

Exposing Hurricane Katrina: The Scope of an Unnatural Disaster

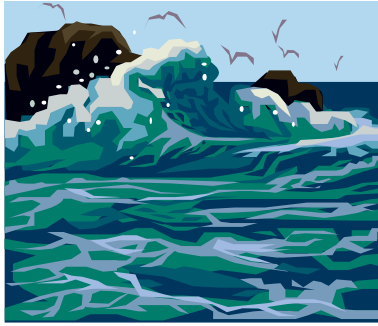


 MACALESTER COLLEGE

November 2005

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Introduction

Hurricanes seldom have convenient timing. Katrina's landfall at the beginning of our academic year at Macalester College challenged faculty, students and administrators to respond in ways that connected our goals for civic engagement with intellectual inquiry.

The 25 students that comprise the Environmental Studies Department's "Water and Power" course decided to use their new skills and foci on river development to think about the past and future of the Mississippi delta. The following report aims to understand both why such catastrophic flooding happens in this stretch of the Mississippi river basin and how communities and governments will move forward.

Our college is situated just a mile or so from the Mississippi River. In this upper stretch of the basin, the Mississippi is tame and unthreatening. While the river is just three feet deep at its headwaters, by the time it travels two thousand miles south to Algiers Point in New Orleans, the Mississippi measures 200 feet deep. The dams and locks built on the river in our neighborhood bear a family resemblance, yet almost a distant one, to the scale of infrastructure in the delta. While our landscape is so different from the delta region, the river connects us to the Gulf Coast.

In addition to water, ideas flow with the river. As our nation recovers from the devastation caused by this disaster, we too are trying to re-imagine the ways we can manage water infrastructure. In the pages that follow, we offer a history of the politics of place and space. We also endeavor to re-think not just the effects of the disaster but what this means for how our society has seen and represented the human and ecological dimensions of Katrina.

As an interdisciplinary report, we hope this document is a useful tool for understanding how and why Hurricane Katrina left an indelible mark on our natural and political landscape. We also hope it synthesizes the range of ideas we have encountered for re-building and renewing life along the Gulf Coast.

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November 2005

The Storm Hits: Predictions and Aftermath

by Kevin England, Victoria Harris, and Matthew O'Connor

Summary

This section recounts the life of Hurricane Katrina, from its original formation until the end of its run. First, we follow the development and progression of the storm, as well as the predictions made and precautions taken prior to its advent. Then, we detail the actual events of the storm itself. We end with a description of the aftermath immediately after the skies cleared.

Before the Storm

Hurricane Katrina first formed as a tropical depression over the waters north of Cuba (1). Its course would take it across Florida as a Category 1 hurricane, and then back into the Gulf of Mexico where it would quickly intensify into a Category 5 tempest with maximum sustained winds of 175 miles per hour and gusts of up to 215 mph (2). Eventually it would strike Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, and would continue north overland, losing energy all the while. The behavior of this storm repeatedly defied prediction; this cut short what little time those in its path had to prepare, and this volatility may have caused the elevated loss of life seen as a result of the storm (3, 4). Here we chronicle Katrina's path and note how the storm baffled meteorologists and caused for a great lack of preparation by the residents and governments involved.

On the 24th of August, 2005, Katrina was named as a tropical storm. Heading northwest towards Florida, the storm was upgraded to a Category 1 hurricane less than a day later, leaving Florida residents with only a day's warning before Katrina made landfall (1). A mere 8 hours after first striking the state, Katrina was in the Gulf of Mexico again, weakened once more to a tropical storm. At first, it was predicted that after leaving Florida the storm would wash itself out (5). By the next morning, however, it had recovered its Category 1 status, and it spent the rest of the 26th gaining strength in the warm Gulf waters. It also began to veer unexpectedly northeast that day, and it became clear that the storm would eventually strike somewhere in Louisiana (3, 4, 5). As a result, Governor Blanco declared a state of emergency on the 26th (2). On the 27th, Katrina startled meteorologists by jumping to a Category 3 storm. The sudden increase was later explained by the hurricane passing over the Gulf Loop Current, a warm water stream which is known for intensifying hurricanes, but the increase was not predicted (6). This all was cause for alarm; experts knew that the levees on Lake Ponchartrain could only sustain the strength of a Category 3 hurricane, and so predicted a possible breach should the storm make landfall at New Orleans (5, 6). President Bush ordered a State of Emergency for the state of Louisiana, and some coastal towns began evacuating (2).

The next day, the 27th of August, Katrina leaped from a Category 3 to a Category 5 hurricane, the highest level of intensity on the Saffir-Simpson scale (1, 2). What's more, by this time the storm had reached enormous proportions, even for a hurricane—Katrina had a roughly 200 mile diameter of hurricane-force winds (1). The National Weather Service predicted 'devastating damage,' and President Bush declared a State of Emergency in Alabama and Mississippi (7). The predicted path would have led Katrina straight to New Orleans, and it was thought the storm would likely maintain its intensity until a few hours after reaching shore. A projected 25% of the nation's oil supply was predicted to be cut off temporarily, and prices soared while stocks plummeted (2, 7). The death toll

was predicted to be in the tens of thousands, and some wondered whether there would be a city left after the storm had passed (6). A mandatory evacuation was ordered for the city of New Orleans, and people fled the city via whatever methods were available to them (1, 4). Though many people had left already, gasoline, transportation, water, and other resources were running low, and fleeing motorists, though all roads were made outbound temporarily, were rendered motionless (5). At any rate, the order to evacuate came just a day before Katrina made landfall, and so of some 1.6 million residents and visitors, about 300,000 remained in the city with no feasible way of leaving in time, many of whom did not own cars or were travelers whose flights were cancelled with news of the approaching tempest (3, 4, 6). About 10,000 of those who did stay took refuge in the Superdome, while the rest were in other last-minute shelters (hotels, convention centers, and the like), or faced the storm in their homes (3, 7). Katrina surprised experts one last time, however; just hours before striking, the storm veered inexplicably north, and weakened to a Category 4 storm (1, 4). Many lives may have been spared by that one event, and the death toll, though tragic, would not be nearly as dramatic as first feared. Katrina's eye made landfall near Buras, Louisiana, at about 6:00 a.m. August 29.



The path of Hurricane Katrina, from its formation on the 23rd of August north of Cuba, through its rapid intensification in the Gulf of Mexico, until its eventual depletion on the 30th near Ohio. BBC website, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/features/understanding/hurricane_katrina.shtml>, accessed October 24, 2005.

During the Storm

Hurricane Katrina made landfall as a Category 4 storm on August 28, 2005 in Plaquemines Parish Louisiana (8). The storm winds were measured at a sustained 140 mph (8). The storm made secondary landfall on the Louisiana/Mississippi coastal border as a Category 3 storm with recorded winds of 125 mph (8). Katrina came ashore pushing a tidal wave up to 22 feet (7m) high in front of it in Mississippi, devastating boats, coastal buildings, power lines and trees up to half a mile inland (9). Communities in Louisiana were flattened by a 12foot (4m) storm surge (10). The storm dropped more than 14 inches of rain in parts of Louisiana, and almost 10 inches in Mississippi (11). When the storm thundered through New Orleans, the levees that protected the city from Lake Pontchartrain were damaged severely in three sections; 17th Street Canal, London Avenue Canal and Industrial Canal (12). Water flooded the city, up to 20 feet (7m) in some places. The worst damage occurred in the 9th Ward, a district of New Orleans in the lowest lying topography.

Immediately After the Storm

In the wake of Katrina, there was widespread destruction across the Gulf Coast. Hardest hit was Louisiana, specifically New Orleans. As a result of the breaches in the levees, 80% of New Orleans was flooded with water levels up to 20 feet. (13) The high water levels resulted in the ruin of thousands of homes, businesses, and roadways in the city. It was not until October 12 that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) were able to pump New Orleans dry. USACE estimates that 250 billion gallons of water flooded New Orleans after Katrina, all of which had to be pumped out. (14) The parishes surrounding New Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, Terrebonne, and Plaquemines parishes all also suffered flooding and destruction similar to New Orleans.

The other main area of damage from Katrina came along the Mississippi coastline. Along the Biloxi-Gulfport coastline the hurricane created a 20 to 30 foot storm surge. (15) Flooding was reported as far as six miles inland as a result of the storm surge. (16) Numerous casino boats along the Biloxi coastline were pulled from their moorings and pushed inland. (17) The strength of the storm surge completely demolished structures and pushed the wreckage far inland.

While New Orleans and the Mississippi coastline received the most damage and the most press attention, as Katrina pushed north from Louisiana, flooding and damage was reported throughout the eastern United States. In Alabama, Mobile Bay overflowed, flooding large sections of Mobile. (18) Georgia suffered heavy rains, high winds, and tornadoes to the western part of the state. An estimated 30 homes were destroyed by tornadoes. (19) Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and New York all suffered flooding and tornadoes as the remains of the Katrina pushed north. Each state suffered strong winds and thousands of customers lost power as a result. Flooding occurred in Kentucky, New York, Ohio, and West Virginia. As far north as the St. Lawrence River Valley in Quebec, Canada, flooding was reported, washing out roads and threatening homes. (20)

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Environmental History of New Orleans

**By Madeline Kovacs, Mara MacKinnon, Petra Norlund,
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Summary

The environmental history of New Orleans is unlike any other. Frequent floods and hurricanes coupled with ideal economic resources have made human development of the lower Mississippi Valley a tricky, yet lucrative business. The growth of the city of New Orleans has been characterized by increased governmental efforts to tame the Mississippi River, a river whose drainage basin covers nearly half the surface of the continental United States, and stretches from Idaho to the Appalachians. This struggle has given rise to New Orleans' fragile environmental and social conditions.

The Nature of New Orleans

New Orleans is situated on the Mississippi alluvial plain, surrounded by the gulf on its East, the Mississippi to the South, and Lake Pontchartrain to the North. Through millennia of sediment deposition, flooding and redirection of its flow, the river gradually carved out the Mississippi delta. The river basin plains have extensive areas of wetlands and fertile soil replenished by periodic flooding. New Orleans has a subtropical climate, with mild winters and hot, humid summers. Much of the city is actually located between 1 and 10 feet (0.3 to 3 m) below sea level, making it the lowest



point in the state of Louisiana and one of the lowest in the country. In fact, Ari Kelman describes the city of New Orleans as “a bowl floating in a massive cauldron. Only a rim of raised edges keeps water from flowing into a sunken center.”(1) When water does find a way into the city, drainage is extremely slow.

