

The Big "O": Abandoning New Orleans

Posted by

Friday, 02 September 2005 03:06 - Last Updated Friday, 02 September 2005 03:06

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Media Channel - Danny Schechter - DAY 5: No more water; the fire this time. Explosions rock and illuminate the darkness of New Orleans -- some from exploding gas lines and some from gunfire. Another night in a wet and dangerous town that is quickly coming to resemble a war zone in the Third World. It is a place filled with angry and hungry people, people who have felt abandoned and been abandoned for a long time-- even as help is said to be finally on the way.

www.mediachannel.org

A Time for ZERO Tolerance?

Danny Schechter

NEWS DISSECTOR

September 2, 2005

**SHOOT TO KILL
THE RACIAL DIVIDE
RATE THE MEDIA**

"I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today--my own government." - MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Was it global warming or a global warning or both? As a great poet once put it, when the center will not hold, things fall apart. And fall apart they have. Suddenly, the people thought to be sympathetic victims are being rebranded as predators. Protecting property and rescue workers seems to have become more of a priority than saving the beleaguered in a town that is drowning -- literally.

And, yes, some of those people are in revolt, or acting out, or getting what they can, fighting back, sometimes in violent ways. The Washington Post speaks of a "city of despair and lawlessness." And what was it before the hurricane? Answer: a city of despair and lawlessness, one of the poorest and most violent cities in America, with a high unemployment, crime and murder rate, all "diseases" of poverty. One can acknowledge realities without endorsing them. Only now, these problems are out in the open as a new "insurgency" comes home.

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Is not the chaos and fury in the streets in some way a reflection of the chaos in the suites of the agencies that have been so slow to respond? Of course, security is important. By all means. So is food.

So is a government that cares.

Traumatized people can become savage in a savage situation so outside their control. What would you do when desperation amidst a sense of Armageddon strikes in an environment suffocating in all that heat and with all that fear?

The Bush people keep referencing the Bible -- and so, poof! We now have a Biblical moment to behold. It ain't pretty.

THIS JUST IN

No Room at the Inn: CNN reports this morning:

"Officials at the Astrodome in Houston, Texas, say the facility is full and cannot accept any more New Orleans hurricane refugees."

BLOGGING THE DEVOLUTION

From the blog of Michael Barnett, The Interdictor, from inside New Orleans via Alternet.org:

"New Orleans Police Department Status: The situation for the NOPD is critical. This is firsthand information I have from an NOPD officer we're giving shelter to. Their command and control infrastructure is shot. They have limited to no communication whatsoever. He didn't even know the city was under martial law until we told him! His precinct (5th Precinct) is underwater! UNDERWATER -- every vehicle underwater. They had to commander moving trucks like Ryder and U-Haul to get around. The coroner's office is shut down so bodies are being covered in leaves at best or left where they lie at worst."

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'BIG UNEASY'

And are we seeing everything, asks Edgar Steele:

"Where are all the alligators? That's what I want to know. All the alligators in the swamps and rivers of southeastern Louisiana, now provided an express route to downtown New Orleans via all those breached levees. There are lots of them. I've seen them myself, the times I've visited 'The Big Easy' in recent years. Makes sense that they would have swum downtown by now, doesn't it?

"And the bodies. Where are all the bodies? You know, the 'thousands' of people that the New Orleans Mayor says died during the recent hurricane. I haven't seen a single 'floater,' which is what rescue personnel call them, since the TV coverage of the aftermath began. Maybe the gators got them...

"Lack of coverage of alligators and dead bodies, alone, tells you just how censored and managed is the news for even a huge, breaking catastrophic event in America today."

'ANARCHY IN THE STREETS '

Is what Nola.com calls it as reports of "chaos" and fighting with police and soldiers surface. (And yes, tragically, rapes, too.) There's been gunfire and looting galore with tense crowds unwilling to starve by the side of the road. Suddenly, the government agencies which couldn't or wouldn't pull off a an evacuation or get relief to the needy are moving in high gear to restore order. It's needed -- but so is help for the medical and humanitarian workers who are overloaded. That is not the headline!

