



## 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 ~ 08.18.06

#### Reports Released:

- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) released a report late last week called *Abandoned & Abused: Orleans Parish Prisoners in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina*. This report is part of the ACLU's National Prison Project, the only national litigation project working on behalf of prisoners. The ACLU documented neglect of the Orleans Parish Prison prior to the hurricane, the terrible conditions faced by prisoners during the storm, and the overall lack of preparation on the part of officials which exacerbated the already catastrophic situation. Orleans Parish Prison had been described as "one of the most dangerous and mismanaged jails in the country." As floodwaters rose, guards left prisoners locked in their cells to fend for themselves. The prisoners "went days without food, water and ventilation." Deputies admit that they "received no emergency training and were entirely unaware of any evacuation plan."  
*Source:* "National Prison Project Calls for Immediate Action by President, Congress and Justice Department." ACLU. August 10, 2006.  
<http://www.aclu.org/prison/conditions/26421prs20060810.html>
- Appleseed, a coalition of law firms, compiled a report detailing the experiences of five cities hosting large populations of persons displaced by Hurricane Katrina. The cities include Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Birmingham, Houston and San Antonio. The goal of the report is to recommend the best practices found through the experiences of these cities to better prepare all cities for future emergencies. The uncommon length of stay for many evacuees in these host cities has created unique challenges for many cities. The report was constructed through the analysis of 350 interviews conducted between June 5<sup>th</sup> and June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006.  
*Source:* "A Continuing Storm: The on-going struggles of Hurricane Katrina Evacuees." *Appleseed*. Accessed: August 15, 2006. <http://appleseeds.net/servlet/GetArticleFile?articleFileId=232>

#### Living Conditions:

- Local experts believe that race relations in New Orleans have hit rock bottom. "In the first few days after Katrina I met many white people who felt Katrina was the best thing that ever happened to New Orleans." "It destroyed the black community and in one fell swoop had eliminated crime, poverty, problems with the schools and the burden on social services," said Lance Hill, Executive Director of the Southern Institute for Education and Research at Tulane University. In an effort to address the issue of racial polarization in the post-Katrina period, Ervin Staub, a professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts was recruited by the Southern Institute to help develop a model of community healing to be implemented in New Orleans' communities. According to Hill, "we have to accept the fact that we've experienced not just a natural disaster trauma but an ethnic trauma ... Whether you agree with people's interpretation of events we have large numbers of people black and white who feel they have been victimized because of the color of their skin".

*Source:* Webster, Richard A. "Experts: New Orleans race relations crumble under post-Katrina stresses". *New Orleans CityBusiness*. August 14, 2006.
- In the New Orleans suburb of Kenner, demolition of 401 units at the Redwood Park apartment complex continued, despite objections from local Hispanic communities. These apartments provided an affordable housing option for a large portion of the city's Hispanic population, however, the complex suffered serious damage during the hurricane, causing it to be deemed uninhabitable and leaving 1,800 people without homes. The owner of the property has expressed an interest in rebuilding the complex as a mixed development, combining commercial uses with housing. Hispanic community activists called on the City Council to rebuild low-income apartments in the area, but local officials stated that they would not pressure the property owner to provide affordable housing. Interestingly enough, when the complex was originally built 36 years ago, the federal government provided subsidies to builders in an attempt to keep rents low. Activists like Dr. Vinicio Madrigal have pointed to this and argued that the government should have provided more assistance to residents in the aftermath of the hurricane. "One of the main reasons for government to exist is to provide infrastructure and protection for the less fortunate. They failed miserably this time around."

*Source:* Swerczek, Mary. "Razing of apartments fuels Hispanic concerns." *Times-Picayune*. August 15, 2006.

[http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_08\\_15.html](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_08_15.html)
- Although the schools in the Recovery School District are scheduled to open in 3 weeks, more than 40% of the teachers still need to be hired. The district faces the daunting task of filling 191 teaching positions, many in special education as well as high school science and math, which are more difficult to fill. An official speaking for the Recovery School District said that it might not be necessary to fill all teaching positions considering that student enrollment is not extremely high. Officials in the school district are striving for students to teacher ratios of 20:1 for elementary schools and 25:1 for high schools. To date, this looks like a lofty goal.

*Source:* Ritea, Steve. "La.-run school district lacking teachers." *Times-Picayune*. August 16, 2006.

[http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_08\\_16.html#172602](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_08_16.html#172602)
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency has run into problems again, this time with trailers it provided to Hurricane Katrina evacuees. Keys used to open a trailer's front door can actually be used to unlock as many as 50 other trailers. As a result, the locks on nearly 118,000 trailers will

have to be replaced. The security risk is especially high in areas where trailers are clustered together. FEMA said the reason for this problem is that there are only three companies in the country that make trailer locks. So far, law enforcement authorities estimate that only a small number of trailers have been broken into.

