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## Weekly Research Update

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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 ~ November 17, 2006**

### Reports Released:

- The Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) released a report on November 14 entitled "Without Housing: Decades of Federal Housing Cutbacks, Massive Homelessness, and Policy Failures" detailing cutbacks in federal affordable-housing over the past 25 years and its link to "massive homelessness". Although the report looks at national trends, the themes ring true with the New Orleans area where public housing has slowly been disappearing from the landscape. In 1996, HANO had a housing stock of 13,694 units, pre-Katrina the stock was at 5,146 units and post-Katrina the number of occupied units is around 1,100.  
For the full report: [http://www.wrAPHOME.org/wh\\_press\\_kit/Without\\_Housing\\_20061114.pdf](http://www.wrAPHOME.org/wh_press_kit/Without_Housing_20061114.pdf)  
Source: Filosa, Gwen. "Activists link homelessness to federal spending priorities; Mortgage-holders get more aid than poor." *Times-Picayune*. November 15, 2006.  
<http://www.nola.com/search/index.ssf?/base/news-18/1163574499190480.xml?NZNPMPT&coll=1>
- The Brookings Institution will release its Katrina Index: November Findings on November 16. A summary of the report is planned for the next research update. Until then, please visit their website.  
Source: [http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/200512\\_katrinaindex.htm](http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/200512_katrinaindex.htm)

### Recovery:

- Jeff Smith, Louisiana's director of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, stressed at a meeting of the Ascension Chamber of Commerce that Hurricane Katrina was "the worst storm this nation has ever seen" and that the U.S. Congress and the rest of the nation do not fully comprehend the unprecedented nature of the destruction. Katrina caused \$100 billion in damage and affected a large area the size of Great Britain. He indicated that recovery post-Katrina will take "well over a decade." Among the pressing issues Smith noted in his speech are the suffering tax base, the "huge labor problem", the massive amount of debris, huge oil spills, destruction of coastal wetlands, 18 hospitals that remain closed in the New Orleans' area and the affected institutions of higher education.

Source: McMillan, John. "Nation just doesn't understand scale of Katrina, official says." *The Advocate*. November 10, 2006.

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/suburban/4608006.html?showAll=y&c=y>

- Despite the outpouring of aid, massive challenges remain in the Gulf Coast region. Critical to the road to recovery is in meeting the health needs of the vulnerable populations. In the aftermath of Katrina, Operation USA provided \$8 million in supplies and \$700,000 in grants to clinics in the region. There is a great need for community clinics however buildings remain in disrepair and evacuated clinical staff have yet to return. Operation USA recently granted another \$816,000 to 22 agencies in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Source: Operation USA's Continued Response to Hurricane Katrina. *Operation USA. Reuters AlertNet*. November 9, 2006.

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/opusa/116311310484.htm>

- During a panel discussion at the Carter Center symposium on mental health policy, survivors and rescue workers of Katrina indicated the traumatizing impact that the storm continues to have on people's psychological well-being. Due to storm damage, mentally ill patients are still unable to receive proper treatment and medicine. Additionally, the storm precipitated mental problems such as depression and anxiety among people who previously did not have such symptoms. According to law enforcement agencies in New Orleans and Jefferson Parish, domestic abuse, alcohol abuse, fighting and suicide rates have gone up.

Source: Turner, Dorie. "Mental Health Problems From Katrina Persist." *Associated Press* featured in *The Washington Post*. November 9, 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/08/AR2006110802135.html>

- The unarmored nature of the levee and floodwall system is what led to the protection system's failure during Hurricane Katrina. The system could be improved by lining it with rock or concrete. However, due to limited federal funding the Corps can only armor the most vulnerable spots including more recently the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet and one in eastern New Orleans.

Source: Grisset, Sheila. "Armor All. Critics of the rebuilding of the levees fronting the Gulf of Mexico and Lake Pontchartrain say the Corps of Engineers is setting them up for failure again by not armoring their sides with rock and concrete." *Times-Picayune*. November 12, 2006.

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-7/1163319378112270.xml&coll=1>

#### Governments' Responses:

- The controversial St. Bernard Parish ruling on renting only to homeowner blood relatives will be suspended from enforcement by choice of the parish administration pending a hearing. A lawsuit against the ordinance was brought by the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center in September deeming the ordinance as racially discriminatory and reconstructive of racial segregation. Although the hearing is pending the suspension is seen by the organization as a success.

Source: Bohrer, Becky. "La. Parish to stop enforcing rule requiring permission to rent to non-relatives." *The Associated Press*. November 14, 2006.

- FEMA has decided that only trees touched by salt water will be eligible for removal by the government agency's affiliated contractors. This is only the latest in a series of fluctuating requirements to deem particular trees eligible for removal or not. The rules keep changing and the number of trees qualified for removal continues to dwindle. When the program was

announced an estimated 10,000 trees would be removed with federal assistance. The new requirements are accompanied by a new estimate that a whopping 500 trees will actually be eligible for assistance. The deadline for filing for removal is Dec. 1. Eligible trees must be removed by Feb. 28.

