

Reconstructing New Orleans: Class, Race and the Ownership Society
April 7, 2006

SCALE OF THE DESTRUCTION

Katrina was the most destructive natural disaster in American history (Lessons, Feb)

The Area

93,000 square miles across 138 parishes and counties.

Costly

Katrina is the first disaster, natural or man made to approach \$100 billion mark
Housing (\$67b), consumer durables, business property and government property

Housing

Destroying an estimated 300,000 homes. (Andrew was 80,000 homes)

Debris

118 million cubic yards (Andrew as 20)

Communications

Stripped 38 911 call centers
Knocked out 3 million phone lines
50% of radio stations went off the air
44% of television stations went off the air
2.5 million power outages.

Oil Spills

Ten spills or equivalent to worst release of oil in the nation
Six major spills of over 100,000 gallons reported by LA
7.4 million gallons into Gulf Coast regional water ways (2/3 Valdez in 89)

Toxic Hazards

Storm surge struck:

466 facilities that handle dangerous chemical wastes
31 hazardous waste sites

16 superfund sites (3 of which were flooded)
170 drinking water facilities – destroyed or compromised waste water treatment plants

Human Toll

1330 (NOLA) and 231 in Mississippi
Victims were elderly – 71% in Louisiana over 60 (47% of those over 75)
2,096 reported missing, as of February 17th.
770,000 displaced (largest since Dust Bowl)
End of October, still 4,500 living in shelters

Services (As of January 2006)

85% of schools in New Orleans closed
2/3 of retail food establishments, half of bus routes, half of major hospitals closed.

Evacuated

Largest pre-storm evacuation in the nation's history
Of 1.1 million people over 16 who evacuated in August, 500,000 have not
Returned home, as of late December.

Military -- largest military mobilization on US soil since the Civil War

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER (John Barry)

Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America (John M. Barry)

The flood began as “man against nature. It became one of man against man. For the flood brought with it also a human storm. Honor and money collided. White and black collided. Regional and national power structures collided. The collisions shook America.” (Barry, 17)

The Mississippi Valley

20 % larger than China's Yellow River
Double size of Africa's Nile, India's Ganges
Lies within 41% of continental United States
In parts of 31 states
Only Amazon and Congo have a larger drainage basin.
Measured from head of Missouri tributary – longest in the world

The River itself:

The lower Mississippi begins at Cairo, Illinois at confluence with Ohio
1,100 miles to the Gulf (straight line is 600 miles)
It runs through flat land... 3 to 2 inch drop/mile.

Turbulence:

1. **Sinuosity** generates enormous forces – its “Ss” – collide with the banks.
During floods it can move from 9 mph to 18 mph. (39)
2. **Below Sea-Level** Last 450 miles: River bed lies below Sea-level. 15 feet at Vicksburg and 170 Feet at New Orleans. There is no reason for the bottom of the river to move to the sea or flow at all, but the top does! -- Ever breaking internal wave.
3. **Sediment:** -- A average of 2 million tons/day into Gulf.

Question how to Control Flooding

Build Levees or combine that with reservoirs, cut-offs, outlets.
The levees-only policy won – the river scours itself and carry the load
Then the 1927 Flood:

The Flood of 1927 (on the Lower Mississippi)

30 feet of water where almost a million (931,000) people lived.
27,000 square miles flooded, equal to New England in size.
330,000 people rescued.
Red Cross ran 154 concentration camps in seven states with a total of 325,554 people mainly African Americans.
Dynamiting of the River below New Orleans (St. Bernard Parish)
Scoured the Atchafalaya (main distributary) and it wants more! (286)

THE REMAINING PROBLEM

The Old River Control Structure (between Naches and Baton Rouge) and 30 miles south the Morganza floodway. **And the Atchafalya**

The Atchafalaya:

By volume discharge, one of the 3rd or 4th largest rivers.
Has a 3 to one slope advantage over the Mississippi
Offers a shorter route to the Gulf : 140 miles, half the main stream distance
By the 1950s it was claiming up to one third of the mainstream flow
1950 geologists predicted by 1975 the shift would be unstoppable
Morgan City would be Pompeii
The new mouth would be 150 miles from the old

The Old River Control Project

Authorized in 1954, started in 1963.

Corps quote: “The Old River Control Structures, located two hundred miles above New Orleans on the Mississippi River, prevent the Mississippi from changing course by controlling flows diverted into the Atchafalaya.” (Mc,12)

Old River Control Structure now controls the flow between the rivers.