The AP reports: " New Orleans descended into anarchy Thursday, as corpses lay abandoned in street medians, fights and fires broke out and storm survivors battled for seats on the buses that would carry them away from the chaos. The tired and hungry seethed, saying they had been forsaken."

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The President of these United States who never called for zero tolerance for poverty has now demanded "zero tolerance" of looters.

ZERO

Breitbart.com comments:

"With his despicable comments, Bush gave a 'green light' to the police and National Guard to kill people in cold blood who are foraging for survival-related essentials such as food, water, clothing, tents, blankets, radios, batteries, and child-related items such as diapers?"

"Where the hell are the water drops and food drops the military can do in a few hours? Is Bush intentionally killing the people in New Orleans as a result of his ignorance and poor planning?"

www.breitbart.com

BBC REPORTS: SOS FOR NEW ORLEANS

"New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin has issued a 'desperate SOS' for thousands of people stranded with no food or water at the city's convention centre.

"Up to 25,000 people are at the centre, in addition to tens of thousands more still trapped by the flood waters unleashed by Hurricane Katrina.

"The state governor has called for 40,000 troops to restore order.

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President Bush, who plans to visit the disaster zone on Friday, has asked for \$10.5bn (?5.7bn) in emergency aid.

WHITE HOUSE: 'THIS IS NOT A TIME FOR POLITICS'

From yesterday's White House briefing, via Think Progress:

REPORTER: There's a lot of discussion going on about the funding of projects prior to this, whether projects in New Orleans in particular were underfunded because of the Iraq war or for other reasons. Do you find any of this criticism legitimate? Do you think there is any second guessing to be done now about priorities given that [a disaster in] New Orleans was sort of obvious to a lot of the experts?

MCCLELLAN: As I have indicated, this is not a time for politics. This is a time for the nation to come together for those in the Gulf Coast region and that's where our focus is. This is not a time for finger-pointing or politics. And I think the last thing that the people who have been displaced or the people who have been affected need is people seeking partisan gain in Washington. So if that's what you're talking about, that's one thing. Now, if you're talking about specific areas, I would be glad to talk about some of those, if that's what you want.

REPORTER: I'm talking about policy

REPORTER: One project, for instance, is the one where people felt they needed \$60 million in the current '06 fiscal year, and they were given \$10 million. Those types of projects. And a lot -

MCCLELLAN: Which project is this?

REPORTER: Southeast Louisiana Flood Control.

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BLACK AND WHITE

What is the racial dimension of this catastrophe? Most white commentators and politicians dismiss it. Blacks do not. Here's a radio transcript from from the Black Commentator:

"Will the 'New' New Orleans be Black?

"One of the premiere Black cities in the nation faces catastrophe. There is no doubt in my mind that New Orleans will one day rise again from its below sea level foundations. The question is, will the new New Orleans remain the two-thirds Black city it was before the levees crumbled?

"Some would say it is unseemly to speak of politics and race in the presence of a massive calamity that has destroyed the lives and prospects of so many people from all backgrounds. But I beg to differ.

"As we have witnessed, over and over again, the rich and powerful are very quick to reward themselves as soon as disaster presents the opportunity. Remember that within days of 9/11, the Bush regime executed a multi-billion dollar bailout for the airline industry. By the time you hear this commentary, they may have already used the New Orleans disaster to bail out the insurance industry - one of the richest businesses on the planet. But what of the people of New Orleans, 67 percent of whom are Black?

