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Weekly Research Update

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 ~ November 3, 2006

Reports and Research:

- An LSU professor and her graduate students are working on research that explores how the resulting violence of Hurricane Katrina affected children already familiar with neighborhood violence. This project is funded by a National Institutes of Mental Health grant.
Source: Cullen, Ed. "We're on a mission'. LSU psychology professor battles cancer as she and her students study hurricane's effects on children." *The Advocate*. October 29, 2006.
<http://www.theadvocate.com/features/4498206.html>
- The Southern Institute has launched a new web site dedicated exclusively to the Katrina Research Project on Equity (KRPE). The site is a tool to facilitate networking and collaboration among researchers who want to study the impact of race and class in the post-Katrina recovery. It has a searchable database of more than 100 completed and ongoing research projects on Hurricane Katrina. The web site also offers a quick and easy way for researchers and volunteers to connect with developments and opportunities along the Gulf Coast.
Source: Katrina Research Project on Equity. Accessed November 2, 2006.
www.katrinaresearch.org
- The actual figures of the deaths resulting from Katrina remain a "grey area" of the storm effects. John Mutter, a Columbia University professor and his research associate are using published stories and obituaries, Internet searches and a Web site appeal to find out more information about people who died or may have died as a result of Katrina. According to Mutter, "the scale of the tragedy is measured in the death toll. It's very important to get as accurately as possible what the real number was."
Source: Warner, Coleman. "The Storm After the Storm; They died after Katrina, after evacuating to unfamiliar cities, after losing everything to the storm and, often, their will to live. A new project seeks to add them to the official Katrina death toll." *Times-Picayune*. October 28, 2006.
<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/116204138486520.xml&coll=1>

- Public Health researchers from across the country have recounted the social implications for health in a recent study. The team reflects on the social inequities that determined who would live and die in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. A section of the paper devoted to 'environmental disasters' notes that although triggered by environmental phenomena the impacts of such disasters are far from "natural", but instead are predicated on the context of individuals and communities within social hierarchies. The paper reiterates the importance of social medicine and urges the bedside manner of clinicians be extended to "community-side" manners that acknowledge and work to eradicate health inequalities.

Source: Holtz, Timothy, et. al. Health is still social: Contemporary examples in the age of the Genome. *PLoS Medicine*. October 24, 2006.
<http://medicine.plosjournals.org/perlserv/?request=get-document&doi=10.1371/journal.pmed.0030419>
- Storm surge from Hurricane Rita did not diminish as one moved from the eye of the storm causing massive reshaping all along the gulf's coasts, but also reacting to the coastal contours of the region. Data collected from US Geologic Survey pressure sensors were used to compile the USGS report's comprehensive findings. The report can be reviewed at U.S. Geological Survey study: <http://pubs.usgs.gov/ds/2006/220/>.

Source: The Associated Press. "Survey: Rita storm surge reacted to contour of coast." *The Times-Picayune*. October 30, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/newsflash/louisiana/index.ssf?/base/news-28/1162219753260650.xml&storylist=louisiana>

Recovery:

- Local economic development officials believe that attracting companies that produce modern construction components to locate in the New Orleans area would spawn the building of housing that would draw residents back to the area. Additionally, the new business would bring coveted manufacturing jobs to the area and diversify the local economy which historically has not been strong in manufacturing. According to Steve Molnar of Greater New Orleans Inc. "we see it as an opportunity to grow a new industry for this market. When we look at the level of rebuilding funds that are going to be flowing through this economy, it's a natural fit." The available funds include incentives offered through the Gulf Opportunity Zone, and the training of the local workforce through the Recovery Workforce Training Program.

Source: Mowbray, Rebecca. "Building Potential. Economic development officials hope to make manufacturing the state's trademark economy even if it goes against the grain of its history." *Times-Picayune*. October 29, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/business/t-p/index.ssf?/base/money-1/116210163868170.xml&coll=1>
- Over 10,000 South Mississippi apartment units were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by Katrina. This is well over the earlier estimates of the Gulf Regional Planning Commission. Of the units lost, 2,633 units were subsidized housing or 41.5% of all subsidized housing coast-wide.

