

1. HURRICANE KATRINA, POVERTY AND RACISM

Poverty and Race in New Orleans

Before Hurricane Katrina, there was another hurricane, a slow-moving economic hurricane bringing greater levels of poverty to the working-class cities like New Orleans. 2005 was the fourth consecutive year of increasing poverty in America, with one million additional Americans falling below the poverty line.¹³ Seventy per cent of employees in the New Orleans Metropolitan Area are (or were) working class, defined as “those people with relatively little power at work” and whose incomes are typically below \$40,000 per year. Poverty is something that happens to working class people, not middle class or corporate elite people. Specifically, those employed in the lowest-paid occupations such as health support, “food preparation, building maintenance, personal care, and sales” may have “occupations that pay from \$12,000 to around \$18,000 a year—at best not enough to bring a family of four out of poverty.”¹⁴ Being poor does not mean someone is not working. It means that a family is not earning enough income to really get by.

Below is a table of the 2004 demographics for employed adults from selected parishes within Metro New Orleans:

New Orleans Metropolitan Area: White and Minority Working Adults¹⁵				
Parish	White	%	Minority	%
Jefferson	155,422	74%	54,654	26%
Orleans	64,066	34%	123,689	66%
Plaquemines	8,030	77%	2,050	23%
St. Bernard	25,959	90%	2,787	10%
St. Charles	16,776	77%	5,072	23%
St. James	5,072	56%	3,997	44%
St. John the Baptist	11,358	59%	7,890	41%
St. Tammany	80,178	89%	9,838	11%

In the 2000 census, over 67 % of the population of the City of New Orleans (Orleans Parish) was African-American, 28% were white, 3% Latino and 1.28% “of two races,” perhaps representing the “Creole” population.¹⁶ Creoles have historically been a privileged group within New Orleans Society, and the Mayor of New Orleans since 1978 has been a person of color, or rather a “creole of color.” Ernest Nathan Morial (1978-1986), Sidney Barthelemy (1986-1994), Marc Morial (1994-2002) and C. Ray Nagin (2002-) have all been light-skinned Creoles. But outside of New Orleans they are widely perceived as black. The percentage of minorities (most of whom are black) living below the poverty line in the City of New Orleans is of course higher than the number of poor whites. But it may be surprising to some to learn that *for the Greater New Orleans Area in the wake of Katrina, a greater number of whites (85,000) live below the poverty line than do minorities (65,000).*

When the levees broke, the flooding in the City of New Orleans became the focus of media attention, and while other parishes experienced major flooding, Orleans Parish was hit the worst. With two thirds of the population of Orleans Parish being African-American, media cameras portrayed a situation where blacks were the primary victims. The drama unfolding in the City of New Orleans drew attention away from the complete destruction of Plaquemines Parish which, stretching south along the Mississippi and surrounding wetlands, took the brunt of the storm surge, and the equally devastating flooding of St. Bernard's Parish.

Yet low income whites are not the only ones who experienced this invisibility. 124,000 Latinos made up three per cent of Louisiana's population. Throughout the Gulf Coast Region some 145,000 Mexicans live and work, and 40,000 Mexicans were displaced by Katrina out of New Orleans alone. Native Americans along the coast were hit terribly hard, including:

the Parch Band Creek Indian Tribe in Alabama; the Coushatta Indian Tribe, Jena Band of Choctaw, and the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe in Mississippi. For one tribe near Chalmette, Louisiana, the local high school served as a tribal morgue, holding the bodies of Native American workers, including shrimpers and other fishermen, who were drowned in the flooding of New Orleans.¹⁷

Dr. Robin Rose of Oregon has been trying to get assistance for three small native groups in southern Mississippi had their communities literally washed away in the storm surge: the Pointe ou chien Tribe, the Iles des Jean-Charles Tribe and the Band of the Biloxi Chittamach are all tribes registered with the state, but because they have not been able to get Federal recognition, federal assistance has not been forthcoming.

Nearly 50,000 Vietnamese fisherman in Louisiana and the oldest community of Filipino shrimpers in the North America were displaced by the storm.¹⁸ We heard very little about any of these peoples on *CNN* or *Fox* or *ABC*.