The First Impacts

Many perceive New Orleans as an “inevitable city” due to its economic properties. It is true that prior to French arrival, the native inhabitants of the lower Mississippi valley had subsisted among the marshlands for millennia. Unlike European settlers, however, their residences on the fertile alluvial highlands in the river delta and along the banks of the Mississippi were often seasonal and impermanent. The natives understood the unpredictability of the river's flooding pattern, and migrated their homestead as the river changed its course. Their numerous village sites on the highlands provided added incentives for early locations of settlement. They transformed the marsh through their settlement sites that encouraged the growth of plants and trees that increased the marsh biodiversity. The native population also assisted the early pioneers, demonstrating the strategic location of New Orleans in terms of transport and soil fertility. One important piece of geographic knowledge was the location of what would be known as Bayou St. John, which provided an effective portage between Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River. This portage gave the pioneers a ready access to the gulf and made the location of New Orleans a preferred site in the lower river valley for a city settlement.

French Development

New Orleans was founded by the French in 1718 on the abandoned settlement of the Quinissippa tribe. When French explorers first saw the site, they noticed that it had obvious geographical, military and commercial advantages. The site was almost a natural dock for the transshipment of goods. The Mississippi provides a natural waterway system for moving people and goods across the mid-continent of North America and down the Mississippi to its outlets on the Gulf. New Orleans would be strategically situated so that it can control the trade between the interior of North America and the rest of the world. The problem was that there was no ground high enough to provide a natural site for a city. Although the Mississippi has a large delta, it is not embayed, and the Mississippi is almost uniformly wide, lacking an easy spot to cross. Where the river meets the Gulf consists of marsh and water muck, hardly ideal for the ships to locate the port. In essence, the delta environment shoehorned the site of New Orleans into a constricted site and forced its future development into strange shapes and curious internal patterns.

The French did not only seek a city but a productive hinterland when they settled. They sought to create an agricultural colony and experimented with producing different crops. However many crops failed because they were not suited to the environment, and could not withstand the frequent flooding. In 1716, the success of rice paddies in the lower Mississippi valley provided a staple crop for the settlers. Rice, combined with the thriving cattle herd and logging business made New Orleans habitable and profitable for the French settlers. Nonetheless, economic development was slow during the French rule. France's economic policy was mercantilism, which essentially held the view that all economic activity should be regulated by the state for the benefit of the state. Thus the colony existed solely for the benefit of France, which led to minimal investment in the city and almost no economic growth or trade. The need for labor in the production of rice and levee construction did however lead the French to divert some of its trade in African slaves to New Orleans beginning from 1719. This became a precursor which has led to the mixed population that today exists in the city. French control over the city lasted for forty-five years. New Orleans was handed over to the Bourbons of Spain after the Seven Years War (1756-63) when France lost Canada to Britain. Although it was the French that founded the city, it was the Spanish that made the city great. The Spanish saw the city's great potential for trade with Europe and Latin America and took the opportunity to expand its trade relations with the outside world.

Economic Appeal to the United States

The United States gained possession of New Orleans through the Louisiana Purchase in 1814. Shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, steamboats became a viable and cheap method of transportation in New Orleans. This had significant impacts on the economic growth of the city, the lower Mississippi valley, and the entire drainage basin. Steamboats opened up the city for transport and the area of New Orleans grew rapidly in the years since. Today, it is the natural hub for the global food industry and farmers rely on cheap shipment to be able to compete in the global food market. Without barges food would have to be transported by rail, a more costly affair since food has a very low value to weight ratio.

The industry that we see today in New Orleans is no longer only dependent on agriculture industry and the shipment of goods alone. The oil industry is also very important to New Orleans and the national economy. Several of the biggest energy industries are located in New Orleans. Tourism is also

significant as New Orleans has many famous festivals and celebrations like the Mardi Gras. Coastal fishing and the shrimp industry continue to contribute to the economy of the city as well.

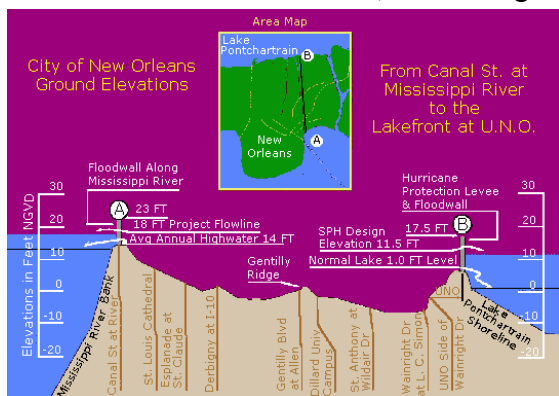
Levees-Only Policy

The first permanent settlement in the New Orleans area was the French colonial outpost situated on the relatively high ground provided by a natural levee in 1718. However, the necessity for added protection from the seasonal floods of the Mississippi led French settlers to construct an artificial embankment, which in 1727 measured eighteen feet wide and three feet high, and spanned one mile along the waterfront. Just after the U.S. bought New Orleans in the Louisiana Purchase, the levee already stretched from north of Baton Rouge to south of New Orleans.

By the mid-1800's, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had begun to play a central role in New Orleans' flood management projects. Its involvement with the Mississippi from 1803 to 1829 was mostly concerned with improving the navigability of the nation's most valuable port and barge transportation system, which connected the Gulf of Mexico to the nation's heartland. To make way for steamboats, the Corps cleared snags and removed debris from the river. Then, between 1840 and 1860, several devastating floods demonstrated to Congress the need for federal involvement in controlling the Mississippi. It passed the Swamp Land Acts of 1849 and 1850, which promised to allot the Mississippi Valley states, Louisiana in particular, more land if they agreed to do more toward managing the river. The federal government also commissioned river studies at this time to help determine how the states should proceed.

The study done by Andrew Humphreys, who later became Chief of the Army Corps of Engineers, won almost universal popularity for a levees-only approach to containing floodwaters. This proposal gained further momentum when, a year after Congress created the Mississippi River Commission (MRC) in 1879, the Commission's annual report claimed that levees would force the river to gouge a deeper path for itself, thus lowering the flood heights. The New Orleans city government and local economic powers dismissed alternatives such as spillways and reservoirs in favor of levees because they were cheaper to build; they used less land; and the logic behind them was easy to follow (if wrong). Local interests and the MRC footed two thirds of the bill to build the first levees. However, the Commission's decision to confine the river to a permanent channel forced sediment to collect on the riverbed instead of the banks, decreasing the channel size. Thus began a cycle that would continue for

nearly a century: rising river stages caused by the restricted floodplains would move citizens to petition for higher levees, which, in turn, would further heighten the river.



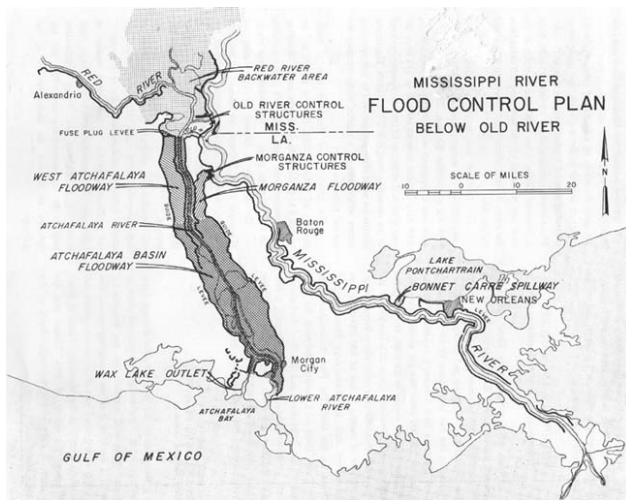
Abnormally high rainfall throughout the Mississippi drainage basin in 1927 caused the Great Mississippi Flood, which proved once and for all the inadequacies of levees-only. To avoid the flooding of metropolitan New Orleans, the MRC blew up the levee further downstream. Floodwaters quickly submerged Saint Bernard Parish and

covered an area of over 26,000 square miles. This disaster led Congress to pass the 1928 Jones-Reid Act which officially ended the levees-only policy, but still sought control over the river through a more multi-faceted approach.

Engineering Innovations

The new, comprehensive flood control and navigation strategy for the Mississippi region – the Mississippi Rivers and Tributaries Project approved by Congress in 1928 – proposed as a first measure the construction of the Bonnet-Carre Spillway at the site where the levee broke in the 1871 flood. Further augmentation of the levees risked a disastrous waterfront collapse, as the riverbanks, made of loose alluvial deposits, could not support more weight. A month after its completion in 1937, the Bonnet-Carre spillway reaffirmed what its advocates had predicted by successfully diverting potentially devastating floodwaters into Lake Pontchartrain.

The Mississippi River and Tributaries Project has been responsible for other significant control structures as well. Levees still protect the alluvial valley 2203 miles along the river, but a huge array of floodways such as the Morganza and West Atchafalaya floodways and the Atchafalaya floodway basin, divert a portion of the main flow from the flood plains along the Atchafalaya. Wax Lake and Berwick Bay serve as further sinks for floodwaters.



In more recent years, the Corps has worked to stop the Mississippi's natural tendency to shift courses. John McPhee writes, "The Mississippi River, with its sand and silt, has created most of Louisiana, and it could not have done so by remaining in one channel" (10). The river has begun to re-direct more and more of its flow toward one of its distributaries, the Atchafalaya. Yet allowing the river to complete this shift would convert the river channel into a huge floodplain during the transition to its new bed, and direct the river thirty miles west of the now-huge commercial center that exists along its banks. The Army Corps responded by building a retention system called Old River Control, completed in

1963, at the h-bend where the Red River Meets the Mississippi, regulating the flow of the Atchafalaya to only thirty percent, and leaving the Mississippi with seventy.

