

Commentaries by Lance Hill

Table of Contents

Friday, September 16th, 2005 - Orlando on the Bayou (short and long versions).....	2
Sunday, October 23rd, 2005 - Today in the Ninth Ward.....	7
Saturday, December 31st, 2005 - My Birthday in New Orleans.....	8
Friday, January 20th, 2006 - Throw Me Something Mister!	9
Thursday, April 20th, 2006 - My Day of (trying to) Absentee Voting	11
Sunday, May 21st, 2006 - How White People Elected Ray Nagin	12
Wednesday, June 14th, 2006 - Katrina’s Blueprint for Ending Poverty.....	14
Monday, July 31st, 2006 - What Cause is This for Optimism?	16
Thursday, August 31st, 2006 - Who Delayed the Planning Process?.....	17
Friday, November 10th, 2006 - The Answer is Up There	17
Thursday, April 26th, 2007 - How not to Build Racial Unity and Counter Racism in New Orleans	19
Monday, May 21st, 2007 - new dataset available on post-Katrina FEMA trailer siting attempts	21
Tuesday, June 26th, 2007 - AFT Report on New Orleans Schools and Former Teachers.....	22
Tuesday, August 28th, 2007 - Time Magazine on Racial Tensions and Solutions in New Orleans.....	23
Tuesday, September 4th, 2007 - The Nation Magazine on New Orleans Charter Schools	23
Tuesday, October 30th, 2007 - Student Achievement in New Orleans–AFT Report	23
Friday, January 18th, 2008 - LSU Fans on New Orleans Public Housing	23
Monday, March 24th, 2008 - Group Charges St. Bernard Renting Laws	24
Wednesday, May 28th, 2008 - Louisiana Weekly Index — An African-American View of New Orleans	24
Wednesday, August 20th, 2008 - New Orleans Demographic Project	25
Tuesday, September 30th, 2008 - Excellent Article on Post-Katrina Housing Discrimination	25
Thursday, February 19th, 2009 - New Orleans last in nation for job creation from stimulus bill.....	26
Thursday, April 30th, 2009 - May Day Solidarity Rallies Tomorrow.....	26
Friday, May 8th, 2009 - Reminder: MIRA Lunch Meeting.....	27
Tuesday, June 23rd, 2009 - Trauma Studies on Katrina Impact	27
Friday, July 31st, 2009 - Teach for America taking veteran teacher jobs in New Orleans; and Race and Flood Protection	28
Thursday, August 27th, 2009 - Katrina’s Secret Killings: The Memorial Hospital Story	28

Tuesday, September 15th, 2009 - FW: Call for Papers - Opportunity for Tulane Graduate and Undergraduate Students to Present at Local Conference	28
Thursday, October 22nd, 2009 - Interview on Katrina, Race, and the Exclusion Movement	30
Wednesday, November 18th, 2009 - Happy Race Relations in New Orleans?	32
Sunday, December 6th, 2009 - Equity in New Orleans Schools? Leigh Dingerson on WBOK Monday	32
Friday, May 21st, 2010 - Scathing IRP Report on New Orleans Schools	33
Thursday, July 22nd, 2010 - New Orleans School Teacher Blasts Teach For America and Charter Schools	34
Tuesday, August 24th, 2010 - More History Denial on Katrina Recovery.....	34
Tuesday, September 7th, 2010 - New York Times on post-Katrina “greenspace” Plan to Demolish Black Neighborhoods	35
Wednesday, October 13th, 2010 - LEAP Scores: 2010 New Orleans LEAP Scores by School Type.....	36
Tuesday, November 30th, 2010 - Diane Ravitch New Orleans Video Presentation - Dillard University, October 2010	36
Friday, December 3rd, 2010 - Access Denied: SPLC Report on New Orleans Schools	37
Wednesday, February 9th, 2011 - Census supports theory Katrina “pretext to run a bunch of poor black folks out of town”: James Gill column in Times-Picayune	37
Saturday, March 19th, 2011 - Should Japan Kill Disaster Victims as Happened in Katrina? Read Dr. Arthur Kaplan	37
Wednesday, October 19th, 2011 - Poverty Skyrockets in New Orleans: 65% of Black Children Under Age of Five Living in Poverty: Lance Hill Commentary.....	38
Thursday, December 8th, 2011 - Is the Youth Murder Increase in New Orleans a Policing Issue?....	38
Friday, May 18th, 2012 - Race and Politics in Post-Katrina New Orleans.....	38

Friday, September 16th, 2005 - Orlando on the Bayou (short and long versions)

Orlando on the Bayou

(short version)

Commentary by Lance Hill

I submitted this op-ed to the New York Times at their request on September 16, 2005 while I was living inside New Orleans in defiance of the evacuation order. A longer version follows. Neither was published by the Times but both versions appeared in on-line publications on October 17, 2005.

Within the next few weeks, city authorities will lift the order declaring martial law in New Orleans and begin to allow reentry of homeowners with habitable shelter. The result will be one

of the most remarkable and unprecedented political transformations ever experienced by a major American city. New Orleans will emerge with a white political majority where African Americans once comprised 70 percent of the population. Conservative estimates are that less than half of the city's 350,000 blacks will have the wherewithal or inclination to return. This seismic demographic and political shift is the direct result of Katrina's destruction of tens of thousands of black homes that, notwithstanding massive federal aid and flood insurance guarantees, will either be permanently razed or rebuilt at costs far beyond the reach of most African-Americans. For example, the legendary Ninth Ward, which once held nearly 13 percent of the city's black population, has been decimated and is unlikely to see many of its former 45,000 residents return. The questions facing all of us who still call this city home – including those like myself who stayed throughout the hurricane and its aftermath to care for neighbors and those less fortunate – will be, “In whose image will New Orleans be reconstituted?” What will become of black New Orleans and its vibrant and innovative culture? What will be the fate of the city that gave the world Louis Armstrong, Mardi Gras Indians, brass bands, and the uniquely inflected “bounce” musical innovations in rap and hip hop music?

Sadly, there are those who share none of these concerns, for they believe Katrina was a blessing in disguise for eradicating the poverty and crime they exclusively associate with black people. After all, what is to be made of the now-confirmed reports that law enforcement authorities from the predominantly white suburban community of Gretna closed the Crescent City Connection Bridge — the major thoroughfare heading west out of New Orleans across the Mississippi River – and fired over the heads of those seeking food, water and shelter in Katrina's aftermath?

Shocking as it may sound, the idea of purging New Orleans of its African American majority is appealing to some people. After all, proposals to forcibly exclude African Americans from the city in the 1950s in order to make New Orleans an all-white enclave enjoyed legitimacy and support in the same respected social circles that later went on to lead the Citizens' Council movement and other forms of resistance to integration. And today on the streets of New Orleans I am hearing many members of the same old moneyed “carnival royalty” families openly arguing that Katrina provides an opening to depose black majority rule. These sentiments are deeply rooted in the psyche of those Southern whites who still bemoan the post-Civil War federal occupation of South, and recall with pride the day that their confederate forbearers overthrew bi-racial Reconstruction with the Southern Compromise of 1877. Today that situation is turned on its head as federal authorities prepare to “occupy” the city with a different form of reconstruction – only this time it will likely have the unintended consequence of restoring white majority rule. Even now, during the process of recovery, many of the city's leading businesses and institutions have brought in thousands of unskilled workers from outside Louisiana, while unemployed black New Orleanians sit idle in relocation centers.

The decisions being made today about New Orleans, with only one percent of the city's voters present, will set the course for decades to come. But they will be decisions made without the input of New Orleans' black community, which is fragmented and disorganized in exile. Not only are tens of thousands of poor and unemployed African Americans still housed in shelters, but countless educated black middle class professionals who comprised the city's political, intellectual, religious and social leadership have been just as severely displaced. Likewise, all of the traditional mechanisms for black community dialogue and protest are gone – the black radio

and television stations, newspapers and magazines, barber and beauty shops, and even churches and bars.

Following the Civil War the federal government failed to provide the education, training and economic resources necessary for dispossessed African Americans in Louisiana and throughout the South to overcome the poverty and deprivation of slavery. In the aftermath of Katrina, the federal government now has a second opportunity to succeed where it formerly failed.

The spirit and ethnic diversity of New Orleans is worth saving as much as the Italianate mansions of St. Charles Avenue. But already there is tremendous pressure to repackage, and commercialize the culture of this great city without the people who made it. New Orleans may be reborn, but if not done right it will be without a soul. Such a spiritual death would make the city a vacant caricature of itself; the Orlando of the Bayou. That's when I will finally evacuate.

Orlando On the Bayou

(long version)

Commentary by Lance Hill

September 16, 2005

“The niggers are killing each other over in Lafayette” said the pickup driver, referring to the black New Orleanians who had relocated to a shelter in Cajun country following Hurricane Katrina. The driver, a middle-aged white man employed in the disaster recovery business, was accompanied by the owner of several gas stations. I sat quietly observing from the back seat of a Texas National Guard humvee on my way to receive a tetanus shot at a military hospital. (I had refused to evacuate and, thankfully, the Texans had decided to defy city and state authorities who prohibited providing food, water, or medical assistance to “outlaws” such as myself). “Thank God you guys are here,” the driver shouted over din of his diesel engine. “Keep the blacks out,” he yelled. “Don’t let them back in. We’re going make this a beautiful city.”

New Orleans authorities will soon suspend martial law and permit the reentry of all New Orleanians to their city. This will result in one the most remarkable political transformation of any major city in United States’ history. New Orleans will resurrect under a white political majority in a city where African Americans were 70% of the population only a month ago. This seismic shift is the direct result of Katrina’s destruction of tens of thousands of black homes that, notwithstanding massive federal aid and flood insurance guarantees, will never be rebuilt, or will be rebuilt at costs far beyond the reach of most blacks.