After the Select Committee Delegation stopped to visit the breach at the Industrial Canal along the western edge of the Lower Ninth Ward, where we witnessed the total destruction that was unleashed when the levee broke, releasing a twenty foot wall of water that leveled the immediate neighborhood (taking the highest death toll), our bus drove eastward to St. Bernard's Parish where the damage was basically just as severe. We were joined on the bus by St. Bernard Parish President, Junior Rodriguez, who told us that of over 6,000 homes in the parish, only four were not heavily damaged by the flood. Debris was everywhere and only a few homes were occupied. President Rodriguez did not mince words with our delegation, and he spelled out all the problems and runaround he was facing in dealing with FEMA, problems very similar to those facing the residents of Orleans Parish.¹⁹

The suffering of the residents of St. Bernard's parish, where 90% of the residents are white, draws to our attention to the fact that poverty is not racially specific, and nor is the vulnerability associated with it. When ex-FEMA Director Michael Brown testified before the Select Committee, Rep. Gene Taylor of Mississippi asked if he realized that Katrina hit at the end of the month, and that many of those living on fixed incomes, such as retirees, had already made their monthly purchases, and might not have foreseen the need to keep their gas tank full for the

possibility of an evacuation. Taylor suggested that FEMA did not take into consideration that many of those who stayed behind, black and white, were persons of limited means. Poverty increases a person's likelihood of being a victim during the storm, and after.

Income or class divisions in America increasingly cut across ethnic and racial divisions. Consider that while minorities make up 37% of the workforce in the New Orleans Metropolitan Area, minorities hold fully 26% of higher-paying managerial and professional jobs. *Across the United States, 75% of minorities do NOT live below the poverty line.* Moreover, of the all those who do live below the poverty line in America, two-thirds are white. "Racism continues to operate and accounts for the fact that poverty is experienced *disproportionately* among blacks and Hispanics (and among women because of sexism). But we should not allow this comparatively heavy burden among minorities to blind us to the full realities of poverty in America."²⁰

Racial Stereotyping and Racism

Hurricane Rita didn't care if you were rich or poor, as the equal destruction of the homes of the very wealthy and working class residents of the Mississippi coast will testify. But the flooding of New Orleans—because it hit predominantly African-American neighborhoods the worst, and because poverty *is* highest among blacks—seemed to reinforce widely held preconceptions that equate being "poor" with being "black." There was justifiable frustration expressed by many whites at the way the media shaped perceptions of the disaster by focusing on black poverty and black suffering while lower income whites in both rural and urban areas felt abandoned by emergency responders, as in many cases they were. Hurricane Rita, which struck the coasts of Texas and Louisiana on September 24, 2005, did little damage to cities or oil refineries, but it caused significant new flooding in rural areas and in other areas exacerbated rural flooding initially resulting from Hurricane Katrina, devastating many rural and mostly white communities and causing significant damage to hospitals. Undoubtedly part of the reason for a delay in meeting the needs of these communities was that responders were still overwhelmed by the magnitude of Katrina's impact.

At the same time, however, attributing black suffering primarily to poverty not only reinforces negative racial stereotypes of blacks, it also makes it very frustrating for blacks and other minority persons who have been the victims of treatment motivated by racial hatred if all of their suffering is simply attributed to their poverty, which is already assumed. The media coverage of the aftermath of the hurricane tended to reinforce such racial stereotypes of Blacks. For example, in one of his running commentaries, *CNN* anchor Wolf Blitzer stated: "You simply get the chills every time you see these poor individuals ...so many of these people, almost all of them we see, are so poor and they are so black."²¹

Racial stereotyping was starkly evident in the use of the term "refugees" that was typically used to describe black residents seeking to evacuate. The term "refugee" denotes a person crossing a national border in search of security. Thus the use of the

term “refugee” to describe survivors may have served to create confusion in the minds of casual observers of television reports, by equating them with, for example, Haitian refugees seeking asylum in the United States, wave after wave of whom have been historically denied their requests for asylum. Workers and volunteers at evacuation shelters in Louisiana and Texas “heard loud and clear from those living there that the government, the media and everyone else should call them something other than refugees. ‘We ain’t refugees. I’m a citizen,’ insists Annette Ellis.” One day, after getting an earful from a crowd of 800 at the Bethany World Prayer Center in Baker, Louisiana, President Bush went live on television to urge the practice be stopped.²² Usage of the term “refugee” fell precipitously. Here we must commend the President for at least taking some initiative.

