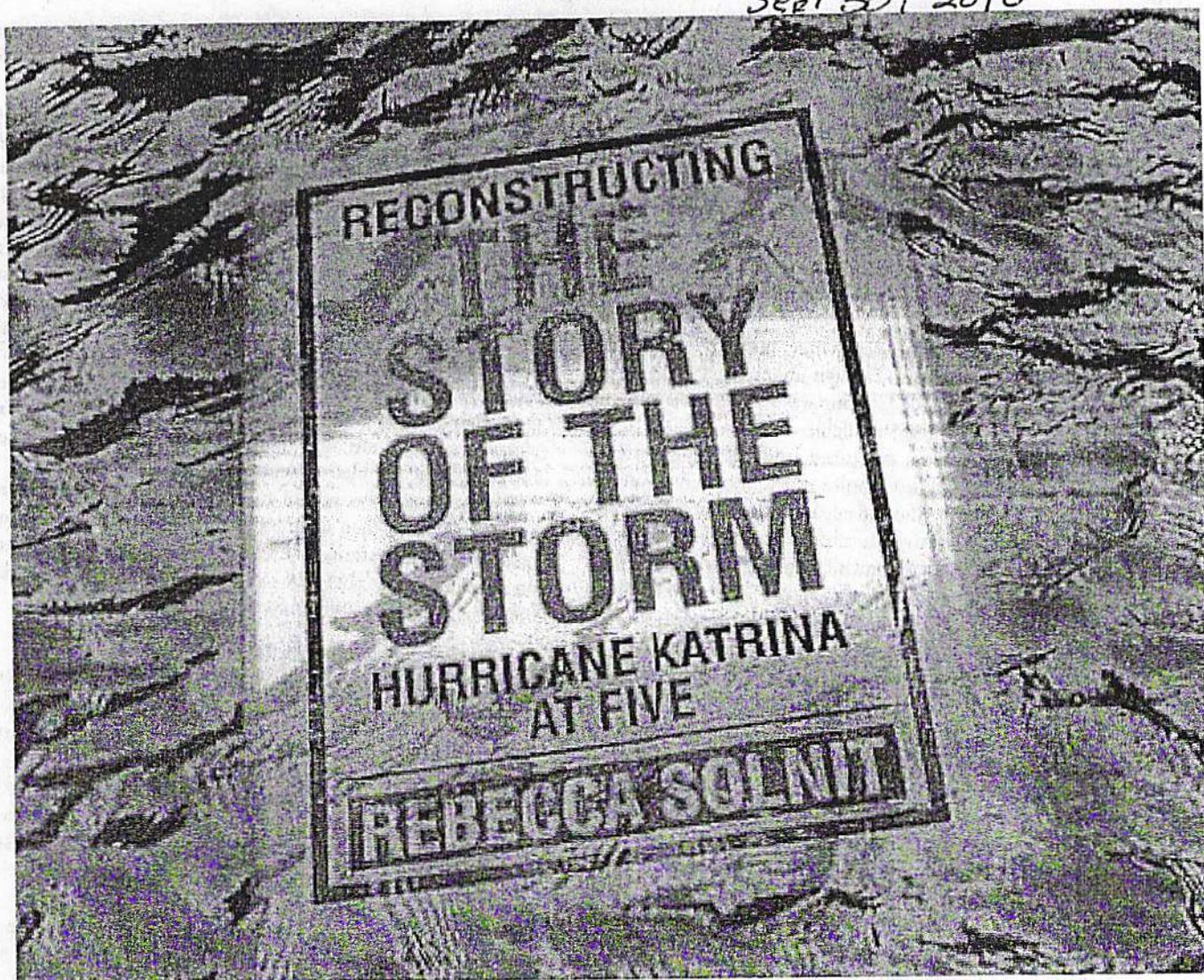




Five years later we're still coming to terms with what happened in New Orleans on August 29, 2005, and thereafter, struggling to get the facts straight and to figure out what it said about race, disaster and even human nature. How we remember Hurricane Katrina is also how we'll prepare for future disasters, so getting the story right matters for survival as well as for justice and history.

In August 2005, 90,000 square miles of the Gulf Coast were devastated; more than 1,800 people died; 182,000 homes were severely damaged in New Orleans alone, where 80 percent of the city was flooded. Hundreds of thousands went into an exile from which some will never return. A great and justified bitterness arose in African-Americans who were demonized by the media and the government and who felt that they had not been treated as citizens or even as fellow human beings. An African-American woman at an antiwar rally in the nation's capital a month later carried a sign saying, "No Iraqis left me on a roof to die."

The widely told initial version of Hurricane Katrina was a lie and a slander, based on rumors and racism, and it's been falling apart steadily ever since. For the past two years an antithetical version has been overtaking it, one that tells the real story of

who went crazy and who was in danger in the days after the hurricane. It has gained more ground than I ever imagined it would, and the history books may yet get this one right.

When the Media Went Mad

The story of Hurricane Katrina as originally constructed served authoritarianism, racism and a generally grim view of human nature. It was first told hysterically, as though New Orleans had been hit by a torrent of poor black people or had become, as Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times* put it then, "a snake pit of anarchy, death, looting, raping, marauding thugs." An overwrought *Huffington Post* columnist even spread rumors of cannibalism, while many major media outlets repeated rumors of snipers firing on helicopters. These rumors were never substantiated, but they interfered with the rescue operations nonetheless.

The gist of these stories was that in the absence of authority, people went berserk; the implied solution was the reimposition of authority—armed, ruthless and intense. Heavily armed Blackwater mercenaries were dispatched to New Orleans, where, as Jeremy Scahill reported in this magazine, they shot at

citizens with little fear of repercussion. While the focus was on young men of color as the peril, police and white vigilantes went on a murder spree that was glossed over at the time.

The AP reported on September 1, 2005, "Mayor Ray Nagin ordered 1,500 police officers to leave their search-and-rescue mission Wednesday night and return to the streets of the beleaguered city to stop looting that has turned increasingly hostile." Only two days after the catastrophe struck, while thousands were still stuck on roofs, in attics, on overpasses, on second and third stories and in isolated buildings on high ground in flooded neighborhoods, the mayor chose protecting property over human life. There was no commerce, no electricity, no way to buy badly needed supplies. Though unnecessary things were taken, much of what got called looting was the stranded foraging for survival by the only means available.

The mainstream media fractured under the pressure of reporting such a huge and complex story. Journalists on the ground often wrote empathic and accurate stories and broke out of their "objective" roles to advocate for the desperate and rail against systemic failures. Meanwhile, further away, credulous television, online and print reporters spread lurid rumors about baby rapists and mass murders and treated minor and sometimes justified thefts as the end of civilization. They used words like "marauding" and "looting" as matches, struck over and over until they got a conflagration of opinion going.

They, along with government officials at all levels, created the overheated atmosphere of fear and hostility that turned the task of rescuing stranded people into an attempt to control a captive population. New Orleans became a prison city; the trapped citizens became prisoners without rights. Those in the Superdome, for example, were prevented from leaving the stinking, scorching zone as people dropped from heat and dehydration. The literal prisoners, adult and juvenile, in the New Orleans jails were abandoned to thirst, hunger and rising floodwaters. Hospitals packed with the dying were not allowed to evacuate; citizens were not allowed to walk out of New Orleans on the bridge to Gretna because the sheriff on the other side was there with cronies and guns, keeping them out.

The stories of social breakdown were quietly retracted in September and October 2005, but the damage had been done. A great many found new confirmation of the old stereotypes that in times of crisis people—particularly poor and nonwhite people—revert to a Hobbesian war of each against each.

The Crimes That Counted

If you believe what happened after Hurricane Katrina was all about the masses running amok, then the proper response is pretty much the vigilante one: arm yourself, treat your neighbor as your enemy, shoot first, ask questions later. But the evidence suggests that the people running amok were the ones who were supposed to protect the public. They were the sheriff on that bridge to Gretna, the corrupt and overwrought policemen who shot unarmed civilians and Louisiana Governor Kathleen

Blanco, who said, "I have one message for these hoodlums: these troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary, and I expect they will."

