



## Season of Prayer

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*An examination of rebuilding efforts*

*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 ~ 08.04.06

#### Reports:

- The U.N. Human Rights Committee recognized that in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the United States has yet to "ensure that the rights of poor people and in particular African-Americans are fully taken into consideration in the reconstruction plans with regard to access to housing, education and health care." According to the U.N. panel, the United States "should take measures, including adequate and adequately implemented policies, to ensure the cessation of this form of de facto and historically generated racial discrimination."  
*Source:* Klapper, Bradley S. "U.S. needs to ensure rights for poor and blacks after Katrina relief efforts, U.N. body says." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. July 28, 2006.
- Claritas Incorporated, which provides U.S. demographics data, just released updated population estimates for the Gulf Coast region this week. Their data shows demographic shifts during the period of October 2005 to July 1, 2006 and is unique in that it provides estimates on areas impacted directly by the hurricane as well as on places where evacuees now live. Overall, the estimates indicate a gradual shift back toward the numbers that existed prior to Hurricane Katrina. Also, counties that experienced a large influx of evacuees in the aftermath of the hurricane are now seeing declines in population as evacuees have started to return home or move elsewhere. Conversely, areas that experienced a population loss due to Hurricane Katrina are now seeing their population numbers increase. Of all counties that experienced population loss, Orleans Parish has actually had the largest population recovery.  
*Source:* "Claritas Announces Update of Hurricane Katrina-Adjusted Population Estimates."  
*Market Wire*. August 1, 2006.  
[http://www.marketwire.com/mw/release\\_html\\_b1?release\\_id=149589](http://www.marketwire.com/mw/release_html_b1?release_id=149589)

## Living Conditions:

- At the National Urban League Conference last week, the rebuilding of New Orleans was a topic of discussion. According to Rev. Al Sharpton "A year later, nothing's changed." This sentiment was echoed by Marc Morial, former mayor of New Orleans who noted that Katrina was seen as an opportunity to push poor minorities out of the city, the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of "urban renewal".  
*Source:* Varela, Anna. "Civil rights leaders say no progress since Katrina." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. July 29, 2006.
- Businesses in New Orleans call for more tourists. As hospitality services continue to come back on track in the city the need for people to use these service becomes more and more apparent. Those who do come to the city are still taken a back by the remains of devastation littered across the city. Residents remind, just because Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest have returned to New Orleans, the city is not "back."  
*Source:* Sayer, Alan. "Post-Katrina, New Orleans Seeks Tourists." *AP Wire*. August 1, 2006.  
<http://www.localnewswatch.com/jordanfalls/stories/index.php?action=fullnews&id=207189>
- Martin Luther King Elementary School was once a source of pride for Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward residents. Today, school staff and residents are determined to ensure it remains so. King will reopen for fall enrollment, but at a different site. School officials are quick to mention that the move is temporary. School staff, community members, and supporters have worked together to reopen the school as one of New Orleans' many charters. However, as was the case before the storm, King Elementary is different. The school is the only charter opening to date without the use of a private managing entity. The school is planned for the community and of the community. State reviewers for charter applications in Louisiana were impressed by the support from the community the school tenders as well as the proven success King has seen before Hurricane Katrina. The school, with 96% of students utilizing free and reduced school lunch programming, consistently ranked above average in test scores and achievement. For some, the fact that King is coming back, means they and their families will return too.  
*Source:* Ritea, Steve, "The Dream Team: Flood-wracked Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward's Martin Luther King Elementary continues to beat the odds in fight to reopen a successful learning center." *The Times-Picayune*. August 1, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?base/news-6/1154412353315490.xml&coll=1>
- St. Bernard Public Library was damaged by Hurricane Katrina. Over \$3.6 million in FEMA money has been made available for building repairs to the St. Bernard Parish Public Library and replacement of books. This is part of FEMA's recognition that libraries are a vital public service. According to Jim Stark, FEMA's Director of the Louisiana Transitional Recovery Office: "Libraries add to the vitality of a community. The restoration back to an operating library will be another step in the recovery of St. Bernard Parish."  
*Source:* "More Than \$3.6 Million in Public Assistance for St. Bernard Parish Public Library." Press Release 1603-517. *FEMA*. July 31, 2006. <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=28382>
- Although 11 months have elapsed since Hurricane Katrina, the healthcare system in New Orleans continues to be wholly inadequate in meeting the needs of the city's residents. Part of the problem is that many doctors have still not returned to the city, and some who did return decided not to stay. Additionally, many residents are waiting longer and longer to seek medical