The question that will face New Orleanians in the coming weeks is “In whose image will New Orleans be reconstituted?” What will become of black New Orleans and its dynamic culture that gave the world Sidney Bechet, Louis Armstrong, Mardi Gras Indians, brass bands, and uniquely inflected contemporary musical innovations in rap and hip hop music? What will become of the endearing culture of celebration that served as an antidote for the numbing boredom of repressed and colorless Midwestern lives? The spirit and ethnic diversity of New Orleans is worth saving

as much as the Italianate mansions along St. Charles Avenue. But as we rebuild this city there will be tremendous pressure to commercialize, package, and deliver the culture without the people who made it. New Orleans, the city of majestic homes and elegant muscular oaks will no doubt be reborn; but possibly without a soul. Such a spiritual death will result in New Orleans becoming the Orlando of the South. That's when I will voluntarily evacuate.

Since Hurricane Katrina came ashore on August 29, I have traveled by bicycle through hundreds of neighborhoods taking care of strangers (mostly pet lovers who would not leave their pets) talking to people from all walks of life. I do not pretend to know what the nation's perception of the events here have been. We "resisters", as the government has dubbed us (odd, I thought I was a "resident") have gone three weeks without newspapers, internet access, postal service, land-line phones, and receive almost all of our news through one officially designated radio/television station. So I do not know the issues in the national policy debate on the rescue and recovery efforts. But I do know what I have seen and heard on the streets, and it is not encouraging.

There is a growing and powerful "racial exclusion movement" among a significant section of the white New Orleanian community that sees Katrina as an opportunity to eliminate poverty and crime by eliminating black people. It is not a new movement, nor is it the sole province of parvenu gas station owners. Proposals to remove the New Orleans black population enjoyed a measure of support as late as the 1950s. I now hear many members of the old moneyed "carnival royalty" families openly arguing that Katrina provides an opening to depose black majority rule in the same way that their confederate forbearers overthrew the bi-racial Reconstruction government in the 1876 compromise.

I draw a distinction between a disaster and a tragedy. Disasters are something nature inflicts upon humans. Tragedies are something humans inflict upon other humans in their botched efforts to remedy disasters. The rescue efforts were clearly a tragedy; now we are faced with a second tragedy in the recovery processes both material and moral.

The decisions that will set the course for recovery for decades to come are being made today— with only one percent of the city's voters present. It is not a foregone conclusion that the issues of equity and fairness will make it to the table. The table has already been set, and who will be at it is anyone's guess. The New Orleans African American community finds itself fragmented and living in exile; not only the thousands of poor and unemployed African Americans in shelters, but also the thousands of educated black middle class professionals who comprised the city's political, intellectual, religious, and social justice activist leadership. When these people return things will no doubt heat up, given that the majority of black voters opposed Mayor Ray Nagin's election and his strongest critics, like the rest of the city's residents, have not been allowed back into the city.

There are already ominous signs that the recovery path may end up reproducing privilege inside New Orleans and poverty outside. Economically secure white New Orleanians have, for the most part, returned to secure their homes, yet no return provisions have been made for poor homeowners and renter. Particularly disturbing is the failure of corporate and institutional leadership in the city to set an example of equity. As thousands of unemployed black New Orleanians sit idle in relocation centers in Texas, many of New Orleans' leading businesses and

institutions are rapidly cleaning up with the help of thousands of workers—largely Hispanics imported from Texas. The city is flooded with Latinos who will soon become the new preferred service class. This development does not bode well for the eventual return of the black working poor.

Despite the dearth of outside news, I did listen to President George Bush's speech on the radio when he laid out his recovery plan. His call to build 4,000 new homes for low-income people is a good start; but that will provide housing for less than six percent of the 350,000 blacks who lived in New Orleans before Katrina. What was missing from his speech was a commitment to a specific funding level and the guarantee of equality in outcomes, not simply treatment.

The degrading treatment of black New Orleanians during the rescue phase also raises questions about the recovery process and equity. To this day, the city and state governments refuse to provide water, food, or medical aid to anyone remaining in New Orleans, though virtually all of those people live in the thousands of homes that sit on historically high ground and have never flooded by way of Lake Ponchartrain. Many of these residents are wondering aloud if should place our confidence in the same people to plan and direct a recovery process that results in a vibrantly diverse city?

The final task is that of moral recovery. My wife, Eileen San Juan and I originally stayed because we have lived through thirty years of hurricanes and floods and have always stayed to care for our homes and help our neighbors. It is the appalling indifference to the suffering of others that I have witnessed as a "resister" inside the city that convinces me that we urgently need a carefully planned and comprehensive program for "moral and ethical" recovery. My own experience was particularly disturbing.

On Friday, September 2, 2005, the fifth day following the hurricane, I awoke to radio news that thousands of evacuees were continuing to languish in the sun at the Morial Convention Center because city officials had ordered police and guardsmen not to issue food, water, or medical support. The news account also reported that two corpses were propped by the front door of the convention center.

I frantically loaded our car with supplies, spray-painted "AID" on all the doors and windows and headed for the convention center. On the way I passed a dead bloated body at Magazine and Jackson. She was wearing white socks with large blue stars. The scene at the convention center was one of unspeakable and shameful suffering. Women begged me to take their babies who were dehydrating. I had to tell them that there were no hospitals: all medical personnel had been forcibly evacuated, even on dry land. Contrary to official pronouncements that the convention center was too dangerous for police, let alone unarmed relief workers, people at the center greeted me like an angel from the heavens. People systematically distributed my goods as others implored me to bring back baby formula, water, and antibiotics. A man approached my car as I tried to leave. His eyes were dark and hollow. "Please mister," he said in daze. "Tell the world what's going on down here. Tell them that people are killing each other just for a drink of water."

Shaken, I raced back to my home to get more water and supplies. A mile from the center a white pick-up truck fell in behind me with two police officers. The unmarked truck had no siren or lights. I decided not to stop because I was sure they would tell me not to come back. Then suddenly, “Boom! Boom! Boom!” The state patrolman had fired three shots into the air from his handgun to force me to stop. I stopped, though furious that they had nothing better to do than chase relief workers. The policeman demanded to know what I was doing and why did I have “AID” painted on my car. I heatedly explained that I was taking food, water, and medical supplies to babies and elderly people who were dying in the sun at the convention center. Then I asked what were they doing heading *away* from the problem with an empty truck. They let me go.

The moral recovery in Katrina’s wake needs to be approached with the same forethought as the material recovery. I have directed an organization for thirteen years that has the simple mission to teach the moral imperative to speak out against the suffering and persecution of others. We have used the history of the Holocaust and the civil rights movement to teach young people the causes and consequences of racism and moral indifference. Now, we no longer have to reach back decades to find a telling case-study of human failure and redemption. Hurricanes bring out the best and worst of human behavior. It is heartening that so many communities have opened their schools to the 60,000 black New Orleanian students left homeless by this disaster, but plunging children into strange worlds without preparing and training them, their families, and their host schools for the culture shock is a recipe for a second disaster.

The recovery process is not written in stone—yet. The only guarantee for a recovery that does not exacerbate racism and compound inequality, and one that brings New Orleans back to life in both body and spirit, is a national mobilization of African Americans and all those lovers of “the city that care forgot” to relentlessly pressure the federal government for an inclusive and fair decision-making process.

Sunday, October 23rd, 2005 - Today in the Ninth Ward

First Published in Gambit Magazine 10-23-2005

My friend and I drove down to the Ninth Ward today. We came across a young man near Caffin Avenue helping his family prepare their house for the insurance adjuster. It was his first time back. “They left us back here to drown,” he said bitterly. His anger was deep and silent like the deadly undertows of the Mississippi river. “They don’t want us to come back here.”

I asked if anyone else in the neighborhood had come back. Not really. “My grandma stays down there,” he said, pointing down the street. “Her house is gone. Over there is where my Aunt stays. Her house is gone too. So is my sister’s—the one next to the blue house. Did anyone in the neighborhood die? Yes. The man around the corner. Both he and his daughter drowned. No one knows how it happened and no one wants to talk about it.

His best friend used to live across the street. They just sent his body back from Iraq before Katrina hit. A withered American flag bunting on the porch is the only reminder of his friend's wake. "His medals all washed away in the flood," he said, glancing down at the street. The sun was setting and we had to leave before last light and the curfew. I asked if we could take his picture. He flashed a big smile. I could not believe that there was still a smile left in the Ninth Ward.

But there it was; irrepressible, generous and forgiving.

Saturday, December 31st, 2005 - My Birthday in New Orleans

Today is New Years Eve. It is also my birthday. Those of you who were born on a holiday know the true meaning of human tragedy. New Years Eve is even worse than other holidays since it is the only official American holiday that sanctions and glorifies the ritual use of intoxicants to erase all consciousness of human pain, suffering, and social and moral obligation. Thank God for that. Unfortunately, this tradition also means that family and friends cannot be held accountable if they forget your birthday or, god forbid, they combine it with the closest holiday in a transparently convenient "proximal celebration."

My wife grew weary long ago of my chronic and very public complaints that the family consistently shortchanged my birthday. She had always made it a special day for me and it was not her fault rest of the world had better things to do. In recent years, she took to launching a pre-emptive strike against my whining by asking what I wanted to do for my birthday. I'd brush off her question, but she would ask the next day, and the next day, and so on. There are liability issues here and she did not want to be stuck paying a big settlement. So finally I would break down and I tell her what I wanted: Nothing. No cake (we're all too fat from the holidays). No big meal (everyone is worn out, and besides cooking a big meal means I'd have to finally wash the dishes I left to soak at Christmas). I would tell her that all I wanted for my birthday was some corndogs. And some pistachios. She was always happy to agree to this modest celebration, though she added the proviso that she did not want to hear me crying about how I never got a cake or party on my birthday. Yes, dear.