Real people got caught in the crossfire. Take Donnell Herrington, a 33-year-old former Brink's truck driver who stayed behind to help his grandparents and who later rescued many others by boat from their flooded housing project. Herrington was walking to the evacuation site in Algiers Point when a white vigilante with a shotgun attempted to murder him. Herrington was shot in the neck, hit so hard the blast lifted him off the ground, and then shot again in the back as he tried to escape. His friend and cousin, who were walking with him, were also injured by the buckshot and then chased down by racists who terrorized them. An African-American couple in the neighborhood drove Herrington to the nearest hospital, where a surgeon stitched him up. According to that surgeon, Herrington nearly bled to death from pellets to his jugular.

His assailants were part of an organized militia that presumed any and all black men were looters and decided that they were justified in administering the ad hoc death penalty for suspected or potential petty theft. No one reported on these vigilante crimes in the first round of coverage.

The Past Is Equipment for the Future

The July 15 federal indictment of Roland Bourgeois Jr. is stamped FELONY, and the charges at the top of the page are "conspiracy, civil rights violations, obstruction of justice, false statements and firearms violations." What that means is that this white man allegedly tried to murder Herrington and his companions because they were black, because they were walking through his neighborhood and because in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina there weren't a lot of rules, and those who should've been enforcing them had gone mad.

"It was the plan and purpose of the conspiracy that defendant Roland J. Bourgeois Jr. and others known and unknown to the grand jury would use force and threats of force to keep African-Americans from using the public streets of Algiers Point in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina," says the indictment. Bourgeois and other vigilantes were situated between the Coast Guard evacuation point and the rest of the city, picking off people who were just trying to get out. "Anything coming up this street darker than a paper bag is getting shot," the indictment charges Bourgeois with saying. He is the first, but may not be the last, of the suburban vigilantes to be indicted this summer.

These indictments are part of a package, along with two sets of indictments of police by Eric Holder's Justice Department, that came down just in time; the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina is also the statute of limitations for some of these charges.

The catastrophe's fifth anniversary is becoming an opportunity for a major re-examination of the colossal disaster uncovered by journalist A.C. Thompson's award-winning reporting, with a new Spike Lee documentary, *If God Is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise*, and a *Frontline* documentary, both set to air in late August. I never thought I'd see the day. Early in 2007, when I started looking into what happened in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it pretty quickly became clear to me that though the city had

Rebecca Solnit wrote about Hurricane Katrina and four other major disasters in depth in her book A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster, just out in paperback.

swarmed with journalists, none of them wanted to touch the crimes Bourgeois and his cronies had committed.

The evidence these journalists overlooked was everywhere. In September 2005, Malik Rahim, the ex-Black Panther who co-founded Common Ground Relief and who lives in the Algiers neighborhood, told Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!* on camera about vigilante murders of black men. He showed her the body of a dead black man lying under a sheet of corrugated metal, bloated and decaying in the heat. Herrington testified about his near-murder in Lee's documentary *When the Levees Broke*, broadcast in 2006 on the first anniversary of the storm. At the end of the segment, he takes off his shirt so that the buckshot wounds welting his torso are visible, as is the long scar on his neck.

Some of the evidence I came across wasn't so obvious, but it wasn't hard to find either. I heard from staff at the Common Ground Health Clinic that vigilantes and their associates who came in for care confessed or boasted of crimes. Rahim gave me a DVD of a little-seen documentary in which some of the Algiers Point militia boasted of shooting black men. A few others told me stories that corroborated that the vigilantes had kept a body count. I acquired this evidence without really trying, while pursuing other stories entirely, which made me wonder what was up with the hundreds of reporters who'd come to New Orleans.

On March 1, 2007, I wrote to the best investigative journalist I knew, my friend A.C. Thompson, "Hey, I'm sitting on a kind of wild story, and I'd love to talk to you about it." He'd never been to New Orleans, and it wasn't until *The Nation* and The Nation Institute's Investigative Fund took an interest that A.C. got dispatched to the city. More than three years and dozens of trips to New Orleans later, A.C. has turned the city and the story of Katrina upside down. Without his work, a lot of people would've gotten away with murder and attempted murder.

A.C. uncovered a story no one in the media had touched—the police killing of Henry Glover, first reported on in these pages in December 2008 ["Body of Evidence," January 5, 2009]. He also joined forces with *Times-Picayune* reporter Laura Maggi, who reopened the Danziger Bridge case, in which police shot several unarmed African-Americans after the storm, including a middle-aged mother who had her forearm blown off, a mentally disabled man who was shot in the back and killed, and a teenage boy, also killed (several others were wounded).

Justice Department officials have charged eleven policemen for the Danziger Bridge case and five for the Glover case, and most recently sent warning letters to two more for the post-Katrina case in which Danny Brumfield was shot in the back and killed. In total they've opened up six civil rights cases for New Orleans police crimes post-Katrina, and a federal probe of the department is under way. With any luck, it's the foundation of the real story of what went down after the storm, as well as reform of what A.C. tells me is the most corrupt and incompetent police department in the country.

Truth Emergencies

Truth may be the first casualty of war; it's certainly the most important equipment to have on hand in a disaster. There's the practical truth about what's going on: Is the city on fire? Is there an evacuation effort on the other side of town? And then there's

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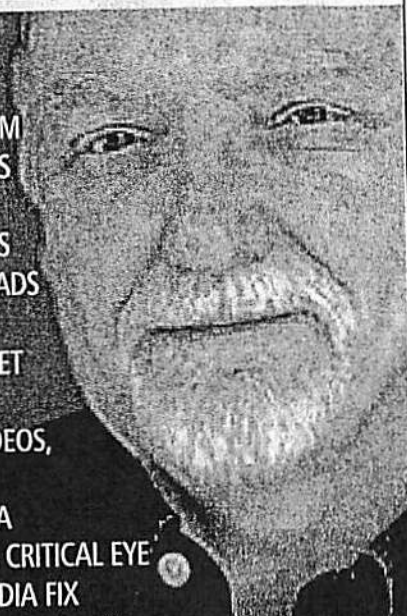
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the larger truth: What goes on in disasters? Who falls apart and who behaves well? Whom should you trust? Most ordinary people behave remarkably well when their city is ripped apart by disaster. They did in San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake; in New Orleans during Hurricane Betsy in 1965; in Mexico City after the 1985 earthquake; in New York City in the aftermath of 9/11; and in most disasters in most times and places.

Those in power, on the other hand, often run amok. They did in San Francisco in 1906, when an obsessive fear that private property would be misappropriated led to the mayor's shoot-to-kill proclamation; a massive military and national guard on the streets; and the death of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of civilians. Much like New Orleans ninety-nine years later, those who claimed to be protecting society were themselves the ones who were terrorizing and shooting. Earlier this year, Haitians were subjected to a similar rampage of what the disaster sociologists Lee Clarke and Caron Chess call "elite panic." For example, 15-year-old Fabienne Cherisma was shot to death in late January in Port-au-Prince for taking some small paintings from a shop in ruins, one of many casualties of the institutional obsession with protecting property instead of rescuing the trapped, the suffering and the needy.

Surviving the new era, in which climate change is already causing more, and more intense, disasters, means being prepared—with the truth. The truth is that in a disaster, ordinary people behave well overall; your chances of surviving a major disaster depend in part on the health and strength of your society going into it. Even so, countless individuals under corrupt governments, in New Orleans, in Mexico City, in Port-au-Prince, often rise to the occasion with deeply altruistic, creative and brave responses. These are the norm. The savagery of elite panic is the exception, but one that costs lives.

Pieces of the Picture

After Hurricane Katrina, neoliberals and Bush provided a near-perfect example of Naomi Klein's theory of disaster capitalism. Everything from supplying buses for evacuation to tarps for torn-up roofs became an opportunity for Bush supporters to reap financial rewards. The city's public housing was torn down; the schools became charter schools, many along military lines. Told this way, what happened was pure loss, for the left as well as for the poor (though the schools before Katrina had been a mess). But that's not all that Katrina triggered.

