

Orleans Down the Drain, But Who's to Blame?

Posted by

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Media Channel - Danny Schechter - "You didn't hafta have been there in the past two days to be stung by what happened. Anyone who walked the streets or partied in NO, or watched Angel Heart (the movie), or walked the dusty roads along the Gulf saw an America that won't ever be again..." - Da'ud X Mohammad, New Orleans refugee

www.mediachannel.org

NEWS DISSECTOR August 31, 2005

It is Bad and Getting Much Worse

NEW ORLEANS, GOING, GOING.....

The humorist Roy Blount had written a paragraph that now seems not funny but prophetic.

"New Orleans is nobody's oyster. It is situated, however, like a served-up oyster - the half-shell being the levees that keep Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River from engulfing the city. New Orleans lies several feet below river and lake level, and it sinks a little farther every year. When the big hurricane hits - and it will, New Orleanians assure you, with what suffices locally for civic pride - the waters will finally rise over the shell and inundate the town, killing tens of thousands."

From Raymond P. Ward's blog "Minor Wisdom"

NOLA.com, the "Everything New Orleans" website this AM: reports a "DESPERATE" situation

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with chaos, looting, and levee repairs failing...They carry a story on "What Hiroshima Looked Like"

NEW YORK TIMES: This morning: "Floodwaters were still rising as much as three inches an hour in parts of New Orleans late Tuesday."...also from other Gulf coast areas: "Death was only part of the devastation along the GulfCoast. There was also the hunger, the thirst and the homelessness."

QUOTE: 11:15 PM: STATE OF DEVASTATION

We have gone frm the eve of destruction to a state of devastation.

"We probably have 80 pct of our city under water,' Mayor Ray Nagin said after breaches in levees protecting the low-lying Louisiana city sent lake water into the streets. 'It's almost like a nightmare that I hope we wake up from,' Nagin told local WWL-TV. 'Our city is in a state of devastation.'

Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi:" It looks like Hiroshima is what it looks like," Gov. Haley Barbour said, describing parts of Harrison County, Mississippi.(NYT)

Da'ud X Mohammad: "You didn't hafta have been there in the past two days to be stung by what happened. Anyone who walked the streets or partied in NO, or watched Angel Heart (the movie), or walked the dusty roads along the Gulf saw an America that won't ever be again..."

Robert Polhemus: "I cannot begin to tell you Danny my utter frustrationand Outrage as I watch the devastation taking place down South. The day before Katrina struck I watched as SUV after SUV cut into lanes of outbound trafficking future refugees from New Orleans. No talk of global warming (Bush right now is sitting in the White House terrified that the real reason for katrina is his administrations outright attack against the mere mention of the word Global Warming) I wish to go further here. I worked for GreenPeace in Los Angelos in 1990/91. People laughed at me when I warned of the potential Catastrophe of Global Warming."

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WHEREAS, August 29, 2005 AD

"WHEREAS, the National Weather Service has indicated that Hurricane Katrina will likely affect the Louisiana coast with hurricane force winds and heavy rainfall by this evening;

WHEREAS, because of anticipated high lake and marsh tides due to the tidal surge, combined with the possibility of intense thunderstorms, hurricane force winds, and widespread severe flooding, Governor Kathleen Blanco and I, New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin, have each declared a State of Emergency;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, as the Mayor of the City of New Orleans, pursuant to the authority granted by La. Rev. Stat. 29:727, do hereby promulgate and issue the following orders, which shall be effective immediately and which shall remain in effect until the earlier of five days following the date of this issuance or the declaration by the Governor that the State of Emergency no longer exists:

1. A mandatory evacuation order is hereby called for all of the Parish of Orleans, with only the following exceptions: essential personnel of the United States of America, State of Louisiana and City of New Orleans; essential personnel of regulated utilities and mass transportation services; essential personnel of hospitals and their patients; essential personnel of the media; essential personnel of the Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff's Office and its inmates and essential personnel of operating hotels and their patrons. Unless covered by one of the aforementioned exceptions, every person is hereby ordered to immediately evacuate the City of New Orleans or, if no other alternative is available, to immediately move to one of the facilities within the City that will be designated as refuges of last resort.

