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Drowning the Crescent City: Told Stories of Katrina

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This article reviews secondary sources on the possible causes of the devastation in New Orleans resulting from Hurricane Katrina. These sources include newspaper accounts, radio and television interviews, government documents, and extensive historical chronicles of the aftermath of Katrina. The authors examine the consequences of policy action (or inaction) at all levels of government with respect to preparedness for evacuation. Using readily available online archival sources, the authors probe the interwoven complexity of the social structures of class, race, and age, together with the everyday lived experience of poor African American and elderly residents, to critically examine the question "what happened and why?" The article concludes with an examination of the legacies of racism and class inequality that are both socially reproduced in Katrina and, if not given keen attention by policy makers and other leaders, may foretell a similar disaster in the future.

Catastrophic disasters are best defined in that they totally outstrip local and state resources, which is why the federal government needs to play a role. There are a half dozen or so contingencies around the nation that cause me great concern, and one of them is right there in your backyard (DeParle, Pear, Risen, & Shanker, 2005).[1]

Based on the total economic loss in the Gulf Coast region and an expected reconstruction price tag as high as $200 billion, Hurricane Katrina stands as the worst catastrophic disaster in the history of the nation. The levels of federal and private financial resources that will pour into rebuilding and reconstructing the region, especially in the 300-year-old city of New Orleans, is unparalleled in modern times. The reconstruction effort is likened to the Marshall Plan. The engineering, economic, and social infrastructure will have to be rebuilt—from scratch. In New Orleans, this includes levees, hospitals, places of employment, and schools.

This archival study will use present-day documentary sources in an attempt to capture dimensions of this historical account in the moment of its narration. We pose a simple question in regard to the broader question of who is accountable for

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the failures of government to protect the health and safety of more than an esti-mated 445,000[2] citizens in New Orleans: What happened? That is to say, that based on what we know with some degree of confidence, can we document who made major policy and strategic decisions prior to Katrina? Perhaps more important for the immediate victims and their families, who was in charge in the immediate days following Katrina, and what historically will be the consequences of their actions or nonactions? The immediate goal of this exploratory research is the production of historical knowledge generated by the capture of secondary documentary sources of reporters on the ground. This critical historical study, we hope, may inform future longitudinal studies as to the factors implicated in why thousands of residents were unable to evacuate New Orleans or failed to evacuate.

For analytical and historical purposes, we cast a fundamental distinction in this study: the federalization of New Orleans in the immediate days after Katrina struck and the militarization of the city (occupation) post-Katrina. The former refers to the calls for federal assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) by the governor of Louisiana and the mayor of New Orleans. This military occupation continues today, 3 months after Katrina came ashore. On one hand, these are ideal types that frame our study; on the other hand, the analytical categories are blurred, as the article reveals. Nonetheless, we keep this distinction in mind as we proceed with the account and the analysis.

FEMA Director Joe M. Allbaugh indicated the concern and priority in fur-thering efforts to safeguard New Orleans against catastrophic natural disasters caused by a Category 3 (or greater) hurricane. Such efforts resulted in a 2002 City of New Orleans Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan under the direc-tion of homeland security director for New Orleans, Terry Ebert. Notably absent was planning input from FEMA. This plan was obviously not finished before Katrina made landfall, and preparations for the New Orleans Superdome as a main shelter site were not to be completed until 2007. With 24% of the city's adult population disabled and between 50,000 and 100,000 households (nearly 20% of the population) without immediate access to transportation, Ebbert had estimated in 2002 that at least 100,000 residents of New Orleans would be unable to evacuate the city. "Planning was stymied by a shortage of buses. . . . As many as 2,000 buses, far more than N.O possessed, would be needed to evacuate an estimated 100,000 elderly and disabled people" (Applebome, Drew, Longman, & Revkin, 2005, p. 25). Michael Brown, former FEMA director (as of September 12, 2005), stated in an interview concerning his resignation that by the time New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin issued the mandatory evacuation order for the city on Sunday, August 28, it was already too late to evacuate the city: "It would take at least 72 hours to get everyone out" (Stevenson & Lipton, 2005, p. A18).