Source: Frulla, Priscilla. "Apartment losses near 50%." *The Sun Herald*. October 31, 2006.
<http://www.sunherald.com/mld/sunherald/business/15890263.htm>
- A free Wi-Fi network which was constructed to provide wireless internet coverage in New Orleans following the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina will be shut down early next year. The network has enabled small business users in the downtown area of the city to stay connected while a fixed broadband infrastructure is being repaired. When the fixed system is

complete it will be a city-wide network offering free connectivity at speeds up to 300kbps, with charges applying for faster services.

Source: CommsUpdate. "New Orleans loses free Wi-Fi." *TeleGeography's CommsUpdate – Online*. October 30, 2006. http://www.telegeography.com/cu/article.php?article_id=15048&email=html

- According to the approximately 350 participants in a Unified New Orleans Plan planning meeting on October 28, the majority believe that the areas that sustained minor damage from Katrina and currently heavily populated with residents and businesses should be prioritized in terms of being allocated the limited funding to repair utilities, streets and other infrastructure. Close to half of the participants indicated that the size of New Orleans' geographic footprint is of little concern. Shrinking the city would exclude the worst damaged areas which tended to be inhabited by black and poor residents. The participants of the planning meeting were not representative of N.O. demographics pre-Katrina with respondents being 75% white, and 40% with households incomes over \$75,000. There is a concern that the planning process is omitting the voice of many residents that live outside of the region thus not including their wants in the city's recovery plan. AmericaSpeaks is working with UNOP to ensure that the displaced, especially low-income African-Americans, have a voice in the process.

Source: Krupa, Michelle. "Survey backs plan for smaller footprint; But demographics of voters questioned." *Times-Picayune*. October 29, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/116210217168170.xml&coll=1>

- FEMA announced that it has received necessary funds to begin the restoration of New Orleans' signature red street cars. The funds will also be used to begin to restore the RTA fleet of buses destroyed by hurricanes last fall. Bus replacement will be with hybrid buses which take over a year to be delivered. The recover may not be swift, but FEMA representatives claim "it's a good start." FEMA also notes that the \$43 million will not be enough to return transportation services to pre-Katrina levels, but the RTA is simply ecstatic about the arrival of any funds at all.

Source: Williams, Leslie. "Streetcars getting back on track; Feds will pay for repairs, new buses." *The Times Picayune*. November 1, 2006.

http://www.nola.com/newslogs/tpupdates/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_tupdates/archives/2006_10_31.html

- Over 200 residents of Orleans and St. Bernard parishes gathered on October 28 to call for the complete closure of the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet. According to Carlton Dufrechou, director of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, "the public is demanding the channel be closed immediately. Rebuilding levees is futile without the restoration of our coast, and the key to restoring the coast below New Orleans is closing the MR-GO." Feedback from the meeting will be included in a Corps report due in Congress by December 15.

Source: Bazile, Karen Turni. "Close MR-GO, residents tell the corps; Congress to consider the channel's future." *Times-Picayune*. October 29, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/metro/index.ssf?/base/news-17/116210204168170.xml&coll=1>

- Critics continue to question the ability of Entergy to come out of its downward financial spiral. CEO, Dan Packer released a plan for the energy provider to emerge from bankruptcy in 2007 – two years earlier than expected- but can the plan truly add up? Entergy will utilize block community grants from the state and increase rates by 32% (provided the rate increase is passed by city council in a vote on Wednesday). All employee programs and benefits will stay in tact making some ask, "why should financially strapped New Orleans residents and businesses pay a

large rate hike while the parent corporation profits?" Thus far, Entergy has done little to save face or improve public opinion on its post-storm capabilities.

Source: "Entergy N.O. plan does not add up." *New Orleans CityBusiness – Online*. October 30, 2006. <http://www.neworleanscitybusiness.com/viewStory.cfm?recID=17137>.