"New Orleans is a poor city. Twenty-eight percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Well over half are renters, and the median value of homes occupied by owners is only \$87,000. From the early days of the flood, it was clear that much of the city's housing stock would be irredeemably damaged. The insurance industry may get a windfall of federal relief, but the minority of New Orleans home owners will get very little - even if they are insured. The renting majority may get nothing."

www.blackcommentator.com

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HISTORY AND HERITAGE

From the Geopolitical Intelligence Report written by STRATFOR founder Dr. George Friedman:

"The Battle of New Orleans in January 1815 was a key moment in American history. Even though the battle occurred after the War of 1812 was over, had the British taken New Orleans, we suspect they wouldn't have given it back. Without New Orleans, the entire Louisiana Purchase would have been valueless to the United States. Or, to state it more precisely, the British would control the region because, at the end of the day, the value of the Purchase was the land and the rivers - which all converged on the Mississippi and the ultimate port of New Orleans. The hero of the battle was Andrew Jackson, and when he became president, his obsession with Texas had much to do with keeping the Mexicans away from New Orleans.

"During the Cold War, a macabre topic of discussion among bored graduate students who studied such things was this: If the Soviets could destroy one city with a large nuclear device, which would it be? The usual answers were Washington or New York. For me, the answer was simple: New Orleans. If the Mississippi River was shut to traffic, then the foundations of the economy would be shattered. The industrial minerals needed in the factories wouldn't come in, and the agricultural wealth wouldn't flow out. Alternative routes really weren't available. The Germans knew it too: A U-boat campaign occurred near the mouth of the Mississippi during World War II. Both the Germans and Stratfor have stood with Andy Jackson: New Orleans was the prize.

"Last Sunday, nature took out New Orleans almost as surely as a nuclear strike. Hurricane Katrina's geopolitical effect was not, in many ways, distinguishable from a mushroom cloud. The key exit from North America was closed. The petrochemical industry, which has become an added value to the region since Jackson's days, was at risk. The navigability of the Mississippi south of New Orleans was a question mark. New Orleans as a city and as a port complex had ceased to exist, and it was not clear that it could recover..."

DEMONSTRATION TIME

There was one in New York yesterday at FEMA, demanding relief be sent. There are two more today--one in Union Square and another in Times Square tonight at 5 PM.

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"It is offensive for former Presidents Clinton and Bush to call on people to make donations to help the victims. Bush didn't say that paying for the war and occupation of Iraq would be contingent on voluntary donations; he just went ahead and stole the money from our public schools, healthcare and other social programs.

"Join us tomorrow at 5:00 pm at Times Square to demand immediate relief for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. At the protest, activists will announce plans for a Nationwide Day of Solidarity with the victims of Hurricane Katrina."

THE PRICE OF GASOLINE: UP, UP, UP

"Thousands Complain to Feds on Gas Gouging

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Soaring gasoline costs prompted thousands of complaints Thursday to federal officials about alleged price gouging and demands by some members of Congress for an investigation into gasoline markets.

"The Energy Department reported more than 5,000 calls to its price gouging hotline from motorists around the country, although officials emphasized there was no way to immediately determine how many of the allegations were valid."

OPINIONS

Molly Ivins:

"It's tacky to start playing the blame game before the dead are even counted. It is not too soon, however, to make a point that needs to be hammered home again and again, and that is that government policies have real consequences in people's lives. This is not "just politics" or blaming for political advantage. This is about the real consequences of what governments do and do not do about their responsibilities. And about who winds up paying the price for those

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policies."

Eli Stephens:

"Let's start with a quote:

"The Superdome is not a shelter. If we were to lose power, if we were to lose plumbing facilities, if a storm were to hit and create flooding in the area; the Superdome would not be a desirable place to be.'

"Something somebody said last week? Nope. Something said on September 23, 2004 by a spokesperson for the Superdome, shortly after Category 4 hurricane Ivan hit the Gulf Coast.

"Twice recently, I've mentioned the experience of Cuba in dealing with that hurricane (which was a Category 5 when it hit Cuba) -- 1.3 million people, more than 10% of the population, evacuated under the direction and with transportation provided by the government, not a single person dead, compared to 18 killed in Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi, and 70 more in the Caribbean."

lefti.blogspot.com

Tom Lewis:

"On its front page today, the Wall Street Journal characterized the situation in New Orleans as 'anarchy.' In the online edition tonight, a military helicopter hovered low over an open plaza, 'dropping' food supplies (more like kicking them out the door) to what looked like mostly poor people. It was a sight one might have seen in a photograph from Indonesia or Sri Lanka after the tsunami, or in Bosnia or Darfur, war-torn or less-developed countries...