Another levee now exists to hold in check the waters of Lake Pontchartrain to diminish its flood threat and to keep hurricane-driven waves from inundating lakefront residential areas. during hurricanes. The Army Corps built up the levee in response to a series of hurricanes that hit New Orleans in the last half century, those of 1956, 1961 and 1964 in particular. Thirty-eight hurricanes have reached New Orleans via Lake Pontchartrain, including Hurricane Betsy which caused massive death and destruction in the city when it breached the walls in 1965. In October of 1965 Congress approved \$250 million for the Louisiana Project which included down payments for levees and storm barriers for Lake Pontarchrain. Other proponents of the project included Texas industries who partially funded the project in order to

protect sites for oil-drilling and chemical plants in the suburbs below the lake on the outskirts of the city.

In response to pressures from increasing awareness of human impacts on the river and its environment, the Army Corps has in the past few decades begun pursuing environmental engineering and tried to restore some of the lost wetlands along the Mississippi through the use of freshwater diversion structures, dredge spoil, and retention dikes along the shore. The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act of 1990 began to restore some of these wetlands that had been receding due to lack of sediment deposition. Louisiana has 40% of the nation's wetlands, which are disappearing at a rate of 25 square miles a year partially because of the long-term damage caused by the levees-only. The river, which used to replenish the buildup of the Louisiana delta with fresh sediments during floods, now deposits these sediments off the edge of the continental shelf. As a result, the sea is encroaching on the land, and there is a net land loss all across the coastline.

New Problems

Changes to the environment caused by human development have worsened the problems caused by flooding and hurricanes. The population of New Orleans more than quadrupled from 100,000 in 1850 to over 450,000 in 1930, and by 1930 residential expansion consistently meant drainage of swamps and marshland. Deforestation and clearing of wetlands for agriculture and paved streets has increased runoff, thereby increasing the volume of the river during any rain. This draining of the wetlands, which previous to any development acted as a natural flood control plain for the river, has resulted in a water table that lies no more than two feet below the ground in some places. Dredging and oil drilling have aggravated sinking and deterioration inching New Orleans downward toward the Gulf: a topographic map of New Orleans would show recent recession of terrain at the city's center. A huge influx of chemical and power plants into the low-elevation suburbs from 1964-1968 situated chemical waste at one of the lowest spots in the area.

Lack of federal funding in recent years has slowed the maintenance and construction of Mississippi flood control structures. In 1995 Congress passed the Southeastern Louisiana Urban Flood Control Project (SELA), which granted the Army Corps of Engineers 430 million dollars to reinforce and build levees and pump stations over the span of the next ten years. However, an estimated 250 million dollars worth of pressing projects that could not proceed because of a lack of funding remained. In 2003, natural disaster prevention money for New Orleans became even scarcer, partly because of the budgetary strains of the war in Iraq and homeland security. Despite 2004's turbulent hurricane season, and the Federal Emergency Management Association's warning that a hurricane hit to New Orleans was one of the three likeliest and most catastrophic threats to the country, federal money continued to dwindle. For the 2005 fiscal year, the U.S. government authorized 10.4 million dollars for SELA, a sixth of what local officials and the Corps said they needed. All new projects had to be put on hold, including a planned study of how New Orleans might protect itself against a category 4 or 5 hurricane.

Environmental Racism

The decision of the Citizens Flood Relief Committee in 1927 to destroy a levee protecting St. Bernard Parish 12 miles downstream, in favor of saving New Orleans, illuminates the issue of environmental racism. From initial settlement to present day neighborhood location, demographic patterns reflect the

environmental injustice characteristic of New Orleans. Throughout history, politically and economically marginalized people have been forced to settle on marginal land. With the rise of industrialization, corporations have determined these disadvantaged communities to be prime sites for locating their polluting factories, toxic industrial complexes and hazardous waste facilities, counting on disenfranchisement and despair to prevent the vocalized protest that they would face in more affluent neighborhoods. When these naturally and unnaturally vulnerable populations are further threatened by climatic events such as hurricanes, the results are truly disastrous.

With the end of the Civil War, recently emancipated slaves migrated to New Orleans, joining the large free black population already living in the at risk areas of the city. Consequently urban demographics came to be characterized by segregated neighborhoods, with affluent whites claiming the hills and blacks (of all classes) being forced to settle below sea level. These demographic patterns persist and can be seen today in neighborhoods such as the Lower Ninth Ward. Due to its low elevation, the Lower Ninth Ward is in a section of the city that is the most threatened by extreme weather. It is also one of the blackest areas with 98% of its residents being African American. In the words of Craig E. Colton, a geologist at Louisiana State University, “[I]n New Orleans, water flows away from money. Those with resources who control where the drainage goes have always chosen to live on the high ground”(CPR, 2005, p.35). Although for years scientists have voiced concern over the inadequacy of the levees, funding was never allocated for a reconstructed system, since seemed that only low lying, African American neighborhoods were likely to be flooded if the levees were breached.

Marginalized communities are not only the most at threatened by severe weather events and flooding, but they also the most endangered by close proximity to hazardous material as in three Superfund sites within the city’s community’s of color. This risk is exacerbated by the likelihood of flooding which can release these toxins from their weak constraints and spread them throughout residential sites. One particularly egregious example of environmental racism is the “Agriculture Street Landfill...an old municipal landfill where ordinary garbage was mixed together with liquid hazardous waste to a depth of between two and 32.5 feet,” upon top of which the city built a low income housing project and an elementary school in 1969. In response to community pressure and a study conducted by the CDC on the site’s undeveloped areas which concluded that “if they were ever used for residential housing, exposure to lead, arsenic, and polycyclic hydrocarbons in the soil could pose an ‘unacceptable health risk,’ the EPA decided that the contamination warranted an emergency cleanup. The CPR explains that, “Instead of excavating the site, treating contaminated soil in situ, or even installing a liner that would prevent the landfill’s contents from washing away” the EPA limited its remedy to the excavation of “less than two-thirds of the site and the placement of two feet of clean fill on top of the buried waste”. If the EPA had just allocated the \$12 million residents requested for relocation, instead of spending \$20 million on this superficial cleanup, they could have averted disaster.

Conclusion

Humans did not heed nature’s warnings when they made the decision to settle permanently in New Orleans. The natural riches which lured them there derive from the very conditions that can make New Orleans’ environment unlivable. Poor planning and overzealous development of the Mississippi and its surrounding land only increased the possibility for catastrophe. Kofi Annan said in 1999: “The term ‘natural disasters’ has become an increasingly anachronistic misnomer. In reality, it is human behavior that transforms natural disasters into what should be called unnatural disasters.”

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Media Representations of the Hurricane Katrina Disaster

By Tim Bates, Fay Cleaveland, Erin Foster West,
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Summary

American media have acted as the main disseminators of information throughout the Hurricane Katrina Disaster. As such, they have played an important role in educating Americans and shaping perceptions of the event and its aftermath. Although the scope of material is much too large to summarize here, this paper offers an analysis of media coverage in five major areas: prior warnings of the disaster, racial representations, refugee representations, rebuilding efforts, and international coverage. A closer look at these themes highlights the ways in which media coverage can both amplify or minimize certain aspects of the disaster.

Pre-disaster News Reporting: Did it Hinder Evacuation?

The national news media began by portraying Hurricane Katrina as just another storm in a bevy of upcoming hurricane possibilities for the 2005 season. However, despite a few cursory mentions of the storm early in the week leading up to the disaster, as more and more information and details on the storm's path and growing strength, the media quickly increased their warnings of catastrophe. Although some might blame the media for misrepresenting the storm's potential and causing some New Orleans residents to remain in the city, it was likely a much more complicated set of factors that caused these people to stay and endure the poor living conditions and lack of services.

Appearing first as a tropical depression, Hurricane Katrina was first noted in a public advisory by the National Hurricane Center on August 23, 2005. On the 25th of August, Baton Rouge's The Advocate published a brief mention of upcoming Hurricane Katrina in Pat Shingleton's weather column; it claimed that the storm was "en route to southeast Florida and the Gulf." In the same article, the reporter also discussed "other" types of hurricanes, including parts of ships and alcoholic drinks. News reporting on the storm began slowly, but by the 29th, when the hurricane first made landfall in Louisiana's Plaquemines Parish, coverage had substantially increased. Warnings to evacuate the city had been published, along with dire warnings of the storm's predicted intensity and clearly, to anyone reading or watching the news, the storm was to be disastrous.

On the 26th, New Orleans' Times Picayune reported that "Tropical Storm Katrina may come into play" in the upcoming fishing climate in a piece entitled "Anglers' Almanac." This article also only trivially notes the hurricane and is perhaps indicative of how blasé the public's opinions of hurricanes may have become. Of course, at that point, the hurricane's path was still uncertain, as reported by the New York Times' Andrew Revkin.

Meanwhile on the 26th, an Associated Press article reported that Louisiana's governor, Kathleen Blanco, had declared a state of emergency the very same day and invoked language of the storm's "imminent threat." A parish emergency official hoped that the emergency teams were prepared and that it was "kind of late in the year to be making disaster plans" (Associated Press). The next morning, CNN Saturday Morning News reported that the Katrina had caught many Florida residents unaware and that even despite being a Category 1 storm at the time, it had caused a good deal of destruction.

Furthermore, they reported, the storm had already been declared a Category 3 overnight with potential for growing to a Category 4, which they described as “extremely powerful, extremely strong” (CNN).

By 12:00am on Sunday, August 28, CNN was repeating many of the already reported facts – that there was a voluntary evacuation of New Orleans, that conditions in the area were going to deteriorate quickly, that the potential for disaster was “high,” and that this storm was “absolutely one to take very seriously if you live anywhere in Southern Louisiana” (CNN). The newscast becomes increasingly sensationalistic, mentioning roads “jammed” with vehicles evacuating, and describing the storm as a “monster.” This anthropomorphism of the storm was an oft-repeated stylistic decision for papers and wire services.

The New York Times’ coverage grew from two pages on the 29th to nearly seven on the 31 as the storm hit, damaged the town’s levee system, and moved inland. The headlines grew larger and more emphatic, the coverage grew to encompass almost all of the paper’s “above the fold” space, and color photos showed the tragedy, devastation, and loss in the hurricane’s path.

It is clear that the media, as soon as it became clear that the storm would be severe, seized the opportunity to publish dire forecasts, although they may have slightly exaggerated the storm’s expected impact. Any residents who remained in the city did not do so because the media failed to adequately portray the danger of the storm. Instead, other factors, such as transportation and low perception of risk due to years of unfulfilled hurricane predictions (which the news could not change), were probably at the heart of the issue.