So it is usually is very nice birthday. All my kids are in town that day—or at least they call and leave a message on the machine.

This year, of course, nothing is the same. This morning I woke up and retrieved the newspaper which, since the hurricane, takes a very long time to read and gets you good and depressed for rest of the day. This is a very tough city to live in if you care about people. This morning on the second page there is a small story about the murder-suicide of a displaced family that lived in Grapevine, Texas. They faced eviction next week from their temporary housing. The man apparently killed his wife and son and then turned the gun on himself.

I was stunned. I did not feel like I was reading a story about strangers. I felt as if they had lived next door for years. Or that I had worked with the guy or he delivered the mail or his wife was the clerk I chatted with at the drug store. I sat there on the couch crying. I was glad that

everyone else was still asleep and could not see me cry. I wanted this man and his wife and son back. This did not have to happen.

What a way to start the New Year, I thought. What a birthday.

Sometimes I hate this city so much I don't think I can stay here another moment. Last night I was getting out of my car when I caught the scent of a blooming sweet olive tree. I used to tell people that I could never leave New Orleans because it was the only city in American that smelled of sweet perfume. The blooming plants take turns throughout the seasons lacing the night air with the fragrances of sweet olives, magnolias, jasmines and honeysuckles. No city in the country is so alluring. Last night New Orleans had her perfume on. It made me angry at first. I know how cruel and uncaring this city can be, and a little perfume isn't going to make me forget. But the sweet olives and magnolias know nothing of tragedy, despair, and defeat. When the wind died down and the floodwaters receded, they started their cycle of life again. All they know is to bloom, to release their gifts, and then to bloom anew.

There was a moment last night that I once again wondered if I could I ever leave this place. The city had turned warm and sweet for my birthday. That's a kind gift.

Friday, January 20th, 2006 - Throw Me Something Mister!

(First published in *Louisiana Weekly*, February 13, 2006)

I attended the second line parade in New Orleans a few weeks ago that was unfortunately marred by a shooting at the end. The shooting overshadowed a much bigger story. By the time the second line had turned down Orleans Avenue, there were at least 10,000 people marching in the street, a solid mass of people—black people—from Claiborne to Broadway. Near the end of the march they were chanting “we’re back,” “we’re back.” A cultural event had been turned into a political protest—in quintessentially New Orleans style. Contrast this outpouring to the poor turnout for recent traditional street protests staged in support of levees (100 people showed up for the protest at the Army Corp of Engineers). What the second line parade did was what every successful social and religious movement in the past has done: adapt their message to the cultural traditions of a community.

We need to make visible the frustration, anger, and sense of abandonment that has immobilized New Orleans. I spoke at an event the other day and someone asked for a show of hands of people who had seen the “devastation.” Most raised their hands. I thought to myself, no you have not seen the devastation. All you have seen is empty houses. The real devastation is in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people who lost everything and are far removed from family and community. Day by day they are losing hope. One of the ironies of Katrina is that the evacuation has made poverty and human pain virtually invisible. We have become victims of the television age in which images dominate content. Television shows pictures of empty houses and then cuts away to images of displaced people living well-fed and comfortably in Houston. But seldom does the public see the victim on the foundation slab waiting for the

mythical FEMA trailer. They don't see the fear of single mothers contemplating what will happen when the FEMA rent runs out and her children have no food or shelter. This is why Bush can dither on his commitment to build a new levee system; he is being asked to protect empty houses, not people. Put families in these empty houses, as the Vietnamese community has done in New Orleans East, and the moral onus will be on Bush to protect people.

We need to surface the pain, suffering, and frustration of Katrina victims for the public to see. What do we want the world to see on Mardis Gras day? Happy, well-fed people having a good time? Fine. But we also should let them see a united mass movement of tens of thousands of determined people from all walks of life who believe the federal government has forsaken them. We can do both. I suggest that after the Rex parade, the crowds lining the streets fall in behind in a massive "second line parade" with children, costumes, wagons, and protest signs. The march route would loop around Canal and end at the Federal Building where we would stage a protest—no leaders, no speeches, just people taking a stand before the world. To give voice to those still displaced who deserve to come home, people could bring signs that have the names of people who want to come home, e.g. "My Name is Shirley Breaux and I want to come home to New Orleans" (people could post their names on a web site). It would be a beautiful gesture and show the country we know how to both party and politic. All you need is two feet or a few wheels. And you'd still have time to catch the truck parades. This is New Orleans, after all.

Follow-up

(The post below was sent out to my personal list six-weeks later, February 20, 2006. At the time of my initial proposal for an interracial march, the Bush administration appeared to have abandoned New Orleans and was backing off his promise to fund flood protection and the rebuilding of housing. But in the intervening weeks, Bush announced funding that would provide levee protection and a bail-out for homeowners; but no guaranteed rentals for low-income people. The announcement appeared to satisfy the white community, most of whom had already returned, but left the displaced black population, the majority of whom rented, with no guarantees that they would have housing to return to.)

With some regret, I have abandoned my proposal for staging a second-line protest to the Federal Building on Mardis Gras day for several reasons. One is that I talked to the Zulu parade leaders and they plan to head the other way, down Orleans to their headquarters on Broad for a block party. This means that any event along the traditional parade route will be virtually all-white and not reflect the unity I was hoping for. I expect the Zulu "second line" will have the feel of a political protest. Second-lines in the black community are different than carnival parades; they are participatory, self-organized, and not commercially driven or staged for tourists. By definition, the "second line" is an unorganized assemblage that follows the march leaders, the "first line." That leaves a lot of room for spontaneity and political expression.

I have to confess that the response to my initial proposal was disappointing. One of the Zulu leaders asked me if I thought any white people would attend the rally. I told him I didn't know. Last Christmas day I organized a "welcome home" community event at Jackson Square. I was the only one there for a very, very long time. Why would people not want to

attend a rally to bring back “homes and neighbors”? Is it because most white people are willing to support rebuilding levees and razing neighborhoods, but they don’t want to open the city’s arms to displaced blacks and the poor? Or is it because people go to parades to forget their problems, not to remember them? In any case, I won’t be there. I do not feel like attending any celebration in a city that, after six months, has yet to publicly memorialize the 1,300 dead nor lament the continued exodus of 300,000 citizens. In the traditional Jazz funeral, the band first honors the deceased by playing a mournful dirge; it is only after this memorial that the body is “cut loose” and the raucous, swinging music begins. First the dirge, then the party.

I am not telling people what to do. I fled my home state of Kansas to escape the public scolds who want to regulate when and where you enjoy yourself. There will be a Mardi Gras day, regardless of what I think or do; but it won’t be my Mardi Gras day. For me, Mardi Gras was not about floats and throws. It was about sharing the streets in joy with thousands of my neighbors, black and white; cheering the bands from schools like Fortier, Carver, and Landry, who marched with pride and determination despite their tattered uniforms and dented instruments; and handing down the best “carnival throws” to the scruffy, children scampering on the ground. I don’t think the neighbors, the bands, or the scruffy children will be there this year. So, neither will I.

Thursday, April 20th, 2006 - My Day of (trying to) Absentee Voting

I am surprised at how many people responding to my column earlier this week thought the early voter system for the New Orleans Mayor’s election was successful in helping displaced black voters. They were amazed to hear that only 4% of the black registered voters made it to the eleven polls set up around the state to accommodate voters still in exile. I don’t blame them. The main story on the vote outcome was in the New Orleans Times-Picayune’s April 16, 2006 which reported the total number of votes cast in early voting *but not* in comparison to the total number of registered voters, especially those displaced. What was reported under the subheading “Large Black Turnout,” was Louisiana Secretary of State Al Ater’s estimate that 70% of the 10,585 people who cast ballots were black, which translates into 7,409 black votes. That sounds like a lot of votes unless you include what the Times-Picayune omitted: that these were 7,409 voters of out a total of 188,166 eligible black registered voters. Put in this context, the real story was that 96% of the eligible black voters did not show up to the satellite polls and will have to vote absentee or in person. How Easy is Absentee?

As of today, April 18, if you want to vote absentee you need a computer, internet connection and fax machine, not items that most poor evacuees scooped up along with their children when they evacuated. I decided to cast an absentee ballot since I will be out of town the day of the election. First I had to download the “absentee ballot request form” from the Secretary of State’s site. I filled it out and then had to walk to a local coffee shop to find two strangers willing to sign as witnesses—otherwise I had to pay a notary. Then I had to fax in the request and wait. One problem: there is no fax number on the request form. So I called the 1-(800)-833-2805 which is listed as an information line on the form. I dialed that and got the following: “The toll free number you have dialed is not in service.” Then I called the Secretary of State office at the regular number and they gave me their own fax number and said the toll-free line must not be operating. Then I dialed the Secretary of State fax number at (225) 922-0945. Busy. Then I

called the local voter registrar and they gave me a local number which did work. I am now waiting for them to fax me a ballot. I will then fax the completed form back to the voter registrar's office and hope it arrives along with the other tens of thousands of ballots.

So how will this affect the black turnout? Secretary of State Al Ater says that since 70% of the people who voted at satellite polls were black, which compares to the current black registered vote of 65%, so he thinks the satellite system worked and the election will be fair to displaced black voters. Consider his math. First, the fact that only 288 voters out of 100,000 New Orleanians living in Houston cast a vote in Calcasieu Parish, the closest poll to Houston, proves that the system did not work for displaced voters, black or white. People don't like to drive hundreds of miles and spend \$100 on gas to vote. I don't even like driving six blocks and standing in line 10 minutes. Secondly, the goal of a fair election is to get black voters outside of New Orleans proportionate to the current displaced voter population, not the former black population or registered voter population. Blacks comprise far more than 65% of the displaced population in most big cities. Statistically, if you accept that the current population of New Orleans is 150,000 and that it is evenly divided racially, that means there are 240,000 blacks and 50,000 whites still displaced—or roughly five times as many blacks as whites. To be proportionately fair, blacks in displaced communities would have to be voting at rates five times as high as whites and requesting absentee ballots at five times the rate. Based on Ater's numbers, they are showing up at about twice the rate, at best.

