the last week of August. On August 28, a playground will be built at Nelson UNO Charter School.

> Coordinator: KaBOOM!

> Contact: info@kaboom.org>info [at] kaboom.org.

>

> 8/28 - "Reality Check" Tour

> Survivor's Village, a tent city protest for the reopening of public housing in New Orleans, is putting together a media exclusive tour of the state of public housing and public housing residents in New Orleans. The tour is from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

> Coordinator: Survivors Village

> Contact: survivorsvillage@gmail.com>survivorsvillage [at] gmail.com for more information or to RSVP.

>

> TUESDAY, AUGUST 29 -- ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF KATRINA LANDFALL

>

> 8/29 - Come Back Home Campaign

> Around 5,000 survivors who are still displaced and scattered all across the U.S. will be traveling to New Orleans to make their demands to return home heard by the city council of New Orleans. The People's Organizing Committee is working with survivor's councils around the country to build toward this coordinated effort. This event is the last part of the Come Back Home Campaign.

> Coordinator: People's Organizing Committee

> Contact: Ishmael Muhammad, ishmaelmuhammad@yahoo.com>ishmaelmuhammad [at] yahoo.com

>

> 8/29 - Trinity Episcopal Church (1329 Jackson Ave) will host a musical vigil to mark the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. From 12 noon to 12 midnight, the church will be open to all who seek a space to pray, meditate, grieve, hope, walk the labyrinth, listen to music, and find strength for the future. The vigil will begin with Noonday prayer, and will also include musical prayer services at 5 pm (Evensong) and 9 pm (Compline), with music and readings in between. The vigil will conclude at 12:01 am on Wednesday August 30. We also invite the public to write, draw, or paste their memories, losses, burdens and fears in a Book of Remembrance. Please come as you are and stay as long as you like.

> Coordinator: Trinity Episcopal Church

> Contact: Albinas Prizgintas - aprizgintas@trinityno.com>aprizgintas [at] trinityno.com, 670-2520; Nell Bolton - nbolton@trinityno.com>nbolton [at] trinityno.com, 670-2543

>

> 8/29- New Orleans Jazz Funeral Requiem - In Honor of the Victims of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and the flooding of New Orleans caused by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

> * As an invitation to New Orleans: Cultural Artist & Activists, Social Service Organizations, Neighborhood Organizations, and Citizens.

> Where: New Orleans Superdome, Poydras St.

> Time: 11:30am, Procession to Congo Square

> PHONE FOR PARTICIPATION: THE NEW ORLEANS STREET ARTS COUNCIL

> phone: 504-312-9546 or email: nola_saw_hammer_nails@yahoo.com>nola_saw_hammer_nails [at] yahoo.com

>

> 8/29 - United Front to Commemorate the Great Flood memorial march

> People's Hurricane Relief Fund is working to coordinate a memorial event around the anniversary of H. Katrina's landfall and the ensuing Flood. PHRF is working with more than 30 grassroots organizations to plan and execute the memorial. Current plans center on a memorial march from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Aug. 29 beginning at the levee breach in the Lower Ninth Ward and ending at Congo Square.

> March Schedule:

> - 10 a.m. gather @ Jourdan and N. Galvez, the site of the 9th Ward Levee Break. Olayeela Daste will preside over a memorial ceremony that includes the Franklin Avenue Baptist Choir and Zion Trinity, along with a number of spiritual leaders and Patricia Jones of the Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Association. Commemoration planners are requesting that people bring candles and white flowers.

> - 11 a.m. march across the Claiborne Street Bridge, take a left onto Poland and a right onto St Claude. The Hot 8 Brass Band will join the procession as it crosses Franklin to provide a Second Line beat for the remainder of the march. From St Claude, the march will proceed to Rampart Street and end at Congo Square.

> - 1 p.m. commemoration activities continue at Congo Square with reflections from family members whose loved ones have passed and from community leaders including Jerome Smith (aka Big Duck) and Malcolm Suber, as well as the next generation of community spokespeople, including hip hop artists: Skip UTP, Mia X, Ms. Tee, Sess 4-5

and Mr Meana. These artists will speak about their experience during and after the Great Flood. Music appropriate to the commemoration will include gospel, Mardi Gras Indians, African drums, Suga and others. Sunni Patterson and Wild Wayne will emcee. A healing tent and memorial wall will also provide support for people at Congo Square.

>
> Free bus transportation has been arranged for people from Houston, Jackson, Baton Rouge and Atlanta who want to attend the Commemoration. For information about Atlanta buses, call Addis at 770-256-1882; for Houston buses call Gina at 713 433-4194; for Jackson buses call Chokwe at 601-353-4455 and for Baton Rouge buses call Demetrius at 504-931-2065.

>
> Visit <http://www.peopleshurricane.org> for more information
> Contacts: Malcolm Suber - 504.931.7614, msuber4366@yahoo.com>msuber4366 [at] yahoo.com
> Arlene (to arrange interviews)- (504)301-0215 (PHRF office) or (415) 305-7835

>
> 8/29- Desire Street Ministries and Desire St. Academy
> On the one year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, Aug. 29 at 10 a.m. CT, students, faculty, family and friends will all gather in the New Orleans' Upper Ninth Ward at the former ministry and school headquarters of Desire Street Ministries and Desire St. Academy, at 3600 Desire Street, for a time of prayer, remembrance, and thanksgiving lead by executive director and former New Orleans Saints quarterback Danny Wuerffel.
> Desire Street Ministries was established in the Upper Ninth Ward in 1990 when Mo Leverett, a pastor, musician and missionary, moved into the Desire Street neighborhood to reach out to children who were trapped in poverty and crime. Fifteen years later, the ministry was supporting a church, an academy for urban young men, a pediatric clinic, and various programs designed to help revitalize the Desire neighborhood, most of which was lost on Aug. 29, 2005, during Hurricane Katrina, as is completely devastated the Ninth Ward and dislocated the entire Desire St. neighborhood.

> In the aftermath of the storm, Leverett and Wuerffel worked tirelessly to locate the students currently enrolled in the academy who had been scattered throughout the United States, and find a suitable location to restart the school, and to care for staff, family, and friends. Shortly after, Desire Street Academy relocated to Camp Timpoochee, a 4-H camp located in Niceville, Fla., operated by the University of Florida, Wuerffel's alma mater.
> CONTACT: Marcia Peterson, (866) 633-0070, mpeterson@desirestreet.org>mpeterson [at] desirestreet.org

>
> 8/29 - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. -- To commemorate the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, The Historic New Orleans Collection will host an all-day event on Tuesday, August 29, 2006, featuring presentations by the Times-Picayune reporting staff, winners of the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Hurricane Katrina coverage, and a lecture and book signing by Richard Campanella (Geographies of New Orleans: Urban Fabrics Before the Storm, August 2006). The anniversary event, free and open to the public, will be followed by a reception and exhibition viewing.

>
> 8/27-8/29 - The City of New Orleans has planned Hurricane Katrina memorial activities themed Remembrance, Renewal, and Rebirth on Sunday August 27, 2006 and Tuesday, August 29, 2006. All City events are free and open to the public.

> Schedule of Activities:

> Sunday, August 27, 2006

> 3 p.m. - 5 p.m.: Gospel Concert in the 2nd Floor Auditorium, Hall H, Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (900 Convention Center Blvd.). The concert will reflect on the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, honor survivors and memorialize the lives that were lost through songs of praise and worship. The concert will feature a performance by the One New Orleans Mass Choir and other gospel artists.

> Tuesday, August 29, 2006

> 8:30 a.m.: Prayer Breakfast at Asia Baptist Church (1400 Sere Street). Mayor Ray Nagin will be the special guest of Dr. William J. Shaw, President of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. and Dr. R. B. Holmes, Jr., President of the National Baptist Congress of Christian Education at a prayer breakfast to pray for the rebuilding of New Orleans.

>
> 9:38 a.m.: Ceremonial Bell Ringing and Wreath Laying

> Mayor Nagin and Mrs. Nagin will be joined by community leaders, elected officials, dignitaries, city employees, and the public at 9:38 a.m. on the front steps of City Hall (1300 Perdido St.) to ring ceremonial bells signifying the series of levee breaches that occurred throughout the city. Bells will ring for two minutes. (9:38 a.m. - 9:40 a.m.) Simultaneously, members of the New Orleans City Council will lay wreaths on levees throughout the city.

>
> 10:30 a.m.: Mississippi River Heritage Park Dedication Ceremony

> Mayor Nagin will join City Council President Oliver Thomas and members of the New Orleans City Council, to dedicate a monument titled, "A Place of Remembrance," at the Mississippi River Heritage Park (1100 block of Convention Center Blvd) in remembrance of the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

>
> Noon: Citywide Interfaith Service

> National, state, and local leaders will reflect and offer inspirational words of encouragement at the Citywide Interfaith Service at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (900 Convention Center Blvd.). Clergy from various religious backgrounds will offer scriptural readings and prayer. Bishop G.E. Patterson, Presiding Bishop of the Church of God In Christ Inc. and Pastor of Temple of Deliverance Church of God In Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, will deliver the Keynote Address.

>
> 2:00 p.m.: One New Orleans Procession in the tradition of a Jazz Funeral from
> the Convention Center to Superdome

> The Traditional New Orleans Jazz Funeral Procession will be a 1.5 mile march, led by Lieutenant General Russel L. Honoré, from the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center to the Louisiana Superdome. The procession will include first responders, national, state and local elected officials, dignitaries, jazz musicians and the community at large. The traditional jazz funeral procession will honor first responders and the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

> A traditional New Orleans Jazz Funeral is a musical tribute honoring the passing of noted members of the community. This cultural ceremony is distinguished by an assemblage of musicians, usually featuring several brass band elements who stage a procession. The procession begins with the playing of the dirge, a slow, mournful, solemn tempo that expresses a somber respect for the deceased. At a certain point, the procession picks up the tempo and energy in celebration of the positive accomplishments of the individual and an acknowledgement of his

or her zest for life.

> Contact: For more information about memorial activities, please e-mail katrinaanniversary@cityofno.com">katrinaanniversary [at] cityofno.com.

>

> 8/29 – St. Bernard Parish daylong remembrance beings at 10 a.m. with the dedication of an illuminated, stainless steel crucifix and stone monument bearing the names of the 129 St. Bernard Parish residents who died in Hurricane Katrina. The monument will be located at the site of the Mississippi River–Gulf Outlet

> Coordinator: St. Bernard Parish Council

> Contact: Tony “Ricky” Melerine, parish councilman and committee co–chair and Charlie Reppel, chief of staff for Parish President Junior Rodriguez

>

> 8/29 –Back to the 9th on the 29th

> Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans plans a “Back to the 9th on the 29th” lunch (12 noon) at the Shirley Landry Benson PACE Center at St. Cecilia (4201 N. Rampart St.) to recognize Catholic Charities’ dedication to models of excellence in healthcare, education, housing and economic development in the neighborhoods of New Orleans.

> Coordinator: Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans

> Contact: Sarah Comiskey, associate director of communication – 504–596–3023, scomiskey@archdiocese-no.org">scomiskey [at] archdiocese–no.org

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

>

> 8/29 –Interfaith Prayer Service

> The Archdiocese of New Orleans will hold a prayer service from 7 to 8 p.m. on August 29 at St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square hosted by Archbishop Hughes. Members of 12 faiths, including Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu will participate in this service. The Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra will play in Jackson Square from 8:00–8:55, and at 8:55, the Katrina bell (twin to the 9/11 bell in New York City) will be rung to commemorate the lives lost in Katrina.

>

> SEPTEMBER

>

> Early September – Student Hurricane Network will coordinate a lobbying effort in Wash, D.C.

> Coordinator: Student Hurricane Network

> Contact: Lauren Bartlett, lauren_bartlett@yahoo.com">lauren_bartlett [at] yahoo.com or Michael Goldstone, mgoldstone@gmail.com">mgoldstone [at] gmail.com

>

> 9/1 (early Sept.) – Planned opening of Women’s Health Clinic

> With Charity Hospital shuttered, adequate and accessible health care for New Orleans’ uninsured returning residents is in poor shape. The women of Incite! Women of Color, a collective of feminist activists dedicated to ending violence against women of color, has partnered with other local organizations to attempt to open a free health clinic for women and children in the historic Treme district.

> Coordinator: New Orleans Women’s Health and Justice Initiative

> Contact: Shana Griffin, ambkeysha@yahoo.com">ambkeysha [at] yahoo.com

>

> 9/12 – Community Forum on Katrina Arrests

> Critical Resistance New Orleans will host a forum to discuss the plight of hundreds of New Orleanians who were arrested in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina for committing “crimes” while trying to care for their basic needs and the survival of their families. Many of these citizens spent nearly a year in prison and some still remain behind bars awaiting charges on issues such as public intoxication or trespassing. Critical Resistance will host community forum at 7 p.m. on Tues., Sept. 12 at Ashe’ Cultural Arts Center.

> Coordinator: Cricritical Resistance New Orleans

> Contact: 504.304.3784 or visit <http://www.criticalresistance.org/katrina>

>

>

>

> This is a once–a–week email listing whats up in New Orleans. To Subscribe, email weeklypulse-subscribe@lists.riseup.net">weeklypulse-subscribe [at] lists.riseup.net. To Unsubscribe, email weeklypulse-unsubscribe@lists.riseup.net">weeklypulse-unsubscribe [at] lists.riseup.net. To check out our calendar online, go to <http://www.neworleansnetwork.org>.

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Trying to Make it Home: New Orleans One Year After Katrina

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Organization: Justice For New Orleans

Author:

Bill Quigley

Date Published:

08/22/2006

Link:

<http://www.commondreams.org/views06/0822-31.htm>

Bernice Mosely is 82 and lives alone in New Orleans in a shotgun double. On August 29, 2005, as Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, the levees constructed by the U.S. Corps of Engineers failed in five places and New Orleans filled with water.

One year ago Ms. Mosely was on the second floor of her neighborhood church. Days later, she was helicoptered out. She was so dehydrated she spent eight days in a hospital. Her next door neighbor, 89 years old, stayed behind to care for his dog. He drowned in the eight feet of floodwaters that covered their neighborhood.

Ms. Mosely now lives in her half-gutted house. She has no stove, no refrigerator, and no air-conditioning. The bottom half of her walls have been stripped of sheetrock and are 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.

Two plaster Madonnas are in her tiny well-kept front yard. On a blazing hot summer day, Ms. Mosely used her crutches to gingerly come down off her porch to open the padlock on her fence. She has had hip and knee replacement surgery. Ms. Mosely worked in a New Orleans factory for over thirty years sewing uniforms.

When she retired she was making less than \$4 an hour. "Retirement benefits?" she laughs. She lives off social security. Her house had never flooded before. Because of her tight budget, Ms. Mosely did not have flood insurance.

Thousands of people like Ms. Mosely are back in their houses on the Gulf Coast. They are living in houses that most people would consider, at best, still under construction, or, at worst, uninhabitable. Like Ms. Mosely, they are trying to make their damaged houses into homes.

New Orleans is still in intensive care. If you have seen recent television footage of New Orleans, you probably have a picture of how bad our housing situation is. What you cannot see is that the rest of our institutions, our water, our electricity, our healthcare, our jobs, our educational system, our criminal justice systems - are all just as broken as our housing. We remain in serious trouble. Like us, you probably wonder where has the promised money gone?

Ms. Mosely, who lives in the upper ninth ward, does not feel sorry for herself at all. "Lots of people have it worse," she says. "You should see those people in the Lower Ninth and in St. Bernard and in the East. I am one of the lucky ones."

Housing

Hard as it is to believe, Ms. Mosely is right. Lots of people do have it worse. Hundreds of thousands of people from the Gulf Coast remain displaced. In New Orleans alone over two hundred thousand people have not been able to make it home.

Homeowners in Louisiana, like Ms. Mosely, have not yet received a single dollar of federal housing rebuilding assistance to rebuild their severely damaged houses back into homes. Over 100,000 homeowners in Louisiana are on a waiting list for billions in federal rebuilding assistance through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

So far, no money has been distributed.

Renters, who comprised most of the people of New Orleans before Katrina, are much worse off than homeowners. New Orleans lost more than 43,000 rental units to the storm. Rents have skyrocketed in the undamaged parts of the area, pricing regular working people out of the market. The official rate of increase in rents is 39%. In lower income neighborhoods, working people and the elderly report rents are up much higher than that. Amy Liu of the Brookings Institute said "Even people who are working temporarily for the rebuilding effort are having trouble finding housing."

Renters in Louisiana are not even scheduled to receive assistance through the Louisiana CDBG program. Some developers will receive assistance at some point, and when they do, some apartments will be made available, but that is years away.

In the face of the worst affordable housing shortage since the end of the Civil War, the federal government announced that it refused to allow thousands of families to return to their public housing units and was going to bulldoze 5000 apartments. Before Katrina, over 5000 families lived in public housing - 88 percent women-headed households, nearly all African American.

These policies end up with hundreds of thousands of people still displaced from their homes. Though all ages, incomes and races are displaced, some groups are impacted much more than others. The working poor, renters, moms with kids, African-Americans, the elderly and disabled - all are suffering disproportionately from displacement. Race, poverty, age and physical ability are great indicators of who has and who has made it home.

The statistics tell some of the story. The City of New Orleans says it is half its pre-Katrina size - around 225,000 people. But the U.S. Post Office estimates that only about 170,000 people have returned to the city and 400,000 people have not returned to the metropolitan area. The local electricity company reports only about 80,000 of its previous 190,000 customers have returned.

Texas also tells part of the story. It is difficult to understand the impact of Katrina without understanding the role of Texas - home to many of our displaced. Houston officials say their city is still home to about 150,000 storm evacuees - 90,000 in FEMA assisted housing. Texas recently surveyed the displaced and reported that over 250,000 displaced people live in the state and 41 percent of these households report income of less than \$500 per month. Eighty-one percent are black, 59 percent are still jobless, most have at least one child at home, and many have serious health issues.

Another 100,000 people displaced by Katrina are in Georgia, more than 80,000 in metro Atlanta - most of whom also need long-term housing and mental health services.

In Louisiana, there are 73,000 families in FEMA trailers. Most of these trailers are 240 square feet of living space. More than 1600 families are still waiting for trailers in St. Bernard Parish. FEMA trailers did not arrive in the lower ninth ward until June - while the displaced waited for water and electricity to resume. Aloyd Edinburgh, 75, lives in the lower ninth ward and just moved into a FEMA trailer. His home flooded as did the homes of all five of his children. "Everybody lost their homes," he told the Times-Picayune, "They just got trailers. All are rebuilding. They all have mortgages. What else are they going to do?"

Until challenged, FEMA barred reporters from talking with people in FEMA trailer parks without prior permission - forcing a reporter out of a trailer in one park and residents back into their trailer in another in order to stop interviews.

One person displaced into a FEMA village in Baton Rouge has been organizing with her new neighbors. Air conditioners in two trailers for the elderly have been out for over two weeks, yet no one will fix them. The contractor who ran the village has been terminated and another one is coming - no one knows who. She tells me, "My neighbors are dismayed that no one in the city has stepped forward to speak for us. We are "gone." Who will speak for us? Does anyone care?"

Trailers are visible signs of the displaced. Tens of thousands of other displaced families are living in apartments across the country month to month under continuous threats of FEMA cutoffs.

Numbers say something. But please remember behind every number, there is a Ms. Mosely. Tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, of people each with a personal story like Ms. Mosely are struggling to return, trying to make it home.

Water and Electricity

New Orleans continues to lose more water than it uses. The Times-Picayune discovered that the local water system has to pump over 130 million gallons a day so that 50 million gallons will come out. The rest runs away in thousands of leaks in broken water lines, costing the water system \$2000,000 a day. The lack of water pressure, half that of other cities, creates significant problems in consumption, sanitation, air-conditioning, and fire prevention.

In the lower 9th ward, the water has still not been certified as safe to drink - one year later.

Only half the homes in New Orleans have electricity. Power outages are common as hundreds of millions of dollars in repairs have not been made because Entergy New Orleans is in bankruptcy. Entergy is asking for a 25 percent increase in rates to help it become solvent.

Yet Entergy New Orleans' parent company, Entergy Corporation reported earnings of \$282 million last year on revenue of \$2.6 billion.

Health and Healthcare

Early this month, on August 1, 2006, another Katrina victim was found in her home in New Orleans, buried under debris. The woman was the 28th person found dead since March 2006. A total of 1577 died in Louisiana as a result of Katrina.

A friend of mine, a lawyer with health insurance and a family physician, went for an appointment recently at 11 am. The office was so crowded he had to sit out in the hall on the floor to wait his turn for a seat in the waiting room. Three hours later he met his doctor. The doctor thought might have a gall stone. The doctor tried to set up an ultrasound. None were available. He ordered my friend to the emergency room for an ultrasound. At 4pm my friend went to the hospital emergency room, which was jammed with people: stroke victims, young kids with injuries, people brought in by the police. At 5am the next morning, my friend finished his ultrasound and went home. If it takes a lawyer with health insurance that long to get medical attention, consider what poor people without health insurance are up against.

Half the hospitals open before Katrina are still closed. The state's biggest public healthcare provider, Charity Hospital, remains closed and there are no current plans to reopen it anytime soon. Healthcare could actually get worse. Dr. Mark Peters, board chair of the Metropolitan Hospital Council of New Orleans said within the next two to three months, "all the hospitals" will be looking seriously at cutbacks. Why? Doctors and healthcare workers have left and there is surging demand from the uninsured who before Katrina went through now non-existent public healthcare. There is a shortage of nurses. Blue Cross Blue Shield officials reported "About three-quarters of the physicians who had been practicing in New Orleans are no longer submitting claims."

There is no hospital at all in the city for psychiatric patients. While the metropolitan area had about 450 psychiatric beds before the storm, 80 are now available. The police are the first to encounter those with mental illness. One recent Friday afternoon, police dealt with two mental patients - one was throwing bricks through a bar window, the other was found wandering naked on the interstate.

The elderly are particularly vulnerable. Over 70 percent of the deaths from Katrina were people over 60 years old. No one knows how many seniors have not made it back home. Esther Bass, 69, told the New York Times, after months of searching for a place to come home to New Orleans, "If there are apartments, I can't afford them. And they say there will be senior centers, but they're still being built. They can't even tell you what year they'll be finished." As of late July 2006, most nursing homes in the 12 parish Gulf Coast area of Louisiana are still not fully prepared to evacuate residents in the face of a hurricane.

The healthcare community has been rocked by the arrest of a doctor and two nurses after the Louisiana Attorney General accused them of intentionally ending the lives of four patients trapped in a now-closed local hospital. The accusations now go before a local grand jury which is not expected to make a decision on charges for several more months. The case is complicated for several reasons. Most important is that the doctor and nurses are regarded as some of the most patient-oriented and caring people of the entire hospital staff. It is undisputed that they worked day and night to save hundreds of patients from the hospital during the days it was without water, electricity or food. Others say that entire hospital and many others were abandoned by the government and that is what the attorney general should be investigating. The gravity of the charges, though, is giving everyone in the community pause. This, like so much else, will go on for years before there is any resolution.

Jobs

Before Katrina, there were over 630,000 workers in the metropolitan New Orleans area - now there are slightly over 400,000. Over 18,000 businesses suffered "catastrophic" damage in Louisiana. Nearly one in four of the displaced workers is still unemployed. Education and healthcare have lost the most employees. Most cannot return because there is little affordable housing, child care, public transportation and public health care.

Women workers, especially African American women workers, continue to bear the heaviest burden of harm from the storm. The Institute for Women's Policy Research reports that the percentage of women in the New Orleans workforce has dropped. The number of single mother families in New Orleans has dropped from 51,000 to 17,000. Low-income women remain displaced because of the lack of affordable housing and traditional discrimination against women in the construction industry.

Tens of thousands of migrant workers, roughly half undocumented, have come to the Gulf Coast to work in the recovery. Many were recruited. Most workers tell of being promised good wages and working conditions and plenty of work. Some paid money up front for the chance to come to the area to work. Most of these promises were broken. A tour of the area reveals many Latino workers live in houses without electricity, other live out of cars.

At various places in the city whole families are living in tents. Two recently released human rights reports document the problems of these workers. Immigrant workers are doing the dirtiest, most dangerous work, in the worst working conditions. Toxic mold, lead paint, fiberglass, and who knows what other chemicals are part of daily work. Safety equipment is not always provided. Day laborers, a new category of workers in New Orleans, are harassed by the police and periodic immigration raids. Wage theft is widespread as employers often do not pay living wages, and sometimes do not pay at all. Some of the powers try to pit local workers against new arrivals - despite the fact that our broken Gulf Coast clearly needs all the workers we can get.

Public transportation to and from low-wage jobs is more difficult. Over 200 more public transit employees have been terminated - cutting employment from over 1300 people pre-Katrina to about 700 now.

Single working parents seeking childcare are in trouble. Before Katrina, New Orleans had 266 licensed day care centers. Mississippi State University surveyed the city in July 2006 and found 80 percent of the day care centers and over 75 percent of the 1912 day care spots are gone. Only one-third of the Head Start centers that were open pre-Katrina survived.

Public Education

Before Katrina, 56,000 students were enrolled in over 100 public schools in New Orleans. At the end of the school year there were only 12,500. Right after the storm, the local school board gave many of the best public schools to charter groups. The State took over almost all the rest. By the end of the school year, four schools were operated by the pre-Katrina school board, three by the State, and eighteen were new charter schools.

After thirty-two years of collective bargaining, the union contract with the New Orleans public school teachers elapsed and was not renewed and 7500 employees were terminated.

For this academic year, no one knows for certain how many students will enroll in New Orleans public schools. Official estimates vary between a low of 22,000 and a high of 34,000. There will be five traditional locally supervised public schools, eighteen schools operated by the State, and thirty-four charter schools. As of July 1, not a single teacher had been hired for fifteen of the state-run schools. As of August 9, 2006, the Times-Picayune reported there are no staff at all identified to educate students with discipline problems or other educational issues that require special attention.

Whatever the enrollment in the new public school system is in the fall, it will not give an accurate indication of how many children have returned. Why? Many students in the public charter schools were in private schools before the hurricane.

Criminal Legal System

Consider also our criminal legal system. Chaka Davis was arrested on misdemeanor charges in October 2005 and jailed at the Greyhound station in New Orleans in October of 2005. Under Louisiana law, he was required to be formally charged within 30 days of arrest or released from custody. Because of a filing error he was lost in the system. He was never charged, never went to court, and never saw a lawyer in over 8 months - even though the maximum penalty for conviction for one of his misdemeanors was only 6 months. His mother found him in an out of town jail and brought his situation to the attention of the public defenders. He was released the next day.

Crime is increasingly a problem. In July, New Orleans lost almost as many people to murder as in July of 2005, with only 40 percent of the population back. There are many young people back in town while their parents have not returned. State and local officials called in the National Guard to patrol lightly populated areas so local police could concentrate on high-crime, low-income neighborhoods. Arrests have soared, but the number of murders remain high. Unfortunately, several of the National Guard have been arrested for criminal behavior as well - two for looting liquor from a home, two others for armed robbery at a traffic stop.

Criminal Court District Judge Arthur Hunter has declared the current criminal justice system shameful and unconstitutional and promises to start releasing inmates awaiting trial on recognizance bonds on the one year anniversary of Katrina. The system is nearly paralyzed by a backlog of over 6000 cases. There are serious evidence problems because of resigned police officers, displaced victims, displaced witnesses, and flooded evidence rooms. The public defender system, which was down to 4 trial attorneys for months, is starting to rebuild.

"After 11 months of waiting, 11 months of meetings, 11 months of idle talk, 11 months without a sensible recovery plan and 11 months tolerating those who have the authority to solve, correct and fix the problem but either refuse, fail or are just inept, then necessary action must be taken to protect the constitutional rights of people," said Hunter.

In the suburbs across the lake, Sheriff Jack Strain told the media on TV that he was going to protect his jurisdiction from "thugs" and "trash" migrating from closed public housing projects in New Orleans. He went on to promise that every person who wore "dreadlocks or che-wee hairstyles" could expect to be stopped by law enforcement. The NAACP and the ACLU called in the U.S. Justice Department and held a revival-like rally at a small church just down the road from the jail. Though the area is over 80 percent white, the small group promised to continue to challenge injustice no matter how powerful the person committing the injustice. Recently, the same law enforcement people set up a roadblock and were stopping only Latino people to check IDs and insurance. I guess to prove they were not only harassing black people?

Finally, a grand jury has started looking into actions by other suburban police officers who blocked a group of people, mostly black, from escaping the floodwaters of New Orleans by walking across the Mississippi River bridge. The suburban police forced the crowd to flee back across the two mile bridge by firing weapons into the air.

This is the criminal legal system in the New Orleans area in 2006. None dare call it criminal justice.

International Human Rights

The Gulf Coast has gained new respect for international human rights because they provide a more appropriate way to look at what should be happening. The fact that there is an international human right of internally displaced people to return to their homes and a responsibility on government to help is heartening even though yet unfulfilled.

The United Nations has blasted the poor U.S. response to Katrina. The UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva accepted a report from Special Reporter Arjun Sengupta who visited New Orleans in fall of 2005 and concluded: "The Committee remains concerned about information that poor people, and in particular African-Americans, were disadvantaged by the rescue and evacuation plans implemented when Hurricane Katrina hit the United States of America, and continue to be disadvantaged under the reconstruction plans."

Asian tsunami relief workers who visited New Orleans over the summer were shocked at the lack of recovery. Somsok Boonyabancha, director of the Community Organisations Development

Institute in Thailand, told Reuters she was shocked at the lack of progress in New Orleans. "I'm surprised to see why the reconstruction work is so slow, because this is supposed to be one of the most rich and efficient countries in the world. It is starting at such a slow speed, incredibly slow speed."

Warnings to the Displaced

Local United Way officials see the lack of housing, healthcare and jobs and conclude that low-income people should seriously consider not returning to New Orleans anytime soon.

United Way wrote:

"Most of these people want to come home, but if they do not have a recovery plan they need to stay where they are. Some of these evacuees think that they can come back and stay with families and in a few weeks have a place of their own. But the reality is that they may end up living with those relatives for years. Sending people back without a realistic plan may have serious consequences: the crowding of families into small apartments/homes/FEMA trailers is causing mental health problems - stress, abuse, violence, and even death - and this problem is going to get worse, not better. Also, when the elderly (and others) are those returning and living in these conditions, their health is impacted and then the lack of medical facilities and hospital beds is a problem. Again the result may be death.

Basically if an evacuee says they have a place to stay - like with relatives - those communities will give them bus fare back or pay for U-hauls. If an evacuee was a renter here and they want to return they should be told to plan on returning in 3-7 years, and in the meantime stay there, get a job, and be much better off."

FEMA officials in Austin are also warning people about returning to New Orleans.

They wrote:

"Before you return...New Orleans is a changing place. You should consider the conditions you may be returning to. Many neighborhood schools will not be open by August. Your children may have to travel some distance to get to school. Grocery and supermarkets have been slow to return to many neighborhoods. Sometimes there aren't enough residents back in your neighborhood for a store to open and be profitable. You may have to travel a large distance to groceries. Walking to the store might not be an option.

If you or your family members require regular medical attention, or if you are pregnant or nursing, the services you received before the storm may be scattered and in very different and distant locations. Depending on your medical needs, you may have to drive across the river or even as far away as Baton Rouge. If you or your family members have allergies, remember that there is lots of dust and mold still in the city. While you may have suffered from allergies before the storm, please consider that being in the city will only worsen your allergies. If you have asthma, other respiratory or cardiac conditions, or immune system problems, you would be safer staying out of flooded areas due to the mold, particles and dust in the air. If you must return to the city, wear an approved respirator when working in moldy or dusty areas.

Additionally, police, fire and emergency personnel are stretched to their limits. If you own a car, gas and service stations are limited in many areas. You may need to purchase a gas can in the event you cannot get gas near your home. Public transportation (buses) are also limited and do not operate in all areas.

Available and affordable housing is extremely rare. Waiting lists for apartments are as large as 300 on the list, depending on how many bedrooms you need. Living inside your home could be dangerous if mold has set in if your utilities are not in top working condition. Living in New Orleans may be easier said than done until we have fully recovered from the storm."

This is New Orleans, one year after Katrina.

Where Did the Money Go?

Everyone who visits New Orleans asks the same question that locals ask - where is the money? Congress reportedly appropriated over \$100 billion to rebuild the Gulf Coast. Over \$50 billion was allocated to temporary and long-term housing. Just under \$30 billion was for emergency response and Department of Defense spending. Over \$18 billion was for State and local response and the rebuilding of infrastructure. \$3.6 billion was for health, social services and job training and \$3.2 for non-housing cash assistance. \$1.9 billion was allocated for education and \$1.2 billion for agriculture.

One hour in New Orleans shows the check must still be in the mail.

Not a single dollar in federal housing rehab money has made it into a hand in Louisiana. Though Congress has allocated nearly \$10 billion in Community Development Block Grants, the State of Louisiana is still testing the program and has not yet distributed dollar number one.

A lot of media attention has gone to the prosecution of people who wrongfully claimed benefits of \$2000 or more after the storm. Their fraud is despicable. It harms those who are still waiting for assistance from FEMA.

But, be clear - these little \$2000 thieves are minnows swimming on the surface. There are many big savage sharks below. Congress and the national media have so far been frustrated in their quest to get real answers to where the millions and billions went. How much was actually spent on FEMA trailers? How much did the big contractors take off the top and then subcontract out the work? Who were the subcontractors for the multi-million dollar debris removal and reconstruction contracts?

As Corpwatch says in their recent report, "Many of the same 'disaster profiteers' and government agencies that mishandled the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq are responsible for the failure of 'reconstruction' of the Gulf Coast region. The Army Corps, Bechtel and Halliburton are using the very same 'contract vehicles' in the Gulf Coast as they did in Afghanistan and Iraq. These are 'indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity' open-ended 'contingency' contracts that are being abused by the contractors on the Gulf Coast to squeeze out local companies. These are also 'cost-plus' contracts that allow them to collect a profit on everything they spend, which is an incentive to overspend."

We do know billions of dollars in no-bid FEMA contracts went to Bechtel Corporation, the Shaw Group, CH2M Hill, and Fluor immediately after Katrina hit. Riley Bechtel, CEO of Bechtel Corporation, served on President Bush's Export Council during 2003-2004. A lobbyist for the Shaw Group, Joe Allbaugh, is a former FEMA Director and friend of President Bush. The President and Group Chief Executive of the International Group at CH2MHill is Robert Card, appointed by President Bush as undersecretary to the US Department of Energy until 2004. Card also worked at CH2M Hill before signing up with President Bush. Fluor, whose work in Iraq was slowing down, is one of the big winners of FEMA work and its stock is up 65 percent since it started Katrina work.

Senator Byron Dorgan of North Dakota has raised many protests and questions over inflated prices. "It is hard to overstate the incompetence involved in all of these contracts - we have repeatedly asked them for information and you get nothing." Republican U.S. Representative Charles Bustany, who represents an area heavily damaged by Hurricane Rita, asked FEMA for reasons why the decision was made to stop funding 100 percent of the cost of debris removal in his district. FEMA refused to tell him. He then filed a Freedom of Information request to get the information, and was again refused. When he asked to appeal their denial, he was told that there were many appeals ahead of his and he would have to wait.

If a US Senator and a local U.S. Republican Representative cannot get answers from FEMA, how much accountability can the people of the Gulf Coast expect? There are many other examples of fraud, waste and patronage.

How did a company that did not own a truck get a contract for debris removal worth hundreds of millions of dollars? The Miami Herald reported that the single biggest receiver of early Katrina federal contracts was Ashbrite, Inc. of Pompano Beach, FL, which received over \$579 million in contracts for debris removal in Mississippi from Army Corps of Engineers. The paper reported that the company does not own a single dumptruck! All they do is subcontract out the work. Ashbrite, however, had recently dumped \$40,000 into the lobbying firm of Barbour, Griffith & Rogers, which had been run by Mississippi Governor and former National GOP Chair Haley Barbour.

The owners of Ashbrite also trucked \$50,000 over to the Republican National Committee in 2004.

How did a company that filed for bankruptcy the year before and was not licensed to build trailers get a \$200 million contract for trailers? Circle B Enterprises of Georgia was awarded \$287 million in contracts by FEMA for temporary housing. At the time, that was the seventh highest award of Katrina money in the country. According to the Washington Post, Circle B was not even being licensed to build homes in its own state of Georgia and filed for bankruptcy in 2003.

The company does not even have a website.

FEMA spent \$7 million to build a park for 198 trailers in Morgan City Louisiana - almost 2 hours away from New Orleans. Construction was completed in April. Three months later only 20 of the trailers were occupied. One displaced New Orleans resident who lives there has to walk three miles to the nearest grocery.

Hurricanes are now a booming billion dollar business. No wonder there is a National Hurricane Conference for private companies to show off their wares - from RVs to portable cell phone towers to port-a-potties. One long time provider was quoted by the Miami Herald at the conference that there are all kinds of new people in the field - 'Some folks here said, 'Man, this is huge business; this is my new business. I'm not in the landscaping business anymore, I'm going to be a hurricane debris contractor.' "

On the local level, we are not any better. One year after Katrina the City of New Orleans still does not have a comprehensive rebuilding plan. The first plan by advisors to the Mayor was shelved before the election. A city council plan was then started and the state and federal government mandated yet another process that may or may not include some of the recommendations of the prior two processes. One of the early advisors from the Urban Land Institute, John McIlwain, blasted the delays in late July. "It's virtually a city with a city administration and its worse than ever. You need a politician, a leader that is willing to make tough decisions and articulate to people why these decisions are made, which means everyone is not going to be happy." Without major changes at City Hall the City will have miles of neglected neighborhoods for decades. "We're talking Dresden after World War II."

Signs of Hope

Despite the tragedies that continue to plague our Gulf Coast, there is hope. Between the rocks of hardship, green life continues to sprout defiantly.

Fifteen feet of water washed through Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School for Science and Technology in the lower 9th Ward. When people were finally able to get into the building, the bodies of fish were found on the second floor. Parents and over 90% of the teachers organized a grass-roots effort to put their school back together. Their first attempts to gut and repair the school by locals and volunteers from Common Ground were temporarily stopped by local school officials and the police. Even after the gutting was allowed to resume, the community was told that the school could not reopen due to insufficient water pressure in the neighborhood. But the teachers and parents are pressing ahead anyway in a temporary location until they can get back in their school. Assistant Principal Joseph Recasner told the Times-Picayune: "Rebuilding our school says this is a very special community, tied together by more than location, but by spirituality, by bloodlines, and by a desire to come back."

New Orleans is fortunate to have a working newspaper again. The Times-Picayune won a well-deserved Pulitzer for its Katrina coverage. Its staff continues to provide quality documentation of the Gulf Coast region's efforts to repair and rebuild.

The New Orleans Vietnamese people continue to inspire us. They were among the very first group back and they have joined forces to care for their elders, rebuild their community church, and work together in a most cooperative manner to resurrect their community. Recently they took legal and direct action to successfully stop the placement of a gigantic landfill right next to their community. Their determination and sense of community-building is a good model for us all.

The only Republican running for Congress in New Orleans is blasting President Bush over failed Katrina promises. Joe Lavigne is running radio ads saying, "Sadly, George Bush has forgotten us. He's spending too much time and money on Iraq and not enough living up to his promise to rebuild New Orleans. His priorities are wrong. I'm running for Congress to hold President Bush accountable." Maybe other Republicans will join in.

Tens of thousands of volunteers from every walk of life have joined with the people of the Gulf Coast to help repair and rebuild. Lawyers are giving free help to Katrina victims who need legal help to rebuild their homes. Medical personnel staff free clinics. Thousands of college, high school and even some grade school students have traveled to the area to help families gut their devastated homes. Churches, temples, and mosques from across the world have joined with sisters and brothers in New Orleans to repair and rebuild.

Despite open attempts to divide them, black and brown and white and yellow workers have started to talk to each other. Small groups have started to work together to fight for living wages and safe jobs for all workers. Thousands came together for a rally for respectful treatment for Latino and immigrant workers. Seasoned civil rights activists welcomed the new movement and pledged to work together.

Ultimately, the people of the Gulf Coast are the greatest sign of hope. Despite setbacks that people in the US rarely suffer, people continue to help each other and fight for their right to return home and the right to live in the city they love.

On Sunday morning, a 70 year old woman told a friend where her children are. "They are all scattered," she sighed. "One is in Connecticut, one in Rhode Island, one in Austin." When he asked about her, she said, "Me? I am in Texas right now. I am back here to visit my 93 year old mother and go to the second line of Black Men of Labor on Labor Day. But I'm coming back. Yes indeed. I will return. I'm coming back."

Bill is a human rights lawyer and law professor at Loyola University New Orleans. You can reach him at Quigley@loyno.edu

">Quigley@loyno.edu. For more information see www.justiceforneworleans.org

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Confronting gender after Katrina: An Interview with Shana Griffin

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Organization:
INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

Author:
Elena Everett

Date Published:
08/25/2006

Link:
<http://www.dissidentvoice.org/Aug06/Everett25.htm>

From "One Year After Katrina" a 98-page report released yesterday by Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch.

Shana Griffin is resident of New Orleans and 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 Masters Degree in Sociology at the University of New Orleans. She is currently working on the Women's Health and Justice Initiative, which is a 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 ">whji_info@yahoo.com.

Elena Everett: There have been a lot 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 intersectionality 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 3/4ths of themselves and come in as a just 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 and as things began to unfold in the city with the flood waters, 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 24-hour notice to evacuate, it would be the same population, the same poor black women in the most vulnerable situations.

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

SG: 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 toward the needs of women of color in the Gulf Coast region.

To me, it's not enough to have a solid race and class analysis, because beyond those two, you also need a gender analysis. 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 and 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 and today when you look at the statistics around housing, healthcare, even incarceration -- women and especially black women are much more vulnerable. In 2003 in Louisiana 80% of new HIV cases were black women -- in public housing, the vast majority of tenants were women . . . I can go on and on -- those who are most directly impacted are women when it comes to the aftermath of natural and man-made disasters.

EE: How do you feel the initiative and clinic will work to address some of those issues?

SG: The purpose of the clinic is to improve low-income and uninsured women of color's healthcare access and to promote an holistic and community-centered approach to primary to healthcare. At the same time we look at the oppression and violence that have impact on the health status of women and to improve those situations. It's more than providing healthcare 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 also 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.

Elena Everett is Program Associate at the Institute for Southern Studies and Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch. She can be reached at: elena@southernstudies.org
> elena@southernstudies.org. Thanks to Jordan Flaherty

* For a comprehensive calendar of events during the anniversary week, go to: www.neworleansnetwork.org.

Recent Related Articles on Hurricane Katrina and its Aftermath

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- * [Trying to Make It Home: New Orleans One Year After Katrina](#) by Bill Quigley
- * [The Katrina Anniversary](#) by Jordan Flaherty
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African American Leadership Project

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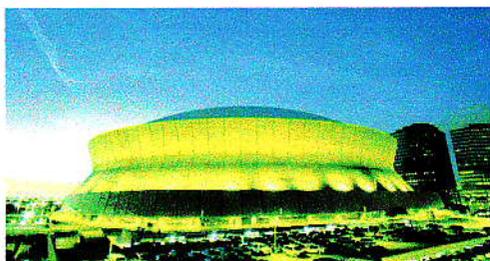
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Thursday, June 8, 2006

African American Leadership Project

AALP SEEKING FAMILIES OF KATRINA VICTIMS TO PARTICIPATE IN A "HANDS AROUND THE DOME" CEREMONY TO HONOR THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO DIED DURING AND AFTER KATRINA, and THOSE WHO SAVED OTHERS



From **August 25-29, 2006**, the African American Leadership Project (AALP) and other community based groups will conduct a Citizen oriented "Remembering Katrina Observance" in recognition of the 1st Anniversary of the disastrous storm and its aftermath. As a part of that observance, citizens of all walks of life are being asked to join together on **Saturday August 26th at 12 pm** at the Louisiana

Superdome to form a **"HANDS AROUND THE DOME"** in solemn memory of the suffering, and loss of life during and after the storm, and in memory of those who risked their lives to save others.