Another area of apparent racial stereotyping involves reports of widespread looting. While blacks who commandeered supplies during the storm were called “looters”, at least one television report showed white survivors “taking” supplies from a store. *USA Today* quoted one resident who compared the looters to cockroaches.²³ Most incidents of the goods taken during the storm were taken to address human needs in a crisis. Food and clothing were stolen for family and neighbors. Doctors who raided pharmacies for medicines to treat their patients are praised in the *Select Committee Report*. Dire circumstances make for dire methods. However, as one commentator writes, even violent crimes were undertaken for reasons that are understandable, given the circumstances. “Carjackers were looking for cars to get out. Pirates were looking for boats.” Looting has occurred in many previous crises. Yet it was clear from their statements that neither none of the major players from Bush to Chertoff to Governor Blanco were prepared for Hurricane Katrina.

I don't mean that they failed to anticipate the magnitude of the flooding; we knew that already. I mean that they have no idea how easily a natural disaster can turn human beings into a second-wave destructive force. They don't understand that disasters often bring out the worst in us, that the human dynamics are collective, and that ‘responsibility’ is quickly swamped. If you don't understand these dynamics, you can't plan for them. You end up pleading for ‘personal responsibility’ when what you needed was air drops and the National Guard.

It's not like this hasn't happened before. The 1977 New York City blackout led to an epidemic of stealing. The mayor of Charleston, [South Carolina], during Hurricane Hugo says FEMA was clueless about law and order during that 1989 crisis. He thinks we need a military unit to take charge of these situations. That may be going a bit far, but we certainly need to think more systematically about the human dynamics of natural disasters. We run computer models of hurricanes, levee breaches, and flooding. What about isolation, desperation, looting, fighting, and shooting? It took the mayor of New Orleans three days to tell his cops to switch from rescue operations to controlling post-hurricane crime. Why? Because crime wasn't in the model.²⁴

Recommendation: When the *National Response Plan* and/or other disaster preparedness plans are revised, they need to be updated to anticipate looting as a highly probable and often rational

response to scarcity by individuals in an emergency. Rights of property must not supersede the right to food, water and medicine, i.e. the right to survive, especially not during a declared emergency.

After Katrina, as the media hyped up reports of looting and presented black looting as mindless thuggery, an overall climate of fear was created, causing responders from both relief and law enforcement units, including the National Guard, to delay entry.

There still seem to be conflicting accounts of the level of street violence during the storm. The rumor of children being raped in the Superdome does indeed appear to have been just a wild rumor. But our office has received numerous calls claiming that some of the accounts that have now been dismissed as unsubstantiated by the media. One source says women at the Convention Center witnessed rapes, that women made sure to sit in groups, that inside the Convention Center, where it was pitch black, escaped prisoners roamed freely, and that at the height of it, only eight police officers were present before the rescue. During the Committee Delegation's meeting with first responders, the officer in charge of Special Forces at the Convention Center was asked how many people died. He could not say, he told us, but his men did remove any number of bodies, some with stab wounds. Survivors with direct experience who we have talked to are often loathe to get into the details, simply describing the conditions inside the Superdome or the Convention Center as "very bad."

Below we will also discuss below prisoners who had to escape from prisons in order to save their lives because they were left to die in the floodwaters. Regardless, the absence of any Federal forces on the ground in New Orleans for over a week, when National Guard forces were overstretched, left the situation in chaos.

Barbara Arnwine, President of the Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights, in testifying before the Select Committee, commented on the impact of rumors and stereotyping by saying that it is typical for rumors to spread in a crisis, but that in the case of Hurricane Katrina the rumors were racially charged. They amounted to allegations of massive criminal and subhuman activities by blacks. The rumors instilled fear and panic in aid workers, who then became reluctant to enter African-American communities to provide assistance. Ms. Arnwine believes that had their been a strong Federal presence sooner, providing security and communications, the rumors would have quickly died down.

Ms. Arnwine also noted that this did not apply only to New Orleans. Communities throughout the Gulf Coast Region saw no presence of staff from FEMA or its principal subcontractor, the Red Cross, for as long weeks after the storm in some cases. She pointed out that the majority African-American residents of Gulfport, Mississippi, a town whose majority of African-American residents have long been familiar with racial stereotyping and governmental indifference, were essentially overlooked by the Red Cross, which preferred to establish its operations either in white towns or in the white part of town. Thus African-American churches came to the rescue of those hardest hit by the storm, using their limited resources to provide food and medicine, as well as shelter and transportation.²⁵ Given the scale of need, some churches went bankrupt. Although a Federal policy was established to compensate the churches for their

losses, Arnwine told the Committee that poor communication and racist assumptions concerning the likelihood of fraud have made it virtually impossible for these churches to get reimbursed.