Hiding these troubling numbers creates the impression that black voter turnout will be normal, which can lull black voters into a false sense of security. The racial fairness of an election, its success in overcoming obstacles for displaced black voters, can only be measured by reporting the turnout percentages, not simply vote totals. Otherwise we are in for a big surprise. Consider the consequences: If black turnout is as low as 33%, which I think is quite possible, and white turnout is 70%, which is very likely, then whites will outpoll blacks 63,466 to 62,094, even though blacks have twice the registered voters. With numbers like these, one can make a convincing case that, regardless of intentions, the effect of mail registration and absentee ballots will be similar to the literacy and property qualification tests used to limit black vote in 1898. Given that 40% of African Americans in New Orleans read at the lowest level of literacy, almost identical to the literacy rate in 1898, it will be extremely difficult for displaced voters to obtain and properly complete the complex mail voter registration and absentee ballot forms. And since 80% of the black community rented before Katrina and little effort has been made to restore rentals, public housing, or move in FEMA trailers, home-ownership amounts to the new property test: if you own a home, you are more likely to get to vote.

Afterword: The registrar never faxed my ballot. I won't be voting Saturday, like a lot of other people.

Sunday, May 21st, 2006 - How White People Elected Ray Nagin

First Published in *Louisiana Weekly*

I was surprised too. But there were hints along the way. Back in September it was hard to find an African American who had anything good to say about New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin. In early September, New Orleans Hip Hop artist “Juvenile” penned the song “Get Ya Hustle On” which was released as an album and video in February of 2006. The song castigated Nagin as someone that black people couldn’t trust and his video featured three figures wandering the devastated Ninth Ward wearing paper masks of George Bush, Dick Cheney, and Ray Nagin. Three peas in a pod as far as Juvenile was concerned.

Juvenile was someone to listen to if you wanted to gauge black opinion—at least poor dispossessed blacks. In 2002 Tulane professor Joel Devine published a study of public opinion of the Central City neighborhood of New Orleans, an overwhelmingly black and poor neighborhood bordering the most affluent sections of Uptown New Orleans. Devine’s poll asked residents in nine of the eleven census tracts who they regarded as the most important leaders in their community for “getting things done.” Respondents were offered choices including the current Mayor, Marc Morial, and other black elected officials as well as home-grown Rap entertainers, including Juvenile. Remarkably, Juvenile trounced the opposition. While only 11% of the respondents considered Morial “very important, nearly three times as many (32%) ranked Juvenile as the most effective leader. Indeed, Juvenile emerged as the most popular leader in the community, followed by rappers Master P and Jubilee. Based on his popularity, it would be reasonable to conclude that Juvenile was only giving voice to the attitudes among his supporters and fans who hesitated to express them publicly. Things began to change in the following months. On April 1, 2006, I attended the rally and march across the Mississippi River Bridge protesting the racist Gretna police blockade of black refugees during the Katrina flooding. As an historian of the civil rights movement, I can say that the 5,000 people who crossed the bridge were taking part in the largest protest in New Orleans history. That fact slipped past the local media but it was still a harbinger of the growing anger and frustration that African Americans were feeling. Something else was obvious at the rally and march. For the first time I noticed public support for Nagin. His signs and t-shirts were everywhere and the speakers on the Dias, Al Shapton included, appeared to be coalescing around Nagin as black New Orleans last hope. Nagin’s powerful showing in the April Mayoral primary signaled a sea change in black opinion (long before the publication of Douglas Brinkley’s highly critical book on Nagin). Whatever misgivings they had about the Mayor in September, African Americans found him more acceptable than the other candidates. So what happened in the intervening months following the controversial evacuation and rescue efforts? I think it’s clear from the people I have been talking to, both in the city and those still displaced, that by the primary a consensus had developed in the black community that white people were deliberately attempting to take the reins of city government to remake New Orleans into a whiter and more affluent community. This fear was disparaged in the local media as the “so called conspiracy theory,” but one event after another occurred that left little doubt that, far from a conspiracy, there was an open and organized movement to prevent poor people and their neighborhoods from returning. The public school system had been virtually closed; thousands of poor blacks were evicted from their homes; utility companies dragged their feet on reconnecting black neighborhoods (Ninth Ward residents were only allowed back into their neighborhoods this month; white “good government” groups fought to deny building permits in the flooded areas which they hoped to bulldoze into oblivion; traditional black occupations such as roofers and

painters were given to itinerant Latino labors; and white neighborhoods effectively prevented FEMA from bringing in 30,000 trailers for displaced people, mostly blacks.

Then it got worse. The uptown white elite pushed to abolish the school board and assessors offices, both majority black, and then demanded that the Mayoral election be held while 80% of the black community remained displaced. The New Orleans Times-Picayune, the city's daily newspaper, endorsed a majority-white city council ticket and a white mayoral candidate who had only 3% black support in a city that was 70% black. No wonder that African Americans began to fear that there was no place for them in the city envisioned by the uptown elite and their confederates comprised of developers, urban planners, and ageing and increasingly conservative yuppies. Only one person with the requisite power took a stand against these exclusion policies: Ray Nagin. The Mayor ignored the recommendations of his own Bring New Orleans Back Commission and allowed building permits in the flooded areas. He rejected the plans to turn the Ninth Ward into a park and promised to bring back all neighborhoods. While many white uptowners openly told the national media that they hoped for a whiter city, Nagin, in his infamous Martin Luther King Day speech, attempted in a clumsy way to assure blacks that they would return in the same numbers as before—that the city was going to remain a Chocolate city. As it became obvious that Nagin was not going to do the bidding of affluent and powerful whites, they soon abandoned him in search of a real white hope. As they pulled their money and political support for Nagin, the white elite ended up pushing the Mayor into the arms of the only section of the electorate left: the African American voters. Mitch Landrieu had solid liberal credentials, but asking blacks to place their fates in the hands of any white man in Louisiana was asking for blind faith. In Nagin they had a candidate they believed was beholden to them and them alone. Whether or not their faith is misplaced we will have to see. But the white elite ended up with the opposite of what they dreamed of: a black mayor and a majority black city council. We can only hope they will be more charitable and forgiving than their erstwhile insurrectionists. The pundits will write this election off as old-fashioned racial block voting. They'll say Nagin won because black people always vote for black people. They are dead wrong. New Orleans' blacks have demonstrated repeatedly that they are willing to elect white officials. For years, black voters re-elected a white District Attorney and Criminal Sheriff in contests that included black candidates. No, people were not voting skin color; they were voting fear. It was the deliberate efforts of the white elite and their supporters to take control of city government and prevent poor African Americans from returning that created the racial fear and distrust that sent black voters into Nagin's camp. It was white people, not blacks, who got Ray Nagin elected. Not all white people were part of this power grab, but their silence in the face of injustices didn't help inspire interracial trust. We can restore that trust and bridge the racial divide by repudiating those who led the palace coup and start anew by treating the poor and the displaced as people who did not lose their citizenship when they lost their homes. They have a right to come home to a better life.

Wednesday, June 14th, 2006 - Katrina's Blueprint for Ending Poverty

First published in *Poverty and Race, May/June Issue*

There is an old saying “When you stumble, dig for gold.” When we encounter adversity we seldom have the presence of mind to learn from it, although we generally learn more in life from our mistakes than from our successes. Hurricane Katrina was a monumental stumble that nearly landed us into an abyss. It scattered the poor of New Orleans throughout the nation and left those behind consumed with the task of shoring up the city’s levees before the next storm arrived. Yet concealed within the dispersal of hundreds of thousands of poor people—the new Diaspora—runs a rich vein of new knowledge that may unlock the secret to ending poverty.

The unexpected windfall was not that the floodwaters had washed away the poor to better lives elsewhere. This is the fashionable “silver lining” argument trumpeted by pundits who believe that every success that displaced people enjoy is more evidence that they should never return home to New Orleans. A “culture of poverty” created by the poor themselves is responsible for their plight, so they say, and no amount of government services or employment opportunities can mend a broken spirit.

Most of the displaced are not faring as well as some would have us believe, but there are success stories and they deserve our attention—but not for the reasons normally offered. Success can also be a sign of failure—in this case, the failure of New Orleans to provide adequate services and opportunities for poor people to help them succeed. Why do the same people flourish in one environment and founder in another? The answer lies with viewing the displacement as an enormous social experiment.

Before Katrina, we were told that it was a waste to spend money on New Orleans schools because poor black students did not want to learn. Yet there is clear evidence that many host communities have succeeded where New Orleans failed. In Houston, Austin, and Columbia, South Carolina, many displaced children are excelling in school and their parents are rising out of poverty. Rather than treat these successes as arguments against returning to New Orleans, we need to find out why these communities succeeded and use their strategies as a blueprint to rebuild New Orleans schools and neighborhoods. The answers are not that hard to find. One Houston school dramatically improved displaced student achievement scores by reducing the teacher-student ratio to nearly half the New Orleans public school ratio and providing comprehensive mental health services and computer-based learning technologies. In Colombia, South Carolina, Mayor Bob Coble and Congressman Jim Clyburn created a relief organization that provided displaced families with personal “shepherds,” volunteer advocates who guided evacuees through the maze of government bureaucracies to help them secure decent housing, necessary social services, and good healthcare and schools.