Racial Representations in the Media

After the events of Hurricane Katrina, the national media coverage depicted two distinct responses to the disaster, formed along racial lines. Many of the images that were shown on television and in newspapers were black groups of people staying in public centers, looting or destroying property. Conversely, white residents were shown either inside or around their homes, typically alone.



1. Still image from video taken in New Orleans after Katrina. Appeared on NBC Nightly News.



2. Photos appeared on R News of survivors eating together.

Here is a still image taken from a MSN News online video discussing the affects of Hurricane Katrina on the poor. Most of the people shown in this telecast appear to be African-American. The second picture is from a Time Warner Cable news report about a luncheon for hurricane survivors put on by New Orleans local churches. Most people in this photo also appear to be African American. This reinforces the depiction of blacks in large groups of survivors away from their homes and relying on public support and charity.

The media showed the people searching for food or water. Again, African-Americans were depicted as engaging in delinquent behavior. These two pictures were shown on Yahoo News. The top photo is what appears to be a black man wading through water carrying a large bag and a case of soda underneath one arm. The caption on this photo says: “A young man walks through chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New



3. Looting photos from Yahoo News (above, right).

Orleans.” The second photo is of two light skinned people, with backpacks and one carrying a small bag. The caption on the second photo says: “Two residents waded through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store...”

The media chose to portray the black man as the looter, in other ways, as a criminal with malevolent intent. The second photo represents the people much differently from the first one. The term “resident” makes them seem a part of the community and deserving of their found goods. The two white “residents” have found their goods harmlessly without engaging in illegal activity.



3. (cont.) Another Yahoo News photo of shopper and man jumping from a store.

Another picture from the Associated Press illustrates these differences very well. In this photo, two people are standing outside a convenience store. A dark skinned man is shown in front of a broken window standing apart from a presumably white male looking through a bag. The caption reads, “As one person looks through a shopping bag, left, another jumps through a broken window, while leaving a convenience store...” The white male is described as a shopper presuming that he purchased his goods legally. However, the black male is perceived to have jumped through the window after having broken in to steal goods from this convenience store. The white male is legitimized while the black male is criminalized.



4. Photo of woman and insurance inspector from The Washington Post.
5. Photo taken from the Associated Press appearing on a website about hurricane relief efforts.

More often than blacks, whites were shown as victimized by the hurricane or the looting afterwards. The media often showed whites in or around their homes. The top picture shows a light-skinned man surveying the damage the storm has done to his home. The bottom photo is a picture of a white woman standing in her home with an insurance claims inspector. In these photos, whites were portrayed as individual victims. They were protecting their homes from looters and showed with their damaged property after the hurricane was over. On the other hand, blacks were often shown as these

very looters or portrayed as relying on public support for supplies.

Refugees in America: How Media Shapes Perceptions of Katrina Victims

The use of the term “refugee” by American news media to refer to the segment of population displaced by Hurricane Katrina redefines their status as U.S. citizens. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defines a refugee as any person having “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; [is] outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, [and] is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. As applied to Hurricane Katrina, refugee refers to the group of Gulf Coast residents who are now outside their home territory and unable to return to it due to damage. Since this particular group of people is made up of U.S. citizens still living in the U.S., the use of the term can imply that Katrina refugees are a group with characteristics that separate them from normal U.S. citizens. Labeling U.S. citizens as refugees has dangerous implications that have sparked debate over the damaging use of the term on members of our population.

The picture of refugees painted by news media stories is of a group entirely displaced from their former lives and dependent on public aid for survival. In a September 5th article entitled “Refugee Crisis: States struggle to process hundreds of thousands of Katrina’s refugees,” Todd Lewan identifies

the situation created by Katrina as an “unprecedented refugee crisis,” which has left state officials “rushing to feed, clothe, and shelter more than half a million people dispossessed by Hurricane Katrina.” He describes how a plane of refugees was greeted in Arizona with flip-flops set out on the Tarmac for their use, an image that highlights the group’s destitution. Then, “carrying garbage bags, backpacks, and brown shopping bags with their only belongings, the evacuees were led into the airport.” Again, the image of Katrina refugees receiving flip-flops and being passively led to the airport is of a group without resources descending on a new and unknown city and entirely dependent on others.

Meanwhile, refugees’ reception is not always described as warmly as in Arizona. In an October 6th Associated Press article entitled “Some Katrina Refugees Are Told to Move On,” refugees given shelter in hotels were given the message to “move on” in order for those hotels to honor prior reservations of incoming guests. The imagery in this story is of “several family members packed into one room” who cause a “burden on hotel staff, and use more water and electricity.” Here, connotations of squalor and dependence are closely linked with refugees.

Such depictions of “refugees” have sparked debate over the consequences of news media applying the word to American citizens. Many feel that this term connotes status less than citizenship, and the imagery in media backs up that claim. Because the majority of displaced citizens are black, the Reverend Jesse Jackson stated “it is racist to call American citizens refugees.” President George W. Bush agreed that “the people we’re talking about are not refugees, they are Americans and they need the help and love and compassion of our fellow citizens.” This backlash has left media sources divided. Since mid- September, the Washington Post and several leading news sources have banned the use of refugee from their coverage, using terms such as “evacuee” and “displaced person” (Noveck). However, other press sources, including the Associated Press, and the New York Times have stated that refugee is the only term “to capture the sweep and scope of the effects of this historic natural disaster on a vast number of our citizens” and will continue using the word where they deem appropriate (Noveck).

News media inevitably shape public perceptions on the disaster and the people affected by it. In turn, public perceptions of those displaced by Katrina will ultimately determine how they will be received in their new locations and the ease of their assimilation. With this in mind, it is important to remain critical of refugee representation in news media and the connotations and consequences of applying refugee terminology and imagery to a group of American citizens.

Rebuilding Efforts Portrayed by the Media

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, one of the largest obstacles facing the nation is long term and short term rebuilding of the city. Two main newspapers are analyzed here, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, because of their nationwide reader base and also their traditionally conflicting views. Limiting the scope allows for more in-depth analysis of the coverage, and will hopefully highlight the main perspectives available to the public regarding the future of New Orleans.

There are two main categories presented on reshaping the Gulf Coast: the immediate needs, and the long-term processes. In the days following the disaster, the Times published many articles analyzing the economic damage and supplies required to keep the damaged city running. To even have a hope of

rebuilding, they argued that food, clean water, and temporary shelter were necessary to guarantee the safe exit of displaced persons as well as the safe entry of rescue workers. On September 3, the Times reported that, the “First Estimate Put Storm’s Economic Toll at \$100 Billion.” This figure included the basic supplies and troops required to establish some sort of order. Also in the short-term coverage are many articles about President Bush’s response to the Hurricane. The Times seems slightly critical of his response, commenting that on Bushes first visit to New Orleans, he avoided the areas of highest devastation. These are mostly black neighborhoods, so these sentiments allude to the accusations of racist treatment by the government toward New Orleans citizens.

Articles about the immediate needs obscure the long-term social and structural changes that need to take place to rebuild the Coast. They highlight sensationalizing numbers and human-interest stories that are dramatic and grab the largest public interest. They fail, however, to dive into the deeper problems and structures that need to be confronted to make lasting change. In the Journal, one reporter notes that people need to maintain a sense of urgency throughout the entire rebuilding process, which is a ‘marathon, not a sprint’ (Francis). The Wall Street Journal’s articles largely cover future economic interests and possibilities in the Gulf. Headlines such as “New Orleans Bonds Hold Firm Despite Financial Uncertainty” cover the paper, leaving out human-interest stories and more sympathetic coverage (Francis).

The Times also criticizes immediacy-based rebuilding efforts. ‘New Orleans has to rebuild not just its buildings and its political culture, but its image,’ Joel Kotkin said in a Sept. 18th interview (Levy). These issues are not based on food or clean water – the government and the corporations with Gulf interests will influence them. This article also referenced past cities in conflict, such as Detroit, that have faced great physical and social damage. This comparison could lead the public to believe that rebuilding is an impossible task. The articles emphasize that individual families and small businesses will be the basis for rebuilding neighborhoods, but the task of rebuilding New Orleans as a place is daunting when the media presents it as such.

The New York Times and Wall Street Journal both cover the immediate and long-term rebuilding efforts of New Orleans. The short-term efforts connote sympathy and human-interest while obscuring the wide spread scale of rebuilding that faces the city. Coverage of long-term efforts fails to highlight the struggles of communities and individuals, focusing instead on structural changes. These conflicting messages convey very different approaches to the rebuilding efforts that New Orleans must face.

International Media Coverage

The media response to Hurricane Katrina has been enormous and varied. To make the amount of media manageable, the material examined will be the response in widely read daily French and English speaking newspapers ranging from France, Britain, India, Tunisia, Australia, and Algeria.

In examining major daily newspaper articles from August 29 to late October, each country had its own take on the crisis. France’s Le Monde, for example, focused mostly on governmental incompetence and the Bush Administration’s response to the disaster, with 272 articles discussing Katrina. In comparison, Algeria’s L’Expression had only four, all editorials. Tunisia’s La Presse highlighted Tunisian aid and condolences extended to the people of New Orleans. The Australian focused on human-interest stories, including an interview with American televangelist Pat Robertson predicting

the coming of the apocalypse, while the UK's Daily Telegraph focused on economic effects of the storm and its aftermath.

One of the most interesting responses, however, came in the form of an editorial in the Indian Express entitled "Apocalypse Now." The author, Shailaja Bajpai, commented that tragedies in the first world, such as 9/11 or natural disasters, are painted in a positive light- in terms of efficient emergency response, neighbors helping neighbors, etc. In the third world, the chaotic elements are highlighted – bombs exploding in nightclubs with no leads, the human misery caused by a storm, and the government's inept response to these disasters. Bajpai argues that the coverage of Hurricane Katrina, which included photos of bodies floating in the streets, police brutality and panicking officials at every level, shows that the image of America is no longer solely "orderly, efficient and caring" and now is represented with the same imagery as the Third World.

The sense of chaos in the Southern United States is commented on both directly and indirectly in the vast majority of the articles in the major daily papers. From the headlines in Le Monde on September 5 ("Katrina Sows Death and Devastation" and "Ravaged by Katrina, Survivors Accuse the Bush Administration") to the headline in Algeria's L'Expression ("While New Orleans is Under Water, Bush is Under Fire") or in photographs from the Daily Telegraph showing SWAT teams raiding apartments, black families trapped on roofs or car tops, and dead bodies floating in the street.

