



Season of Prayer

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An examination of rebuilding efforts along the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita with an emphasis on displaced populations, inadequacy of government responses, and inequitable development strategies.

Weekly Update ~ 07.28.06

Reports:

- In April, The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) contractors spread across the country to review city and state preparedness levels and plans for disaster response. Review teams reported disappointing results challenging some 60% of proposed plans. However, this is a more optimistic view than cities and states have of themselves. Many states and cities rated themselves lower than even the review committees! This may be a strategy to avoid possible funding cuts from the department. Many local and state governments remain confused by DHS's recent decisions to cut grants to both Washington DC and New York with redistribution of funds to areas of unclear vulnerability.
Taylor, Marisa. "Review shows rift over readiness." *ContraCoastaTimes.com*. July 25, 2006.
<http://www.contracostatimes.com/mld/cctimes/news/15116434.htm>
- Houston, Texas is a city of approximately 2 million people - 30% of whom identify as Black. A poll recently conducted by Texas Southern University and released Monday finds that most black residents of Houston stated they will not trust the government in a hurricane. Instead, 8 out of 10 black residents polled believe God will protect them in such a situation. A concern for the city is that when warnings are issued, residents may ignore them because they discredit their source - the government. This may result in increased vulnerability specifically for black communities.
ABC News13. "Local blacks won't trust government in hurricane, survey finds." *AP Wire*. July 25, 2006.
<http://abclocal.go.com/ktrk/story?section=local&id=4397385>
- The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) issued a public notice this week calling for public comment on recommendations and reports of the impacts Hurricane Katrina had on media and telecommunications infrastructure along the Gulf Coast. The recommendations were compiled by an independent review panel. Comments are due to the FCC on or before August 7, 2006.

Source: National News. "FCC Wants Comment on Recommendations to Hurricane Katrina Communication Impact." *Bayoubuzz.com*. July 27, 2006.
<http://www.bayoubuzz.com/articles.aspx?aid=7735>

Events:

- On July 24 New Orleans' Mayor Nagin, the City Council, and community groups announced commemorative events for the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. The city's planned events will occur over three days, beginning on Sunday, August 27.

A complete schedule of these events is available on the City of New Orleans website:

<http://www.cityofno.com/portal.aspx?portal=1&load=~//PortalModules/ViewPressRelease.ascx&itemid=3647>

- Additionally, the New Orleans City Council announced events which include:
 - ✓ **Friday, Aug. 25:** "New Orleans One Year Forward: The City Council's View," a morning briefing at Gallier Hall led by Councilwoman Stacy Head, including a presentation by New Orleans demographer Greg Rigamer highlighting the progress New Orleans has made during the past year.
 - ✓ **Saturday, Aug. 26:** "The Art of Healing". Young people will present their feelings through the arts. The council also is sponsoring "Finding Hope Beyond Katrina," an essay competition for middle school and high school students.
 - ✓ **Saturday, Aug. 26:** There will be a candlelight ceremony for Katrina victims at 8:30 p.m. at Algiers Point. Candles will be lit for each person who died during Katrina.
 - ✓ **Sunday, Aug. 27:** "A Memorial Tribute to the Victims of Hurricane Katrina," by members of the Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Council at 1 p.m. at Claiborne Avenue and Tennessee Street.
 - ✓ **Tuesday, Aug. 29:** Each council member will lay a wreath in one of the most devastated neighborhoods in his or her district at 9:38 a.m., in commemoration of the time the first levee breached. The City Council will dedicate a granite monument at 10:30 a.m. at the Mississippi River Heritage Park in the 1100 block of Convention Center Boulevard.
 - ✓ **Tuesday, Aug. 29:** A memorial march is planned from the levee break in the Lower 9th Ward to Congo Square. It begins at 10 a.m. and will last until 1 p.m.
- A collection of grass-roots organizations including; African-American Leadership Project, the Causeway Concentration Camp Foundation, the Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association, New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition, the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, Common Ground and the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, are planning events. These events will include; "Hands Around the Dome," marking the ordeal of those who sought refuge in the Superdome; White Buffalo Day; a documentary film festival and spoken-word performance; and a memorial ceremony at the site of the Industrial Canal levee break. No dates or times have been set, but final schedules will be posted at www.peopleshurricane.org.

Source: "Solemn events to mark Aug. 29; N.O. will observe storm anniversary." *Times-Picayune*. July 24, 2006.

- In efforts to inform residents about the recovery process, a free expo will be held August 11 through the 13th at the Mississippi Coast Coliseum in Biloxi for people planning to rebuild in neighborhoods affected by Hurricane Katrina along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. This event is

being sponsored by the Governor's Office of Recovery and Renewal. According to Gavin Smith, director of the recovery office "We're trying to give disaster victims the tools they need to make informed decisions about how they rebuild." Governor's Office of Recovery and Renewal:

<http://www.governorbarbour.com/recovery/expo/>

Source: Wagster Pettus, Emily. "Katrina recovery expo set for coast in August." *The Associated Press*. July 26, 2006.