Following the ceremony at the Dome, participants will march to the Convention Center for a rally and further ceremonies. The complete schedule of activities and events during the AALP's Remembering Katrina Observance can be found on the AALP website at www.aalp.org.

During the ceremony, AALP would like to read the names aloud, light a candle in their honor, display their picture, offer a prayer and acknowledge the family. Thus, they are trying to locate the families and relatives of those who lost loved ones in New Orleans or in an another city, resulting directly from the storm or indirectly from the stress it caused. The AALP is also trying to locate those who took risks to save others.

The AALP is a nonpartisan network of community activists, religious and business leaders, academics and concerned citizens that focus on dialogue and Agenda building, policy advocacy, community planning and neighborhood development. It has been in existence for 4 years. It's Chairperson is Mrs. Gail Glapion , its Vice-Chairperson is Mr. Vincent Nzinga, and its Project Manager is Mtangulizi Sanyika. It includes among its founders the late Dr. Morris F.X. Jeff Jr.

Families of Katrina victims interested in participating in the **"HANDS AROUND THE DOME"** ceremony, or anyone with information about a family, or community rescuer should contact the AALP by calling 504-242-8353, or e-mail wazuri@aol.com.

AALP has released the following tentative schedule:

FRIDAY, AUG. 25TH 7 PM - 9 PM

- "NATIONAL DIALOGUE" ASHE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER
- Marc H. Morial

- Julianne Malveaux
- Ron Daniels
- George Curry
- Richard Hatcher (invited)
- Ron Dellums (invited)

SATURDAY, AUG. 26TH 12 PM - 3 PM

- "HANDS AROUND THE DOME"
- A Umoja Circle around the Superdome and March to the Convention Center in Memory of the Lives Lost to Katrina

SUNDAY, AUG 27TH 2 PM - 4:30 PM

- " ECUMENICAL/INTERFAITH WORSHIP SERVICE"
- Watson Teaching Ministries
- A Praise and Workshop Service featuring all Faith Traditions to Consecrate the Memory and Experience of the Survivors
- Katrina Remembrance & White Buffalo Day at Congo Square with Cyril Neville

MONDAY, AUG 28TH 7 PM - 9:30 PM

- 1st ANNUAL KATRINA LECTURE SERIES
- Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, Author of "Come Hell or High Water" (invited)
- Dr. Ivan Van Heerden, Author of "The Storm" & Deputy Director of the LSU Hurricane Research Center (confirmed)

TUESDAY, AUG. 29TH 10 AM

- GREAT FLOOD COMMEMORATION MARCH
- From the Lower 9th Ward to Congo Square in conjunction with The PEOPLE'S HURRICANE RELIEF FUND AND OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS (assemble at Jordan and North Galvez Street)
- 6:30 PM- 9:30 PM CLOSING EVENT: LET THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN
- Premier of The Final Call's DVD "Unmasking New Orleans"
- A Town Hall Meeting on "The Future of the City"

The AALP invites you to share this info with others, in that they would like the broadest possible participation in the events. If you have any thoughts on a possible Katrina Memorial, do share them with AALP.

Supporting Organizations

Causeway Connection Camp Foundation
 Common Ground
 Deep South Center for Environmental Justice
 Louisiana Rebuild Hope Now Coalition
 Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association
 National Coalition for Black Civic Participation
 New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition
 People's Hurricane Relief Fund
 People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

Rebuilding Resistance: Organizing Lessons From One Year After The Devastation of New Orleans

Author: Jordan Flaherty **Date Published:** 08/25/2006 **Link:** <http://www.leftturn.org/?q=node/410>

It has been a year since Katrina. Half of the people of New Orleans remain dispersed around the US. Vast stretches of the city lie empty. Bodies are still being found in the devastation of the lower ninth ward. Suicide rates have tripled. The national guard is still patrolling the streets. Most schools and hospitals—especially those serving poor people—are still closed.

This anniversary has brought one last influx of media attention, but after that—barring another round of horrible devastation—the national spotlight will begin to move on. A few months down the line NPR and The New York Times will reassign their reporters. Progressive and liberal foundations will redirect their money to the next urgent priority. Activist volunteers will be going back to school or onto the next volunteer hub.

Corporations, nonprofits, NGOs, workers centers, charities, researchers, religious organizations, unions, the media, and many other players have dedicated huge amounts of money and resources into New Orleans. We are engaged in heated battles with nationwide implications over issues such as health care, education, public housing, and criminal justice.

The forces lined up in these struggles have had dramatic successes and failures. For radicals and progressives, there are important organizing lessons to be learned on tactics, strategy, and more. It is vital to our movements not just that we care about what happens in New Orleans, but that we learn from it.

Community resistance

Organized resistance has risen spontaneously wherever New Orleanians have found themselves, including in hotels, shelters, and trailer parks. There have been organizing committees elected in the New Orleans convention center while floodwaters were still rising, in an evacuation camp just outside of New Orleans hours after the storm, and on a bus during evacuation. In many ways, the organizing and activist community has been trying to catch up ever since.

Last spring I visited Renaissance Village, an evacuee community of over 500 trailers located north of Baton Rouge on land owned by a youth prison. “Last year I was a middle-income American, a homeowner—I never imagined I’d come to this,” declared Hillary Moore Jr., a former city employee and New Orleans property owner exiled in a small trailer in the middle of the complex.

Not long after moving in, Moore and others organized a residents’ council. “We got tired of a lot of things Keta [the contractor company managing the park] was doing and we decided to organize because we realized there is strength in numbers,” he explained. The residents’ council has an elected board and open meetings every week.

Throughout the city and its diaspora, there is a still-fresh history of civil rights organizing. People from this tradition—especially the more grassroots and non-hierarchical, Ella Baker-inspired part of the movement—are a vital part of New Orleans’ grassroots movements and culture who have been leading much of the current wave of resistance, as well as inspiring many volunteers and supporters.

This is a vital part of local history. Matteo “Flukie” Suarez, a Mississippi Freedom Summer activist and New Orleans Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organizer told New Orleans’ Gambit newspaper last year, “One of the interesting stories that’s never been told, in my opinion, is that wherever you went across the South, there were always New Orleans people working in the civil-rights movement...Practically anywhere you went, there was someone from New Orleans working.”

There are also community traditions such as Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, mutual aid institutions founded in the Black community in the reconstruction era that continue to this day. These associations have been an important link in sustaining community as the city has rebuilt. In everything from supporting the survival of the city’s culture to rebuilding and organizing, these institutions have been vital, and almost completely ignored and undervalued by city and federal governments.

There has also been inspiring resistance from other communities of color in the area, such as the Vietnamese community, who have struggled to rebuild despite a lack of support from FEMA and other agencies, and have had notable successes in fighting a landfill near their community in New Orleans East. New Orleans’ Latino community, much larger now than pre-Katrina, has led inspiring organizing around workplace issues, confronting exploitative employers and winning.

Corporate left

It has been dramatic to live in New Orleans during this time of intense struggle and witness the divide between paid and unpaid workers on the ground. Some of the most inspiring stories of resistance have involved people without any organizational affiliation or responsibility to corporate backers. For example the Soul Patrol—a group of young Black men in the seventh ward neighborhood organized by longtime community organizer Mama D—began relief and reconstruction days after the storm, and to this day have received almost no funding.

Left and liberal foundations have already spent millions of dollars earmarked towards the Gulf. But according to recent reports, most of that money did not go to New Orleans-initiated projects, and in fact much of it went to the same east and west coast nonprofits who have traditionally received the majority of grants—organizations with more experience in writing funding proposals and pleasing the funding networks.

The reality is, many groups that do the most powerful work don’t know how to—or don’t have time to—write press releases or grant proposals or fundraising emails or design websites. Other organizations write beautiful mission statements and speak very well and come across very committed, but have no roots in the community, are

completely misguided, and do very little. New Orleans has been filled with top-down, non-accountable, well-funded organizations, from giants like Red Cross and Save the Children to smaller nonprofits.

New Orleans—and the south in general—has a long history of outsiders spending large sums of money for organizing without community leadership or involvement. Efforts like this almost always fail. An example of this is the AFL-CIO's infamous "HOTROC" campaign in the late 90s, which cost million of dollars and brought in countless organizers over a period of several years, all with the aim of organizing New Orleans' multi-million-dollar hotel and tourism industry. The campaign didn't organize a single worker. Without community input, these efforts are usually misdirected from the start. Meanwhile, vital local efforts go unfunded and unsupported.

Community rising

Grassroots, people-of-color-led organizations—most of them in existence since pre-Katrina—have fought on the ground and organized tens of thousands of New Orleanians in the struggle for community-led relief, reconstruction and return, with comparatively little attention from funders or media. The following efforts are only a handful of examples of this:

INCITE Women of Color Against Violence has brought delegations of women of color organizers from around the US to support their Women's Health and Justice Initiative, which involves establishing a women's health clinic and resource center.

Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, a Black-led grassroots environmental justice organization, has worked with local social justice organizers to bring a human rights framework and analysis to the grassroots struggle, while also actively engaging with these struggles themselves, such as by bringing local community members to the UN to present testimony about the US government's human rights violations in New Orleans.

The African American Leadership Project has organized community forums that brought radical and progressive policy proposals from the grassroots directly to the mayor and city council, and in doing so has reframed some of the policy debates.

People's Hurricane Relief Fund and People's Organizing Committee have brought in mass numbers of volunteers—including hundreds of students from historically Black colleges—to engage in direct organizing.

These organizations have challenged not only the elite priorities in the reconstruction of our city, but the foundations and structure of corporate reconstruction and profiteering. They have also been aided by direct organizing support from many principled allies from across the US—groups like Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Critical Resistance, Catalyst Project, and many others.

Other more traditional nonprofits have also done vital work. For example, in the months since their founding, a criminal justice reform coalition called Safe Streets Strong Communities has combined a grassroots organizing strategy—working directly with the incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and their family members—with political pressure and legal support. In their first months, they 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, while simultaneously becoming a force in city and state government and mobilizing a grassroots base. Among progressive and radical communities around the US, perhaps the most widely known post-Katrina relief organization is the Common Ground relief collective.

Thousands of volunteers—most sleeping on floors in recently reclaimed and cleaned buildings with makeshift electricity and sometimes without running water—have come into work with Common Ground. They have gutted hundreds of houses and established several ongoing projects, including bio-remediation, a community garden, and wetlands restoration.

As a large group of mostly-white volunteers in a majority Black city facing mass displacement, they have also received a lot of criticism. "Activists gain a certain credibility by coming here," cautions Bridget Lehane, discussing the analysis of the Peoples Institute for Survival and Beyond, a thirty-year-old antiracist organization based in New Orleans that she works with. "They can go home and talk about what they've seen and done here, in this historic moment and place, and gives them a status, but what are they leaving behind?"

I've only lived in New Orleans a few more years than the Common Ground volunteers. In many ways, the issues they face are ones that I have grappled with since I moved here, as a white activist attempting to be in solidarity with and accountable to a community that I am divided from by layers of privilege. My hope is that these visitors will take their experience and knowledge gained from New Orleans back to their communities and not only spread the lessons learned, but also revitalize organizing in their home cities.

Neighborhood associations

The ever-shifting dynamics of power in the city are profoundly expressed in the rise in prominence and influence of another institution of New Orleans' communities—neighborhood associations. These organizations—most of which existed pre-Katrina—have seen their membership numbers and involvement multiply. They have had real successes in designing their own plans for rebuilding and resisting the destruction of their neighborhoods, and there are progressive forces working in these groups. They have also become important as a place for everyone from politicians to architects and designers and planners to foundations and others to go to for input.

This is a potentially encouraging development, in that these neighborhood associations represent a real possibility of direct democracy and community involvement. However, with so much of the city still displaced, the membership of these organizations is biased towards who is back, which in return reflects the racialized nature of this disaster. For example, even neighborhoods that are majority African American, such as Gentilly and Broadmoor, were represented in this process by neighborhood associations that are—in my observation—majority white.

As the planning process has continued, these issues have risen even further to the forefront. A year into the process, tens of millions of dollars in grant money has been promised by the Ford foundation and other large funders, but it's unclear who will get that money, or who will decide. Meanwhile, not only have there been power struggles between the Mayor and the governor on this issue, the mayor and city council have each hired separate planners, reflecting deep divisions on the part of both politicians and local elites. Other devastated Gulf cities such as Biloxi finalized their plans many months ago. But in New Orleans, even people deeply involved in the process remain confused about where it's heading, and whether it will coalesce along one

big plan for the whole city, or many different plans, differently funded and hotly contested. These neighborhood associations have been the frontline battleground of this struggle.

Continued struggle

This has been a sad time for anyone from New Orleans, or anyone that cares about the people of the city. It has been a time of increased drinking and depression. Tensions have been high and violent crime is rising. But it has also been a beautiful and inspiring time. The people of New Orleans are standing up and fighting back in an historic struggle for justice, joined by progressive allies from around the world, and reinforced by a tradition and culture of resistance.

Every time I see a family moving back to the city, I am inspired by this small act of resistance and courage, this dedication to community and to the further life of the city. Every day, I see other little acts of resistance, in secondlines and other cultural expressions. I see people going to what seems like the thousandth neighborhood planning meeting and still remaining lucid. I see people demonstrating in the streets. I see people being kind and generous in the face of the cruelty of the city's elite who tried to keep them out.

In hundreds of small struggles, in grassroots organizing and demonstrations around the city, the fight continues. New Orleanians are directly challenging the institutions of racism and corporate profiteering and exclusion that have descended on this city. As Beverly Wright, director of Dillard University's Deep South Center for Environmental Justice said at a spring mayoral forum, "they've underestimated the determination of people like me to fight to our last breath."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jordan Flaherty is an editor of Left Turn Magazine, and an organizer based in New Orleans

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New Orleanians Bring the Streets to Life on the Anniversary of the Great Flood

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Organization:

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition

Author:

Arlene Eisen

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Link:

<http://www.peopleshurricane.net/commemoration.html>

It was almost 10AM and all three drawbridges—the only entry points into the Lower 9th Ward—were up. A line of cars piled up, waiting impatiently at the main bridge, anxious about being late to the start of the day's events. A Memorial Ceremony was set to start at 10, at the very place where a barge broke thru Industrial Canal Levee sending up to 20 feet of water crashing into the homes of thousands of people.

Following a few angry calls to the New Orleans Police Department, the Mayor's Office and the City Council, at a few minutes after 10AM, cars were finally allowed onto the St Claude Bridge. For months while the Army Corps of Engineers patched the levee, a wall of barbed wire ran parallel to it, preventing visitors or any unwanted levee critics from approaching. But on the 29th, someone cut the barbed wire and hundreds of people gathered in front of the useless new wall that could not resist the force of even a Category 2 storm.

At the levee, one of the community's spiritual leaders, Mama Olayeela, offered libations in front of an altar with hundreds of candles. A solemn drumbeat accompanied her. "Open the way, Great Mother, for the healing spirits to enter," she responded to the drumbeat. Zion Trinity offered songs for "the warrior spirit in us to rise." And as the crowd filed away from the levee to join the commemoration march, a number of people lining the road read the names of each of those who passed in the Flood. Commemoration organizers had collected some 900 names. That day, in their memorial edition, *The Times Picayune* printed 850 names. Close to 600 are still unidentified or missing. Many in the crowd carried photos of their loved ones who had passed. Others carried signs, "Remember the dead, fight for the living".

Death and Rebirth

Many have reported that the Lower 9th Ward looks, feels and smells like a dead zone. Only a hand full brave pioneers have reclaimed their homes in the midst of block-after-block of devastated, abandoned homes—where the city still does not supply water, sewer or garbage service. But, as the crowd trudged in 95 degree heat up the rutted dirt road, past fields overgrown with weeds where piles of rubble (formerly houses) had recently been bulldozed, life returned to the Lower 9th Ward.

Veteran New Orleans activists were thrilled to be marching along side people they may see on their jobs, on buses, on street corners, but until then, never on political marches. A weathered man with a tambourine, Mr. Johnson, who had to be at least 80, walked stiffly, as if he had wooden legs with no knee joints. He refused an offer to ride in the air conditioned vans available at the end of the march for people not able to walk three miles in the tropical heat. Although the 29th was a work day, it was also the anniversary of the Storm that took so many people's lives and flooded 80% of New Orleans. Nearly 2000 people joined Mr. Johnson because they still ache for public recognition of their grief and they still seethe with fury for the injustice they've experienced. Young, old, people in wheelchairs, children in strollers, young men with t-shirts down to their knees and others wearing dashikis stared down the National Guard perched in their humvees at each corner—some of the 300 who occupy the Black communities of New Orleans.

For a few blocks, this writer walked with Mrs. Anderson. Exactly a year ago, as the water rose to the second floor of her Lower 9th Ward home, she sought refuge on her roof. She began sobbing as she described how rescue helicopters, made eye contact, then passed her by as they headed for the white section of town. Finally, the raging waters pushed her home off its foundations and she clung to the roof until it crashed into a tree. She doesn't remember how many hours she waited in the tree, not for help, but for death. "I urinated on myself for warmth". Her sister interrupts, "you mean you were so scared, you pissed yourself."

Ms Anderson is one of the 250,000 low-income Black New Orleanians who were displaced by the storm and don't have the means to come home. She's been staying in La Place, some 25 miles west of New Orleans. "The doctor told me not to come back for the anniversary, that it would be bad for my blood pressure, but I had to come just for this day." Most displaced New Orleanians are living a few hours away from New Orleans and want to come home. But the state is systematically denying their right to return by withholding housing assistance, favoring below-minimum-wage jobs, privatizing health care and education. One of the demands of the Commemoration is for the right to return to New Orleans—reconstructed with social justice.

As the somber march reached a street that divides the 9th Ward from the 8th Ward, the Hot 8 Brass Band interrupted Ms Anderson's story with an upbeat version of "I'll Fly Away." She, her sister and daughter, as soon as they heard the music, broke into the traditional Second Line dance, along with the rest of the crowd. The energy of the music lifted the grief and anger off the shoulders of the crowd. Everyone —those holding "Right to Return" signs and those with gold caps on their teeth, who heard about the event on the local hip hop station, chanted together to the beat: "New Aw-lins" over and over. Sess 4-5, a local hip hop artist who worked hard to promote the Commemoration, was exultant. "Now it's gonna happen," he told this writer, before he yelled into his bullhorn, "No justice, no peace!"

At Congo Square

Energized by the music and hydrated by free water distributed along the route, few seemed to mind the three-mile march at the peak of tropical heat. They were more relieved by the disappearance of any threat from Hurricane Ernesto.

Nine hundred names, imprinted on huge black banners greeted people as they entered Congo Square—since slavery, the historic center of people's resistance to oppression in New Orleans. Drums welcomed the marchers. Some lingered at an altar with 1600 candles, writing the names of loved ones under a candle, some dancing in the flickering glow. Across the square, a Healing Tent offered massage, acupuncture and counseling. And bordering the square, people could visit a variety of tables with information about the new Women's Clinic, the Workers' Justice Coalition, the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Association, Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and others.

Well-known New Orleans DJ, Wild Wayne from Q93, nationally recognized poet Sunni Patterson and poet producer Asali DeVan shared MC duties. The speech/performance of Mia X—a New Orleans native and first female rapper on the No Limit Record label—

was the highpoint of the afternoon. She told the crowd, "I have a baby father in the cemetery and a baby father in the penitentiary and no family left to come home to in New Orleans." She lost five family members in the Flood. "That's why we have to have a Cease Fire among our people. We need to figure out how to meet our mental needs ... We have a culture and history here—we gotta support each other." The crowd gave her much love.

Other speakers -- including Nikkisha Napoleon whose Uncle passed in the Flood, more people who lost family members, local Black community leaders and Malcolm Suber who represented the United Front that organized the Commemoration -- all contributed to the message of the day. Members of the International Commission of Inquiry for the upcoming Tribunal on Katrina Crimes against the People—from Brazil, Venezuela and South Africa —spoke of their common experiences on the slave ships of yesteryear and today. They were committed to honoring those who passed and shared a consensus that the needless death and destruction that followed Katrina was a genocidal attack on Black people. The continued forced dispersion of Black people—the largest since the betrayal of Reconstruction-- must be resisted. They also demanded that the City rescind any threat to subject peoples' homes to seizure under eminent domain and that public housing be opened. In short: displaced people have the right to return to affordable, safe homes, quality schools, jobs with dignity, quality health care and recreational facilities. All committed to working for reconstruction of New Orleans and the Gulf according to the right to social justice and self determination.

By Arlene Eisen, an activist and long term volunteer with Peoples' Hurricane Relief Fund in New Orleans. arlenesreport@yahoo.com

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One Year Later – Common Ground's Accomplishments

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Organization:	Date Published:	Link:
Common Ground Collective	08/29/2006	http://www.commongroundrelief.org/node/281

What We Have Done Together!

- Hosted and organized **10,000 volunteers** to provide relief and assistance to hurricane survivors.
- Supported well over **100,000 people in seven parishes** – New Orleans, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Terrabone, St. Tammany, St. Charles and St. Mary's.
- Contributed **millions of dollars to the community** through distribution of food, water, cleaning supplies, protective gear, tools, building materials, and volunteer labor
- Established the **Common Ground Health Clinic**, the first civilian run medical clinic, nine days after the hurricane. Since then Common Ground has run mobile clinics, a Latino Health Care Outreach Project, a Health Center in the Upper 9th Ward that has now shifted to a brand new Lower 9th Ward Health Clinic. Common Ground clinics have seen 15,000 residents, workers and volunteers in the last eleven months.
- Initiated and support **nine Distribution Centers in four parishes** – Algiers, Upper 9th Ward, Lower 9th Ward and New Orleans East in Orleans Parish, in Houma/Dulac in Terrabone Parish, Project Hope in Violet in St. Bernard Parish, and Zion Travelers Cooperative in Phoenix in Plaquemine's Parish.
- Provided volunteers with **extensive Anti-Racist work** providing analysis, education and organizing through orientations, trainings, caucuses and workshops. Over 1200 have participated in the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond's "Undoing Racism" training.

- Cleaned and gutted over **1000 homes** in the Upper Ninth Ward, Lower Ninth Ward, Houma, Plaquemines and Violet
- Cleaned and gutted 12 churches in four parishes, 4 daycare centers and numerous offices and homes of community groups, organizers and activists.
- Tarped over a 100 roofs, cleared and cleaned many streets, parks and yards.
- Provided skilled arborists to trim and cut hundreds of damaged trees.
- Common Ground gutted **Martin Luther King Elementary School** in the Lower Ninth Ward. Common Ground also gutted, cleaned and painted eleven other schools throughout New Orleans.
- Transformed the **Mt. Carmel Baptist Church and Community Center**, from a flooded, muddy and moldy building to an extensive volunteer housing site including a distribution center and health center to a fully restored Church, sanctuary and community center operating a kids program.
- Supported the parishioners in their fight to save **St. Augustine's Catholic Church**, which the Archdiocese attempted to close down. This is one of the oldest Black churches in the country - where both free blacks and slaves worshiped together.
- Supported the residents of public housing projects in their fight to open up public housing, including the establishment of the **Survivors Village** at St. Bernard Housing Project.
- Began to **detoxify polluted soil at over 30 sites** using a variety of bioremediation techniques in the Upper and Lower 9th Ward, 8th Ward, New Orleans East, Gert Town, Gentilly and the 7th Ward. Three volunteer and community trainings have been offered and we have gathered extensive analysis of toxins in the area.
- Created a **Women's Center** that has offered resources, emergency housing and training programs for dozens of women and their children in New Orleans.
- Served hundreds of people through our **Common Ground Legal Team** monitoring police harassment and abuse, sponsoring a free legal clinic every Saturday since October 2005, supporting litigation and on the ground resident action to block evictions and to open up public housing. Also assisted residents to access hundreds of thousands of dollars from FEMA and Insurance companies.
- **Common Ground Media Centers** provide free access to local phone calls, fax machines and the Internet six days a week to New Orleans area residents. They also publish "Breaking Ground News" and host the Post Katrina Portrait Project, which chronicles survivors and volunteer experiences.
- Cleaned numerous community gardens in preparation for and with returning gardeners and restored the Sundone Organic Garden, now also known as the **Meg Perry Community Garden**, in memory of Meg who lost her life in a tragic bus accident December 10, 2005.
- Initiated a **Kids and Community Project** that ran an after school program this spring with 15 special education kids from Martin Behrman Charter Elementary School (students, aged 8-14). Over the summer the project supported existing programs at Capdau UNO Charter Elementary School (K-8), Medard Nelson UNO Charter Elementary School (K-8), Sophie B. Wright Middle School (5-8), KidsmArt, Country Day Creative Arts - (in return Country Day Creative Arts provided 5 scholarships to students from our after school program) by providing 16 full-time volunteer teaching assistants.

At the Woodlands Apartments, programs include before- and after-school activities for youth and their families including: *Tupar Amaru Shakur Children's Breakfast Program, serving 20-30+ kids/day, *Summer Camp, serving 20 kids, aged 4-10, per day, * Kids' Bike Shop, serving 10-20+ kids per day, * Weekly Thursday Night Basketball Tournaments, attended by 60+ people, *Bi-Monthly Community Unity Day celebrations, attended by 80+ people.

Kids and Community has also distributed: * 300+ backpacks stuffed with school supplies, * 120+ winter coats, * 1400+ Christmas and Valentines Day gift packages, * 300+ books to public schools, * Approx. \$10,000 worth of art and school supplies at the Woodlands Apartments and 9th ward distribution centers.

- Supported New Orleans **Workers Rights' Movement** since last fall. In 2005, Common Ground Health Clinic organized mobile health clinics to provide essential services to isolated communities of workers, many of whom are immigrants and non-English speaking. In the early part of 2006, Common Ground volunteers established a mobile distribution of food and water supplies to workers living in tents in City Park. Out of the mobile distribution, volunteers began to support workers' organizing efforts in City Park to better their living conditions. Volunteers also organized and supported community efforts that resulted in a march of 5000+ on May 1st, when millions marched nation-wide in support of workers and immigrant rights. We are a member of the New Orleans Workers Justice Coalition. Coalition Work includes establishing a Worker Rights Center and challenges to the H2B "Guest worker" Visa program that is not fulfilling its commitments to the workers including a lawsuit for damages.
- Supported **Wetlands Restoration** by providing public education materials and using volunteer labor - to plant thousands of plants at Bayou Sauvage and the wetlands in City Park.
- Provided **Mold Remediation** to 30+ homes, one church and one warehouse using efficient micro-organisms instead of bleach or chemicals, as well as initiating 3 independent studies of the efficacy of EM (Efficient Micro-organisms) and its effect on toxic molds. To date, CG is brewing activated EM in the 9th ward and distributing it to residents and workers while training them how to use it correctly. Approximately 100 buildings have been sprayed with EM at some point before, during or after the gutting process, thereby reducing the mold spore count by 80 percent either inside the building or at the pile in the street.
- Initiated a project called **Rebuild Green**, which is building a model home in the upper 9th ward that will showcase sustainable design and alternative energy sources.
- Donated or repaired over a **thousand bicycles**, offered bike repair classes and repaired thousands of flat tires through the bike shops.
- Organized or participated in numerous **special events** and concerts including Bonnie Raitt, Jefferson Starship, Boots Riley and the Coup, Damion "Jr. Gong" Marley, Jazz Vipers, and the Rebirth Brass Band in New Orleans and around the country.
- Supported public education through our Speakers Bureau and tabling- where we have sent volunteers and

residents on speaking tours throughout the country and world to spread the word and build support for the residents of New Orleans.

- Created a **Student Solidarity Network** of 35 college groups who have mobilized volunteers and donations to support the people of New Orleans.
- Gained management rights of the **Woodland Apartments**, a 361 unit apartment complex on 13 acres in Algiers working to manifest a vision of safe, affordable and sustainable community housing.
- Initiated a job training program called **INVEST** that is paying stipends to over a dozen local residents who work 5 hours a day with 1 hour in training classes.
- Attracted national media attention including Democracy Now, Night Line, CNN, the Washington Post, The Nation, Yes Magazine and many, many more.

AREA WORK

- Set up a protection plan in the **Lower 9th Ward** to ensure homes are not bulldozed without consent. Since January we have opened a distribution center, temporary resident housing, a community kitchen, and a media lab. We continue gutting residents' homes and are bioremediating numerous sites. A new Common Ground Health clinic opened on August 28th.
- Supported the **Houma Indian communities** in Terrabone Parish, (Houma, Dulac, and Point-Aux Chenes) devastated by Hurricane Rita. Of the 3500 members over one thousand were left homeless, their homes completely destroyed by wind and water. In addition to making regular deliveries to the Bayou since Hurricane Rita. Also started the Marshall Eddie Conway and Vikki I. Richardson Children's Free Breakfast Program. Common Ground has distributed goods to over 10,000 people, gutted, tarped or repaired 100 homes, reconstructed the Bobtown Grave site and ran a children's free breakfast programs Mon-Fri for most of June and July.
- Supported the work of **Zion Travelers Cooperative Center**, a community initiative in Phoenix, Plaquemines Parish that has organized a community relief distribution center and tool and equipment loan center and has restored the church, gutted dozens of homes, cleaned and repaired the local cemetery, and cleared a blighted lot four hundred FEMA trailers. The Church celebrated its grand opening on June 16th
- Initiated what is now call **Project Hope** in Violet, East St. Bernard Parish. This volunteer site and distribution center continues to serve the communities around Violet in the lower east end of the parish with distribution and house gutting support.
- Initiated work in **Mid City** in February by establishing a volunteer base at the ArtEgg Warehouse. We helped to clean and restore the building for art studios, a large permaculture garden, offices for the Alliance for Sustainable Energy and green building vendors. We cleaned numerous other homes and buildings in the area. The new volunteer site on Miro St. cleans out schools and supports the bioremediation team, including a project cleaning up pesticides from the Thompson Hayward Pesticide Plan in Gert Town. This team is now helping to build a mobile laboratory with a donated trailer and equipment.

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New Orleans Call for Action!

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Organization:
INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

Date Published:
09/16/2006

Link:
<http://www.incite-national.org/issues/katrinaaction.html>

SUPPORT JUSTICE IN NEW ORLEANS!

In March 2005, the City of New Orleans, and specifically the Treme Community, one of the oldest communities of free Africans in America, generously hosted INCITE! for the Color of Violence III. Local residents, activists and organizers opened their homes, school, churches, community center, auditorium, and hearts to us, sharing their struggles while helping us create a unique space for organizing against all forms of violence against women of color in the U.S. and around the world.

Just six months later, New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, in which the many intersecting systems of oppression we theorized and organized around at COV III converged in the lives of survivors. The Treme Community, which for many of us was a temporary home for three beautiful days in March, was particularly hard hit by waves of water, racism, classism, and the impacts of U.S. imperialism abroad. Women of color, because of their location at the intersection of these forces, as well as their roles as caregivers to young, elderly, and disabled people, have been on the front lines of struggles for survival in the days and months following Katrina. However, the needs of low-income women of color struggling against poverty and powerlessness resulting from systemic racism and sexism have not been central to government or non-profit responses.

INCITE! is now calling on women of color who participated in the Color of Violence, members of INCITE! chapters & affiliates, and women of color allies, to support the women of New Orleans through the work of the INCITE! New Orleans chapter.

What can I do?

Join or support an INCITE! delegation to New Orleans! The women of INCITE! New Orleans have been centrally involved in establishing and supporting the Women's Health and Justice Initiative, a multi-dimensional community-based organizing project centered on improving women of color access to quality, affordable, and safe health care services, integrating sexual health and reproductive and environmental justice. The Initiative's first project is opening up a Women's Health Clinic, which is located in the historic Tremé community. The clinic promotes a holistic, community-centered well-woman approach to primary health care and will provide a wide range of preventative health services.

INCITE! New Orleans is also building a Women of Color Organizing and Resource Center, which will serve as a hub for organizing among low-income women of color for meaningful participation in the reconstruction of New Orleans, the rights of workers - both immigrant and non-immigrant - who are the backbone of reconstruction efforts, health, safety & housing rights for women of color returning to New Orleans, and community-based responses to violence and approaches to safety.

Volunteers with health care, education, community health promotion and stress, grief, domestic violence, and sexual assault counseling experience are urgently needed to support the work of the Women's Health and Justice Initiative, as are volunteers with administrative, multi-media, and construction skills.

Individuals with fundraising & organizing experience with respect to housing, environmental justice, health and safety, immigrant and workers' rights, and violence

against women are needed to assist in the development and establishment of the Women of Color Organizing and Resource Center.

INCITE! strongly suggests that volunteers plan to stay at least a week between the 1st and the 15th of the month so that the local community can best accommodate everyone without a sense of weariness in a city still operating with limited resources. Between 3 and 6 volunteers can adequately be accommodated. PLEASE NOTE THAT WE ARE PRIORITIZING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN OF COLOR IN THESE DELEGATIONS.

Be aware that delegation participants will be housed under varying conditions (on sofas, futons, air mattresses) and will be asked to bring basic supplies for themselves and to meet local needs. We will be working long hours, and will likely participate in physical work as needed to assist in various INCITE! Projects.

For more information about how to join a delegation, please contact INCITE! New Orleans at whji_info@yahoo.com

">whji_info@yahoo.com or call us at 504.524.8255.

If you cannot travel to New Orleans, we still need your help! We urgently need financial donations to get our women's clinic and Women of Color Organizing and Resource Center off the ground! No amount is too small.

Please make your check out to WHJI and send to:

INCITE!

1362 Constance St

New Orleans, LA 70130

Organize a fundraiser or supply drive in your community to help meet women's basic health needs in New Orleans in the face of collapsed infrastructure, widespread presence of environmental contaminants, mold, and refuse, and failure of supplies collected by the Red Cross and FEMA to reach women most in need.

Organize to support folks in your area! New Orleans residents have been scattered throughout the country, and many are still housed in government facilities (i.e. army bases), shelters, churches, and hotels. Support New Orleans residents in your area by:

Identifying where survivors are living and organizing in your area;

Facilitating forums for New Orleans survivors to come together, share their experiences, and organize around the right of return and New Orleans reconstruction;

Distributing information about resources available in your local area to survivors. Government agencies have made little or no effort to help survivors access local housing, income support, education, child care, medical, transportation and anti-violence resources.

Support local survivors' councils in their advocacy efforts around relief, return, and rebuilding. Offer office space, fax, copying and telephone facilities and woman power to their organizing efforts.

Facilitate legal clinics to assist survivors in accessing information and benefits from FEMA and the Red Cross, and in fighting eviction and foreclosure proceedings with respect to their homes in New Orleans.

Advocate for a full accounting of the current location of all New Orleans residents and publication of FEMA and Red Cross databases. Demand an extension of hurricane-related housing and income support. Visit www.katrinaaction.org. Support the following survivors' demands:

The People's Declaration: Survivors Assembly Demands Identified by survivors on December 9, 2005

We demand that the local, state and federal government make conditions possible for our immediate return. This includes the following:

The Nagin Administration must make temporary housing such as apartments, hotel rooms, trailers and public housing developments available for us while we rebuild our homes.

The government must put an end to price gouging, stop all evictions and make rents affordable.

Local residents must take the lead in rebuilding our communities and must be hired to do the rebuilding work.

There must be immediate debt relief for debt associated with this disaster.

Quality public education and childcare must be provided for our children.

Quality affordable health care and access to free prescriptions must be provided.

The government must immediately clean up air, water and soil to make it safe and healthy for people to return home.

We demand that the government provide funds for all families to be reunited and that the databases of FEMA, Red Cross and any organizations tracking our people be made public.

We demand accountability for and oversight of the over \$50 billion of FEMA funds and the money raised by other organizations, foundations and funds in our name.

We demand representation on all boards that are making decisions about relief and reconstruction. We also demand that those most affected by Hurricane Katrina be part of every stage of the planning process.

We demand that no commercial Mardi Gras takes place until the suffering of the people is lifted.

We are calling for survivors and supporters to participate in a Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend 2006 conference and demonstration to make these demands heard!

For more information about our work in New Orleans and how you can support these critical projects, please contact INCITE! New Orleans at whji_info@yahoo.com">whji_info@yahoo.com or call us at 504.524.8255.

Be sure to let us know about the organizing you are doing in your local area so that we can share that information with the women of INCITE! New Orleans!

The Importance of Civil Disobedience in Post-Katrina New Orleans

Author: Elizabeth Cook **Date Published:** 09/17/2006 **Link:** <http://austin.indymedia.org/newswire/display/34593/index.php>

Citizens of New Orleans are taking it upon themselves to enforce the right of return with everyday acts of civil disobedience. Public housing residents in particular are fighting back. HUD is attempting to shutter all of public housing in New Orleans, but residents have forced the reopening of Iberville Housing Development, and have attempted reoccupation of two other developments.

From the "looting" that occurred as people scavenged for food, water and medicines, in the days following Katrina, to the refusal of thousands to leave, despite a mandatory evacuation order by gun point, civil disobedience has taken its place as a survival tool in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Two incidents of civil disobedience in New Orleans that involved arrests went virtually unreported in the local and national media during the Katrina anniversary events. This is no accident, in my view.

On Monday, August 28, nine people were arrested, including Jay Arena of C3/Hands off Iberville, at the Lafitte Housing Development, after attempting, with Lafitte resident D.J. Christy, to reoccupy Christy's unit. I was present on that day, and witnessed the arrests.

One day later, several men entered the Six Flags compound in eastern New Orleans and attempted to take a FEMA trailer for a female resident of the lower 9th ward. Curtis Muhammed of the Survivor's Council, a senior citizen who walks with a cane and founder of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, was arrested in the incident.

The "Lafitte Nine" event received exactly two sentences at the end of the article in the *Times Picayune* that addressed the recent Yes Men Hoax at Lafitte Housing Development on the same day as the attempted reoccupation.

National media, to my awareness, has given virtually no coverage, though members of the national press were there.

The Six Flags incident received no notice in local traditional media, although it found its way onto www.justiceforneworleans.org. The Lafitte incident was ignored by that same web site.

In contrast to the corporate owned media, alternative media is recognizing the importance of incidents of civil disobedience in New Orleans. The international Independent Media website picked up the Lafitte incident and put it on its front page.

The virtual, corporate-owned, media blackout is a sure sign that those in power feel intimidation. The ignoring of public housing in the local media, and now apparently acts of civil disobedience, is a sign the ruling class doesn't want the word to get out.

What word would that be?

Would it be this message: That the federal government is waging a war against the working class citizens of New Orleans by its refusal to reopen public housing and adequately fund the rebuilding of affordable housing, and vital infrastructure.

The word is also that people have been fighting back since before the floodwaters receded, in everyday acts of civil disobedience. These efforts, by the people, have continued as people exercise their right of return, despite incredibly difficult, government imposed hardship.

The war on the working class involves endlessly delaying funding for rebuilding, as in Louisiana citizens not yet receiving a penny of funds from the Road Home Program. It is a war in the form of FEMA dragging its feet when it comes to rebuilding our vital sewerage and water board infrastructure. It is a war on the working class when Charity Hospital is shut down and no adequate infrastructure created in its place to insure an above crisis level of available health care.

Road Home Recipients will now have to be finger-printed. All recipients of government contract funds for rebuilding, including the major CEOs of Fluor, Halliburton, Shaw Group and Bechtel, all of whom have received millions in clean-up and reconstruction "projects," and all state, local and federal officials who have hampered and delayed reconstruction, should be fingerprinted as well.

Desperation and determination can often work hand in hand, and those two traits are driving acts of civil disobedience in New Orleans.

Public housing residents have been in the forefront of the grass roots movement to enforce the right of return. They have staged numerous acts of civil disobedience since Katrina to reclaim their apartments.

Constructed as a result of the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1937, the Lafitte Housing Development was originally built for African Americans, and remained, until Katrina, a predominantly African American community.

The attempted reoccupation of a Lafitte unit was in defiance of a recently announced HUD partnership with the Catholic Church, MIT and Chase Bank, and several non-profit entities, among others, to "redevelop" Lafitte, which means the demolition of 865 units of affordable, public housing. I have seen several of the units myself, since Katrina, and besides a good hard scrubbing and painting, there is very little that needs to be done to the units. They are built out of masonry, and won't need the extensive gutting required by much of the private housing stock.

Hundreds of Iberville Housing Development residents have been staging everyday acts of civil disobedience by returning to their units. The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO), under the auspices of HUD, since Katrina, has mounted an intense and intimidating public relations campaign, well-financed with your tax dollars, against the reopening of public housing.

Iberville residents have particularly been targeted with disinformation manufactured by HANO. The 900 unit complex itself was barely touched by flood waters on the interiors of the units. There was little reason not to reopen, but that didn't stop HANO from manufacturing reasons.

Notices were sent out by HANO to the handfull of Iberville residents who had returned in early spring, that the soil was contaminated and residents would have to move.

A long-time Iberville resident called in the media, and the support of other residents, and HANO retreated.

HANO soon regrouped and sent out notices that mold was a problem and residents, again, would have to move. Residents responded to this intimidation by simply not moving. Again, HANO retreated.

Residents have waged the most difficult civil disobedience by reoccupying their units. Many residents, because they returned "on their own", have not gained "official" recognition that they are indeed back. HANO invariably condemns these actions as "illegal", refusing to recognize the right of return, in a timely manner, for these residents.

Residents who are "illegally" back are subjected to everyday harassment. This harassment has included unexpected and adrupt visits from HANO managment, visits from and accompanying threats of eviction from HANO security, refusal by HANO to have services adequately restored, such as gas service for cooking and heating, and HANO refusing to provide appliances for those who have returned.

Undaunted by the harassment by HANO, residents are using plug-in hot plates, heating bathing water in pots, filling coolers with ice, many sharing refrigerators with neighbors. Some, who can afford it, are simply buying their own appliances.

C.J. Pete Housing Development in the Central City neighborhood of New Orleans, which did not flood, was home to 300 residents prior to Katrina. On September 12, a resident with supporters attempted to reoccupy her unit, with the intention of setting up a generator. HANO security was there however to block the attempt. A handful of residents had begun to clean their units with the intent of reoccupation. They would be doing so without public services: no electricity, no gas and no water, and no information as to when those services would be restored.

St. Bernard Housing Development residents and their supporters risked arrest on April 4 of this year when they broke through a police barricade to begin the clean-up of their units. The 1500 apartment units remain closed, however, due to HANO policies .

Several dozen B.W.Cooper Housing Development residents mounted a phone campaign in the months after Katrina, and were able to secure the reopening of at least 300 units.

Early on in this recovery process, when news started getting around about the Bring New Orleans Back Commission's (BNOB) recommendation that certain areas of the city be converted to green space, residents began lining up for permits to rebuild, and publicly thumbing their noses at the BNOB, corporate-heavy commission meetings.

When the BNOB recommended shutting down the permitting process, Mayor Ray Nagin balked, he was running for re-election, and shelved the BNOB Commission report.