Bajpai is right: were it not for the names of the places ravaged, the world that is described hardly coincides with the image of the United States as the last remaining super power. Between disarray in the streets, environmental contamination, political corruption, inefficiency, racism and turmoil, the images presented are simply not those that America has held of itself nor parts of the overall images projected abroad. Although the final affects of these reports remains to be seen, the coverage of Hurricane Katrina thus far could be viewed as revolutionary.

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Relief Efforts

By Caitlin Flynn, Leah Harnik, Katyana Melic

Summary

Despite the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina, the real disaster occurred after the physical storm. The impact of Katrina was felt across the gulf but New Orleans as a national, cultural and economic center received the greatest percentage of the aid and will therefore be the focus of this section of the paper. On August 26 a state of emergency was declared for Hurricane Katrina. Despite the early warning and the emergency preparedness plans the relief efforts were lacking. The federal, state and local levels all suffered from a lack of communication. While the local level was incapacitated, the federal government was uncoordinated, poorly managed and lowly funded, all of which resulted in one of the worst disaster responses in US history. As the local, state and federal agencies fumbled, the quickest responses came from foreign nations, non-governmental organizations and individuals.

Local Response

On Friday, September 2, four days after the hurricane, the city of New Orleans was in chaos. Eighty percent of the city was flooded. 150,000 people were stranded in the city. Stories of rape and murder had surfaced from the Superdome. Federal aid had still not arrived. In an unusual display of honest anger from a politician, Mayor Ray Nagin blasted the response of the federal government on the Louisiana radio station WWL. In his interview with Garland Robinette, Nagin said:

We authorized \$8 billion to go to Iraq, lickity split. After 9/11, we gave the President unlimited powers, lickity split, to take care of New York . . . You mean to tell me that [New Orleans] a place where you probably have thousands of people who have died and thousands more are dying every day, we can't get figure out a way to authorize the resources that we need. (New Orleans mayor lashes out at feds).

His anger stemmed from the red-tape and lack of communication between the local and federal levels that prevented more immediate aid. The fourteen minute interview was widely distributed through the internet, and Nagin's righteous indictment of the federal government helped to both focus blame away from the local level and speed up the federal government's aid. Days after the interview, President Bush toured the wrecked areas in New Orleans and Mississippi.

In the radio interview, Ray Nagin made a request that has been cited as his largest failing in the relief effort:

I need 500 buses, man. We ain't talking about -- you know, one of the briefings we had, they were talking about getting public school bus drivers to come down here and bus people out here. I'm like, "You got to be kidding me. This is a national disaster. Get every doggone Greyhound bus line in the country and get their asses moving to New Orleans." (New Orleans mayor lashes out at feds).

In the emergency plan for southeast Louisiana, it is clearly stated that buses should be used to evacuate those who lack transportation. "School and municipal buses, government-owned vehicles and vehicles provided by volunteer agencies may be used to provide transportation for individuals who lack transportation and require assistance in evacuating" (Controversy over whether New Orleans Mayor failed to follow hurricane plan). Despite these plans, hundreds of school buses were not used and were eventually flooded. Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco has stated that if those buses had been used

according to plan they, "could have saved an estimated 20,000 people" (Controversy over whether New Orleans Mayor failed to follow hurricane plan). Aerial photographs depicting flooded fields of buses have angered people who see the abandoned buses as a sign of failure.



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This flooded parking lot in this photograph, which was widely circulated after the hurricane, has been sardonically renamed the Ray Nagin Memorial Motor Pool. Ray Nagin responded to the criticism that he did not fully use all available resources by saying, "Sure, here was lots of buses out there. But guess what? You can't find drivers that would stay behind with a Category 5 hurricane . . . So sure, we had the assets, but the drivers just weren't available" (Russert). Despite Nagin's reasoning, the submerged buses have become the leading symbol of the poorly executed relief effort.

When asked what his biggest mistake in connection with the hurricane, Nagin replied:

My biggest mistake is having a fundamental assumption that in the state of Louisiana, with an \$18 billion budget, in the country of the

United States that can move whole fleets of aircraft carriers across the globe in 24 hours, that my fundamental assumption was get as many people to safety as possible, and that the cavalry would be coming within two to three days, and they didn't come (Russert).

While the local government failed to relieve the suffering of its residents, it is at least understandable since much of the city was damaged or destroyed in the hurricane.

State Response

Two days before Hurricane Katrina slammed into New Orleans, Louisiana state Governor, Kathleen Blanco, requested federal aid from President Bush indicating that the storm would be beyond the scope of the city and state levels. Despite the request, almost nothing in terms of aid arrived. The day of the hurricane, August 29, Blanco called President Bush to reiterate the need for federal assistance. Bush could not be found. Blanco then called the chief of staff, who also could not be reached. Calling through the ranks, she finally left a message with a low level official in the Homeland Security Office (Carney et al.).

On August 28, an agreement was reached between Governor Blanco and the Governor of New Mexico for New Mexico to transfer National Guard troops to New Orleans to help with the relief effort. Due to overlooked paperwork on the federal level, the troops did not arrive until September 1 (Kathleen Blanco).

Lack of communication and red-tape served as the model for nearly all of the state's relief efforts. The Louisiana Homeland Security Office, which reports to Kathleen Blanco, was responsible for denying the American Red Cross access to the city of New Orleans after the hurricane (Red Cross: State rebuffed relief efforts). The director of the state's Homeland Security Office said that he had requested a delay of 24 hours for logistical reasons.

On September 15, a day after President Bush had claimed responsibility for the slow response of the federal government, Governor Blanco announced her culpability for the mistakes and failures of the state government: “At the state level, we must take a careful look at what went wrong and make sure it never happens again. The buck stops here, and as your governor, I take full responsibility” (Blanco: 'I take full responsibility').

Federal Response

On August 26, three days before Hurricane Katrina hit, President Bush declared a state of emergency and directed FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), under the Department of Homeland Security, to coordinate relief efforts. Following this, FEMA prepositioned 18 disaster medical teams, medical supplies and equipment, urban search and rescue teams along with millions of MREs (Meals, ready-to-eat), liters of water, tarpaulins, and truckloads of ice (Hurricane Katrina), ready to be used if necessary. "The agency has more than 1,700 truckloads of water, meals, tents, generators and other supplies ready to go in," Michael Chertoff, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security said. Following the hurricane, federal health officials started setting up medical shelters, and the Coast Guard reported rescuing more than 1,200 people (Editor & Publisher Journal). The federal government's National Response Plan was put into action.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began sending medical emergency supplies to locations near the worst-hit area within 48 hours after landfall. Days after landfall, medical authorities established contingency treatment facilities for over 10,000 people, and plans to treat thousands more were developing. Partnerships with commercial medical suppliers, shipping companies, and support services companies ensured that evolving medical needs could be met within days or even hours (Hurricane Katrina).

However, the criticisms of the federal government's response are more numerous than the credit given it. While the National Response Plan was activated, it was implemented incompletely, slowly, and apparently with much confusion as to the leadership and responsibilities it was supposed to address. “Even before the storm struck the Gulf Coast,” Knight Ridder news reporters said, “Chertoff could have ordered federal agencies into action without any request from state or local officials.” Michael Brown, head of FEMA, they added, had only limited authority to do so until about 36 hours after the storm hit, when Chertoff designated him as the "principal federal official" in charge. “Chertoff's hesitation and Bush's creation of a Katrina task force both appear to contradict the National Response Plan and previous presidential directives that specify what the secretary of homeland security is assigned to do without further presidential orders”(Editor & Publisher Journal). Many point to this lack of coordination and failure to follow existing plans as the main reasons for the government's lack of effective response.

Recent budget cutbacks for disaster response and the diversion of many resources to the war on terror and the war in Iraq have also been a source of criticism. Federal flood control spending for southeastern Louisiana, for example, has been chopped from \$69 million in 2001 to \$36.5 million in 2005, according to budget documents. Federal hurricane protection for the Lake Pontchartrain vicinity in the Army Corps of Engineers' budget dropped from \$14.25 million in 2002 to \$5.7 million this year (Borenstein). Another example is the large number of National Guard personnel stationed in Iraq, unable to respond to domestic emergencies.

However, even with this reduction in manpower, President Bush did not exercise his authority to call the National Guard into action. Additionally, when Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco requested the deployment of national guard troops from other states, the Federal government took over 2 days to process her request. During this time, President Bush was still on vacation on his ranch, only returning on August 31, two days after the hurricane struck.

There have also been many criticisms of specific government agencies. FEMA's priorities, such as rescuing stranded people over the provision of food and water for already safe people, have been questioned. Furthermore, there have been reports of FEMA blocking other agencies aid. Aaron Broussard, the President of Jefferson Parish, which neighbors New Orleans, criticized the governments response on *Meet the Press*. Broussard claimed that FEMA blocked water deliveries from Wal-Mart, blocked the shipment of fuel to his area, cut emergency communication lines and described how the local sheriff posted armed guards to protect the lines after they were reconnected (Hurricane Katrina).

Other scandals have surfaced. For example, on September 6 FEMA stopped allowing journalists to accompany rescuers searching for victims, saying they would take up too much space. At the same time, FEMA requested that journalists stop taking pictures of dead bodies. News organizations have filed suit in Federal Court, claiming a violation of the First Amendment's freedom of the press. In face of the lawsuit, FEMA has since countermanded this request (Hurricane Katrina).

International Response

When Hurricane Katrina struck on Monday, August 29, much of the world was taken aback at the devastation that America suffered. The resulting state of affairs that emerged in New Orleans reminded some of the chaos that plagues much of the world's war torn regions. Despite the shock at the apparent lack of coordination from the federal government and the inundated state of the American nation, many countries were quick to offer aid in the form of money, personnel, water, food rations, helicopters, temporary shelter and emergency fuel mainly to the federal government directly (Hurricane Katrina).¹ In the wake of the storm, the federal government was willing to accept aid only from the United Kingdom and the European Union, but after reports began streaming in of the devastation of New Orleans the state department released an official list of names of the countries that offered aid.