attention, worsening their condition and forcing them to eventually go to the emergency room. Hospital ER's, which were operating over capacity prior to the storm, are now even more overloaded. Many hospital beds are out of commission, some medical equipment is damaged, and there is a serious lack of emergency medical technicians, paramedics, and ambulances, making it difficult to handle patient needs. Nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, long-term acute care hospitals, and home health care have been on the decline due to the shortage in doctors, nurses, and janitors. Also, hospitals have had to pick up additional costs when treating uninsured patients as well as those on Medicare, which has fixed payments to hospitals. Adding the complexity, all hospitals are expected to further cut services within the next two or three months.

Source: McConnaughey, Janet. "Hospitals in serious condition, 11 months post-Katrina." Times-Picayune. July 28, 2006.

[http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_07\\_28.html#166402](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_07_28.html#166402)

- One aspect of the uncertainty of post-Katrina life includes who vacates FEMA trailers and who does not. Currently over 1,200 trailers have been vacated in Jefferson Parish, over 240 in St. Bernard Parish, 230 trailers in Plaquemines Parish, and nearly 600 in Orleans Parish. However, as of July 14 occupied trailers remained the norm with 17,400 occupied FEMA trailers in Orleans; 19,000 in Jefferson; 7,200 in St. Bernard; and 4,000 in Plaquemines Parish. Trailer requests continue and more are being installed. Regardless of the trend, FEMA trailer residents are determined to return. Some neighborhoods feature signs that read "I AM COMING HOME! I WILL REBUILD! I AM NEW ORLEANS!"

Source: Gyan Jr., Joe. "FEMA trailer life currently the norm for many in N.O. Those determined to rebuild homes often face long wait." *The Advocate*. July 30, 2006.

- The recent rise in violent crime in New Orleans has some residents skeptical of moving back to the city. Six people were killed over the weekend bringing the total death toll to 78 since January. It is projected that New Orleans may surpass Camden, New Jersey as the most crime laden city in the country this year. In past years, New Orleans has consistently ranked second.

Source: Rochell Konigsmark, Anne. "Six Weekend Slayings Put New Orleans on Edge." *USA Today*. August 1, 2006. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-07-31-new-orleans\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-07-31-new-orleans_x.htm)

- Mental health providers and researchers have noted that in the post-Katrina period New Orleans has seen an increase in the severity of mental health problems. This coincides with a mental health care system that is in shambles. According to James Barbee professor at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, one-year after Katrina "the event is still unfolding. People are losing jobs. They're moving because they're so discouraged by the situation. There's a lot of uncertainty about the future. It's not easy to live here." Barbee is co-author of a report published in the Journal of American Medical Association that compiles data to illustrate that although many months have passed since Katrina, the mental health of New Orleans is in a dire state. Despite the rise in mental health conditions among residents, the city still has limited mental health service provision infrastructure with many hospital buildings destroyed and few psychiatrists practicing. Mental health professionals are calling for the federal government to assist in rebuilding the system.

Source: McCulley, Russell. "Is New Orleans Having a Mental Health Breakdown?" *Time*. August 1, 2006. <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1221982,00.html>; Accessed August 1, 2006.