These simple experiments with urban poverty have produced a formula for success. Now we know that these children can learn, if only they are provided the necessary resources. Given this knowledge, to return these children to the same under-funded and overcrowded schools will be nothing short of a moral crime. Now we know that families are far more likely to prosper and become independent if they have a helping hand from someone who will advocate for them against unresponsive government bureaucracies and heartless corporations. Why cannot we provide the same helping hand for people returning to New Orleans? If we change nothing, nothing will change. The great exodus from New Orleans created an unprecedented opportunity to experiment with new strategies for ending poverty. The key that unlocked the door to a better

life in Houston or Austin is the same key that will unlock the door to a better life in New Orleans. While researchers are descending on the Gulf Coast by the hundreds to find solutions to our problems, it may be that the answers are to be found using this “Diaspora as Blueprint” approach to research in the displaced communities. Social scientists need to adapt their research strategies and objectives in the displaced communities so that they can ultimately translate their findings into a blueprint for ending poverty, inadequate schooling, and crime in New Orleans as well as rest of the nation.

Monday, July 31st, 2006 - What Cause is This for Optimism?

First published in *Infoshop News*

The *New York Times* recently opined that there is “optimism in many corners” of New Orleans on educational reform in the city. I’m not sure what corners they’ve been hanging out at, but they are not in poor black neighborhoods. The Recovery School District (RSD) is the unit within the Louisiana State Department of Education charged with running the 107 New Orleans schools that were placed in receivership last fall. The RSD estimates that they will have 30,000 students in the district by January 2007, most of these returning displaced students from the poorest black neighborhoods in the city. A few weeks ago the first signs appeared that something was amiss: the RSD postponed school openings and admitted that they had not hired a single teacher for the district. By the time the RSD began vetting applicants last week, the charter schools and suburban districts had long since hired most of the available teachers.

When I heard that recent meetings of the RSD staff were virtually all white, I contacted several members of the RSD staff and could not get a response to my questions about the current staffing levels and diversity. Last week I finally received an email from Katherine Whitney, the RSD Chief of Staff who told me that the RSD had only ten people on staff: ten people running a school system of 30,000 students! Of the ten staff members, I can only identify one person responsible for special education programs in which approximately 6,000 special needs students will have to be placed individually—by school opening day, September 7th. Now the RSD is talking about staffing the schools with substitute teachers—who were virtually impossible to recruit before Katrina.

How can the RSD justify this inexcusable lack of planning for the needs of poor African American students? No matter what occurs in the next few weeks, there is reason to question what, if any, thought and planning has gone into the curriculum and instructional resources for the schools. Had these been 30,000 middle class white children, is there any doubt that the media—including the *New York Times*—and business and civic leaders would be howling in protest and demanding that drastic corrective measures be taken immediately? What cause is this for optimism?

Thursday, August 31st, 2006 - Who Delayed the Planning Process?

First Published in *The New Orleans Agenda*, August 31, 2006

NEW ORLEANS, LA — The media is full of stories these days blaming the slow neighborhood planning process in New Orleans on Mayor Nagin or the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA). What is omitted from this analysis is that the biggest set-back to the recovery planning resulted from the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC) issuing a plan that proposed eliminating huge portions of the black community and called for an immediate moratorium on all building in flooded areas. The neighborhoods not slated for immediate “greenspacing” were to have their fates decided by April by proving that more than 50% of the community was going to rebuild—all to be decided before some neighborhoods, like the predominantly black New Orleans East, were even re-opened to home owners—and without any input from the 80% of the black community that rented and remained in exile.

The public reaction to the BNOBC “smaller footprint” plan unveiled in January 2006 was so overwhelmingly negative that Nagin quietly declined to fund the balance of the planning process (this is confirmed in today’s Times-Picayune story). Nagin had little interest in bulldozing his only potential voter base after his erstwhile white business supporters abandoned him in favor of Ron Forman. It took the Mayoral election in May to decide the final fate of the BNOBC plan—and Nagin’s re-election, this time with overwhelming black support, drove a stake through the heart of the plan.

So the whole planning process, this time allowing for the participation of neighborhood members, had to start anew in June. Whatever mistakes Nagin, the City Council and the LRA have made, the people who deserve the primary blame for the current planning delay are the ones who attempted to destroy entire black neighborhoods on the argument that they were flood hazards—which turned out not to be the case based on the newly released Base Flood Elevation (BFE) maps. Note that on the BNOBC map that the ninth ward was slated for “greenspace” while the white Lakeview neighborhood, which is according to the BFE maps is even further below sea level, was not slated for “greenspacing.”

So who are the sources for the stories pinning the blame for the current delay on Nagin and the LRA? In many cases, the sources are the very people who engineered the discredited BNOBC plan (one national print story used eleven sources to explain the delay: every single source was white and most were rich and powerful and representatives of groups that had either designed or promoted the BNOBC plan).

Friday, November 10th, 2006 - The Answer is Up There

Commentary by Lance Hill November 10, 2006 It’s an open question for social psychologists whether or not suffering makes people more compassionate or simply hardens their heart to the suffering of others. For those of us living in New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina, the answer may be right over our heads. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused roof damage to tens of

thousands of buildings in New Orleans that were roofed with asbestos shingles. Unfortunately, under Louisiana law, no asbestos abatement precautions are required for most owner-occupied homes or commercial rental properties with four or fewer units. Everyday in New Orleans you can witness the widespread removal of roofing-material in which asbestos shingles are ripped from roofs and thrown from the roof into open dumpsters. If the tiles break or are spread on driveways and in lawns where they can be crushed, they can eventually release asbestos dust which can be inhaled by roofing workers, building tenants, and neighbors. Fibrous asbestos is also being removed from buildings without adequate precautions in other building materials forms such as floor tile, acoustic ceiling tile, and fireproofing.

Asbestos particles released from shingles when inhaled can cause numerous respiratory diseases, including asbestosis and lung cancer (plueral mesothelioma). Children playing in yards adjacent to homes that had asbestos improperly removed can disturb fibers in the yard and inhale them months after roof repairs. The same is true for yard workers who inadvertently stir up asbestos fibers when they mow lawns.

The danger to roofing workers and tenants is obvious. Roofing workers in New Orleans since Katrina are mostly itinerant Latino laborers and it is common to see them working without respirators and protective clothing, in clear violation of OSHA regulations that require personal protection equipment for workers handling asbestos materials. On several occasions I have seen Latinos working on roofs in the complete dark of night with no lights whatsoever—and with no apparent concern from the home owners. Rental occupants and neighbors are seldom informed that asbestos dust might be contaminating their breathing air during renovations or that it can be tracked into homes or deposited into their yards. In the coming years, thousands of homes damaged by Katrina will have asbestos removed which can create potential health hazards for workers, renters, and neighbors. Since a large number of the roofing workers are illegal aliens, we can expect that they will eventually be sent back to the countries of origin, carrying in their lungs the seeds of a long and painful death.

Although the potential health crisis cuts across income lines, poor African Americans who rent in older neighborhoods are more likely to be exposed to asbestos health dangers in the future. Once again, Katrina is exacerbating inequality and health disparities. Insurance companies are contributing to the problem by not covering the added costs of asbestos abatement, which can double the price of a new roof. But the ultimate decision of whether or not to endanger the health of roofing workers and contaminate a neighborhood with asbestos rests with local home owners and rental owners. They can insist on safe asbestos abatement procedures, which most roofing companies are trained and licensed to perform.

Everyone who was affected by Katrina has suffered, but we need to be vigilant that our own suffering does not make us indifferent to the suffering of others. Our actions in the future will prove if we merely survived Katrina or if we grew as a community from the tragedy.

Thursday, April 26th, 2007 - How not to Build Racial Unity and Counter Racism in New Orleans

There is a long overdue discussion beginning in New Orleans on how to address race and class issues and bridge the growing racial divide in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. For many months there was little recognition in the mainstream media that displaced African Americans felt locked out of their city or that there was any foundation for these feelings. Feelings of exclusion were dismissed as the product of paranoid conspiracy theories or politicians exploiting groundless fears. But the growing distrust and resentment was evident in the findings of social scientists more than a year ago. A Louisiana Recovery Authority survey of displaced citizens conducted in the first months of 2006 revealed a profound racial division over the future of the city. When asked how important was it that New Orleans “return to its pre-hurricane racial mix,” 88% of black respondents responded “extremely important,” while 67% of white respondents felt that it was “not important at all.” Last October, Tulane Professor Loretta Pyles conducted a survey in one predominantly African American neighborhood that was heavily flood damaged. The study revealed that 84% of the respondents did not trust other races, which is three times the rate of national surveys asking the same question.

More recently, the Louisiana Chapter of the Sierra Club recently honored St. Bernard Parish Council President Henry “Junior” Rodriguez with their “Legislative Leadership” award. This, despite the fact that Rodriguez has a long and un-apologetic history of publicly using racial epithets and took the lead in passing the “blood relative rental law” last October that effectively prevented blacks from renting in St. Bernard Parish. The law made it a crime for white homeowners to rent to anyone other than a “blood relative,” effectively making it impossible for blacks and Latinos to rent in the 96% white parish. That a putatively liberal organization like the Sierra Club can countenance racism by honoring a man with a long history of open bigotry is a sign of a serious problem that begs for a community-wide dialogue; and it’s a case study in how *not* to build racial unity and counter racism.

The Sierra Club incident is evidence that, in this racially polarized city, the tendency is to avoid an open and frank dialogue on racism in the recovery. But avoiding a dialogue on the injustices of the rescue and recovery periods simply muzzles the victims and creates a false sense of unity based on repressed grievances and a lack of accountability. People who have endured deep ethnic group trauma and injustices are forced to endure their wounds in silence, which prevents individual and group healing. The prevailing local strategy for building racial unity since Katrina has been to dodge the difficult discussion of racial injustices and disparities and, instead, unite blacks and whites to work around a common project that will magically make prejudices disappear. The problem is that not only does this strategy silence the voices of the victims, but it simply does not work.