Recommendation: FEMA or any agency that replaces it must be directed to produce impact and implementation policy studies aimed at producing emergency preparedness and response policies that address the particular needs of minority communities.

Recommendation: Congress should pass legislation to set procedures for protecting the civil liberties of minorities during an emergency situation. Armed forces and police should be on notice that individual acts of blatant discrimination or abuse of minorities will result in serious punishments, and systemic abuse will result in loss of financial support. Private relief organizations with discriminatory relief practices should be subject to review and possible loss of contracts.

FEMA's website directs viewers to support Operation Blessing, a \$66 million dollar relief organization founded by religious businessman Pat Robertson. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit, Operation Blessing was featured prominently on FEMA's list of charitable organizations taking donations.²⁶ Only a week before Katrina hit, Robertson was brazenly calling for the assassination of a sitting head of state: Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. "We have the ability to take [Chavez] out, and I think the time has come that we exercise that ability," said Robertson.²⁷ When Ariel Sharon suffered a stroke in January, Robertson expressed similar ill, suggesting God had smote the Israeli Prime Minister when he told his television viewers: "He was dividing God's land, and I would say, 'Woe unto any prime minister of Israel who takes a similar course to appease the [European Union], the United Nations or the United States of America.'"²⁸ How can FEMA in good conscience direct traumatized disaster survivors into the hands of an organization run by a man who so plainly advocates murder by assassination and wishes death upon the suffering? We have no idea what Mr. Robertson did with the money, but we know this: Operation Blessing didn't show up to help out in mostly African-American neighborhoods.

In fact, African-Americans in New Orleans were on their own, much as the *Times-Picayune* predicted they would be. Writing in July 2005 the paper wrote:

City, state and federal emergency officials are preparing to give the poorest of New Orleans' poor a historically blunt message: In the event of a major hurricane, you're on your own. In scripted appearances being recorded now, officials such as Mayor Ray Nagin, local Red Cross Executive Director Kay Wilkins and City Council President Oliver Thomas drive home the word that the city does not have the resources to move out of harm's way an estimated 134,000 people without transportation.²⁹

Recommendation: Future emergency preparedness planning must include the provision of transportation for the elderly, the infirm and those without their own means of locomotion, as well as the placing of Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) as near as is feasible, to enable these evacuees to return to their homes as quickly and easily as possible.

When the storm hit, residents of Algiers, a mostly African-American community just north of Gretna, and of the Lower Ninth Ward, formed their own relief organization: the Common Ground Relief Collective (CGRC), in the absence of private or public relief assistance. On September 5th, a week after Katrina made landfall, local Algiers activist Malik Rahim and three of his colleagues started their efforts with just \$50.

Mr. Rahim's name was among those on a list of speakers which our office suggested speakers for hearings, should any be held during the Select Committee's Delegation to the Gulf Coast on January 19-20, 2006. As the Select Committee elected not to hold hearings, we arranged a community event at a local church to take the testimony of the speakers.³⁰

Sakure Kone, a member of CGRC spoke on behalf of Mr. Rahim at our meeting, and the section that follows is drawn from his comments.

In flooded Algiers, the needs of the people were vast. The only thing working was the telephone. No stores, hospitals or clinics were open and there was no presence by officials. Malik Rahim put out a call by phone to his contacts across the country. Initially, paramedics arrived and met immediate needs by making door-to-door house calls. Mr. Rahim belonged to a local mosque: Mosque Bilal. At Mr. Rahim's suggestion, the officials at the mosque opened its doors to the public to serve as a free medical clinic. As more doctors, nurses and med students showed up to volunteer, the clinic became fully operational, seeing between 120 and 125 patients per day. The call had also gone out for food and water and these began arriving from all over the country. Mr. Rahim then set up a distribution center in his own home. To meet the intense demand, another distribution center and clinic was established across the river in the Lower Ninth Ward.

CGRC held discussions with government officials, but no governmental assistance to these efforts was forthcoming, perhaps due to CGRC's "no strings attached" policy with regard to assistance. "We were there for one purpose and one purpose only," said Kone, "and that is to meet the health, food and water needs of the community." Since September 5th, CGRC's volunteers have numbered 800, with 350 on hand as of January 19th, and a thousand more expected during spring break. CGRC currently serves over 300 meals at a time to local residents, and its volunteers have gutted, sanitized and refurbished dozens of homes, including homes in the Lower Ninth Ward that the City of New Orleans says it intends to bulldoze, though a court injunction has put a temporary halt on this.³¹

Stephen Bradbury also spoke at our New Orleans community meeting on January 19th, 2006. Bradbury works with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), which like CGRC helped to fill the needs of residents in the absence of public and private assistance in mostly African-American communities. Like CGRC, ACORN has undertaken the task of organizing volunteers to gut mold-infested houses gutting, seeking to refurbish a thousand houses by March 31st, 2006 as a first step toward allowing people to come back.