The countries offered aid based on their capabilities: Oil producing countries predominantly offered oil, while countries that have emergency preparedness teams like Israel pledged manpower support. Others offered money. Among the extensive list were countries that are still recovering from the December 2004 tsunami crisis, including Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and Indonesia. Sri Lanka offered 25,000 dollars to the American Red Cross. Sri Lankan President was quoted as saying that the Sri Lankan people remembered the promptness of the American response to the tsunami (Argentur).

During such crises, countries put aside their political differences to come to the aid of victims. Fidel Castro of Cuba offered to send 1,100 doctors and 26 tons of medical supplies and equipment, but as of

¹ For more information on the extensive list of countries that offered aid refer to the following website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_response_to_Hurricane_Katrina

September 5 there was still no response from Washington (CNN news). Venezuela offered to send fuel at a much lower cost than usual (BBC news). Yet again as of early September the State department had not made a decision on the offer. Iran had also offered 20 million barrels of crude oil.

One of the most historic international aid responses was that of Mexico. It has been 159 years since Mexican troops have been on American soil. President Fox offered his condolences and support by sending 196 Mexican troops to the Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio Texas. The army brought with them 3 tons of water, emergency medical supplies and other essentials that would greatly help the people. Mexican epidemiologists also helped in assessing the danger of mosquito spread diseases. The government also offered to fund Mexican nationals returning back to Mexico (Hurricane Katrina).

The response from developed nations has also been tremendous. The Canadian relief efforts have been one of the most extensive to be approved and accepted by the American government. Canada sent three aircraft carriers. The ships and aircraft helped relocate people and provided emergency medical and food supplies. Countries like the Netherlands and Singapore sent in helicopters to help with transferring supplies. The Netherlands' extensive experience in flood control prompted the US government to accept their offer to send water management experts and pumps.

NATO was approached by the federal government to send emergency kits, food supplies and blankets. NATO also sent an officer to coordinate requests between the two parties and to assist FEMA (CNN news).

International Relief is not confined to states; international agencies and NGOs were also quick to respond. Among them was the American Red Cross. The American Red Cross has never undertaken such a massive relief effort. The American Red Cross is designed to work for short term relief. As of October 7, the LA Times reports that the organization has distributed \$811 million dollars and spent \$110 million on shelter and food. The Red Cross dealt with the pressures and managed to provide 230 shelters 5 days after the disaster. Despite their attempts there has been heavy criticism. The criticism can be attributed to the general feeling of frustration and despair in the region towards the slow response from both the government and aid agencies. But many have attributed it to the scale of the disaster. A few weeks after the disaster the Red Cross still had not reached remote areas leaving many stranded. Since the federal government was not accepting many countries aid offers, the Red Cross received them instead. The Red Cross is a familiar and popular name, but the money used does not go into long term development because that is not within its charter or capabilities. If money had been more evenly spread amongst local charities and organizations then maybe the relief effort would have been more accessible to the victims (Getlin).

Conclusion

While flood water incapacitated the local relief efforts, a mess of bureaucratic red-tape, procedural formalities, and misunderstandings kept the state and federal agencies from responding promptly and efficiently to the challenges of rescue and relief. While the hurricane will probably be the costliest and deadliest storm in US history, the true tragedy is that despite the early warnings, in the richest and strongest country in the world, the relief efforts were inefficient and ineffective. The story of Katrina demonstrates the inadequacies of the US government on the one hand, and the compassion of individuals, agencies, and countries around the world on the other.

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Rebuilding after Katrina

By Megan Grinde, Talia Kahn-Kravis, Patrick McGarrity, Ross Milton

Summary

After the initial shock of hurricane Katrina subsided, one question buzzed in everyone's head: What should we do with the Gulf Coast? There have been a variety of proposals, each coming from a different perspective, with different priorities in mind for the use of the this once urbanized land. We covered five different plans in this chapter: Bush's plans to rebuild, not rebuilding in New Orleans, green rebuilding, locally controlled and responsible rebuilding, and plans for sediment management within the Mississippi to protect the coast.

Bush Administration's Plans for Rebuilding

Almost immediately following Katrina, the Bush administration began making guarantees that New Orleans, along with all other affected areas of the Gulf Coast, would be rebuilt as quickly as possible. "We'll do whatever it takes, we will stay as long as it takes, to help citizens rebuild," President Bush promised Louisiana residents; "we'll not just rebuild, we'll build higher and better" (Forbes, Whitehouse News).

Through all the diverse opinions addressing how to rebuild New Orleans (and even whether to rebuild New Orleans), the Bush administration has maintained that rebuilding must occur, with a special focus on economic growth and special incentives for businesses. "We will take the side of entrepreneurs as they lead the economic revival of the Gulf region," the president stated in mid-September, explaining his rationale behind his plan for creating a "Gulf Opportunity Zone" that would provide federal funding for making the Gulf Coast a virtual nursery for new businesses and market growth (Forbes).

Despite his claims that the region "should... include minority-owned businesses," many of his critics say that the president is simply recreating conditions that will lead to the same racial and socio-economic inequalities that have plagued the area for hundreds of years (Forbes, Rawstory, ABC). The president has also recommended that "as many jobs as possible should go to the men and women who live in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama," yet many rebuilding contracts have already been made with giants of the business world rather than smaller, local agencies (Whitehouse News). The most conspicuous of these was the September 30 contract with the Virginia based Kellogg Brown & Root Services, a subsidiary of Halliburton. "The Bush administration is importing many of the contracting practices blamed for spending abuses in Iraq," asserts one cynic, "as it begins the largest and costliest rebuilding effort in US history" (Wall Street Journal).

Other facets of Bush's rebuilding plans include Worker Recovery Accounts and an Urban Homesteading Act. The Worker Recovery Accounts project would provide up to \$5000 for evacuees for job training, education, and child support during their search for new jobs and homes. (Whitehouse News). Congress is also being urged by the president to pass what he deems an Urban Homesteading Act to provide free building sites for low-income families. Skeptics question the sources of the vast amounts of funding necessary for such ambitious rebuilding efforts. While addressing the affected region, Bush promised that the federal government would shoulder the "great majority" of the costs in the effort, yet made no mention of what the projects would actually cost. So far, Congress has approved \$62 billion in aid, but cost estimates of the projects proposed by Bush surpass \$200 billion (Forbes).

Not Rebuilding New Orleans

Although the rebuilding of New Orleans has already begun, there have been many urgent cries to halt the process altogether- abandon the once culturally vibrant city and allocate the people of New Orleans, money and resources towards more secure and sustainable prospects. Advocates of “letting New Orleans go” have three main arguments dealing with the physical geography of the region, the vast social inequalities, and exhausting land use. Many believe that all these problems are a direct result of governmental capitalistic policies which will inevitably be repeated throughout development.

New Orleans should have never been built in the first place. It was a major port, therefore historically rich and economically prosperous, but this was all fundamentally artificial. Billions of dollars were spent building dams, levies and filling in back swamp to make the region habitable. The process of doing this aggravated the very resources that supported these structures- making the Gulf Coast more vulnerable to natural disasters. With impending climate change we need to work on restoring natural ecosystems- swamps that act as storm buffers, wetlands that are endangered and crucial to many industries- not exacerbating a global environmental crisis. Hurricanes have devastated this region before and they will continue to (possibly more intensely) in the future.

Not only have we built on precarious land, but we have built up some of the most environmentally depletive industries- mainly oil drilling, but also vast commercial transport systems, fisheries, luxury hotels and casinos. The Mississippi and the Gulf have become major “open sewers for industrial [toxic] waste” (Blair, 2005).

On top of being environmentally disadvantaged New Orleans is home to some of the most extreme social and economic disparities within the United States. “New Orleans’ poverty rate is roughly double the national average” (Travino, 2005) 67% of which are African American. Almost half of New Orleans schools are rated as “academically unacceptable” and there are high rates of corruption and crime. In Jack Shafer’s article “Don’t Refloat” he says that New Orleans is so dysfunctional that “only a sadist would insist on resurrecting this concentration of poverty, crime and deplorable schools.” (Shafer, 2005)

The government has ignored all these problems in the past or proved incompetent in mitigating them. Why recreate these vulnerable and “wretched” conditions when we can use the money to relocate refugees into existing relatively successful communities and structures? “Only fools continue to make the same mistakes, over and over again,” (Blair, 2005).

Rebuilding Green

Since, at this point in time it is evident that New Orleans is being rebuilt, for reasons discussed above, it is imperative that it is rebuilt in an ecologically and socially just manner. There are many different NGOs working to find affordable, sustainable and green ways to rebuild New Orleans counter to Bush’s business oriented development. Most of these NGOs have similar goals and frameworks for their actions. Some of these include: instituting a sustainable New Orleans task force made up of experts of sustainable development and community members representing all groups and structure to scales- money going to rebuild New Orleans is for the victims, they should be deciding what is done with it.

Coastal and flood plain restoration is a top priority. One campaign developed in the 1990’s, “Coast 2050,” plans to “design restoration strategies based on ecological principles so the future coast will have the productivity and other desirable features of a highly valued natural system” (Lange, 2005). This project would cost an estimated

\$14 billion over the next 30 years and is strongly opposed by Bush. Upgrading oil refineries and cleaning up factories in the Gulf region is another important step. They can never be truly green, but using more efficient machinery and proper maintenance would reduce waste significantly. Oil and gas drilling also needs to be curbed. To balance this loss of fossil fuels and further our independence from them, renewable energy alternatives need to be available. Since renewable energy such as wind and solar power is expensive incentives, like tax breaks for consumers, manufacturers and developers would increase access to all.

New Orleans should adopt “smart growth” policies. “Creating walkable, architecturally distinctive neighborhoods, encouraging community participation in decision making, opting for mixed land use, making development decision ‘predictable, fair, and cost effective,’ preserving farmland and open space, providing for a variety of transportation modes, adopting compact building styles and directing development towards existing communities,” (Lange, 2005) establishing green building standards, limiting sprawl would all fall under the category of “smart growth.” If the government is to be involved, a “new, new deal” should be created, investing in public infrastructure and union stable jobs instead of private “frivolous” businesses. Redevelopment needs to come from the bottom up; this is the only way to begin to combat structural racism and economic and environmental injustices. If New Orleans follows through on all/some/any of these sustainability principles it has a chance to be a model city for the rest of the U.S. and potentially expand and mainstream “green markets” everywhere.