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"It may be that three decades of bashing and neglecting government are over. When we need a functioning government on the scale of the U.S. federal and state governments, we had better have been paying attention for decades, not the space of a few sound bites."

From William Bowles in the UK:

"Hurricane Bush hits America

"Nothing, I think illustrates the insanity of the 'war on terror' than the aftermath of the hurricane that hit the Gulf states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama."

www.williambowles.info

Comment on this post...

Media Blame the Victims

How do you rate the coverage of the calamity?

It was ABC's night. Prime Time devoted an hour to gripping reports, including an airing of the racial dimension. The longer segments told some powerful stories in a way that the quickie news flashes couldn't. All praises due to Nightline for blending on-the-ground reporting from New Orleans and Houston and an angry confrontation between Ted Koppel and Michael Brown,

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the head of FEMA.

Koppel showed how out-of-touch federal officials were as he contrasted what they knew about what was happening in places like New Orleans' convention center (where years ago I attended several NAPTE TV program fair) with what was really going on. He pounded at their poor planning and late delivery of services. Brown was practically in tears, but Ted did not let up. This type of fire has been missing for quite awhile.

The program also showed the gap between real TV journalists and producers and the cable news soundbyte and stand-up crowd, which relies on live reports with little digging. Let's give credit where credit is due.

BIAS AND INSENSITIVITY

Dahni-El Giles writes to his "friends in the news:"

" I hope this is brief message is worth your time. If possible, I am hoping to get attention of someone who has ready access to news outlets.

"There are two pictures being spun of people ravaging for food in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In the attached document are pictures from Associated Press at the Yahoo News. In the document, a picture of a 'white' couple is shown wading in the water having foraged for food and supplies in a grocery store. There is also a picture of a 'black' couple shown wading in the water after having 'looted' a store.

"Fact: I am unaware of the basis of either party's venture to the store. Within the captions, there is no discernible difference between the two trips except for the word 'loot.' With no other information provided about the pictures, how are they different? In my opinion, the connotations of the captions under are serious. In a time of extreme emergency, a story should not be spun in this manner.

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"If this struggle for survival is being depicted falsely, we cannot allow this to occur. Global and local sympathy should not be curtailed by misrepresenting the intentions of people fighting for their lives. Obviously, if the situation was depicted accurately, we would hope that sympathy of the audience would not wain for the many people in need due to the actions of a few."

These captions have been widely discussed and apparently changed -- after the fact.

INTERNATIONAL WORLD TELEVISION

Hurricane Katrina and Global Warming: IWT, International World Television, asks: Is there a link?

"Hurricane Katrina's humanitarian tragedy has many asking about the potential link between severe weather and global warming. The issue underscores the need for real environmental reporting and science-based debate -- like the kind you'll find on IWTnews. Add your voice to the debate happening on our blog:

click.iwtnews.com

NPR INTERVIEWS CHERTOFF

Nancy Morgan writes about what she was listening to:

"I was driving home from work today and NPR was doing an interview with Michael Chertoff, Director of Homeland Security who is supposed to be in charge of the hurricane relief effort. Whenever the interviewer would ask what about those thousands, an NPR reporter on the phone was on the scene and reported two thousand people)who are stuck at the New Orleans Convention Center and have been there for up to four days without any food, water, or directions about where to go or what to do. People are literally dying on the scene. Well, this zero, Chertoff, insisted everything was going along fine, and they should go to the nearest

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'staging' area to get food and water, and he even said he didn't think it was wise to spread rumors and he had not heard of those people. The reporter persisted, but Chertoff was a total jerk!! He's great for Bush because he denies reality and then gets pissed when someone has the audacity to challenge him, just like Bush. Bush's speech yesterday was an abomination - he read his script in the way he does, but then tried to talk off the cuff, and said inane things, like 'America will be stronger for this.' This guy needs to be plunked down in the middle of New Orleans and left there for four days without food and water. Oh, I forgot, his kind don't do hardship. Oh, and Scottie today at the White House briefing said, in response to a question about funds being cut for hurricane preparedness and to shore up the levees, that now is not the time to start finger pointing because there are people who need help. God, have they no shame?"