The point is that estimates from as far back as 2002 indicated that in case New Orleans had an emergency that required a citywide evacuation, 100,000 people did not own their personal transportation or the means to obtain such ends (Lipton, Drew, Shane, & Rohde, 2005) and therefore could not evacuate themselves or their families. The New Orleans city government had prepared an emergency evacuation

fund titled "City of New Orleans Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan" to which $18 million had already been contributed since 2002. This funding level could not however support the emergency needs for shelter, food, living expenses, and medicines of 100,000 residents estimated to remain in the city (nearly a fourth of the total parish population). Plans for another $16 million toward improvements to the Superdome and a new "command center" would not be complete until 2007. Twenty-eight percent of people in New Orleans lived in poverty (Deparle, 2005).[3] However, as 73% of those living in Orleans Parish affected by the storm were Black people, 34% of them would be categorized as poor. A significant figure when compared to 14.6% of the non-Black population affected living below the poverty line. City Councilwoman Cynthia Hedge-Morrell noted that because of the late August date of the disaster, those residents who depended on public assistance to live "wouldn't have had any money to evacuate" (Saulny, 2005, p. A1) because assistance funds are not generally made available until the first of every month. They were literally waiting on their checks to arrive on September 1.

Louisiana State University professors Brian Woshon and Chester Wilmont confirmed that the New Orleans evacuation plan worked well for those with access to transportation. Before the storm hit, residents would flee by automobile down all lanes of I-10 in the same direction away from the city. Ironically, by Thursday, September 3, 5,000 residents on foot would collect on an elevated section of that very same freeway waiting for rescue to arrive in 90-degree weather. On Friday, September 2, President Bush visited New Orleans, giving a speech at Louis Armstrong International Airport, bringing with him federal troops, resources, and martial law for the city of New Orleans. Federalization of the city began. On Sunday, September 4, 2005, more than 60,000 citizens had been physically relocated from various locations, martial law had rapt the city, and federal troops and prisoners were the only living inhabitants of Jefferson Parish.

Federalization: The Seeds of Occupation

How many mistakes can account for the mismanagement of care for an estimated 100,000 lives? Who made them? We need to clarify that Michael Brown and FEMA, as an organization's function, were not to provide relief and assistance in this time of emergency. Their job was to manage others to do so. Mr. Brown's task was to coordinate 14 federal agencies with local counterparts with the State of Louisiana and the City of New Orleans departments, among others, to navigate the treacherous waters that terrorized the city and lead the forgotten residents of New Orleans to safety. According to Mr. Brown's spokeswoman, an appropriate leader for FEMA is one who can "manage the budget, personnel, and policy."

In response to growing questions and concerns about the federal role in providing support to the disaster-stricken areas, President George W. Bush states, "Our [the federal government and FEMA particularly] job is to prepare for and assist state and local people to save lives and help these people get back on their feet" (Romero & Longman, 2005, p. A6). Still, the FEMA philosophy, loosely translated

by FEMA spokeswoman Natalie Rule, maintained, "We will be there for you. You just go for it. We've got your back" (Applebome et al., 2005, p. 25). In classic bureaucratic fashion and upholding that loosely translated philosophy, Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Lt. Col. William J. Doran, III, reiterated to New Orleans and state leadership, "If you do not know what your needs are, I can't request to FEMA what I need" (DeParle et al., 2005, p. A29).

Is it possible that Michael Brown, former director of FEMA, was an "incredibly compassionate, very dedicated fellow in a thankless job," as Andy Lester, friend and colleague of Brown, indicates? In the days after Katrina made its way inland, could Mr. Brown be both "doing a great job" as Joe M. Allbaugh, former FEMA director, stated or a "heck of a job" as President Bush praised and still have caused so much public and political dissatisfaction that numerous requests for his removal had been placed? Bluntly posed: Was he that incompetent (Lipton & Shane, 2005)?

Reports of requests for Mr. Brown's removal would indicate that the call for action was a partisan one that placed Democratic Senators Hillary Clinton of New York and Mary L. Landrieu of Louisiana on the same side with House Representative Democrat Bennie Thompson of Mississippi at the head of those accusations. Republicans such as Mark Foley of Florida were also strongly critical of Brown, although criticism was often directed more to the agency as a whole in contradistinction to its leadership under Brown. A critical analysis suggests that, at minimum, these levels cannot be distinguished. A more harsh reading is that Brown was not up to the task. He failed. Moreover, the data suggest that he failed primarily owing to the fact that FEMA, under its reorganization in the Department of Homeland Security, was not up to the task of federalization in the context of a massive disaster.