2. In order to effectuate the mandatory evacuation, at the direction of the Mayor, the Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of Homeland Security for the City of New Orleans or any member of the New Orleans Police Department, the City may commandeer any private property, including, but not limited to, buildings that may be designated as refuges of last resort and vehicles that may be used to transport people out the area.

The City Attorney is directed to file this declaration promptly in the office of the Clerk of Court and with the Secretary of State.

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WATCH AND WEEP

The pictures are hard to believe and the heartache is hard to live with. A great city going down. Evacuated in more ways than one.

At first, New Orleans seemed to have been spared this time, spared one more time. At lunch yesterday with a friend who grew up in the Big Easy I was told everyone there knows it is coming in the same way people in San Francisco live in dread of "the big one," the earthquake to come that will many fear someday destroy the city everyone loves.

IT HAPPENED

And then some levees were breached, and then the waters came, and then the folks in the Super Dome realized it wasn't so super being there as water rushed in there too, while others clamored for rescue on their rooftops, hoping to ride it out. In the end, the surges of water drove them out--and we still don't know. as of Tuesday night how many didn't make it in a town of great beauty and pervasive poverty down on the bayous.

DOA

The death count in Mississippi and the region will rise. It has passed 100 in Mississippi with hundreds more expected. (Five confirmed dead in Louisiana as I write.) And somehow these folks who have lost everything will need to rebuild their lives. The lights are not on, and supplies are dwindling ,and yes there is some looting, an outrage perhaps, but the kids I watched on TV doing it were hauling food back to the projects, trying to make it through another day as the rescue effort cranks up another notch, no where near what's needed.

MEDIA TROUBLES

The TV stations can't be seen. The electricity still out in many places. The Newspaper went

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online but who in town can read it only a few. ("Hurricane Katrina may have literally stopped the presses of New Orleans' newspaper The Times-Picayune, but it couldn't stop the paper from publishing an electronic PDF edition.)

"Eweek.com reports, "But the damage done by the 135 mph winds and subsequent flooding disrupted electricity to the Times-Picayune's presses, making it impossible for residents to, among other things, get timely and accurate news of the storm's aftermath." Go to Nola.com for what they can tell us

The breached levees couldn't be closed. The water poured in enGULFing cars and homes and businesses and hotels and you name it. 12-15 feet of water. Bucktown was gone. The West End was hit hard. Ward 9 was going. And then coming up from under or being helicoptered to safety--powerful pictures on Keith Olberman's show on MSNBC--you saw the faces of people of color, the poor who can barely afford to live now coping with THIS! (Oddly, Rita Cosby's program which followed was coming to us live from ARUBA--they had planned another exploitive story on that missing blonde tourist. Pathetic. Bob Costas had the day before refused to do a Larry King show on the topic. See Below.)

DID IT HAVE TO HAPPEN?

This was not a question I saw explored on the TV News programs I watched last night. DXM sends these links:

www.phxnews.com

From "How Bush's policies doomed New Orleans"

AND

www.bestofneworleans.com

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[No title]

"Beginning in 2001, the Bush administration has consistently cut federal disaster mitigation programs run by FEMA..."

AND

www.findarticles.com

New Orleans district of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers faces

"Additionally, a study to determine ways to protect the area from a Category 5 hurricane was canceled."

AND

www.mediainfo.com

Did New Orleans Catastrophe Have to Happen?

From The Center for American Progress:

"In 2001, the Federal Emergency Management Agency ranked a major hurricane strike on New Orleans as "among the three likeliest, most catastrophic disasters facing this country," directly behind a terrorist strike on New York City. .. New Orleanians were grimly asking each other, "So, where did you used to live?" (To donate to Red Cross disaster relief, call 1-800-HELP-NOW).

"While it happened, President Bush decided to ... continue his vacation, stopping by the Pueblo El Mirage RV and Golf Resort in El Mirage, California, to hawk his Medicare drug benefit plan.

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On Sunday, President Bush said, "I want to thank all the folks at the federal level and the state level and the local level who have taken this storm seriously.?"

THE FACE OF POVERTY

I am sure it was no consolation to learn that, as disaster was striking, the Census Bureau released a report on another disaster, announcing that the nation's poverty rate rose to 12.7% of the population last year, the fourth consecutive annual increase....Overall, there were 37 million people living in poverty, up 1.1 million people from 2003."