Living Conditions:

- In Gulf Port, Mississippi it looks like recovery efforts have turned a corner. Morale is up and a can-do attitude is predominant. In Mississippi, school enrollment reached 90% of pre-Katrina levels by the end of the 2005-6 school year and nearly 98% of storm debris has been cleared. With the disbursement of FEMA funding recently making its way into the pocketbooks of households, building is beginning to boom. Mississippi's recovery also faces challenges, as is to be expected. Unemployment along the coast has doubled post-Katrina and the state has never built housing at the rate which will be required for the proposed recovery strategy. Still, it would seem Mississippi is moving in the right direction and so some will ask, why is New Orleans standing still?

Source: Copeland, Larry. "In Mississippi, Katrina recovery gaining speed." *USA-Today Online*. July 25, 2006.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-07-24-miss-rebuilds_x.htm

- Repetitive power outages plague New Orleans where, 10 months after Hurricane Katrina, the power company supply's only half its number of pre-Katrina customers and still can not accommodate the need. Adding to growing frustration surrounding damaged and inadequate infrastructure the electric company has announced it will raise its rates by 25% from last year's prices to cover for lost revenue. In a city where many struggle for daily necessities, a more expensive electric bill and a sporadic electrical supply will not alleviate problems, but add to them.

Source: Nossiter, Adam. "10 months after Katrina, New Orleans residents may have power, or not." *The New York Times*. July 22, 2006.

<http://www.statesman.com/news/content/news/stories/nation/07/22neworleans.html>

- Economist and University of New Orleans Chancellor Timothy Ryan claims New Orleans has regained 70% of its jobs since Hurricane Katrina. He cites a 78% gain in tourist sector jobs and a 20% increase in oil and gas related jobs. However, only 2/3 of retail jobs have returned to the city and there is concern that 60% of small businesses will not make it through rebuilding. This positive report surprised everyone, including mayor Nagin.

Source: Henderson, Peter. "New Orleans regains 70 pct of jobs since Katrina." *Reuters*. July 26,

2006. <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N26240017.htm>

- The Children's Health Fund nonprofit organization, LSU Health Sciences Center School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics unveiled two mobile health facilities to provide care to children survivors of Hurricane Katrina beginning in mid-August. These mobile health care units will travel to FEMA housing sites around East Baton Rouge Parish to provide physical and mental care to children and their families that are living in isolated areas which limit their access to such services.

Source: Wold, Amy. "Health care gets new wheels. Mobile units slated to visit FEMA parks." *The Advocate*. July 22, 2006.

- FEMA and the charity Save the Children joined forces to provide children living in temporary trailer parks spaces to play in trailer communities. Mark Shriver, vice president of Save the Children noted that “FEMA is acknowledging the need.” Save the Children issued an investigative report July 24 into life inside the trailer communities in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Among the findings, Shriver notes “these families are under incredible stress—many have lost homes, jobs and family members and are now living in cramped quarters. We found there were few spaces for families to get together and no facilities for kids to play.” Save the Children’s “Safe and Protective Communities Project” will start in the Diamond Group Site in Louisiana’s Plaquemines Parish, one of FEMA’s largest trailer parks with 450 trailers.

Sources: Asthana, Anushka. “A Place Where Displaced Kids Can Play.” *The Washington Post*. July 24, 2006.

“Save the Children and FEMA Partner to Improve Quality of Life for Children in Gulf Coast Temporary Housing Sites” *Save the Children*. July 24, 2006.

http://www.savethechildren.org/news/releases/release_072406b.asp?stationpub=i_hpb4_emer004&ArticleID=&NewsID=

Save the Children report: Rapid Assessments of Temporary Housing Camps For Hurricane-Displaced Children and Families. July 2006.

http://www.savethechildren.org/emergencies/usa/images/katrina-assessment_final-0706.pdf
- City run cemeteries in New Orleans no longer offer grave digging services with burial. Bereaved families must make their own arrangements. Many city cemetery workers have not returned after Hurricane Katrina while still others were displaced before the storm when city employment cuts diminished opportunities for employment. Perhaps most problematic in attempting to hire new workers is finding how to entice them when wages are low (\$5.15/hour) and the work is strenuous, both physically and mentally. City cemeteries are those that many low income and poor household use. This new cost translates into increased financial insecurity and pain for families already dealing with so much.

Source: Jensen, Lynne. “With cemetery staff scarce, New Orleans families fend for themselves when it comes to burying their dead.” *The Times-Picayune*. July 23, 2005.

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/metro/index.ssf?/base/news-16/1153637991230580.xml&coll=1>
- Evacuees enrolled in FEMA’s long-term housing program will lose their federal housing aid to pay rent next month unless they renew by Monday. This deadline applies to nearly 27,000 displaced families, of which 19,000 are in Texas, and most of which are in Houston. The program is an 18-month assistance program that expires in February, known as Section 408 open to evacuees who are heads of households and who rented or owned in hurricane-battered areas.