On Monday, August 29, 2005, the day in which Katrina achieved landfall in Louisiana, Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana was quoted as saying, "We are indeed fortunate to have an able and experienced director of FEMA who has been with us on the ground for some time" (DeParle et al., 2005, p. A29). Such doublespeak indicates that, on the surface, there appears to be two Michael Browns, and there should be a clear distinction between the role of FEMA as a federal agency and Brown as the director of that agency. Although we now know that Senator Landrieu's statement is false in that Brown had just arrived in Louisiana that day, it must also be noted that the following day Brown is praised publicly by the senator and Louisiana's governor. He later told reporters that he asked the White House to "take over the response from FEMA and state officials" (Stevenson & Lipton, 2005, p. A18) and therefore needed the president's help in mobilizing the federal government. Brown's call for future militarization of the Crescent City was answered 3 days later with the arrival of President Bush and federal troops, who evacuated all citizens who remained in the city, quarantined all neighborhoods save those in and around the French Quarter, and implemented a system of martial law. What happened in those 3 days may very well be what cost Brown his position at FEMA and may be what determines the future role and further organizational infrastructure of FEMA as a federal agency. It explains his failures of leadership and substantially justifies his firing as director.

FEMA has 2,600 (Stevenson & Lipton, 2005) employees nationwide, reflective of its transition from a cabinet-level agency with an independent budget to one that was absorbed along with 21 other agencies into the Department of Homeland Security. Former FEMA Director Allbaugh was quoted in 2001 as saying that under the Clinton administration, FEMA had become "an oversized entitlement program" (Lipton & Shane, 2005, p. A3), giving rise to the agency's current supportive role. This contrasts markedly with its former emphasis on flood prevention, as the agency was perceived ideologically by the Bush regime as part of the welfare state apparatus. In actuality, FEMA coordinated disaster relief on the ground to victims of massive storms. Drastic cuts in federal grants to FEMA that directly funded flood prevention efforts made by Allbaugh with the support of a "fiscally conservative republican Congress" (Marsh, 2005a, p. 4) were defended under a mantra of an effort to "restore the predominant role of state and local response to most disasters" (Lipton & Shane, 2005, p. A3). Ideologically, responsibility for hurricane protection devolved under the Bush's administration reorganization and the policy priority to fund the "war on terror."

Under this ideological banner and in light of the new direction of FEMA in the Bush administration, Mr. Brown's "help me help you" (Stevenson & Lipton, 2005, p. A18) approach acquires a different pitch. Whereas Brown admits in his nationally broadcast statement that "the federal government did not even know about the Convention Center until today" (Lipton & Shane, 2005, p. A3) was false—he had known nearly 24 hr before that statement was made—what Brown is not saying is what his actual failure in that situation was. "Not only does FEMA have the resources but it has the backing of the Department [Homeland Security] to do the job" (Lipton & Shane, 2005, p. A3), stated Russ Knock, press secretary at Homeland Security. Knocke also reputed indications that the federal response was slow or delayed, stating "we pushed absolutely everything we could . . . every employee, every asset, every effort to save lives" (Stevenson & Lipton, 2005, p. A18).

As of Monday, September 5, FEMA had been credited with the rescue of 350 people across the city, whereas the national coast guard had reportedly claimed the rescue of 18,000 citizens (DeParle et al., 2005). Clearly, FEMA is not the military arm deploying federal troops and resources that Governor Blanco and Mayor Nagin were calling for. FEMA illustrates the limits of the reach of federalization in the response to the hurricane. Martial law, the start of militarization, was implemented to restore law and order and quell "looters." FEMA subsequently played a supportive role to the military in managing and coordinating agencies, supplies, and resources around what actions the military took.

Militarization: The Media Construction of Civil Disorder

FEMA should be criticized for many institutional failures that may be illustrated by focusing on the documented experiences of two key actors at the eye of the Katrina political storm. FEMA employee Marty J. Bahamonde and Louisiana Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco had distinct levels of interaction with Brown and paint a vivid picture of Brown's leadership performance.