The biggest fear of the "powers that be", in relation to New Orleans right now, is that enough members of the working class and working poor will return, and begin to organize and fight for the restoration of the city's infrastructure. More people home means more pressure on the federal government to rebuild the public infrastructure, and more pressure on local and state officials to pressure the federal government for the necessary funding.

The government knows there is less dissent with fewer people, particularly fewer working class people who might be inclined to tip the balance in favor of the rebuilding and full restoration of public services.

A policy to reinvent public housing in New Orleans fits right in with the agenda of fewer working poor, or working class in New Orleans. In the name of so-called, "mixed income" housing, the demolition of viable public housing is proposed, backing the time table up indefinitely for the right of return for our low-income citizens.

The neighborhood rebuilding process taking place now, has residents participating with the resources to return and rebuild already. These select few are planning the doggie parks, lush landscaping and Lincoln Beach revitalization, and pushing for "mixed income" neighborhoods to replace public housing. There is also a push to restructure zoning laws to restrict, for example, the rebuilding of dense apartment complexes in New Orleans East. These apartment complexes were a source of affordable housing for thousands.

A slightly watered down, New Orleans City Council gutting ordinance, passed recently, that simply extends the time of notification before the process begins to take your home from you, further damages the rights of private property owners in a capitalist system, and will prevent the return of affordable rental property, as landlords

scavenge for the crumbs thrown at them by the corporate heavy Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA).

New Orleans residents heavily relied on rental housing for affordable housing prior to Katrina. The LRA is planning the disbursement of funds that will rebuild just 18% of the rental stock in south Louisiana that was severely damaged. It is also making these funds available to new investors and non-profit entities, ensuring a competition driven process that places the homeowner at probably a purposeful disadvantage to organized entities already on the ground groping for funds.

Regarding public housing, in effect, the Federal Government, with the blessing of state and local officials, have confiscated 4000 affordable housing units for the working poor. HUD has couched its plans for public housing in language that expresses that what is to come will somehow be "better" for the residents.

It is difficult to ascertain how the demolition of their housing will serve residents' interests in a humane fashion.

HUD's policies in effect serve to rip apart the fabric of whole neighborhoods. Federal, state and local officials have often touted the redeveloped St. Thomas Housing Development, now known as River Gardens, as the model for the future of public housing. 1500 families were displaced as a result of the demolition of St. Thomas, and fewer than 100 of those families have been allowed to return to the "new" River Gardens.

For officials to "tout", cynically, such a project, as somehow "beneficial" to residents, displays a level of arrogance, or ignorance, as the case may be, to the real lives of the working poor.

Thousands have yet to receive the FEMA trailers they applied for, including many public housing residents.

Families living on top of each other, two, three families to a household is nothing new. There was a crisis in affordable housing in New Orleans before Katrina, its growth coinciding, incidentally, with the steady neglect, deterioration and boarding up of thousands of public housing units.

Remember the fire in Chicago? It was just 6 days ago that 6 children were killed in a fire in a building in Chicago, the tragedy befalling a family living by candlelight. It is long past time to connect the dots on incidents like that tragic fire, and one that claimed the lives of several members of an extended family in Harvey, Louisiana, several years back. They were crowded into one apartment whose services had not yet been turned on. Connect the dots to the national crisis in affordable housing.

Historically, the private sector has not met the acute demands for affordable housing for the working class and very poor, and the Fair Housing Act of 1937 was passed with at least a tacit acknowledgement of that belief. Yet stupidly, the federal government has refused to adequately maintain or increase the numbers of public housing units that are so needed.

Down from 14,000 units inhabited in the late '80's, to a little over 5000 prior to Katrina in New Orleans, the government's war on its own resources for the people solidified in the Reagan administration. Public housing, under attack for decades now, has paralleled a growing, affordable housing crisis that ironically, the Fair Housing Act was supposed to address. Families having to double, triple up, like the tenements in the early 1900's, is a crime committed on the working class of this country.

In New Orleans, time is now measured as in days and months after Katrina.

Katrina is one year plus now, and thousands of FEMA trailers are still being stored rather than used.

80% of the housing stock in Orleans parish was severely damaged, and not a penny of federal money for home owners has yet made its way to New Orleans citizens, one year later. 70% of its rental stock was severely damaged, yet plans for rebuilding will be vastly under-funded.

In the lower ninth ward, residents are still waiting for drinkable water to return to a huge swath of the neighborhood, as well as electric and gas services. FEMA trailers can't be hooked up unless there are services to hook them up to.

In Houston, in a recent town hall meeting, Houstonians openly called for Katrina evacuees to be sent back.

New Orleans housing activist Mike Howells said recently a new underclass is being created, with all of the attendant blame, scapegoating and stereotypes.

If your heart hasn't already broken enough from the pain and loss inflicted on our fellow citizens, picture their forced exile in another city, specifically Houston, and public airing of hostility directed towards their presence there.

Then swing back to the forced closing of public housing here, and the Fed refusal to adequately rebuild infrastructure. How apparently easily and quickly the federal government essentially creates an underclass of people who are being blocked from returning to their homes.

Citizens necessarily turn to acts of civil disobedience when faced with the trampling of human rights, when faced with survival issues.

Affordable housing and vital, public infrastructure is a survival issue.

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Dismantling a Community

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Organization: Center for Community Change
Date Published: 10/01/2006

Link:
<http://www.communitychange.org/issues/education/publications/>

Dismantling a Community, a new publication from the Center, chronicles the selling-off of New Orleans Schools in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Rather than build the first-class public education system that New Orleans kids have deserved for decades, Federal Government officials and right-wing advocates used this tragedy as fertile ground for social experimentation on a grand scale.

Thousands of seasoned teachers have been let go and teacher's unions have been decimated while some \$40 million has been spent to turn the New Orleans education system into a complex web of individually operated schools where parents have to vie for a quality education for their children.

Dismantling a Community tells the consequences of the ongoing assault that privatization advocates have unleashed on the fragile neighborhoods of New Orleans.

[Click here to download the report](#)

Attachment	Size
DismantlingFULL.pdf	4.85 MB

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Home for the Holidays Coalition, Flyer

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Organization: Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition
Date Published: 10/12/2006

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Come and Volunteer in New Orleans!

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Organization:
Common Ground Collective

Author:
Home for the Holidays collaboration: All Congregations Together, Common Ground 9th Ward Projects, People's Hurricane Relief Fund

Date Published: 10/15/2006
Link: <http://indymedia.us/en/2006/10/20082.shtml>

Flyer - 920K

The "Home for the Holidays" coalition is putting out a call to volunteers nation-wide come to work in New Orleans with the goal of helping every 9th Ward family signed up for assistance to have their home gutted by the New Year. With thousands of families still displaced and federal monies (Road Home program) still not released, many households lack both the physical and financial resources to gut their houses without some form of assistance. The absence of strong alternatives creates a continued need for volunteer house gutting operations.

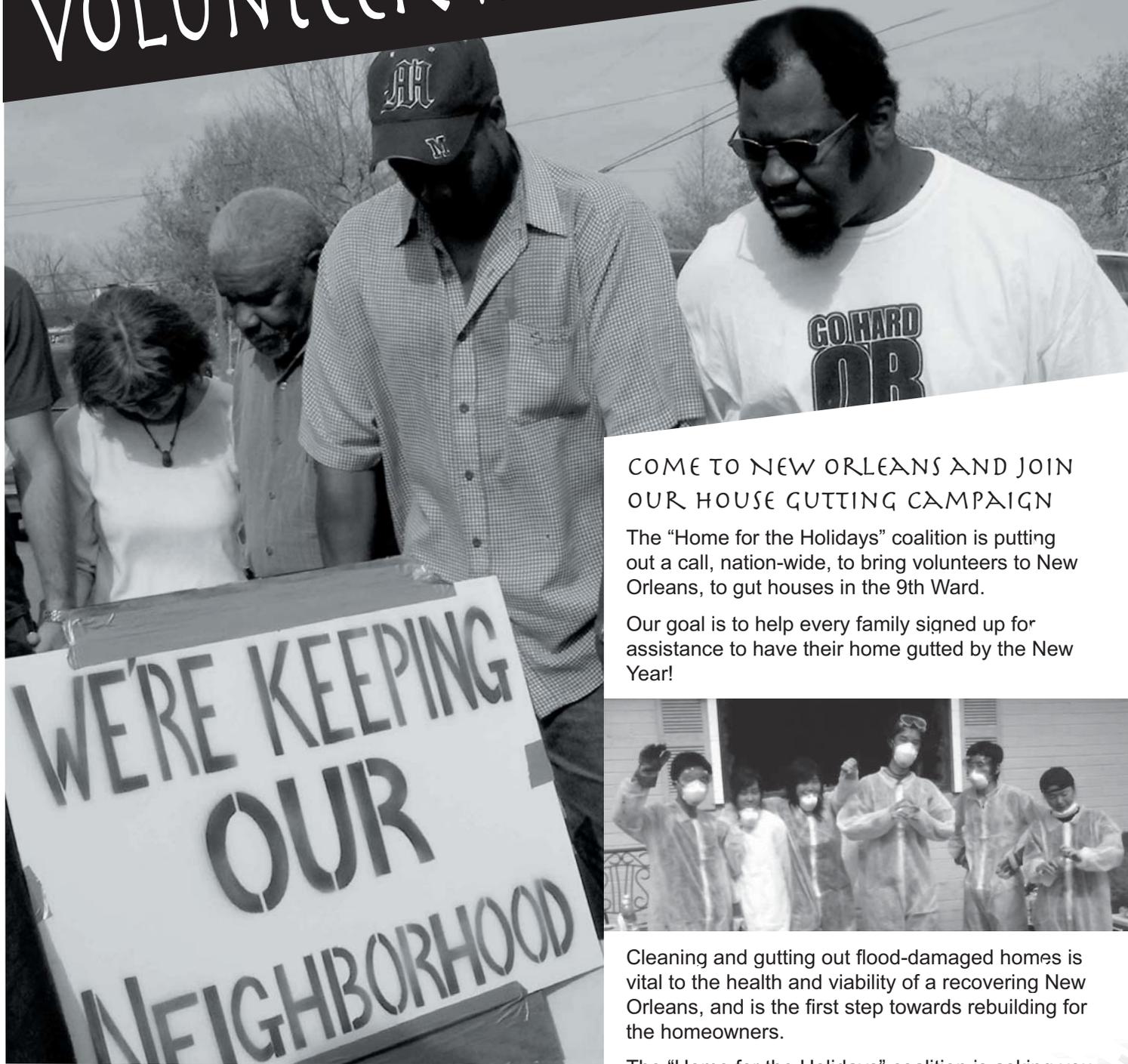
All Congregations Together
Common Ground 9th Ward Projects
People's Hurricane Relief Fund
Collaboration to Bring Families "Home for the Holidays"

NEW ORLEANS, LA

The "Home for the Holidays" coalition is putting out a call to volunteers nation-wide come to work in New Orleans with the goal of helping every 9th Ward family signed up for assistance to have their home gutted by the New Year.

"We see housing as an integral part to stabilizing families and communities and therefore the city. ACT's commitment is to rebuild communities, one home at a time. In rebuilding homes, we rebuild families. We are looking to our larger, national community to assist us in this effort to bring people home for the holidays volunteering their time and giving of themselves during this holiday season," stated Mary Fontenot, Executive Director for New Orleans All Congregations Together.

VOLUNTEER IN NEW ORLEANS!



COME TO NEW ORLEANS AND JOIN OUR HOUSE GUTTING CAMPAIGN

The "Home for the Holidays" coalition is putting out a call, nation-wide, to bring volunteers to New Orleans, to gut houses in the 9th Ward.

Our goal is to help every family signed up for assistance to have their home gutted by the New Year!



Cleaning and gutting out flood-damaged homes is vital to the health and viability of a recovering New Orleans, and is the first step towards rebuilding for the homeowners.

The "Home for the Holidays" coalition is asking you your family, your friends to come volunteer with us, to help bring the families of the 9th Ward back to New Orleans.

MORE INFO!

www.nolahomefortheholidays.org
nolahomefortheholidays@gmail.com

The "Home for the Holidays" coalition is a project of All Congregations Together, The People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Common Ground Relief.



Cleaning and gutting flood-damaged homes is vital to the health and viability of a recovering New Orleans and the first step towards rebuilding for homeowners. While volunteer efforts through relief groups and churches have made tremendous strides in cleaning of houses for free in the City of New Orleans, there are still hundreds of families needing assistance with house gutting.

With thousands of families still displaced and federal monies (Road Home program) still not released, many households lack both the physical and financial resources to gut their houses without some form of assistance. The absence of strong alternatives creates a continued need for volunteer house gutting operations.

"PHRF feels it is very important to support this "Home for the Holidays" campaign to gut houses as part of this fight for peoples right to return. This is the first step in a long struggle to make people whole. Our people deserve the moneys that have been appropriated through the road program and we are also determined to make sure that happens," stated Malcolm Suber, National Organizing Coordinator for Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund.

The city's "Good Neighbor" program further complicates the situation, establishing a relatively narrow timeframe in which homeowners can take action to prevent the seizure of their property. Regardless of how the city proceeds with carrying out this program, its mere existence has created a high level of anxiety and concern within community. To fill this need and best support the recovery process throughout the Ninth Ward, we need a continued influx of volunteers.

"If we can get 250 volunteers a day until the end of the year, we can have every house on the 9th Ward list cleaned and gutted for the New Year. House gutting is a way that people from all over the country can come to New Orleans and really make a difference in helping the community rebuild" stated Michelle Shin, Coordinator of the Common Ground Lower 9th Ward Project.

In addition to the work of volunteer organizations, we propose the City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana partner in this effort by:

1. Releasing the Road Home money to homeowners allowing them to begin rebuilding their homes,
2. Request under emergency powers that the National Guard be mobilized to assist in House Gutting.
3. Commit to a plan for the re-opening of public housing
4. And the restoration of clean drinking water and electricity to all parts of the city

Volunteers wishing to register can do so at www.nolahomefortheholidays.org

Contact us at ✉ NOLAhomefortheholidays@gmail.com

">NOLAhomefortheholidays@gmail.com OR 504-218-6613

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Video Clip: "I Won't Drown on that Levee and You Ain't Gonna Break My Back"

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Organization:	Date Published:	Link:
Critical Resistance	10/25/2006	http://www.criticalresistance.org/katrina/video-nest.html

An into the treatment of Orleans Parish Prisoners during the evacuation of New Orleans. Recommended via Critical Resistance's list serve: amnesty@lists.criticalresistance.org

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Community Justice: Interview with Robert "Kool Black" Horton

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Organization:	Author:	Date Published:
Critical Resistance	Jordan Flaherty with Jacqueline Soohen	12/06/2006

Link:
<http://www.leftturn.org/?q=node/663>

Raised in New Orleans' St Thomas Public Housing Development, Robert "Kool Black" Horton is a dedicated community organizer and father, as well as a former hip-hop artist and current gospel choir singer. He began his organizing career as a founder of Black Men United for Change, a grassroots community-based organization that initiated local responses to community problems. For fifteen years, he has been a trainer with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, a New Orleans-based anti-racist training organization. He is currently Campaigns and Project Director for Critical Resistance, a national prison-abolition organization. This Saturday and Sunday, Critical Resistance is sponsoring a Weekend of Reconciliation and Respect, featuring a keynote address by former political prisoner, professor Angela Davis. For more information on the Critical Resistance Amnesty Campaign, please see <http://www.criticalresistance.org/katrina/>

Jordan Flaherty: What is your organizing background?

Robert "Kool Black" Horton: I'm a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. For the past fifteen years or so I've been doing work dealing primarily with issues effecting Black men, particularly in public housing. I started with an organization called Black Men United for Change, in the St. Thomas public housing development about 15 years ago.

Black Men United for Change was part of a larger effort that was taken on by the St. Thomas Residents Council

and the St. Thomas Irish Channel Consortium, to do grassroots organizing and educate people about what was happening in their neighborhoods, to deal with issues around teenage pregnancy prevention, the high risk of HIV in the community, and also issues around tenant's rights as public housing residents.

These meetings would go beyond conversation on these issues, into dialogue about housing issues, the murder rate, police brutality, drugs, employment – those kind of basic things people need for their survival. So because this community was already pretty organized, we had one or two retreats and Black Men United for Change was established.

We started by bringing employers to the table to help brothers get jobs. We acted as a job referral, and we had about 60 or 70 people connected with our organization that we were able to find work for.

Then we started working on these issues of crime and policing. The murder rate was so crazy, there were two areas in particular, one was called Death Alley, and the other one was called Cutthroat. You didn't want to be in these neighborhoods after dark. The murders were occurring, and there was no intervention. The police would come out and lay the yellow tape down and draw the chalk lines but this was after the blood was spilled, and we felt it was too late by then. We realized that, had someone stepped in sooner, we could save lives.

So Black Men United for Change developed a community-policing model called the St. Thomas peacekeepers, which was conflict resolution based on the relationships we had with folks in that neighborhood.

A person would get killed, for instance, on a Tuesday evening. But it didn't start then. It was initiated a few days earlier, on a Friday or Saturday night at the neighborhood block party or a dice game. And because no one said anything then, it was allowed to filter over later.

We had a large presence wherever there were community events or large gatherings. We would be present in the neighborhood, and because we had relationships with the people involved, we knew how to approach them and get them to at least listen and some to some sort of reasoning. There were times where the situation was too complicated for us to get involved, or we were too close to the situation – then we would bring in an outside, neutral, party.

As a result of our work, we began to watch the murder rate drop in St. Thomas, from 31 murders to zero, in a three-year period. The murder rate was about 31 people when we began – that's 31 killed in one year, just in the St. Thomas development. That went down to fourteen the next year, then to six, then zero.

We were also able to address police brutality. There were rumors that people were being targeted and gunned down by the New Orleans police department. There was this group (of police) called the headhunters, who rode around with black baby doll heads on the hood of their police car. We were able to deal with that matter and have those officers removed from out of not only St. Thomas, but the entire 6th district police area, because they were terrorizing not only St. Thomas, but also the other public housing sites in that district.

JF: How would you describe Police/Community Relations in New Orleans?

KB: : Folks are being criminalized. When the issue of race in particular comes into play, the New Orleans police department is not unique. When you look historically, the police department has been one of the biggest terrorists in our neighborhoods, and that's across the country, and those relationships haven't changed much. The faces of politicians have changed, that's it.

JF: What do you mean when you say your community was already organized?

KB: : New Orleans has been doing organizing for years, and people who want to come in solidarity should be respectful with when and how they enter a community. There was a lot of organizing in St. Thomas; we developed a lot of leaders. The people who were 9 to 12 years old when we started, in 7 years, led that program, and were the staff. That was the intention, to pass it on to that next generation of leaders.

JF: St. Thomas was later torn down, and the former residents were dispersed across the city. Now, HUD is talking about demolishing virtually all public housing in the city. Are public housing residents being demonized?

KB: : People are being blamed for crime. They say that crime is a public housing issue. Ask yourself, where did the dollars for housing go? We saw our greatest deterioration in public housing and downsizing of funding and staff in the 1970s and 80s. This was a backlash to integration. Fifty percent of St. Thomas was vacant. The money was pulled out of public housing. The staff was downsized.

“Hope VI” (the federal program to transform public housing) is a joke. This country is getting out of the public accommodation business. Look at health care; look at charter schools and the privatization of schools. The country is downsizing from public responsibility. Public education was developed for white people initially. In the 60s, people of color integrated the system, and it became time for the government to get out of that service.

JF: What was your work after Black Men United For Change?

KB: : I also worked with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. I'm what's called a core trainer – I've been training with them almost all of my years as an organizer. They do Undoing Racism workshops, a training model to become an antiracist organizer. We believe that skills alone are not enough to become an organizer. You have to understand the culture and time we live in. Just because you develop skills, that doesn't make you a better organizer. If you don't address the issue of racism, then you just become a skillful racist

We developed Freedom Schools, modeled on the freedom schools that came out of the 60s, to take a message of antiracism to a younger audience. Kids as young as 9 years old would participate. We would help kids get clarity on institutional power as it relates to racism. That experience helped shape my political perspective.

Now I'm working with Critical Resistance. I appreciate how they work as an organization: nonhierarchical, and conscious of issues of accountability.

Being one who went through the criminal justice system I know what it means to be on the inside of those walls just as much I know how important it is to be on the outside bringing light to the inhumane treatment people get on the inside.

JF: What is Critical Resistance's current campaign?

KB: : Amnesty for prisoners of Katrina is the campaign Critical Resistance has taken on. We are asking for forgiveness for all charges of those who were arrested for so-called looting, for trying to survive after the storm

We have people a year later who still haven't seen the inside of a courtroom, mainly because the court system was destroyed. The evidence was washed away, records have deteriorated, public defenders were laid off, and people are lost in the system. People cannot prepare for trial because evidence has been destroyed. A young man appeared last week who was lost in the system for thirteen months. They just found him. How many other cases are there like that? The law says the District Attorney is supposed to accept or deny charges within 60 days for state charges, yet there are people missing in the system for months. There's no real rehabilitation, just warehousing.

Camp Greyhound (The prison set up in New Orleans greyhound bus station in the first week post-Katrina) is not the best way to rebuild New Orleans – and yet it was the first piece of infrastructure rebuilt in the wake of Katrina. We need food, shelter, clothing, and jobs. We need that for the right of return, for people to have safe communities.

JF: What is your experience with the criminal justice system?

KB: : December 1 of 1988, I was arrested for drugs and a gun charge. Just like many teenagers, I made a mistake. I was 19, there were things pushing me into that kind of lifestyle. But I made choices for myself and I decided not to have myself pushed into that system.

JF: How long were you incarcerated?

KB: : I only did two and a half years. That's mainly because growing up I was always around folks that talked about the plight of black folks in this country, and the issues that are impacting us. That spirit, the lessons from those conversations, would visit me in prison.

I want to say this, as it relates to amnesty: For two years before Katrina, I was unemployed. I could not find work in this city. For something that happened 18 years ago, I couldn't get a job in this town. When does a person pay his debt to society? I served two years in prison. I've worked with youth around this country. I'm involved in all kinds of civic organizations, I made a complete change in my life and I still can't get work.

Now there's legislation saying if you've ever been convicted you can't get financial aid for school. How does this effect people who are trying to turn their life around? What are we talking about when we talk about safety?

When I was in Orleans Parish Prison (OPP), I stayed in what was called "Tent City," which has now been re-erected, post-Katrina. It was a makeshift jail outside. It was 14 degrees and we were sleeping outside on cots without a heater. OPP had at that time at least 12 different facilities in this city. We should question that – why are there so many jails in one town?

Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the nation, and New Orleans has the highest incarceration rate in the state. We also have the third poorest education system in this country. With the No Child Left Behind act, people are being pushed out of school.

What's going to be the focus when we rebuild this city? Is the focus on bricks and mortar, or people? There's a lot of talk about levees and infrastructure and hotels and businesses, but very little talk about bringing people back and making sure they have wages and benefits, a quality education and health care.

Politicians and media talk about crime and safety, but there's another agenda, and that agenda has racism written all over it. There's no plan to bring people back to this city. People have been planning to remove the poor Blacks of this city. Using the issue of crime has been one way to do it. So it's another mass gentrification scheme. Right now, they're talking about tearing down public housing that could provide housing and right of return for 5000 families, but developers are talking about money-making schemes right now, and planning to benefit from other's misery.

JF: What happened to St. Thomas?

KB: : St Thomas was a painful experience for me. It helped me understand this thing called community organizing, so that's positive. But it is painful because of the end results. They said they would turn our community into a mixed income community. Community folks that participated didn't know the scope of what they were dealing with. Developers ended up gentrifying and developing the community out of existence.

JF: What are the organizing lessons you've learned in New Orleans post-Katrina?

KB: One lesson I've learned is that this is bigger than me. We can't use the model we used to use. We have to look for different models. We can't see the issue of prisoners as a civil rights issue; this is a human rights issue.

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Amnesty for Prisoners of Katrina: A Weekend of Reconciliation and respect for Human Rights

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Organization: Critical Resistance	Date Published: 12/09/2006	Link: http://www.criticalresistance.org/katrina/amnestyweekend.html
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**Saturday, December 9, 2006
HUMAN RIGHTS TEACH-IN**

Hear Angela Davis' Keynote Speech – (mp3 file)



Sunday, December 10, 2006
AMNESTY SUNDAY



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AMNESTY WEEKEND SCHEDULE

MEDIA INFO

Angela Davis Speaks Out on Prisons and Human Rights Abuses in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

Scholar and former prisoner Angela Davis was in New Orleans this month to speak out against human rights violations and demand amnesty for those imprisoned during Hurricane Katrina. We hear from her keynote address at the event "Amnesty for Prisoners of Katrina: A Weekend of Reconciliation and Respect for Human Rights." [rush transcript included]

Former Senator and Vice Presidential candidate John Edwards has entered the 2008 presidential race—one day earlier than he intended. On Wednesday, Edwards' campaign inadvertently posted the news of his candidacy during a test-run on its website. Edwards had intended to make the announcement today during a speech in the 9th Ward district of New Orleans.

Scholar and former prisoner Angela Davis was also in New Orleans recently. Her visit to the city was in recognition of International Human Rights Day. After Hurricane Katrina hit, many in New Orleans were arrested for looting, left to drown in locked jail cells and held past release dates. As many as 85% of defendants in the 3,000 criminal court cases still pending in New Orleans qualify for representation by a public defender. An untold number of them have yet to see a lawyer.

Angela Davis went to New Orleans to speak out against human rights violations and demand amnesty for those imprisoned during Hurricane Katrina. She gave the keynote address at a series of events organized by the prison-abolition group—Critical Resistance. "Amnesty for Prisoners of Katrina: A Weekend of Reconciliation and Respect for Human Rights"—took place in New Orleans earlier this month. In her speech Davis referred to Merlene Maten—a 73-year-old New Orleans grandmother—who spent 16 days in prison for allegedly looting \$63 worth of food from a deli a day after Hurricane Katrina hit. Here is an excerpt of Angela Davis' speech.

Angela Davis. Activist, author and professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her most recent books are "Abolition Democracy" and "Are Prisons Obsolete?"

RUSH TRANSCRIPT

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ANGELA DAVIS: I wanted to—I wanted to focus our attention for a minute on three cases, three incidents in this country recently. I'm talking about the shooting of that young brother, Sean Bell in New York on the mother of his wedding. The 50 gunshots that the police admit were shot that day? I am talking about what's his name Michael Richards. Did you see—did you see, did you all see it? Cause you can actually go on line and you can see it. It was much, much worse than anything I had ever imagined. Okay, I'm not going say anything, because that was really upsetting, and he says, I don't know where it came. [laughter]

And then there's another instance I wanted to mention. And that involved, it's something that happened in the San

Francisco Bay Area where I live. And it involved a Kenyan writer by the name of N' Gugi Wa Thiong 'o. Now, I don't know how many of you have read his work, but he is one of the most revered writers in Africa, on the continent of Africa. He has published—maybe some of you know his—have heard of his book, *Decolonizing the Mind*? Okay, that's N' Gugi Wa Thiong 'o. He just published a new book which is really great. I'm reading it now, it's called, *Wizard of the Crow*.

He's been on tour with that book and came to San Francisco from Irvine, California, where he's now teaching. And was staying in a hotel, Hotel Vitali, which is one of those boutique hotels. You know one of those kind of swanky, sort of small hotels. But, Random House was paying for it, right his publishing company. And, so he's sitting there one morning, reading the newspaper and this employee of the hotel walks over to him and says to him, I am sorry, but only guests are allowed to use this space. Now N' Gugi is, I think he is—he's probably about 64 or 65. He may have had a sweatshirt on, you know. But, if a white person had a sweat shirt on, nobody would ever assume that he wasn't or she wasn't registered in the hotel. And so N' Gugi said, he says to the guy, what makes you so certain that I am not a guest at this hotel? And the employer wouldn't listen to him. And he said he said it again and finally, they had to go over to registration.

And, well now there's a big campaign and the hotel manager has apologized, this is San Francisco after all. And you know this boycott of the hotel got started really quickly on the internet. And so, the manager is saying he will donate money to anti-racist organizations, and he will do this and he will do that. [laughter] But, the thing is, I spoke to N' Gugi about this. And he said, I kept asking him what makes you so certain? Because I saw this absolute certainty.

Now, the man didn't say "you're black." He didn't say, you know, black people don't belong here. He was just certain the he could look at this man and tell that this man didn't belong there. Just like the cops who shot Sean Bell could look at this young brother and his friends in the club and he could tell that they dealt in drugs, they were criminals, that they deserved to be shot.

VOICE FROM AUDIENCE: They felt threatened.

ANGELA DAVIS: Exactly. So, I want us to think about this certainty. This self certainty as a way in which racism expresses itself. It doesn't have to be about the fact that the person—or it doesn't have to be—there doesn't have to be anything explicit about the race of the person. It's just, I know you should not be here. It's like your sheriff said when Nagin accepted the prisons and hospitals and a couple of other categories from the evacuation order, apparently, at the press conference, the Sheriff, Gusman, was asked to answer the question as to why the prisoners were exempted and he said, we need to—something to the effect, we need to keep them here because that is where they belong. This is where they belong. They are prisoners, this is where they belong.

So, I want us—I want us to think about this question of racism and this self certainty. I want us to ask, where—where does racism live today? Where did it reside in the past? And, how do we identify those spaces the are so haunted by racism today? So, we can actually talk about migrations of racism. Cause, you know, we used to be able to understand it. We used to say exactly what was racism, what wasn't. And now, it's not that easy. And that is because racism itself changes. It—it moves, it travels, it migrates, it transmutes itself.

Now, when Hurricane Katrina struck, over 6000 human beings were locked up in Orleans Parish Prison. And you know, that this is one of the largest city jails in the country. And, so actually, I have this quote that Sheriff Gusman said. When it was announced by the prisons would not be evacuated he said, we are fully staffed, we are under our emergency operations plan, we've been working with the police department, so we are going to keep our prisoners where they belong.

And this is that same certainty, the certainty of racism, the certainty that appears to be colorblind, but is actually where attitudinal racism has migrated. I think we can discover racist attitudes in that certainty. Orleans Parish Prison was where prisoners belonged under any and all circumstances. The belonged out of sight, away from view. As one of the children said who was removed their from the juvenile facility, we were "treated like trash." Sheriff Gusman was saying, basically, prisoners belong in a trash can with the top closed shut.

And so there was this disaster within a disaster. As the ACLU, National Prison Project put it, a disaster that we could not see. A disaster that went unrecognized because few people thought that prisoners deserved to be treated as human beings. Because few people recognized prisoners as having rights, as having human rights. And so prisoners were locked in their cells and the flood waters were rising and there was no way to get them out. There was no clean water, they were forced to drink water with feces floating around in it.

We heard about the horrible conditions at the superdome and at the convention center and they were horrendous. And it's interesting that both of those places were considered to a certain extent, places of incarceration for a largely black population. But we did not hear about the people being forced to remain in the flooded spaces of the OPP. We did not know that children had been taken there. And, if you look at the ACLU's report called Treated—I think it's called *Treated Like Trash*.

VOICE FROM AUDIENCE: Abandoned and Abused.

ANGELA DAVIS: *Abandoned and Abused*. If you look at the ACLU's—No I'm talking about—I'm not talking about the ACLU. You're right. That's the report about OPP. I am thinking about the juvenile—that was called *Treated Like Trash*.

And then of course another 700 or so people were arrested during the hurricane, and Merlene Maten was one of them. And then they called Burl Cain, you know I was shocked that he was still the Warden of Angola. You know, cause I saw *The Farm* that documentary and I read Tom Burgess book, *God of the Rodeo*. And read about the way in which Burl Cain tried to get him to share the profits from the book with him before he would agree, you know, before he would sign the consent form. Well, anyway, yeah. If any of you know anything about Burl Cain, you know that, well, at least in that documentary, he gave the impression that one of his favorite activities was conducting executions at Angola. But, holding the hands of the people who were being killed in order to usher them on their way to god. I mean, I know some people in Louisiana are—[laughter] anyway, okay don't let me get started there.

But yeah, Camp greyhound when he came to run the jail that they called camp greyhound because they turned the greyhound bus station into a jail, right. And when I heard about that, I immediately thought about Guantanamo. I immediately thought about camp x-ray in Guantanamo. It seems that the authorities here were more concerned with questions about confinement and control, and law and order, and with security in the negative sense; more

attention was devoted to possible breaches of the law than to anything else. And, in this sense, you might say that what we saw during Katrina was a local manifestation of the military practices and policies guiding the bush administration's approach to Iraq. [applause]

And to the whole so-called War on Terror. Just as anyone who looks Arab or Middle Eastern or who was known to practice Islam is a potential terrorist? A potential enemy combatant? You know, think of all the people who are still locked up in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, and all these prisons all over the world because they are suspected of being enemy combatants. Just as Merlene Maten, was suspected of being a looter, because she is black and—

—break—

ANGELA DAVIS: When you think about the fact that the sheriff would not even consider the possibility of evacuating the prisoners before Katrina hit land, it was the same kind of racist certainty. He, when he was confronted with accounts of prisoners of the OPP, Gusman denied their claims altogether, and he said that you don't, and I'm quoting, "rely on crackheads, cowards, and criminals to say with the story is". It was the same kind of racist certainty. He didn't say black crackheads. [laughter] He didn't say black cowards, he didn't say black criminals, but each one of those words is a carrier of racism. And so, it seems to me, that it might be important for us to think about how the prison industrial complex contributes to and nourishes itself from and lives on racism.

Now, I was asked to talk a little bit about the prison industrial complex, but you know—you know what the prison industrial complex is, don't you? You do, don't you? I mean, it is not just all of those prisons that we see all over the country, jails and prisons. It's all of the connections. Right? It's the connections that we begin to see in the 1980's, when the social programs begin to be dismantled and when globalization of capital begins its ascent. And so capital money, instead of being focused on the needs of people increasingly goes into profitable areas. And, so there's no resources for health care, there's no resources for housing subsidies, so then what happens is that these huge surpluses of—of—of populations who have no place any more, because there are no jobs for them. A lot of the factories have gone abroad, gone to the global south. And so people have no way to make a living. And so, I mean, it is not as if there was a conspiracy, but it was a kind of systematic conspiracy without people actually deciding this is what was going to happen.

And so, the idea is to build more and more prisons to serve as receptacles for those people who no longer have a place because there is no longer jobs for them, there's no longer education for them, there's no longer welfare for them, there's no longer health care for them.

This begins in the 1980's. The industrialization process, right? And we see it happening right now in the global south. We see it happening in Africa. We see it happening in Latin America. You can go to countries where the poverty is so extreme because the IMF or the world bank has decided you get a loan only if you can put it into a profitable sector. Not if you want to use the money for schools, or not if you want to use the money for housing. And so what happens is that there are increasing numbers of people and countries in Africa, in Latin America and in Asia who have become, or who are considered to be garbage now. There is no place for them.

And so, they're building prisons all over. And in some countries, you see abject poverty. And against the backdrop of that abject poverty, you see the shiniest new prison using the most advanced and most sophisticated new technology. Now, something is wrong, something is seriously wrong. And it seems to me that we can see those contradictions right here in New Orleans.

And perhaps you've heard about the connection the people often make between the prison industrial complex and slavery? Right? You know about the 13th amendment, right? We all talk about the institution of the prison being haunted by slavery. Actually, I have heard a lot of talk about ghosts in New Orleans since I have been here. Apparently, the hotel where we are staying is haunted? But, I really believe in ghosts. I do. But I believe in the ghosts of history and I don't know if we recognize those ghosts. I see that OPP, and Angola, and CYC, or YSC are haunted by slavery. Anybody who has seen the film *The Farm* cannot help making those connections. But, there is something about the ghosts of slavery that I want to talk about this evening, especially as a way of understanding why black people are so easily labeled criminals, so easily identified with—as the threat to law and order.

Now, we know that the 13th amendment abolished slavery. Right? At least that's what they say. I just can't believe, that we believed it. Like, one little statement in the Constitu—an amendment is going to abolish this huge, complicated institution. And the 13th amendment doesn't even tell us what slavery is. So it doesn't even say what it abolished. It just says slavery and involuntary servitude. But slavery was a lot more than involuntary or coercive labor. You know, what are they talking about? Abolishing slavery as being based on human property or being based on—on social death? Or being based on racism? Cause the racism is definitely still here.

And the vestiges of slavery are definitely still here, but there is one vestige especially I think we should be aware of this evening. And that is the extent to which black people, even though we assume that slaves were not recognized as legal personalities, were not recognized by the law. Because you know, slaves could never file suit, or could never testify against anyone. But, there were ways in which every single slave was recognized as legally accountable and that is when a slave committed a crime. Now, if property commits a crime—[laughter] do you see what I am saying? It can't be morally accountable, it can't be legally accountable. And the fact that there was so many different punishments, punishments for black people who were slaves that were far more severe than for white people who had committed to the same crimes.

So, if you look at that accountability, that has always been there. And you look at the fact that there are more black people in prison than any other group of people in this country, it seems like somehow or another, we have allowed ourselves to believe that—that there was a due process there. And there are reasons why they're so many people in prison. But it seems to me, that—when black people became recognized as full citizens, or recognized as having standing before the law, it is the same standing that we already had during slavery and that is that kind of negative standing, the standing of guilt, the ability to be found guilty.

And so now racism expresses itself under the sign of equality. Under the sign of due process. The negative affirmation of a legal personality of black people continues to hold sway today. And the proof of the participation of black people in US democracy is precisely the fact that they have received due process before being sentenced in such disproportionate numbers to prison. But the prison is the negative side of democratic freedom. Just as slavery—slavery used to furnish the evidence of freedom to people who weren't slaves.

Slavery was a way of letting people know who weren't slaves that they were free. Right? And in a lot of ways, that—that was the only way they knew they were free, that they weren't slaves. Now, the prison does the same thing.

We know that we are free because we are not behind bars. And besides, imprisonment has become so profitable. But I think I need to end now, because I think I'm still on California time and I'm going over a little bit the time that was allotted me.

Let me conclude by saying that we want amnesty for all the prisoners of Katrina. [applause] We want amnesty, we want amnesty for everybody who is doing Katrina time, for everybody who is doing Katrina time. We want all municipal state and federal records of prisoners of Katrina expunged. These records should also be expunged from credit and employment agencies, no one should be tried, sentenced, fined, imprisoned, jailed, detained, involuntarily relocated or deported. We call for amnesty to challenge how the prison industrial complex is used in times of disaster, while structural disasters like racism and poverty continue to be ignored.

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A National Call to Students – “Louisiana Winter”

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Organization: Gulf Coast Civic Works Project	Author: Tracie L. Washington	Date Published: 12/09/2006
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Two articles follow. The first is an announcement of a press conference about the Louisiana Winter, and the second is a longer recruitment flyer.

A National Call to Students "Louisiana Winter"

Press Conference on Thursday, December 14, 2006. 3:00 p.m.
U.S. District Court Building 500 Poydras Street
New Orleans, Louisiana 70130

In 1964, 800 college students from around the country came to Mississippi to register African American voters who were being denied this constitutional right. In that spirit of democracy, civil rights advocates across the country, led by Dr. Scott Myers-Lipton of San Jose State University, has called upon students to travel to the Gulf Coast to participate this January in Louisiana Winter. The NAACP Gulf Coast Advocacy Center is proud to co-sponsor this event.

The goal of Louisiana Winter is to both witness first-hand the social suffering that is occurring and to promote the immediate passage of federal legislation to implement the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project. If passed by Congress, the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project would hire 100,000 Gulf Coast residents to rebuild New Orleans and communities in the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The residents, who will be given subsidized tickets back to their neighborhoods, will setup temporary housing for themselves, and then rebuild and repair houses, schools, levees, parks, and other civic buildings and spaces. (See www.SolvingPoverty.com <<http://www.SolvingPoverty.com>>)

Louisiana Winter will bring the nation's attention to the continued social suffering in the Gulf Coast during the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday celebration, and demand immediate action from Congress. Louisiana Winter will also be a learning experience that our nation's students will never forget, as they learn first-hand about the social conditions in the Gulf Coast, and how their actions are making history since they will be actively building Dr. King's Beloved Community.

This project will work and be a tremendous success, but only if residents in our community actively participate. We must guide Congress. We must serve as the lead, telling Congress what we need in our community. Please see attached flyers for more details on this exciting program. If you have any questions, please contact Scott Myers-Lipton at smlipton@sjsu.edu or Tracie Washington at twashington@noocpnet.org

Tracie L. Washington, Esq.
Director -- NAACP Gulf Coast Advocacy Center Suite 1400 -- 650 Poydras Street

A National Call to Students – “Louisiana Winter”

In 1964, 800 college students from around the country came to Mississippi to register African American voters who were being denied this constitutional right. In that spirit of democracy, we call upon students to travel to the Gulf Coast to participate this January in Louisiana Winter. The goals of Louisiana Winter are: to turn the nation's attention to the Gulf Coast; to have students witness first-hand the social suffering that is occurring; and to promote the immediate passage of federal legislation to implement the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project.

If passed by Congress, the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project would hire 100,000 Gulf Coast residents to rebuild New Orleans and the surrounding region. The residents, who will be given subsidized tickets back to their neighborhoods, will set up temporary housing for themselves, and then rebuild and repair houses, schools, levees, parks, and other civic buildings. (See www.SolvingPoverty.com)

Responding to the Call: Students

If you are a student, and want to participate in Louisiana Winter, plan on being in the Gulf Coast region from January 14–20, 2007. Teams of 20–40 students will spend Monday through Friday in a different town or parish throughout the Gulf Coast. Each student team will arrive in a town or parish between 7 and 9 am; then, from 9 am–10:30 am, the local residents will tell their stories of the social suffering that has occurred and still is occurring. The students will then go from door to door and store to store between 10:30 am and 5 pm, handing out flyers and educating citizens about the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, and the need to pass immediate Congressional legislation to implement it.

Each night, there will be a town hall meeting from 7–9 pm. All of the citizens that the students have met with throughout the day will be invited in order to have a more in-depth conversation about the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, and to see what actions we can take together to implement it in Congress. In each town forum, the residents will be invited to attend a mass rally on Saturday, January 20th in either New Orleans or Baton Rouge.

To register your participation, please go to www.SolvingPoverty.com, and fill out the on-line student registration form. After you complete the form, we will contact you with information about your student team and where you will need to be at 3 pm, on Sunday, January 14. If you have any questions, contact Seychelle Martinez at SeychelleM@hotmail.com

Responding to the Call: Gulf Coast Wards, Towns, and Parishes

If you are a community group or a citizen in the Gulf Coast, and would like to invite a student team of 20–40 students to your ward, town, or parish, please go to www.SolvingPoverty.com and fill out the on-line community registration form. Here are a list of things we need for each parish or town that is interested in hosting a student team: (a) a place for the students to sleep for 1 night, (b) breakfast, lunch, and dinner for 1 day, (c) a community center that can host the morning discussion and the evening town meeting, (d) 4 or 5 community members to talk to the students in the morning, (e) assistance on where the students should go door to door and store to store, and (f) help with transportation to the next town. If you have any questions, contact Dr. Scott Myers–Lipton at smlipton@sjsu.edu

Responding to the Call: American Citizens

If you are an American citizen and you want to support Louisiana Winter, you can do two things: first, you can come to the rally on January 20, or hold a similar rally in your community, and second, you can make a financial contribution at www.SolvingPoverty.com to support the logistical costs.

