

SuperDome Lockdown: Katrina's Prisoners

Posted by

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PEJ News - C. L. Cook - New Orleans' least fortunate, those too poor or infirm to flee Monday's killer hurricane, taking refuge in the city's Superdome football stadium today find themselves prisoners in a fast deteriorating situation.

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[[breaking 2:06pm pdt](#) - Louisiana Governor announces an evacuation of one of New Orleans' emergency shelters due to rising water caused by the failure of a second levee protecting the city. Water too is accumulating in the biggest area of refuge, the SuperDome. Says situation "untenable" and the entire city must be evacuated as levee waters rise. And the rains have begun again.]

SuperDome Lockdown C. L. Cook

PEJ News

August 30, 2005

At this hour, more than 80 are feared dead in New Orleans, while reports coming from neighbouring Biloxi, Mississippi say "[hundreds](#)" may have been killed by a massive storm-surge wave. [Looting and rising water](#) has prompted curfews and a declaration of martial law. Car-jackings have been reported, allegedly by "refugees" desperate for a way out of New Orleans. City jails too were evacuated, adding some 5,000 inmates to the growingly chaotic scene there. Thousands of National Guard, who would [normally be in place](#) to aid in rescue and evacuations, are currently stationed in Iraq.

The water is still rising in hard-hit New Orleans, as one of the city's levees gave way today, sending millions of gallons of storm water into the sub-sea level metropolis. It's merely more misery for the citizenry. But none are suffering in quite the way as the thousands who took refuge from Katrina in the Superdome.

An estimated 10-12 thousand people unable to evacuate prior to Katrina's landfall in the historic city and forced to seek shelter in the football stadium today find themselves locked down and under armed guard. The situation inside the dome is grim. Gaping holes torn from the roof of the decades-old structure allowed cascades of rainwater in, flooding the field and sending refugees scrambling for the nose-bleed seats. But, from the beginning, the Superdome operation was miserable.

In the hours leading to the landfall of the, ultimately Class 4 hurricane, thousands were left waiting for hours in the open while [security checks](#) were laboriously undertaken, with National Guard and police searching and confiscating liquor, guns, and other contraband. Though no

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comments have yet emerged, the racial dimension to the exodus was immediately apparent on television. Corporate newscasts of the long lines snaking around the Dome revealed the overwhelmingly Black cast of the evacuees. A cast contradicted by that of police and National Guard sent in to oversee the operation.

Trapped in the stifling heat and humidity of the Dome, Guardsmen allowed some access to the concourse winding around the building to get fresh air and relief. But, the Guard in still under orders to bar exit to those stuck for the second day. Utilities and waste-disposal systems inside are currently overwhelmed, with [reports of the failure](#) of air-conditioning and overflowing toilets and garbage bins adding to the people's trials. One woman, frustrated with the situation would rather take her chances outside, saying; "I don't care how bad my house is. It's got to be better than this."

One man was reportedly injured this morning in a fall from the heights of the Dome. It's unclear at this hour whether this was an accident, or intentional. Survivors today also learned they are to be sequestered until at least next Monday. Guard spokesperson and commander of Guard troops deployed to the Dome, General Ralph Lupin says he knows the situation is bad, but ruled out release, saying;

"We're doing everything we can to keep these people comfortable. We're doing our best. It's not getting any better, but we're trying not to let it get any worse." Adding; "I know people want to leave, but they can't leave." He said, "There's three feet of water around the Superdome."

Part of the concern is looting. National Guard are trying to get into the streets, while helicopter over-flights are reporting scavengers roaming the flooded city in search of anything they can find. There are also reports of grocery and convenience stores being looted in New Orleans and outlying towns.

The Superdome, billed as "[hurricane proof](#)" at the time of its construction fared less well than its architects hoped, with the outer skin peeling away in the high winds, with several large holes opened in the roof when panels were torn loose.

The Dome was opened in 1975.

[CNN is now reporting, those rescued from rising waters, plucked from roofs and trees are being transported to the Dome, swelling the numbers inside to an estimated 20,000.]

[[Blog's Eye view](#) of Katrina's landfall.]

Chris Cook hosts [Gorilla Radio](#) , broad/webcast from the University of Victoria, Canada. He's also a contributing editor to PEJ News. You can check out the [GR Blog here](#).

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