During the storm and its aftermath, far more people did heroic things, and these, perhaps even more than the crimes Thompson reported on, are the key missing stories of the storm. Before he was shot, Herrington was one of hundreds who got into boats and commenced rescuing people stranded in the floodwater. Some in surrounding communities sneaked past authorities to start rescuing people in the drowned city. Young gang members kept mothers of small children and babies and elderly people provisioned. People banded together in schools and other surviving structures and formed improvisational communities whose members watched out for one another.

As days turned into weeks and then months, volunteers from around the country came to feed the displaced and rebuild the

city. Others took evacuees into their homes and helped them start new lives. Middle-aged Mennonites, young anarchists, musicians, members of the Rainbow Family of hippie communards, environmentalists, Baptists, Catholics, college students on spring break, ex-Black Panthers, movie stars, Habitat for Humanity carpenters, nurses and nearly every other kind of citizen showed up to save New Orleans. The outpouring of generosity and empathy was extraordinary. New Orleans was saved by love.

I first visited the city post-Katrina six months after the storm, and it looked as though almost nothing had happened since. The place was wrecked. Houses were smashed or shoved by floodwater into the middle of the street; many had the spray-painted markings of search-and-rescue teams, some reporting bodies or pets found inside. Cars were flipped over or propped up on fences and trees. Whole neighborhoods were abandoned and pitch-black at night, because even the streetlights were dead; and in places like the Lower Ninth Ward, returning residents had to make street signs by hand.

The place could have died; its fate was up in the air. It still is—with coastal erosion and rising seas, the petroleum industry's

Most people behave remarkably well when their city is ripped apart by disaster. Those in power, on the other hand, often run amok.

poisons, the troubled economy and corroded political system that were the city's problems before Katrina hit. Crime has risen, and New Orleans is a violent place. But it's also a vibrant place again. By some estimates more than a million volunteers have come through the city. Some who intended to come for weeks found they couldn't leave: they'd fallen in love with the gregarious sweetness of so many Orleanians and with the chance to make a difference. They've added their commitment to altruism and civil society to the city's mix. New Orleans always had a flourishing public sphere of festivals and street life and a private sphere of social organizations, but there has been a rise in civic engagement, in public meetings, neighborhood groups and focused organizations dealing with housing, the environment, immigrants' rights and more. Housing is scarcer and more expensive, but wages have risen since the labor pool shrank. New environmental initiatives are on the table or being realized.

Then there's the catastrophe's impact on national politics. The Bush administration's outrageous incompetence and indifference prompted a hitherto intimidated press and nation to begin criticizing not just the failed response but the Iraq War and the administration overall. The levees broke and so did the bulwarks that protected the president. As Bush's own pollster put it, "Katrina to me was the tipping point. The president broke his bond with the public.... I knew when Katrina—I was like, Man, you know, this is it, man. We're done." The racism and poverty that the catastrophe revealed laid the groundwork for newcomer Barack Obama to ride to victory in 2008. Which is how we got Eric Holder, the attorney general who's taken a direct role in some of the federal indictments in New Orleans this summer.

The very subject of recovery is a complicated one for New Orleans. After 9/11 New York pretty much wanted to get back to where it had been—a thriving, functioning city (albeit one with plenty of poverty and injustice). No one thought New Orleans should get back to what it had been, and the disaster became an opportunity for the city to reinvent itself in various ways. That process continues, and where it goes is anyone's guess. It still depends on the dedication of volunteers and citizens, some of whom are returning, putting their lives back together in what may be, by some intangible measures of joy and belonging, America's richest city, even if it's the poorest by others.

A disaster unfolds a little like a revolution. No one is in charge, and anything is possible. The efforts of elites, often portrayed as rescue or protection, are often geared more toward preserving the status quo or seizing power. Sometimes they win; sometimes they don't. Katrina brought many kinds of destruction and a little rebirth, including the spread of green construction projects, new community organizations and perhaps soon, thanks to the work of Thompson and others, some long overdue justice for police crimes. It's too soon to tell what it will all mean in a hundred years, but it's high time to start telling the real story of what happened in those terrible first days and weeks. ■

Crossing the Line

Women on the US-Mexico border are seeking out alternatives to embattled abortion clinics.

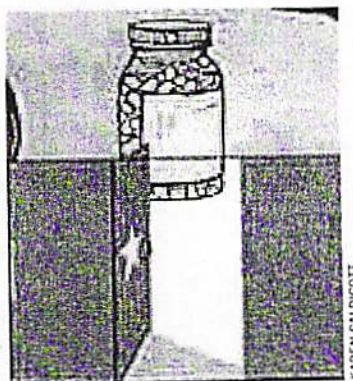
by LAURA TILLMAN

Brownsville, Texas

Diana, a slight, 30-year-old office manager wearing a smart blouse and pencil skirt, has a tired note in her voice. In the privacy of her office, she has spent the afternoon discussing an event in her life that she previously never recounted to anyone. She is talking about her abortion. Or maybe her miscarriage. She's glad she never has to know which.

A single mother of two boys, Diana was unemployed and in the hospital when she began to suspect she was pregnant. It was December 2006, and she had missed her period for two months. Her doctor conducted a urine test, which came back negative, but when Diana still hadn't gotten her period in January, she started to panic. She knew it wasn't the right time for another baby. She wasn't working and had been suffering severe symptoms of brittle diabetes, a rare form of diabetes that requires frequent hospital visits and brings bouts of depression. She felt unstable and wasn't able to afford her medications. "I thought, If I am pregnant, I want to take something to not be pregnant," she says.

For most women in the United States, this would mean a trip to a doctor or abortion clinic. But where Diana lives, in Brownsville, Texas, just north of the border, Mexican pharmacies are only a few miles away. Items said to be abortifacients—including pills, teas and shots—are well-known to be cheap and accessible just across the bridge. Misoprostol, a pill that makes up half of the two-drug combination prescribed for medical abortions in the United States, is easy to purchase over the counter in Mexico because of its effectiveness in treating ulcers. When used alone and taken correctly, it will produce a miscar-



riage between 80 and 85 percent of the time.

Meanwhile, the closest abortion clinic, in Harlingen, is some thirty miles away. That might not sound like much, but without a car it is difficult to make the trip discreetly. This was one of several reasons Diana didn't want to go to the clinic. It was also prohibitively expensive: potentially more than \$900, because she was already a few months into her pregnancy. Also, she was scared that the doctor wouldn't want to operate because of her diabetes. Finally, Diana had been there once before to escort a friend. The whole

time she'd felt like she was being judged by the strangers around her; she imagined their eyes on her as she sat waiting.

Widespread opposition to abortion in the Rio Grande Valley may not be obvious at first: it is not discussed in polite conversation. But spend a little time here and the bumper stickers that cry out from cars, the messages that dot billboards on the expressway and the rhetoric inside many churches resoundingly confirm an antiabortion message. There are accessible clinics, and the procedure is legal. But within many women's homes, their communities, their churches and their minds, a trip to the abortion clinic amounts to a damnable transgression. In fact, abortion is so stigmatized, many women don't even realize it is legal. Terri Lievanos, who worked for years as an education coordinator for Planned Parenthood of Brownsville, says that this is true even among women born in the United States: "They come in here and say, 'Wait a second, abortion is legal?' They've only heard it discussed in a negative way."

For Diana, who was born in Mexico and raised in a deeply Catholic household, the prospect of being seen at a clinic was more emotionally taxing than the risk of taking a mystery drug and enduring the consequences at home by herself. A friend told her that he knew where to buy an abortion pill—most likely Misoprostol, although Diana says she doesn't know its name or what he paid—and drove across the border to pick it up for her.

Laura Tillman is a freelance journalist and photographer who was a staff reporter for the Brownsville Herald from 2007 to 2010. This article was reported in collaboration with the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute.