Media Kick–Off: A national press conference to announce Louisiana Winter will be held on Thursday, December 14th, one month to the day before students arrive in the Gulf Coast, at 3pm at the Federal Building in New Orleans, Louisiana and at 1 pm at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library in San Jose, California. Dignitaries and students will be in attendance.

Signed,

Brian Jupiter NAACP Chapter New Orleans

Rev. Michael–Ray Mathews Grace Baptist Church – San Jose, CA S

Scott Myers–Lipton, Associate Professor San Jose State University Bill Quigley, Professor Loyola

University New Orleans School of Law Dr. Marty Rowland, P.E., professional civil/environmental engineer, urban planner – New Orleans

Tracie L. Washington, Esq. Director – NAACP Gulf Coast Advocacy Center

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Katrina Amnesty Campaign: on the Status of Prisoners and Public Safety in New Orleans

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Organization:	Author:	Date Published:	Link:
Critical Resistance	Critical Resistance	12/10/2006	http://www.criticalresistance.org/katrina/

Hundreds of New Orleans residents trying to survive Katrina were criminalized, arrested and jailed for the charge of 'looting.' Prisoners were abandoned in flooded cells for days, while those able to escape their cells were held at gunpoint on an overpass without food or water. Prisoners who've never even been convicted of anything, whose cases and records have been lost, who've posted bail, and those whose release dates have past are still being held illegally. Poorer residents returning to their homes are being arrested for curfew violations and coerced into guilty pleas without due process, lawyers or phone calls and used to clean out the now toxic Orleans Parish Prison...

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Background: Critical Resistance is a national grassroots organization that works to end the reliance on prisons and policing as responses to what are social, economic and political problems. We have three U.S. offices — one of which was in the Mid City neighborhood of New Orleans — and 11 chapters, one of which is in New Orleans.

New Orleans is an incredibly important place for Critical Resistance. We held our most recent conference in New Orleans' historic Treme community, drawing thousands from New Orleans and the South. Our Southern Regional office — now destroyed — in New Orleans' Mid City neighborhood was Critical Resistance's hub for the entire South, along with a center for organizing around imprisonment and police brutality in New Orleans itself.

The Status of Prisoners and Public Safety Post–Katrina: In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we know that prisoners and prisoners' family members have been among the most adversely affected.

Prisoners were left to drown in jail cells. Thousands of people in New Orleans area jails were separated from their families and do not know whether their loved ones are alive or dead. Prisoners were refused the right to call their loved ones or held at gunpoint on freeway overpasses.

And now, thousands of prisoners have been moved to at least 35 different prisons across the country, many are facing the prospect of not being released as scheduled, and an unknown number have had their cases thrown into chaos by lost evidence and records.

Nearly 230 people have been booked in a makeshift jail set up in a New Orleans Greyhound Station, the vast majority for the 'crime' of feeding and clothing themselves during the hurricane. The jail has been called "a real

start to rebuilding this city." And, the city is under immense lockdown, with real repercussions for all who live there.

The Demand: We assert that the criminalization of people taking care of themselves and their communities during and after Hurricane Katrina mirrors the larger criminal legal system. The re-building of New Orleans must challenge that system to address genuine public safety and community needs. Our demand is as follows:

We the undersigned demand unconditional amnesty for people impacted by Hurricane Katrina who were, or might be, arrested or charged for trying to take care of themselves and their families and friends, and that those already in the system, whose cases are potentially affected by Katrina, be released immediately. We further demand that all records of their criminalization be permanently erased from the records of all municipal, state, federal, credit, and employment agencies.

We make these demands with the long-term goals of rebuilding New Orleans in a way that fosters genuine public safety and addresses real community needs.

By "Amnesty" we mean that no one should be arrested, charged, tried, sentenced, fined, imprisoned, jailed, detained, involuntarily relocated, or deported.

Our goals are:

- To gain amnesty for those arrested in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina;
- To challenge the use of the prison industrial complex (PIC) in this disaster while structural disasters such as racism and poverty continue to be ignored;
- To challenge the continued imprisonment of people whose cases have been impacted by Katrina, and the imprisonment and prosecution of so-called "looters";
- To call attention to the real dangers inherent in rebuilding New Orleans on a foundation of jail cells and militarized streets, and call for genuine public safety based on community based and designed models.

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crnational@criticalresistance.org

" class="style5">EMAIL TO SIGN ON TO OUR COALITION <!-- InstanceEndEditable -->

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WHY AMNESTY?

Amnesty, or forgiveness of charges, is one of several possible remedies for, or responses to, human rights violations. It is often a key demand raised in response to the imprisonment of people by unjust government actions. The call for amnesty generally demands the immediate unconditional release of prisoners, primarily because of the illegitimacy of the arrest and imprisonment.

The Government Response to Hurricane Katrina is Perpetuating Human Rights Violations in New Orleans
Critical Resistance is challenging the imprisonment and prosecution of people whose cases are impacted by Hurricane Katrina, and the treatment of those incarcerated during and in the wake of the storm. Thousands have been affected—over 6,000 people were seriously endangered in Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) when Katrina hit and flooding began, and hundreds more, arrested after the storm, were thrown into chaos. Take, for example, Melinda Beane who languished in Angola 48 days after she should have been released. Ms. Beane was held on a warrant that was ultimately dismissed, but had no access to courts. Or there is the plight of Pedro Parra-Sanchez, "lost" for 13 months after a post-Katrina arrest. Mr. Parra-Sanchez was not arraigned or tried. He did not see an attorney or the inside of a courtroom until he was finally released in November 2006. Well-documented systemic failures in preparedness and a lack of evacuation plans played a major role in the disaster experienced disproportionately by African American and poorer residents of all races in New Orleans in the days following Katrina. There is growing recognition of the neglect and abandonment of African American and poor residents of New Orleans as a human rights violation and of those uprooted by the storm as internally displaced people due rights and remedies under the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

The U.S. government has ratified three treaties with the United Nations that protect poor people from human rights violations: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention against Torture. Nonetheless, Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath clearly illustrate the ways in which the U.S. ignores its treaty obligations to respect and protect the people of New Orleans.

Like the violations that characterize the storm's effects more broadly, the treatment of the Prisoners of Katrina violates U.S.-ratified international treaties:

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 7, 9, and 10:

- Article 7 prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment — People left in OPP were subjected to horrendous environmental hazards, left without food and water, and many were abandoned in locked cells as waters rose. When prisoners were finally evacuated some were taken to state prisons where they were assaulted with racist slurs, beaten by guards, and subjected to routinized physical torture reminiscent of the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. One man was badly beaten then forced to lick his own blood off the floor. Others were threatened by guards dressed in riot gear, made to kneel in one position perfectly still for hours on end and beaten if they moved.
- Article 9 prohibits arbitrary arrest or detention and the deprivation of liberty except in accordance with the law and established procedure — Many arrested just before and after Katrina did not see an attorney or judge for weeks or months after their arrest, effectively denying them due process and forcing them to spend time in prison they likely would not have otherwise. Many of those arrested directly after the storm, mostly Black residents, were picked up on arbitrary charges or for trying to help family and friends survive the

floods. Others in OPP awaiting trial, but not convicted, were thrown into legal limbo, left inside when evidence in their cases was destroyed in the flooding. If there is no evidence to try these prisoners, due process requires that they must be released.

- Article 10 requires that people deprived of their liberty be treated with humanity and respect — Mayor Ray Nagin issued a mandatory evacuation order just before Katrina hit. He explicitly exempted all OPP prisoners and the staff to run the jail. Sheriff Gusman refused offers to help move prisoners, saying that they would “stay where they belong.” The mayor’s recognition that all residents should leave New Orleans, For more information call 504.304.3784 or go to criticalresistance.org/katrina and his choice to allow 6,000 of them to be left behind in danger simply because they were prisoners is in violation of Article 10. The conditions those prisoners were forced to endure further violated their human rights. They were left in toxic floodwater, with no outside communication (prisoners’ phones were shut off two days before the storm even hit), while officials took over four days to evacuate and even then left prisoners on a highway overpass, bound and under armed guard, maced for standing to stretch or urinate, still with little food or water.

The Convention Against Torture (CAT), Articles 1 and 2 and The Convention of Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Articles 2 and 5:

- Article 1 of CAT prohibits the intentional infliction of severe pain and suffering for any reason based on discrimination of any kind. Article 2 forbids using exceptional circumstances, including natural disaster, as justification for torture. Articles 2 and 5 of CERD requires participating states not to sponsor, defend, or support racial discrimination and asserts the rights of people to bodily safety and security without regard to race — The mostly Black and poor people in OPP were treated by the state as totally expendable when they were abandoned and subsequently abused at the hands of Sheriff’s officers and state prison guards. Prisoners then faced explicit racial harassment and outrageous violence in the prisons to which they were evacuated.

Amnesty is one of the possible remedies for addressing Katrina-related human rights violations in New Orleans. The Prisoners of Katrina Amnesty Campaign seeks amnesty for people who were arrested for trying to take care of themselves and their families, people who were kept in custody after their release date, and people whose rights to due process were violated due to lost or damaged evidence. The campaign demands that the records of prisoners of Katrina be permanently erased from all municipal, state, federal, credit, and employment agencies; that no one should be arrested, charged, tried, sentenced, fined, imprisoned, jailed, detained, involuntarily relocated, or deported as a result of Katrina-specific actions.

After Katrina, the bulk of government apathy was directed at the mostly African American residents of New Orleans, many of whom lacked the resources to evacuate when Mayor Nagin issued a mandatory order to do so. Daily reports from the flood ravaged city highlighted “looting” and rumors of violence in the streets, and at the Superdome and the Convention Center, where thousands of people took shelter and waited for help. For the most part, Black people were characterized as “thugs” and “hoodlums.” After nearly 15,000 National Guard troops moved into New Orleans, Governor Blanco’s well-reported warning that the troops were “locked and loaded” sent a message of terror and resulted in containment through curfews, checkpoints, and intimidation. Critical Resistance recognizes the massive targeting and incarceration of people of color in the U.S. as a violation of the prohibitions in the Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination on state-fostered racial discrimination and seeks to apply the requirements of international human rights law to challenge the systemic root of punishment. Additionally, CR supports new remedies to redress the effects of racism and other human rights violations that do not rely on the very systems perpetuating those violations.

The call for amnesty is a call to address the injustices suffered by those stranded in a chaotic system, and ensures that those who have charges pending or convictions on their records for Katrina-specific “crimes” can move forward with their lives. Today, the frequent use of background checks, particularly for housing and employment, greatly jeopardizes displaced residents’ right to return home. Individuals with a criminal conviction or a pending case, as well as their family members can be excluded from public housing and job opportunities. In a post-Katrina New Orleans, this is particularly egregious. Amnesty minimizes the long-term consequences—particularly as the city rebuilds—for people and communities most impacted by the prison industrial complex.

Further, amnesty can fundamentally change the ways in which we think about and approach notions of genuine public safety. The mobilization of tens of thousands of military and law enforcement personnel in the wake of Katrina and the abandonment, then systematic abuse, of prisoners highlights practices that are neither abnormal nor extreme. Rather, they represent the terrifyingly logical outcomes of the prison industrial complex and its justifications, even in the face of (ostensibly) natural disaster.

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Rebel Survivors: The Vietnamese of New Orleans East won a grassroots victory nobody expected

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Author: Eric Tang
Date Published: 01/01/2007

“IT’S EITHER GOING TO BE A COMMUNITY CELEBRATION or a protest with people getting arrested,” says 22-year-old Minh Nguyen without a hint of irony in his voice. It’s a rainy August night in New Orleans East, and Nguyen is speaking to a room of about 40 teens and twentysomethings who call themselves the American Young Leaders Association (VAYLA). Nguyen, who chairs the group, is presenting the two scenarios that could play out on the morning of Tuesday, Aug. 15. This is when residents anticipate the closing of the Chef Menteur Landfill, a dumpsite located only a half mile up the road from the Village de l’Est neighborhood, the heart of the Vietnamese American community of New Orleans East. Opened in February 2006 under an executive order signed by Mayor Ray Nagin, the unlined landfill was created to hold over a fourth of New Orleans’ Katrina debris. According to community members, most of what is being dumped is unsorted waste, and some fear that toxins are already seeping into the soil—a Louisiana wetland, no less. But the mayor’s executive order is set to expire on the evening of Aug. 14, and after months of community protest, bolstered by political pressure from New Orleans city council members and environmental groups throughout Louisiana, Nagin has stated that he will not seek a renewal of his order. All signs point to the closing of the landfill come the morning of Aug. 15. But Nguyen and his fellow

organizers do not presume anything. For there are several wild cards still at play, including the possibility that the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ LDEQ – Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality)-- an agency that many residents had originally counted on as an ally--may actually assert its authority in keeping the site open. So VAYLA is now preparing for plan A and plan B: the former, a celebration in honor of the community's victory should the landfill be closed; the latter, a massive protest that will include a human blockade at the landfill entrance, effectively preventing the trucks that dump at the site each day from entering.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

In the case of a protest, arrests are an absolute certainty. The ardent hope in the room is that those in power will simply find it politically untenable to keep the landfill open. Yet tonight one also senses that the VAYLA members are itching for a good fight. There is spirited talk of what it will take to miss work and school in order to do "jail time." And it's not just youthful exuberance or devil-may-care posturing that drives the talk. After being displaced for months, these youth understand what there is to lose in life.

"The landfill is a hard slap in the face," says Steven, 16. "It's like the mayor was saying he didn't care how difficult it was for us to get back here." Steven and his parents, who for 20 years worked as crabbers in the Gulf Coast, initially evacuated to Houston before relocating to Southern California. There his parents made a decision to permanently relocate to the west coast. They assumed that the shrimp and crab industries of the Gulf had been decimated by Katrina. But by December, only two months after his family's relocation, Steven began to show clinical signs of depression. A once straight-A student, he found himself unable to concentrate on schoolwork. Before long, he couldn't muster the mental and physical energy to go to classes. His visits to a therapist did little to help him. Finally, he pleaded with his parents to give New Orleans another try. Steven's family returned to Village de l'Est at the beginning of the new year. Along with their neighbors, they gutted and rebuilt their home. Then came the landfill.

Katrina had dumped the waters of the Intercoastal Canal into the living rooms and bedrooms of Village de l'Est. And no sooner had the community returned than the mayor ordered a thousand trucks each day to dump Katrina trash in its backyard.

The morning of Aug. 15 turned out to be a celebration. Nearly 250 residents and allies gathered at the shuttered gates of the landfill, cheering its closure. With the anniversary of Katrina less than two weeks away, the victory out East served as a vital boost for those concerned with the right of return and a just reconstruction in New Orleans. But it also took many New Orleanians by complete surprise. By January, as most displaced residents were only beginning to trickle back into the city to pick up the pieces of their lives, the normally low-key Vietnamese of New Orleans East were already four months into their return and rebuilding process. The community was so well organized that it was able to mobilize over 400 protestors to the steps of City Hall for the first landfill rally. For all the news of returnees scraping by without basic resources such as electricity and running water, the residents who took to City Hall that day somehow managed to arrive with sleekly printed signs and T-shirts denouncing the landfill. Nobody--neither the elected officials nor the protestors' supporters outside--was prepared to see this level of organization.

Soon the struggle over the landfill grabbed headlines in The New York Times and other major print media outlets. Meanwhile the TV news networks followed the story week-to-week, anxiously awaiting its final outcome. New Orleans East, hardly known as a hotbed of activism, had overnight become something of a beacon for a grassroots movement determined to assert the rights of the most marginalized Katrina refugees.

As an Asian American community subsisting in a New Orleans long divided by the black-and-white fault line--the depth of which was fully exposed by Katrina--the residents of Village de l'Est are especially susceptible to enlistment as a model minority wedge. Yet a deeper and more clear-eyed examination of the conditions that led to the community's impressive organizing efforts reveals that the landfill struggle is not so much an example of model minority-ism as it is a model example of what it takes for the grassroots to win in post-Katrina New Orleans. Indeed, as a "success story" it is, by turns, a lesson in why intergenerational and multiracial collaborations are indispensable, a crash-course in the distinct political history of the Southeast Asian refugees, and a startling example of just how quickly the longstanding politics of a community can shift.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

"The landfill struggle, everything we're fighting for out here--this is about the Vietnamese and the Blacks together," asserts James Bui. The Gulf Coast regional director of the National Association of Vietnamese American Service Agencies (NAVASA), Bui has these days grown accustomed to fielding questions about Black-Asian relations in New Orleans. He is quick to stay on message: The Vietnamese Americans are not in this for themselves; and they will not be cast against African Americans. The topic comes up quite a bit when one considers that pre-Katrina New Orleans East was approximately 75 percent Black, with Village de l'Est representing the sole Vietnamese American majority (yet, even here, Blacks constituted well-over a third of the neighborhood). Post-Katrina, however, the return of Black residents to the East has, per capita, paled in comparison to that of the Vietnamese. And although most returnees are in the same boat when it comes to the rebuilding of homes, public schools and hospitals, the Vietnamese Americans have been exceptional in their quick reopening of ethnic community institutions and businesses. As a startling example, 75 percent of the Vietnamese businesses are now open in the East, compared to less than 10 percent of Black-owned businesses. To be sure, the disparity along racial lines can seem rather stark at times. And according to Bui, these differences are only exacerbated by a mainstream media that insists on viewing the organizing efforts out East as strictly a "Vietnamese thing." These media accounts often leave out salient details such as the extent to which the political strategy that led to the closure of the landfill was directed by a coalition of groups known as Citizens for a Stronger New Orleans East, which consists of both Vietnamese- and Black-led groups. Or the fact that the Southern Christian Leadership Council lent invaluable support to Queen Mary of Vietnam Catholic Church--the religious, cultural, and political hub of the Vietnamese community of New Orleans--as the latter coordinated return and rebuilding efforts. Or, finally, that Father Thi Vien Nguyen, head of the church, has made it a point to demonstrate multiracial solidarity by attending the rallies, town hall meetings and community events put on by Black community groups seeking the right to return and the opening of schools and health centers. "These are the things you're not reading about in the Times," says Bui.

And then there's the matter of where to put the remaining Katrina debris now that Chef Menteur landfill is closed (as well as the question of where to move the mountain of trash that currently sits at the site). LDEQ and the Waste Management Corporation, which runs the landfill, have their sights set on Waggerman, a multiracial, working-class town on the outskirts of New Orleans. Although officials have assured residents there that the site will be fully certified and properly lined, local resistance to the dumping has already begun. "I'm completely with them," says Father Vien, suggesting that the Vietnamese American community would stand squarely with the protestors of Waggerman should dumping commence there.

"I don't see any resentment of the Vietnamese coming from the Black community or any other community," says Norris Henderson. "What I see is an example of what we all can do if we hang in there together." Henderson serves as the director of Safe Streets, Strong Communities, a New Orleans grassroots group that is leading the organizing efforts to reform the dysfunctional NOLA prison and criminal justice system, a system that overwhelmingly targets young Black men. Having served over 27 years in prison himself, Henderson began his organizing career as an inmate, working from the inside to successfully win prison reforms under the most difficult circumstances. Henderson knows perseverance when he sees it: "Most people don't think you can win. They're too quick to become defeatist. But [the Vietnamese Americans] had a common goal and they were persistent--they had what it took."

Yet, in assessing all that it took, one cannot overlook the Catholic church as a generative force behind the social and political networking. Built in the mid-1980s, Mary Queen of Vietnam is the largest Vietnamese Catholic church in the United States. "We were lucky," Father Vien remarked. "The church was not badly damaged and this allowed us to get back in [to Village de l'Est] to coordinate the return and rebuilding effort." Indeed, for those returning only weeks after the storm, the church served not only as temporary shelter, but as the site for food and clothing donations, as well as a clearinghouse for information on the whereabouts of missing family and friends.

Along with the church, there is also the community's long history of uprooting and displacement to consider, a past that may shed some light on their precipitant, against-all-odds return in Katrina's wake. This is embodied in an 88-year-old woman from Village de l'Est who goes by the nickname Ba Tam (Grandma Tam). When boat rescuers knocked on Ba Tam's house on the Wednesday following the massive flood, she told them that she was feeling too weak to evacuate; she would prefer to rest for a little while, and then leave with the last boat carrying Father Vien and the other priests coordinating the rescues. But nobody informed Father Vien. By Thursday, Ba Tam realized that she had been left alone in Village de l'Est. She survived by catching fish swimming in the flooded waters--having been "shocked" by the salt water from the Intercoastal Canal, the fish swam slowly and were rather easy to catch. Then, Ba Tam cured the fish on the scorching roof tops of abandoned cars. In time she had enough food to last her a month. She would be stranded for a total of eight days. According to Father Vien, surviving like this was nothing new for Ba Tam. Her life as a refugee had long ago prepared her for this.

"Before Katrina, I guess you could call us libertarians," says Father Vien. "Our attitude toward government was: You don't bother us, and we won't bother you." But Katrina ushered in a new era. "It was impossible for us to not speak up," he said. "We realized that if we speak, the powers will listen. They would have to heed the people's voice. We had a responsibility to contribute, to push for government accountability."

For NAVASA's Bui, there's no mistaking the profound political shifts taking hold of the community. "This is the first time I've seen a Vietnamese church practicing liberation theology," Bui said. His point is substantiated by the droves of young Vietnamese-American progressive students and activists who have come to New Orleans East over the past year to support not only the rebuilding effort, but to take part in what some consider an unprecedented grassroots movement--a sign of what may be on the horizon for Vietnamese American politics. In the week leading up to the closure of the landfill, the VAYLA offices were abuzz with young activists from around the country, including a cadre of law school students from UCLA and community youth organizers from Houston, Boston, Philadelphia and Florida. All were there to lend support to the landfill struggle. Mai Dang, 22, from Orange County, is part of the Dan Than Corps, a group of nearly a dozen young Asian Americans from around the country, mostly Vietnamese, who have committed at least a year of their time to rebuilding communities in New Orleans East, as well as in Biloxi and Gulf Port, Mississippi. For Dang, the Vietnamese American youth who have flocked to New Orleans represent a "spark" for what could be longer-term change in a historically conservative Vietnamese American political landscape. "When people first come down here, they come with the desire to just help out, to give back," observes Dang. "But soon they realize that what we're really fighting for is a social justice movement."

Eric Tang is a New York City-based writer and activist.

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Common Ground Health Clinic Updates

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Organization: Common Ground Health Clinic
Date Published: 01/06/2007

Media Release
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January 06, 2007
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RECOVERY GRANTS AWARDED TO HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS SERVING HURRICANE-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

The Baxter International Foundation Health Recovery Fund awards grants totaling \$833,813 to support organizations working to improve the health of Mid Southerners

NEW ORLEANS, LA (January 6, 2007) – The Common Ground Health Clinic (CGHC) Is proud to announce its reception of a grant intended for the formation of the Community Health and Strength Project (CGHC-CH&SP) totaling \$200,000 from the Foundation for The Mid-South (FMS) on behalf of The Baxter International Foundation Health Recovery Fund. The fund was established in February of 2006 to support the recovery and restoration efforts of community-based health care clinics, nonprofits, and other community-based health services in the Mid South after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The guidelines for this round of grants were developed by the Mid South Health Advisory Committee based on feedback from over 150 health care professionals during a regional conference on improving health disparities in the region—including a focus on health inequities caused by socio-economic conditions.

The organizations receiving funding are:

- Catholic Charities Trauma Recovery for Youth serving the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Central Mississippi, and the Delta (\$75,000)
- Boat People SOS, Inc. serving Biloxi, Mississippi, and the New Orleans, Louisiana, area (\$192,480)
- Common Ground Health Clinic serving the New Orleans, Louisiana, area (\$200,000)
- University of Arkansas for Medical Science—Area Health Education Center serving Sevier County, Arkansas (\$189,583)
- YWCA of Greater Baton Rouge, Louisiana, serving 11 parishes including the city of Baton Rouge (\$176,750).

About The Community Health And Strength Project

Common Ground Health Clinic – a neighborhood-based primary care clinic, committed to anti-racist work – proposes a Community Health and Strength Project in which explicit anti-racism education and initiatives would combine with health education, community projects and direct health care delivery to address underlying health problems in an area of entrenched poverty suffering from the collapse of the charity health care system after Hurricane Katrina. The intention of this project is to expand capacity for existing programs and grow new approaches for improving general health (with a specific focus on hypertension and diabetes) through 1) direct health education; 2) training community health educators; 3) developing healthier lifestyles/meals through culturally and community-accepted mechanism; 4) training to make racist structures visible and supporting working groups to focus on specific problems; and 5) providing community mediation and training community mediators to sustain a neighborhood justice program.

About The Baxter International Foundation

The Baxter International Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Baxter International Inc., helps organizations increase access to healthcare in the United States and around the world. The Foundation, established in 1981, began to focus exclusively on increasing access to healthcare in 2002—particularly for the disadvantaged and underserved—in and near communities where Baxter employees live and work.

Baxter International Inc., through its subsidiaries, assists healthcare professionals and their patients with the treatment of complex medical conditions, including hemophilia, immune disorders, cancer, infectious diseases, kidney disease, trauma, and other conditions. The company applies its expertise in medical devices, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology to make a meaningful difference in patients' lives. For more information, please visit www.baxter.com.

About the Foundation for the Mid South

The Foundation for the Mid South is a nonprofit organization that invests in people and strategies that build philanthropy and promote racial, social, and economic equity in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The Foundation has both acquired and leveraged millions of dollars from inside the Mid South and nationally to support and expand nonprofits and leadership in the region.

About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful, and timely change. For more than 30 years, the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.

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Public Housing Takes Center Stage in Post-Katrina Struggle. New Documentary Tells the Story of Those Fighting to Return Home

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Organization: [Advancement Project](#) **Author:** Crystal N. Hill **Date Published:** 01/12/2007

Link:

<http://www.advancementproject.org/cjrc-newsletter/01-07/public-housing-katrina.h...>

More than a year after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the Gulf Coast, displaced residents of New Orleans are embroiled in a heated dispute with the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO). Although most of the city's public housing actually withstood the hurricanes with little or no damage, residents are fighting for the basic right to return to the public housing developments they call home. This ongoing struggle to return to public housing in New Orleans will undoubtedly remain a hot-button issue on the racial justice agenda this year.

In 2006, the issue of affordable housing and re-opening public housing reached a boiling point, as Katrina

survivors organized, protested, pitched tents, and testified against the refusal of HUD and HANO to allow public housing residents to return to New Orleans. All of the residents involved are African-American. Unable to afford housing elsewhere, many languish in strange cities, moving around from week to week, unsure as to when they will ever have a steady place of residence.

To raise public awareness about the issue, Advancement Project and Washington Koen Productions collaborated to produce a documentary titled, "This is My Home: The Fight for Public Housing in New Orleans." This 23-minute film is about the plight of thousands of families who remain displaced throughout the country and shut out of New Orleans. It is a tribute to the perseverance of the displaced residents of New Orleans and a call to action to all justice-minded people to support the residents' right to return home.

Public housing residents were among those ordered to evacuate New Orleans in August 2005 in the immediate wake of Hurricane Katrina. These displaced residents are scattered throughout the country, struggling to make ends meet, far away their jobs, and without their social networks. When they were ordered to leave New Orleans, they took only what they could carry. They expected to return when the mandatory evacuation order was lifted six weeks later. It has been almost a year and a half. A majority of these families, approximately 4,000, are still waiting to come home.

Meanwhile, HANO and HUD are using the misery of displaced residents to redesign public housing in the city, in willful disregard of the severe housing crisis in New Orleans. This is a crisis, not an opportunity. These housing agencies are acting unjustly and inhumanely. They are also wasting taxpayers' dollars. Documents from HANO show that it will cost \$400 million more to demolish and rebuild (and rebuild fewer units) than it would to repair and re-open these public housing developments. Displaced residents are using government-issued vouchers for more than \$1,000 each to help pay rent in foreign cities, when they could be moved back into their own homes if the government just let them return. Furthermore, the plan advanced by HANO and HUD seeks to drastically reduce the affordable housing stock despite its need now more than ever.

Advancement Project Staff Attorney Anita Sinha is part of the litigation and advocacy team that has been involved in efforts to assist displaced New Orleans public housing residents. She said, "Post-Katrina New Orleans has become a laboratory for government officials and private individuals who are concerned more about profit than people." She notes that the situation in post-Katrina New Orleans has been about the increased privatization of the public sector, primarily in three areas: public housing, public schools, and health care. Public schools are being replaced by charter schools. Public hospitals that used to provide low- or no-cost health care to those in need remain unopened. Similarly, government and private institutions are using Katrina as an excuse to decimate public housing and turn it into so-called "mixed-income" developments that leave poor residents out in the cold.

Last year, Advancement Project spearheaded a public housing lawsuit on behalf of displaced residents desiring to return home. There is a possibility the case will go to trial in 2007. According to Sinha, the "This is My Home" DVD is part of a larger communications advocacy strategy designed to reach out to Congress, the media, and residents to "make them feel more connected to the lawsuit," says Sinha, especially those displaced residents who have been very active in the lawsuit but live several states away from New Orleans since the storm.

Members of Congress have helped to give momentum to the public housing struggle. Lawmakers who chair committees such as the Housing Oversight, Financial Services, and Ways and Means Committees, are calling for investigations of the public housing situation in New Orleans, requesting hearings, and posing questions to HUD. Working to inform elected officials about the lawsuit and other efforts to assist displaced New Orleans residents is a large part of the work that is to be done in 2007.

In addition to the fight for public housing in New Orleans, Advancement Project will continue its effort to build legal resources for the indigent throughout the Gulf Coast. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the minimal legal infrastructure that existed in the Gulf Coast, while at the same time drastically increased the need for legal services. This created a call for a national network of lawyers to fill the vast gaps in resources for post-Katrina victims. Advancement Project formed the Grassroots Legal Network in the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes to connect Gulf Coast grassroots organizations with desperately-needed legal resources. The Grassroots Legal Network's co-convenor Sinha reports that the need for the network continues to be critical, and will be a significant part of Advancement Project's post-Katrina work in 2007.

The other priority for Advancement Project's 2007 post-Katrina work is addressing the rampant labor violations that plague the city. Sinha characterized Advancement Project's New Orleans' workers' rights project as "building a multiracial understanding and coalition" between immigrant workers who are being exploited and African-American workers who continue to be shut out of their homes and, consequently, jobs in New Orleans. Advancement Project worked with the National Immigration Law Center and organizers from New Orleans in 2006 to develop the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice. Advancement Project Co-Director Judith Browne-Dianis serves on the center's advisory board. This collaboration led to the release of *And Injustice for All: Workers' Lives in the Reconstruction of New Orleans*, a compilation of personal narratives based on interviews with more than 700 workers.

As this year moves forward, Advancement Project will keep its hand on the pulse of these and other injustices suffered by displaced Gulf Coast residents at the hands of government and private institutions. In particular, as the public housing struggle escalates, Advancement Project and local partners will continue serving as advocates for these residents and support their right to return home.

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Occupation at St. Bernard Housing Project

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Organization:	Date Published:	Link:
Survivors' Village	01/15/2007	http://www.survivorsvillage.com/pr20070115_occ.html

Media coordinator: Soleil Rodrigue / survivorsvillage@gmail.com

">survivorsvillage@gmail.com / 504.717.7324

St. Bernard Resident: Stephanie Mingo / vmingo@bellsouth.net">vmingo@bellsouth.net / 504.529.3171

January 15, 2007 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

Occupation at St. Bernard Housing Project

New Orleans, LA (January 15, 2007) –Members of Mayday NOLA (maydaydc.mahost.org), a housing rights advocacy group, are currently occupying undisclosed buildings in the St. Bernard Housing Project. Mayday NOLA has committed to stay in the buildings until an agreement that is satisfactory to a board representative of the residents who requested the action is reached with HUD and HANO.



“It is our intention to continue to occupy St. Bernard in protest until the residents are satisfied that their demands have been met. On this we are not negotiable,” says a letter from the occupiers. “Any negotiation must be done with representatives of the public housing residents whose homes are being threatened and who have requested that we undertake this occupation.” The occupation was planned to coincide with a Martin Luther King Jr. Day protest in which public housing residents will go through a fence separating them from their homes, enter their apartments, and begin to rehabilitate them.

“Our homes are livable,” says Sharon Seans Jasper, a St. Bernard resident and organizer. “We will not let the city destroy them.”

“We support the actions of the occupiers and hope that they will help convince HANO and HUD to meet the demands of displaced residents,” says rally organizer Endesha Juakali of Survivors Village. “Mayday NOLA has been willing to take these actions, but it was HUD, HANO, and the Mayor’s Office that created the necessity for occupation.”

HANO and HUD plan to demolish over 5000 units of affordable public housing, housing that is desperately needed for families that wish to move back to New Orleans. In a market where rents have increased between 70 and 300 percent since Katrina, inflated rents and the lack of subsidized housing have been a major factor in preventing evacuees from returning to their homes. Finding private landlords that accept housing vouchers is extremely difficult, and finding affordable housing without subsidization is nearly impossible for public housing recipients.

HUD’s own cost analysis reveals that their plan to demolish and rebuild will waste taxpayers’ money. A recent motion for summary judgment filed in a current suit to reopen the development (available at: justicefornorleans.org) cites HUD documents that show the demolition and redevelopment of public housing “will end up costing over \$175 million more than extensively modernizing the developments, and upwards of \$450 million more than simply repairing them would cost.” The motion also argues that the demolitions have racial implications. “Prior to Katrina over 5,100 African-American families lived in New Orleans’ public housing. Nearly 14 months later, only approximately 1,000 have been allowed to return. HANO’s actions clearly have disproportionately harmed African-Americans and have lead to the overall decline in the city’s African American population since Katrina.”

This action is timed to honor Martin Luther King Jr. who said “Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”

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As Police Arrest Public Housing Activists in New Orleans, Federal Officials Try to Silence Leading Attorney for Low-Income Resid

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Organization:	Date Published:	Link:
Democracy Now!	01/31/2007	http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=07/01/31/1543227

Dear allies,
The New Orleans PO’s SWAT team raided one public housing development, CJ Peete, yesterday afternoon. A form’er public housing resident was arrested for . asking why they are kicking down the doors of people’s homes. This morning at 2 A.M, the SWAT team raided the St. Bernard development and arrested two individuals (who are not public housing residents) in the development’s community center. Amy Goodman did a great piece on the issue this morning, interviewing Bill Quigley and one of the individuals arrested from jail.
<http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=07/01/31/1543227>
More to follow ... Anita

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As Police Arrest Public Housing Activists in New Orleans, Federal Officials Try to Silence Leading Attorney for Low-Income Residents

New Orleans police raided the Saint Bernard housing project this morning where activists had been occupying a building to prevent government plans to demolish it. Meanwhile, the Housing Authority of New Orleans has sent a letter to one of the lead lawyers for the residents, Bill Quigley, asking him to stop speaking to the media and to remove statements he made that appear in several online videos. [includes rush transcript]

New Orleans police raided the Saint Bernard housing project this morning where activists had been occupying a building to prevent government plans to demolish it. Two people were arrested. Last summer, federal housing officials announced plans to demolish four large public housing developments even though tens of thousands of low-income New Orleans residents remain displaced. The move sparked one of the most intense struggles in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Just before the program we received a call from one of the two activists arrested this morning. Jamie "Bork" Loughner spoke to us from Orleans Parish Prison. She described what happened.

New Orleans activist Jamie "Bork" Loughner, speaking from Orleans Parish Prison.

Well the battle over the future of public housing in New Orleans recently took an unexpected turn. A few days ago the Housing Authority of New Orleans sent a letter to one of the lead lawyers for the residents asking him to stop speaking to the media and to remove statements he made that appear in several online videos. The letter accused attorney Bill Quigley of making "prejudicial extrajudicial statements to the press and others." The New Orleans Housing Authority also threatened to haul Quigley in front of the state's Bar Association's disciplinary board if he did not agree to stop discussing the case.

Bill Quigley joins me now from New Orleans. He is a law professor at Loyola University. We invited the New Orleans Housing Authority on the program. They did not respond to our request.

Bill Quigley. Law professor at Loyola University in New Orleans, also the director of the Law Clinic and Gillis Long Poverty Law Center at Loyola University.

RUSH TRANSCRIPT

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more...

AMY GOODMAN: Before the program, we received a call from one of the two people arrested this morning. "Bork" Loughner spoke with us from the Orleans Parish Prison. She described what happened.

JAMIE "BORK" LOUGHNER: Last night at 2:30 in the morning, MayDay NOLA, which had been in the middle of a 17-day occupation of the New Day Community Center, with permission of the leaseholders, had been raided by SWAT team members at gunpoint. It was quite scary.

We were there because we believed in the fact that people who lived in these public homes -- St. Bernard Project and CJ Peete and the others -- deserve to come back. There's thousands of families that have been displaced, almost 5,000 units that are scheduled for demolition, and we believe firmly that they shouldn't be demolished, that people should be allowed to return home to New Orleans to their communities. We believe that these are internally displaced people here in the United States and that everything should be done to get them home.

The public housing development is in good shape. It was solid concrete walls. Even though it was flooded, it was architecturally sound, according to MIT architects. And there's no reason for HANO to decide to hassle people who are just trying to reopen public housing in and even have them arrested, when they should be concentrating on getting housing back for families that need it.

AMY GOODMAN: Jamie "Bork" Loughner, speaking from the Orleans Parish Prison. She was arrested this morning.

Well, the battle over the future of public housing in New Orleans recently took an unexpected turn. A few days ago, the Housing Authority of New Orleans sent a letter to one of the lead lawyers for the residents, asking him to stop speaking to the media and to remove statements he made that appeared on several online videos. The letter accused attorney Bill Quigley of making "prejudicial extrajudicial statements to the press and others." The New Orleans Housing Authority also threatened to haul Quigley in front of the state's Bar Association's disciplinary

board if he doesn't agree to stop discussing the case.

Bill Quigley joins us now from New Orleans, a law professor at Loyola University. We invited the New Orleans Housing Authority on the program; they didn't respond to our request. Bill Quigley, what is happening in New Orleans?

BILL QUIGLEY: Well, thank you for helping explain what's going on in New Orleans, but we are really engaged in a fight for the soul and spirit of our community. The public housing struggle is part of the overall struggle in the city to see that there is room in the new New Orleans for renters, for working-class people, for the elderly and for the disabled. We have significant racial overtones to who is being excluded from the city and very significant economic overtones in terms of who is being excluded from the city.

And the public housing struggle is about 4,500 affordable apartments that the federal government, HUD, is trying to demolish to make way for many fewer apartments that would be pitched to a different audience altogether. The people in charge in the federal government, in cooperation with some private developers in the areas, have actually seen Katrina as an opportunity to get rid of the lowest-income people in the community and to, in a sense, start over without the participation of people who used to live here, who could go back into their apartments on very short notice, and that the raid this morning and the charges that have been filed against residents who went back in to clean their own homes, the threats against myself and Tracie Washington, the civil rights lawyers who are working with the residents, just shows that this is really a pitched battle for who gets to come back to New Orleans and who is going to participate in the rebuilding.

AMY GOODMAN: We're talking to Bill Quigley at PBS station WLAE in New Orleans. You've got a piece that's on [Counterpunch](#) right now online: "Why is HUD Using Tens of Millions in Katrina Money to Bulldoze 4,534 Public Housing Apartments in New Orleans When It Costs Less to Repair and Open Them Up?" Well, what is the city saying? Do you have the support of, for example, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin?

BILL QUIGLEY: No. We really don't. The residents have the support of very few elected officials. Most elected officials are remaining silent. They're not coming out in favor of the demolition, but they're also not opposing it. There's a real transition going on in New Orleans over and a struggle over who's going to be in charge. Is it going to be the white business community who is going to be politically and in every other way in charge of the community, or is it going to be the majority of the city who -- or its citizens pre-Katrina, where the city was over two-thirds African American and over half renters and mostly-working class people? The white power structure, assisted in many cases by black professional workers, are in the process of trying to claim the city and claim a new vision for the city that does not include the people who used to live here.

And the tragedy is that they are using the money that Congress gave to the victims of Katrina, and they are what I call like a Robin Hood in reverse. They are stealing the money that should be coming to the low-income community, and instead converting that money and using it for property owners and the developers and the like. And in case of public housing, they're using Katrina tax credits, they're using Katrina rebuilding money in excess of \$100 million and additional money to destroy houses that are structurally sound and are actually in better physical shape than almost any of the residential buildings in the city of New Orleans. So they are using money to help Katrina -- that was designated to help Katrina victims, to destroy affordable housing, put money into the pockets of developers and then put up some other housing that they're not going to let low-income people back into.

AMY GOODMAN: So where are these people, if they're not allowed back home?

BILL QUIGLEY: Some are in the suburbs or around New Orleans in a Section 8 house or that, but most of the people are actually still very far away from New Orleans in Houston, in San Antonio, in Memphis, in Birmingham, Atlanta, and really do not have the ability to come back unless there is affordable housing available. Our rents in the city of New Orleans have gone up 70% in the city, 80% in the suburbs, because we still have tens of thousands of properties that are destroyed and demolished.

And the city is undergoing an overall privatization. They are privatizing the public education system. They are privatizing public housing. They are privatizing public healthcare, and they are privatizing the public employee's work force. So the public housing is really the most visible symbol of the attack on the poor, the attack on African Americans, attack on the elderly, the disabled, renters and people who the powers that be in Washington, in Baton Rouge and in New Orleans would just as soon never come back.

AMY GOODMAN: What are you going to do about this demand that you be quiet, that you remove the video from the website that includes your comments. AP did a story on this, quoting Michael Gerhardt, a constitutional law scholar at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, saying, "To bypass the judge is unusual, and to make the threats is even more unusual."

BILL QUIGLEY: Yeah, I have been involved in a lot of controversial exchanges and struggles with governmental agencies in the past, but this is really -- to have the federal government and the local government say, "Stop talking to the press," insist that interviews on documentaries be taken down and the like is just -- it's very troubling. I have told them I'm not going to do it. I said no lawyer looks forward to anybody's attempt to yank their license, or a gag order from the court, but I said we're not going to do it. This is a fight that the residents and the residents' advocates, civil rights lawyers, are involved in that goes on in Congress, goes on in the state legislature, city council and every place. It's not like some private divorce case, where you want both sides to be quiet and just handle it in court. This is an issue of public policy. It's an issue of the direction of our country. It's an issue of economic justice, and it's actually, as the person who spoke to you from jail said, it is a matter of international concern. These are internally displaced people that the United Nations Human Rights Council has said have been mistreated on the basis of race and their economic status. So we're not going to be quiet. The residents are not going to stop fighting.

AMY GOODMAN: Bill Quigley, just 30 seconds, then we have to move on. But 16 protesters were given prison terms this week. This is on an entirely different issue. But you're the connection between them, an attorney for the School of the Americas protesters given prison terms ranging from one to six months during the annual demonstration. They were charged with trespassing.

BILL QUIGLEY: Yes. People, ages 17 to 70, went to federal court in Georgia earlier this week, and I was with them, gave beautiful testimony about their connections and solidarity with the people of Latin America who have been abused, killed, massacred by graduates of the School of the Americas, now called WHINSEC, that's on the grounds of Fort Benning. So that's part of an ongoing struggle, where over 200 people have spent 92 years in prison

standing up in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Latin American. So people should take a look at the soaw.org website, and they can find some more about it.

AMY GOODMAN: Bill Quigley, thanks so much for joining us, law professor at Loyola University in New Orleans. And a shout out to our friends at the PBS station WLAE, where he is.

To purchase an audio or video copy of this entire program, [click here for our new online ordering](#) or call 1 (888) 999-3877.