According to Mr. Bradbury, ACORN's focus since Hurricane Katrina has been to address three areas in which the rights of hurricane survivors have been or are still being violated:

1. Right of access to information: Federal, state and local governments have not stepped in to assist survivors to keep abreast of what is going on in their home. To meet this need, ACORN has set up the ACORN Katrina Survivors' Association, with centers in many of the cities where survivors were evacuated to.
2. Right of return: Government has a responsibility to try and ensure that those displaced by a natural disaster are located as close to their homes as possible. Yet not only were Katrina survivors evacuated to 44 states, some as far away as Washington State, but there has been a lack of interest in getting people back home, and survivors are being enticed to remain where they have been evacuated with everything from housing vouchers, clothing vouchers, Wal-Mart cards and so on. People relocated within Louisiana had a hard time even locating the Red Cross, unless they were in a shelter.
3. Right to participate in decision-making: ACORN is working on a daily basis to try to ensure people can come home and have a voice in decision-making. Government has an obligation to ensure that people have a role in the decision-making around the re-building of their homes "and that has not occurred in any way, shape or form." Neither the Governor's Commission, nor the Mayor's Committee had input from residents from low and moderate income families or from people who were not in New Orleans. The School Board has recently flaunted this by going ahead and saying that we will just be an all-charter school system, without input from the majority of people who will be impacted by their decision.

Mama D (Dyan French Cole) testified to the Select Committee about how she stayed at her residence throughout the disaster. Throughout the ordeal, she took in large numbers of evacuees and setting up a makeshift clinic with a local nurse on call to address illnesses. For this she was recognized by *CNN* as one of "Katrina's Heroes."

Many Americans may imagine that the functions performed by African-American churches and community self-help groups were actually provided by FEMA or the Red Cross. Where African-American survivors did get real outside help was after relocation, as Mr. Bradbury pointed out above. But the rumors and stereotypes that had been played up in the media followed them, and some were met with racism as renters refused to rent to "New Orleanians." Attacks against survivors have been reported in several cities.³²

Many African-Americans and others are skeptical about the way in which families were split up and put on planes without being told where they were going, sending the African-American community from New Orleans into Diaspora. We must ask *qui bono?* Who benefits? In its eagerness to bulldoze the Lower Ninth Ward even as bodies are still being discovered in the debris, the Government of the City of New Orleans has been in a running legal battle with lawyers representing the displaced. It appears as if the City can scarcely wait to wipe the slate clean, deprive long-standing residents of their property rights, declare eminent domain and hand the survivors' property over to developers. It also seems clear that African-American communities are primarily the ones being targeted.

Consider the sentiments of three white and male residents of Jefferson Parish talking with two journalists about the black community in New Orleans:

Resident 1: I wonder how many will come back.

Resident 2: Well, that's why when they shipped them to Texas, man...

Resident 1: They'll be in New York next year.

Resident 2: But I tell you what, you guys keep track of this, the governor of Texas right now is getting all of this great publicity.

Resident 3: He getting federal money, that's why

Resident 2: Six months from now, they're going to vote him out of office. The disaster that he's brought to Texas is incredible.

Resident 3: Yeah, they're walking out with these little white jars, glass jars, so their crack cocaine won't get wet.

Resident 2: It's unbelievable. Every single person is the same—sociology kind of person—Well, I tell you what, that's the only good thing. And the best thing before all of this started, my wife and I always used to say this: Declare Martial law here and the federal government needs to invade this place. And they really do. So they finally did. We have schools that don't exist. The feds are now going to come in and rebuild this whole place. It's going to be much better after than it is now. But you all have no idea what—you know, what kind of city this is. I mean, it's a fun place. Don't get me wrong. As long as you have enough money to live [*gesturing upward with his hand level*] up here. See ya.³³

The last statement by Resident 2 is a clear example of equating being “black” with being “poor.” But even more noteworthy is his mention of a pre-Katrina conversation with his wife about the need for the Federal government to “invade” New Orleans, declare martial law, apparently to drive out the black population so that wealthy whites could develop their property. This raises the question of the extent to which such conversations were also taking place within governmental circles or among private developers prior to Katrina.