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New Orleans Forsaken

Gary Younger | August 31, 2006

"We are what we pretend to be," said Kurt Vonnegut. "So we must be careful what we pretend to be." Up until late August of last year, the United States pretended to be the leader of the Free World—a nation that derived its leadership from its military power and derived its freedom from its meritocratic impulses. Indeed, the two were interlinked. Everyone who worked hard enough could get on here; that was not just the philosophy that made America what it was but the basic worldview worth exporting at the barrel of a gun, if necessary. Then came Katrina. And for a short moment, the pretense was over.

When the levees were breached, Lake Pontchartrain poured into the bowl of New Orleans and washed up the America that most Americans had tried to forget. Like Rodney King, Katrina told truths that were both long known and long denied and put them on prime time. This was reality TV at its most compelling and sickening. To be in the Crescent City the week after was to see what Haiti would look like with skyscrapers—the appearance of wealth, power and order towering over the reality of poverty, helplessness and chaos. America clearly did not have to go abroad to find the developing world, let alone fight it. It was right here. Rates of black infant mortality in Louisiana are on a par with those of Sri Lanka; black male life expectancy is the same as for men in Kyrgyzstan.

In many ways these scenes were far more ruinous to America's international reputation than the debacle in Iraq. Anyone with a television, from Jamaica to Jakarta, got a ringside seat on the reality behind the rhetoric of freedom the Bush Administration sought to impose internationally at the barrel of a gun. A nation where people died in the street for lack of basic food, water and medical services without the removal of corpses for weeks and even months had abdicated its authority to lecture the rest of the world on how to run their affairs.

Scandalized by incompetence at every level of government and indifference at the highest levels, the nation turned its ire on the White House. This was entirely logical. Katrina was an act of nature. But almost everything that happened both before and after was an act of neglect. Not benign neglect—the careless omission of deeds by people too busy to do otherwise—but malign: the willful disregard for environment and infrastructure over several decades because the state did not care to act otherwise.

The episode exemplified all the ills of the Bush Administration. Poverty, racism, cronyism, underinvestment, inequality, militarism, ineptitude, dissembling, sectarianism, cynicism and callousness—all the hallmarks of Bush's tenure—were on display. As the year continued, immigration, corporate welfare, democratic deficits and gentrification would be added to the list.

The light that Katrina shone on American reality burned brightly and petered out quickly. Bush was a legitimate target, but he was also a convenient one. His policies had accentuated America's fault lines but

they had not created them. Katrina revealed the problems with his Administration. But the past year has also exposed the left's inability to formulate a coherent progressive agenda in response, galvanize a constituency for it and then sustain a campaign around it.

To truly grasp how events in New Orleans unraveled, America would have to grapple with its ahistorical understanding of race, ambivalence toward class and antagonism toward government. But those rabbit holes proved too deep and too ugly, and in the end it was a journey the country had neither the will, curiosity nor leadership to make.

Katrina revealed the need to examine the relationship between the private and the public and the responsibilities of the individual to the collective. It exposed the legacy of segregation, the prevalence of class inequality and the necessity of government. It is a mark of the country's dysfunctional political culture that just ten months earlier, none of the key issues raised by Katrina had featured in a hotly contested presidential election in which the nation's future was reputedly at stake.

Nonetheless, the hurricane represented a crucial political moment. With no foreign enemy to deflect attention from his shortcomings--for all her faults, and there were many, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco was no Osama bin Laden--the spotlight was on Bush. And people didn't like what they saw. Katrina became a signifier for an Administration that was heartless and clueless. The poor of New Orleans were left to sink or swim in no small part because the MBA President was out of his depth.

Neither the hurricane nor its likely effects were a surprise. In 2001 a Federal Emergency Management Agency report ranked a major hurricane striking New Orleans as one of the three most likely potential disasters--after a terrorist attack on New York City and an earthquake in San Francisco. Like the infamous presidential daily briefing of August 6, 2001, titled "Bin Ladin Determined To Strike in US," Bush failed to heed the warnings and then pretended he had never even heard them. Moreover, unlike September 11, with Katrina he knew the approximate time and place disaster would strike. Not for the first time, he was missing in action. And while the Gulf Coast lay in ruins, he remained in Southern California trying to sell the Gulf War.

Bush's ability to export freedom to the Middle East was brought into question by his inability to deliver food to Middle America. For the first time in his presidency, a narrow majority of people did not believe Bush was a strong and decisive leader. His approval ratings sank below 40 percent, and they have barely recovered.

This moment showed potential to raise the level of political discourse beyond flag, faith, soundbite and photo op. For a few weeks, issues of race, class privilege and poverty, which were once rarely discussed beyond the margins, became mainstream. With no government with which to be embedded, even the lame media learned to walk the walk again. Their powers of inquiry and capacity for indignation were reborn. Cameras that remained shuttered as coffins returned home from Iraq tracked bodies floating down Canal Street. Just a few weeks after the hurricane, *Newsweek* ran a cover story titled "Poverty, Race and Katrina," as though the magazine had only just discovered it.

But with a few notable exceptions, the media soon left town and would not return in substantial numbers until Mardi Gras. Without any viable political expression to sustain it, the well of human compassion ran dry. The anger was there, but with no movement to harness it or ideology to advance it, the fury burned bright but fizzled quickly.

Clearly feeling the pressure, Bush delivered a prime-time speech from New Orleans's Jackson Square just over two weeks after Katrina struck. "All of us saw on television, there's...some deep, persistent poverty in this region," he said. "That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations

from the opportunity of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action." But as the pressure waned, so did his interest in the issue. Over the next ten months Bush would mention domestic poverty only six times. "Does he often talk about poverty? No," his press secretary, Tony Snow, told the *Washington Post*. "He is focused on eliminating the barriers that stand in the way of people making progress."

Pretense was back in vogue. Whites pretended that racism played no part in the debacle, with only 12 percent accepting that race played a factor in the slow response, according to a CNN poll two weeks after the hurricane. The proportion of African-Americans who felt it had been a factor was five times higher. The last time the nation had seen the same event and reached such entirely opposite conclusions on grounds of race was the O.J. Simpson trial.

That anyone could have witnessed the scenes outside the Superdome and Convention Center and think race did not play a part speaks to the level of denial that remains among white Americans and to the persistence and prevalence of racism. Katrina charted a path from the subtle and undramatic institutional racism that has become entrenched at every level of American society to its most crude and devastating consequences--destruction, displacement and death.

For some whites it was too subtle. In this New South, black demands for full citizenship fell foul not of the law of the land but of the law of probability. African-Americans were more likely to be flooded, more likely to be displaced, less likely to be able to return and, when the mayoral elections were held this past spring, less likely to be able to vote.

That race was a factor is beyond question--in a Southern city just fifty-one years after integration became law and forty years after the Voting Rights Act, race is a factor in almost everything. Yet to attribute the discrepancy between black and white attitudes entirely to racism is as legitimate and convenient as to blame the Bush Administration for the whole fiasco. To do so would misunderstand race not as the starting point from which to engage with broader issues but as the end point to which all problems affecting African-Americans inevitably lead. Such an approach not only allows whites, even those who are poor, to disregard every issue apparently pertaining to blacks as a discrete problem borne from race. It also has crippled the left in any bid to make connections between African-Americans and others on grounds of class, gender, sexual orientation or almost anything else that might overcome this antipathy.

So while race was clearly a factor, it was not the only factor, or even the dominant one. Those African-Americans with money could leave, and most did. Those without could not.

A basic understanding of human nature suggests that nearly everyone in New Orleans wanted to escape Katrina and survive. A basic understanding of American economics and history shows that, despite all the rhetoric, wealth--not hard work or personal sacrifice--is the most decisive factor in determining who succeeds.

In a nation that prides itself on taut bootstraps and rugged individualism, these axioms strike at the heart of one of America's great taboos--class. Those who could not get out after the storm were the same ones who could not get on before it. Katrina arrived at the end of the month and some were waiting to get paid. One in four in New Orleans did not have a car, yet there was no public transportation out of the city. Even if they did have a car, they needed money to fill it up with gas and for a motel at the end of the trip. Of those who had the choice, many among the old and infirm and those who cared for them preferred to take the risk with the hurricane than to endure the certain discomfort of sitting in traffic for hours and then trying to find somewhere to stay.

