



Season of Prayer

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 ~ 09.01.06

One Year Later:

- President Bush traveled the Gulf Coast this week commemorating the one year memorial date of Hurricane Katrina's landfall. The president met with state and local officials, community members, the faith community, and area non-profits. The promise of the federal government to hold true in assisting full recovery in the region again rang through speeches and conversations. A fact sheet released by the White House showed the number of times the president has visited the region in 2005, the billions of dollars allocated for housing initiatives (but does not mention the inability of funds to find their way into the hands of households), and outlined the president's itinerary.
Source: White House, Fact Sheet: President Bush's Visit to Biloxi and New Orleans. August 28, 2006. Accessed: August 29, 2006.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060828.html>

Reports Released:

- The National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies issued a report entitled "The Invisible Tide: Vietnamese Americans in Biloxi, MS. An Update One Year After Hurricane Katrina" in an attempt to render Biloxi's Vietnamese population visible. In the wake of Katrina, the Vietnamese population was mostly invisible to government agencies. These residents were not informed of state-sponsored aid. The report found that around 4,000 Vietnamese living in South Mississippi and concentrated in East Biloxi did not collect relief money. One reason being that recovery agencies were and are not equipped to provide services that are linguistically and culturally attuned to Vietnamese community resulting in exclusion from assistance and services.
Report link: <http://www.navasa.org/word%20doc/BiloxiFinal.doc>
Source: Newsom, Michael. "Report outlines relief defects: Vietnamese families became invisible." *The Sun Herald*. August 27, 2006.
- CorpWatch, an organization committed to ensuring corporate accountability, released a report that details corporate greed and disaster profiteering facilitated by government ineptitude and complicity during the ongoing Gulf Coast reconstruction effort. Specifically, the report talks about the awarding of rebuilding contracts, many of which

were no-bid, to politically connected companies from outside the region; sub-contracting schemes that short-changed companies and laborers who actually did the work; as well as, the exploitation of labor in general and particularly undocumented migrant workers. *Source:* King, Rita J. "Big, Easy Money: Disaster Profiteering on the American Gulf Coast." CorpWatch. August 17, 2006. <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=14004>

- Congressional Democrats issued a report last week which heavily criticizes the Bush administration and Republicans more generally for their response in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The report highlights the glaring discrepancies between promises made to the Gulf Coast by the Bush administration and realities on the ground. The Democrats focus on promises made and broken with regard to housing, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and other public services. After going through a litany of grievances, the Democrats offer a series of policy prescriptions in order to remedy the situation. *Source:* "Broken Promises: The Republican Response to Katrina." Senate and House Democrats. August 23, 2006. <http://democrats.senate.gov/pdfs/KatrinaReport2006.pdf>
- The American Society of Civil Engineers released what it has termed an "urgent call to action" emphasizing the utmost importance of public safety above all other concerns. An external review panel put together by the ASCE consisted of 14 engineers and social scientists. The panelists acknowledged a sense of obligation after completing the process to increase understandings of the decisions and practices that led to the tragedies of Hurricane Katrina. The Panel's report details a list of specific calls to action and can be accessed in full via the ASCE webpage - http://www.asce.org/files/pdf/Ch9_WhatMustWeDoNext.pdf *Source:* "Hurricane Katrina: One Year Later, What Must We Do Next?" American Society of Civil Engineers. August 25, 2006. http://www.asce.org/pressroom/news/display_press.cfm?uid=2809

Displaced Persons:

- According to FEMA, 25,434 evacuees from Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas moved to Alabama after Katrina and Rita. Currently some 20,828 evacuees remain in Alabama and many have no plans to return to their homes. Approximately 113,000 Alabama residents applied for federal and state assistance after Katrina. 5,063 out-of-state evacuees live in or around Mobile, 3,263 live in the Birmingham area and thousands of others are scattered throughout the state. According to a report by Appleseed, a nonprofit legal organization, evacuees in Birmingham have found permanent housing and jobs and have placed their children in local schools. Despite many evacuees gaining a sense of stability, many continue to feel a sense of loss in terms of community and social networks. Additionally not all evacuees feel welcome in their receiving communities with locals asking "why haven't you gone home yet?" *Source:* Reeves, Jay. "Alabama still home to 20,800 Katrina evacuees; many to stay." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. August 28, 2006.
- Nearly 4,000 hurricane evacuees remain in Arkansas. According to FEMA, the state had more than 15,000 evacuees. However, the governor's office estimates an influx of as many as 75,000 refugees in the past year. The impact of Katrina and Rita can still be felt

on the state's culture and future disaster plans. Arkansas spent \$44.1 million on refugee assistance.