Moderate Proposals for Rebuilding New Orleans

Since the catastrophic extent of the damages in New Orleans became apparent, many organizations and individuals have put forth how they would rebuild the city. Some, like the Brookings Institution and the National Resource Defense Council have published complete reports detailing the plan of action they believe is appropriate, while others have responded to what is happening to criticize and offer their way of tackling a single issue.

Before the storm, New Orleans undoubtedly had many problems. It was one of the poorest cities in the United States, and inside it, poverty was concentrated into specific pockets of destitution. These problems only became more evident and gained national attention through the merciless water of Katrina. The poorest part of the city, the lower ninth ward, had by far the worst flooding. All the groups that fill the middle ground between not rebuilding New Orleans at all and rebuilding it just as it was perceive this catastrophe as an opportunity to right some of the wrong visible in the city.

The Brookings Institution, a large influential Washington think tank, released a report from their Metropolitan Policy Program presenting their plan for the reconstruction of the 7 county area of New Orleans. The report details the pre-Katrina situation in terms of the rampant poverty, sluggish economic growth, and racial and economic segregation. Their premise is that since 1970 the city of New Orleans has had a stagnant economy and increasing poverty and segregation. These conditions made Katrina more disastrous as low-income and poor African Americans primarily inhabited much of the flooded area in Orleans Parish. (MPP 18)

In their plan, the Brookings Institution concentrates on what the federal government’s role should be in the rebuilding. In this analysis, they propose “three threshold principles: Don’t replicate the mistakes of the past. Build on a great city’s assets. And ensure that reconstruction benefits long-time Orleanians by adhering to an inclusive planning process” (MPP 27). As a think tank whose expertise is not environmental policy and flood control, they did not analyze the options for increasing the size of levees to protect the city but instead start with

the premise that “Seeking to dominate nature with structural solutions did not work.” Instead of “dominating nature” they prefer to pursue “sustainability in every dimension” (MPP 28). This notion of sustainability is echoed by many other voices who recognize the failure of the former ways of thinking. To do this the report recommends a four-part plan of deciding what locations should be rebuilt, using the federal budget to “promote sound land use and high-quality city design,” improving transit, and implementing the Coast 2050 plan.

The institute report suggests that a panel of experts and local representatives make decisions about where to build based on environmental and engineering reports. The National Resource Defense Council, one of the nations most influential environmental organizations agreed. Their report stated, “Planners and developers should take care to avoid unprotected floodplains and areas of the coastline that are fundamentally unstable” (NRDC 11). However, the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, the panel created by Mayor Ray Nagin to plan the city’s reconstruction has all but vocally disagreed. The Times-Picayune reported that the BNOBC plan would include a complete rebuilding of the Lower 9th Ward, one of the hardest hit and least environmentally feasible sites in the city. The article also quoted Mayor Nagin, “We will rebuild this entire city... We will rebuild the Lower 9th Ward” (Egglar). This may be an example of a sustainable future capitulating to political realities.

The Coast 2050 report is a \$14 billion plan to recondition the Gulf Coast that has resurfaced into the discussion following the hurricane. The 1998 plan authored by a coalition including the Army Corps of Engineers details the steps to be taken to restore the coastal wetlands (LCWCRTF 7). The project is costly, but compared to the overall reconstruction budget and even just the \$62.3 billion already approved by Congress the cost is manageable (Walsh).

Other organizations have responded to particular issues in the rebuilding process instead of creating complete reports. For instance on September 8th, President Bush issued a proclamation suspending the requirement that federally financed construction projects pay workers at locally prevailing wages (Bush). Peter Phillips of the Economic Policy Institute authored a briefing paper arguing that the President’s action was unnecessary and damaging to the local economy. He pointed out that the reconstruction from the Northridge earthquake preceded ahead of schedule even under the Davis-Bacon Act. The Administration apparently heeded this advice as it announced on October 26 that he act would be reinstated on November 8th (Hulse).

Clearly, what essentially amounts to building a new city in the footprint of much of New Orleans presents a vast array of issues. To create a solid plan will take time and cooperation among many groups. This complete plan has not materialized yet but many moderate groups have started to traverse the waters between rebuilding an identical New Orleans and building nothing at all and ford the ocean between allowing laissez faire capitalism to rebuild and imposing direct control on the corporations and individuals that will rebuild the Big Easy.

Restore the Wetland to Restore the City

The successful rebuilding of New Orleans cannot be complete if we do not look at the dramatic changes in the region that helped allow the damage that Katrina brought. Coastal Louisiana, particularly the southeastern portion, has been undergoing rapid loss of wetland and coastal marshes. This land is what has protected the people of southeastern Louisiana from storms historically. Though we will never know entirely, the results of Katrina may have been different had so much of this land still been there to protect the city. If we are to rebuild a safe New Orleans, it must come with policies that will stop this process and start to restore the lost land.

The fact that coastal wetlands are effective protection against the storm surges of hurricanes is commonly accepted. The loss of these wetlands will lead to the damage that we saw with Katrina. The Federal government agrees, as the Army Corp of Engineers states on the third page (iii) of their Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA), Louisiana Ecosystem Restoration Study: “The capacity of the coastal wetlands to buffer storm surges from tropical storm events will diminish, which will increase the risk of significant damage to oil, gas, transportation, water supply and other private and public infrastructure and agriculture lands and urban areas.” Given the damage risked by the loss of coastal wetlands, it is clear that rebuilding must include the saving and restoration of these wetlands.

In his 1989 paper, *The Role of The Mississippi River in Wetland Loss in Southeastern Louisiana, U.S.A.*, Richard Kesel laid out the case for the fate of the region being in caught up in the sediment load of the lower Mississippi. He did this by following the history of the river and its wetlands through the data of scientific studies. He was able to determine that the river was carrying much less sediment and that this was directly related to the wetland loss. In response, Kesel offers two specific policy solutions. He does not specify hurricanes as his concern, but as shown above, these wetlands are necessary for the protection of New Orleans. His article goes to the root of the problem and offers policy solutions.

Kesel proves in his paper that “The suspended load of the Lower Mississippi River has decreased by almost 80 percent since the latter half of the nineteenth century” (Kesel 191). This is problematic because “Coastal wetlands in southeastern Louisiana have been built by Mississippi River sediments deposited either directly as deltaic deposits or by marine processes reworking the fluvial deposits” (Kesel 183). Kesel claims that the loss of sediment is “largely responsibly” (Kesel 183) for the wetland loss.

Given this cause, the solution to protecting New Orleans must include provisions based on addressing sediment loss. According to Kesel, because so much has been lost already that the natural process can not restore itself simply by returning to historical sediment levels: “Historic natural fluvial processes of overbank flooding and crevassing cannot maintain the marsh surface” (Kesel 191). “A positive balance would not be achieved on the present marsh surface even if the rate of sediment accumulation for the historic period prevailed today” (Kesel 191) Therefore, the solution must require substantially boosting sediment levels to targeted regions of the lower delta. Kesel calls for the diversion of large amounts of overbank sediment to targeted areas where high rates of land loss are occurring (Kesel 191-192). Kesel sees this as the only way to restore the wetlands; it’s also the only way that we can insure the continued safety of the city of New Orleans.

Conclusion

With the images of the destruction caused by the hurricane still fresh, relief efforts to assist the victims are still continuing and rebuilding has only just begun. The many proposals created all could still become reality. However, the Bush administration’s plans are being carried out with the backing of the federal budget. Concurrently, the governor of Louisiana, the mayor of New Orleans, and other local officials all have their own plans and are exerting what power they have to enact them. Despite all these new innovative ideas, the government is not taking much of a different approach towards its rebuilding methods, and property rights remain the same; therefore, it is likely that the new New Orleans and Gulf Coast will not be that different from the old one. Still, we remain hopeful.

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The Political Effects of Hurricane Katrina

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Joel Larson, Anna Goldberg

Summary

Hurricane Katrina can be seen as many things; a natural disaster, an indicator of socio-economic inequality, and a breakdown of the emergency response system, among other things. As such, it is necessary to analyze Katrina by looking at her various parts. One engaging arena for analysis is the political effects of Hurricane Katrina, from her international political ramifications to changes in local voting patterns. The following essay will provide an overview of the way that the storm has changed the political landscape of the Louisiana, the United States, and the world.

The International implications of Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina has made waves beyond those in the Gulf. As the shortcomings of the United States federal response surfaced, countries throughout the world saw a picture of the United States which normally remains concealed from international view. Katrina's effects internationally may be profound, however, only time will tell exactly how this event will change the international political scene.

Concerning U.S. foreign policy, Katrina's exposure of racism and poverty within the United States has undermined the nation's credibility as a successful example of free markets and democracy (Haass). In doing so, the storm may have affected the nation's ability to implement democracy elsewhere, a key tenet of our current foreign policy (Haass). On another front, lack of manpower and resources to respond to Katrina reveals that United States is stretched beyond its means both financially and physically. This may have ramifications for our continued presence in Iraq.

Katrina further exposed vulnerability within the economy of the United States and a lack of preparedness for disaster on our own shores. The blow to energy resources and infrastructure in the Gulf emphasized U.S. over-dependence on fossil fuel resources. The subsequent jump in oil and gas prices also highlighted our lack of timely alternative solutions to fuel shortages, thus presenting a key economic and therefore political weakness to friends and enemies abroad (Haass). Slow government response, moreover, has uncovered the lack of progress in emergency responses, despite the push for increased security after 9/11.

Finally, Katrina has brought to light changing environmental conditions which the U.S. has continuously refused to acknowledge. International critique notes the irony of U.S. unwillingness to adhere to international air quality and emissions reductions to combat global warming. "It is now urgent that the world's leaders take heed of nature's warning, look at the evidence and realize that the climate, on a global scale, is changing. This is already known from scientific reports, but they continue to ignore it, play it down, or not to care about it"(El Columbiano). The damage wrought by Katrina was likely intensified by above average temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico (Gelbspan). The exposure of U.S. vulnerability to the effects of global warming may incite a greater push for changes in our energy policy nationally and internationally.

Partisan Conflict in the Wake of Katrina

Hurricane Katrina has fostered partisan conflict, due to the government's poorly orchestrated response. Public cries of incompetence and indifference to the poor and predominantly African-American population, were exacerbated by some racially-insensitive remarks made by prominent Republicans, including House Speaker Dennis Hastert, who said on September 1 that "It looks like a lot of that place could be bulldozed". Anger among African-American's showed in the September 13th primary elections that occurred nationwide. The increased minority voter turnout demonstrated a feeling of discontent for the Bush Administration and the government overall.