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Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital in New Orleans: A timeline since its forced closure after Hurricane Katrina

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Author: K. Brad Ott
Date Published: 02/01/2007

Timeline compiled by K. Brad Ott, Department of Sociology, The University of New Orleans. bradott@bellsouth.net

August 30, 2005 – Floodwaters from breached levees and floodwalls by Hurricane Katrina inundate the basement of the Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital, curtailing most back-up generator power, water and sanitary systems. J

September 4, 2005 – After waiting five days for rescue of its patients the Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital and University Hospital were fully evacuated after flooding compromised the respective facilities. 2

September 5–19, 2005 – Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital Emergency Department, LSU and Tulane University residents, U.S. military personnel and others proceed to ready the hospital for reopening, by draining floodwaters from Big Charity's basement; reconnecting its electrical power systems; clearing all 21 floors of perishable refuse; fully cleaning its first three floors (including its Emergency Department and psychiatric Crisis Intervention Unit) and restoring its requisite operating and air conditioning systems. 3

September 19, 2005 – Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Donald Smithburg of LSU Health Science Center, Health Care Services Division (LSUHSC-HCSD) orders its medical staff and U.S. military units to leave Big Charity, declaring Charity Hospital permanently closed. This is in spite of preliminary clearance from the U.S. Public Health Service, FEMA, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the latter granting authorization for the U.S. military units to be in Charity) that it is ready to reopen. LSUHSC-HCSD instead orders its medical staff, assisted by U.S. military units, to erect a makeshift MASH tent-like facility (which become known as "E-MED" tents) to be located in the once-flooded parking lot across from University Hospital. This opens in late September and is dubbed "The Spirit of Charity". 4

Mid September 2005 – The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) returns all but \$8 million of a \$352 million advance grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); DHH says it could not hang onto the funds because it had not allocated a use for them. By year's end more than 3000 workers would be laid off from Charity Hospital in New Orleans alone. Limited investigation through Louisiana Public Records requests reveals the bulk of the \$352 million may have been for the reopening of Big Charity. 5

Late September 2005 – LSUHSC-HCSD's consulting and engineering firm, ADAMS Management Corporation (which had completed a report two months before Hurricane Katrina promoting a new replacement facility for New Orleans' Charity Hospital), assesses both Avery C. Alexander and University Hospitals and declares them to be 65% and 68% damaged respectively, effectively declaring them to be unsalvageable. (Nevertheless a year later LSUHSC-HCSD officials opt to reopen the more damaged yet smaller University Hospital building after repairs begun in the spring of 2006, as prompted under threat of Louisiana State Legislative action). 6

October–November 2005 – The USS Comfort, a U.S. Navy hospital ship, is docked at the Poland Avenue Wharf and operates as New Orleans' Level One Trauma Unit because Charity Hospital remained shuttered. 7

Early October 2005 – "The Spirit of Charity" moves its E-MED tents to New Orleans' Morial Convention Center and remains there until eventually forced out because of the resumption of convention business. 8

December 17, 2005 – The New York Times publishes a report by Adam Nossiter entitled "Dispute Over Historic Hospital for the Poor Pits Doctors Against the State"; exposing to the wider public for the first time the active struggle between LSUHSC-HCSD and its medical staff over the viability of Charity Hospital. By early 2006 LSU-employed medical staff was warned against further public protestations, lest they risk losing their jobs and professional credentials. Other newspapers and media, including USA Today and the BBC World Service, feature similar reports. Curiously, aside from a commentary by columnist Lolis Eric Elie, New Orleans' only daily newspaper, The Times-Picayune, has as of late January 2007 yet to feature a report or even a letter to the editor about the dispute. 9

March 1, 2006 -- "The Spirit of Charity" relocates yet again to a formerly-flooded and shuttered department store, Lord and Taylor in the New Orleans Centre next to the Superdome. Meanwhile the unflooded yet readied Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital remains unused and closed, thereby apparently losing its key Joint Committee on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) certification by allowing it to lapse. 10

January 16, 2006 – A group of former Charity Hospital medical residents march in the Martin Luther King Jr. march from the Lower Ninth Ward, raising their demand to reopen Charity Hospital. They subsequently link up with activists from the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Committee (PHRFOC) and other community groups. J I

January 27, 2006 -- Responding to returning Oklahoma National Guard members who had helped clean up Charity Hospital, United States Senator Tom Coburn, MD (R-OK) wrote a letter to LSUHSC-HCSD CEO Donald Smithburg, demanding that Charity Hospital be reopened; and that a real independent evaluation of the facility occur. Following an apparent courtesy letter by Smithburg, the request was ignored. 12

March 25, 2006 – More than 300 former Charity Hospital workers, residents, patients and their families, plus other concerned people rallied outside the Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital to "Rally to Save Charity Hospital". Amongst those in attendance was Dr. James Moises, who resigned his position as part of the Charity Hospital Emergency Department in order not to be silenced in demanding that it be reopened, and that an independent evaluation of the facility be conducted. Medical staff on-hand dubbed themselves "Doctors Without Hospitals" in wry allusion to the international group "Doctors Without Borders". The rally was organized in conjunction with the PHRFOC.13

April 6, 2006 – Sparked by the "Rally to Save Charity Hospital", the New Orleans City Council unanimously passed a resolution demanding that the Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital be reopened. 14

Early April 2006 -- LSUHSC-HCSD opens a Level One Trauma Center in the former Elmwood Medical Center, now owned by Ochsner Hospital, 15 miles from downtown New Orleans. 15

June 8, 2006 – A press conference was held in front of Charity Hospital in support of two Louisiana State Legislative bills that potentially would lead to its reopening. Senate Bill 697, authored by Senator Diana Bajoie of New Orleans (who is also Senatc Pro-Tempore), demanded the reopening of the Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans (MCLNO encompasses both Big Charity and University Hospitals), House Concurrent Resolution 89, authored by Representative Kenneth Odinet of Arabi, specifically demanded Big Charity Hospital's reopening on an interim basis until a new hospital is constructed; as well as calling for an independent architectural and engineering evaluation to be conducted through the state's Facility Planning and Control in conjunction with the Foundation for Historical Louisiana. Though it never was formally passed by the legislature, the threat of SB 697 is credited with prompting LSUHSC-HCSD to reopen University Hospital after LSU officials originally balked at the idea. Meanwhile HCR 89, passed with no opposition, has yet to be implemented. 16

Late June 2006 – As authorized by HCR 127 (authored by Representative Sydnie Mae M. Durand), The Louisiana Health Care Redesign Collaborative was formally launched. Spearheaded in early 2006 by DHH Secretary Dr. Fredrick Cerise, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana health insurance CEO Gerry Berry, and federal Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Secretary Michael Leavitt, the Redesign Collaborative held three months of meetings which did not deviate from their pre-ordained outcome of proposing to implement private insurance subsidies for the uninsured, removing fiscal preferences for the Charity Hospital system to serve them. 17

October 17, 2006 -- The Louisiana Health Care Redesign Collaborative offers its final report to be submitted to the federal Center for Medicare Services which requests a federal waiver of rules on Medicare and Medicaid. If fully implemented, the private insurance subsidy scheme would cost more than \$500 million a year in Region 1 (Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes) and more than \$1 billion statewide a year according to state officials – far more than providing Charity Hospital system safety-net healthcare for the same population. 18

November 13, 2006 – Participants in the Region 1 Mental Health Stakeholders Meeting demand the reopening of Big Charity Hospital, specifically for its psychiatric Crisis Intervention Unit. Participants, led by Orleans Criminal Court Judges Calvin Johnson and Ernestine Gray, protest an attempt by DHH-conveners to steer participants away from their outcry against DHH's and LSU's unwillingness to reopen Charity Hospital. 19

November 20, 2006 – Despite being originally declared more damaged than its sister and much larger Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital, LSUHSC-HCSD reopens University Hospital. Absent from this opening are pediatric and psychiatric services, as well as an emergency department. The facility is formally dubbed the "LSU Interim Hospital". 20

December 17, 2006 – Despite protestations that LSU lacks a business plan for a new hospital to replace New Orleans' Charity Hospital, as well as demands to reopen Big Charity in the interim, The Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA), with just two 'no' votes, authorizes \$74 million in federal block grant dollars for land acquisition for the new facility. LSU argued that waiting any longer would jeopardize a proposed joint facility with

the Veterans Administration, whose own hospital was also damaged by the storm. The LRA says it will release an additional \$233 million to LSU once a formal business plan is presented to the LRA for review and approval. 21

January 18, 2007 – Shutting out public comment against the proposal, the Joint Louisiana Legislative Committee on Health and Welfare, despite lacking a quorum, approves passage of the full \$300 million LRA grant to LSUHSC-HCSD for its SUN A Hospital project. The Joint Louisiana Legislative Budget Committee rubber-stamps the proposal the next day. It also spurs with the Louisiana Recovery Authority over the LRA's reluctance to approve the full \$300 million in federal block grant dollars for LSU. Senate Health & Welfare Committee Chair Joe McPherson notes that the legislature had already approved of \$331 million beginning in 2004 for any future LSUHSC-HCSD hospital to replace Charity and University Hospitals; and the LRA should trust state officials with the full amount. 22

January 31, 2007 – HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt's latest private insurance subsidy proposal has more than 500,000 people currently served by the Charity Hospital system losing such coverage AND being deprived of replacement private insurance. While state officials say that the plan is not likely to pass, most also suggest that if the federal government picks up the entire tab of private insurance coverage for the uninsured, they would agree to shift preferential funds away from the Charity Hospital system that currently provides comprehensive safety-net healthcare. 23

January 31, 2007 – A group of community activists meet at a New Orleans coffeehouse to revive flagging efforts to reopen the Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital. The group, which calls itself the "Reopen Charity Hospital Committee", begins planning for a press conference February 22 to demand adherence to HCR 89, a state law passed in the 2006 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, which demands that Big Charity be reopened until a new facility is constructed, as well as be independently evaluated by architecture and engineering specialists in conjunction with the Foundation for Historical Louisiana 24

February 1, 2007 – Two state legislators have asked Louisiana Attorney General Charles Foti to clarify whether the Louisiana Joint Legislative Budget Committee acted properly January 19 when it added \$226 million to a \$74 million Louisiana Recovery Authority proposal for land acquisition for a new LSU VA Hospital. Senator Tom Schedler and Representative Jim Tucker said that the budget committee acted improperly when it voted to steer \$300 million in federal block grant dollars for the project that is said to replace New Orleans' Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital. The Attorney General did not comment at the time the letter by Schedler and Tucker was reportedly submitted. 2

J Conversations with Charity Hospital personnel; Keith Van Meter, MD, "Katrina at Charity Hospital: Much Ado About Something", The American Journal of the Medical Sciences, Nov. 2006, Volume 332, Number 5, PP 251–254.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid; Tom Coburn, MD, U.S. Senator of Oklahoma, Letter to Donald Smithburg, January 27, 2006. Jan Howard (member, 82nd Airborne U.S. Army Division), statement about Charity Hospital conditions, transcribed spring 2006 by Doctors Without Hospitals.

4 Ibid; Conversations with Charity Hospital personnel; Lolis Eric Elie, "City needs Charity to return", The Times–Picayune, March 24, 2006.

5 Laura Maggi, "La Agency gives back much of FEMA money", The Times–Picayune, Sept. 27, 2005; Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) inter–departmental e–mail from Jeff Reynolds to Charles Castille, Sept. 22, 2005: excerpt of e–mail text: " ... We did talk with Art Jones of the Military Department, it appears that the Charity Hospitals might also be included in this \$350 million dollar request ... "

6 Jan Moller, "Temporary hospitals are considered", The Times–Picayune, Oct. 29, 2005; Adams Management Services Corporation invoice to Don Smithburg, Oct. 15, 2005; "New Medical Center of Louisiana: A Major Step Toward Reality", This Week at MeL, July 7– 13, 2003; "Executive Summary: Site and Facility Masterplan, Consolidation of Charity and University Hospitals, Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans", Adams Management Services Corporation, June 2005.

7 Keith Van Meter, MD, "Katrina at Charity Hospital: Much Ado About Something", The American Journal of the Medical Sciences, November 2006, Volume 332, Number 5, PP 251–254; Primary participant source material.

8 Ibid.

9 Adam Nossiter, "Dispute Over Historic Hospital for the Poor Pits Doctors Against the State", The New York Times, December 17, 2005; Lolis Eric Elie, "City needs Charity to return", The Times–Picayune, March 24, 2006; Conversations with Charity Hospital personnel.

10 Keith Van Meter, MD, "Katrina at Charity Hospital: Much Ado About Something", The American Journal of the Medical Sciences, Nov. 2006, Volume 332, Number 5, PP 251–254.; "Executive Summary: Site and Facility Masterplan, Consolidation of Charity and University Hospitals, Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans", Adams Management Services Corporation, June 2005. This report cites an JCAHO accreditation extension to December 2005.

11 Primary participant source material; Conversations with Tulane University Medical School residents.

12 Tom Coburn, MD, U.S. Senator of Oklahoma, Letter to Donald Smithburg, January 27, 2006.

13 Primary participant source material; Press release from LSUHSC–HCSO in response, March 25, 2006. 14 New Orleans City Council Resolution R–06–143, April 6, 2006.

15 Keith Van Meter, MD, "Katrina at Charity Hospital: Much Ado About Something", The American Journal of the Medical Sciences, November 2006, Volume 332, Number 5, PP 251–254; Various press reports.

16 Primary participant source material; Press release from LSUHSC–HCSO in response, June 8, 2006; Louisiana State Legislature website: <http://www.legis.state.la.us> (see HCR 89 and SB 697, 2006 Regular Legislative Session).

17 Louisiana State Legislature website: <http://www.legis.state.la.us> (see HCR 127, 2006 Regular Legislative Session); Charter of the Louisiana Health Care Redesign Collaborative, signed July 17, 2006; and the Louisiana Health Care Redesign Collaborative Members List, both available via the DHH website: <http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov>

18 Jan Moller, "Cost estimate for N.O.–area health plan balloons" The Times–Picayune, November 3, 2006.

19 "Louisiana's Plan for Access to Mental Health Care, Region 1 Stakeholders Meeting," November 13, 2006; Primary participant source material.

20 Kate Moran, "Scaled back hospital opens", The Times–Picayune, November 17, 2006.

21 Primary participant source material; Louisiana Recovery Authority press release, December 18, 2006.

22 Primary participant source material; Resolution of the Joint Louisiana Legislative Committee on Health and Welfare, January 18, 2006; Conversation with Senator Joe McPherson, January 18, 2006; Louisiana State Legislature website: <http://www.legis.state.la.us> (see SB 1, 2004 Regular Legislative Session).

23 Jan Moller, "Plan to insure poor gets cool reception", The Times–Picayune, February 1, 2007.

24 Primary participant source material. Meeting was held at Flora Coffeehouse, New Orleans, January 31, 2007. 25 Jan Moller, "N.O. hospital plan called into question", The Times–Picayune, February 1, 2007.

About the researcher: K. Brad Ott is a Charity Hospital system outpatient. He suffered a stroke (DVT, from sitting too long during a trip) in 2003. Though most of the damage was reversed by arriving at the Avelyn C. Alexander Charity Hospital within the oft–noted 3–hour "stroke window", he must maintain a steady blood–clotting and medication schedule. He is also awaiting an eventual PFO/heart–hole closure surgery. Ott, a native of Erie, PA and a resident of New Orleans for nearly thirty years since high school, has been a long–time community social justice activist. Following his hospitalization, Ott was Legislative Chair for Advocates for Louisiana Public Healthcare (2004–2005). He was appointed in 2004 to the Region 1 Health Care Consortium, representing the uninsured in the NCC's advisory function to Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco's "Governor's Panel on Healthcare". Under a partial Louisiana Rehabilitation Services scholarship, Ott returned to the University of New Orleans in January 2005, and is presently in his senior term in Sociology. He is also a research intern at the University of New Orleans' Center for Hazards Assessment, Response and Technology (CHART). He can be reached at kott@uno.edu or bradott@bellsouth.net.

To Render Ourselves Visible: Women of Color Organizing & Hurricane Katrina

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Organization: INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence
Author: Alisa Bierria, Mayaba Liebenthal
Date Published: 02/01/2007

Excerpt from from the book: [What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation](#) by the South End Press Collective. Ordering Info Below!

Invisibility & Organizing Strategies

Domestic and sexual violence is facilitated by other disasters. Women of color bear the brunt of compromised safety during a disaster and after. Shortly after Katrina, a visiting representative of Florida's disaster management team told Mayor Nagin's Bring New Orleans Back Commission that domestic violence will increase. There's little doubt why. Cramped living conditions (families housed in small travel trailers, or in overcrowded homes and shelters) and high stress situations increase the prevalence of domestic violence. The lack of affordable housing in New Orleans which contributes to domestic and sexual violence will not improve for low-income people any time soon due to the decision of federal housing officials to raze 5,000 public housing units in an effort to drive poor people permanently out of the city. With the breakdown of communities and the loss of old neighbors – and the loss of just about all neighbors – because of widespread displacement and destruction of affordable housing, community accountability for rape and abuse becomes even harder to implement. Building and re-connecting communities must be a critical and central anti-violence strategy, now more than ever.

Despite the correlation between the housing crisis and sexual and domestic violence, there are few emergency shelters in the city (none of which are readily accessible and available), and no battered women's shelters. However, the lack of battered women's shelters and the destruction of institutional systems designed to support domestic violence survivors has actually revealed some weaknesses of this system that existed before the hurricane. A New Orleans-based coalition of domestic violence service providers working to support women after the storm have found themselves assisting women in a variety of circumstances, not just domestic violence survivors. The providers have come to realize that they must support survivors of domestic violence in the context of many kinds of violence – including extreme poverty, stranger harassment, the loss of their children, criminalization, poor health care, etc. – not just as it relates to their experience of being in an abusive relationship. But all of these problems existed before the storm, especially for the most marginalized survivors of domestic violence. The context may have looked different, but the fact that domestic violence exists in a context of so many other kinds of violence and oppressions is not a new phenomenon. In fact, radical women of color have recognized that "violences" against women are not isolated from one another and we have been recommending that the anti-domestic violence movement take a broader, more integrated approach to supporting women from the beginning of the movement's inception. However, this recommendation has, in the past, fallen on deaf ears in order for the problem of domestic violence to be taken seriously by the people with the most power (who, incidentally, are also people who do not want to discuss issues such as poverty and criminalization) instead of the most marginalized people. Why did it take the flooding of a city for this point to finally be legitimate?...

Whitening New Orleans

Perhaps one of the more insidious effects of invisibility is that mainstream populations and government agencies will not acknowledge that you are gone. Hypervisibility and misrepresentation, on the other hand, will ensure you do not come back. For example, in a meeting about the shortage of public housing in New Orleans, City Council member Oliver Thomas said that "we don't need soap opera watchers all day." Also, Rep. Richard H. Baker, a Republican from Baton Rouge, was overheard telling lobbyists that, "we finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did." Thomas's and Baker's statements invoke intensely hateful stereotypes about former public housing residents – a group composed of disproportionately low-income Black women and children. These are the people, apparently, that Thomas, Baker, and others do not want to come back and comments such as these essentially justify the permanent displacement of thousands of public housing residents.

Population-control policies such as the destruction of affordable housing, denial of health care, lack of environmentally safe public schools, and other critical community services that need to be in place for a real sustainable return, intentionally block particular people – especially poor women of color – from returning home. These policies create a forced migration and displacement of people of African descent and other people of color from New Orleans. They change the demographic nature of a city renowned for its African traditions and rich multicultural legacy, radically transforming and whitening New Orleans. Furthermore, Avis Jones-DeWeever of The Institute for Women's Policy Research notes that "more women than men left the region after the storm" and low-income women of color in particular are having a difficult time coming back home. The institute has found that, before Katrina, women made up 56 percent of the local workforce, but only 46 percent today; the number of families headed by single mothers in the metropolitan area has dropped from 51,000 to less than 17,000; and food stamp usage by those single mothers who have returned has quadrupled.

Unfortunately, white progressive and radical left volunteers that have come to "rebuild" in the name of altruism and charity also contribute to the changing demographic of the city. Though hundreds of non-profits, NGOs, university urban planning departments and foundations have come through the city, they have paid little attention to the organizing led by people of color that existed before Katrina and is struggling now more than ever...

...white volunteers coming to New Orleans benefit from their experience, but they remain unaccountable to local folks. Many non-local people in the city are here to "get experience" working in a disaster zone. These character-building experiences in some cases actually have the capacity to compromise women's and community members'

safety, many of whom have lost everything. For example, white volunteers participated in the first wave of intensified post-Katrina gentrification; organizations created cramped conditions for hundreds of volunteers which help to increase sexual assault; and activists organized planning processes that plan local people right out of the process all undermine community safety. Essentially, when people treat you like you don't matter, you don't feel safe. Many of these volunteers are coming from a contemporary form of activist tourism – in which a U.S. or European radical activist tours “hot spots” for revolutionary work around the world to increase her activist cred. This kind of “solidarity” objectifies people of color – again, our bodies are made to signify their truths. The viewer is the white activist, the viewed is the oppressed person of color, the encounter between the two is unidirectional – objectifier and objectified.

An alternative way of considering “solidarity” was put forward in a recent article, “Rethinking Solidarity,” by the Refugio Collective in Brooklyn, New York. They write, “It's the unaltered position of power and privilege that much of this [U.S.-based] activism is rested upon... But accountability is a process, one that moves in both directions and requires more thoughtful reflection of our position in this country in relation to others.”

Volunteers in New Orleans who are outsiders, especially those who are white, need to engage in humble and thoughtful reflection about how one should take up space in a devastated community that is undergoing fast-tracked, ruthless gentrification. Otherwise, the whitening of New Orleans will continue and will instigate more violence such as white volunteers calling police into neighborhoods that are already terrorized by law enforcement violence. Further, volunteers who decide to stay and get paid work are given preferential treatment over New Orleanians of color that were here before because of employment discrimination based on race, class, gender, education, and nationality. They can often afford skyrocketing rents in neighborhoods they would not have dared to enter before the storm. This is called back-door disaster gentrification (also known as volunteer fall out). Non-local allies could do work in solidarity with New Orleans from where they live by supporting displaced survivors in their own local communities, but those who choose to work in New Orleans often do so because they are drawn by the excitement of realizing their own political ambitions (whether they be pursuing pet projects in devastated neighborhoods or simply adding this town to their activist résumé)...

Authentic Visibility

The authentic visibility of the oppressed, in this case women of color, is sometimes perceived by the left as an actual threat to solidarity instead of an opportunity for richer, more effective, and more relevant political strategies. However, when the experiences, ideas, and lives of women of color are centered, instead of being considered “divisive” or “secondary,” a politic emerges that has the possibility of making the entire movement

better for everyone. When women of color assert an authentic existence and visibility that acknowledges the intersections of oppressions within the

public and private spheres, we create opportunities for everyone to construct new ways to think about organizing for justice and liberation. As

Andy Smith, a member of the INCITE! national collective, puts it, that the role of radical women of color organizing is not just about including women of color in organizing agendas, it's about re-centering women of color in organizing agendas, allowing their authentic experiences to guide our ways of thinking about justice. Andy writes in her article, “Re-Centering Feminism,” that “radical women of color organizing is not simply based on a narrow politics of identity but more on a set of political practices

designed to eliminate the interlocking systems of oppression based on heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism and colonialism, a vision that is liberatory for all peoples.”

If we were to re-center women of color in the work of organizing in the context of Hurricane Katrina, we would recognize that sexual violence is a serious political issue as it relates to community violence and safety in notoriously unsafe spaces such as the Superdome, and as it relates to the military occupation that took place in the name of “restoring order” to New Orleans. We would realize how critical it is to develop our own community-based resources and responses to violence within our communities as well as violence targeting our communities such as police violence and environmental racism. Centering the lives of women of color—because they are often the primary caregivers for both children and elders—may have helped us anticipate the way that children would be targeted in chaos, or the way in which people with disabilities and elders might be trapped in nursing homes and hospitals. Centering undocumented immigrant women, recognizing that often when they experience domestic or sexual violence they do not call the police for fear of deportation, we might have anticipated the dangers faced by undocumented people would have been more endangered during the hurricane, either by immigration enforcement deporting them when they tried to access resources, or by drowning because of their fear of calling authorities for help who may deport them.

Further, instead of demanding that foundations “include” women of color projects among their funding priorities and value women of color organizing styles in their assessments, we may recognize that depending on volatile foundation-based funding – often based on “flavor of the month” priorities – is not a sustainable practice for long-term revolutionary projects. By re-centering the experiences of women of color, we may realize that we need alternative strategies to fund our grassroots movement-building work...

TO READ THIS FULL ARTICLE, AS WELL AS OTHER AMAZING WRITINGS BY ACTIVISTS ABOUT HURRICANE KATRINA, WE STRONGLY URGE YOU TO BUY THE BOOK!

FOR MORE INFO, PLEASE VISIT: <http://www.southendpress.org/2006/items/87670>

Or contact Joey Fox at 617.547.4002 or joeyfox@southendpress.org

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A New Agenda for the Gulf Coast: What Congress can do now to

confront the ongoing crisis of Hurricane Katrina

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Organization: Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch **Author:** Chris Kromm and Sue Sturgis **Date Published:** 02/01/2007
Link:
<http://www.southernstudies.org/NewAgendaGulf.pdf>

Attachment	Size
NewAgendaGulf.pdf	2.77 MB

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Join or Support an Incite! Delegation to New Orleans! Updated Call for Delegates

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Organization: INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence **Date Published:** 02/01/2007

From the INCITE! email list:

The women of INCITE! New Orleans have been centrally involved in establishing and supporting the Women's Health and Justice Initiative, a multi-dimensional community-based organizing project centered on improving women of color access to quality, affordable, and safe health care services, integrating sexual health and reproductive and environmental justice. The Initiative's first project is opening up a Women's Health Clinic, which is located in the historic Tremé community. The clinic promotes a holistic, community-centered well-woman approach to primary health care and will provide a wide range of preventative health services.

INCITE! New Orleans is also building a Women of Color Organizing and Resource Center, which will serve as a hub for organizing among low-income women of color for meaningful participation in the reconstruction of New Orleans, the rights of workers – both immigrant and non-immigrant – who are the backbone of reconstruction efforts, health, safety & housing rights for women of color returning to New Orleans, and community-based responses to violence and approaches to safety.

Volunteers with health care, education, community health promotion and stress, grief, domestic violence, and sexual assault counseling experience are urgently needed to support the work of the Women's Health and Justice Initiative, as are volunteers with administrative, multi-media, and construction skills.

Individuals with fundraising & organizing experience with respect to housing, environmental justice, health and safety, immigrant and workers' rights, and violence against women are needed to assist in the development and establishment of the Women of Color Organizing and Resource Center.

INCITE! strongly suggests that volunteers plan to stay at least a week between the 1st and the 15th of the month so that the local community can best accommodate everyone without a sense of weariness in a city still operating with limited resources. Between 3 and 6 volunteers can adequately be accommodated. PLEASE NOTE THAT WE ARE PRIORITIZING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN OF COLOR IN THESE DELEGATIONS.

Be aware that delegation participants will be housed under varying conditions (on sofas, futons, air mattresses) and will be asked to bring basic supplies for themselves and to meet local needs. We will be working long hours, and will likely participate in physical work as needed to assist in various INCITE! Projects.

If you cannot travel to New Orleans, we still need your help! The Women's Health and Justice Initiative still needs supplies and material support. Go to this website for more info www.incite-national.org/issues/healthresources.html.

Organize a fundraiser or supply drive in your community to help meet women's basic health needs in New Orleans in the face of collapsed infrastructure, widespread presence of environmental contaminants, mold, and refuse, and failure of supplies collected by the Red Cross and FEMA to reach women most in need. For a list of supplies needed, please contact us at incite_national@yahoo.com class="moz-txt-link-abbreviated">incite_national@yahoo.com or call and leave a message at (504) 524-8255. Send your financial contributions or supplies to INCITE!, 1362 Constance St, New Orleans, La, 70130.

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Public Housing Residents Take Back Their Homes; Newsletter

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Organization: People's Organizing Committee **Date Published:** 02/11/2007

(**Note: Please scroll down and find the link to download the full February, 2007 POC newsletter. It's complete with pictures and many more articles. **)

February 10 was a historic day in New Orleans. Residents of the C.J. Pete public housing development moved back into their homes, which the government had slated for demolition.

Although Hurricane Katrina did not seriously damage the buildings HANO and HUD used the excuse to evacuate all the public housing in the city and lock the residents out of their homes. Then they decided to demolish the public housing and replace it with so-called mixed-income housing, which basically means most people would never be able to come home.

In all previous hurricane evacuations, residents were able to come back to their homes after the storm passed. In

this case, they were not even allowed to come back and get their belongings. Tens of thousands of residents evacuated to distant cities or trailer parks have not been able to get home at all. The government later broke into the apartments to throw refrigerators down stairs, breaking doors off hinges and leaving the units open to widespread looting and destruction, including theft of pipes and electrical fixtures. The \$10,000 the government offered some residents can never cover what they have lost, including baby pictures, diplomas and other sentimental personal items. And still HANO and HUD have claimed that it would be illegal for the residents, who hold valid leases to their apartments, to come home.

Despite all of this, public housing residents have come together over the past several months and formed an organization, Residents of Public Housing, which is part of the New Orleans Survivor Council. They decided to move back home.

People's Organizing Committee, which is committed to developing and following the leadership of those most affected by Katrina, helped provide support for the residents' move. At the direction of the residents, they cleaned apartments, obtained generators to provide light and heat, canvassed the surrounding neighborhood to explain the move and build support, and sent out a press release for the residents' press conference. At this writing, two dozen volunteers from a high school in New Jersey are working for the residents, cleaning out more apartments in the complex.

The move and the press conference were managed and led entirely by the residents themselves. Six residents spoke before the cameras about their determination to come home. "The government wanted us to get out and stay out," said one resident. "I voted for Nagin, but he did nothing for us. They want black people out of New Orleans, and they figured this was one group they could get rid of. But nothing is going to stop us from coming home. C.J. Pete is back!"

This event was a change from earlier public housing reoccupations. Some of them were mainly symbolic, and in most cases, people who were not residents took a major hand in leading them. A few weeks ago, when residents attempted to move back into a different development, the rally and speeches were mainly led by white activists, not by the residents. This displayed a lack of respect for the black residents, who are not only capable of leading their own movement, but on principle should be leading it. Racism in America has created a situation where poor, black working class people are so marginalized and disrespected that even many politically progressive groups and individuals don't trust them to organize and lead their own fight. POC is dedicated to bottom-up leadership, so its role was to provide every possible support and encouragement to the residents to lead themselves.

About 60 people, residents and supporters, came to the press conference and support rally. Balloons decorated the front porch of the newly opened units. A big sign announced the reoccupation. Residents took turns speaking on a bullhorn to the assembled crowd and passers by, repeating for all to hear that C.J. Pete is back to stay. The Community Kitchen donated food for the event. Residents also thanked organizations that donated generators, including Hope House, the Workers' Center and Moving Forward Gulf Coast. And The Hot 8, a second line band played at the end, while residents danced and sang along in a happy celebration of their victory. "I don't know what you've been told, but the projects is livable!" went the words to the last song. This chant echoed as supporters drifted away and residents went back to the work of settling into their new apartments.

Residents dance to the music of the Hot 8 after their press conference

Residents and POC staff provided a security watch through the night, aware that HANO could descend on them at any moment and try to evict them. The residents will remain vigilant to defend their homes.

Meanwhile, on the wave of this victory, Residents of Public Housing is making plans for reoccupying the next development, the Lafitte projects. Their intention is to open all the projects now slated for demolition and bring their communities back.

Attachment	Size
Katrina-II-C-Housing6-Public-7.pdf	4.82 MB
Katrina-II-C-Housing6-Public-7.doc	6.8 MB

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Katrina Survivors and Immigrant Workers Unite to Arrest Slave Owner

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Organization: People's Organizing Committee
Date Published: 02/15/2007

Poor black working class New Orleans residents are facing the worst racist attack in decades. At the same time, immigrant workers from Central and South America are being trafficked as slaves in New Orleans and across Louisiana. These two groups have come together to arrest one of the slave owners and traffickers.

Public housing residents who just last Saturday reoccupied their homes in the C.J. Peete housing development were told last night, Wednesday, February 14, that they must vacate their units or lose their vouchers. This would leave their extended families homeless. Today, young volunteers from New Jersey who have been helping to clean up the development were threatened with arrest for their efforts to help the residents.

Despite this emergency, when organizers from the New Orleans Survivor Council heard that immigrant workers had located their slave owner and were ready to execute a citizen's arrest, they left New Orleans to come help their brothers and sisters.

Slave trafficker Matt Redd has been holding about one hundred Mexican workers as virtual slaves near Lake Charles, Louisiana. About forty of these workers, accompanied by supporters from the New Orleans Survivor

Council, walked to the offices of Redd Properties in Sulphur, LA to attempt to execute a citizen's arrest.

At a press conference in a CVS parking lot, just before going to Redd's office, workers told the press that Redd had taken their passports without their consent at the US consulate in Mexico where they obtained their H2B (guest worker) visas. Redd then charged them plane fare and then put them in vans to bring them to Louisiana, where he leased them out to low-wage employers in restaurants, car washes and municipal waste management. He also recently imported dozens of skilled pipe fitters and welders, who have not worked in the two weeks they've been in the country. These workers have had no income, and because they do not have their passports, they can't even go home. One worker told the press that his mother needed blood for a liver operation, and that he was the only family member whose blood was a match for hers, but he is unable to return because he doesn't have his passport. In the past several days, Redd had begun firing workers for circulating a petition demanding their passports back.

A spokesperson for the New Orleans Survivor Council told the immigrant workers the words to some freedom songs: "before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave," and "we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes." He pointed out that a carload of NOSC organizers had come to join them in making the citizen's arrest despite the fact that at 11:30 the night before, residents who had reoccupied their public housing units were put out in the street by the Housing Authority on one of the coldest nights of the winter. Even so, the speaker said, "we are all the same people, the only thing that separates us is language; and we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes."

The citizen's arrest statement said in part, "You are officially accused of taking an official passport of a person and refusing to return it in order to prevent the movement and travel of that worker without lawful authority in order to maintain the labor of that worker - this is a felony under the law of the United States of America." The statement quoted the particular U.S. and Louisiana laws against slavery and trafficking in slaves, and pointed out that it is the right of a private person to make an arrest of a person who has committed a felony. That person can then hold the criminal until law enforcement comes to take him into custody, or can take him to law enforcement.

Redd was not in his office, but the group had notified law enforcement agencies of their intention to make an arrest, so when they arrived at the office they demanded law enforcement find and arrest him. Sheriff's police must have been a little worried about openly defending slavery while the press cameras were rolling, and they quickly worked out an agreement with Redd by phone to give back the passports of the workers present. The Sheriff's office took possession of the passports and returned them to the workers, but the workers are still adamant in their demand that Redd be arrested for violating the anti-slavery laws. They vowed to continue their struggle, and to make sure that all passports Redd is holding will be returned to their owners. Meanwhile, the Survivor Council members jumped back in their cars to return to the struggle to reopen public housing, to rebuild the homes of black residents the government doesn't want to come home, and to continue its campaign to build a world-class levee around the Lower Ninth ward.

These beginnings of unity between black New Orleans hurricane survivors and immigrant guest workers - the descendants of the old slaves uniting with the modern day slaves - is a very significant event. As one of the Sheriffs pointed out, it was the U.S. government itself that gave the passports to the slaveholder. Just as in the days of African slavery, the government is on the side of the owners. When the descendants of the former slaves were asked what should be the next step, they suggested filing suit against the government of the United States for being an accomplice to slave owning and trafficking.

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The Lower 9th Ward Health Clinic Opens To Serve The Medical Needs Of The Community

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Organization: Common Ground Collective
Author: Alice Craft-Kerney
Date Published: 03/01/2007
Link: <http://www.commongroundrelief.org/node/419>

Press Advisory for:

March 1, 2007

For More Information:

Alice Craft-Kerney: 504-259-8279

The Lower 9th Ward Health Clinic Opens To Serve The Medical Needs Of The Community

NEW ORLEANS, LA - On Thursday, March 1, 2007, in response to the lack of medical services available to returning families, Lower 9th Ward residents are finally opening the doors to their new medical clinic located in the home of Patricia Berryhill, a registered nurse and former resident of the Lower 9th Ward and will host a press conference.

What: Opening of the Lower 9th Ward Health Clinic

When: 10:30 am - 11:30 am, March 1st

Where: 5228 St. Claude Ave. at the corner of Egan St.

The Lower 9th Ward Health Clinic, a newly established primary care medical clinic, serving residents of the Lower 9th Ward neighborhood in New Orleans, will host its opening on March 1, 2007.

The clinic will be the only health care provider for the Lower 9th Ward, and will also accept patients from surrounding neighborhoods. Since the storm, New Orleans has been struggling to reopen hospitals and critical healthcare services, leaving thousands of families with either no access to medical care or up to a fourteen-hour



wait in an emergency room across town.

The Lower 9th Ward is one of the areas most heavily devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and its survival is dependent upon the return of essential services such as convenient access to quality health care providers for all residents, regardless of their ability to pay. Resident organizers supported by grassroots organizations and individuals from around the country have created strong and impacting solutions and are working on others projects all designed to ensure that the historic Lower 9th Ward enjoys a long and prosperous future.

Resident health care providers, Common Ground Lower 9th Ward Project and Leaders Creating Change Through Contribution have come together to provide medical services that are not accessible to the residents of the Lower 9th Ward and surrounding areas. The clinic is collaborating and partnering with St. Margaret's Daughters, California Nurse's Association, AARP, Tulane's New Orleans Children's Health Project and others, and has received invaluable legal and accounting assistance from McGlinchey Stafford, PLLC and Postlethwaite & Netterville, respectively. The clinic will fill many unmet needs of the communities it serves: volunteer healthcare professionals will augment staffing needs to provide high quality health care to all who need it, treating disaster related and chronic illnesses and mental health issues that otherwise would go untreated. For the present situation, the clinic will serve the returning residents of this community who would otherwise go without access to care.

"It is amazing what we can accomplish when we put all our talents and God-given gifts together for the betterment of our community. This is a time of reflection, but also a time of rebuilding. In the words of the prophet Nehemiah, "Let us rise up and build," said Alice Craft-Kerney, R.N., Executive Director of the Lower 9th Ward Health Clinic.

Despite the level of destruction, more and more residents are returning to their damaged or destroyed homes everyday, but they are struggling to survive and rebuild. Surrounded by flood debris, collapsed houses and toppled cars, parts of the neighborhood are still without electricity.

The Lower 9th Ward Health Clinic will be an anchor in rebuilding and relief efforts, working to strengthen the sense of community, with residents providing basic medical care to their fellow neighbors. The clinic will serve as the medical hub of the area, disseminating information and referrals, and well as, providing basic healthcare to the residents.

Specifically, the Lower 9th Ward Clinic aims to offer health support to treat a range of ailments including, but not limited to hypertension, stress, diabetes, cardiac conditions, minor trauma, plus treating respiratory illness and infections related to exposure to toxins from the flood. Soon, immunizations, help in registering for government programs (i.e., Medicaid, Medicare, SCHIP, etc.), and pharmaceutical assistance for persons suffering from chronic illnesses will be provided through the clinic.

Available for interview:

Alice Craft-Kerney, R.N., a New Orleans resident with strong family and community ties to the Lower 9th Ward, lives in a FEMA trailer in New Orleans. Prior to receiving the trailer, she was living in the Lower 9th Ward on the second floor of her brother's flood-damaged home. Craft-Kerney, a nurse with 21 years' experience, led the effort to build a health clinic in her neighborhood, and will work there full-time as the executive director. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Craft-Kerney worked for 20 years as a registered nurse at Charity Hospital, which for generations served the city's poor until the floodwaters tore it apart. Although University Hospital has reopened, it has not expanded to full capacity to treat ambulatory patients.

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No "Road Home" for Renters

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Organization:

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition

Date Published:

03/01/2007

NO "ROAD HOME" FOR RENTERS

Gov. Blanco Is Violating the Human Right to Housing

Access to housing is a basic human right that is recognized by the U.S. government and international laws. However, Governor Blanco has designed a disaster recovery program that doesn't give a single dollar directly to any displaced renters.

Before Katrina: 60% of New Orleanians were renters

After Katrina: Rent for private apartments in the New Orleans area is up nearly 80 %

HELPING LANDLORDS, NOT RENTERS: Governor Blanco has obtained \$10.4 billion of federal funds for the Road Home Program, which is managed by the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA). As part of the Road Home Program, the LRA has allocated \$869 million for landlords who agree to use the funds to rehab their units and rent them at so-called "affordable rates." In addition, the LRA has earmarked approximately \$500 million in community development block grants and \$80 million in tax credits to fund the construction of 7,000 rental units in hurricane-damaged areas throughout Louisiana. But today, not a single unit is available for rent on the LRA's online rental property database. It will take at least several more months, and more likely years, for people who rent to get any trickle-down benefits from the grants and incentives that the LRA offers to landlords and developers.

TOKEN POTENTIAL HOME OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY FOR RENTERS: Governor Blanco and the LRA recently promised to give some displaced Louisiana renters the opportunity to become first-time homeowners. However, this promise rings hollow when considering the fact that the LRA has only provided \$50 million or 0.4% of the \$10.4 billion for this homeowners program for displaced people. Although \$50 million seems like a lot of money, it can only help approximately 245 displaced families or individuals - an outrageously small number of displaced residents - to purchase a home.

$\$50,000,000.00 \div \$204,147.00 = 245 \text{ homes}$

Displaced Public Housing Residents Make City Council Member's Neighborhood Mixed Income

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Organization: Survivors' Village **Date Published:** 03/03/2007 **Link:** <http://www.survivorsvillage.com/pr20070303.html>

Media contact: Endesha Juakali / survivorsvillage@gmail.com
>survivorsvillage@gmail.com / 504.239.2907 or 504.284.6975

March 3, 2007
EMBARGOED UNTIL 11:00AM, SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 2007
PHOTO OPPOTUNITY

Displaced Public Housing Residents Make City Council Member's Neighborhood Mixed Income

New Orleans, LA (March 3, 2007) –Displaced residents and supporters will rally outside City Council member Stacy Head's home on Saturday to demand the re-opening of New Orleans public housing. At 12:30 PM protesters will gather at the Latter Library, 5120 St Charles Ave, and from there will march to Head's home.

"We are going to her home because she wants to keep families out of their homes," says rally organizer Endesha Juakali of Survivors Village. "We will not let politicians kick back to rich developers so they can profit from Katrina at the expense of displaced residents. This is cronyism in its worst form."

Despite overwhelming support for the re-opening of public housing, City Council Member Stacy Head has recently ignored public opinion and advocated for its demolition. In a recent email she states that she opposes the effort to 'reopen public housing immediately' even though hundreds of these homes are completely undamaged. According to the Secretary of State's website, Head received \$844,000 in campaign donations, most of which came from real estate, development and construction interests.

Since Head claims to be a 'strong believer in mixed income housing' displaced residents of the Lafitte, CJ Peete, BW Cooper and St. Bernard public housing complexes in New Orleans will demand that Head make her neighborhood 'mixed income'. They will be joined by supporters from organizations that include Survivors Village, the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, Common Ground Relief, United Front for Affordable Housing and C3 Hands Off Iberville. The protest will also connect the fight for public housing with the need for fully funded public services in every neighborhood, including public education, public health systems, and public transportation.