Testimonials from Evacuating New Orleans Residents

“There was a lot of racism down there in that City and a lot of people died because of it. And it's time for people to start telling the truth about it.”

~ Linda Bowie, Hurricane Katrina survivor

The following testimonials make clear some of the problems with how the evacuation was handled by law enforcement.

Leah Hodges presented her story before the Committee, a story that one Member openly stated he could not believe. Having found five seniors abandoned at a nursing home, she and other members of her family transported them out and approached police more than once, but in each case the police refused to assist, one time responding with racial slurs and obscenities. “They cursed [my brother] and threatened to blow his brains out, and the other one said you should have, and my brother walked away.” Later they met U.S. Coast Guard search and rescue team members who had been ordered to patrol the survivors with guns but who were furious, not at the survivors, but at their orders, since they wanted to be out rescuing people from the contaminated water. They directed the family to military trucks, to be moved to an evacuation point. Despite being promised immediate evacuation, they were detained under armed guard for several days at the I-10 Causeway junction bridge under conditions she described as inhumane. There were numerous deaths of elderly persons and others who did not receive medical treatment and the environmental conditions were entirely unsanitary. She claimed that whites were consistently bused out first, with blacks being left for days in what she describes as a “concentration camp.” Ms. Hodges is collecting stories, and is pursuing the matter as a human rights violations issue. We here present photos showing the unsanitary conditions at the site that match her description of the conditions.



ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER/BABA TUNJI



ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER/BABA TUNJI

Patricia Thompson testified before the Select Committee that she was invited to evacuate before the storm but would not leave her daughters. During the flood, she gathered her children and grandchildren, fearing to lose them because some could not swim.

We were told to go to the Superdome, the Convention Center, the interstate bridge for safety. We did this more than once. In fact, we tried them all for every day over a week. We saw buses, helicopters and FEMA trucks, but no one stopped to help us. We never felt so cut off in all our lives... We slept next to dead bodies, we slept on streets at least four times next to human feces and urine. There was garbage everywhere in the city. Panic and fear had taken over. The way we were treated by police was demoralizing and inhuman. We were cursed when we asked for help for our elderly, we had guns aimed at us by the police who are supposed to be there to protect and serve. They made everybody sit on the ground with their hands in the air, even babies... My 5-year-old granddaughter cried and asked her mama if she was doing right. I know the police were scared, but they had no right to treat everyone like hardened criminals.

Mama D asked the Committee why the responders showed up pulling guns on the survivors. “We had to hide. I didn’t leave. We had to hide to save people,” she said. “Police brutality? We are used to it.”

Carla Nelson was a resident of Algiers, a mostly black community in Jefferson Parish. When lights and power were lost at her residence she and her family sought refuge. They learned on the radio that buses were being sent to evacuate people. Following these instructions, they went to the transport site only to be told that the buses there were there to transport residents of St. Bernard’s Parish, which is 90% white. They were told to return at 6 p.m. Traveling in the dark, they sought out police who were flashing lights, but were told to return home, and threatened with jail if they did not have identification. They returned to the bus station as previously

instructed but were stopped by a police car and surrounded by police with guns drawn and spotlights shining on their faces. One of the children was a 14 year old with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and he was “freaking out,” as he had never experienced this kind of intimidation. They were sent home, and each day, for several days, they made attempts to reach the bus station only to be turned back by Gretna police with lights and guns drawn. This incident was repeated at least four times. One time they ventured out in the morning hours and were accosted by a robber, and had to run and hide.

Finally, they reached an evacuation point where there were thousands of mostly African-American survivors in long lines. They got in line, realizing that the Gretna Police would not turn back thousands. One police officer apologized, and stated that the Police had been wrong to turn them away before. As they stood in line for two hours in the rain, the Police accosted a young African-American man and put him on the ground, guns to the head. People cried out, pleading with the officer not to shoot him. One of the officers drew his gun and fired his gun in the air. This made it seem like someone in the line fired a gun; but no one in the line was armed. “Had it not been for a news helicopter overhead taking pictures, we would never have been able to get on the bus, as they were telling us that we could not board the bus because someone had shot the gun.”