The Democratic offensive launched against the Bush Administration after Katrina was uncharacteristically disciplined and fierce. The Democrats credited the weak response to the disaster to corruption and cronyism that they maintain developed under Republican rule. FEMA's director Michael Brown was immediately targeted for his inexperience, and his failures tainted the entire Bush Administration's response.

Unlike 9/11, when the President saw a dramatic rise in his approval ratings after the attacks, Hurricane Katrina yielded only sharp critiques and Bush's worst approval ratings to date (39%) (CNN/USA Today/Gallop). This discontent has generated resistance to many Republican policy initiatives. The Voter Protection Act, which are set to expire, require identification to vote and would likely disproportionately disenfranchise poor and minority populations. Since Katrina, the Voter Protection Act have received additional support for renewal. In addition, an effort has been made to amend the bankruptcy law passed this summer, which no longer allows for the cancellation of debts and will affect a vast number of Katrina survivors (Bosworth). Most significantly Hurricane Katrina's relief efforts coincided with the largest drop in the public's support for the Iraq war. The absence of a significant National Guard presence due to overseas deployment has illustrated the conflict's drain on the Army's resources and the Katrina effort's logistical failure.

Hurricane Katrina has changed the partisan landscape of Washington and has placed a majority party on the defensive. Using this momentum, The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has decided to develop a unified platform for the 2006 mid-term elections and is developing themes to match the lessons of Katrina, including greater accountability, management, and government aid for the purpose of improving the lives of its citizens

Federal Agencies and Investigations of Hurricane Katrina Disaster

The disaster of Hurricane Katrina has citizens and public officials demanding accountability from the federal government. Former residents of New Orleans are now searching for answers as to why their government did not immediately answer their plea for assistance. To resolve these questions, it is important to examine the structure and history of federal agencies, as well as the congressional commissions and investigations seeking accountability. Understanding the scope of agency's jurisdiction and responsibility can help us to identify how the political fallout of Hurricane Katrina will affect the federal government.

The Department of Homeland Security has the important role of protecting and preserving the United States. The DHS assumes primary responsibility for ensuring that emergency response professionals

are prepared for any situation. On March 1, 2003, FEMA became an integral part of the DHS, reemphasizing the country's need for a collaborative and capable safety and security department. Together, DHS and FEMA have continued to lead the effort to improve federal emergency response. Moreover, FEMA has accepted the responsibility of initiating proactive mitigation activities, training first responders, and managing the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration. Like the DHS, FEMA plays an essential and active role in maintaining national security and protecting citizens' lives and property.

Despite the responsibilities of DHS and FEMA, there were massive failures in the relief efforts and immediate aid response to Hurricane Katrina. Investigations into FEMA's response are ongoing and although government officials and spokesmen have asserted knowledge of the main problem (i.e. disorganization, poor coordination/communication, lack of experienced direction) no concrete allegation exists to explain the ineffective and inevitably harmful results of the failed emergency response. Already, FEMA has seen a change in executive management, as former chief of staff Michael Brown resigned under serious public and political pressure. Brown's credentials and general abilities were brought into unsympathetic question as investigations commenced only days after the disaster. In response to mounting disapproval of his ability to appoint a capable executive director, President Bush appointed R. David Paulison, a former firefighter and former Administrator for the U.S. Fire Administration, to be the acting Director of FEMA. The President and the Republicans are hoping that Paulison will be more effective and accountable, as Republicans cannot defend against any more founded accusations of their ability to staff credible and reliable leaders.

The criticisms of the DHS as well as FEMA come from varied political groups. Civil rights advocate and leader Jesse Jackson stated that, "the decision to change leaders over a failed system is no substantial change" ("Bush Chooses New FEMA Director") This attack on the structural integrity of FEMA and the DHS raises questions of possible reforms to homeland security. Due to the importance of revitalizing public trust and ensuring that organizational disasters such as FEMA's breakdown do not occur again, investigatory commissions are being constructed as to what happened on the federal level of response. Whether this commission will be an independent commission or a congressional committee is still in question. Partisan politics plays an increasingly important role in this process.

As Senator Lieberman avowed, "Hurricane Katrina was the most significant test of our new national emergency preparedness and response system since 9/11 and, it obviously did not pass the test" (Senate Subcommittee). The nation has realized in the outcome of Hurricane Katrina that the federal government and its agencies are still in drastic need of improvements. Although initially the political fallout of the hurricane has been negative, the country can now once again look to rebuild not only the foundations for the city of New Orleans, but the fundamentals of a more secure and safe nation.

State of Louisiana

The state of Louisiana has found itself in an odd situation in the aftermath of Katrina. While many have focused on the responses of the federal and local governments, little has been discussed regarding the effects that the hurricane will have on politics in the state. Those consequences will be both short-term and long-term. While it is possible to make a division between the two, they are integrally linked and those who seek to address problems at this scale need to recognize the effects as such.

Short term effects have come to light during the weeks directly following the hurricane and will continue to arise over the next few months. One results from the control of recovery funding. The conflict occurs when the state requests funding from the federal government, assuming that the state will retain control of the construction. When federal bodies exercise their power to push smaller organizations to the side, this does not happen. This conflict is already taking place with allocations made under the Community Disaster Loan Act of 2005.

Another difficulty will be reaching agreements with local leaders on how to best rebuild after the hurricane. This has already begun to occur between Louisiana governor Kathleen Blanco and New Orleans mayor Ray Nagen (Blanco). One of the mayor's proposed redevelopments is the construction and zoning of a casino corridor in the city, to create a source of tax revenue that could be used for infrastructure and recovery activities. This idea has been met with caution by the governor, who states, "I have never believed that gambling should be the base on which to build our economy"(Blanco). A third impact will be elections for the upcoming midterm and gubernatorial elections. With the diaspora of New Orleans and Louisiana residents, elections scheduled over the next few months will be difficult to run and manage. Clarke-Avery and Gelfand suggest relaxing absentee ballot regulations, postponing federal midterm elections, and relaxing voter identification requirements (Clarke-Avery and Gelfand). In addition, they warn of the possible consequences redistricting of the state is likely to have on the Afro-American population, noting that the heart of this minority group was centered in New Orleans and that that population is now scattered throughout the state and country.

Long-term consequences are many and include the possible reduction of state representation in the House of Representatives. The major population center of Louisiana was New Orleans, and if many of its former residents decide not to return to the state its Congressional representation will decrease. The state and federal governments can authorize a mid-decade census but they cannot use that census to reevaluate congressional districts or reapportion federal representatives (Title 13, United States Code, section 141 E2). The 2010 census, however, can be used for such purposes, and with data collection beginning in two years, New Orleans and the state of Louisiana may still end up being underrepresented. A second long-term difficulty is financial recovery under acts such as the Community Disaster Loan Program signed by President Bush in October. Provisions in these acts have been contested by state officials who are worried about the ability of their constituents to pay back loans issued to them (Community Disaster Loan Program Needs Retooling).

Political effects on the city of New Orleans

After the devastation that Hurricane Katrina brought upon the city of New Orleans, the city will not only have to rebuild its buildings, but also its population. The lack of people returning to New Orleans will ultimately have a large effect on the politics of the area. For a long time, New Orleans has been the democratic stronghold of Louisiana, and New Orleans and its surrounding area was the only part of the state where a majority voted for Democratic Presidential candidates in 2004 and in 2000 (Katrina Impact on Louisiana Politics). New Orleans' democratic leanings have a lot to do with its large black and low-income populations. Generally, people of lower incomes, those with household incomes under \$30,000 a year, tend to vote democratic (Katrina Impact on Louisiana Politics). This statistic is very similar to that of the black population in Louisiana, which generally votes overwhelmingly democratic, at times by more than 90 percent (Katrina Impact on Louisiana Politics). But the lower income and

black communities, who often were the deciding factor in many New Orleans elections, are now those who are either not allowed back into the city, or chose not to return.

In the wake Hurricane Katrina, some parts of New Orleans are unfit to live in, and are being cleaned up slowly. One of these areas of the city is so demolished and infected with dead bodies and dirty water that Mayor Nagen is considering keeping it closed permanently. This area, called the 9th ward, is one of New Orleans' poorest areas. A predominantly black, low-income community, the 9th ward has voted along Democratic lines for years. "Scrapping away the lower ninth would most certainly change the already delicate equations of racial and economic politics... a city that was 67 percent black but is likely to have a smaller black majority once it is resettled"(Connolly). Taking away a densely populated predominately black area, could permanently change the way all of New Orleans votes.

What is interesting about the proposed closing of the 9th ward is that at the same moment that Mayor Nagen is contemplating permanently closing a section of the city; he is also trying desperately to convince residence to return to the city. The mayor of New Orleans, is no longer campaigning for votes, but rather voters. "Mayor C. Ray Nagin hop scotched shelters across the state... to assure Hurricane Katrina evacuees that the city is beginning to operate again and urge them to 'come on home'" (Hsu and Whoriskey). Yet, must people who are choosing not to return to New Orleans are doing so for economic reasons, thinking that it would be more affordable to create a new home where they have been evacuated to. "A Washington post poll of New Orleans evacuees in Houston found many claimed they will relocate in Texas. Many others may not have the financial means to return to the Crescent city" (Crouere). Because of the financial implications which are involved in returning to a battered city like New Orleans, mostly white, upper class citizens will be able to return to New Orleans. In a state where most white people vote republican, the ratio of blacks to whites who return to New Orleans, could change the city's liberal leanings.

With some citizens being blocked and others being too poor to return, the question remains how New Orleans' political leanings will change in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. At the moment, it seems as if the city will lose a lot of its lower-income, and black communities, which most likely will result in a decrease in the democratic majority of the city.

Conclusion

The political effects of hurricane Katrina span a range of political institutions and geographical scales. Unfortunately without the full perspective of time, we will not be able to see the real political impacts of hurricane Katrina for years to come. But it will be interesting to follow the topics which we have covered in this paper. In the years to come we will gain understanding on whether Katrina was the political turn around and catalyst that people made it out to be.

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Cover Page Photograph Citation

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