The inability of the poor to leave New Orleans reflected not just a lack of geographical mobility but of

social mobility. Far from denying the importance of race, this enriches our understanding of the various elements that might inform it at different times. Race and class in this respect are not contradictory and antagonistic but complementary and symbiotic--so closely intertwined that to try to understand either separately is to misunderstand both entirely.

In the absence of any progressive political leadership, the scope for broadening the national conversation that would make those connections was limited, to say the least. By the time of the runoff for the mayoral election in May, race had been eviscerated of substance in New Orleans politics and had taken on a purely symbolic importance. The election pitted Ray Nagin--once nicknamed Ray Reagan--against Mitch Landrieu, brother of Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu and son of Moon Landrieu, the last white mayor of the city. With little to choose between the two where policy and vision were concerned--neither had any--the contest became a battle between melanin content and family ties.

Melanin won. Nagin, who delayed ordering mandatory evacuation until it was too late, for fear that business would sue him for loss of trade, was back in office. It is clear how this benefited him; it is doubtful that it will improve the lives of African-Americans in New Orleans.

So when the venting was done, the right pushed ahead with its agenda to rebuild the city in its own image--an accelerated version of the gentrification patterns taking place in cities throughout the country that would make it whiter and wealthier.

The "new" New Orleans the right had in mind would be free of drugs, crime and poverty, not because the root causes of those problems were to be eradicated but because the communities from which they came were to be eliminated. "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans," said Republican Congressman Richard Baker from Baton Rouge less than two weeks after the storm, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. "We couldn't do it, but God did."

Katrina presented a chance to reshape the political, social and economic nature of the city. Before long Bechtel, Fluor, Shaw and Halliburton were in town both literally and metaphorically cleaning up. According to census figures published in June, the black population of the New Orleans metropolitan area had fallen by 42 percent in the nine months after the hurricane; meanwhile, the median household income rose by 9 percent.

While African-Americans emigrated, Latinos immigrated. The city's Hispanic population ballooned from 3 percent to more than 20 percent in the few months after the storm. Every morning at Lee Circle, hundreds of day laborers gathered under the watchful eye of the Confederate general and waited for work. Every night thousands slept in a tent city in City Park, Scout Island, where one standpipe and three toilets served several hundred people. Even as the xenophobic right called for mass deportation of undocumented workers, the nation's most vital reconstruction project was being undertaken primarily by migrant workers, many of them undocumented.

But if there has been one thing more amazing than how New Orleans has changed over the past year, it is how much it has stayed the same. We're more than halfway through this year's hurricane season, yet it's an open question whether the city is any better prepared. The postman returned to his rounds in the Lower Ninth Ward, which was 98 percent black, only in July; he found that many addresses no longer had houses and that many houses still had no doors. I drove through the Lower Ninth in May with Antoinette K-Doe in the hearse she bought when she evacuated to North Carolina; she kept stopping and staring at the post-apocalyptic sight of the neighborhood where she grew up. It looked as if Katrina had arrived just a week earlier: Whole houses had been washed off their moorings and into the road; cars had been washed into the houses; trees had been blown onto cars. And there they were still. "We're the richest country in the world," K-Doe said. "I don't understand how we can't fix this up."

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Undone by Neoliberalism

Adolph Reed Jr. | August 31, 2006

In October 2005, returning from my first trip to New Orleans since the week before the storm, I wound up in conversation with a 40-something white doctor who lives in Jackson, Mississippi. As a native Floridian, she had a sense of the damage that a Category 4 or 5 storm could produce even as far inland as Jackson; so, when Katrina was upgraded on the weekend before landfall, she headed for the city's main storm shelter to volunteer. She was shocked when she arrived to find that no other doctors had volunteered. She expressed surprise and dismay that "people just didn't step up." When I suggested that's one reason we need a strong central government, to mobilize responses to such crises, she immediately and animatedly dissented that she doesn't believe in "big government." When I asked who, then, was to have "stepped up," her response was vague--individual doctors, unspecified voluntary groups. She had no conception that there are some things only large public institutions can do in a centrally organized way. When we changed the topic to maintain civility, I learned that she was going to visit her son, a University of Pennsylvania student. On hearing that's where I teach, she related with glee that the previous semester her progeny had taken a course on Tupac Shakur: "Only at Penn, right?" That's one facet of the neoliberal mindset; it can be broadening and culturally enriching to spend \$40,000 a year for a child to learn about a dead rapper, but a counterproductive use of resources to fund government and public services.

This brings to mind Margaret Thatcher's infamous quip, that there is "no such thing [as society]...there are individual men and women and there are families." In his *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey quotes Thatcher's succinct statement of the neoliberal ideological program: "Economics are the method, but the object is to change the soul." The goal of this change is acceptance, as the unquestioned natural order of things, that private is always better than public, and that the main functions of government are to enhance opportunities for the investor class and suppress wages for everyone else. Hurricane Katrina and reactions to it throw into relief how successful that program has been.

The neoliberal worldview, which the late Daniel Singer, among others, memorialized as TINA--There Is No Alternative to market logic--has become the default position of common sense. Its smug moral standard is drawn from an idealized world in which equivalent individuals make choices in line with an abstract market rationality. Its viciousness seeped through even during the phase of mass-mediated compassion for the human suffering in New Orleans. The litany of victim-blaming questions frequently enough arose: Why didn't they evacuate? Why would they choose to live below sea level? Why should we be expected to pay for their choices? Those questions no

doubt had a racial edge regarding New Orleans, but it is useful to recall that Joseph Allbaugh, Michael Brown's predecessor as FEMA director, denigrated FEMA as a huge "entitlement program" when he took over and promptly stonewalled rural white, heavily Republican Missourians with the same kind of accusatory language during the severe flooding of the Mississippi River in 2001. A critique that focuses just on race misses how the deeper structures of neoliberal practice and ideology underlie the travesty in New Orleans, as well as in the other devastated areas of the Gulf Coast. (Adjacent to the Lower Ninth Ward, St. Bernard Parish, nearly 90 percent white, working class and reliably Republican, was virtually wiped off the face of the earth. Most of the parish's housing was destroyed. No hospitals or public libraries have reopened, and only 20 percent of its schools are operating.)

The "chocolate city" quip for which Mayor Ray Nagin became notorious nationally was an instance of his scuffling to reassure angry black New Orleanians that he did not endorse the widely touted models of a smaller, whiter city that seemed to follow from his administration's utterances and practices. And it is revealing of the depth and persistence of many whites' racial double standards that the Mayor's affirmation of the goal of retaining a black majority provoked a national and local firestorm of denunciation as narrow and racist, but the many calls for remaking New Orleans as a white-majority city, to which he was ultimately responding, generated no such reaction. But as it turned out, even though the most politically articulate and militant demands stressed the rights of renters [see Chris Kromm, page 22], Nagin's main policy concession to the protest against the rebuilding proposals was to extend greater latitude to "homeowners." Thus, in what was supposed to be a victory for popular interests against developers, renters were left out of the equation entirely and established as non-stakeholders. The irony is that blacks were disproportionately renters, and renters were disproportionately black. And roughly 90 percent of rental units destroyed were low-income affordable. Many, no doubt a preponderance, of black homeowners are not affluent, and securing greater civic voice for homeowners democratized the process, if only by slowing down the development juggernaut a bit. Nevertheless, the concession at the same time inscribed property ownership as the condition for entry into the arena of interest groups with effective civic voice.

Treating property ownership as the sine qua non for policy consideration didn't raise any eyebrows locally or nationally, except among the ranks of those who were left out. Neither the black Mayor nor the majority-black City Council has shown initiative in taking into account, much less defending, the interests of poor New Orleanians. The city's evacuation plans notoriously failed to anticipate adequately poor people's circumstances and needs. Landlords began evicting tenants without a hint of due process as soon as water receded and rumors spread of possibilities for extracting exorbitant rents from construction workers. The state officially prohibited evictions before October 25, but that prohibition was academic for the tens of thousands of people dispersed in shelters around the region and nation. And even that minimal right was flagrantly ignored with impunity. New Orleans City Council president Oliver Thomas complained in February that government programs and agencies had "pampered" poor people and proclaimed that they should not be encouraged to return. As he put it, "We don't need soap opera watchers right now." At least one other black councilmember expressed support of his view, as did the New Orleans Housing Authority receiver.