It was this strategy of avoidance on the part of whites that allowed St. Bernard officials to pass a segregation ordinance last fall without a whimper of protest from relief groups and nonprofits working in the parish. The outcome was the collapse of joint work between St. Bernard Parish groups and adjacent black groups in the Lower Ninth Ward and soaring distrust and resentment. Moreover, the conspiracy of silence over the blood-relative law contributed to the ironic situation in which black and Jewish relief workers continued to volunteer in the parish and

were put to rebuilding homes that, unbeknownst to them, they could not legally rent. That led to even more distrust and a sense of betrayal on the part of visiting relief workers. The lesson here is bigots interpret silence as consent.

There are also pitfalls in how we define racism that can lead to avoiding a forthright and useful discussion of the causes of inequality. In recent years the concept of “structural racism” has been presented as a framework for analyzing and solving poverty and inequality. “Structural racism” is a social science concept based on the distinction between conscious and unconscious racism. Conscious racism comprises those hateful ideas and deliberate actions intended to denigrate ethnic groups and produce inequality. Conscious racism is easily recognized because it is overt and what we might call “old fashioned racism.” In contrast, unconscious racism, e.g. “structural racism” is not motivated by hatred or imposed by overtly bigoted human actors, but rather comprises social and economic structures or traditions and policies that have an inadvertent discriminatory effect. It is not so easily identified and ferreted out. Within the “structural racism” framework, racial disparities and poverty are caused by economic and social forces, not hateful humans.

There is no doubt that structural racism exists in New Orleans (for example lack of public transportation to well-paying jobs in the suburbs) but the dominant problem for poor, displaced African Americans is hardly an unconscious form of structural racism: instead, these are conscious exclusionist policies, like the “blood relative” law, enacted by real humans through action or inaction that are intended to prevent poor blacks from returning to New Orleans or its environs. Those policies are motivated by very real and human ideas: the unwillingness to respect the rights of the poor and an indifference to their suffering.

Examples of conscious human agency in perpetuating inequality and exclusion are abundant. Following Katrina, the Immigration and Naturalization service granted hotel owners requests to import hundreds of temporary “guest workers” from Latin America to work in hotels, on the flimsy argument that they could not find New Orleanians in the emergency shelters willing to return to the city for jobs and live rent-free in luxury hotels. Depriving displaced blacks of their jobs was a conscious human act, not the byproduct of some faceless structure. In the first month after the storm, landlords evicted more than 6,000 renters, most of them black, without notice to make way for higher-paying out-of-state recovery workers. Shortly afterwards, white neighborhood groups blocked the placement of 30,000 FEMA trailers in the city as part of the “not in my back yard” movement. The city’s only hospital for the uninsured was shuttered, making it impossible for the majority of displaced African Americans to return since they had no health insurance.

In New Orleans virtually every key issue—education, healthcare, employment—has pitted the white community against displaced blacks. Federal funds for community rebuilding are spread thin and white neighborhoods that were untouched by flood waters are constantly competing for the same funds that might help restore flooded black neighborhoods. This reality makes it difficult for people who say they are opposed to racism to avoid challenging those people, businesses, and institutions that support exclusionist policies that discourage the return of the poor and perpetuate inequality. We need to take care that a focus on “structural racism” does not deflect us from a frank and open discussion of the racial disparities in the recovery that are the

result of human actions—and the need for white people to publicly acknowledge these injustices and take a stand against them. Only by correctly identifying the ideas and systems that produce and reproduce inequality can we remedy the problems and anticipate and prevent a replay of these events in the future.

There is no “healing of the racial divide” or “countering racism” that does not involve (1) publicly acknowledging racial and class injustices and disparities and (2) taking concrete actions to remedy the problems. People and institutions must be held responsible and accountable for their actions, or complicit inaction and silence. We need to speak out against actions that exclude, harm, or treat people unfairly, be they deliberate or inadvertent. Multicultural unity is based on trust and trust is based on action—the willingness of coalition partners to acknowledge injustices and take steps to correct them. Trust is not an act of faith; it requires real support and solidarity for victims of injustice.

Finally, we need to redefine racism to encompass the kind of moral indifference that leads to discriminatory outcomes. Indifference to the suffering of others is the new form of racism in America today. White people are indifferent to the suffering of blacks because, to some degree, they regard blacks as less human and deserving of rights. Racism should not be defined exclusively as negative and derogatory ideas about people of color or overt antipathy and a sense of biological or cultural superiority. Racism has changed over the years. When biological racism became discredited by the 1960s, we recognized that the same discriminatory behavior can result from cultural racism (e.g. “we are all the same inside, but they are just raised wrong”).

As Elie Weisel, the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize Winner once said, “The opposite of love is not hatred but indifference.”

Monday, May 21st, 2007 - new dataset available on post-Katrina FEMA trailer siting attempts

Dear Colleagues,

The Murray Research Archive at Harvard University (<http://www.murray.harvard.edu/>) now holds the original data set entitled “Proposed Locations for FEMA Trailers in Post-Katrina New Orleans, 2005 - 2006.”

The purpose of this dataset is to understand the factors affecting decision makers who sought to place travel trailers in the New Orleans, LA area post-Hurricane Katrina.

This data set captures the number of temporary trailers and temporary trailer sites per zip code that were proposed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in conjunction with the New Orleans city government. Based on the TAC-RC-IA Priority Sites Report (Master Copy) dated 29 June 2006, this data set also provides demographic, socioeconomic, geographic,

political, and civil society measures for 114 zip codes in and around metropolitan New Orleans, Louisiana where those trailers could have been placed.

Demographic information includes population, voting age population, elderly population, and population density per zip code. Geographic measures include the area of the zip code in square miles along with three different measures for water damage and flooding per zip code. Socioeconomic indicators include median house prices, income, percentage of individuals attending college, percentage non-white, percentage of families below the poverty line, and percentage unemployed per zip code. Following Hamilton (1993), we measure civil society mobilization potential through voter turn out.

Note that this data set does not capture the areas that, in the end, received trailers. Rather, it can be used to test the siting heuristics used by decision makers in the post-Katrina environment when many local communities in the area publicly expressed their opposition to have trailers and trailer parks put in their back yards. The list of proposed sites can be analyzed to understand which areas city and government planners believed would be most amenable to these controversial facilities in the post-Katrina environment.

The study can be reached directly through the following URL:

<http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/mra/faces/study/StudyPage.jsp;jsessionid=1d0ed6c8e78cb8abdf08bdfacfb7?studyId=565>

This data set was used to create the working paper “Strong Civil Society as a Double-Edged Sword: Siting Trailers in Post-Katrina New Orleans ” by Daniel Aldrich and Kevin Crook, available at the Social Science Research Network (http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=960497).

Sincerely,

Daniel

—

Daniel P. Aldrich, Ph.D.
USJRP Advanced Research Fellow, Harvard University
Assistant Professor, Political Science, Purdue University
<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~daldrich/>
Tel: 617.495.2626

Tuesday, June 26th, 2007 - AFT Report on New Orleans Schools and Former Teachers

This is a masterfully researched report on the effect of firing all 5,000 Orleans Parish teachers in the wake of Katrina. The report debunks just about every premise of the post-Katrina school “reform” movement and serves as a warning for creating a school system that, unlike any other

system in the United States, does not take advantage of experienced, local educators. The report also documents the development of a "dual school system" and the double standards employed from the outset of the "reform" movement.

http://www.aft.org/presscenter/releases/downloads/NoExperReport_07.pdf

Tuesday, August 28th, 2007 - Time Magazine on Racial Tensions and Solutions in New Orleans

This article by Russell McCulley includes an interview with me in which I discuss the effect of Ethnic Group Trauma on racial dynamics in the city. We present an expanded version of the theory in our Storm Bridge program workshops.

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1656660,00.html>

Tuesday, September 4th, 2007 - The Nation Magazine on New Orleans Charter Schools

Below is a link to a critical article on charter schools and growing inequality in New Orleans schools. <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070910/tisserand>

Tuesday, October 30th, 2007 - Student Achievement in New Orleans—AFT Report

Below is a link to a report by the United Teachers of New Orleans, Louisiana Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers. "Reading, Writing and Reality Check" is a study of the emerging dual and unequal school system resulting from the privatization of the majority of public schools in New Orleans. The report concludes that 6 out of 8 of the elementary schools that belong to the Algiers Charter School Association experienced a dramatic drop in standardized test scores since Hurricane Katrina. It also highlights the relationship between veteran teachers and charter school success.

<http://la.aft.org/UTNO/index.cfm?action=article&articleID=eb05edfd-2efe-42b7-8753-dc4b84e3b504>

Friday, January 18th, 2008 - LSU Fans on New Orleans Public Housing

Not that this was not a predictable response, but I think that the fans were so willing to express their racist views on video tape for the world to see is a sign of the level of racism and the growing arrogance of the exclusionist movement that seeks to prevent poor African Americans

from returning to New Orleans. I think it also reveals that opposition to public housing is, for some people, just shorthand for a set of racist prejudices and stereotypes that they apply to all poor black people, e.g. “they don’t want to work, they don’t want to follow the laws, etc.” For these whites, the debate is not about affordable housing but rather whether or not poor people have any right to return.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hVvMfgvocE>

Monday, March 24th, 2008 - Group Charges St. Bernard Renting Laws

Here’s another story on how New Orleans suburbs are making it difficult for African Americans to return to the New Orleans area. St. Bernard Parish officials are being sued a second time in two years for rental laws that critics claim are designed to prevent African Americans from renting in the flood-damaged Parish. In October 2006 the Parish Council enacted the infamous “Blood Rental” ordinance that dissenting council member Lynn Dean said was intended to prevent blacks from moving into the overwhelmingly white Parish (the council, including current council president Taffaro, voted to censure Dean for his public remarks at the time). Forced to revise the Blood Rental Ordinance, the council continued to claim the right to approve and restrict rentals in the parish.