Source: Varney, James. "FEMA has key concern with its trailers." *Times-Picayune*. August 15, 2006. <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=28842>  
[http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_08\\_15.html#172163](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_08_15.html#172163)

#### Displaced Persons:

- Approximately 300,000 evacuees are believed to have gone through Georgia at some point in the months following Hurricane Katrina's landfall. As of June 2006, 40,622 evacuated families were registered for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency under Georgia ZIP codes. Based on the agency's assumption of 2.5 persons per household, it is estimated that more than 100,000 evacuees remain in the state, about 84,000 of whom reside in metro Atlanta. According to the report "A Continuing Storm: The On-Going Struggles of Hurricane Katrina Refugees" the emergency migration to Atlanta was well executed by local organizations and government. Similarly, the Atlanta metro area has a greater availability of resources than other receiving cities. Another factor that attributed to the smooth transition was the fact that many of the evacuees already had support networks in place.  
Source: Dart, Bob. "100,000 evacuees still in Georgia; Report praises metro response to Katrina victims" *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. August 15, 2006.
- Mississippi Governor Barbour announced at the Governor's Recovery Expo a federal-state program to offer training, job placement and other help to Mississippi Gulf Coast residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina. The "Working your Way Back Home" initiative is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and administered by the Mississippi Department of Employment Security in partnership with Manpower, Inc. According to Gov. Barbour "By helping to bring back skilled workers needed to fill jobs for rebuilding the Gulf Coast and south Mississippi, this initiative will be valuable to both displaced families and Mississippi businesses."  
Source: "Barbour announces program to help workers return to Miss. Coast." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. August 11, 2006. Mississippi Department of Employment Security. *Working Your Way Back Home*.  
[http://www.mdes.ms.gov/wps/PA\\_1\\_0\\_6A/docs/WorkYourWayBackHome.pdf](http://www.mdes.ms.gov/wps/PA_1_0_6A/docs/WorkYourWayBackHome.pdf)
- Houston police believe a 17.4% increase in homicides can be attributed to the influx of displaced persons from New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Twenty-one percent of homicides in the City implicate New Orleans residents either as a victim or suspect. The Governor of Texas warned displaced persons via a televised address only days after Katrina made landfall that legal repercussions in Texas would be harsher than those in New Orleans. This week, another reminder - he meant it.  
Source: Brandon, Alex. "LA Katrina victims blamed for Houston crime." *USA Today - Online*. August 15, 2006. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-08-15-evacuees-crime\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-08-15-evacuees-crime_x.htm)

#### Actions:

- Bolivian, Peruvian and Dominican immigrant workers recruited for hotel housekeeping and maintenance jobs in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans are suing their employer, Decatur Hotels, for exploitation. The lawyer who helped the 80 workers file the lawsuit has claimed that

recruiters promised stable work hours and high wages, but neither of these have been fulfilled. On top of this, overtime pay which the workers were relying on has not been paid. All of this, combined with the \$3,500-\$5,000 costs incurred by the workers as they came to the US, has left many of them in debt, unable to take care of families and having to fend off collectors. To make matters worse, the H2B visas that the workers were given by Decatur Hotels prevent them from leaving their jobs even if they find better employment.

*Source:* Roberts, Michelle. "Post-Katrina immigrant workers sue." *Detroit Free Press*. August 17, 2006.

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060817/BUSINESS07/608170405/1020/BUSINESS>

- In the first trial regarding insurance coverage during Hurricane Katrina a Mississippi judge ruled in favor of Nationwide Insurance, which determined most of the hurricane damage was caused by flooding and therefore not covered in their policy. Paul and Julie Leonard, the couple that filed the lawsuit against Nationwide, claimed that most of the damage to their house was caused by wind-driven storm surge and should be covered by their insurance policy. They also stated that their agent had told them that they did not need to buy flood insurance because such damage would be covered by Nationwide's hurricane insurance. However, the judge said that this claim could not be substantiated by any evidence. This case will likely set a precedent for hundreds of similar trials.

*Source:* Davidson, Laurence Viele. "Nationwide Wins First Trial Over Katrina Coverage." *Bloomberg News*.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601103&sid=av. AsCibURs&refer=news>

- Mayor Nagin joined opposition to a controversial landfill by halting dumping at the site. The mayor did not renew a contract to private waste management provider, Waste Management. State regulators believe this action may set back New Orleans' clean-up by more than a year. Multiple landfills have fallen under close scrutiny since some in-city sites were opened to dumping construction debris. Regulation on debris type was altered under the pretense of emergency necessity by Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Mike McDaniel last year. Concerns about the new dumping practices point out potential ground water contamination, effects on community drinking water, and the nearby Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge. Environmental non-profit agencies have also joined forces by filing a suit against landfill owners. This action may have contributed to the Mayor's decision this week.