This all attests to the triumph of neoliberalism as both ideology and policy regime, and that triumph is seamlessly compatible with the discourse of racial politics. Black property owners, after all, are stakeholders as well as whites. Demonizing government to cut public spending and regulation, plundering the public treasury through privatization and rationalizing both through the myth of

magical market efficiency all underlie what happened to New Orleans. The storm exposed the consequences of neoliberalism's lies and mystifications, in a single locale and all at once. The levees on the 17th Street and London Avenue canals, it turns out, failed because they were inadequately constructed. In the words of the Independent Levee Investigation Team, "safety was exchanged for efficiency and reduced costs." This was largely the result of federal underfunding, partly the result of the Army Corps of Engineers' skimping, partly state and local officials' temporizing and lack of government oversight or, in neoliberal parlance, cutting government red tape. The breach of the Industrial Canal, and much of the flooding of St. Bernard Parish, resulted from storm surge that pushed up the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, a boondoggle channel dug four decades ago as corporate welfare that was obsolete almost from its opening.

It's certainly understandable that Mayor Nagin found himself overwhelmed and that he occasionally lost composure in the first days of a sui generis disaster, and the negative comparisons of him to New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's handling of 9/11 are absurd, if not racist twaddle. I took the subway with no problem to my office, not much more than a mile up Fifth Avenue from the World Trade Center, and then walked to my apartment in Alphabet City, on Manhattan's Lower East Side, on 9/12. Nearly all New Orleans's infrastructure was destroyed, overwhelmed or inaccessible after the levees failed; not even most of Manhattan below 14th Street was in that condition after the World Trade Center collapse. Nagin's finest moments were his no-nonsense denunciations of the Bush Administration's dereliction and his passionate demands for federal assistance.

Nevertheless, at every point the Mayor has been hamstrung and undone by his commitment to a neoliberal approach to government. Less than two months before Katrina, the Nagin administration determined that it couldn't afford to provide transportation to evacuate. So the city produced DVDs to distribute in poor neighborhoods, alerting residents that they would be on their own in the event of a major storm. Since then, Nagin and other local officials have governed unwaveringly in line with neoliberal presumptions, even as doing so may have stifled repopulation and reconstruction. First, while the city was still submerged, Nagin fired some 3,000 municipal employees, many, if not most, of whom had lost their homes or been displaced. Later, the Orleans Parish School Board laid off 7,500 teachers and other employees. No serious consideration was given to the possibility that maintaining a public workforce could help people return sooner by giving them income, providing services and augmenting the cleanup and reconstruction efforts.

A year after the storm, municipal services remain barely existent. Fewer than half the schools in Orleans Parish are open. Most of those are operating as charter schools, as privatizers have seized the moment. Just about half of the bus routes and fewer than a third of the buses in New Orleans are in service. My family and countless others attest to the hassle of trying to deal with the irrationality of privatized utilities companies. Still, both Mayor and Council can imagine only scenarios in which the "private sector" will be stimulated to come to the rescue and lead a renaissance. This means they can imagine only policies aimed at boosting investor confidence--cutting spending precisely when they should be increasing it--or drawing on corporate "expertise."

And this isn't just a New Orleans thing. St. Bernard Parish, practically without revenue, has outsourced much of its police service, bringing in DynCorp, a private military-services firm--what used to be called mercenaries. It's difficult to understand how paying them at least three to four times more (some estimates run as high as \$950 per man, per day) than the local deputies with whom they'll be grouped will save money. In the days after the storm Louisiana Governor Kathleen

Blanco hired Blackwater USA, another such firm, to provide "security" in New Orleans, during the period when subsequently disproven rumors of chaos and widespread violence titillated the nation and fueled the right's pornographic racism. The state even outsourced identification of bodies after the hurricane, in some cases, apparently, to firms with histories of fraud and misfeasance.

It's at the federal level, where the responsibility should be heaviest in times of such great disaster, that the practical realization of neoliberal vision is most striking. The Bush Administration's refusal, in the face of overwhelming evidence of the danger, to fund the New Orleans levee project is well-known and criminal. Michael Brown's incompetence and lack of engagement at FEMA became breathtakingly clear to the public shortly after Katrina's landfall. His e-mail records show just how cynical his appointment was. As Katrina steamed through the Gulf, he hesitated to declare a disaster area in its Florida wake, expressing concern that some might file fraudulent claims. Presumably for the same reason he temporized until the storm had come ashore on the Gulf Coast. On August 29, hours after the storm hit Louisiana, he issued a press statement urging us all to contribute to a list of sixteen recommended private charities to support relief efforts. That was a strange enough abdication of his responsibility as director of the federal agency charged with managing emergencies, but the Red Cross was one of just two secular agencies on the list. On the 31st, responding to a memo alerting him to critical conditions at the Superdome and Convention Center, he wrote, "Thanks for the update. Anything specific I need to do or tweak?" A few hours later he replied to a frustrated staffer in the field, "I'm working on an organization chart and staffing plan now." During those days he found time to respond to e-mails from random citizens either praising or criticizing his efforts and forward them, along with self-pitying comments, to his staff.

Brown was in over his head. But the larger point is that he and his bosses--Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and President Bush--have so little regard for government that they couldn't conceive of the agency's functions, even to go through the motions. They could connect only to do public relations damage control, punish enemies and outsource plunder to cronies. When the chief executive officers of the parishes hardest hit by Katrina and then Rita participated in a discussion on local public television in late October 2005, each of them was trenchantly critical of FEMA's shoddy performance (and the Red Cross's, by the way). They also complained bitterly about Halliburton and the other private contractors hired to do cleanup. The main charge was that the firms refused to coordinate with others and demanded additional pay for every action. Such is the practical truth of "market efficiency."

There are groups and individuals struggling mightily to provide services and advocate for the interests of poor and displaced New Orleanians, renters and others likely to be simply cast aside by the market imperative. But they lack resources to be effective in the current political environment. On the national scale neither the labor movement (in either institutional variety), nor women's, civil rights or environmentalist groups, nor, least of all, the Democratic Party seems prepared to advance and fight for a clear alternative vision.

As time goes on, fewer and fewer Americans will recall that government can do anything but make war and suppress dissent. Unless current patterns change, the struggle for New Orleans's future may be a more extreme, condensed version of the future of many, many more people as the bipartisan neoliberal consensus reduces government to a tool of corporations and the investor class alone.

Source URL: <http://www.thenation.com/article/undone-neoliberalism>

Katrina's Untold Story

More than three years later, Hurricane Katrina still stands as a symbol of our elected officials' brutal indifference to the lives of poor African-Americans. No evacuation plan was in place for the thousands who lacked transportation; as the floodwaters rose, the elderly and the infirm, parents and children, were abandoned to drown or starve as the Department of Homeland Security slumbered. Adding insult to injury, stranded African-Americans, left on their own to scavenge desperately for food, water and dry clothes, were tarred as looters. It was not only the likes of Fox's Sean Hannity going on about the "mayhem and looting and stealing"; the *New York Times* offered up purple prose about looters who "brazenly ripped open gates and ransacked stores for food, clothing, television sets, computers, jewelry and guns, often in full view of helpless law-enforcement officials." Then-Governor Kathleen Blanco postured that her troops "know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary." And Mayor Ray Nagin ordered 1,500 police to abandon search-and-rescue operations to target theft instead.

EDITORIAL

Our lead story in this issue, "Katrina's Hidden Race War," shows that this hysteria had grave unintended consequences. Reporter A.C. Thompson found that in the chaotic days after the storm, residents of one New Orleans community, claiming to combat "looters" and "outlaws," established a system of racist vigilante justice—and police turned a blind eye. As one vigilante said, "The police said, If they're breaking in your property do what you gotta do and leave them [the bodies] on the side of the road."