The controversial proposed demolitions have been contested on many fronts. Two weeks ago a federal court refused HUD's request to dismiss a lawsuit demanding the reopening of undamaged public housing apartments. After an emotional congressional hearing on affordable housing last week, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, D-California, authored a bill allowing 3000 displaced public housing residents to return to their homes by August 1st, and blocking HUD's proposed demolitions until a plan for one-to-one replacement is finalized.

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New Orleans Community Spaces in Crisis

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Organization: Left Turn **Author:** Jordan Flaherty **Date Published:** 03/07/2007 **Link:** <http://www.leftturn.org/?q=node/549>



Community centers have long been central to New Orleans organizing, serving as a gathering location for people, culture and ideas. One activist recently explained, "organizing here looks like neighborhood get-togethers, potlucks, block parties, and conversations on a neighbor's porch. Its about culture and community." But 18 months after Katrina, many of New Orleans' community spaces, vital resources in the reconstruction of the city, remain shuttered. Traditional sources for support, such as foundations or charities, often miss this aspect of New Orleans' community, and many of these spaces have received little outside assistance.

In a city where many people are still in crisis, most federal support still has not arrived, insurance companies have evaded responsibility, and every repair seems to take longer than expected, a lot of these spaces need help. Few of have received anything close to the funding, resources, or staff they need for their work, and some are working unsustainable hours while living in a still-devastated city. Because New Orleans' education and health care systems have been dismantled, many have either personal or family issues around health or school that they must deal with.

Many spaces were in poorer neighborhoods, which were more damaged during Katrina. This is the case for The Marcus Garvey Resource Center, a community space for African American youth located near the former Magnolia housing projects, which received several feet of water.

Many of these centers are Black-owned businesses which nurture the city's culture, while supporting the community and local organizing. For example, in the legendary Creole restaurant Dooky Chase, Martin Luther King, Jr. held strategy meetings with local community organizers, the walls featured stunning artwork by Black

artists, and figures from James Baldwin to Ray Charles would stop in to eat. For almost 65 years, the restaurant stood as a community anchor across the street from the Lafitte projects. Today, 18 months post-Katrina, both are still struggling to reopen. After months of work and the support of many prominent national allies, Dooky Chase is scheduled to open its doors in April. Lafitte remains shut behind metal gates, and is the focus of grassroots struggles, congressional hearings, and a federal lawsuit.

Other community spaces were part of public housing developments – such as the Sojourner Truth Center, which hosted a 2005 performance tour sponsored by INCITE Women Of Color Against Violence. The Sojourner Truth Center is located inside the Lafitte, and remains closed along with the nearby apartments.

Rising rents and costly repairs forced the Neighborhood Gallery, a Central City-based venue for everything from theatre, paintings and sculpture to dance parties and community meetings, out of their home.

More than damage from the storm, the Neighborhood Gallery was a victim of a housing market that has doubled in many areas. With much of the city still blighted, speculators snapped up non-flooded properties and affordable spaces became scarce. With tourism down and the population decimated, businesses around the city are suffering, and for Black-owned businesses and community spaces, the situation is at a crisis.

Before closing post-Katrina, Neighborhood Gallery had been open, in various locations, for almost twenty years. “Every neighborhood we’ve gone into, we’ve enhanced it,” Gallery co-director Sandra Berry tells me. “We take the arts to the ‘hood. We’ve taken artists to a deserted field and built a playground.” Neighborhood Gallery co-founders Sandra Berry and Joshua Walker are now organizing events at schools, coffee shops, and other spaces.

Two community spaces that share a Central City building, Ashe Cultural Center and Zeitgeist Multi-Disciplinary Arts Center, faced no storm-related damage, but were given a choice to either buy their spaces, or be kicked out, as the building they were located in transformed to condominiums. Ashe chose to embark on fundraising to buy their space, while Zeitgeist spent several months searching the New Orleans housing market. “The best offer I received was for a space in Shreveport,” complained owner Rene Broussard.

The Community Book Center, a vital seventh ward gathering spot, reopened in December along with several other businesses on the same block despite still having no front windows and a floor in major need of work. “Step carefully,” founder Vera Warren-Williams warned guests as they entered the store during the reopening celebration. After nearly a year and a half of shuttered storefronts, this street’s rebirth is a precious spot of hope in a city where 60% of the population remains displaced and many businesses still have not returned.

During the reopening, the owners of Community Book Center and other businesses on the block spoke of their dedication to their community and to the city. This is a theme echoed by other community spaces and small businesses. “We must have spaces that support all of us,” Sandra Berry of the Neighborhood Gallery explained. “We have to spread the art, support the culture. From prisons to church. Wherever there are people, we need to be.”

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Survivors Council to Open Lawless High School. Residents and Volunteers Face Down Cops and School Officials

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Organization: People's Organizing Committee
Date Published: 03/08/2007

Link:
http://www.peoplesorganizing.org/breaking_news.html#sc

On Thursday, March 8, residents and volunteers working with the New Orleans Survivor Council faced off against the Recovery School District (RSD). The NOSC had previously decided to reopen the public school system themselves, because the city has taken public education out of New Orleans. They are targeting mainly poor black communities, and particularly the Lower Ninth Ward and the area around the C.J. Peete public housing development.

As a result of NOSC pressure, Martin Luther King elementary school will be reopened soon in the Lower Ninth, but residents are not happy about the fact that it is reopening as a charter school. People need to know that all of their children are guaranteed to be able to attend school in order for them to move back home. Charter schools choose their students.

So a few weeks ago, the Survivor Council decided to reopen Lawless High School, also in the Lower Ninth, and Tom Lafon near C.J. Peete, as public schools. Student volunteers have been cleaning Lawless out for the past week. This week, students from Wilberforce and FAMU were in the building, cleaning and salvaging usable educational materials, when the RSD sent contractors to the school. The contractors demanded to know who had authorized the students to work. They answered, “the New Orleans Survivor Council authorized us; this is their school, and we’re cleaning and reopening it.”

The contractors revealed that they had been hired to clear out the “full contents” of the school, throw them away, and prepare the school for demolition! The second floor of the building had computers, books, software still in its original wrappings, and other salvageable materials. At schools that have been designated as “full content” schools, contractors are instructed to throw away all the contents of the school. Nearly all of the schools designated as “full content” schools are in poor, black neighborhoods. Other schools are designated “partial content” schools, and in those, contents are salvaged.

Since both the volunteers and the hired contractors were under instructions to clean out the school, the POC organizers proposed that they all work together. An agreement was worked out whereby the RSD contractors would work on the first floor, where everything needed to be thrown out, and the NOSC volunteers would work on the second floor and continue to salvage materials. However, then the contractors added “you have one day.” After that, they said, the students would be in the way and would have to go.

The volunteers responded that they planned to stay until they got the job done, and added that if anyone started tearing the building down, the students would get in their way. When the contractors reiterated their demand that the students leave the following day, POC and the Survivor Council decided to pull out all the stops. That night, they called residents and the press.

The next day (Thursday), nearly a dozen residents donned protective clothing to join twenty students in cleaning out the school. The press watched as the students, many of them having done a quick orientation in civil disobedience, prepared to be arrested if necessary, alongside residents who were not about to back down on their goal of opening a high school for their children.

Looking for a response, the press called RSD officials on the phone. The officials asked where the things taken out of the school were, and residents responded that they

had salvaged it, because the RSD was going to trash useful materials and equipment. The RSD then decided that they did not want the publicity that would come from calling police to arrest residents and their volunteers cleaning out their own school, and finally said they would meet with NOSC to discuss the reopening of Lawless School!

After the experience of MLK School, residents don't have confidence in the RSD to look out for their interests, but they knew they had won at least a temporary victory that day. The next day, they sent another team into Tom Lafon School so that residents determined to reoccupy C.J. Peete would also have a school to send their kids to.

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Common Ground Responds to City's Attempt to Confiscate Property

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Organization: Common Ground Collective **Date Published:** 03/14/2007 **Link:** <http://www.commongroundrelief.org/node/432>



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Brandon Darby 504-421-1205
Daniel Williams 504-579-4098

500 Volunteers of Common Ground Relief Take Action in the Lower Ninth Ward

New Orleans, LA—On March 14 & 15th, 2007, in response to the City of New Orleans "Good Neighbor" policy, Common Ground volunteers and New Orleans residents will clean up debris and trash in the Lower Ninth Ward to prevent the City from forcefully taking private property in this neighborhood.

What: Common Ground Spring Break Clean-Up in the Lower Ninth Ward

When: March 14 and 15, 2007: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

[More images](#)

Press Availability: March 14 and 15, 2007: 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Where: Deslonde Street. Between Claiborne Avenue and Florida Avenue.

Lower Ninth Ward residents have faced tremendous obstacles in their efforts to rebuild after Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent levee failures. Following the storm, a military occupation and a curfew prevented residents from returning to rebuild the Lower Ninth Ward. Additionally, the City has also been painfully slow in restoring basic services to this area, such as water, electricity, and phones. Many residents view the government as standing in the way rather than helping people return home.

Now, the City of New Orleans has initiated the grossly misnamed, "Good Neighbor" Program. Thousands of residents—many of whom are elderly and disabled—are facing the possibility of having their homes taken by the City if they do not keep their lots clean and their lawns cut. "Enough is enough," says Common Ground Director, Brandon Darby. "The so-called Good Neighbor Program is not about being neighborly. It's about taking private property from homeowners in an unjust, unconstitutional manner."

Over 500 volunteers and residents will work on Wednesday, March 14th, and Thursday, March 15th, to clean up trash and debris. According to Common Ground Co-founder, Malik Rahim, "Common Ground volunteers from across the country are working in solidarity with residents to demonstrate our commitment to rebuilding this community. We are showing what can happen when people stand for peace and unite with residents of a community."

Since Katrina, volunteers from different grassroots organizations have cleaned and gutted thousands of homes in the Lower Ninth Ward in an effort to enforce residents' right to return home. Common Ground alone has worked in over 600 homes in the Lower Ninth Ward. Today, most homes in this neighborhood have been gutted, but residents simply need more time to rebuild.

Common Ground is a grassroots relief organization started by residents and other activists in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. To date, Common Ground has brought over 12,000 volunteers to New Orleans, and has gutted 1,100 homes. The organization also runs two emergency housing shelters and offers educational programs for children in the greater New Orleans area.

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PHRF makes a breakthrough on price gouging and tenant rights in New Orleans

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Organization: Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition **Date Published:** 03/15/2007
Link: <http://www.peopleshurricane.org/news/phrf-makes-a-breakthrough-on-price-gouging-...>

On Thursday, March 15, 2007 more than 100 members, supporters, and coalition partners of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF) and Tenants Rights Working Group (TRW) – some as far away as Houston – including Critical Resistance, Survivors Village, C3/Hands Off Iberville, Zion City Community Organization, Common Ground Collective, and the NAACP won a major concession from City Council on the question of price gouging and the lack of tenant rights in the city of New Orleans.



In the face of mounting pressure from the more than 10,000 signatures gathered on the price gouging and tenants rights petition, **demonstrations outside the home of New Orleans city councilwoman Stacy Head** organized by Survivors Village, and the barrage of phone calls and emails sent to the various City Council members demanding rent control, an agreement was reached in principle that the City Council and the Housing and Human Development Committee would:

1. Develop policies to address the question of rent control in New Orleans.
2. Work with PHRF and the TRW on this Committee to craft the necessary policies.
3. Would challenge the State Legislature and Constitution to address the crisis of price gouging and lack of tenant rights protections.

Several other critical breakthroughs were made at the Council Meeting. The 15th action marked the first occasion since the Hurricane and Great Flood where renters and tenants spoke and acted on their own behalf and were directly included in the decision making processes of the government determining the course of the city's reconstruction. To this point the reconstruction process has been totally dominated by developers, property owners, and designers. Another critical development was the organic connections and identifications made by private and public market renters as "tenants". This emerging consciousness is critical for the development of the TRW, which seeks to unite public and private market renters into one powerful organization or block to win Affordable Housing and the Right of Return.

The concessions of the City Council are but the first step in the struggle to win Affordable Housing in New Orleans. PHRF and the TRW are very clear that we must continue to grow, build, and mount escalating pressure to actually win a price gouging and rent control ordinance and renter relief and restitution. We are going to need the ongoing support of all our supporters, allies, and partners to attain this victory. We are asking that everyone continue to support us in our outreach efforts to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to build the TRW, and to support our upcoming forums and mobilizations, including a critical forum on Class and Class Conflict in the Reconstruction Movement in New Orleans in April, to win this undeniable human right.

The Tenants Rights Working Group (TRW) will host its next meeting on Tuesday, March 20th at 6 pm at the offices of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF) located at 1418 N. Claiborne Ave. #2, New Orleans, LA 70116. For more information call (504) 301-0215 or email info@peopleshurricane.org

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Greetings Friends and Comrades

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Organization: Survivors' Village
Date Published: 04/07/2007

Survivors' Village
3800 Block of St. Bernard Avenue New Orleans, La. 70122
504-239-2907

Greetings Friends and Comrades:

One year ago today Survivors' Village took its first steps towards the front of the bus and started an active resistance against the city of New Orleans, its housing authority (HANO) and their combined efforts to prevent public housing residents from returning to their homes.

Residents and volunteers stormed the gates of St. Bernard Development, forcing through barbed wire fences erected by HANO, to allow residents access to their homes. For some it was their first opportunity since hurricanes Katrina and Rita, to view the state of their apartments and retrieve things they wanted.

Our campaign is an active and vibrant struggle, surging and soaring in some moments, lagging and depressing in others. One member sums up our year aptly, "tell no

lies ... claim no easy victories."

A year ago, when the HANO officials boarded up windows and doors and erected barbed wire topped fences around the developments, the destruction of public housing was a foregone conclusion, but residents and supporters did not stop fighting. Our fight to preserve these neighborhoods moves forward via:

A viable lawsuit - a lawsuit most thought would be summarily dismissed.

Rep. Maxine Water's Bill (HR-1227), which mandates the reopening of 3000 apartments by August, and halts the demolition of public housing while it guarantees one-for-one replacement for any redevelopment, passed with overwhelming support in the House and has moved on to the Senate.

Construction of Resurrection City - several wooden structures meant to house protestors.

Winning the public support of elected officials - Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco has endorsed maintaining current housing stock.

St. Bernard residents are meeting with representatives from the AFL-CIO to discuss the possibility of residents buying and redeveloping the area.

Our setbacks only highlight our city's misguided recovery and rebuilding efforts:

Following one of the most violent weekends in New Orleans - seven murders in a 72-hour period - city officials diverted the police force to ticket a Survivors' Village protestor exercising his First Amendment rights and destroy the structures of Resurrection City. The City also assigned future security of the St. Bernard development to the New Orleans Police Department.

Activists fighting alongside residents face charges in municipal court, which under normal circumstance would be routinely dismissed. In addition to myself, Malcolm Suber from the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, Jay Arena from C3, Bork from Mayday NOLA and Curtis from Common Ground have also been jailed and forced to fight various charges.

The New Day Community Center, inside St. Bernard, was destroyed by S.W.A.T. team members and HANO maintenance men after they removed peaceful protestors.

It is clear to me we are about to be met with a serious effort by the city to close both Resurrection City and the Survivors' Village permanently.

Our response must be to dedicate ourselves to rebuilding both Survivors' Village and Resurrection City. We must take the battle to the Mayor and City Hall.

Last night there was an emergency Survivors' Village meeting, and we decided to implement the following action steps:

1. Starting this Saturday we will replace the signs, symbols, and memorials torn down by the city.
2. Saturday April 14, we will have a 24-hour protest vigil the home of our Mayor, who won re-election primarily because of the support of public housing residents.
3. After the vigil we will begin a 24-hour, 7-day a week, in-your-face direct action campaign targeting the mayor.
4. We will picket and march on the Jazz and Heritage festivals to educate the tourists as to what is going on in New Orleans.
5. We will plan and implement a time-limited tent city in Duncan plaza in the near future.
6. We will rebuild Resurrection City on Saturday June 2, 2007, and maintain a 24-hour, 7-day a week presence from that point on.

How Can You Help??

We Will need the help of righteous and dedicated people in the following ways to continue our struggle successfully:

1. We need financial resources to rebuild Resurrection City, the Survivors' Village and the New Day Support Center (to house our volunteers and to insure a place for people to live close to the battle front)
2. We are calling for physical supporters. If you can come to New Orleans the first weekend in June and meet us at Resurrection City we will need as many bodies as possible!!

Going to jail may be a part of this job description

To donate make checks payable to:

Survivors' Village 3820 Alfred St.

New Orleans, LA 70122

For more information contact:

Endesha Juakali 504-239-2907 EJKSSNO @ YAHOO.COM

Homeland Security Begins With Homes!!

Join Rally to Demand Sen. Mary Landrieu

Support DR 1227 to Reopen Housing Now!!

Senator Mary Landrieu will be the keynote speaker at a so-called 'Homeland Security Forum' sponsored by corporations hustling contracts from the federal government. Yet, at this forum there will be no talk about *real* homeland security for Louisianans, like constructing better levees, like preserving our wetlands, and like passing House Bill HR 1227 that includes:

Making \$1.75 BILLION in unexpended FEMA funds available to the Louisiana Recovery Authority's Road Home program, that is' designed to help private homeowners rebuild.

Opening 3,000 badly needed public housing apartments in New Orleans by August 2007, and one-for one replacement in any redevelopment plans for HANO's stock of over 7,000 apartments.

Senator Landrieu has done NOTHING to pass this bill; indeed she is trying to kill it! She and her family have relied on the support of working class and African American voters for years, but she is doing nothing to meet their REAL homeland security needs. Come out Friday and send her a clear message: Sponsor and Support HR 1227 in the Senate Now!!

Press Conference and Rally Friday, April 20

Gather at 11 :30 AM, Picket until 2 PM 611 Poydras Ave.

Pan American Life Center

Sponsor: C3/Hands OffIberville, United Front for Affordable Housing

For more information and to endorse this action call Elizabeth Cook at 504-319-3564

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Rep. Waters introduces Katrina Housing Recovery Legislation

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Organization:

ACORN: Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

Date Published:

05/03/2007

<!--DMAILER_SECTION_BOUNDARY_0--><!--DMAILER_SECTION_BOUNDARY_0-->Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA), Chair of the Financial Services Committee Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity, introduced H.R. 1227, "The Gulf Coast Hurricane Housing Recovery Act of 2007" on March 1.

The bill comes on the heels of the Housing and Community Opportunity field hearings in the Gulf Region to address the region's ongoing affordable housing crisis. The bill will make a number of policy, bureaucratic, and procedural changes to speed the return of displaced Gulf Coast residents and funnel federally-approved funds to the region to expedite the rebuilding effort.

"The residents of the Gulf Coast, who have been displaced for over a year, have spoken loud and clear and they intend to return home," Waters said.

"While the President goes on another 'look-see' tour today in the Gulf Region, his Administration continues to disregard the residents of the Gulf Coast. This bill will provide immediate assistance to the displaced families of the Gulf by freeing up rebuilding funds for homeowners and providing tough oversight of state housing assistance plans and requiring HUD to reopen public housing and provide voucher assistance for added affordable housing."

Louisiana ACORN head organizer Steve Bradberry testified at a Congressional Hearing on housing held before Waters and other dignitaries at Dillard University on Feb. 22.

To view Bradberry's testimony, [click here](#).

05-03-07

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New Orleans ACORN celebrates rebuilding victory

Organization:
ACORN: Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

Date Published:
06/04/2007



ACORN members pose with Josephine Butler outside of her new storm-resistant home on Feb. 22.

New Orleans ACORN has been a driving force in the rebuilding, recovering and organizing of the 9th Ward ever since Hurricane Katrina. The work persists nearly two years after the storm.

New Orleans ACORN fought for residents of the 9th Ward to visit their devastated communities after the storm, and when there was talk of not repopulating the area, home to mostly low-to-moderate families, New Orleans ACORN stepped up once again and began working to save those neighborhoods. New Orleans ACORN fought to save many Lower 9th ward homes from being razed by waging the “No Bulldozing” campaign as well as fighting to restore potable water and phone services to the area.

And on March 29, when the city of New Orleans announced a plan that counted the Lower 9th Ward as one of two neighborhoods targeted for major rebuilding, splitting \$145 million with New Orleans East, New Orleans ACORN counted this as yet another victory in the fight for the rights of low-to-moderate income residents to return and rebuild post-Katrina.

Vanessa Gueringer, ACORN chairwoman of Lower 9th Ward chapter, said she believes the plan will crush concerns that politicians intend to abandon her neighborhood.

“This is awesome,” she said. “It says to the Lower 9th Ward: You can come home!”

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Gulf Coast Organizations: Self-Organized Events at the U.S. Social Forum

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Date Published:
06/28/2007

GULF COAST ORGANIZATIONS: SELF-ORGANIZED EVENTS AT THE U.S. SOCIAL FORUM June 28 - July 1, 2007

Thursday June 28, 2007

Morning Workshops:

** Ashe Cultural Center & Crossroads:
'Art for Life: A New Orleans Healing Music Ritual'

** People's Hurricane Relief Fund:
'They Left Us Here to Die: Hurricane Katrina & Ethnic Cleansing
in New Orleans and Mississippi Gulf Coast'

Afternoon Workshops:

** People's Hurricane Relief Fund:
'We Are Our Own Liberators: Self-Determination in the Gulf Coast'

** Catalyst Project & People's Hurricane Relief Fund:
'You Can't Kill the Spirit: Solidarity Organizing in the Movement to
Rebuild New Orleans'

** Environmental Justice Resource Center & Deep South Center for
Environmental Justice:

'Toxic Wastes & Race at 20, 1987-2007: Grassroots Struggles to Dismantle Environmental Racism'

** Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, Critical Resistance, People's Hurricane Relief Fund, US Human Rights Network, National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty:

'Say What? A Dramatic Reading of US Government Lies to UN Officials about Gulf Coast Reconstruction'

** Kids Rethinking New Orleans Schools:
'Youth Changing Public Schools in New Orleans & Beyond'

** People's Hurricane Relief Fund:
'Stop the High Rent: Housing as a Human Right'

Gulf Coast Orgs/USSF p. 1

** People's Institute for Survival & Beyond:
'Undoing Racism/Community Organizing: An Anti-Racist Solution for Building a Movement Toward Social Transformation & Equity'

Evening Plenary:

'Gulf Coast Reconstruction in the Post-Katrina Era: Challenges, Visions, and Strategies'

Friday, June 29, 2007

Morning Workshops:

** Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, Mossville Environmental Action Now, Gert Town Revival Initiative & Southwest Workers' Union:
'Stop Environmental Racism! A Protest Action at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency & Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry'

** Critical Resistance:
'Post-Katrina New Orleans: The Reconstruction and Rebuilding of a Police State'

Afternoon Workshops:

** Ashe Cultural Center:
'Thirteen Lessons: A Theatrical Workshop on Adult Literacy'

** Latino Health Outreach Project, New Orleans Women's Health Clinic, Common Ground Health Clinic, Santa Rosa Free Clinic, Berkeley Free Clinic, San Francisco Women's Clinic:
'Healthcare Justice: Moving from Critique to Action'

** Safe Streets, Strong Communities:
'Building Bridges Among Gulf Coast Organizations'

** Advocates for Environmental Human rights, Gert Town Revival Initiative, Mossville Environmental Action Now:
'Changing the Equation: US Environmental Protection= Environmental Racism'

** Latino Health Outreach Project:
'Migration Along the Katrina Corridor: Immigrant Organizing and Healthcare Across the Gulf South'

Gulf Coast Orgs/USSF p. 2

** New Orleans Palestine Solidarity & Middle East Children's Alliance:
'Forced Displacement and the Right to Return: Palestine, New Orleans, and Urban America'

Saturday, June 30, 2007

Morning Workshops:

** Fourth World Movement:
'Families in Extreme Poverty as Equal Partners in Poverty Eradication for Another Possible World'

** Left Turn:
'Media as Movement Building'

** Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, NYC Association of Homeless, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, Good Work, Enlace Comunitario, CHAMP: Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project, El Centro for Igualdad y Derechos:
'Building Movement at the US Social Forum: Dialogue on Organizing'

Afternoon Workshops:

** Left Turn & INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence:
'The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex: Part I'

** The Ordinary People's Society, Project South, and Fairness for Prisoners Families:
'People's Family Reunion: A Gathering of Formerly Incarcerated People, Our Families & Friends'

** People's Hurricane Relief Fund:

** Left Turn & INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence:
'The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit
Industrial Complex: Part II'

**Gulf Coast Resolution-Building Caucus Meeting

** People's Movement Assembly & Closing Ceremony

Sunday, July 1

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Attachment	Size
Gulf Coast Orgs_USSF.cwk	31.29 KB

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Proposed Resolution to Protect the Human Rights of People Struggling to Return to and Rebuild the Gulf Coast Region

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Author:

by Kimberley Richards, People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (New Orleans, LA), Monique Harden, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights (New Orleans, LA)

Date Published:

07/01/2007

Proposed Resolution to Protect the Human Rights of People Struggling to Return to and Rebuild the Gulf Coast Region in the Aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina & Rita

Presented to the US Social Forum People's Assembly

Whereas, if another world is possible, another United States is necessary and another South is critical;

Whereas, people around the world witnessed the U.S. government's racist treatment of African Americans in the Gulf Region of the southern United States during Hurricane Katrina;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government's approval of a hurricane evacuation plan designed for people who have access to vehicles and resources for lodging away from the Gulf Coast region, which discriminated against African Americans who do not have access to vehicles and resources for lodging;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government placing the lives of African Americans in jeopardy by failing to immediately transport African Americans to safe haven;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government constructing substandard and ineptly designed levees that were breached by a storm surge that flooded 80% of the city of New Orleans;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government ignoring the eyewitness accounts of African American hurricane survivors living in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, who heard an explosion at their levee before their homes and neighborhood were inundated with floodwater;

Whereas, this racist treatment included giving law enforcement officers a shoot to kill order that allowed the brutalization, incarceration, and merciless killing of African American hurricane survivors;

Whereas, this racist treatment included law enforcement officers blocking access of mostly African American hurricane survivors to bridges that led to higher and safer ground near the city of New Orleans;

Whereas, this racist treatment included a search and rescue operation that separated African Americans hurricane survivors from family members and brought them far distances without their knowledge or consent;

Whereas, this racist treatment included denying food, water, and shelter to African Americans who were evacuated from the Gulf region;

Whereas, the government continues the injustice to this present day – twenty-two months after Hurricane Katrina – with a privatization scheme that is hostile to the needs and human rights of African American, Vietnamese American, Latino, and poor white people who live in the Gulf Coast region;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs began with providing lucrative contracts to companies that overstated their expenses while perpetrating wage theft and other abuses on mostly Latino migrant and immigrant workers; 2

Whereas, a governmental priority of recovery expenditures has not been the rebuilding of homes and communities, but the expansion of the prison industrial complex and the deployment of the national guard to residential neighborhoods in New Orleans;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs include repairing and upgrading levees and floodwalls in a way that – as of June 2007 and at least through the end of 2011 – will protect predominantly white neighborhoods in New Orleans from flooding, but will not protect any African American neighborhood in New Orleans from flooding;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs include providing huge tax breaks for private companies seeking to demolish public housing units in New Orleans that were not damaged by the hurricanes and take over other Gulf Coast neighborhoods for the purpose of building golf courses, condominiums and other housing that Gulf Coast residents cannot afford;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs include replacing public schools and public healthcare facilities with privately owned companies;

Whereas, nearly two years ago, more than 750,000 people from the Gulf Coast were displaced from their homes as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as well as substandard levees constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;

Whereas, to this present day, approximately 300,000 people suffer the injustice of prolonged displacement and remain separated from their homes, families, friends, and communities as a result of hostile governmental programs that deny their right to return home, which constitute an ethnic cleansing of New Orleans and the Gulf region;

Whereas, the Robert T. Stafford Act, the federal law establishing governmental responses to national disasters, mandates that the President has complete discretion in responding or not responding to a disaster and its after effects; and establishes that people affected by a disaster have no legal right to any assistance, including emergency medical care and shelter;

Whereas, the United Nations has established the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which recognizes that people who are forced to flee their homes as a result of a natural or man-made disaster are internally displaced people, and provides protections for internally displaced people who would otherwise have neither a right to restorative justice nor protection from unfair and abusive treatment by governmental and private entities that unjustly prolong their displacement and deny their right to return;

Whereas, the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement prohibits displacement that is aimed at or results in ethnic cleansing or altering the racial, ethnic or religious composition of the affected population;

Whereas, the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement establishes the right of displaced persons to request and receive humanitarian assistance and protection, as well as the right to voluntarily to return to their communities or resettle;

Whereas, the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement establishes the right of displaced persons to housing that requires governments to provide temporary housing for the duration of the displacement and support the rebuilding of permanent homes; 3

Whereas, the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement establishes the right of displaced persons to education that requires governments to provide education and training facilities as soon as conditions permit;

Whereas, the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement establishes the right of displaced persons to healthcare that includes mental health and social services;

Whereas, in international settings, the U.S. government has endorsed the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, encouraged other nations to adopt the Guiding Principles as binding national law, and established a foreign policy, USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Policy, which applies the Guiding Principles to the assistance that is provided by the U.S. government to displaced people in other countries;

Whereas, social justice and human rights organizations led by African Americans and other people of color in the Gulf Coast region are in the struggle to bring people back home which involves advocating that the government comply with the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and seek to build a united front that dismantles the racist and regressive politics and governance controlling our communities in the South;

Therefore, be it resolved that the United States Social Forum ("USSF") People's Assembly stands in solidarity with the people of the Gulf Coast region who are struggling to rebuild their lives and communities and those who remain displaced;

Therefore, be it resolved that the USSF People's Assembly calls for a just, anti-racist, and sustainable rebuilding of the Gulf Coast that ends the U.S. government's human rights violations which have denied mostly African American residents of the Gulf Coast their right to return and rebuild; and have created a new slavery of mostly Latino migrant and immigrant people whose labor has been brutally exploited in the reconstruction of Gulf Coast communities;

Therefore, be it further resolved that the USSF People's Assembly advocates for federal laws that

adopt the rights and duties established by the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in order to protect the human rights of people from the Gulf Coast who are struggling to return to and rebuild their communities, as well as the human rights of all other people who become displaced as a result of a natural or man-made disaster;
prohibit the exploitation and abuse of people, regardless of status, who work in the reconstruction of communities damaged by a disaster; and
establish and fund the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, a civic works program in the Gulf Coast that would create 100,000 rebuilding jobs for the region's residents.

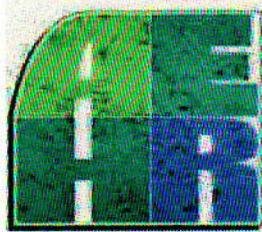
Attachment	Size
Gulf Coast Proposed Resolution – USSF.pdf	33.04 KB

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: No Flood Protection for African American Neighborhoods

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Organization: [Advocates for Environmental Human Rights](#) **Date Published:** 07/14/2007



Advocates for Environmental Human Rights

Defending and advancing the human right to a healthy environment

www.chumanrights.org

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: No Flood Protection for African American Neighborhoods

After Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was compelled to acknowledge that the substandard design and construction of levees and floodwalls caused 80% of the City of New Orleans to flood. However, the Corps has not taken responsibility for compensating New Orleanians for their massive losses.

On June 20, 2007, the Corps released maps that show the current risk of flooding in the Greater New Orleans area. The flood risk is based, in part, on the repairs and upgrades to levees and floodwalls that were completed by the Corps in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. According to the Corps' maps, predominantly white neighborhoods that flooded during Hurricane Katrina will now have flood waters reduced by 5.5 feet because of the construction of flood gates and pumps. However, predominantly African American neighborhoods will either have no reduction in flood waters or a reduction in flood waters that range from 6 inches to 2 feet.

The Corps is in the process of preparing maps that will show the risk of flooding after its comprehensive upgrade of levees is completed by the year 2011. In the meantime, African Americans are now subjected to paying more for insurance than whites and investing more money to rebuild homes that can be repeatedly flooded for several years.

Racial Discrimination & Neighborhood Flood Risks Based on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Data

Predominantly African American Neighborhoods	Floodwater Reduction	Predominantly White Neighborhoods	Floodwater Reduction
New Orleans East	0 inches	Lakeview	5.5 feet
Gentilly	6 inches	Old Metairie	5.5 feet
Ninth Ward	2 feet		

For more information and to view the flood risk maps prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, check out <http://nolarisk.usace.army.mil/#map>.

Safe Streets, Strong Communities, Brochure from 2nd Annual Picnic

Organization:
Safe Streets/Strong Communities

Date Published:
07/29/2007

SAFE STREETS, STRONG COMMUNITIES

(Excerpts from a brochure handed out at
the Safe Streets/ Strong Communities
Second Annual Picnic, July 29, 2007)

WHO WE ARE

Safe Streets - Strong Communities is a membership based organization whose mission is to create safe streets and strong communities for everyone, regardless of our race or economic status.

Safe Streets works in coalition with other concerned citizens, advocates and attorneys who came together with a common vision for criminal justice reform and rebuilding. Our Coalition Partners include: A Fighting Chance, Fairness for Prisoner's Families, Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC), Innocence Project - New Orleans, Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, Louisiana ACLU, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Southern Center for Human Rights and Voice of the Ex-Offender (VOTE).

OUR VISION

Our vision is to build a world where all communities are safe and strong. This means putting resources into our children and families by funding schools, housing, and services instead of jails and prisons. To do this, we must build *power* in our communities by standing together and demanding changes.

REFORMING OUR PUBLIC SAFETY SYSTEM

Safe Streets organizes in communities most affected by our broken criminal justice system, particularly those who have been victims of violent crime, victims of police harassment, are current or former prisoners, those who have suffered because of an indigent defender system in crisis, their family members and friends. Our projects include:

Orleans Parish Prisoners Survivors Council, established to help those who were in OPP when Katrina's floodwaters began to rise;

Family Advocacy Tools to help family members advocate for their loved ones on the other side of the fence;

Safe Streets brochure.cwk. p. 1

Communities Against Police Brutality to help communities mobilize responses to police injustices and demand accountability of their elected officials;

Police Accountability Advocates, who can help you file a complaint at the Public Integrity Bureau or pursue other avenues to gain justice.

WHAT SAFE STREETS STANDS FOR:

The criminal justice and public safety system in New Orleans was in crisis long before Katrina devastated our city. The system cost tax payers millions of dollars every year while it failed to keep our citizens safe, leaving us vulnerable to crime and violence, and with one of the highest murder rates in the nation.

Abuse and corruption within the NOPD, inside the Orleans Parish Prison Complex and within our court system has been the source of law suits, protests, and scandal on a national scale. These broken systems have brought shame to our city and hindered our ability to attract new comers and vital economic development. Simultaneously, whole portions of our community have been funneled into this broken system, destroying lives and the fabric of our families, while failing to protect our communities.

From the tragic waters of Katrina, we have been given an opportunity for a fresh start. As we rebuild our homes, schools, parks and levees, let us rebuild a criminal justice system that provides safety from all forms of violence and crime and is democratic, fair and accountable. Let us reconstruct a public safety system that creates safe streets and strong communities for everyone, regardless of race or economic status.

DEMANDS FOR NOPD REFORM:

Support and fully fund an Independent Monitor who will investigate police misconduct and make public recommendations for police accountability and policy change.

Conduct a Nationwide Search with citizen input for a Superintendent of the New Orleans Police Department who will clean out corruption and reform the NOPD.

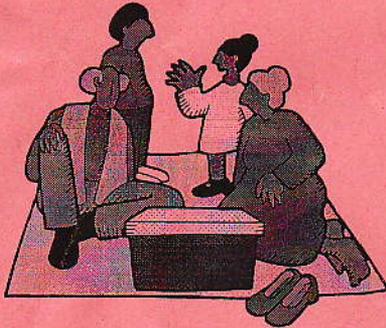
Reconvene a Police-Citizen Review Task Force that will create a 5 year plan for Recovery and Reform.

For More Info: www.safestreetsnola.org

Safe Streets brochure.cwk. p. 2

**Safe Streets/Strong Communities invites you to
Join Us For Our**

2nd Annual Picnic



COME OUT FOR A DAY OF FOOD,
MUSIC, FUN AND COMMUNITY

Great Food * Spacewalk *** DJ Joe
Blakk *** Kickball *** Games for the
kids *** Softball *** Raffles *** Know
Your Rights Information *** FUN!! *****

Sunday, July 29, 2007

City Park - Shelter No. 1

(Off Orleans Ave. near City Park Ave.)

2:00 PM until 7:00PM

Come Out and Learn About Safe Streets/ Strong Communities

*****IF YOU HAVE A LOVED ONE WHO IS INCARCERATED OR WHO
HAS BEEN HARASSED BY POLICE, MAKE SURE YOU DROP BY OUR
ADVOCACY TABLE!*****

Safe Streets/Strong Communities works to build unity among those who are the most hurt by the criminal justice system, especially with those who have lost a loved one to violence, been victims of police brutality and harassment, are current or former prisoners, their family members and friends. We use our power in numbers to demand fundamental changes to the agencies and systems that affect our family members' lives.

**For more
information or to
get involved call
Robert Goodman at
522-0416 or at 214-
714-0674**

www.safestreetsnola.org

Racism and Resistance: The Struggle to Free The Jena Six

Organization: Left Turn **Author:** Jordan Flaherty **Date Published:** 08/16/2007

Link:

<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=13551>

ZNet | Activism

Racism and Resistance: The Struggle to Free The Jena Six

by Jordan Flaherty; [Left Turn Magazine](#); August 16, 2007

Almost a year ago, in the small northern Louisiana town of Jena, a group of white students hung three nooses from a tree in front of Jena High School. This set into motion a season of racial tension and incidents that culminated in six Black youths facing a lifetime in jail for a schoolyard fight.

The story that has unfolded since is one of racism and injustice, but also of resistance and solidarity, as people from around the world have joined together with the families of the accused, lending legal and financial support, adding political pressure, and joining demonstrations and marches.

The nooses were hung after a Black student asked permission to sit under a tree that had been reserved by tradition for white students only. In response to the three nooses, nearly every Black student in the school stood under the tree in a spontaneous and powerful act of nonviolent protest. The town's district attorney quickly arrived, flanked by police officers, and told the Black students to stop making such a big deal over the nooses, which school officials termed to be a "harmless prank." Walters spoke in a school assembly, which like the schoolyard where all of this had begun was divided by race, with the Black students on one side and the white students on the other. Directing his remarks to the Black students, District Attorney Reed Walters said, "I can make your lives disappear with a stroke of a pen."

The white students who confessed to hanging the nooses never received any meaningful punishment. Nor did the white students who months later beat up a Black student at a school party, nor did the white former student who threatened two Black students with a shotgun. But, after these incidents, when Black students got into a fight with a white student, six Black youths were charged with attempted murder, and now face a lifetime in prison. The white student was briefly hospitalized, but had no major injuries and was socializing with friends at a school ring ceremony the evening of the fight. The accused students may not have been involved in the fight, but they were known to be organizers of the protest under the tree. They were also star athletes in the school football team, and had no history of discipline problems.

The Black students were arrested immediately after the fight, in December of last year. School officials and police officials took statements from at least 44 witnesses. The statements do not paint a clear picture of who was in the fight. Statements from white students refer to a group of "Black boys," but most testimonies are unclear as to the identities of who was involved. Some of the arrested youths are not implicated in the fight at all.

Despite this, when Mychal Bell, the first youth to go to trial, refused to take a deal in exchange for testifying against his friends, he was quickly convicted by an all-white jury. Bell's public defender Blane Williams, visibly angry at Bell and his parents because the youth did not take the deal, called no witnesses and gave no meaningful defense. This attorney's behavior gives a vivid example of our nation's broken and underfunded public defender system. Some have called Jena a throwback to the past, but in fact Jena presents a clear vision of the current state of our criminal justice system.

In Paris Texas, a white teenager burns down her family's home and receives probation, while a Black student shoves a hall monitor and gets 7 years in prison. Genarlow Wilson, in Atlanta, is sentenced to ten years in prison for participating in consensual oral sex with a 15 year old when he was 17. Like these and many other cases, the case in Jena is textbook proof that there are still two systems of justice functioning in this country, one for Black people, and one for white. The unpunished incidents in the days and months leading up to the fight clearly demonstrate that the students of Jena would never have faced charges if white students had beaten a Black student.

Local Resistance

Immediately after the arrests, parents of the accused began organizing. Their call, "Free the Jena Six," was initially heard by activists from other parts of Louisiana, such as the Lafayette public access TV show, "Community Defender," which was the first media from outside their immediate area to give coverage of the case. Noncorporate media has been vital in spreading word of the case, beginning with blogs and YouTube videos, which then led to articles in grassroots publications and high profile stories on Democracy Now and in The Final Call.

LaSalle parish, where Jena is located, is 85% white. The town is still mostly segregated - from the white barber who refuses to cut Black hair to the white and Black parts of town, separated by an invisible line. LaSalle is also one of Louisiana's most wealthy parishes, with small oil rigs in many back yards contributing to area wealth. The parish is a major contributor to Republican politicians, and former klansman David Duke received a solid majority of local votes when he ran for governor in 1991 - in fact, he received a higher percentage of votes in LaSalle parish than in any other part the state. Jena was also the former site of a notoriously brutal youth prison, which was closed after years of lawsuits and negative media exposure. The prison is now scheduled to be reopened as a private prison for the growth business of immigrant detentions.

Only one church in town has allowed the parents to hold meetings. There has been local pressure on family members and their allies to stay quiet. However, in the face of opposition, their voice has grown louder. Without an infrastructure of support, without any paid organizers, this struggle was initiated and is still led by six courageous families.

Three hundred supporters, most from the immediate region, but some from as far away as California, Chicago and New York, descended on Jena on July 31 to protest District Attorney Reed Walters' conduct and call for dismissal of all charges. The largest groups included Millions More Movement delegations from Houston, Monroe and Shreveport, and nearly fifty members of Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children from Lake Charles and New Orleans. Other delegations from across Louisiana included members of INCITE Women of Color Against Violence, Critical Resistance, Common Ground and Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. The demonstration marched through downtown Jena - reported to be the biggest civil rights march the town of 2,500 residents has ever seen - and delivered a petition with 43,000 signatures to the District Attorney's office.

In the two weeks since the demonstration, more major allies have begun to come on board. The Congressional Black Caucus - representing 43 members, including Senator Barack Obama - issued a statement calling for charges to be dropped, while the city of Cambridge Massachusetts passed a resolution in support of the families of the Jena Six. Al Sharpton and other national leaders have visited Jena, while Jesse Jackson brought the support of members of the state legislative Black caucus.

ColorOfChange.org, which has coordinated much of the outside support, has gathered 60,000 signatures on a petition to Louisiana Governor Blanco, calling for her to pardon the accused, and investigate District Attorney Reed Walters.

Blanco, a Democratic governor elected with the overwhelming support of Black residents of Louisiana, responded with a condescending statement, tersely informing petitioners, "The State Constitution provides for three branches of state government - Legislative, Executive, and Judicial - and the Constitution prohibits anyone in one branch from exercising the powers of anyone in another branch." This is the same governor who, as Katrina approached, urged gulf coast residents to "pray the hurricane down" to a level two. When New Orleans was flooded and people were trapped in the New Orleans Superdome and convention center, she informed the nation that she was sending in National Guard troops, and "They have M-16s and they're locked and loaded. These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so, and I expect they will." More recently, Blanco created a program to bring federal money to homeowners rebuilding after Katrina - the "Road Home" - that has been a dismal failure on every level.