The Governor

Kathleen Blanco's interaction with Director Brown began on the same rhetorical level as Senator Mary L. Landrieu, with flowery words at a Baton Rouge press conference. "Director Brown, I hope you will tell President Bush how much we appreciated—these are the times that really count—to know that our federal government will step in and give us the kind of assistance that we need" (DeParle et al., 2005, p. A29). Although Governor Blanco clearly acknowledges that Mr. Brown represents the emergency need for federalization in supporting Louisiana in this time of crisis, she will soon also make it abundantly clear that federalization is far from enough to suit her needs. Federalization via FEMA consisted of federal support of state and local bodies organizing relief efforts and attempting to restore order and the widely held perception that civil order had collapsed in New Orleans—an ad hoc federal process with limited duration. This is a federal role that Governor Blanco was at no point satisfied with as she requested federal assistance beyond what FEMA could provide, when she declared the State of Emergency 3 days before Katrina made landfall. The governor rearticulated this plea every day until President Bush's arrival.

Beginning on Tuesday, August 30, Blanco called for the Superdome to be evacuated, yet the totals housed by the facility grew to 20,000 on Wednesday and more than 24,000 on Thursday before the process of federally assisted evacuation began. Military helicopters airlifted citizens to the airport. Military occupation was implicit from the outset with greater levels of federal assistance and officially arrived with President Bush on Friday (Lipton, Drew, et al., 2005). Both the Louisiana governor and New Orleans Mayor Nagin stressed a need for federal authority to provide the raw materials that were needed to perform rescue tasks. They also received military support, first from the National Guard and then the Marines and Air Force to conduct recovery and rescue operations—as well as to gain control over looters and perceived incidents of violence at the Convention Center and other sites downtown. The heads of state and local government in Louisiana apparently lacked the authority to get needed resources from other states. This confusion, as the media were to widely report, caused delays of several days in the delivery of basic survival needs of food, water, and medical attention to 20,000 U.S. citizens left behind by its federal government.

Louisiana reportedly lost 3,000 National Guard troops via deployment to fight the war in Iraq and 20 military vehicles to the breach in the levee that would have likely proved useful in relief efforts (Lipton, Drew, et al., 2005). To make matters worse, FEMA had promised to deliver 500 buses (far short of the 2,000 that was planned but enough to evacuate several thousands residents); however, only a mere fraction arrived. A full evacuation would be delayed by days. The governor was admittedly beside herself with anger and frustration unable to evacuate the growing numbers of people at the Superdome and Convention Center, even though she had a plan in her hands to do so. Obviously overwhelmed by the gravity of the situation and an inability to react, she recounts at one point crying out, "Does anybody in

this building know anything about buses?" at the state's emergency center in Baton Rouge, a question directed toward anyone who cared to listen and/or respond (Lipton, Drew, et al., 2005).

As reported by an irate New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin in an interview with radio station WWL-AM, "I've already called for martial law in the city of New Orleans. We did that a few days ago" (Nagin, September 1, 2005). On the President's arrival, the number of federal military troops would nearly double from 4,700 on Wednesday when Governor Blanco estimated the death toll to be in the thousands and called for a day of prayer. The next day, the governor would abandon the healing powers of prayer and call for a total of 40,000 federal military troops. Within 5 days, the number of troops on the ground would double again, reaching 16,000 by Monday, September 5. Friday's arrival of the President and the force of militarization also saw the Superdome nearly completely evacuated in a day, as an estimated 24,000 people were relocated, leaving only 1,500 remaining by the time of his departure (DeParle et al., 2005).

The FEMA Employee

FEMA official Marty J. Bahamonde disobeyed orders from New Orleans city officials by remaining in New Orleans after being deployed there by Brown for meetings concerning the city's evacuation plans the weekend prior to Katrina making landfall. Positioned at the Superdome on Sunday, August 28, he was the only FEMA worker on site and e-mailed Mr. Brown as well as homeland security officials promptly that issues were developing there and that assistance was needed. His response? A message stating that Mr. Brown needed time to eat dinner and do a television interview left Bahamonde unable to respond to a quickly developing crisis. The irony was not lost on him that only a third of the water supply trucks, less than a 10th of the food supplies, and none of the medical teams were in place at the Superdome when they were first expected by the mayor to arrive. The now infamous "cavalry was way late" outburst on local radio by the mayor made national headlines. That night Mr. Brown met with state officials in Baton Rouge in a televised news conference where sympathetic sentiments are expressed among state, local, and federal government representatives.