The Atchafalaya has been separated from the Mississippi since 1963.

The 1973 flood almost destroyed the structure – flowed under this structure

Katrina could have done it also

SOUTHERN LOUISIANA (South of New Orleans)

Sediment and Wetland (Tidwell)

Over 7000 years, Mississippi created 6000 square miles of wetland
By the 1880s.

Less than a century, one third (1800 square miles) has disappeared

Lost of wetland

Net loss of Louisiana is 50 square miles/year/ 25 square/year

1930-2000. 1.2 million acres, a Delaware

In 100 years, Louisiana

Katrina and Rita: 75,000 acres (Manhattan and Brooklyn combined)

Land to water conversion fastest in the world

Threatens cultures (Cajun, Vietnamese, Filipino)

Threatens industries – Fishing – Oysters, Shrimp and Crab – loss of habitat
Oysters – more than any other state. 10m pounds/year

Threatens habitat (birds, etc)

353 species of birds reside here at some point

20% of all ducks in North America over winter (4m)

Mississippi Flyover – Migratory birds from North to South

Threatens New Orleans (no barrier, storm surges)

A mile of marsh reduces storm surge one inch

Marsh disappears at rate of 25 square miles per year

Marsh of 2.7 miles absorbs a foot of hurricane storm surge

Distance to New Orleans (8 ft below sea level) was 50 miles in 1906
Now it is 20 miles and shrinking fast.

Causes

1. Levee only policy: Diverting Mississippi Sediment over the Continental Shelf
On average – 2 million tons/day over the Continental Shelf
2. Oil Industry

Began in the 1930s as the Levee only policy became enforced.

18 % of US annual oil supplies (produced or processed here)
24% of US natural gas supplies – largest natural gas pipeline hub

Offshore Oil Port (18 miles offshore) unloads 15% of nation's foreign oil

3. Canals

10,000 miles of oil and gas canals to hook up wells

Canal built at 300 feet and widens to 600 feet in five years

No sediment – canals keep growing Destroy wetlands

4. Extraction - regional de pressurization (US Geological Survey)

4000 platforms and drilling rigs off the coast of Louisiana that service 35,000 wells. 80% of all offshore oil platforms in the US are here off Louisiana.

5. Mississippi River Gulf-Outlet

Corps built Ms River-Gulf Outlet – saves 40 miles over marsh to Gulf Mr. Go – now largely ignored and expanding – 3 x its original width

Became funnel for storm surge that came into Industrial Canal

6. Fastest sinking areas (Plaquemines Parish) losing elevation at one inch/yr. Elevation (NOAA) standards determined qualifies for fed. Flood insurance

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS: NEW ORLEANS AND ENVIRONS
(Use maps of New Orleans)

Drowning in Poverty for a Long Time

POOR, REGIONALLY SEGREGATED WITH CONCENTRATED POVERTY

Socio-Economic Statistics (2000 Census)

The Two States:

Mississippi 2nd to Washington, DC in poverty rate
Louisiana is the 2nd poorest state.
Mississippi ranks 50th in quality health care. LA is 49th

New Orleans

2nd highest concentration of poverty in the nation – 37.7%
Renters were 43.4% of the city
68% are African Americans
57% Elderly with disabilities

Southern parishes: communities top 30% poverty rates.

Automobiles

9% of households no car or 1 in 4.
4th rank out of 297 metro areas of household without car access
38% of population children and elderly;
48% of households without cars are children and elderly.

New Orleans: Urban/Suburban Color Shift

37% Black in 1960
43% Black in 1970
55% black in 1980
62% Black in 1990
67% Black in 2000

Jefferson Parish	69.8% White.	22.9% Black
St. Bernard Parish	88.2% White	7.6% Black
St. Tammany Parish	87.0% White	9.9% Black

The Lower Ninth Ward (as concentrated poverty) (Dyson)

Last of city to be developed. On its west is the Industrial Canal; east is parish line. North is Southern Railroad and Florida Avenue Canal. South is the river.

Late 50s bridge, the 2nd bridge, the Claiborne Avenue Bridge brought retail stores on the avenue, but Hurricane Betsy in 1965 killed 81 people and flooded 80% of Lower Ninth. In the 70s redevelopment federal help.