Over the course of a year and a half, Thompson walked the streets of Algiers Point, a tidy, predominantly white community on New Orleans's west bank, uncovering evidence of this violence. The accounts of the self-appointed protectors of the community and their victims converged around a stunning sequence of events. In the days after the storm, African-Americans traveling through Algiers Point on their way to a government evacuation area encountered armed patrols of white residents who menaced them at gunpoint, shouted racial epithets and ordered them to leave the neighborhood. Several were shot—the evidence collected here brings the tally to at least eleven—and some, according to the vigilantes themselves, were killed.

We believe that justice in this matter will never be served by the City of New Orleans. Thompson has been unable to ascertain that a single police investigation was opened into any of these shootings, despite efforts by some surviving victims, family members and witnesses to contact the police. His detailed queries to the New Orleans Police Department and District Attorney's office were ignored over a period of several months. The Orleans Parish coroner's office flouted local sunshine laws and refused to turn over key autopsy records until The Nation Institute's Investigative Fund filed suit.

It's not too late for accountability. Louisiana has gained a new governor since the storm, and we'll soon have a new president. Community groups should call upon Governor Bobby Jindal to lead a multiagency task force to get to the

bottom of these crimes. In Congress, Representative John Conyers and Senator Patrick Leahy ought to make use of their subpoena power to get then-Police Chief Eddie Compass and then-District Attorney Eddie Jordan to explain their inaction; police officers posted in Algiers Point after the storm and the vigilantes themselves should face subpoenas, too. And it would be a fitting gesture if Eric Holder, once confirmed as attorney general, swiftly directed the Justice Department to open an investigation. If we as a nation are ever truly to transcend race, tolerance for racist violence in our midst must come to an end.

Throwing Good Money...

Three months ago, the country was galled by Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson's offhand request that taxpayers hand over billions to a tanking financial sector with no strings attached. Lawmakers keen on salvaging the bailout rushed to add amendments intended to ensure proper oversight of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). The bill that passed established a Congressional Oversight Panel, a tiny,

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underresourced but committed watchdog team that on December 10 issued its first report in the form of *Questions About the \$700 Billion Emergency Economic Stabilization Funds*. The panel wrote, "We are here to ask the questions that we believe all

Noted.

BOFFO BAZZI: The American Academy of Diplomacy, a prestigious association of former ambassadors and senior-level diplomats, has awarded its 2008 Arthur Ross Award for Distinguished Reporting and Analysis to *Nation* writer Mohamad Bazzi, who shared this year's award with *New York Times* reporter Dexter Filkins. Bazzi was honored for "his keen insight and analysis," which "helps lead us to a critical understanding of the deeper currents of attitude, belief, and action in the Middle East."

FALK EXPELLED: In an unprecedented step, the Israeli government detained Richard Falk, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, when he arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport on December 14 on official UN business, expelling him after a twenty-hour detention.

Falk, an international law expert (and

Nation editorial board member) has been a courageous voice for years, calling for an end to the Israeli occupation and the Israeli government's policies. He recently released official comments on the Gaza blockade, condemning "the cruel and inhumane" of the Gaza blockade as "a policy of collective punishment" that "constitutes a continuous and massive violation of international humanitarian law" and "Humanity." Falk called on the UN to implement its "responsibility" doctrine, for an investigation and potential indictment of Israeli military leaders.

In response to Israeli accusations that Falk was biased against Palestinians, that his work was inherently imbalanced and "legitimizing Hamas terrorism," he made shameful comparisons

The Nation JAN 5 2009

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Notes on the Philosophy and Policies of Neoliberalism

2014

In 2011-2014, these notes take on greater significance than when I first wrote them. Insightful critics contend that neoliberal policies – an attempted total reliance on the “free” market, working by itself, with no government support going to anything but prisons, armies, and to subsidizing the largest corporate business giants – is what has led to the current “recession” or economic crisis. These critics say neoliberalism encourages the financialization of the economy – investing in derivatives and other exotic wall street “financial instruments” instead of in producing goods and services that meet people’s needs. High-rolling financial gambling by investment banks and Wall street brokers has led to the housing and related banking bubbles that burst in 2007-8, resulting in the massive bail-outs (of investment banks, not homeowners, be it noted) in 2009-10. Needless to say, defenders of the “free market” or “neoliberal” policies that have been in effect for the last 30 years or so tell a different story. Having brought that up, I give you my revised notes first written six years ago:)

First off, don’t be fooled by words. **Neoliberalism** is really neither new (“neo-”) nor liberal (progressive), except in a very limited and rather old fashioned, 19th century, use of that term. It refers to something that is called variously, “free market policies,” “free trade policy,” “free market fundamentalism,” or “the Washington consensus.” It has been called by this last term because it has been embraced by both Democrats and Republicans, with rather few exceptions. The more specific policies of Neoliberalism are often called “market reform,” just plain “reform,” or sometimes “shock therapy.”

These policies have been imposed on the Third World (the “global South”) by the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO, under the heading of “**globalization**.” The policies have also been applied at home in the US, although with less consistency. *Until recently*. In the winter of 2011, house Republicans and governors, and their zombified Democratic colleagues passed a series of budget- tax- service-cutting and union-busting measures which, in their severest forms, had previously been reserved only for the Global South nations of Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

In the ‘90’s, NAFTA, the “free trade” treaty between Mexico, Canada, and the US, would be another example of policy that fulfills neoliberal ideology and that has had large consequences. Some say it all began with the summary firing (by then president Reagan) of striking air traffic controllers, and subsequent deregulation of the airline industry back in the early ‘80s. Congressionally approved permission for **financial markets and investment banks to self-regulate** would be another specific example of the application of neoliberal doctrine. Critics contend that irresponsible speculations spawned by this **deregulation** led to the collapse of 07-08 and the ensuing recession that continues to the present.

How may we get our heads around a viewpoint and its accompanying policies when they have so many different manifestations? *What are the basic tenets of neoliberalism*, the name by which it is known throughout most of the world?

Basic Assumptions, Doctrine, and Theory. The necessity of ceaseless, never-ending economic growth is taken for granted. Grow or die, proponents say. It is said that the best way

to stimulate such growth is through “the invisible hand of the self-regulating market.” Since markets are believed to tend toward equilibrium (balance) of supply and demand, they will give the best results when left alone by governments. The supposedly self-regulating market, in which each person pursues his own private interest, without worrying about anyone else, is said to yield the greatest *efficiency* and benefit for all.

An initial problem with the idea and slogan of “free markets” is that there can be no market or trade without rules. The question then becomes, not whether markets are somehow “free”—they aren’t, nor are they a product of nature, since human institutions always require rules and strategies put together by their human creators. That granted, the question changes to become *who is making the rules, and for whose benefit?*

At home, neoliberalism means hands off corporations—let them do what they want, let them make the rules, give them more and more tax breaks, since they are the experts in stimulating the economy (and making a profit for their controlling-interest shareholders.) Beyond our borders, the countries of the world should imitate or duplicate the historical experience of the West, especially the US, as best they can, while permitting as much corporate investment in their resources and as much low-wage labor as they can contribute, in exchange for the example we (US and EU, allegedly free trade economies) set for them.

Lately it has become more apparent that free market idealizations are being applied willy-nilly even beyond the economy. The government is supposed to be run like a business; the family is supposed to be maximize its flexibility, and individuals are meant to brand and market themselves to compete in every sphere of life, whether intimate or public. Commodity markets, with their single-minded cost-benefit analyses are working their way inside of us. Everything is done by the numbers. Perhaps this is the real zombie apocalypse.

Here are some specific policies that follow from this neoliberal view, or *theory* of the economy. They have been recommended and enforced by the US government (with its congress persons’ and presidents’ campaigns funded by big corporations) and global banking institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund {IMF}, and the World Trade Organization [WTO], among others) for the last thirty-odd years or so.