Source: DeMillo, Andrew. "Evacuees displaced in Ark. Mark first anniversary of Katrina." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. August 28, 2006.

- Oklahoma officials estimate that about 7,500 evacuees remain in the state almost one year after Katrina. Initially about 1,500 evacuees were housed at Camp Gruber, an Oklahoma National Guard training center near Braggs in northeast Oklahoma; while 2,000 were served by a hurricane assistance center in Oklahoma City.

Source: "Estimated 7,500 evacuees remain in Oklahoma." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. August 28, 2006.

- At Colorado State University, Kate Browne, a professor of Anthropology, and Lori Peek, a disaster researcher in Sociology have received a \$50,000 grant to conduct research on the impact that loss of culture has had on Hurricane Katrina evacuees. Nearly 13,000 evacuees settled in Colorado at least temporarily in the aftermath of the hurricane and the research team has tried to document the experiences of some evacuees in Denver. According to Browne "the climate, literally and culturally, left most people feeling disoriented and without a sense of control over their lives. Add to all this their separation from family, and you have a continuing disaster that is nowhere near over." The research team headed by Browne and Peek has set up a website (www.milehinevneworleans.org) that provides important information about Denver for Katrina evacuees.

Source: "CSU documentary assesses Katrina's effect on people." *Rocky Mountain News*. August 28, 2006.

http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/local/article/0,1299,DRMN_15_4950904,00.html

Living conditions:

- Those rebuilding in New Orleans are faced with the reality of higher prices. Economists and others studying the recovery believe that higher housing and other living expenses will remain elevated in the near future. However, Mayor Nagin believes the situation is "going to be temporary, and we'll see the pressure subside over time." The current cost of living in New Orleans contrasts starkly with the cost pre-Katrina, as the City used to rank as one of the least expensive major cities in the US. One of the reasons for the rising cost is the replacement of the housing stock. According to HUD, renters will be paying more than 39 percent more than last year and flood victims that decide to purchase a home will pay about 26 percent more than the previous year. Similarly, the cost of home insurance has increased on average by 12 percent though it is estimated that those rates are higher in the New Orleans area. Displaced New Orleanians find themselves driving more and so spending more money of gasoline. Other expenses that have increased include energy costs and food costs. Similarly the businesses that have reopened are faced with the rising cost of doing business in the area. Despite the elevated cost of living Janet Speyrer, an economist at the University of New Orleans and director of the Division of Business and Economic Research, believes that New Orleans may emerge as a more equitable, middle-class society than pre-Katrina due to the growth of wages at the lower end of the economic spectrum.

Source: Mowbray, Rebecca. "Post-Katrina New Orleans proves pricey; Some say new economic realities will reshape the city permanently." *Times-Picayune*. August 25, 2006.

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/1156486255218950.xml&coll=1>

- Though Hurricane Katrina did not directly affect Baton Rouge, the city has permanently been altered by the influx of evacuees. The rapid increase in population has led to Los Angeles-like traffic jams, a housing crunch, a surge in school enrollment, the overburdening of teachers; an increase in crime; increases in discussions about race and class; and what some fear as the transplanting of New Orleans problems and chaos in Baton Rouge. Additionally there is animosity within Black populations of Louisiana which is bifurcated along geographic lines with New Orleans' Black population being seen as "rough-and-tumble poorer" than Baton Rouge Blacks that are "proud of their middle class roots."

Source: Haygood, Wil. "After Katrina, Baton Rouge Weathers a Storm of Its Own." *The Washington Post*. August 25, 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/24/AR2006082401918.html>

- As deadlines fast approach some families receiving rental assistance from FEMA again face the end of voucher payments as early as next week. ACORN filed a suit against FEMA in a D.C. district court for insufficient explanation of benefits termination. FEMA rental assistance programs have assisted 604,511 families and cost \$3.7 billion. Participants in the program must continually reconnect with FEMA to keep their participation status. Houston's sheltering program has successfully transitioned 22,000 individuals in advance of the coming August 31 deadline, but some 12,000 people have been deemed ineligible and will face a "rent crunch" Friday, September 1st.