Excerpt from attached story:

Noting that most of the Your Home Solution tenants are African-American, Brenneman said he thinks there are racial overtones to the crackdown on those properties. “I think the motivation behind this is that they want to control who lives in the parish,” he said.

Wednesday, May 28th, 2008 - Louisiana Weekly Index — An African-American View of New Orleans

Here is a link to the index of articles and commentaries in the *Louisiana Weekly*. Researchers and incoming volunteers are constantly asking for insights into the African American viewpoint on the Katrina Recovery, which are not normally found in the mainstream media. The *Louisiana Weekly* presents a representative cross-section of local African American opinion, diverse yet reflecting any many ways the growth of a new black nationalism, e.g. Kojo Livingston’s column, “Hard Truth.”

<http://www.louisianaweekly.com/read/archive.html>

The *New Orleans Tribune* is also representative, but has only current issues downloadable:

<http://www.neworleanstribune.com/medley.htm>

Wednesday, August 20th, 2008 - New Orleans Demographic Project

Several community-based organizations in New Orleans are seeking assistance in interpreting demographic studies. In particular, demographers offer widely divergent estimates of the city's population, and several organizations are conducting surveys based on data provided by the postal service and then subsequently weighted based on older census data.

The racial composition of the city is a particular concern given the widespread belief that only a fraction of the previous African American population (68% pre-Katrina) has returned, while the Census Bureau has recently estimated (make a "special adjustment" using pre-Katrina racial data) that the city is at 62% African American. Population projections are also being used to plan school facility capacity for the next ten years, including the demolition of more than 38% of existing school facilities.

This is not a paid consultancy. The Southern Institute is coordinating the partnering of demographers to the community-based organizations, such as Common Knowledge, which have no funding for this project. This could be an ideal partnership with a network of social justice demographers or a graduate or special class project—or it could be a research project that could seek funding in partnership with the local organizations—especially on demographics and equity in the Katrina recovery. If you are interested, please contact:

Lance Hill

Southern Institute for Education and Research

Tulane University

Tuesday, September 30th, 2008 - Excellent Article on Post-Katrina Housing Discrimination

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20080915/ratner> This is an excellent article on Post-Katrina housing discrimination from Nation magazine that got overlooked in the havoc wreaked by hurricane Gustav. It focuses on suburban discrimination, but it is important to note that African Americans were compelled to find housing in the suburbs because of policies that inhibited their return to New Orleans proper. Much of the story focuses on St. Bernard Parish where the overt housing discrimination has failed to generate even a whisper of protest from the scores of humanitarian relief organizations working on housing in the Parish. As always, silence is interpreted as consent by locals, but the courageous public stand by St. Bernard Parish council person Lynn Dean offers an alternative to the strategy of silence in the face of persecution. Dean is quoted in the article saying: "They don't want the blacks back," explained Lynn Dean, 84, a quirky, self-styled "mini-mogul" who served for years on the St. Bernard Parish Council and was one of only two council members to oppose the blood relative law. "What they'd like to do now

with Katrina is say, We'll wipe out all of them. They're not gonna say that out in the open, but how do you say? Actions speak louder than words. There's their action." Lance Hill, Ph.D. Executive Director Southern Institute for Education and Research Tulane University M.R. Box 1692, 31 McAlister Dr. New Orleans, LA 70118 (504) 865-6100 (504) 862-8957 (fax)

Thursday, February 19th, 2009 - New Orleans last in nation for job creation from stimulus bill

1. Here's an article on the New Orleans 2nd congressional district receiving the lowest job creation benefits among the 435 districts from the stimulus plan.

http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2009/02/new_orleans_areas_2nd_congress.html

2. Jobs are a major part of bringing back the displaced population and providing decent income for those who have returned, which would help reduce youth crime and violence.

Below is a link to the **Oxfam** report on African American job losses to outside workers after Katrina:

“But in the end, these policies encouraged employers to create disposable jobs, with wages too low to cover inflated housing costs or too precarious to protect immigrant workers or encourage local workers to return home.” P. 13

http://www.oxfamamerica.org/newsandpublications/publications/research_reports/mirror-on-america

Thursday, April 30th, 2009 - May Day Solidarity Rallies Tomorrow

Come and join other workers

tomorrow, may 1st (May Day)

to commemorate International Workers' Day!

For more information, please visit...

GULFPORT May Day Solidarity Rally – <http://yourmira.org/mayday09.pdf>

CANTON May Day Solidarity Rally - <http://yourmira.org/mayday09canton.pdf>

Para más información en español, por favor visite...

GULFPORT May Day Solidarity Rally – http://yourmira.org/mayday09_esp.pdf

CANTON May Day Solidarity Rally - http://yourmira.org/mayday09canton_esp.pdf

We look forward to seeing you Tomorrow in Canton or gulfport!

Friday, May 8th, 2009 - Reminder: MIRA Lunch Meeting

Dear Human Rights Friends and Supporters for Social Justice:

On **Wednesday, May 13th—at 12:00 NOON** we will gather at the MIRA office (612 N. State Street, 2nd floor) to convene our monthly Statewide Advocacy Meeting. As always, lunch will be provided for **FREE** at Wednesday's meeting. This month we will be discussing:

· **Moment of Silence and Tribute to Mayor Frank E. Melton**

· **Mississippi Legislative Updates**

· **Mississippi Municipal Primary Election Results**

· **Swine Flu: NAFTA, immigrants and media paranoia**

We look forward to seeing you on Wednesday, so be sure to join us for lively conversation and **FREE** food!

(Be sure to bring along any friends and allies who are craving social justice and good cuisine.)

*(*If you would rather call in and participate via teleconference, please contact me at [log in to unmask] for the Conference call-in Number.)*

Tuesday, June 23rd, 2009 - Trauma Studies on Katrina Impact

There are two new studies on trauma effects and Katrina. You should be able to download the pdfs. <http://tmt.sagepub.com/content/vol15/issue2/?etoc>

Friday, July 31st, 2009 - Teach for America taking veteran teacher jobs in New Orleans; and Race and Flood Protection

See the article below on Teach for America replacing veteran teachers. We face the same situation in New Orleans where the state-run RSD laid off (using the euphemism of “surplused”) 200 veteran teachers in June and then contracted to bring in 230 Teach for America teachers in July. This has added to racial tensions in that the veteran teachers in New Orleans are overwhelmingly African American storm victims struggling to rebuild their homes and reunite their families.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2009-07-29-teach-for-america_N.htm

Also this article that reprises criticisms of flood protection work raised by ACORN in 2008

U.S.: Levee Uncertainty Weighs on Katrina’s Displaced - IPS ipsnews.net

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47888>

Thursday, August 27th, 2009 - Katrina’s Secret Killings: The Memorial Hospital Story

The only information missing from this article is that most of the victims were African American and poor and most of the facts were readily available to the local and national media two years ago. This tragedy is a case study of the silence that surrounded the most profound injustices of Katrina. Rest assured, there are more stories to come. In 2008, Dr. Anna Pou was the featured commencement speaker at the Louisiana State University medical school graduation. See the story in: <http://www.propublica.org/feature/the-deadly-choices-at-memorial-826> Preview the New York Times version at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/30/magazine/30doctors.html?_r=1&hp

Tuesday, September 15th, 2009 - FW: Call for Papers - Opportunity for Tulane Graduate and Undergraduate Students to Present at Local Conference

Tuesday, September 15th, 2009

FYI...

From: Jack Covarrubias [mailto:[log in to unmask]]

Sent: Tue 9/15/2009 11:49 AM

To: [log in to unmask]

Subject: Call for Papers - Opportunity for Tulane Graduate and Undergraduate Students to Present at Local Conference

The Center for Policy and Resilience is pleased to announce the opening of its Call for Papers for its upcoming interdisciplinary

conference for graduate and undergraduate students on all topics related to disaster and community resilience. This conference will be held on Friday, 2 October 2009 at the USM-Gulf Coast campus in Long Beach, MS. Travel stipends are available on a competitive basis. The Call for Papers is attached as a Word document and also included in text format below. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions about the conference.

CALL FOR PAPERS FROM GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
Friday, October 2, 2009
University of Southern Mississippi—Gulf Coast
Long Beach, MS

Sponsored by
The Community and Regional Resilience Institute (CARRI) and the Center
for Policy and Resilience (CPR)

*Four years after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast and the host site of this conference, this interdisciplinary research symposium seeks paper proposals from graduate and undergraduate students on disaster resilience and its applications to communities vulnerable to disasters and chaotic events. The conference will include panel and roundtable discussions, as well as speakers.

SUBMISSION OF PAPERS:

*Issue areas may include any area or application of community resilience from all academic disciplines, including disaster mitigation, geographic and scientific perspectives, and economic, political, and social resilience.

*Ten \$200 travel stipends available on a competitive basis.

*Opportunity for publication of presented papers in a special issue of Global Horizons, published by the Center for Policy and Resilience.

*Awards for best graduate and undergraduate papers.

*Please submit all proposals to the attention of Jack Covarrubias at: [\[log in to unmask\]](#) by the deadline of September 21, 2009.