Usually we don't see the faces of America's poor in the sanitized environment of American TV. Their images don't sell and they can't buy. But there they were last night clinging to their homes and watching what they did have sink into the big muddy.

WE ALL WILL BE AFFECTED

Many Americans will feel the economic impact of this according to the San Francisco Chronicle which which reports accoring to the Danny Cassidy News Service

"gas prices in sf cd hit \$3.50 gallon or higher:

"A string of refineries lay in the hurricane's path, facilities that together produce about 10 percent of the United States' gasoline supply. The extent of damage to refineries unclear Monday, but with gas prices already at their highest level in decades, adjusted for inflaion, and the Labor Day holiday fast approaching, the loss of even a single refinery could send prices soaring. (may have lost all of them)

"Crude's only half the story," said James Burkhard, director of global oil market research at Cambridge Energy Research Associates. "We can not replace a refinery quickly if there's a refinery that sustains significant damage."

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"The storm struck at a time when gasoline prices finally had flattened after months of steep increases. The nation's average price for a gallon of regular peaked Aug. 22 at \$2.61 and has barely changed since, remaining at \$2.60 Monday according to the AAA auto club. California drivers now pay an average of \$2.80 per gallon."

THE "FRUITS"

Our economy may soon be sinking too.... But back to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast

I am not sure where I read this but our esteemed Treasury Secretary John Snow noted recently, the fruits of economic growth are not being shared equally.

"In New Orleans, many such low wage earners have congregated at the Superdome. Their stories reveal the conditions faced by the poor in America:

Americans Living Paycheck to Paycheck

"If I hadn't had to work last night, you wouldn't be seeing me here," said Arthur Simpson, 46, an Uptown resident who left his job as a printer in Harahan on Sunday at 6:30 a.m. and headed north.

Fending For Themselves

"The people arriving on this side of the building are expected to fend for themselves," said Terry Ebbert, the city's homeland security director.

Waiting In Line For Basic Services

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They were the poor, homeless, frail or forgotten, those without the means or inclination to go anywhere else. They waited in blocks-long lines outside the massive indoor football stadium. Once inside, they were told, they couldn't leave, possibly for days.

Families Dependent on Gov't Assistance

"No funds," a 41-year-old woman surrounded by four children, ages 2 to 14, said when asked what brought her to the shelter. The woman didn't want to give her name as she waited with stacks of bedding and a few children's toys resting on the sidewalk.

"I know they're saying 'Get out of town,' but I don't have any way to get out," said Hattie Johns, 74. "If you don't have no money, you can't go."

POOR WHITES

Despite what we see in New Orleans, poor whites are driving up the number of the poor.

"The US poverty rate rose in 2004 for the fourth year in a row, driven by an increase in poor whites while the median income for Americans as a whole remained roughly flat, the US Government said overnight..."

finance.news.com.au

Poor Whites Drive Up US Poverty Rate

CLIMATE CHANGE

Yesterday, based on my limited monitoring of the media coverage, I was struck by the absence of commentary about how these severe storms are related to climate change--something our

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government does NOT want talked about. (Just last week, the Bush envoy to the UN, John "recess appointment" Bolton was proposing amendments to UN recommendations that the world do something together. John, like his boss, sees no problem. Perhaps a trip to New Orleans would enlighten him, if such is possible.

Anyway, as many readers reminded me, many journalists HAVE been making this connection, and the very name KATRINA was chosen by the weather service because that is what they call the climate change issue. If I didn't know that, perhaps others didn't as well.....My point was, yes there have been features in the past but by and large they are not part of the BREAKING NEWS. In any event, we know it now. But will it be more widely reported. Stay tuned.

One letter from David White made this point:

"I charged up to 7/11 to check out the Boston Globe and low and behold on Op Ed page I find- Katrina's Real Name (It's Global Climate Change!) by Ross Gelbspan (www.heatisonline.org) a former editor and reporter- and there are as you know many NYT articles by a guy named Andrew Revkin (see www.massclimateaction.org science articles) but I agree, most of media has its head up its ass on this and many other important issues- so keep it up, Iggy! Someday someone will come up with a whole online subscription newspaper for those of us who want straightshooting! "

I was very saddened to watch the faces of the Louisiana National Guard watching the devastation of a part of their state--while "defending" IRAQ.