The buses transported them to the I-10 Causeway. The description of conditions at the Causeway as told by Ms. Nelson, who has never met Ms. Hodges, basically corroborate Ms. Hodges’ story. There were thousands of people there, sick and elderly people. “It was like a camp, like some kind of camp, trash and debris up to your knees, feces, pampers, trash...” Ms. Nelson and family were detained there for nine hours. Others had been there for as long as 72 hours. The elderly were not given priority. When they died in their wheelchairs, all the authorities did was push them aside. Dead bodies were lined up on the opposite side of the street in a straight row covered up in yellow sheets. “Had it not been for the people of Calfax, TX and their 10 buses, we wouldn’t have been here in Texas to this day. That’s how much people were fighting to get on the bus. No consideration, no order, if you didn’t make the bus, you’d be there for a few more days. I was determined to get on the bus and I did.” Upon reaching Calfax, Texas they were given water and food. After several transfers, they reached Plano, Texas where they were issued housing with vouchers. As of January 2006, she and her family had not been back home to assess the damage.

Kevin Bush was removed from his home in the Lower Ninth Ward after the levee system collapsed and flood waters rose to the rooftops. He is a paraplegic who lives in a wheelchair. He was taken to the Superdome by military helicopter. Once there he was placed in a wheelchair by authorities and left to languish without food, water or medical care for five days. He survived, but due to this neglect, Mr. Bush has had to undergo multiple major surgeries to correct complications arising from the incident. Additional surgeries may become necessary.

Linda Bowie was a resident of the Upper Ninth Ward in New Orleans. In previous hurricanes her three daughters would usually remain behind to care for her mother. Thus before Hurricane Katrina she went with her three grandchildren to her 82 year old mother’s house on Canal Street in the Sixth Ward. Her mother was seriously ill. They did not believe that they would need to evacuate. But when the flooding came on August 29th, they decided to try to evacuate, and went

to the I-10 Bridge on Orleans Avenue at Durbanie.³⁴ There were thousands of people at this bridge, and at other bridges, dehydrating in the hot sun as helicopters flew overhead. When it got dark, they found a ride on a boat to a school that they had been told was an evacuation point. With helicopters everywhere, they expected to be evacuated, but they were not. They had paid the boat driver because they wanted to be sure he came back, which he did, taking them back to her mother's house. For the next several days, they repeated a similar pattern of travels. They disassembled her mother's hospital bed and traveled by boat to the bridge with the bed, her mother and a total of ten family members. But each time they reached the bridge, friends there would say that no one had come to evacuate them. Then she decided to try to reach the Superdome on her own, and found transport with the Fish and Wildlife Service staff.

At the Superdome there were military personnel everywhere, but they were mostly idle. "I am about to have a heart attack because my mother is dying on the bridge." She approached several of them and explained the situation. They gave her water because she was dehydrating. They explained that things would be okay because they had helicopters. So she returned to her mother's house and conveyed this message. The next day, she got into a confrontation with Homeland Security personnel who were blocking off the bridge at the North Claiborne overpass at I-10. Despite the presence of many responders, it did not seem as if anyone was getting any help. Her mother may have had a stroke that day. She tried calling a radio station for help. "After a hundred calls they assured us somebody was coming, helicopters will come. No helicopters came." The next day, they took the bed again the bridge, and once again she confronted the DHS personnel at the top of the bridge. After explaining the urgency of her mother's medical needs, one of them said "Well, let 'em die, that's one less nigger we gotta' worry about." "I got angry and they got angry and this nearly started a riot. We were told 'You niggers gotta' get outta' here or we're gonna' kill all y'all.'" She returned to her group lower down on the bridge and they pushed on to the Superdome.

We were trying to gather people like Moses to get them to the Dome... On the way we saw all types of boats, trucks and official vehicles going everywhere, but no one stopped to check out our situation with the hospital bed. People were getting angry, starting to pitch things at the trucks. Seemed like everyone in the Guard had video cameras. It got ugly, with people screaming at the Guard.

At a stopping point, a helicopter landed nearby. She approached them and they called up a Humvee, loaded the mattress from the bed, and put her mother inside. One of Linda's sisters had to plead to be able to ride along. The Humvee drove off and she has not seen her mother since. Another of Linda's sisters is diabetic and had not had her medicine, so she was facing a diabetic coma without help. So once again she left her family behind and went to the Superdome. She had to fight her way up to the front to get inside. The first group they encountered very politely offered a police escort to go back and find her sister. Her sister was brought back to the infirmary, but since there was no medicine and there were no doctors:

All we could do is pray for her. They did give her water, seven bottles, which was generous since there was no water inside or outside the Dome. There was no food. They said we had to go find a place inside. So we did. There was no

military presence inside of the Dome itself. There was military presence outside for the searches. Down on the ground there could have been police. It was horrible. We were way at the top.