*Sources:* Roberts, Michelle. "New Orleans Mayor halts landfill dumping." *Associated Press*.

Accessed online: *ABC news*. August 15, 2006. <http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id=2314381>

Dunne, Mike. "Groups sue state over landfill sites." *The Advocate*. August 10, 2006.

<http://www.theadvocate.com/news/3537966.html>

- A district court denied Louisiana Governor Blanco's request to stop an off-shore drilling lease approved in August. The Governor requested a larger portion of off-shore drilling royalties be funneled directly to the state earlier this month. The ruling allows the contentious lease to continue, but the judge did comment that he thinks the State has a strong case with a high potential for success when it goes to trial in November. The main argument is the lack of protection provided for coastal wetlands which serve as indispensable buffers from tropical storms and hurricanes.

To view a summary of Judge Engelhardt's ruling, click the following link:

<http://www.gov.state.la.us/assets/docs/PDFs/MMSrulingexcerpts8.14.06.pdf>

Source: "Louisiana Blanco Responds To Court Denial In Oil, Gas Revenue Case." *BayouBuzz.com*. August 15, 2006. <http://www.bayoubuzz.com/articles.aspx?aid=7912>

- Officials on the state and federal level finally agreed that Louisiana would need to have 150,000 shelter beds ready for any large evacuations caused by future hurricanes. While the federal government made it clear that they wanted Louisiana to be able to take care of itself, a top state emergency official was skeptical about the state's ability to provide 150,000 beds. Presently 93,000 beds could be made available. The federal government criticizes Governor Blanco for not pressuring local governments to secure potential shelter sites.

Source: Maggi, Laura. "State to shoot for 150,000 shelter spots." *Times-Picayune*. August 16, 2006. [http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_08\\_16.html#172606](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_08_16.html#172606)

- New Orleans leaders are under fire for planning and staffing shortfalls which are slowing down recovery efforts. The city lacks a citywide recovery plan, an entity responsible for rebuilding homes and neighborhoods, and strong leadership.

Source: "Mayor, Critics Spar Over New Orleans Recovery" *KnowledgePlex Week in Review*. Accessed August 3, 2006.

Related articles:

"Experts Excoriate Recovery Leaders; Nagin, Council are Failing City, They Say". *Times-Picayune*. July 29, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/115415325196960.xml&coll=1>

"Mayor Finds Bright Spots in Economic Recovery." *Times-Picayune*. July 27, 2006.

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/1153984791142040.xml&coll=1>

#### Funding Allocations:

- Total Community Action Inc. received \$1.2 million from the disaster relief Bush Clinton Katrina Fund. The repair program pays for minor repairs on the homes of homeowners committed to returning to their properties. Total Community Action intends to focus repair efforts on damaged homes in the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, Desire and 7<sup>th</sup> Ward neighborhoods.

Source: Filosa, Gwen. "Money to aid home repairs; \$1.2 million is for mostly minor work" *Times-Picayune*. August 12, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-16/115536395862730.xml&coll=1>

- The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals' Office of Mental Health has received \$18.5 million in funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide crisis counseling through Louisiana Spirit to hurricane affected residents.

Source: "Dealing with emotional impact of hurricane is a key part of recovery" *FEMA Press Release*: 1603-521. August 11, 2006. <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=28779>

- Construction on unfinished hurricane and flood protection projects has yet to begin in metropolitan New Orleans despite a proposed completion date of September 2007. Six months ago, the Army Corps of Engineers was given \$1 billion to finish these projects and also raise sinking levees; however Corps officials have found that the processes involved in overseeing the expenditure of this money is more complicated than expected. Officials are not overly concerned and still insist they will be able to meet the September 2007 deadline.

Source: Grisslett, Sheila. "Corps racing against time, red tape." *Times-Picayune*. August 14, 2006.

[http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_08\\_14.html](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_08_14.html)

- More than \$10 million of loans and \$500,000 in donations have been distributed to low-income communities by a nonprofit development organization called ECD/HOPE. The organization was started by the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta and Hope Community Credit Union, and has also given 400 no-interest rebuilding loans totaling \$1.5 million to businesses, nonprofits, and individuals.

*Source: "Another financial option after Katrina." The Sun Herald. August 15, 2006.*

<http://www.sunherald.com/mld/thesunherald/business/15275828.htm>