Majority of 20,000 were black, 36% lived below poverty line. (D.12)

Lower 9th Ward (McKinney)

14% were senior citizens

14% were handicapped

60% owned their own homes

HURRICANES: WARNINGS, KATRINA AND FLOODING

NATURAL DISASTER OR ABANDONMENT (DYSON)

Warnings (and willful ignorance (Dyson. 78-80)

- 1998 LOUISIANA COASTAL CONSERVATION REPORT. Land loss catastrophic. Last 50 years, 40 square miles/year.
- 2001 **FEMA** report warned that a catastrophic hurricane in New Orleans ‘was among the three likeliest ... disasters facing this country.’ – Others terror in NYC; Quake in SF

POPULAR MECHANICS “New Orleans is Sinking.” Given storm surge and Coastal development, the big one will produce “staggering amount of damage”

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN a disaster waiting to happen – major hurricane will swamp city under 20ft, killing thousands.

HOUSTON CHRONICLE – New Orleans faces Doomsday scenario. Strand 250,000, kill one in ten left behind, drowned city in 20 feet of water – with thousands landing in Houston!

- 2002 **June. WASHING AWAY.** Times Picayune. “there wouldn’t be much for Residents to come home to.” – Five part series.
- 2004 **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC.** “Gone with the Water” –described a storm that turned out to be Katrina.
- 2004 **HURRICANE PAM:** FEMA hired IEM, Inc of Baton Rouge to run 8 day Emergency response drill to fictional killer hurricane featuring computer

Model of Category 4 hitting New Orleans. 130 miles. Overwhelmed levees And floodwalls. Evacuation of 1 million who needed shelter for months. 600,000 buildings destroyed. Helicopter evacuation of superdome & 15 foot flooding.

2nd part of the plan on how to deal with problems not done. \$\$ cut.

KATRINA THE STORM AND SUBSEQUENT FLOODING

2005 Hurricane Season (June 1st to November 30th.) (Watermark article)

160 Hurricanes in Louisiana since 1559

Record: By July 5th four named storms

Record: By July 12th five named storms

Record: By July 31st – There were seven named storms

27 named storms. 15 were hurricanes (a record)

Three Category five (usually that many in a decade on North Atlantic) a record

National Hurricane Center (December 2005) - (Tropical Cyclone Report)

East of New Orleans

Center about 20 miles east of downtown New Orleans

Winds over New Orleans and Lake P probably less than Category 3

Storm Surge as high as 27 feet near Hancock, MS

Penetrated 6 miles inland and up to 12 miles up bay and rivers

Crossed Interstate 10 in many locations

10 feet as far east as Mobile, Alabama.

On the Western Front

Storm surge into northeastern shore from Slidell to Mandeville. LA

Over-topped and breached levees on Monday the 29th

17th Street Canal early on Monday. London Canal on Monday night. 11 feet

80% of city flooded up to 20 feet within a day or so after landfall.

More flooding after Rita

October 11th, 43 days later, Corps said all floodwaters had been removed.

Why Massive Storm Surge Size of storm – hurricane winds 75 east of center

Plus, already generated northward swells as Category 5. 55 ft wave-largest ever

KATRINA. FLOODING, RESPONSE TIMELINE

Thursday	August 25 th	07:00 pm	Landfall eastern Florida
Friday	August 26 th	11:30 am 05:00 pm	Category Two Category Three Governor Blanco Declares State of Emergency
Saturday	August 27 th	05:00 pm	Blanco to Bush – Fed State of Emergency Blanco ordered counter flow Mayor Nagin – Voluntary Evacuation \ No passengers on Amtrak at 8:30 pm Max Mayfield called both Nagin/Blanco
Sunday	August 28 th	01:00 am 08:00 am 10:00 am	Category Four Category Five 161 mph National Weather Service warns levees Mayor Nagin: Mandatory. Hitchhike or Superdome Meals for 15,000 for three days at Dome. Bush, Brown, Chertoff briefed on possible Levee failures (McKinney)
Monday	August 29 th	03:00 am 06:10 am 08:14 am 09:00 am 10:00 am 06:00 pm	Breach at 17 th Street Canal (300 ft) Landfall at Buras, LA as Category Four Weather Service: Industrial canal breached Storm surge into Industrial Canal, barge Lower 9 th , St Bernard Parish flooding Brown asked Chertoff for 1000 HSD staff Agencies knew of breach, but no action 80% of the New Orleans flooded