While inside, her sister fell ill, and had to be taken back to the infirmary, where she had a seizure. Meanwhile Linda was able to find electrical power at a cellular phone station to power the device she needed to treat her son's asthma. The next day the buses came. "This was a worst nightmare, because that was where the military had barricades everywhere with thousands trying to get on the buses with no order." Managing to get on one of the buses, they were taken to the Astrodome in Houston. After her experience at the Superdome, Linda refused to go inside. She bought a ticket to Lawrenceville to visit her niece.

In mid-January, Linda and her sister met Governor Blanco. *CNN* covered the meeting where the Governor made a phone call to inquire about their mother's plight. Two days later they were contacted by David Lappin, a FEMA medic who had seen the story on *CNN*, and who said he didn't think she would live, and that all the doctors they visited said she was going to die. She was either taken to LSU Hospital in Baton Rouge, Terrbone General in Homa or, he said, they took her to Louis Armstrong Airport, where there was a place set up for critically ill patients whom the doctors deemed untreatable to let them die peacefully. But the medic doesn't know if she died or not, because when he left her she was still alive. Later both *CNN* and Governor Blanco's office called to tell her that they were doing DNA testing at the morgue. The results will be known soon, but Linda is seeking a forensic scientist for independent verification.

CBS's 60 Minutes interviewed eight people survivors who attempted to cross the Crescent-City Connection Bridge into Gretna and were turned back the Gretna Police. Many of them had been told that there were buses awaiting them for evacuation on the Gretna side of the bridge.

With that assurance, they joined hundreds of other people who were walking toward the bridge to Gretna. Images taken that day by a *CBS News* crew driving across the bridge show groups of evacuees approaching a line of policemen holding shotguns. The police car was marked Gretna Police. Cathey Golden told *60 Minutes* that when her group reached the police line, they were told there were no buses, and stopped with a shotgun blast.

They sought an explanation. Larry Bradshaw, a white member of the mostly African-American group, says:

The only two explanations we ever received was, one, 'We're not going to have any Superdomes over here,' and 'This is not New Orleans,' Bradshaw says. 'To me, that was code language or code words for, 'We're not having black people coming into our neighborhood.'³⁵

There were about 200 people in the group, which was slow-moving because within the group were individuals in wheelchairs, on crutches or using strollers. After being turned back, the group camped out in the middle of the bridge. But at dusk that night the Gretna Police came back and confiscated their food and water. Survivor Lorrie Beth Slonsky said that a policeman:

Jumped out of his car with the gun aimed at us, screaming and cursing and yelling at us to get the blank-blank away. And just, just so rabidly angry. And we tried to reason, we tried to talk. And he was putting his gun in the face of young children and families. It said Gretna on the police car.³⁶

These testimonials, and those relayed to the Select Committee by Attorney Ishmael Muhammed, reveal a consistent pattern of stranded African-American residents seeking evacuation points that they had been told about, only to be confronted with armed authorities who in many cases threatened them with weapons and used racial slurs. In two cases, we are told that white survivors were given priority status for getting onto transport vehicles being used for evacuation. There is a general pattern of military or police responders being idle and unresponsive to emergency requests, with the notable exceptions of several helpful and caring individuals.

We should also note that these survivors were not totally lacking means. Ms. Nelson had the money to hire a boat. Ms. Bowie had the money to buy a plane ticket.

In two of these cases, the Gretna Police are involved. Gretna Police Sheriff Harry Lee had set a policy back in the 1980s for his officers to observe special scrutiny for any blacks crossing the Crescent-City Connection bridge. The *New Orleans Gambit* quoted him as saying “It’s obvious that two young blacks driving a rinky-dinky car in a predominantly white neighborhood, they’ll be stopped.” When blacks complained in April 2005 that Jefferson Parish police officers had a caricature of a young black man that they used for target practice, Sheriff Lee responded to questions by saying: “I’ve looked at it, I don’t find it offensive, and I have no interest in correcting it.”

Such blatant displays of racism are surely unworthy of officers in uniform. One means available to government to curb racial abuse is to establish procedures, because it is when procedures and regulations break down that individual authorities are left to act at their discretion, in which case the discriminatory judgment of those who harbor racial prejudices will come to the fore.