Source: Weber, Paul J. “FEMA warns evacuees of looming housing deadline.” *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. July 26, 2006.

Education:

- A group of 19 students have come up with a tentative plan to evaluate New Orleans public schools in an effort to improve the school system. In their proposal, students and their parents will be given the opportunity to grade schools by way of a seven-point questionnaire. Schools will be assessed in various aspects such as safety, cleanliness, teacher-quality, and accessibility of nurses and counselors. The plan was formulated over a 6 week period as part of a program called Rethink – Kids Rethinking New Orleans Schools. During that time, the students discussed and detailed the substandard conditions prevalent in their schools, including filthy bathrooms

that lacked toilet paper and soap, an insufficient number of desks in classrooms, and unhealthy lunches. Because many of the students attended school elsewhere in the aftermath of the hurricane, they were able to draw comparisons between their schools in New Orleans and schools around the country. As 13 year-old student Dudley Grady put it: "We have to realize that every student in this country is equal, and students in New Orleans should not have to deal with these conditions. We deserve to have the same opportunities and experiences as those in Texas or Florida. These are our schools. It's time for us to make a change."

Source: Eric Elie, Lolis. "The Tables are Turned." *Times-Picayune*. July 22, 2006.

http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_07_22.html#163949

- Since registration began for schools in the New Orleans Recovery District, 40% of the available spots have been filled by 4,332 students, and four of the 18 schools are fully enrolled. The schools are set to begin on September 7th and will be able to hold up to 10,775 students on their campuses. Beginning in August and continuing in September, a total of 57 public schools are scheduled to open with the ability to accommodate up to 34,000 students.

Source: Ritea, Steve. "Four schools full as signup revs up." *Times-Picayune*. July 20, 2006.

http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_07_20.html#163176

- Colleges affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are attempting to attract displaced students back to the region via the "Return to Learn" program of the Louisiana Board of Regents. The program would provide a student up to \$1,000 to enroll or re-enroll in the fall at Louisiana colleges and universities.

Source: "\$8.5 million to help woo students back to Louisiana." *CityBusiness*. July 21, 2006.

More information on the "Return to Learn" program: <http://www.returntolearn.info/>

Governments' Responses:

- Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco sued the federal government last week in an attempt to block a federal agency from leasing thousands of blocks in the western Gulf of Mexico for exploration of oil and gas. The lawsuit officially states that drilling would cause environmental damage to Louisiana's coast, damage which is being ignored by the Mineral Management Service. In actuality, Blanco's actions are part of an ongoing effort to increase Louisiana's share of federal royalties on oil production

Source: Simpson, Doug. "Blanco sues federal agency over offshore environmental damage." Associated Press. July 21, 2006.

http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_07_21.html#163525

- Disaster unemployment assistance has ended for those who lost jobs as a result of Hurricane Katrina. At the height of the program approximately 64,000 people were receiving the benefit. Some economists argue that this will force laborers back into the workforce spurring the regional economy. If so, the push will come at a much needed time. If not, the decision will only exacerbate current economic and social malaise.

Source: Bruce, Hamilton. "Katrina unemployment checks end." *The Times-Picayune*. July 26, 2006.

- National government agency, FEMA has decidedly displaced responsibility for disaster assistance on individual state financial capacity. FEMA director, David Paulison stated, "it's

their citizens” referring to state governments. This was in explanation to question about FEMA’s new policy requiring states to foot 25% of the bill in monetary assistance necessary during a disaster. The connotation is that if states don’t pay, FEMA won’t pay. States question if this stance exposes a trend of the national government turning its back on taxpayers.

Source: Walsh, Bill. “State protests FEMA cash cut; ‘People will suffer’ from antifraud rules.” *The Times-Picayune*. July 25, 2006.

- Mayor Nagin addressed the news media to reassure the public that 11 months after Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans is making progress towards recovery “We are on track. We’re moving forward.” The mayor addressed the topics of street cleaning noting the progress in removal of residential and commercial debris. In terms of restoring utilities, work still needs to be done and according to Nagin this will require a joint effort between “the feds, the state and Entergy”. In terms of getting displaced residents back to the city, the mayor’s housing task force plans to open a number of information centers. The first of these centers will open in Houston on August 22 to provide former New Orleans residents in Texas with information on housing, employment, education and social services. A second center will open in downtown the main library of New Orleans on August 23. Nagin wants the offices to provide residents with assistance in navigating the Louisiana Recovery Authority’s Road Home grant program. In terms of where rebuilding occurs, the mayor said he would not set rules, rather affirmed that “government’s role is to create the right environment for people to make intelligent decisions.”

Source: Donze, Frank. “Mayor finally breaks post-election silence; An upbeat Nagin cites economy, cleanup, safety.” *Times Picayune*. July 27, 2006.