Source: Scott, Robert Travis. "Feds to begin cutting off rental aid to thousands." *Times-Picayune*. August 30, 2006.

http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_08_30.html#177512

Recovery Initiatives:

- Economists and construction experts agree that the much-anticipated construction boom following last year's disaster has yet to occur in the New Orleans metro area. According to Ryan Sweet, associate economist at Moody's Economy.com, New Orleans' economy is "in shambles. There's no way to sugarcoat it. (...) This is the first time in U.S. history where a city has sat dormant for almost a year. New Orleans has a long, long way to come back." Two reasons that explain the economic stagnation are: the lack of leadership and the slow pace of getting federal funds to homeowners seeking to rebuild or relocate. For these reasons, New Orleans' economy is currently in a coma. Additionally in order to get people confident in the economy, Amy Liu, deputy director of the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program notes that "before you can have an economy, you need to have a functioning government with delivery of basic services."

Source: Mowbray, Rebecca. "Wounded N.O. economy remains in coma; Experts say it's still too early for full prognosis." *Times-Picayune*. August 25, 2006.

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/1156487733218950.xml&coll=1>

- Without a comprehensive city wide plan many are putting their two cents in to how New Orleans should be rebuilt. Some say it must be decentralized because neighborhoods are

created by the collective contributions of those who construct them while others argue this is the time for designed and planned communities that mix incomes and uses. It would seem San Francisco was able to redevelop more quickly after the 1906 earthquake than New Orleans has been able to. Perhaps, any plan would be better than no plan.
Source: Rybczynski, Witold. "How To Rebuild New Orleans Start with a visit to Denver." *Architecture: What we build*. Aug. 24, 2006. <http://www.slate.com/id/2148311/>

- Mayor Ray Nagin and Governor Kathleen Blanco are once again at odds with each other, this time over the delivery of federal money to the city of New Orleans. Mayor Nagin claims that federal funds given to the state of Louisiana have been slow to reach New Orleans, a charge which Governor Blanco rebutted in an 8-page letter documenting the amount of grants and loans funneled to the city's agencies and residents. The back-and-forth dispute further highlights the endemic miscommunication and lack of cooperation between different levels of government in the aftermath of the hurricane.
Source: Krupa, Michelle. "Nagin asks Blanco: Where's our money?" *Times-Picayune*. August 25, 2006.
http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf/?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_08_25.html#175931
- Officials from FEMA and the Bush administration's Gulf Coast rebuilding initiative stated that the rebuilt New Orleans levee system could handle a major hurricane. However, others including the head of the Army Corps of Engineers and Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu were skeptical of this assessment considering that the levees have only been rebuilt to their pre-storm levels. Currently, levees could withstand a Category 3 hurricane but many like Sen. Landrieu argue that they need to be able to protect against a Category 5 hurricane. Governor Kathleen Blanco also expressed disappointment with the status of the levee system while Mayor Ray Nagin promised that the city was at the very least ready to evacuate.
Source: Heilprin, John. "Feds say New Orleans is storm-ready." *Associated Press*. August 27, 2006. http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20060828/ap_on_go_ot/katrina_fema_9
- The Army Corps of Engineers may finally be able to work on sinking levees, vulnerable pump stations, and other storm protection projects that remained unfinished. Nearly seven months ago, the Corps was given \$1 billion to do what was supposed to be rush work, however it was bogged down by extensive legalities and paperwork. Finally, after negotiations between the Corps and the local governments, the so-called rush work will begin in East Jefferson and 11 miles of levees will be finished in St. Charles Parish.
Source: Grissett, Sheila. "Levee battle ease in East Jefferson." *Times-Picayune*. August 29, 2006.
http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf/?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_08_29.html#177080

Public Opinions:

- According to a poll conducted by AP-Ipsos, 57% of Americans feel somewhat strongly that the country is not prepared to handle another major disaster. Those most fearful of being victims in the next disaster were poor people. The poll also found that only one in three Americans believe President Bush has done a good job responding to Hurricane Katrina.

Source: Yen, Hope. "Poll: Public doubts emergency readiness." Associated Press. August 28, 2006.

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20060828/ap_on_re_us/katrina_ap_poll_4; ylt=AsTSdKyXsRtUFm5L1mDB4bN2wPIE; ylu=X3oDMTA2ZGZwam4yBHNIYwNmYw--

- Residents and Environmental Justice organizations are calling for MR-GO, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet that funneled storm surge into the city and over levees, to be shut down. At least part of the legislature is listening and has requested a version of the Army Corps of Engineers plans include the closure of MR-GO. Hurricane Katrina was not the first instance of MR-GO's influence on New Orleans' flooding, in 1965 Hurricane Betsy's storm surge also found its way into the city by way of MR-GO. Source: Kim, Susan. "Stop MR-GO," groups urge." *Disaster News Network*. August 31, 2006. <http://www.disasternews.net/news/news.php?articleid=3295>