1. **Radical reductions in government spending**, currently called austerity, of “reducing the deficit.” In practice, this measure translates into **deep cuts in, or elimination of, spending for health care, education, public transport, environmental protections, unemployment insurance, day-care, welfare for dependent children, job-training programs, and other social services and programs.** Government subsidies and tax breaks for big business, however, continue and intensify. So does funding of prisons, and a military force nearly as large as the whole rest of the world combined. And expanding.
2. **Cutbacks in or “containment” of wages**, and weakening or elimination of the minimum wage, and roll-back of collective bargaining. The stated aim is to make industry, management, and finance more ‘efficient’ and profitable.
3. **Privatization** of public spaces, goods, and enterprises, such as national parks, prisons, education, health care, the post-office, and a lengthening list of public trusts and resources held in common by all of us, but now deemed better handled by entrepreneurial corporate, i.e., private

enterprise. In this way, “the enclosure of the commons,” that is, the selling off and drying up of spaces, organizations, and resources devoted to the public good, accelerates.

4. Deregulation (aka **the removal or dilution of standards**) for business and finance, and the producers of our food, equipment, toys, drugs and medicines, so that the “magic of the market” can do its work, freed from the grimy and untrustworthy touch of government and the majority of its citizens.

5. Other countries in the “Global South” (like local economies at home) are pressured to create inviting, **unrestricted conditions** for outside (US) **corporate investment**. This means no annoying and expensive safety rules for workers, nor any protection for the environment. Police and military can be used to repress strikers and bust unions. These developing countries are further coerced (by the threat of withholding loans, credit, and protection from their own unruly masses) to increase their **export crops** and **cheap, exportable, assembly plant manufactured goods**. This is meant to achieve, once again, **economic growth**, and unrestricted investments from the “Global North” at any cost. Unfortunately this can lead—but only in the short term, it is claimed—to a decreased ability of these countries to grow their own food, and to greater dependence on food imports at higher prices that result in growing poverty and malnutrition.

But these same conditions are currently being imposed on rural, ghettoized, and depressed areas here in the US as well, in places like New Orleans, after its flood, Detroit in its bankruptcy, Chicago as usual, and many other afflicted great cities. Today these same policies are being proposed or imposed, not only on the global south, but on larger and larger class segments at home: the middle and working classes.

Such neoliberal policies easily sound impressive, touted as they have been by apparent experts. Besides, “the free market” and “government hands-off” appeals to the ideals of rugged individualism, competitiveness, personal responsibility, and self-determination, long-standing American ideals. What are we to think?

From 2010 through the present, there were growing numbers of well-funded ultra-right “populist” organizations (“the Tea Party”), celebrated media pundits, and reactionary political figures who use terms like “shrink big government,” scare words like “socialism” and the deficit, and messages like “some people are makers (the rich) and others (the working poor) are takers,” all slogans which promote the “free market” policies described above, and drown out the hard to hear voices of neoliberalism’s many critics. Since fall 2011, however, the Occupy Wall Street and other grass roots social movements here and around the world have offered a countervailing narrative, analysis, and protest. Don’t these new social movements also represent long-standing American ideals?

Critics say problems with neoliberal theory and policy are mounting. The worldwide economic recession (fall, ’08, through fall, 2014, and counting) that followed on the heels of *thirty years of implementing these very same policies* suggests this. Here are a few points from critics about how the doctrine, ideology and policies of neoliberalism, may be slanted in favor of those already privileged, and destructive to those who are not.

There are some basic unexamined assumptions. Endless economic growth seems incompatible with sustaining life on this finite, already plundered and poisoned, planet. That you can have an unregulated market assumes that free markets are parts of nature that work on their own (in other words, “the market” is **reified**, or essentialized.) But markets are not part of non-human nature, they are constructed by people. Then the question becomes, **who is making the**

rules of the market, and for whose benefit? Do top managers and owners of the largest corporation make rules for their own benefit, while the rest of us wait the ever more distant day when some benefit is supposed to descend on us? Or would it be possible for us, for ordinary people, to change the rules in such a way that they generated actions that might meet, at a minimum, everyone's most basic needs? More ambitiously, is a system possible that gives everyone a genuine voice in determining outcomes they have decided would give meaning to their lives? Would that be "too much democracy"?

1. **Those who already dominate** markets the most are currently **making the rules** of the market place to augment their own profit. Wealth is being **redistributed upward**, at a radically accelerating rate, to those who already have it. Working people and the so-called middle class are shifting resources and transferring value from themselves to the top 1 to 10 percent under the guise of a market that is only notionally "free." This is the real "redistribution" taking place: upward.

2. Regulation can be seen as another word for *standards*. Unrelenting policies of "**deregulation**" remove all standards for protecting the environment, working conditions, workplace safety, or keeping big investors from taking liberties with other people's money, and cutting deals with their well-connected associates. Lack of standards and "deregulated" rule by investors, top managers, and hedge-fund wizards, makes profit king. "It's okay to make a profit isn't it?" That's their sound bite. And their profits are limitless.

3. Cutthroat competition between geographical areas, encouraged by **deregulation** (lowering of standards) and manipulated for short-term profits by "too-big to fail" companies and banks creates a "race to the bottom." Local communities, states, and third world countries compete to see who can provide *the lowest wages, worst working conditions, and weakest environmental standards*, all in order to boost (corporate) investments. If they are "too big to fail," if they are subsidized by tax-payer money and rescued when they go bust, why do we even call them "private"? The profits are private alright, but the risks are borne by all of us, the public.

4. Snowballing **privatization** of formerly communal, shared, or public resources and services turns more and more things into commodities to be bought and sold. Things like **parks, public spaces, airwaves, seeds, animals, political power, armed forces** (mercenary armies—called "private contractors"—like Blackwater and Dynecorp), **water, schools, prisons, health care, body parts** (for transplant), **even DNA** are put up for sale so that the highest bidder can corner the market, leaving the rest of us suddenly looking to our declining wages to buy what were previously taken to be basic necessities, and human rights. The new corporate controllers of these basic human necessities become accountable to no one or nothing, but profit-making. At best, privatization of basic human needs results in benefits for a few, and desperation, bankruptcies, and killing stress for majorities.

5. Under allegedly **unrestricted "free trade,"** large companies become even larger, resulting in quasi-monopolies like oil, pharmaceutical, food processing, agribusiness, and arms-making corporations. "Too big to fail," they tighten their grip on governments, and wring subsidies, tax loopholes, and bailouts from a timid and bought congress and its poorly-informed-by-the-corporate media voting citizens. Meanwhile, a disappearing middle class, greater gaps

(inequality) between classes, shrinking social supports, poverty, and third-world food riots loom on the horizon. Since I first wrote that sentence, protesting social movements—not riots—have erupted in countries around the world.

For thirty-odd years **neoliberalism**, or free-trade fundamentalism, has gone unquestioned by most political leaders, major media pundits, and chief execs. But despite its name, it is neither new nor liberal: it recalls many previous periods of *laissez faire* and the “imperialism of free trade” promoted by the British Empire in the 19th century. But these policies and elite standpoints are not without opposition and resistance. There has been persistent and often effective opposition from **grass roots, environmental, labor, women's, human rights, anti-corporate, new union, and indigenous peoples' organizations and social movements**. And recently, OWS, now called plain Occupy. Their counterparts are to be found in Spain, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, the UK, the list is long. It is from such grass roots, Cain-raising groups and movements—who do not buy the dominant media and political discourse—that genuine change, historically, has always come.

As nations have come apart, the hungry riot, wars for control of oil and water fail to achieve their purposes, and one giant corporation after another tumbles or is swallowed at public expense, even some of the privileged have begun to question the validity of neoliberal market fundamentalism and its policies.

But in 2010 to 13, corporate profits, C.E.O. salaries are again on the rise, and these very same people who brought about the crises are receiving a series of unprecedented tax cuts. And yet they demand more, through their proxies in the US Congress. As a result, the highly privileged (with their legions of corporate lobbyists) argue that we just need to “deregulate,” privatize, and shrink government services *even more*. It works well for *them*. They even manage to convince many of us, who are frightened and confused, and who do live under very real threats, that these policies will somehow, someday, benefit the rest of us. Will they? Things are changing, but in which direction? The apostles of trickle-down economics and corporate rule won't be stopped without continuing public outcry, protest, and organization.