Mychal Bell's sentencing is currently scheduled for September 20. The families are planning another demonstration for that date, and also have assembled a legal team for Bell and the other youths. National organizations such as Southern Poverty Law Center and NAACP joined initial supporters such as Friends of Justice (from Tullia, Texas) and ACLU of Louisiana. Legal expenses for the youths could be hundreds of thousands of dollars, and funding is still needed. Except for Mychal Bell, who has a bail hearing scheduled for September 4, all of the youths are out on bail.

The case of Jena Six has served as a wake-up call on the state of US justice. It shows vividly the racial bias still inherent to our system. But it has also shown something else. That this group of families refuses to be silent in the face of injustice, and that hundreds of thousands of other people around the world have chosen to stand with them. Together they have said that we are drawing the line, here, in Jena Louisiana.

Jordan Flaherty is a New Orleans-based journalist and an editor of Left Turn Magazine. His May 9, 2007 article from Jena was one of the first to bring the case to a national audience. Please see <http://www.leftturn.org> and <http://www.freethejena6.org/> for more coverage of the Jena case.

Resources:

Donate to support the legal defense fund:
Jena 6 Defense Committee
PO BOX 2798
Jena, LA 71342

Donate online at: https://secure.colorofchange.org/jena_fund/
Sign the petition at: <http://www.colorofchange.org/jena/>

For more information or to offer concrete support, email:
[jena6defense\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:jena6defense(at)gmail.com)

Media coverage:
The Final Call:
http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article_3753.shtml
NPR (News and Notes):
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=11756302>
Democracy Now:
<http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=07/07/10/1413220>

Mychal Bell, who has been behind bars since December of 2006, has asked to receive letters from supporters. Please write to:

Mychal Bell
Inmate, A-Dorm
LaSalle Correctional Center
15976 Highway 165
Olla, LA 71465-4801

Congressional Black Caucus resolution:
<http://www.congressionalblackcaucus.net/>

Cambridge, MA, city council resolution:
http://www.cambridgema.gov/cityClerk/PolicyOrder.cfm?action=search&item_id=18831

New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE - <http://www.nycore.org>) is teaming up with other teacher activist groups across the country to develop a curriculum guide for teachers to address what's happening in Jena. Contact breebree@mindspring.com

" target="_blank" title="mailto:breebree@mindspring.com">breebree@mindspring.com or arianamangual@gmail.com target="_blank" title="mailto:arianamangual@gmail.com">arianamangual@gmail.com.

Support Organizations:

<http://friendsofjustice.wordpress.com/>
<http://www.colorofchange.org>
<http://www.millionsmoremovement.com>
<http://www.iaaclu.org/>

YouTube videos in support of the Jena Six:

Day of Action Against the Red Cross

Organization:

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition

Date Published:

08/20/2007

Link:

<http://www.peopleshurricane.org/red-cross-updates/day-of-action-against-the-red-...>

Day Of Action Against The Red Cross

Posted on by  PeoplesHurricane.org

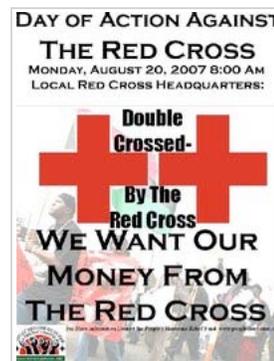
WHY WE MARCH AGAINST RED CROSS

Red Cross has solicited and received billions of dollars to aid Katrina survivors. A large portion of that money (possibly \$80 million) was directed toward the Means to Recovery program. Red Cross officials don't agree on the actual amount and have tried their best to hide the program and make it difficult for desperate survivors to receive these funds.

The Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and other groups across the nation are protesting on Monday, August 20 at Red Cross offices to demand that Red Cross do right by the people these funds were intended.

We are calling for:

1. Immediate disbursal of all funds received for Katrina-Rita Survivors with a target date set for completion.
2. Elimination of the Case Manager process and implementation of a swift, simple process for getting funds into the hands of needy survivors.
3. Total Accountability for all funds received and disbursed. A 'dollars-to-demographics' accounting of funds received for survivors.
4. Immediate identification and release of any funds that were directed to other agencies for Katrina-Rita relief.
5. Congressional and local investigations into the use of Katrina-related funds by all government and non-profit agencies.



Click image to enlarge flyer

Red Cross Calls Cops on Peaceful Picketers

Organization:

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition

Author:

<http://www.peopleshurricane.org/red-cross-updates/red-cross-calls-cops-on-peaceful-picketeers.html>

Date Published:

08/20/2007

Link:

<http://www.peopleshurricane.org/red-cross-updates/red-cross-calls-cops-on-peacef...>

Red Cross Calls Cops on Peaceful Picketeers

PeoplesHurricane.org

Katrina Donations Scandal heats up

It's been a busy few weeks for the American Red Cross. They've been sued for trademark infringement, had an official sentenced to 6 months in jail for theft and issued several conflicting statements to local and national media regarding the Means to Recovery program. The organization that is at the center of the Katrina Donations Scandal is showing signs of desperation.

On Monday, August 20 about 11 people, two of them on crutches, picketed in front of the Jackson, Mississippi office of the American Red Cross. As the picket wound down the Mississippi state Red Cross director, Rev. Sam Campbell drove up. Campbell, not feeling very religious, was less than civil with the Katrina survivors he had met with and promised quick results to earlier that month.

About the same time Campbell showed up a Jackson Police Department car appeared and confronted the picket line leader, Ms. Wilma Taylor. The officer informed Ms. Taylor that she needed to REGISTER to do a peaceful picket and wanted her to obtain a form to that effect. Fortunately Ms. Taylor was able to reach Attorney Chokwe Lumumba who made sure that the marchers would be able to finish their mission for that day. Most thought the very idea of having to register with the police to picket was a violation of constitutional rights. This will be taken up later. The scare tactic follows efforts on the part of Red Cross to deceive and even buy off protest leaders with jobs and offers of personal assistance.

Similar offers were made to protesters in Fort Worth, Texas. 'Divide and conquer' tactics have also been used along with punitive measures to stop groups from publicly demonstrating their displeasure with the organization's reluctance to distribute funds given to help Katrina survivors. Among service providers there seems to be a growing disdain for Survivors who try to get any of the monies that were donated to help them.

Since PHRF released information in mid-July about the nearly covert 'Means to Recovery' program to assist Katrina survivors, Red Cross has had to respond to a flood of requests for assistance and allegations from across the country of mis-use of donated funds.

In that same period PHRF has responded to calls for assistance from groups of survivors in various cities to confront Red Cross and other agencies that have resources but make it difficult, if not impossible to access those funds.

In a two-week period the Red Cross has issued at least three conflicting explanations of the handling of over \$80 million (according to their count of the week) in the Means to Recovery program. Some accounts claim the program is now out of money, a statement that carries little credibility with those who have been involved with the matter for several months. It's difficult to get the same information twice from ARC.

In a televised debate on New Orleans station WDSU Red Cross Chapter Director Kay Wilkins claimed that workers went door-to-door spreading information about this and other assistance programs. In an e-mail poll sponsored by the station 77% of responding viewers sided with the PHRF. Most needy survivors do not own computers, so this had to reflect a large number of White middle class residents of the metro area. None of the 10,000+ people who came to the PHRF offices to get applications recall seeing Red Cross workers in their areas.

The door-to-door claim was repeated in a July 25th Red Cross media advisory which also claimed that the organization informed numerous other groups and over 1,000 partnering organizations to get the word out to the public. It seemed odd that PHRF could inform more people about the program with 200 e-mails than Red Cross could with a multi-million dollar advertising budget...that is, until another version of the story emerged.

In a conflicting account, Red Cross officials told the New York Times last week that the program had been deliberately kept a secret because it was only supposed to serve 4,000 people. Why would Red Cross contact 1,000 organizations to serve as few as 4,000 people? Only time (and legal action) will tell which version of the Red Cross story is actually closer to truth. However, secret or not questions of competence and ethics arise from the handling of the Means to Recovery funds and Red Cross has not revealed how much of the \$80 million has been disbursed to date or why it has made it so difficult for survivors to access the funds. While the New York Times seemed hesitant to even publish an article about the scandal, much local media in New Orleans, including the major daily, have refused to even acknowledge the matter, ignoring the cries of thousands of residents.

To access any portion of the \$20,000 maximum allotment per family, survivors have had to endure a process that is more elaborate and time-consuming than purchasing a home. A 30-page application had been reduced to 13 pages, then 8 pages, but survivors who applied for help in November of last year are still waiting for a response, not to mention actual help. Applicants have to locate a case manager who presented their needs before a 'long-term recovery committee' which decided for them what they really needed and how much of that need would be met. These committees have shown extreme hostility, suspicion and condescension toward survivors in need.

Survivors in Mississippi met last week with the state director who responded only after they picketed the offices there. At the meeting, facilitated by PHRF staff, over thirty evacuees told of the lies and misinformation they were given about the Means to Recovery program by local groups including Catholic Charities, who supplies the case managers that are required by the program. Residents also complained about the Access to Care program which is supposed to provide health-related assistance to survivors but in that area has operated on a reimbursement-only basis, eliminating those who can not pay up front. Local health providers will not honor the program because of the length of time it took for Red Cross to pay them. Elders spoke of the disrespect and disinterest they experienced at the hands of social service workers from local agencies. Officials agreed to hire two case managers and train volunteers. PHRF is calling for the elimination of the case manager requirement to hasten the process of getting the aid to the people.

In Dallas, Texas over 200 survivors are struggling to get assistance from a social service community that is non-responsive in spite of the wealth of resources that have been donated specifically to help them. Red Cross officials finally met with them after PHRF exposed information about the Means to Recovery Program. "The Red Cross director came into the meeting holding a copy of your article," said Kim Ford, who has organized survivors in that area. "They begged us not to hold a press conference."

From Texas, California, New York and throughout the South the reports are flowing in about Katrina evacuees who are hurting and in need but being denied assistance that is available because of the attitudes or dispositions of the social service sector. In most areas those in need face a gauntlet of redundant forms, interviews, challenges, insults, delays, denials and lies to get the smallest amount of help. Yet the 'helping' organizations are quick to solicit and receive funds to help these people. Over \$4 billion has been donated to Katrina relief. Over \$2 billion of that went to Red Cross. Of \$189 million available, \$80 million (according to New Orleans ARC officials) was set aside for MTR. Of that amount less than \$15 million has been disbursed since October of 2006.

In a classic 'David and Goliath' matchup, the \$5 billion budgeted Red Cross has tried a variety of tactics to quiet the tiny PHRF, including sending lawyers to threaten PHRF's funding source, which did not work. Red Cross has also issued statements accusing PHRF of 'misleading' the public about the Means to Recovery program. Although it was not able to claim that statements put forth by PHRF were actually untrue, Red Cross used 'straw man' arguments and elastic interpretations of statements to claim they were being treated unfairly. Their national media advisory implicitly denied the documented fact that PHRF staffer Leon Waters used his personal funds to house survivors in Baton Rouge that Red Cross dumped after their apartments burned. They did not claim to have actually helped the survivors.

The issue of the lack of race and class diversity in the board and staff leadership of Red Cross has also been raised as a factor in the mishandling of Katrina-related funds by the organization.

Since the Means to Recovery revelations numerous other organizations have joined the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund in calling for immediate disbursement of all funds for survivors and full accountability for all funds received by all major agencies, including Red Cross, United Way, Catholic Charities, Salvation Army and others. NAACP, the Nation of Islam, Katrina Home Drive, United Teachers of New Orleans, the Welfare Rights Organization, Liberation Zone Ministries, Nuthin' But Fire Records, the Katrina Action Network and others have joined in the call for accountability. This could require litigation or a congressional investigation because of the reluctance of recipient agencies to come forth with specific information regarding where and to whom the monies have gone.

The Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund expects to address these and other issues at the International Tribunal on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita which will be held in New Orleans August 29-September 2. Witnesses will testify about crimes and human rights violations committed against the people of New Orleans before, during and after Katrina.

International Tribunal Issues Preliminary Findings: Bush, Blanco, Nagin Committed Crimes against Humanity

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Organization: Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition
Date Published: 08/29/2007

Link:
http://groups.google.com/group/nynolasupport/browse_thread/thread/e1e2e4f836c22c...

International Tribunal Issues Preliminary Findings
Bush, Blanco, Nagin Committed Crimes against Humanity

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(504) tel. 301-0215 fax 301-0306
tribu...@peopleshurricane.org
Contact: Monifa Bandele (917) 407- 3018

New Orleans-
Between August 29, 2007 and September 2, 2007, a Tribunal of 16 esteemed jurists from nine countries, including Algeria, Brazil, France, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mexico, South Africa, Venezuela, and the United States, convened in New Orleans to hear testimony by experts and survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

After hearing nearly 30 hours of testimony by hurricane survivors and experts -- covering government neglect and negligence in 15 areas, ranging from police brutality to environmental **racism**, from misappropriation of relief to gentrification -- the jurists announced their preliminary findings.

Jill Soffiyah Elijah, the Deputy Director of the Criminal Justice Institute at Harvard Law School and Chief Judge for the International Tribunal on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, announced the Tribunal's preliminary findings "It is our view that the U.S. government has committed crimes against humanity particularly in relation to its failure to maintain functional levees that should have protected the City of New Orleans from flooding; ... it was the reckless disregard and, in some instances, negligence of the U.S. government, the state of Louisiana and the city of New Orleans that created the devastation we continue to see **today**."

Elijah also announced that the Tribunal made preliminary findings that the federal, state and local governments are guilty of violating the human rights to life, dignity and recognition of personhood; the right to be free from racial discrimination -- especially as it pertains to the actions of law enforcement personnel and vigilantes; the right to return, resettlement and reintegration of internally displaced persons; the right to be free from degrading treatment and punishment; the right to freedom of movement; the right to adequate housing and education; the right to vote and participate in governance and the right to a fair trial; the right to liberty and security of person and the right to equal protection under the law. Both actions and failure to act by the governments had disproportionate devastating impact with respect to race and gender.

The jurists announced that they would deliver their final verdict on December 8, 2007 -- the second anniversary of the Katrina Survivors' Assembly. In the meantime, prosecutors will be submitting additional evidence and videotaped affidavits from an additional 25 survivors.

The prosecution team included experienced attorneys from respected legal associations around the country: the ACLU of New York, National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, the US Human Rights Network, the National Conference of Black Lawyers, the Center for Constitutional Rights, National Lawyers Guild, the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights, Washington DC Legal Defender, Mississippi Disaster Relief Coalition, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, Legal Empowerment Center and the Louisiana Justice Initiative.

The Tribunal Conveners -- representing movements for justice on four continents -- reminded Tribunal participants and witnesses of the solemnity of their task. Lybon Mabasa, a founding member with Stephen Biko of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, insisted, "We must hold these criminal governments to account in order to stop the world from sinking into barbarism and to make the world one where

life is worth living."

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For samples of videotaped testimony, contact Monifa Bandele at 917 407-3018

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Two Years Post Katrina: Racism and Criminal Justice in New Orleans

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Author: Jordan Flaherty **Date Published:** 08/30/2007 **Link:** <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=13655>

ZNet | Activism

Two Years Post-Katrina: Racism and Criminal Justice in New Orleans

by Jordan Flaherty; August 30, 2007

Two years after the devastation of New Orleans highlighted racism and inequality in the US, the disaster continues. New Orleans' health care and education systems are still in crisis. Thousands of units of public housing sit empty. Nearly half the city's population remains displaced. A report released this week by the Institute for Southern Studies reveals that, out of \$116 billion in federal Katrina funds allocated, less than 30% has gone towards long-term rebuilding—and half of that 30% remains unspent.

The city's criminal justice system, already rated among the worst in the nation by human rights organizations pre-Katrina, continues to be in crisis. After the storm, thousands of prisoners were abandoned in Orleans Parish Prison as the water was rising. In the days after Katrina, mainstream media depicted the people of New Orleans as looters and criminals, and a makeshift jail in a bus station was the first city function to re-open, just days after the storm.

For Robert Goodman, an activist for criminal justice reform who was born and raised in the schools and prisons of Louisiana, this demonizing and criminalization of the survivors was no surprise. He tells me that the primary crisis of New Orleans is a discriminatory and corrupt criminal justice system, adding that, "every time a black child is born in Louisiana, there's already a bed waiting for him at Angola State Prison."

On May 9, 2006, Robert Goodman's brother was killed in an encounter with the New Orleans police. This was another death in a long list of civilian deaths at police hands, a list that also includes three deaths in Orleans Parish Prison this year. Advocates say these deaths have not received proper investigation, and point to larger, systemic problems.

A Broken System

For poor Black kids growing up in New Orleans, the education system functions as a school to prison pipeline. In New Orleans, 95% of the detained youth in 1999 were Black. In 2004, Louisiana spent \$96,713 to incarcerate each child in detention, and \$4,724 to educate a child in the public schools. "When I went to prison, I was illiterate," Goodman tells me. "I didn't even know anything about slavery, about our history."

New Orleans' public defense system is in such poor shape that Orleans Parish Criminal District Court Judge Arthur Hunter recently complained that, "indigent defense in New Orleans is unbelievable, unconstitutional, totally lacking the basic professional standards of legal representation, and a mockery of what a criminal justice system should be in a Western civilized nation."

Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate of any state in the US – if Louisiana were a country, it would have the highest incarceration rate in the world. Orleans Parish Prison, the city jail, was - pre-Katrina - the eighth largest jail in the US. Advocates complain that there is no forum for oversight over the jail or Marlin Gusman, the criminal Sheriff who oversees it. "We've suffered under a policy where the city builds a huge jail that is then required to be filled with human beings, or else it's a waste of money," states civil rights attorney Mary Howell.

Robert Goodman is fighting to change the system that took away his brother, as part of a grassroots organization called Safe Streets Strong Communities. Safe Streets is struggling not just to reform the entire system, from policing and public defense to prison, but also to reframe the debate around these issues.

Safe Streets began as a coalition of grassroots activists and organizers from a number of organizations who came together post-Katrina to respond to the immediate crisis. "Our first priority was to help those individuals who had been in Orleans Parish Prison prior to Katrina, many of whom were being held illegally for minor, non-violent offenses," explains co-director Norris Henderson. "In the early days, right after the storm, Safe Streets was basically performing triage for a broken system."

In the transition from the crisis of Katrina to the long-term catastrophe that the city is still in, Safe Streets focused their energy on building their base, ensuring that people in communities most affected were shaping the priorities and making the decisions of the organization.

The organization has been a vital leader in the struggle for a just recovery for New Orleans. Shortly after Safe Streets began pressuring on the issue, the city's indigent defense board was completely reconstituted and now includes people that actually care about poor people receiving a fair trial. After they turned their focus to issues around policing, the city approved and funded an office of the independent monitor to oversee the police. In addition, the city council has begun looking at downsizing Orleans Parish Prison, as well as reducing the sheriff's budget, and tying it to reform and greater accountability – also a part of Safe Street's strategy.

More importantly, they affected the debate around criminal justice in the city. Within a few months after the storm, instead of talk of more prisons, journalists and politicians were looking at the system, and the roots of the problems. Evidence of widespread police misconduct and people locked up for months without charges began to be reported.

For those that have been victimized by law enforcement violence, organizing and talking about what they have faced has already been transformative. "I can't imagine where my family would be if it weren't for Safe Streets," Goodman tells me. "We would have been pushed to the side. This organizing inspired my mother to live another day."

Jordan Flaherty is an editor of Left Turn Magazine, a journal of grassroots resistance. His previous articles from New Orleans are online at <http://www.leftturn.org>. To contact Jordan, email: neworleans@leftturn.org

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A version of this story originally appeared in the July/August issue of ColorLines Magazine. See a special online collection of Katrina-related reporting at <http://www.colorlines.com/>.

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HUD's Wrecking Ball: Tightening the Noose Around New Orleans

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Bill Quigley	09/25/2007	http://www.counterpunch.org/quigley09252007.html

HUD's Wrecking Ball

Tightening the Noose Around New Orleans

By BILL QUIGLEY

Odessa Lewis is 62 years old. When I saw her last week, she was crying because she is being evicted. A long-time resident of the Lafitte public housing apartments, since Katrina she has been locked out of her apartment and forced to live in a 240 square foot FEMA trailer. Ms. Lewis has asked repeatedly to be allowed to return to her apartment to clean and fix it up so she can move back in. She even offered to do all the work herself and with friends at no cost. The government continually refused to allow her to return. Now she is being evicted from her trailer and fears she will become homeless because there is no place for working people, especially African American working and poor people, to live in New Orleans. Ms. Lewis is a strong woman who has worked her whole life. But the stress of being locked out of her apartment, living in a FEMA trailer and the possibility of being homeless brought out the tears. Thousands of other mothers and grandmothers are in the same situation.

Renting is so hard in part because there is a noose closing around the housing opportunities of New Orleans African American renters displaced by Katrina. They have been openly and directly targeted by public and private actions designed to keep them away. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) just added their weight to the attack by approving the demolition of 2966 apartments in New Orleans.

Despite telling a federal judge for the last year and a half that approvals of public housing demolition applications take about 100 working days to evaluate, HUD approved the plan to demolish nearly 3000 apartments one day after the complete application was filed. HUD says the 3000 apartments are scheduled to be replaced in a few years with up to 744 public housing eligible apartments and a few hundred subsidized apartments.

Unfortunately, HUD's actions are consistent with other governmental attacks on African American renters.

After Katrina, St. Bernard Parish, a 93% white adjoining suburb, enacted a law prohibiting home owners from renting their property to anyone who is not a blood relative. Jefferson Parish, another majority white adjoining suburb, unanimously passed an ordinance prohibiting the construction of any subsidized housing. The sponsoring legislator condemned poor people as "lazy," "ignorant" and "leeches on society"--specifically hoping to guard against former residents of New Orleans public housing. Across Lake Ponchartrain from New Orleans, the chief law enforcement officer of St. Tammany Parish, Sheriff Jack Strain, complained openly about the post-Katrina presence of "thugs and trash from New Orleans" and announced that people with dreadlocks or "chee wee hairstyles" could "expect to be getting a visit from a sheriff's deputy."

HUD's actions are also bolstered by pervasive racial discrimination in the private market as well. The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center has documented widespread racial discrimination in the metro New Orleans rental market and in the states surrounding the gulf coast.

HUD told a federal judge a few days "the average time [for the process of reviewing applications for demolition] is 100 days." They did suggest that the process could be expedited in the case of New Orleans. So it was. Instead of reviewing the details of demolishing 3000 apartments and considering the law and facts and the administrative record for 100 days, HUD expedited the process to one day.

HUD and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO, which HUD has been running for years) argued passionately that residents displaced from public housing (referred to once in their argument as 'refugees') are financially "better off" than they were before. This echoes the Barbara Bush comment of September 5, 2005 when she said, viewing the overwhelmingly African American crowd of thousands of people living on cots in the Astrodome, "And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this - (she chuckles slightly) this is working very well for them."

HUD announced approval of demolition of 2966 units of public housing in New Orleans - 896 apartments at Lafitte, 521 at C.J. Peete, 1158 at B.W. Cooper, and 1391 at St. Bernard. A few buildings on each site will be retained for historical preservation purposes.

New Orleans had a severe affordable housing crisis before Katrina when HANO housed over 5000 families. There was a waiting list of 8000 families trying to get in. HUD and HANO together did such a poor job of administering the agency that there were about 2000 more empty apartments that had been scheduled for major repairs for years.

The continuing deceptions by HUD and HANO have been shameless. Since Katrina, HUD has continued to act out both sides of a charade that the local housing authority is making decisions and HUD is waiting on local actions. Yet, the decision to demolish was announced by the Secretary of HUD in DC over a year ago. But in the year since then, HUD has continued to tell a federal judge that any legal challenge to demolitions was premature because HANO had not even submitted an application to HUD for their careful 100 day evaluation. This is while a HUD employee runs the agency, commuting back and forth to DC each week. HANO even announced they would have 2000 apartments ready for people in August of 2006--a deadline not met even in September 2007. HANO later announced to the public that they had a list of 250 apartments ready for people to return only to admit in writing weeks later that no such list existed--nor were the phantom apartments ready.

The list of untruths goes on.

HUD would not agree to delay the demolition of the 3000 apartments until Congress finished reviewing legislation that would give residents the right to return and participate in the process of determining what kind of affordable housing should be in place in New Orleans.

And so HUD's actions help further restrict the opportunities for African American renters in New Orleans. Adjoining white suburbs do not want African American renters back. HUD does not want them back. The local federal judge has refused to stop the demolitions.

But the mothers and grandmothers and their families and friends are still determined to return and resist demolition. One sign at a recent public housing rally summed it up. "We will not allow the community we built to be rebuilt without us."

Odesa Lewis, despite her tears, said she is not giving up. She and other public housing residents promise "we did not come this far to be turned back now. We will do whatever is necessary to protect our homes." Thousands of African American mothers and grandmothers are the ones directly targeted by HUD's actions.

Forty years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr., said "We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered." We can add sexism to the list, particularly in the fight for the right of public housing residents to return.

The fight of Ms. Lewis and others on the gulf coast shows how much we need a radical revolution of values.

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The Justice that Jena Demands

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Organization: Left Turn	Author: Xochitl Bervera	Date Published: 09/27/2007	Link: http://www.leftturn.org/?q=node/760
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The Justice that Jena Demands

By Xochitl Bervera
Published on: September 27, 2007

I want to tell you about Emmanuelle Narcisse. He was a tall, slim, handsome young man who was killed by a guard at the Bridge City Correctional Center for Youth - a Louisiana juvenile prison - in 2003. Apparently, he was "fussing" in line, talking back to a guard. The guard punched him in the face, one blow, and Emmanuelle went down backwards, slamming his head on the concrete. He took his last breath there behind the barbed wire of that state run facility. The guard was suspended with pay during the investigation. No indictment was ever filed against him. There is also Tobias Kingsley,[1] sentenced when he was 15 to two years in juvenile prison for sneaking into a hotel swimming pool (his first offense). Tobias endured physical and sexual abuse inside the prison. He said that guards traded sex with kids for drugs and cigarettes, and sometimes set kids up to fight one another, making cash bets on the winner. His mama said he was never the same after he came home. She said the nightmares, the violence, the paranoia persisted years after the private lawyers helped him come home early. His battles with addiction and depression are not yet over.

And there is Shareef Cousin, who was tried as an adult and sent to death row in the state of Louisiana for a murder that he didn't

commit. Shareef spent from age 16 to age 26 behind bars, the majority of those years isolated in Angola's Death Row, because an over zealous prosecutor didn't care that the evidence didn't really add up. After all, it was only a young Black man's life on the line.

These are young Black men who have encountered Louisiana's criminal justice system who I know because their mothers have become proud members of Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC), the organization I have worked for over the last 7 years. These stories are about young men who have experienced incredible injustice, not unlike the Jena 6, only the national spotlight has never shined on them.

There are hundreds more. Thousands. Every day in the state of Louisiana (and in most states in this nation), injustices of epic proportions are taking place in our criminal and juvenile justice systems. We, those of us who live here, fight here, and organize here, know hundreds of families and young people – often our own - who've endured almost inconceivable levels of violence, abuse, neglect. And despite efforts to get someone, *anyone* to care and to *act*, these young people most often end up statistics in somebody's dismal report, or an anecdote in an article just like this. Because people don't care. Because these young people are not just poor, they are not just Black, they are "criminals".

Hallelujah, someone noticed!

So, Hallelujah! Almost overnight it seems, the nation is looking deep into the heart of Louisiana's criminal justice system and seeing what we've been shouting about all these years! The racism, the blatant and unaccountable abuse of power masquerading as "justice." The slavery-like, Jim Crow-like, Bush-era prejudice and exploitation that has been the bedrock of white supremacy here and all over the Deep South for decades. Young people of color and mothers across the country are rising up saying "We won't take it anymore! We demand justice!" The myth that the goal of the criminal justice system is protecting public safety is slowly unraveling as youth in Philadelphia, DC, Oakland and mothers in Chicago, Jackson, and Birmingham make that most important of realizations, "that could have been *me*," "that could have been *my* child."

Many are asking, "why now?" Why, of all the horrific incidents we've seen and exposed, is this the one that set off this fire of hope? Our young people have been shot and killed by police in every city in this nation, left to die of dehydration in local jails, railroaded by white juries and judges into serving 20, 30, 40 years in the prison plantations we call Angola, Parchment, and Sing Sing...

Let me tell you what my heart tells me. What really matters is not why, but *what* we plan to do with this moment now that it has arrived. What will the leaders, the youth, the elders of our movement do now?

Demanding Justice for Us All

Of course we must relentlessly and persistently demand justice for the Jena 6. But we must demand justice, not only in the form of dropping the charges against *these specific* youth, but in the systematic and thorough rooting out of racism from all wings of the criminal justice systems across the United States of America.

Justice in Jena requires justice for all the others as well – for all those who have suffered (and some who have died) silently behind bars and for their families who have fought without benefit of TV cameras and news reporters. It requires understanding that we will not, we *can not* achieve racial justice in this country if we do not fight against the criminal justice system, not just in individual instances, but in its institutionalized, systemic form. If we do not understand this – and understand it *deeply* – then this newly discovered energy, this tidal wave of outrage, this beautiful, intergenerational protesting isn't going to mean a damn thing past next week's news.

Justice in Jena requires all of us across the country to rise up against the racism and exploitation of the criminal justice system in all the places where we've come to see it and grown to accept it whether that's allowing for an abysmal public defender office in your county or turning away when you see a police officer trample the rights, and perhaps the body, of a fellow citizen. We must cast off once and for all, the fundamental lie that the system has *anything* to do with criminals or justice or public safety. We must not back down, as so many movements have, when we are "crime-baited," accused of defending rapists and murderers, accused of defending crime itself. We must not make excuses for some parts of the system while protesting others. Similar to opposing the war, the whole war, and not simply certain battles or certain strategies, we must oppose the system in its entirety. We must dismiss, once and for all, the urge to discuss what's *wrong* with the system – what's *broken* and needs to be fixed.

There is nothing broken in this system. In fact, usually (when it is not disrupted by 50,000 protestors), it is quite efficient at doing precisely what it was created to do. In the Deep South, the criminal justice system as we know it was built after the abolition of slavery, as part of the terror machine which destroyed the briefly federally protected Reconstruction era. Without nuance or subtlety, the system was created by wealthy, land owning whites to keep Blacks "in line," on the plantation, and working for next to nothing. Thanks to the Thirteenth Amendment which abolished slavery "except as a punishment for crime," laws and codes were invented that criminalized the very existence of Black people, police were hired to "enforce" those laws, and courts were mandated to send these newly created "criminals" to jail, or better yet, to be leased out to the very plantation owners they had been "freed" from just months before. The "justice" that was once meted out by slave owners who were "masters" of their property, was now taken care of by the law. The word "slave" was replaced by the word "criminal."

"Its not about race, it's about crime"

And yet, even with this history known, the stigma of criminality has remained so strong that our own movements have turned their backs on this issue over the years. Too many of our movements today want to dismiss, minimize, or overlook the necessity for a racial justice movement to prioritize organizing around criminal justice. Too often, our members meet others – even those who should be allies – who hold the entrenched belief that if a child is in prison, he must be "bad," he must have done *something* wrong. Even in progressive circles, organizations prefer to focus on the school children who need an education, the families who want affordable housing, the victims of street violence and drive-by shootings. These people are portrayed as "innocent" and deserving while currently and formerly incarcerated people are "guilty" - of something.

Of course, it's a false dichotomy. Everyone knows that the same communities, *the same people*, who are most impacted by violence, the lack of health care, education, and housing are those most brutally impacted by policing and prisons. But the idea of the dichotomy has been essential to maintaining the stigma which justifies the system. And it's been a handy and effective tool to explain away a great deal of racial injustice in this country.

In Jena, when asked about the incident which led to the arrests of the Jena 6, a white librarian confidently explained to the NPR reporter, "It's not about *race*. It's about **crime**." Crime -- the ultimate proxy for race, the ultimate justification for racism.

What the future holds

I believe that this moment in history can be a pivotal one if we make it so. Up to 50,000 people marched in the streets of Jena yesterday – the majority of them Black, many were from the South. All were outraged by the blatant racism evidenced by the criminal justice system. This could be the beginning of the end for a system that should have been dismantled years ago.

But what we fight for and how we fight will make all the difference. The most obvious principle is that we cannot fight for the system to expand – in any way. Asking for the white kids who hung the nooses to be charged, calling for Hate Crime Legislation -- these "solutions" just strengthen the system and give the same players – the DA, the judge, the jury – more powers and more validation. If we understand that the system, at its core, is not designed to promote justice, then why would we ask for anything that expands its reach or powers? At the very least, we must only call for things which *shrink* the system – closing prisons, freeing prisoners, cutting correction budgets, eliminating the death penalty and Life Without Parole, prohibiting juvenile transfers, and implementing sentencing reform.

We can also call for accountability from our elected officials. DAs and judges who perpetuate injustice, state representatives who are in bed with the corrections department and private prison companies – these people should not be allowed to hold office. They should be ousted whether by recall, regular elections, or public pressure to step down.

But we can – and should - also call for the redirection of funds into a real public safety system. We must make it clear that the issue

of public safety is fundamentally distinct from the issue of the criminal justice system. The only thing they have in common is rhetoric. Developing a public safety system which is prevention orientated, based on principles of restorative or transformative justice, prioritizes making the victim and community whole, and creatively resolving conflict is a powerful and noble goal and our communities should know more about these models and fight for them. A public safety system includes community based programs, quality education and the elimination of racism.

The families of the Jena 6 are ahead of the crowd in the list of demands they have made public:

1. Drop (or fairly reduce) All Charges;
2. Reinstate School Credits;
3. No Juvenile Records;
4. Investigate "Noose" Incident of September 1, 2006;
5. Remove Reed Walters from the District Attorney's Office;
6. Conduct Undoing Racism Workshops for Staff, Faculty, Administrators, Students, Parents and Community Members.

These are good demands for Jena. What will you demand in your hometown or city?

FFLIC is a membership based organization consisting primarily of mothers and grandmothers. These mothers and grandmothers have seen all sides of the farce known as the criminal justice system. They have been victims of sexual and physical violence who have either kept quiet or endured the humiliation and neglect of the DA's office and the so-called victim's advocates. They have been forced to call the police on their children when mental illness or addiction has made them violent and no other services exist. They have visited their children in prison and seen boot marks on their faces. They have walked home alone through dark streets in poor neighborhoods where there are no programs, no services, no activities to keep young men busy and hopeful. They have seen their children beat by police officers, by prison guards, sometimes even by judges and district attorneys.

Standing on both sides of the system, these mothers will tell you that justice exists nowhere in the vicinity. It may sound radical, but its time we start listening to those who have been through it all and tear down the disgrace that is the U.S. criminal justice system.

Note: [1] Name has been changed for purposes of confidentiality

About the Author

Xochitl Bervera is co-director of Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (www.ffmpeg.org). She can be reached at [xochitl\(at\)ffmpeg.org](mailto:xochitl(at)ffmpeg.org).

Resources:

New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE) and Network of Teacher Activist Groups (TAG) have developed: Revealing Racist Roots: The 3 R's for Teaching About the Jena 6, a curriculum guide for teachers to address what's happening in Jena. Download the resource guide in PDF Version or Word Version for free at: www.nycore.org OR www.t4sj.org.

Donate to support the legal defense fund:
Jena 6 Defense Committee
PO BOX 2798
Jena, LA 71342

Sign the petitions at: <http://www.colorofchange.org/jena/>

For more information or to offer concrete support, email: [jena6defense\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:jena6defense(at)gmail.com)

The Jena Six and the School To Prison Pipeline: <http://naacpldf.org/content.aspx?article=1208>

If you are in nyc and want to get involved Jena Six Support, email: [da_bla2\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:da_bla2(at)yahoo.com). In New Orleans, email: [neworleans\(at\)leftturn.org](mailto:neworleans(at)leftturn.org).

Support Organizations: <http://friendsofjustice.wordpress.com/>
<http://www.colorofchange.org>
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Organizing Against 'Modern Day Slavery' in New Orleans

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Organization:	Author:	Date Published:
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice	Matt Olson	10/01/2007

Organizing Against "Modern Day Slavery" in New Orleans

By Matt Olson

In a modest office in the Central Business District of New Orleans, the Workers Center for Racial Justice continues to work in partnership with guest workers and day laborers two years after Hurricane Katrina and the failure of federal levees devastated the city. The center organizes to restore human rights to workers, putting their efforts both toward day-to-day gains and through systemic changes. Most problems of worker abuse and exploitation persist among contractors, but earlier this year two worker organizations formed: the Alliance of Guest Workers for Dignity and the Congress of Day Laborers.

Daniel Castellanos-Contreras, a plaintiff in a guest worker lawsuit against a New Orleans hotel chain, spoke on a panel at the first ever U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta in June. To thundering applause, he summed up the violation of human rights for guest workers who must sign contracts with a single employer: "We're required to obey that employer because if we don't they can deport us and we will lose everything that we put in to come here—that we wanted to get here—and what we call that is modern day slavery."

Jacinta Gonzalez, an organizer with the Workers Center, described the everyday abuses incurred by day laborers from contractors and police. "The level of intimidation and violence, it's not only psychological, the social power dynamic, it's very physical," Gonzalez said, referring to contractors who threatened workers with guns to avoid paying wages. "People don't get protective gear ever, people don't get lunch breaks. Any sort of labor violation you can imagine happens in New Orleans."

DAY LABORER

The day laborer population has tripled its pre-flood levels in New Orleans and surrounding areas, expanding from workers seeking employment on two or three corners to nineteen. The increase is a direct response to the new construction jobs available to repair some of the 200,000 homes flooded in the Greater New Orleans area. The organizers focus on the five most attended corners to address harassment by local and national police, rights to seek employment and wage theft claims.

The Congress of Day Laborers, a worker-led organization established a year ago under the umbrella of the Workers Center for Racial Justice, facilitates conversations between workers about the issues that affect them and builds leadership within that community.

A day laborer is "someone who tries to find work from day to day," according to the Workers Center. "We always emphasize the fact that we work with day laborers not Latino

immigrants, not with undocumented immigrants,” clarified Jacinta Gonzalez. She further stressed the center’s openness to work on any issue with any day laborer regardless of race.

“A lot of the organizing we do is just to have workers have conversations with the police to resolve where they can stand. What their rights are, make arrangements with owners of private property around there,” Gonzalez said. “[For instance] tomorrow morning we’re going to have a meeting with the church that is located right across the street from the corner where workers stand” by Lowe’s on Elysian Fields Avenue in New Orleans.

In early August, a contingent of leaders in the Congress of Day Laborers went to the National Conference of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) in Washington, D.C. They attended several workshops to develop their leadership skills, including how they communicate workers’ rights.

The trip further prompted organizers to restructure how wage claims are processed due to both the number of claims reported and in consideration of the financial deficit often incurred when cases are taken to court. “Most workers have at least four or five cases of wage theft where they work from anything from a few hours to weeks where they don’t get paid,” Gonzalez said. “I met one worker who has gotten paid every day he’s worked in New Orleans.” Currently, with the assistance of NDLON, they are studying models other organizations use across the country.

The Center also works to build solidarity between latino and black workers, considering it an investment in the long-term fight for racial justice. Similarly, they try to create spaces in which all workers feel safe from harassment. Black day laborers compose an estimated thirty percent of those seeking employment on corners. Harassment is a problem for day laborers regardless of race. In an August police incident, three black laborers and seven latino laborers were arrested; in another, nine laborers, mostly black, were handcuffed and left to stand in the sun for two hours.

Despite the similar experiences of workers on the corners, building unity remains a difficult process. “Interracial organizing, especially on day labor corners in a city, looks very different than it does when you have a more stable industry,” Gonzalez stated. “When a contractor pulls up, and latino and black workers run to the truck and they’re having a discussion over who’s going to go get a job that day and neither of them have worked all week, it has a higher level of intensity [than in other situations].”

There are simple things that go a long way: acknowledging and dignifying every person with conversation when organizing on the corner, making announcements in both English and Spanish and keeping an open invitation to “Know Your Rights” trainings and other political education provided by the Congress of Day Laborers. The Workers Center, for instance, is hosting a workshop on African American history in New Orleans. The Workers Center and the Congress continue to partner with several black-led community organizations such as Safe Streets/Strong Communities, Survivors Council and Peoples’ Institute for Survival and Beyond to collectively address and unite the causes of black and latino workers.

The Workers Center has a long-term vision of a day laborer safe space, which would alleviate many of the organizing and communication difficulties that crop up in the day-to-day work from corner to corner among an inherently mobile population.

“A day labor designated area would mostly be a place where people could actually stand and not be harassed by police, have a space where they could organize and have a conversation. The most basic things that you need to organize are lacking in these scenarios,” explained Gonzalez. “You have high turnover, you have very unstable situations, you have the police, you don’t have people able to transport themselves to other locations to have meetings. So any meeting means you have to orchestrate pick up times for everybody.”

Many cities have successfully created stable safe spaces, but in New Orleans amid the other instabilities, finding a location remains a secondary goal. The problem is one familiar to post-Katrina New Orleans organizers, and as local teacher and writer Kalamu Ya Salaam said of that effort, “there is no substitute for face-to-face organizing around the needs of people within specific conditions...Our first priority is to survive. Our second priority is to struggle.”

GUEST WORKERS

Through the U.S. Government, contractors can hire foreign workers for domestic jobs if they certify no one will do those jobs locally. Workers in the H-2B Visa Program, commonly referred to as the guest worker program, are often the most desperate and vulnerable, paying thousands of dollars to recruiters to get a full-time U.S. job.

Guest workers in New Orleans and throughout Louisiana formed The Alliance of Guest Workers for Dignity in late January 2007 in partnership with the New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice. It is a membership organization led by guest workers from various professions who hold H-2B visas. They work closely with guest worker co-organizers of the Workers Center Daniel Castellanos-Contreras, an H-2B visa holder, and Jacob Horwitz.

“The story that the Alianza tells is that the guest worker program is basically a program that looks a lot like slavery,” Horwitz explained. “You have a recruiter that goes to another country—a slavecatcher—who brings people in under false promises. When people have gotten here, they’re put in situations where they’re completely controlled. The laws, or the visa, create and allow that situation and employers exploit it.”

In May 2007, guest workers won a “landmark” lawsuit against Decatur Hotels, a New Orleans hotel chain. “The lawsuit was one of the tactics that the workers used. It’s really exciting that we had the decision where the judge said guest workers are also people and also workers and the law applies to them as well as everybody else.”

The latest organizing campaign pivoted around the town of West Lake, Louisiana—more than two hundred miles west of New Orleans—where recruited workers were put in run down houses and for weeks were not given work, at which point they decided to organize. When the stories were told to community organizers and Katrina survivors in New Orleans last February, they were spurred to stop what they recognized as modern slavery.

“Together with 40 workers, Katrina survivors from New Orleans came to West Lake and went into a citizens arrest action under slavery laws and the 13th amendment,” recalled Horwitz, who lived in West Lake for almost two months. “Black folks saying ‘we won’t stand for slavery, this is slavery.’”

The workers and supporters pressured local police to enter the office of Matt Redd, the offending recruiter, and impound the passports there. After marching over to the sheriff’s office, all of the passports were remarkably returned to the workers with evidence tags.

The tactic was extremely successful, but workers continue to demand an investigation into Matt Redd by the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. They requested that Redd’s recruitment certification be revoked.