On Monday, August 29, there was more than twice the number of tourists stuck in the city—30,000. These tourists outnumbered those left behind at the Superdome—12,000. That day, Mr. Bahamonde reports that residential areas in the city are under as much as 11 feet of water and the crowd at the Superdome is swelling, still without the supplies in full that were originally supposed to be in place. On this day, Brown senses that he is unable to handle the situation in New Orleans and calls for the White House to enact a process of militarization in the city. On August 30, the medical teams arrive at the stadium 2 days late, and Mr. Chertoff attends a meeting in Atlanta on Avian flu. Again, the irony is not lost on Mr. Bahamonde, when he directly reports to Mr. Brown that people are being

kicked out of hotels into the street with no food or water, to which an aide responds that it is important that Mr. Bahamonde stand by for a response from Mr. Brown, as it is important that he have time to eat his dinner (Lipton, 2005b).

Was Mr. Brown's forced resignation, therefore, due to the perceived failure of the agency in its disaster relief efforts or for other mistakes FEMA made along the way? Some of the most significant developments in the wake of Hurricane Katrina may not be in what leadership is doing or saying but rather those strategic decisions that discern how support and aid is taking shape. Through the process of federalization and militarization, responses have been fragmented, and most aspects of efforts pre- and post-Katrina compartmentalized. The Department of Homeland Security houses 22 agencies: FEMA comprises 1 of those 22 agencies and formerly an independent cabinet-level department of its own. FEMA is responsible for 15 (Revkin, Wald, & Justice, 2005) separate entities under the umbrella of its jurisdiction. Either political or ideological strategies (or both) that result in fractured roles and a narrowed scope of relief efforts are what critics of both FEMA and the Bush administration are calling a "general decline in the competence of government agencies," as the agency has seemed to become "a dumping ground for cronies and political hacks" (Krugman, 2005, p. A1). Certainly, this sort of nepotism and cronyism in government is nothing new, yet it does allow for arguably underqualified personnel to assume leadership positions in government departments and agencies. These actions and a reduced social role of government are reminiscent of the political maneuvering characteristics of former President Ronald Reagan during the 1980s. The apparently blatant embrace of cronyism and crony capitalism (Denzin, 2006) in light of the catastrophic events surrounding Katrina make the connection all the more significant.

"Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem," laments then President of the United States Ronald Reagan, the sentiment obviously still relevant under the current administration (Denzin, 2006, p. 98). Antigovernment rhetoric, or at least antipathy toward those acts of government involvement in the public sector and/or that which limits the scope of the private sector, is the traditional bastion of the Republican Party. Traditional belief structures are also steeped in policy emphasizing state's rights, severe cuts in social programming, and particular focus on individual rights and responsibilities. The two former FEMA directors and three other top managers in the agency all have intimate connections to President Bush and also all played critical roles in his first presidential campaign (Lipton, Evans, Koppel, & Lehren, 2005). Furthermore, the Department of Urban Housing and Development, which could be assuming a major role in the rebuilding process, has eight of its principal staff positions currently vacant (Krugman, 2005, p. A1).

Mr. Brown's "help me help you" (Stevenson & Lipton, 2005) approach was not an attitude but an ideological standpoint, a political philosophy that guided his reason and action in dealing with state and local administrations as well as the poor and dislocated. Based on the documented evidence, in the days immediately

following the crisis, we believe that the limited capacity of FEMA was exemplary of how the agency's roll had been redefined to function. For the estimated 500,000 (Lipton & Wilgoren, 2005) households displaced by the hurricane across the Gulf Coast region, the first course of action before a full evacuation of New Orleans had even taken place was to provide the storm survivors with monetary funds to make them partially responsible for their own relief (Dewan, 2005a). This attempt, which materialized in the form of government-issued debit cards, proved disastrous because of poor organization and execution of the plan on FEMA's part (Dewan, 2005a).