- State officials will meet next week with officials of the federal Department of Health and Human Services to discuss and evaluate the New Orleans health care proposal which calls for the coverage of at least 80% of the 127,000 uninsured people in the N.O. area within 5 years of implementation. The core of the plan is to replace the existing health care safety net in which the uninsured are covered by the Charity System, under the new plan low-income people will have access to government-subsidized managed care insurance. According to state officials the transition will likely be slow and expensive.
Source: Moller, Jan. "Doubts raised about viability of N.O. health care proposal. Paying for coverage is a chief concern." *Times-Picayune*. November 1, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/116236447775620.xml&coll=1&thispage=1>
- According to federal law, disaster victims are prohibited from receiving multiple sources of financial aid for the same purpose. As such homeowners that received Road Home rebuilding grants and Small Business Administration (SBA) loans and are using them to rebuild their houses could be in violation of the law. Thus rebuilding grants may have to be used to pay off all or a portion of disaster loans from the SBA leaving homeowners with little resources for the rebuilding process.
Source: Walsh, Bill. "SBA rule may cut rebuilding grants. Dust-up compounds homeowners' plight." *Times-Picayune*. October 31, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/116227772393810.xml&coll=1>
- Though the government's response to Katrina has been coming up in some isolated congressional races outside of the Gulf Coast its mention is minimal compared to other issues such as the war in Iraq and the recent page scandal. It has been over 14-months since Katrina and coupled with the public's short attention span, the issue is off the political radar.
Source: Alpert, Bruce. "Katrina blows ill winds in campaigns; But tragedy mostly off national radar." *Times-Picayune*. November 1, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/116236442575620.xml&coll=1>
- N.O. Mayor Nagin announced the \$50 million "self-replenishing gap-loan program" also dubbed "One New Orleans Road Home Fast Track Program" which will offer low-interest loans for up to \$50,000 to residents to begin immediate renovations. This loan was unveiled as part of Nagin's proposed 2007 budget and will provide assistance to 2% of the 53,000 New Orleans homeowners who are expected to receive money from the state's Road Home program.
Source: Donze, Frank. "Nagin unveils loan program; It's for homeowners waiting on LRA cash." *Times-Picayune*. November 2, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/116245747269000.xml&coll=1>

Displaced Communities

- Post-Katrina approximately 30,000 Louisiana hurricane evacuees arrived in San Antonio. Yet the question remains, how has the city's crime rate and services been affected? The city has experienced a 55% spike in murders in the first eight months of this year and an increase in

violent crimes. However San Antonio's political leaders have not linked the evacuees to the increasing crime rate as Houston has. In fact local politicians have avoided this issue loaded with "politically sensitive racial implications" and by not addressing the issue, San Antonio may not receive federal money to cover public safety costs as Houston did.

Source: Bensman, Todd. "Katrina crime: Perceived or real?" *The San Antonio Express-News*. October 29, 2006.

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/metro/stories/MYSA102906.01A.Katrinacrime.35f69ab.html>

- In the post-Katrina period, Vietnamese Americans lack the family and friend networks they once had and grapple with the influx of Mexicans into their community. According to Louisiana statistics, the Asian community in the New Orleans area shrank to 7,000 post-Katrina, a decrease of 5,000 people since 2004. This contrasts with the growth of the Latino community which is currently over 16,000. Vietnamese refugees were new comers in the 1970s and 1980s however in subsequent decades the population in the Gulf Coast area grew to between 25,000 and 40,000 residents. Times have changed and once Vietnamese restaurants are now catering to the Mexican population, and neighborhoods such as Village de L'est are seeing their diversity increase.

Source: "New Orleans Vietnamese and Latinos Adapt Together After Katrina." *AsianWeek.com*. October 27, 2006.

http://news.asianweek.com/news/view_article.html?article_id=e92e862b052c26d4edf64c6112bc5b16

- The LRA is mulling over a proposal to reinstate commuter rail services between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. The rail service is an ambitious \$60 million project suggested by the state Department of Transportation. Many believe more people would be willing to use the train than the bus service currently provided. However, the state is requesting that both options remain available. The train service will not replace the bus service, but will serve as an alternative transportation option between the two state hubs. Many rely on the bus service, LA Swift, for transportation to and from interviews in the New Orleans area. There is currently no charge for the services 1,000+ riders each day.

Source: The Associated Press. "Rail service could connect New Orleans and Baton Rouge." *The Associated Press State and Local Wire*. November 1, 2006.

<http://www.nola.com/newsflash/louisiana/index.ssf?/base/news-28/1162358353121480.xml&storylist=louisiana>