“Our whole framework here [is that] in the wake of Hurricane Katrina black workers have been systematically locked out of jobs, locked out of the city,” Horwitz said. “And the guest worker program is a great example of that, whereas immigrants have been brought in but completely exploited.”

As members of the Alliance of Guest Workers for Dignity transfer to other locations, the Workers Center sees its role increasing nationally. “It’s not just in the Gulf Coast,” Horwitz emphasized, citing a group of guest workers that moved to Rhode Island. “One of the challenges of doing this organizing is workers are only here for a short time, that’s the whole nature of the beast. So as our members spread out, we’re still in touch with them and some of them are very well organized.” A new campaign may revolve around how the Workers Center can turn its mobile membership network to an advantage in long-term organizing.

SUPPORT IN NEW ORLEANS

Local organizations have supported the organizing work and human needs of the day laborers and guest workers in New Orleans and beyond.

Since contractors rarely provide workers with protective gear, even in the particularly dangerous field of construction work, healthcare is crucial. As an alternative to inaccessible physicians, the Latino Health Outreach Project of the Common Ground Collective treats day laborers once a week on the MLK Ave and Claiborne Ave. corner regardless of documentation. Also, LHOP see people before every meeting of the Congress of Day Laborers.

Educating workers about both their rights and the English language remains crucial to balancing the power dynamic between workers and contractors. The Hispanic Apostolate teaches English as a Second Language to 300 students and provides advocacy work, as does the Workers Resource Center, a local branch of the national Interfaith Workers Justice, which also provides resources for the Portuguese-speaking immigrant community.

The Southern Poverty Law Center and the Louisiana Justice Initiative provided lawyers for the hotel guest workers in their legal victory this past May and many legal clinics, including the Pro Bono Project and the Loyola Workplace Justice Legal Clinic, review wage theft claims.

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Common Ground Community Adoption Program

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Organization: Common Ground Collective **Date Published:** 10/01/2007 **Link:** <http://www.commongroundrelief.org/adopt>

Common Ground Community Adoption Program

BACKGROUND:

Because of systematic political and economic neglect as well as the threat of rampant disenfranchisement, New Orleans’ working class and poor communities are in dire need of immediate support in their rebuilding efforts.

The vast delays on insurance policy pay-outs and the foot-dragging bureaucracy that mires the Federal

Disaster Fund (Road Home) grants result in residents' inability to repair and/or rebuild their homes.

The City has implemented a so-called "Good Neighbor Plan" that directs its health department to condemn private properties that have yet to be repaired or rebuilt, setting into motion a process leading to the "expropriation" of such lands by the New Orleans Redevelopment Agency (N.O.R.A.).

Residents are losing their homes at an alarming rate because of lack of financial and material resources. Additionally, many of those who wish to repair/rebuild their homes are displaced residents, evacuees scattered in over forty states.

Common Ground has recently launched a community adoption project that will assist these residents in obtaining desperately needed financial and material resources. This program will also make contributed skilled labor available to those who wish to rebuild.

We are reaching out to national and international communities to encourage them to "Adopt" a Home, a School, a Church, a block of Houses for repair or reconstruction.

YOU CAN HELP BY IMPLEMENTING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS:

1. Purchasing, at wholesale, as well as shipping building supplies and materials for a particular structure, i.e. sheet rock, plywood, paint, bricks, sidings, paint, doors, etc.
2. Opening up a local account at a Home Depot or Lowe's, so that Common Ground can obtain the materials & supplies for this structure.
3. Sending a group of skilled professionals, such as carpenters, painters, plumbers, electricians, dry wallers, etc. to repair and/or rebuild a home, church, or school. Common Ground will provide room and board for these volunteers for the length of their stay.
4. Financing a local group of young, newly trained building apprentices, supervised by journeymen builders, in their endeavors to repair local homes, schools, and churches.

We want to encourage individuals, groups, organizations, faith based entities, financial institutions, businesses, affluent schools/churches, etc. to consider sponsorships. Each sponsor will receive a "before" and "after" photograph of the facility and/or lot, along with a map and short biography of the property and its proprietor(s).

We at Common Ground appreciate your consideration in this very urgent campaign to save some of New Orleans' oldest and most historically significant communities, and to help them survive and thrive once again.

You can Contact Common Ground at:

Common Ground Relief

P.O. Box 6128
New Orleans, LA 70174

504.368.6897

504.483.2145

504.583.0750

sharonjohn1 (at) yahoo.com

sakkone (at) gmail.com

marina (at) communityfuturescollective.org

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All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Call Home

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Organization: Advancement Project	Author: Anita Sinha	Date Published: 10/03/2007	Link: http://www.justdemocracyblog.org/?p=649
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All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Call Home

By Anita Sinha

At last week's annual Congressional Black Caucus conference, Louisiana Representative William Jefferson hosted a panel entitled "Recovery by Whom, for

Whom?" Invited speaker Mayor Ray Nagin answered Jefferson's question as he auctioneered off New Orleans to the audience, stating that the city is undergoing "the biggest economic development in history."

The prices of homes and even hotels are a steal, and deep pockets are invited to swoop down and take advantage of the still-struggling New Orleans. Mayor Nagin represented the city as a "buffet," and shamelessly summoned private business "to eat all they can eat." He called on them to take advantage of the "schmorgesborg" that is New Orleans—there is enough for everybody.

Everybody except the scores of residents who remain displaced. The disadvantaged, who are predominately Black, low-wage workers, the disabled, the elderly, all of whom are poor. I have developed close relationships with some of these residents, which has made being an eyewitness to the impact of their abandonment by our government particularly painful.

Ms. Williams and Ms. Jennings recently invited themselves to my wedding (which does not yet exist), saying that they will rise to give testimony to my good work when prompted to "speak now or forever hold your peace."

Ms. Lewis proudly shares with me updates of her granddaughter who started college this fall, and ends each conversation with "I love you."

They are my clients, and my surrogate grandmothers. Over the past 15 months, I have watched the palpable deterioration of their physical and mental health. They often remind me that they do not have many years left.

Then there are the younger, single, working mothers who are my role models. Ms. Mingo, who works two jobs, cares for four children and a grandchild, and feeds the homeless on the weekends because she considers it her obligation to take care of the less advantaged. She lived in the one of the public housing developments before the storm, and is a leader in the fight for residents' right to return.

Juxtaposed against these and tens of thousands of other stories of struggle, Nagin's speech and the federal government's abandonment are nothing short of criminal.

A FEMA trailer was parked one block away from the CBC conference. Acquired by a grassroots Mississippi organization, Turkey Creek Community Initiatives, the trailer was making its debut in DC to help raise awareness that there is no official plan to rebuild New Orleans and the Gulf Coast—the government has thrown public housing, education, and health to the private market vultures. We parked the trailer earlier in the week on 17th and K streets, visible to the lunchtime traffic of lobbyist, lawyers, and others who work in that bustling area. We urged people to take a tour of the 32 x 10 foot trailer that is supposed to sleep six to eight: "Come see how people are living, two years after Katrina!" We reported on the toxic construction of the trailers that have left residents sick, and in some cases, dead: "Formaldehyde comes on the side!"

Was this public education, or have we—the eyewitnesses—gone mad? The week before the event, the federal judge presiding over the lawsuit we filed in June 2006 on behalf of displaced public housing residents suddenly threw out of his courtroom a case for the right of return. That was on Monday. By Friday, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development approved the demolition of over 5,000 homes. The judge's decision left no buffer between residents' homes and the bulldozers. Demolition is targeted to start in November.

The FEMA trailer was parked one block from the CBC conference because, despite sponsorships from Representatives Waters and Thompson, the trailer was excluded from the conference exhibition. Earlier in the week, our designated resident spokesperson was excluded from testifying at the Senate Banking Committee hearing on S. 1668, a bill that provides for the immediate opening of at least 3,000 units and one-for-one replacement for units demolished. The week before that, we were prohibited from pursuing in open court the right of thousands of families sinking deeper into poverty and despair from returning home anytime soon, or ever. For two years, over 3,800 families have been shut out of their public housing homes in New Orleans. And as Naomi Klein points out in her new book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, for at least 25 years the public sphere in New Orleans has been permitted to erode, the culmination of which the world watched unfold after August 29, 2005.

Enough was enough. The CBC black tie dinner was the next night. The demolition of 5,000 homes is scheduled to start in a month. People, who paid one thousand dollars a ticket, would be adorned in silk, satin, and gems, and so our FEMA trailer needed to suit up and crash the party. Wearing a tuxedo topped with a six-foot-long bowtie, the trailer circled the Convention Center for over two hours while guests arrived at the dinner. The trailer asked one plaintive question: "Where is my table? The reaction was priceless. At first people would smile and return our wave; then as they read the sign and heard our urge to not forget Katrina survivors, their face fell. It was a combination of guilt and scorn—I know, but how dare you try to ruin my evening.

Call it an existential gesture toward the void, and I would be hard-pressed to argue. But we cannot advance civil rights by merely serving as eyewitnesses. The government and the people who permit unjust governance have to be made accountable, up until the bitter end. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This to have succeeded." Success is also to know that even one politician has breathed harder because you have protested.

Anita Sinha is a civil rights attorney with Advancement Project.

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Pledge of Resistance in Defense of the Right to Housing in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast

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Organization:

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition

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<http://www.peopleshurricane.org/news/pledge-of-resistance.html>

Pledge of Resistance

Posted on by  PeoplesHurricane.org



Pledge of Resistance in Defense of the Right to Housing in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast

A major human rights crisis exists in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. It is a crisis that denies the basic rights to life, equality under the law, and social equity to Black, Indigenous, migrant, and working class communities in the region. While this crisis was in existence long before Hurricane Katrina, the policies and actions of the US government and finance capital (i.e. banking, credit, insurance, and development industries) following the Hurricane have seriously exacerbated the crisis.

One of the clearest examples of this crisis is the denial of the right to housing in New Orleans, particularly in the public housing sector. Since the Hurricane, the US government through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has denied the vast majority of the residents of public housing the right to return to their homes. Unlike the vast majority of the housing stock in New Orleans, the majority of the public housing units received little to no flood or wind damage from the Hurricane. Yet, as of October 2007 only one-fourth of the public housing units have been reopened and reoccupied. The Bush government refuses to reopen the public housing units in New Orleans because it appears intent on destroying the public housing system, demolishing the existing structures, and turning over the properties to private real-estate developers to make profits.



Based on the discriminatory Federal Court ruling issued on Monday, September 10th, all of the major public housing units in New Orleans are now subject to immediate demolition (the latest report from Monday, November 5th is that HUD will attempt to start the demolition on Monday, November 19th. However, this is being challenged by various legal advocates and will be delayed until at least Wednesday, November 28th pending a Federal court hearing). The first site on the schedule for demolition is the Lafitte housing project. Lafitte therefore, is the line in the sand that must be drawn by all peoples in support of the human right to housing.

Pledge:

- I believe in the fundamental human right to housing.
- I will not be a witness to the denial of this right to the peoples of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.
- I therefore pledge myself to resist the denial of this right by all civil and humanitarian means available including civil disobedience.
- I pledge to stand ready to take action against this imminent threat and to put myself on the line, either directly in New Orleans or in strategic locales throughout the US, in support of the demands and leadership of the peoples of New Orleans and their organizations in the struggle for housing and human rights.



Have you ever received training in civil disobedience?

We ask that all those interested in coming to New Orleans to contact us before making the journey. We need to ensure that everyone coming is registered, properly orientated and trained in order to partake in this act of resistance in the manner determined by the local leaders and residents.

Please contact us via email at action@peopleshurricane.org

All making this pledge must be advised of the following:

1. As of now we do not know exactly when the demolition orders will be given. We hope to have this information within at least 48 hours of the scheduled demolition to contact you and give you sufficient time to act (including travel for residents and allies coming in from out of town).
2. Given the limited timeframe and resources of the various organizations spearheading this fight back, access to the following will be limited:
 -
 -
 - Legal counsel and aid. All effort is and will be made to provide adequate legal support, but the reality is that it is limited at present.
 - Lodging and food. Given the uncertain timeline and limited resources, housing venues are presently limited, but all effort will be made to support all those making this bold pledge.

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Fact Sheet on HUD Demolition New Orleans

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Author: Bill Quigley
Date Published: 10/07/2007

Link:
<http://lists.topica.com/lists/justice4all-nola@igc.topica.com/read/message.html?...>

HUD DEMOLITION FACT SHEET - 11-07-07

When Katrina hit on August 29, 2005, there were 5200 families living in apartments administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). There were an additional 2000 low-income public housing apartments that were temporarily vacant at the time of Katrina because they were scheduled for renovation.

HUD took control over the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) years before Katrina. HANO is under HUD Administrative Receivership.

Since HUD's takeover, HANO has had a one person board that makes all decisions. The one person HANO board is a HUD employee. That person selects all personnel and approves all contracts. HANO's annual budget has been about \$125 million annually.

Since Katrina hit, HUD and HANO have only opened up apartments for 1600 families to return to public housing. New Orleans public housing is garden style 3 story apartments. For picture look here: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/22/arts/design/22hous.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

HANO's posted documents show HUD has approved plans to demolish four major housing developments: Lafitte (896 apartments will shrink to 276 low-income public housing apartments), St. Bernard (1436 apartments will shrink to 160 low-income public housing apartments), B.W. Cooper (1550 apartments will shrink to 154 low-income public housing apartments) and CJ Peete (723 apartments will shrink to 154 low-income public housing apartments).

After demolishing these thousands of apartments, HUD has approved plans to lease the property to private developers for 99 years to build mixed income housing on each of these sites. HUD has approved developers' plans to dramatically downsize each development.

HANO, HUD and public records document that the total cost for redevelopment of four developments is over three quarters of a billion dollars - \$762 million. The \$762 million does not include current subsidies on displaced residents which is estimated at \$1000 per displaced family per month - approximately another \$100 million so far. Nor do these estimates include the millions in no-bid contracts already let out by HUD and HANO since Katrina for consultants, lawyers, and contractors of all sorts.

The current 4605 low-income public housing apartments will be replaced by 744 low-income public housing apartments. That results in a loss of 3,861 low-income public housing units - or 82%. Even including the market rate and mixed income apartments - there is a total loss of 2,764 apartments to New Orleans. The \$762 million spread over the 1841 apartments comes to well over \$400,000 per apartment. So, HUD's plan is to spend three-quarters of a billion dollars to reduce public housing in New Orleans by 82%. For additional information see: www.justiceforneworleans.org

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African Village, 'Algiers African Heritage Celebration.' A flyer

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Organization: Common Ground Health Clinic
Date Published: 10/14/2007

See Attached Flyer.

Attachment

Size

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Education Versus Incarceration: A Small Louisiana town struggles to shut down a prison and build a school

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Author: Jordan Flaherty **Date Published:** 10/14/2007 **Link:** <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=14270>

ZNet | Activism

Education Versus Incarceration A small Louisiana town struggles to shut down a prison and build a school

by Jordan Flaherty; November 14, 2007

Tallulah is a small town in Northeastern Louisiana, one of the poorest regions in the US. It is about 90 miles from the now-legendary town of Jena, and like Jena it is a town with a large youth prison that was closed after allegations of abuse and brutality. Also like Jena, residents of Tallulah are involved in a modern civil rights struggle. Their town has become a battleground in the national debate on whether to spend money to educate or incarcerate poor, mostly Black, youth.

On a recent Saturday afternoon I visited Hayward Fair, a civil rights movement veteran from Tallulah. Mr. Fair is one of the founders of People United for Education and Action, a grassroots organization dedicated to transforming the local prison (now called Steve Hoyle Rehabilitation Center and primarily holding adults convicted of nonviolent offenses) into a "success center" which would give classes and training. If they succeed in their struggle it will be the first time in this country - where for decades funding for education has been cut while prisons have been built - that a prison has been shut down and replaced by a school, a groundbreaking reversal of the nationwide trend.

When I met with Mr. Fair he was going door to door with activists from the grassroots organizations Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children, Southern Center for Human Rights and Safe Streets Strong Communities. At nearly seventy years old, with muscular arms and a shaved head, he shows no sign of slowing down. "I've been doing a little community organizing," he explained, modestly. As he went from house to house, it seemed everyone in the city knew and respected him, and everyone had an opinion about both the prison and what Tallulah needs. Wielding respect from both his age and his reputation for fighting for justice locally, Fair was bringing a vision of a new Tallulah to residents who have seen a town die around them.

Speaking in a gravelly voice and a deliberate step weighted with experience, Mr. Fair led me to the site of the prison. "When the prison came to town most people weren't even aware of what it was going to be," he said. "It was something that produced jobs and people needed jobs so there wasn't no real resistance to it." But now, the local economy is devastated, and Fair blames the prison, at least in part. "It's killing the economy of the area, in my opinion," he claims. "Prisons only bring money to the owners."

When you enter the city limits, the first thing you see after you pass the "Welcome to Tallulah" sign is the prison, a large complex of 33 buildings surrounded by fence and barbed wire. Standing nearby, Fair gestures down the street. "We're about a block and a half from the junior high school, we're about 5 blocks from the senior high school. Our children have to walk out from the classroom and the next thing they see is all these bars and towers and all these big buildings. It had a psychological effect on the children and the adults as well. It really just devastated this whole city." For several years, the people of Tallulah, aligned with Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children, have fought this struggle, to not just close the local prison, but to open something different in its place, to demonstrate that small rural towns don't have to turn to prisons for jobs.

Tallulah, which is seventy percent Black, used to be a town that Black folks would travel from all around the region to visit. To demonstrate his point, Fair took me to the downtown, to street of shuttered storefronts, with virtually no people out. "On a day like this, on a Saturday evening, you could hardly walk down the streets of Tallulah, you'd be bumping into people. You had all businesses on this end of town," he gestured across the street. "All the way down, nothing but businesses; grocery stores, cafes, clothing stores, barrooms, you name it. The town was wide open, stayed open 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Now Fair says, the town is a very different place. "We are working trying to bring our image back up, but we are now labeled as a prison town." As in much of the country, prisons are a big business in rural Louisiana, and this part of the state has several. "You go east you got a youth prison. West down here you got this facility, you go south you got two prisons right outside the city limits." Tallulah is now far removed from its former glory. Young people move away as soon as they're able. "We lose maybe 70% of our young people," he says. "Why should they stay? There's no opportunities here for them."

The prison in Tallulah has a long and notorious reputation. Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone visited in 1998, and incarcerated kids broke onto a roof to shout out complaints about their treatment. The New York Times wrote several articles that same year, including a front page report calling Tallulah the worst youth prison in the US, and the US Justice Department sued the state of Louisiana over the systematic abuse at the prison, where even the warden said, "it seemed everybody had a perforated eardrum or a broken nose."

New Orleans-based journalist Katy Reckdahl chronicled the beginnings of the struggle to transform this prison in an important series of articles several years ago. But now the effort is nearing its final days. Activists have lined up local and statewide support for this important transition, from the community level to meetings with the Governor, to support of national allies such as the Center for Third World Organizing and the Southern Center for Human Rights. With a new Governor on the way, the next few weeks will be crucial for this struggle, and for the fate of Tallulah. If the people of Tallulah win, it will be an important victory for people everywhere concerned about issues of race, education, and criminal justice.

Mr. Fair is proud of the civil rights history of Tallulah, which is located not far from where the Deacons for Defense, a pioneering Black armed self-defense group active during the civil rights movement, was formed. "We had some people here that went off to world war two, then they come back here and were second class citizens," he explained. "They had to ride in the back of the bus. They said were not going to put up with this. So we started a movement ourselves, to eliminate that."

Fair experienced intense white resistance to basic rights for Black folks. "At one point the Klan met about three miles outside of town and had a rally and they was going to come into town that evening. They thought they were going to run all the Blacks out of town," Fair says. But resistance in the town was strong. "When they came into town the streets was crowded. People were walking stiff legged, with their shotguns down under their pants. We told the police were going to take care of ourselves; we don't need you to take care of us. They thought they were going to scare somebody, but nobody here was afraid of them."

I asked Fair how Tallulah fits into a wider struggle. "All the eyes of the world is focused on the Jena Six. But every small community in the south, and in the north, has its Jena Six. Maybe you can't visualize it or maybe you don't want to visualize it, but this is not just small rural towns. Look at New Orleans, during the storm. When the people was trying to cross the bridge to get out of the flood, there were people on the other side, armed, that would not let them cross. In the rest of the nation people are being treated the same way. Chicago, New York, it don't matter where you are."

Before leaving, I asked Fair what kept him in the struggle. "I ain't struggling, I'm free," he answered, explaining that this struggle is not about him. "I'm gonna do what I know is right, and I don't care who you are. I see the young people in the community that need help. That's what keeps me going. If you see something and you feel it aint right, don't say they ought to change it, get in there, roll your sleeves up and say lets change it. That's the only way. You gotta keep a cool head and do the thing that's right. When you know right and fight for it, you're gonna win."

Jordan Flaherty is an editor of Left Turn Magazine. He was the first journalist from outside of northern Louisiana to write about the case of the Jena Six. You can see more reporting on the Jena Six case online at <http://www.leftturn.org>.

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New Orleans Coming Home: A National Panel Hearing on Law Enforcement in the Reconstruction

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Organization: Safe Streets/Strong Communities
Date Published: 10/27/2007

New Orleans Coming Home

October 24th, 2007



New Orleans Coming Home
Saturday October 27, 2007
A National Panel Hearing on Law Enforcement in the Reconstruction

- Housing**
Evictions and Public Housing
- Schools**
Security Guards and Expulsions
- Labor**
Immigration Raids and Prison Labor
- Mental Health**
Arrests of the Mentally Ill
- Root Causes**
Racism, Poverty and The Prison Industrial Complex

Kingsley House
1600 Constance St.
New Orleans, LA
From 10 AM to 4 PM



For more information call (504)522-3949 or GO
TO: www.safestreetnola.org

The Role of Law Enforcement in the Reconstruction

October 24th, 2007

Juan Alvarez* witnessed his best friend, a man he called his brother since they were both kids, shot to death on a street in Uptown this past June. He chased the shooter for blocks and wrestled him to the ground, struggling with him until a police officer pulled up. The police officer arrested them both, transported them in the same squad car, and held in the same jail cell. Police needed a translator and enlisted a Border Patrol agent to serve as one. Before being released, Alvarez was transferred into federal custody. This young man, who watched his best friend be murdered before his eyes and holds the critical information to prosecuting this violent crime, now sits in a cell, hours away from New Orleans and awaits deportation.

Our jails are overcrowded with non-violent offenders and pre-trial detainees, many of whom have not yet had charges accepted. This dreaded 701, or "DA time," means innocent people can spend weeks or months in jail without being formally charged, losing income, employment, and housing while they languish in Orleans Parish Prison.

There are countless more examples of how, rather than focusing on violent crime, New Orleans' criminal justice resources are spent arresting non-violent residents. School children are arrested by security guards, residents of public housing are charged with trespassing while walking to a neighbor's house and immigrant workers who are helping rebuild our city get robbed by the officers they turn to for help when employers don't pay them. All residents of New Orleans should be concerned that during the reconstruction of our city post- Katrina, this is the type of policing that has spiked dramatically. And this policing disproportionately occurs in poor communities, particularly communities of color.

Yes, there is a public safety crisis in New Orleans – but it's not, as many people argue, because there aren't enough cops on our streets, in our neighborhoods, and in our schools. It's actually the opposite. In New Orleans post-Katrina, poor and low-income communities encounter police in ways that don't increase public safety and in ways that actually make peoples' efforts at rebuilding their lives more difficult, if not impossible.

This is not a new phenomenon. The NOPD has a poor record and reputation that cuts across all racial lines. In fact, a 2006 report authored by Safe Streets/Strong Communities found that two-thirds of those surveyed rated the NOPD's ability to improve public safety "poor" or "very poor," with only 11 percent reporting that NOPD's ability to improve public safety was "good" or "very good."

We are not living in a safer city with more police – we are living in a city in which poor people and people of color face obstacles that mean they are more likely to have a harmful encounter with law enforcement when they try to access education, employment, housing, and healthcare. This ultimately pushes people into a higher level of poverty and a more vulnerable environment as they try to survive and provide for their families. A single parent, a public housing resident and someone who is low income, faces more danger of becoming homeless, losing her children and losing her job with every encounter she has with police, even when she is seeking help.

But solutions to this counter-productive policing do exist. Recognizing that the best solutions are local and community-led but also recognizing that national organization offer helpful models of best practices, our organizations – Safe Streets/Strong Communities here in New Orleans and the Center for Constitutional Rights – have partnered to have a necessary conversation about policing in our city this upcoming Saturday.

The hearing – "New Orleans Coming Home: A National Panel Hearing on the Role of Law Enforcement in the Reconstruction" – will examine the ways that the increase in law enforcement has hampered the ability of residents to access housing, education, employment, and other public services post-Katrina while making us all less safe. At this hearing, we'll be joined by various prominent human rights experts as well as current New Orleans residents and survivors of Hurricane Katrina who have experienced first-hand the ways that the NOPD is disrupting their ability to rebuild their lives.

Today, two years after Hurricane Katrina devastated our city, New Orleans may be open for business and tourism, but the policing means it is closed to families. This Saturday, let's begin a dialogue about what we can do to make New Orleans a safe place for all of our residents.

Norris Henderson is the Co-Director of Safe Streets/Strong Communities. Vincent Warren is the Executive Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights.

*Not his real name

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'Stardust & Empty Wagons,' an update from CC Campbell-Rock

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Date Published: 11/07/2007

Link:
http://www.sfbayview.com/20071107571/News/Hurican_Relief_Network/Stardust_Empty_...

'Stardust & Empty Wagons,' an update from CC Campbell-Rock:

Wednesday, 07 November 2007



Hot 8 Brass Band

'Stardust & Empty Wagons,' an update from CC Campbell-Rock: Dear Fellow Hurricane Survivors:

The Brava Theater Center wants you to be our special guests during the world premiere of "Stardust & Empty Wagons: Voices of the Katrina Diaspora." The stage play, which chronicles the journey of 13 survivors to the Bay Area, runs Nov. 7-25 at the Brava Theater Center, 2781 24th St., San Francisco.

The Hot 8 Brass Band will perform live during the first week of the stage play. You should come on Wednesday, Nov. 7, Thursday, Nov. 8, or Friday Nov. 9, at 8 p.m. or attend the Sunday, Nov. 11, matinee at 3 p.m. Otherwise you can attend through Nov. 25. You must show a valid Gulf Coast ID in order to pick up your tickets. To get on the will call list for free tickets and for more information, contact Angela Carrier, angela@brava.org

">angela@brava.org or (415) 641-7657, ext. 107.

Public housing activist Sam Jackson says: Stop dozing and stop HUD/Bush's bulldozers! End the racist war in Iraq and at home! Stop the demolition of public housing! Pass Senate Bill 1668 now!

Despite the desperate need for affordable housing in New Orleans, the federal courts have given a green light to the Bush administration's demolition plan for some 5,000 viable public housing apartments. While public housing is in better shape than most of the private housing stock and desperately needed, with rentals sky-high, the Bush Department of Housing and Urban and Development, with the Nagin administration's full support, wants to go ahead with this outrage.

The attack on New Orleans' public housing and other public services is just the flip side of criminal aggression against Iraq. Just as we are building a movement that can stop them in Iraq, we have to build one to stop their crimes at home. Sam Jackson and the public housing movement invite all anti-war activists to press for passage of

Senate Bill 1668 that would reopen public housing, but which is now being blocked by Sen. David "Family-Values" Vitter.

National coalition endorses Gulf Coast Civic Works Act: The Gulf Coast Civic Works Project fully supports the introduction of H.R. 4048, the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act of 2007, introduced Thursday in the U.S. House of Representatives. ACORN, RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights and the national network of student and faculty supporters would like to thank representatives Zoe Lofgren of California, Charlie Melancon of Louisiana and Gene Taylor of Mississippi for their leadership in introducing this groundbreaking legislation offering a renewed federal commitment to rebuilding the Gulf Coast and empowering the region's greatest assets, the disaster's survivors.

This legislation would create stronger and more equitable communities by funding and implementing critical infrastructure projects, directly creating 100,000 jobs for displaced and current residents. The bill creates partnerships to rebuild neighborhoods across the region devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, including Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

"Communities across the Gulf Coast suffer from crumbling roads and water systems, ill constructed flood protection, and closed police stations, fire house, schools and hospitals," says Stephen Bradberry, head state organizer of ACORN Louisiana, the region's largest association of low and middle income families. "We have an opportunity to jumpstart the recovery by empowering communities with the resources they need to lead."

The bill addresses the community infrastructure needs, including education, public safety and transportation, which have kept displaced families from returning. It promotes sustainable economic development by giving priority to local businesses for contracts, promoting workforce development and upgrading services while providing opportunities for returning and displaced residents to pull themselves into the middle class through living wage jobs and apprenticeships.

"During the New Deal the federal government partnered with communities to create 4 million jobs in two months building or repairing thousands of hospitals, schools and playgrounds through public works programs," says Dr. Scott Myers-Lipton, San Jose State professor and Gulf Coast Civic Works Project organizer. "This is exactly what the Gulf Coast now needs."

Through a Civilian Conservation Corps-inspired program, youth workers 17-24 will engage in environmental programs to rebuild wetlands and promote a healthy environment. Innovative local advisory bodies ensure community participation in a citizen driven recovery.

"This bill is a critical step towards restoring human rights in the Gulf Coast," said Monika Kalra Varma, director of the RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights. "With this bill, Congress has the opportunity to help disaster survivors realize their human rights to return and participate in rebuilding their communities."

For more information and to get involved, visit the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, www.solvingpoverty.com, ACORN Louisiana, <http://acorn.org/index.php?id=8219>, and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, www.rfkmemorial.org.

The Hurricane Information Relief Network is the Bay View newspaper's nonprofit 501(c)(3) project to provide information and news coverage by, for and about the Katrina survivors who remain stranded across the U.S. and those who want to return home to rebuild their lives and communities. Send news and financial contributions to HRIN, EIN 20-4324012, 4917 Third St., San Francisco CA 94124, (415) 671-0789 or toll free 1 (877) 226-8100, fax (415) 671-0316 or hrin@sfbayview.com

">hrin@sfbayview.com

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Everyone has a right to come home

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Author:

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Everyone has a right to come home

by Michael Steinberg and Evin Casper-Futterman

Wednesday, 21 November 2007



New Orleans rallies to save public housing, considers nation-wide call for mass protest to stop demolition

It was a little past 4:00 on Tuesday, Nov. 13, and Sharon Jasper was leading the crowd in a chant in front of the federal building on Poydras in downtown New Orleans. The call and response was simple, loud and clear: "What do we want?" "Housing!" "When do we want it?" "Now!"

A section of heavy chain lay across Jasper's shoulder, while she held a noose in one hand. A resident of the St. Bernard public housing complex, her accessories dramatized the current plight of New Orleans' shut-out public housing tenants.

"Take the noose from around the poor working class people," Jasper declared. "Take the shackles off our feet. We are out to fight all the corruption of the city government. Public housing is a human need and a human right."

As she spoke out, people marched in a circle on the plaza in front of the federal facility,



In the shadow of the looming skyscrapers and corporate wealth of Poydras Street in New Orleans and the impending plan to demolish and redevelop public housing, dozens of public housing residents, activists, organizers and supporters rallied in front of the federal courthouse last Tuesday to shine a light on the corruption of housing officials and demand the re-opening of public housing. With demolition threatened to begin as early as Nov. 28, talk of a mass protest in New Orleans is heating up around the country. Many activists believe New Orleans is a test ground for the demolition of public housing across the nation and its replacement with "mixed-income" developments that would displace thousands of families. They say: "Pledge to come to New Orleans and resist this privatization of public housing!" Photo: Mavis Yorks

carrying signs that read, "They push out, we push back," "Stop high rents" and "Down with poverty pimps."

The "poverty pimps" are being called out for either profiteering from the demolition of public housing in New Orleans or for their obstruction of any attempt to re-open the developments that currently exist. Speakers called out Federal District Judge Ivan Lemelle for his dismissal of large portions of a class action suit filed on behalf of the residents of public housing, and Una Anderson, a former School Board official running for a seat in the Louisiana Legislature, who has partnered with development firms to assume redevelopment rights for the C.J. Peete Housing Development.

HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson was called to task for his ongoing financial ties to Atlanta-based Columbia Residential, one of the firms given a lucrative role in the St. Bernard redevelopment project. Also being investigated is a close friend's claim that Jackson lobbied to award him a no-bid \$500,000 contract for consulting assistance to HANO after Katrina. Jimmie Thorns is also said to be a close friend of Judge Lemelle.

Referring to a publicized plan to convert the St. Bernard Development into a golf course, attorney Tracie Washington, president of the Louisiana Justice Institute, said, "We don't need a golf course at the St. Bernard housing development! You want to build a golf course? Go to [nearby suburb] Metairie!"

A number of barbs were directed at Sen. David Vitter, the Republican from Louisiana, for his ongoing obstruction of Senate Bill 1688, which allows for, but does not demand, one for one replacement of public housing units. Vitter's recent scandal involving moral indiscretions in Washington, D.C., was brought up on more than one occasion. A sign read: "Tell David we need housing, not brothels!"

According to an information sheet handed out at the rally by organizers, pre-Katrina there were 5,200 families living in New Orleans public housing, with another 2,000 units temporarily vacant while awaiting renovation.

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) took over the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) long before Katrina. But the Bush administration's fingerprints are all over its current course of action.

HUD, through HANO, has opened up only 1,600 public housing units post-Katrina. In addition, HUD is planning to completely demolish four of the city's major public housing developments: Lafitte, St. Bernard, B.W. Cooper, and C.J. Peete.

The info sheet reports: "After demolishing these thousands of apartments, HUD has approved plans to lease the property to private developers for 99 years to build mixed income housing at each of these sites. HUD has approved developers' plans to dramatically downsize each development."

The net result would work out to an 82 percent loss of low-income public housing units. As one long time New Orleans activist put it at the rally, "If you can't see that the overall plan is to keep poor people out of the city, you must be blind."



Katrina survivor Joetta Chestnut speaks to the press as the New York Solidarity Coalition with Katrina & Rita Survivors rallied Nov. 13 in solidarity with New Orleans against the planned demolition of public housing there. Photo: Monica Moorehead, Workers World

New Orleans' public housing, extraordinarily well built WPA-era brick buildings, arranged college campus-style, suffered little or no wind or water damage from Katrina. If replaced by mixed-income housing, only 16 percent of the homes would be affordable for public housing residents, providing no opportunity for most former tenants to return to their old neighborhoods. And there would be more years of displacement before occupancy is possible.

Furthermore, these replacements would take more than three quarters of a billion dollars for more flimsy construction and little provision for hiring local construction contractors or workers, plus more millions for rent subsidies and consulting, legal and other fees. Since the developers can expect to make a profit on their buildings, rents to help defray these taxpayer-supported efforts will mostly be out of reach for former public housing tenants, who are paid minimum wages for the jobs they do for the rest of the city in tourism, health care and other services. That these are mostly African Americans suggests either institutional or intentional racism.

Another reminder of the city's worsening housing/no housing crisis are the homeless people currently massed in Duncan Plaza, directly across from City Hall.

At the federal building, a representative of Homeless Pride, a group organizing in the park and a member of the coalition sponsoring the rally, said: "Our cause at Duncan Plaza is to build a movement of homeless people, and it is growing bigger and bigger ... The private landlords are getting richer and richer. This has got to stop."



The sign on this New Orleans public housing apartment building - empty of its residents who are literally dying to return home - reads, "These are our homes." Photo: People's Hurricane Relief Fund

A Homeless Pride flyer handed out at the rally stated: "There are over 16,000 homeless men, women and children living in the city of New Orleans. We are residing in abandoned homes, buildings, cars and street underpasses across the city. The government does little to help us. Money that could house us never seems to be available for us.

"It is time that this inhumane treatment stops! We, the people of Homeless Pride, are taking a stand against atrocities." Lafitte, which could house almost 900 families but is now almost empty, sits across the street from a homeless encampment where dozens of people live under a freeway overpass.

At the City Council meeting on Monday, Nov. 19, public housing advocates confronted Councilwoman Stacy Head over her refusal to support a bill in the U.S. Senate, SB 1688, that would mandate reopening 3,000 units of New Orleans public housing within 90 days of its passage.

Louisiana Sen. David Vitter, described by Mike Howell as "the person in the U.S. Senate doing everything he can to block public housing," claims he opposes SB 1688 because of Stacy Head's stance against it.

Howell stated the coalition's basic demand: "Everyone who needs a house should have one. The first step is to reopen public housing. Let all the public housing people come home. Everyone has a right to come home."

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For the Holidays, HUD sends Bulldozers

Author: Bill Quigley
Date Published: 12/07/2007

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The bulldozers are revving up in New Orleans to demolish the homes of 4,600 Black families. The Stop the Demolition Coalition is calling for a mass mobilization – meaning everybody who can, pack up and go to New Orleans – for Human Rights Day, Monday, Dec. 10, to try and head off the bulldozers, which are set to roll on Dec. 15.

Read all about it at www.sfbayview.com: For the holidays, HUD sends bulldozers to demolish 4,600 New Orleans families' homes by Bill Quigley (if it's by Bill Quigley, you know it's got to be good!), http://www.sfbayview.com/News/Main/For_the_holidays_HUD_sends_bulldozers_to_demolish_4_600_New_Orleans_families_homes the latest updates, check www.DefendNewOrleansPublicHousing.org.

Meanwhile, save the date – Friday, Dec. 14, 7 p.m. – and invite everyone you know to come to our fundraiser for the Bay View Prisoners' Subscription Fund. For over 15 years, good folks with something to spare have been donating to the fund so prisoners who want the paper but can't afford it will have free subscriptions.

Hundreds are on our mailing list and hundreds more are on the waitlist. Prisoners treasure the Bay View. Many tell us (our mail is full of letters from prisons across the country every day) that the Bay View literally keeps them alive.

Here's Victor Brown, writing from the federal prison in Dublin: "Not only does your newspaper uplift and strengthen our African people and community as a whole, but it gives us brothas that are down the tools and the knowledge to uplift and strengthen the brothas that are in here inside of these walls." Then he adds, "Can you please send me a free subscription?"

Prison is hell. Denied all rights and any shred of human dignity, the one thing prisoners have is time – time to study the Bay View from cover to cover if they can get their hands on it. Think of the great leadership nurtured in prison that changed the world – think of Malcolm X and George Jackson. Think of the great writing that's emerged from prison cells – think of St. Paul and Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

With subscriptions to the Bay View, prisoners gird themselves to become the freedom fighters we desperately need when they come home. We'll have a list of those on the waitlist so you can make either a general contribution or choose someone to receive your gift subscription. That's in the spirit of the Prisoners of Conscience Committee's "One Prisoner, One Contact" campaign.

AND YOU WILL LOVE THE DEC. 14 LINEUP, which is growing by the minute –

- a slideshow of POC Minister of Information JR's just-completed tour of the inner sanctums of Black Brazil that will blow you away!
- testimony from the San Francisco 8, former prisoners from All of Us or None and members of Critical Resistance and the Women's Prison Coalition about the political power inherent in the 2 million people this prison nation locks up and the movement to free 'em all!
- the hip-hop candidate for the Green Party nomination for president of the United States Jared Ball, a professor at Morgan State in Baltimore and a programmer at WPFW, the Pacific station in DC, who says he has dedicated his life "to the study and eradication of white supremacy and capitalism"
- a film by Claude Marks of Freedom Archives on women prisoners
- and some fiery words of wisdom from our favorite elder statesman, Bay View publisher Willie Ratcliff.

So come one come all to the Bay View Prisoners Subscription Fundraiser Friday, Dec. 14, 7 p.m., at Station 40, 3030 B 16th St. (near BART), San Francisco. The place is huge – capacity 600 people! – so bring friends and family and fill it up to show all those brothers and sisters behind enemy lines how much we care. Suggested donation is \$10–\$20, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds.

Now for this week's lineup of stories. You'll love 'em, I guarantee.

Bay area counties incarcerate a hugely disproportionate number of African-Americans for drug offense: San Francisco, Alameda and San Mateo counties are the worst in the U.S., though racial disparities found in 97% of

counties
studied,http://www.sfbayview.com/News/Main/Bay_area_counties_incarcerate_a_hugely_disproportionate_number_of_African-Americans_for_drug_offense.html

POCC in Brazil,http://www.sfbayview.com/News/Main/POCC_in_Brazil.html

The community speaks out against the gang injunctions by SamDrew, Poor News Network,http://www.sfbayview.com/News/Main/The_community_speaks_out_against_the_gang_injunctions.html

Fresno Westside residents denounce city officials calling Black youth terrorists by Mike Rhodes,http://www.sfbayview.com/News/Main/Fresno_Westside_residents_denounce_city_officials_calling_Black_youth_terrorists.html

San Francisco 8: The spirit of Richard Brown by Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, Black Commentator,http://www.sfbayview.com/News/Editorial/San_Francisco_8_The_spirit_of_Richard_Brown.html

Breaking the chains by Jamal Hart, loving son of Mumia Abu-Jamal,
http://www.sfbayview.com/20071205662/News/This_week/Breaking_the_chains....

International Month by the Minister of Information
JR,http://www.sfbayview.com/20071205663/News/Panel/International_Month.html

My rosary is my only weapon: Fr. Jean-Juste goes to court in Haiti, again by Pooja Bhatia, Esq.,http://www.sfbayview.com/20071205664/News/Panel/My_rosary_is_my_only_weapon.html. Another story for International Month, called France: To rebel is justified, will be posted shortly.

Venezuelan referendum: Democracy prevails, the Bolivarian revolution continues by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network,http://www.sfbayview.com/News/What_s_Going_On/Venezuelan_referendum_Democracy_prevails_the_Bolivarian_revolution_co
gotta check out the photo of the "red wave"! and three more fascinating stories about the referendum:

Latin American leaders praise Chavez for 'democratic posture' by Chris Carlson, Venezuelanalysis.com,http://www.sfbayview.com/20071205672/News/Web_Exclusives/Latin_American_leaders_praise_Chavez_for_dem

Venezuela Solidarity Network (US) statement on the Dec. 2 referendum,http://www.sfbayview.com/20071205673/News/Web_Exclusives/Venezuela_Solidarity_Network_US_statement_on_the_Dec

Venezuelan ambassador's statement on referendum by Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez Herrera,http://www.sfbayview.com/20071205674/News/Web_Exclusives/Venezuelan_ambassador_s_statement_on_referendum.html

Did the White House force the indictment of Barry Bonds? The Barry Bonds, Strom Thurmond, Piggly Wiggly connection by Jean Damu,http://www.sfbayview.com/News/Main/Did_the_White_House_force_the_indictment_of_Barry_Bonds_.html

T-Train terrorists by Apollonia Jordan,http://www.sfbayview.com/20071205656/News/This_week/T-Train_terrorists.html

When progressives cheat: Aftermath of the KPFA election by Daniel Borgström,http://www.sfbayview.com/20071205675/News/Web_Exclusives/When_progressives_cheat_Aftermath_of_the_KPFA_election

Wanda's Picks by Wanda Sabir,
http://www.sfbayview.com/20071205661/News/Culture_Currents/Wanda_s_Picks...

What's Going On Calendar: Current Events,http://www.sfbayview.com/News/What_s_Going_On/What_s_Going_On_Calendar_Current_Events.html

Finally, in the spirit of the POCC "One Prisoner, One Contact" campaign, choose a prisoner to befriend from the list of Pen Pals,http://www.sfbayview.com/Pen_Pals.html

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