The plan initiated at the behest of President Bush (Stevenson, 2005) was an initiative to provide each displaced family with $2,000 and was meant, per Michael Brown to "empower evacuees to make their own decision about what they need to have to restart their own lives" (Stevenson, 2005). This strategy dovetails with the neoliberals' call for an "ownership society." Even as the confusion forced the discontinuation of the debit card program, subsequent attempts to distribute these funds also failed, as checks sent via a defunct postal service and electronic transfer caused further distress. When asked by *The New York Times* reporters why such poor attempts had been relied on, a spokesperson for FEMA simply replied that an unidentified FEMA program specialist had made these logistical decisions (Dewan, 2005a). Where FEMA had failed, the Red Cross had picked up the debit card mantle, issuing more than 8,550 cards to families in Texas and Tennessee by press time (Dewan, 2005b). Attempts to provide assistance funds to families would continue; by November, FEMA would begin providing families with $2,358 stipends intended to be used for families to leave shelters and hotels and begin renting apartments. This comes in the wake of reports that those New Orleans survivors residing in Texas would soon be evicted from their temporary residencies. According to *The New York Times*, on November 4, FEMA had provided an estimate of 488,000 (Lipton & Wilgoren, 2005) families with such financial assistance.

The Gulf cities and their residents have paid an unimaginable cost surviving this storm and the administrative failures therein on multiple levels of government. The government is paying unnecessary costs, providing funding at every turn for these survivors. Where does this funding come from exactly? What is the price of private sector innovation and creativity? Who is really benefiting when the opponents of so-called big government are spending in record numbers and not so much to evacuees and the new homeless but to private contractors and clean-up businesses? What will be the long-term affects of such spending in Texas as opposed to that in New Orleans? Of course, these are questions beyond the scope of this article; however, New Orleans as well as Mississippi citizens have posed and will continue to demand answers to these questions to politicians and leaders of government.

Federalization under FEMA led by Mr. Brown was unorganized and inefficient, yet militarization was its polar opposite. Any remnants of federalization,

and the ineffectual method that wrapped it, were perpetrated by Brown himself before he was so unceremoniously stripped of his position. Yet even with the seeming juxtaposition of praise from government administrators, militarization varies little in ideological focus from federalization, as observations of their practices lend great insight to their shared locus.

In the remainder of this study, we implicitly draw on the tenets of critical race theory to pose difficult questions on race and its relation to social class in New Orleans, a pesky issue to which Bush referred when he addressed the nation in front of the St. Louis Cathedral.

The Tolls of Racism: Concluding Reflections

On Wednesday, September 7, *The New York Times* reported a makeshift jail erected from a vacant Greyhound Bus Station in New Orleans was "the real start to rebuilding [the] city." Paul Kurgman, in an article titled "Tragedy in Black in White," makes the assertion that George Bush, like Ronald Reagan, is not "personally racist." Such a statement brings into the fold more questions than it answers, as it can be neither confirmed nor denied in an absolute sense. The assertion begs to be both interrogated and evaluated in light of empirical data. The fact that Krugman (2005) states that "George W. Bush—who like Mr. Reagan, isn't personally racist but relies on the support of racists" initiates a needed query to not only clarify processes of White supremacy and racialization in this context versus "personal" racist implications. It also underscores those counternarratives that give voice to how race is lived in America on an everyday basis and experienced in relation to other factors, especially social class.

Bush's sentiment is one that echoes past sentiments expressed by U.S presidents during and after times of catastrophes, such as Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and the earthquake and fire of 1906 in San Francisco. Yet it also begs to ask what in the case of New Orleans "better" looks like and whom it includes. Racially, who was left behind?

President Bush's speech in front of the St. Louis Cathedral in the French Quarter served as a backdrop for comparing the catastrophe in New Orleans with the riots in Detroit, Michigan, and Newark, New Jersey, in 1967 and the Los Angeles riots of 1992. However, there was one glaring distinction between the events of the past and the one currently at hand. Whereas comparative analysis of systemic conditions that produced the historical moments in question could be regarded as appropriate and fruitful, the long-term fate of the city's African American population is without precedent. These are citizens who are demanding, before Congress and city government, for their right to return home.

The African American majority of New Orleans was disproportionately affected by the hurricane and the events that transpired in the wake of the flood that displaced hundreds of thousands. White flight and the removal of resources

and businesses sealed the fate of the riot-torn cities of the past; however, in the New Orleans context, we witnessed the facilitated exodus of African American from the drowning city. However, in this scenario, good citizens and homeowners have been involuntarily removed from the city, and it is questionable concerning the capacity in which they will return. Unlike cities such as Watts, California, and Detroit, Michigan, where the African American residents were left to tend a burned and broken city, New Orleans has already begun efforts to rebuild, though with significantly less Black residents.