			Chertoff to Atlanta on avian flu issue
		Night	Rumsfeld at Padres game in San Diego
Tuesday	August 30 th	11:00 am 11:24 am	Bush gives speech on Iraq, mentioned K Bush would stop vacation two days early. Chertoff: Incident of National Significance
Wednesday	August 31 st	Morning Morning	Bush Video conference in Crawford, Tx Bush Fly-by on way to D.C
		Nighttime	Condi Rice on Broadway for Monty Python Chertoff declares Brown PFO 100,000 people in Dome and Center Military sets up taskforce for Katrina
Thursday	September 1 st		Speaker of the House, Hastert ..”it looks like a lot of the place could be bulldozed.” (91) Nagin on WWL-AM – no more goddam Press conferences! Condi Rice shoe shopping & tennis with Monica Seles.
Friday	September 2	4:35 am	Chemical Explosions east of French Quarter Bush prepares for trip to NOLA. 6 hrs With 50 firefighters. Mobile (Lott’s Home), Then New Orleans – 17 th St. Canal. Blanco issues 2 orders. Suspends medical Licensing. Authorizes state Homeland To drive buses. Memo of “Mutually Exclusive Chains Of Command” (federal marshal law) Presented top Gov. Blanco Congress passes \$10.5 billion relief package

National Guard arrives in full force
Gov. Blanco issues shoot to kill to Guard
Houston Astrodome full. Reliant Center

Saturday September 3

Superdome evaluation completed
25,000 still at convention center

Blanco creates fund.
Says no to Bush's Exclusive Memo
Hires Clinton's FEMA Director

Bush on his regular radio. 40,000
Total troops to be on the ground.
Rumsfeld and Rice tour New Orleans

Monday September 5th

Bush returns to New Orleans.
17th Street Canal plugged

October 14th

244 billion gallons of water removed
By Army Corps into the Lake.

Where are People Now? (January 2006 BNOB)

Applications for Assistance

Louisiana	38%	523,000
Mississippi	28%	383,000
Texas	11%	198,000
Alabama\	8.1%	109,000
Georgia	2.6%	36,000
Florida	2.3%	31,000
Tennessee	1.1%	15,000

70% -- within 200 miles.

HOUSING (Recovering States)

FEMA and Small Business Association loans in accessible and inadequate

For most poor households. \$9.4 billion in supplemental funds to FEMA

State assistance excludes those with fewest resources, renters and lowest income homeowners in their restrictions on CDBG fed funds.

Mississippi: Homeowners must have had insurance
Louisiana: Homeowners without Insurance: 30% penalty

Only people living in owner occupied housing are eligible. CDBG funds explicitly not for Renters of rental property.

300,000 homes destroyed. (10x more than Andrew in 92)
1.8 million housing units were damaged

112,340 with no insurance in Louisiana
35,000 of 50,000 flooded homes in MS had no flood insurance
750,000 households still displaced. Housing must come first.

Rental assistance from FEMA is growing. As of Feb. 2006,
714,949 households received help. Delinquency rates on mortgages growing from 8.1% to 25.7%.

Renters

MS/LA have allocated \$11 billion emergency CDBG funds to rebuild Housing (Bush requested \$4.2 b more for Louisiana)

45% of 300,000 homes destroyed lived in by renters (34% nationally)
In New Orleans – renters live in more than half damaged homes.

No provisions for rebuilding rental units in state plans

Waveland. Mom evacuates. Returns. Home she rented for 10 yrs gone
She got FEMA trailer in December, but would not put it on site
She purchased a site in Waveland, FEMA wouldn't move the trailer

Sediment Sludge (Wilma Subra – Environmental Action Network)

Katrina picked up contaminated sediment, carried over land and spread it.
Rita spread more. Canal breeches spread more. It is very available. Kick up

Enters the lungs – persistent respiratory problems. The Katrina cough.
Over time, this material will travel

1/8 inch of “visibly distinct sediment” contaminants covering most ground
surfaces after removal of floodwaters from New Orleans and environment (56)

The EPA agrees, but says no long term health risk, therefore no removal
Both FEMA and EPA refused to distribute LEAN kits to returning residents.

GOVERNMENTAL REPORTS AND RESPONSES

Federal Response Hurricane Katrina	Assistant to President
Failure of Initiative	House Select Report
Louisiana Recovery Authority	Governor Blanco
Bring New Orleans Back Commission	Mayor Nagin
Supplemental Statement to House	Cynthia McKinney