#### Local and Regional Plans:

- In an effort to build a strong workforce in the Gulf, the Business Roundtable, which consists of 160 chief executive officers of major companies, unveiled a plan to give basic training to 20,000 people over the next four years who would enter construction professions. Additionally, the national AFL-CIO plans to invest \$700 million in housing and other infrastructure projects. This move should generate funds from the investment and create union construction jobs.  
*Source: "No housing, no workers; no workers, no housing." The Associated Press. July 31, 2006.*
- On Thursday, the Regional Transit Authority Board voted to redraw bus lines citywide to coincide with New Orleans smaller population and layoff 227 employees. The agency will lose a federal subsidy on November 30 and must develop a definitive plan by this date. Prior to Katrina, RTA employed 1,357 people. RTA has offered free service since it resumed service in October. However, fares will be reinstated on August 6. RTA is providing evacuees living in Baton Rouge with augmented bus service however, without additional funding this service may cease on November 30. FEMA has promised to reimburse the RTA \$22.8 million for the destroyed buses, although the actual replacement cost is estimated at \$66.6 million. FEMA has also granted \$27 million to replace the 24 streetcars destroyed by Katrina and one of the Riverfront cars lost to the flood.  
*Source: Donze, F. "RTA to let ax fall after balking; Free rides coming to an end in August." Times-Picayune. July 28, 2006.*
- Entergy, the floundering energy company in New Orleans requested a 120 day extension to file its bankruptcy reorganization plan. The New Orleans City Council has yet to vote on Entergy's proposed rate increase and will not make a decision until November 1, 2006. A district Judge stated that, because of a backlog of cases, the court could not hear the appeal for extension until September 18, 2006 resulting in an unofficial deadline extension at least until that date.  
*Source: Sayer, Alan. "Entergy New Orleans wants more time to file plan." The Times-Picayune, AP Wire. August 1, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/newsflash/louisiana/index.ssf?/base/business-3/1154441358282460.xml&storylist=louisiana>*
- On August 29<sup>th</sup>, the one year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, Orleans parish will start releasing poor defendants who have been awaiting trial. The scheduled release seeks to alleviate the immense backlog faced by the criminal district court and also to rectify the sad state of the criminal justice system, which has been violating the basic constitutional rights of these defendants. Judge Arthur Hunter who made the announcement said that prisoners will only be released if they have not received a trial, and that release does not mean that the charges are erased. One of the main reasons for this backlog in cases is the difficult situation faced by the public defender's office, which is still recovering from going bankrupt and lost many of its attorneys in the aftermath of the hurricane. Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco secured an additional \$10 million for the state's indigent defender program, however this is the amount needed for Orleans Parish alone to provide constitutionally adequate representation of poor defendants.  
*Source: Filosa, Gwen. Judge to release indigent defendants." Times-Picayune. July 28, 2006. [http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_07\\_28.html#166396](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_07_28.html#166396)*

#### Governments' Responses:

- Governor Blanco wrote to President Bush requesting that August 29, 2006 be declared a National Day of Prayer. She also invited President Bush to participate in events honoring those lost to Hurricane Katrina.  
*Source:* "Governor asks President to declare Katrina anniversary as National Day of Prayer." LRA Progress Report. July 27, 2006. <http://www.lra.louisiana.gov/pr072706.html>
  
- According to Gil Jamieson, FEMA's Deputy Director of Gulf Coast Recovery "Louisiana's full recovery is tied to a strong education and health infrastructure". FEMA announced it would provide \$18 million to the state of Louisiana for costs associated with several Louisiana schools, and a Women's Hospital in East Baton Rouge among other projects.  
*Source:* "\$18 Million in Public Assistance Funds Support Return of Vital Services in Louisiana." Press Release (1603-514). FEMA. July 28, 2006.  
<http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=28347>
  
- According to FEMA the updated recovery figures for *Louisiana* are as follows:
  - Over \$13.2 billion paid to policyholders in Louisiana under National Flood Insurance Program.
  - U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) approved over 13,000 disaster assistance loans to business owners (totaling \$1.3 billion) and 78,237 loans to renters and homeowners totaling more than \$5 billion.
  - FEMA issued 1.6 million housing assistance checks over \$3.6 billion to Louisiana victims.
  - Over \$3.1 billion grants awarded to state and local governments to assist with debris removal, emergency protective measures, and restoration of infrastructure.
  - Over \$312 million in disaster unemployment assistance
  - 44.6 million cubic yards of debris has been removed
  - 1 million housing inspections in Louisiana have been completed by FEMA.
  - Over 780,000 Louisiana residents sought information at Disaster Recovery Centers.*Source:* "By The Numbers: Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Disaster Assistance Update." Press Release 1603-516. FEMA. July 31, 2006. <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=28379>
  
- According to FEMA, Federal Assistance in *Mississippi* since Katrina has reached \$8.8 billion and has been distributed:
  - Over \$1.2 billion to individuals and families
  - \$815.3 million approved for Public Assistance (emergency protective measures; repair public facilities; restore public utilities; restore public recreational facilities; repair road and bridges; repair water control devices).
  - \$2 billion for debris removal (nearly 45 million cubic yards of debris; removal is 95.6% complete).
  - \$2.4 billion paid to policyholders (National Flood Insurance Program)
  - 37,093 FEMA-travel trailers and mobile homes
  - \$2.5 billion in U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) loans approved.
  - \$2 billion in loans to homeowners and renters*Source:* "Hurricane Katrina Recovery Update: Week 47." Press Release 1604-410. FEMA. July 28, 2006. <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=28352>