Mass relocation of the city of New Orleans has taken place and humble compensation paid to the 94,308 Katrina evacuees living in 308 shelters as of September 2, 2005 (Corum, 2005). On Friday, Day 11 after the storm, 54,000 people (more than twice the number ever reported to be housed in the Superdome) were in 240 shelters across the country. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children developed a database for these shelters, which by Friday had 1,500 cases of separated children and family, only 258 of which had yet been resolved. Though those numbers are extremely deceptive, as stated earlier, by mid-October, the number of people in hotels grew by 60% (Lipton, 2005a) as those in shelters fell on October 11 to 11,304 people across 14 states from a one-time peak of 273,000 (Lipton, 2005a). Cities such as Dallas and Atlanta were heralded to help 90% (Lipton, 2005a) of those in shelters move out and into hotels. Officials hope for many to move from shelters to hotels, subsequently to apartments while waiting to sort out the disaster they left behind in New Orleans. The Houston, Texas, area alone reported an estimate of 43,500 former New Orleans residents lodged in area hotels. This still leaves many residents unaccounted for as the Department of Homeland Security has estimated that 200,000 to 280,000 homes along the Gulf Coast are lost or uninhabitable.

FEMA has declared 60,000 homes in New Orleans, and the areas worst hit by Katrina, as "damaged beyond repair," with 480,000 other households receiving rental assistance to help with temporary housing, whereas 750,000 households have received $1.5 billion in assistance in the form of $2,000 checks earmarked for emergency assistance. Finally, FEMA inspectors have visited 600,000 dwellings in Louisiana and Mississippi to assess damage and provide federal assistance in the way of one-time direct grants of up to $26,200.

For the survivors and their families, much has been asked in terms of physical movement geographically and then spatially. Many have been airlifted from experiences at the Superdome and Convention Center to either locations in Texas or to naval and National Guard bases in the U.S. northeast (Cowan & Saulny, 2005). Whether evacuated to the north or the south, many former African American residents of New Orleans were required to relocate more than once, either because of those in Texas moving as a reaction to Hurricane Rita or those in the north following evacuation plans that sent them to a succession of states and locations. It is the new African American Diaspora. Being Black, and poor, from New Orleans has been taxing mentally, emotionally, and physically, considering that movement

usually involves not just individuals but families with elders and children in tow. "We've been in three shelters in eight days. . . . I can't even begin to say how I feel about moving" (Cowan & Saulny, 2005, p. A4).

Plans for FEMA to spend $2 billion on 300,000 trailers and mobile homes for temporary housing are slow to materialize, as FEMA has only provided 10,940 housing units via trailers, rooms on military bases, and four cruise ships leased by FEMA. In part, FEMA's failure to provide the mass housing units lies in the fear of repercussion of public perception and scrutiny of "FEMAvilles" that would concentrate estimates of 25,000 poor Blacks per location. Congressional funding for poor Black victims is difficult to appropriate. Instead, FEMA continues to spend millions a night to have families stay in hotel rooms until another form of temporary housing is found to be suitable (Lipton, Evans et al., 2005).

The theme of the federal government's humble compensation doesn't end with the handsome sums placed on housing for the hurricane victims. A significant feature of federalization in what has been documented is the awarding of private contracts of services and parceling out pieces of the public's relief to private interests. On September 8, 2005, with Congress's approval of billions in Katrina relief, government employee purchasing power with government-issued credit cards grew from $15,000 to $250,000 (Marsh, 2005b) on individual purchases. In 2003, with about 325,000 (Marsh, 2005b) cards in existence, about $16 billion in purchases were made. After Hurricane Katrina, $19 million was spent on purchases from Wal-Mart to Home Depot and an assortment of private businesses by October 14, 2005 (none of which documented by *The New York Times* were centrally located in Louisiana). Such a number is miniscule, however, to that which is being paid to hotels and landlords for temporary housing.

City officials are hoping that the rebuilding effort will provide jobs for New Orleans despite estimates that 250,000 (Saulny, 2005) people may not return to the city.