Source: The Associated Press. FEMA says salt water had to touch trees. *The Associated Press*. Tuesday November 14, 2006.

- Despite the ambitious plan of the Bush administration and the state of Louisiana to train thousands of Gulf Coast workers for the regional labor shortages in construction, the plan has underperformed. According to officials responsible for implementing the apprenticeship program, there have been more vacancies than applicants and they believe that the situation is due to the persistent shortage of viable housing in the New Orleans area.

Source: Alpert, Bruce. "Training program turnout is tiny. Officials put blame on housing shortage." *Times-Picayune*. November 10, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/washington/index.ssf?/base/news-1/1163141546296570.xml&coll=1>

- The Louisiana Road Home program will open a center in Houston on November 16<sup>th</sup> in order to assist Hurricane Katrina evacuees still living in Texas in applying for housing grants. This will be the first assistance center outside Louisiana, thus bringing services closer to homeowners still in need.

Source: The Associated Press. "La. to open Road Home assistance center in Houston." *Times-Picayune*. November 9, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/newsflash/louisiana/index.ssf?/base/news-28/1163106549173790.xml&storylist=louisiana>

- While on a work-trip to the Far East and Kuwait, Gov. Blanco told reporters "the pace of the Road Home is inadequate" and that she "will not tolerate any slow action". Blanco would like to understand the issues surrounding the delay and is will to change procedures if necessary.

Source: Anderson, Ed. "Blanco dissatisfied with pace of grants; no decision on when to call special session." *Times-Picayune*. November 15, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/capital/index.ssf?/base/news-4/1163572588190480.xml&coll=1>

#### "Katrina Effect":

- According to Rep. Rahm Emanuel, D-Ill., chairman of the Democrat's campaign in winning back a majority in the House, the win was in part due to the failed response of the Bush administration to Hurricane Katrina. He believes that Katrina was on the mind of voters although campaign ads made no mention of the hurricane as an issue. Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution corroborates with Rep. Emanuel in that "the public perception of incompetence by the Bush team in Iraq and New Orleans was an important factor in the election."

Source: Alpert, Bruce. "Katrina a factor in GOP defeats." *Times-Picayune*. November 9, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/washington/index.ssf?/base/news-1/1163060023313000.xml&coll=1>

#### Katrina – Media and Culture:

- According to Forrest Davis of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, the water in the New Orleans area is safe. However many "buy into the at-times hysterical perceptions of post-Katrina New Orleans as a virtual toxic waste site." This public perception is directly related to the labeling of the city as a "toxic soup" of hazardous chemicals and sewage by the media and environmental groups. The fear of N.O. area environmental conditions may be keeping many

from moving back to the area. Officials are trying to quell the public's concern by providing updated environmental quality test results.

Source: Warner, Coleman. "Getting out the message is tough; N.O. safe for visitors, residents, DEQ says." *Times-Picayune*. November 13, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?base/news-7/1163400637214170.xml&coll=1>

- In order to bring the deep social issues around Katrina to a theatre audience, a new hip hop play entitle 'Katrina: A Whole Lotta Water' made its debut off-Broadway on November 9<sup>th</sup>. According to the play's creator, Emmitt Thrower, the play will "help those unaffected by its far-reaching destruction to come to an understanding of how important it is to feel the pain and suffering of others and count their blessings for what they have." *Katrina: A Whole Lotta Water* is playing at the Producers Club II, located at 616 Ninth Ave in New York City and ran November 9-November 12.  
Source: Jeffries, Alexis. "Hip Hop Play To Focus On Hurricane Katrina." *Vibe*. November 6, 2006. [http://www.vibe.com/news/news\\_headlines/2006/11/hip\\_hop\\_play\\_to\\_focus\\_on\\_hurricane\\_katrina/](http://www.vibe.com/news/news_headlines/2006/11/hip_hop_play_to_focus_on_hurricane_katrina/)
- "Comic Relief," the star studded fundraising telethon is back after an eight year hiatus to raise funds for redevelopment of Gulf Coast communities. The televisions fundraiser will be the culminating event of a week long comedy festival being held in Las Vegas, Nevada. The show will also have a satellite location in New Orleans and be broadcast on HBO and TBS. A large portion of the proceeds are slated to be used to build "shotgun" homes, an architectural style unique to the region, in the Holy Cross area and the Lower Ninth Ward. The homes will be built and sold to families through the management of a local non-profit organization. Comic Relief founder, Bob Zmuda stated that part of the purpose of focusing efforts in New Orleans is to remind people that all is not back to 'normal' in the city – there is still a lot of work to be done.  
Source: Nakashima, Ryan. "Comic Relief back after 8-year hiatus to help Katrina victims." *The Associated Press*. November 14, 2006.