Andrius Kulikauskas also was listening to NPR, too:

"National Public Radio -- www.npr.org -- is providing a lot of coverage, although just listening to the radio its hard to comprehend the full scope of this catastrophe. I suppose that is something this hurricane has in common with the tsunami. It's much worse than so many earlier emergencies. NPR has a hurricane Katrina blog -- www.npr.org -- and also a list of web links -- www.npr.org

GAWKER.COM OFFERS THIS

"The president, finally, has decided that the hurricane is a problem. He claims yesterday at 5pm, finally, that he's going to be devoting his entire administration to saving the lives of the people currently dying in this growing national disaster. And what does a top member of his cabinet do? She goes to a Broadway comedy and today is buying multi-thousand-dollar shoes on 5th Avenue at the same time CNN is showing dead grandmothers in wheelchairs abandoned on the streets of New Orleans.

"This is more than just a cheap shot at Condi. What in the blazes is this woman doing at a Broadway show in the middle of a national emergency? This is akin to going to a Broadway show in the middle of September 11. Don't we expect the Secretary of State to work past 5pm on a day an entire American city is being wiped off the face of the planet? And shouldn't she be doing something else today than shopping at filthy rich stores on 5th Avenue? Could she be -- oh, I don't know -- working with foreign leaders, like the Mexicans, to see what immediate

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assistance they can offer to the neighbor?

"New Orleans is ceasing to exist. What in God's name is Bush doing letting his secretary of state go on vacation in the middle of this?

"Message: 'I don't care.'"

SPANISH-SPEAKING RADIO

David Honig of the Minority Media Council notes:

"New Orleans has almost 100,000 Hispanics, many of whom speak little or no English. There's only one Spanish language radio station (and no TVs) -- KGLA(AM). I don't understand why the feds didn't designate KGLA as an emergency station, since it's the only Spanish language daily media. Our media brokerage represents the owner of KGLA, Ernesto Schweikert. Before the hurricane, Ernesto literally moved himself into KGLA and broadcast, day and night, fulltime announcements to evacuate, probably saving hundreds of lives in the process. Now the only radio station left on the air is WWL(AM) -- which is broadcasting in English only. (Ernesto had to evacuate, and none of us in D.C. who work with him can find him. We're really worried.)

"Good news ? a minute after I sent this, we heard from Ernesto. He and his family are safe in Houston. He'll be going back as soon as he can to assess the damage and try to get KGLA back on the air."

IN PRAISE OF ANDERSON COOPER

Linda Milazzo writes:

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"Please write CNN to express your thanks to reporter Anderson Cooper, for directly, powerfully and emotionally challenging Louisiana's Senator Landrieu for the ineffectual government response to the Katrina disaster.

"When Senator Landrieu began to reel off a list of 'thank you's' to fellow politicians for the GREAT WORK they've done, Cooper charged back with a battering exchange: 'excuse me, Senator, but people here are really suffering and they get angry in these times when politicians come out and thank each other publicly for the great work they do!' Cooper continued to challenge the governor until the interview was through."

COMMUNICATIONS BREAKDOWN FUELS CHAOS

The Washington Post reported:

"Victims of Hurricane Katrina struggled to communicate with each other and the rest of the world yesterday, using everything from text messages to ham radio as most telephone service in New Orleans and coastal Mississippi remained devastated.

"The near-blackout left outsiders desperate for news about loved ones, and in some cases created life-and-death situations as aid workers struggled to get information about people stranded by rising floodwaters in New Orleans.

"Phone companies had trouble even comprehending the extent of damage to their systems because they could not get into some parts of the region. One telephone executive said the storm might have caused unprecedented damage to a communications infrastructure that people have come to take for granted. "