Yet officials such as City Councilwoman Cynthia Hedge Morrell are still in search of a silver lining.[4]

But that's not necessarily how federalization operates: "This is not incompetence. This is willful. That is the only way I can explain it" (Lipton, Evans et al., 2005, p. A1).[5] This catastrophe has become emblematic of a mass redistribution of wealth, the likes of which we may be unable to comprehend for years to come. Bureaucracy has apparently replaced any pretense of attempts toward understanding this situation and providing for those in need, to ends that reduce us to watching in horror a slow death of pragmatism for the sake of private interest.

In effect, what has happened in New Orleans is that a catastrophic hurricane and a failed governmental response have created what would be the equivalent of the most extensive corporate restructuring project ever undertaken. The major component to this restructuring project as the city moves from an industrial society to a modern knowledge-based economy, downsizing.[6] Poor Blacks, and the least skilled (in a vocational/technocratic sense), were among those in particular who were laid

off of city life until New Orleans finds a way to increase production and allow some former residents to reenter her gates:

> The Corp of Engineers . . . should have arranged access to supplies like sandbags and concrete barriers, the way environmental planners reserve access to materials for oil spills. You'd have all that on contract, you have contractors with all those potential needs in place. (Revkin et al., 2005, p. A15)[7]

There are 350 miles (Revkin et al., 2005) of levees around New Orleans, but although the Army Corp of Engineers is responsible for the maintenance and development of the levee system, they did not even have supplies and materials to stop or address flooding issues. With the largest and poorest section of the city removed and the both actual and perceived elements of crime gone, New Orleans's single largest economic draw will be stronger than ever—tourism. It would be naïve to assume that of the 49 (Steinhauer, 2005) contracts that the Army Corp of Engineers has, 12 of which have been awarded, poor Blacks will benefit largely through employment in those companies.

There are many who are optimistic that a timely repopulation of New Orleans is in the works, and the tone of Louisiana public officials indicates such. Yet time is not on the side of those displaced. There are areas, such as the French Quarter, that survived the storm with little damage that have already begun to repopulate and again embrace tourism, and those areas closer to the levees, such as the 9th ward, are quietly being given a different story from the engineers. "Recovery after a disaster generally takes far more time than people expect" (Schwartz & Revkin, 2005, p. A22).[8] However, the real challenge and fear lies in a perspective more common in the current administration and New Orleans elite than individuals would like to admit:

> Even though elected officials have vowed the city would be rebuilt, in the long run it would be foolhardy to redevelop many of the most flood prone areas. Buy the lots back and let insurance pay for the houses. Then maybe make it a golf course or bird sanctuary. (Schwartz & Revkin, 2005, p. A22)

Those events that will unfold and develop in New Orleans in the coming months and years deserve a deeper and closer look than what the public pedagogy has provided. We intend to conduct further research along these lines now that Congress has ordered the release of more than 100,000 documents and records on the tragedy from the Governor of Louisiana. We call on other researchers to join us in mining this wealth of primary data.

Notes

1. Statement made by Joe M. Allbaugh, FEMA director 2002 in DeParle et al. (2005).
2. Estimates on the population of Orleans Parish at the time of Hurricane Katrina vary depending on the source. The figure used here (445,000) is taken from the Congressional Research Service, which is assumed by the authors to be among the most reliable.

3. Poverty is defined as individuals living on $9,000 a year or less and families of four living on $18,000 a year or less, as indicated by U.S Census Bureau (2000) data in DeParle (2005).

4. It should be noted that *The New York Times* article written by Susan Saulny on September 7, 2005, painted a desperate picture of an abandoned city through the voices of former residents as counternarratives to the media's imposed metanarrative of progress.

5. As a senior fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation surprisingly noted in reference to the exorbitant amount doled out for shelters, then hotel rooms, and again for temporary apartments instead of FEMA providing the temporary housing that it originally promised.

6. As an example, when Sir Howard Stringer was called in to head Sony Corporation to stop their gaping loses and to make them more profitable and efficient than they were before, the first thing he did was cut personnel, a third of Sony's U.S. workforce (Siklos, 2005).

7. Martha Madden, consultant in strategic planning in Washington and New Orleans, on the management and preparedness of the Army Corp of Engineers for the levee breach during Hurricane Katrina.

8. Robert W. Kates, emeritus professor of geography at Brown University, on obtaining disaster recovery that provides new levels of protection and achieves goals of rebuilding (as cited in Schwartz & Revkin, 2005).

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