*For more information, please visit the conference website hosted at: <http://www.usm.edu/gc/academic-dean>

Thursday, October 22nd, 2009 - Interview on Katrina, Race, and the Exclusion Movement

This is a transcript of an interview I gave in January of 2008. I offer it to stimulate discussion on how aftermath of Katrina challenges the notion of a post-Racial nation. Below is also a relevant excerpt I wrote from the “Storm Bridge” curriculum training script that we use as part of a racial healing and reconciliation program. <http://www.katrinaresearch.org/Community%20Gumbo%20Interview-wp%202003.pdf> “The hope which I credit moral witnesses is a rather sober hope: that in another place or another time there exists, or will exist, a moral community that will listen to their testimony.” Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*

Excerpt from my Group Behavior Lecture by Lance Hill November 2006 This lecture combines Ervin Staub’s principles with my own analysis that I think is crucial for people to understand what appear to be illogical, maliciously motivated, or evil behavior on the part of both victim groups and dominant groups. When individuals find their basic human needs frustrated, they tend to fall back on ethnic group identity. In part, because we all define our individual identity by our group culture. We look to others to validate reality. We find our psychological and material needs fulfilled in the group. But we pay a price. We surrender our individual moral values and judgment. The group demands loyalty and tends to view attacks on individuals as an attack on the group. In ethnic group conflicts, both groups think their ideas, actions, and perceptions are right and the other group is wrong; both groups regard themselves as victims of the other group and blame the other group for the conflict. Both tend to regard the other negatively; as morally flawed, corrupt, harmful, stupid, irrational, or motivated by malicious intentions. A dominant cultural or political group tends to believe that is superior, more capable of governing and maintaining a just and equitable society. The leaders of the groups believe they lead by merit. When people in the dominant group witness an injustice, (just world hypothesis) they tend to deny that the event happened: they believe that their system which their group controls and which they identify with is fair and just. In the face of a clear injustice, they deny it happened, convince themselves that the victim is better off, or they blame the victim by saying that the victim brought on the suffering through their own personal, character, or ethnic-group failings. The individual may deny the injustice for many reasons other than maintaining ethnic group loyalty and power: they may believe they are powerless to do anything about what happened (as in the case of viewing an injustice on television at a distance) or that they know if they acknowledge the injustice they will have to act to remedy it, which they do not want to do. They may believe that acknowledging the injustice is a betrayal of loyalty to their ethnic group and that it will reduce the legitimacy of the group’s right to govern a particular sphere of life (nation, city, or economic and service institutions such as banking, healthcare, etc.)—that their group will lose the moral right to govern because they are unfair. Members of dominant groups that subsequently lose power may still hold onto their claims that no injustice occurred or adhere to the ideology that motivated and justified the injustice, because these beliefs protect them from the guilty emotional consequences of their failure to act in a moral way. After

the conflict crisis or harm-doing, even if the dominant group loses power, they may create a “defensive shield” to protect themselves from guilt and shame and to gain acceptance in the moral community by continuing to maintain the rightness of their actions and continuing to devalue and blame the victims. For passive bystanders in the dominant group, they may accept the justifications of the group leaders and continue to blame and devalue the victims to reduce guilt and maintain their belief that their group is fair and just. There is a price to pay for acting on individual moral conscience once one falls back on their ethnic group identity; ethnic groups tend to punish and ostracize dissenters. The outcome is that an individual’s behavior as part of an ethnic group appear illogical, unfair, and immoral to the victim group. The danger of ethnic group behavior is that it suspends our individual conscience and encourages us to easily devalue the other group and demonize them or scapegoat them for their problems. People find it easier to harm by action or inaction people who they consider less than human. Great violence begins with small acts of harm. For dominant groups, these harmful actions can take place under the banner of improving society, often because they are trying to fulfill the basic human needs of their own group (security). Leaders construct an ideology that justifies their right to control society because their group is more intelligent and deserving. The ideology is characterized as humanistic and beneficent and projects a vision of a new and better world that is safe and secure, but in which the competing ethnic group is an obstacle to this vision. The dominant group transforms the victims of a disaster into perpetrators—people who are causing problems. Now the dominant group claims victim status and uses it to justify unfair treatment of the other group. The same applies for subordinate ethnic groups. Especially in difficult times, individuals seek to fulfill their basic human needs through their ethnic group identity. The group demands loyalty and tends to view attacks on group individuals as an attack on the group. They can view these attacks as a threat to their identity and legitimate claims that the system is unfair. To demonstrate their loyalty, individuals deny the failings of group members or their group as a whole. The group can easily slip into a destructive cycle of vengeful violence against the adversarial group, which is behavior that the dominant group uses as evidence that the subordinate group is the source of the conflict, less than human, and beyond moral obligation. The subordinate group uses its victimhood to devalue and dehumanize the dominant group: now the cycle of mutual devaluation and violence takes hold. In both dominant and subordinate groups, a crisis can transform every issues of social and political life into a symbolic fight over group claims of the right to rule or victimhood. People pledge blind and uncritical support for leaders and policies that they would normally not in less trying times. Both groups become convinced in their version of the truth, past and present, and the inherent evil motives of the opposing group. Reason and moral obligation go out the door. What is unique about the Katrina disaster is that we have both a natural disaster and an ethnic group conflict. Unlike an ethnic group conflict, Katrina made everyone in the storm-path a victim. People in the midst of a disaster are often consumed with fulfilling their own needs and are not aware of the needs of others. In the case of the evacuation, most of the victims of Katrina remained “out-of-site” and “out-of-mind.” Preoccupation with the self-serving needs can appear to other victims as indifference to suffering. Moreover, victim status has historically led groups to use their own suffering as an excuse to diminish the unique suffering of others. Victimhood can bestows a kind of moral exemption that allows dominant groups to relinquish any special moral obligation to those who suffered more and, in some cases, through the actions or inactions of the dominant group itself. As Staub points out in his book, the Hutu’s justified their genocide of the Tutsi’s because they had once been “enslaved” by the Tutsis. It is precisely because of this mentality of “victimhood as moral exemption” (which can

be invoked by victims and perpetrators alike) that we need a healing framework that allows all victims to have a voice and gain justice. The key to ending the cycle of devaluation and conflict is to understand that people may engage in ethnic group behavior for rational reasons to fulfill unmet human needs. Even the dominant group may be attempting to fulfill needs for a safe community that provides adequate social services. That achieving these needs may come at the expense of others may make them unjust, but understandable just the same. If I could have offered someone a free ticket out the Superdome, to safety and comfort, how many would have accepted the offer even if they knew that others may deserve it more? If human needs are met by the government or community, individuals have less reason to engage in ethnic group behavior that is destructive and counterproductive. Fulfilling human needs, combined with a program that brings the conflicting groups together in ways that humanizes them to each other is the pathway to reconciliation. Lance Hill, Ph.D. Executive Director Southern Institute for Education and Research Tulane University MR Box 1692 31 McAlister Drive New Orleans, LA 70118 (504) 865-6100 fax (504) 862-8957

Wednesday, November 18th, 2009 - Happy Race Relations in New Orleans?

A recent poll by New Orleans Survey Research Center at the University of New Orleans found that most respondents were “happy” with race relations in their own communities. This might strike people as out of step with several recent surveys such as the Kaiser Family foundation that found 79% of respondents saying New Orleans was racially and class polarized. The “happy” results in part owe to the fact that they survey included nine metropolitan area parishes, diluting the sample opinion of African Americans in New Orleans proper where most of the racial conflict over the recovery has centered. The survey also asked for opinions about race relations in their “community” rather than “New Orleans,” which respondents could have construed narrowly as their affluent white suburb. Unfortunately, the results tend to get reported as representative of race relations in New Orleans and, as a result, conceal problems which have to be acknowledge before they can be solved. Contrast this survey with the Oxfam survey of New Orleans residents last year, conducted by Silas Lee, that found: –57% of African Americans thought the racial discrimination was a major problem in employment — 69% of African Americans felt that discrimination was a major problem in the justice system—including 80% under the age of 40 — 66% of African Americans thought that discrimination was a major problem in access to affordable housing –62% of African Americans under the age of 40 thought that discrimination was a major problem in schools –62% of African Americans thought that discrimination was a major problem with access to healthcare—including 70% under the age of 40. See the UNO poll at: <http://www.onecommunityinitiative.org/> I have attached the relevant excerpts from the Oxfam survey.

Sunday, December 6th, 2009 - Equity in New Orleans Schools? Leigh Dingerson on WBOK Monday

Southern Institute for Education and Research

Lhill@tulane.edu

Leigh Dingerson will be joining Dr. Barbara Ferguson on a WBOK-AM Monday at 10:00 a.m. CST. The program can be listened to online. Leigh is the author of several studies of Charter schools including the book, "Keeping the Promise: The Debate on Charter Schools. She has been a critic of the school privatization model in New Orleans. (See program information link below)

The Center for Action Research on New Orleans School Reforms

Presents:

The New Orleans Imperative: Quality Education for All Children

Two Hour Special Program

Monday at 1230 AM on your radio dial or you can listen online at:

www.wbok1230am.com

Monday, December 7th, 10:00 AM — 12:00 PM CST

Special guests are **Leigh Dingerson and Dr. Barbara Ferguson**. They will discuss choice and competition as proposed keys to improving public education.

Friday, May 21st, 2010 - Scathing IRP Report on New Orleans Schools

<http://bit.ly/IRPReport> This Institute on Race and Poverty report on New Orleans schools was released May 15. It has some excellent research on how charters have skimmed off the best students. The debate with the Cowen Institute at the end is useful as well. But the the conclusion and recommendations to remedy the problems leave much to be desired. This study falls in the category of those who believe that school privatization does not inherently lead to inequality in school services; that all we need is a few charter reforms and a mixed system of private and public schools. The flaw in that argument is that if the New Orleans experiment proves anything, it is that charter schools need a public system in which to dump high-need, high cost students. Privatized schools a public school system of last resort for the same reason that private hospitals need free and poorly-resourced neighborhood clinics: to create the illusion that the patients that private hospitals reject will still receive adequate services elsewhere. The authors argue that chartering should stop at the current 60% level in New Orleans. Superintendent Paul Vallas has already announced that he intends to stop chartering new schools. The architects of the original plan to privatize 100% of New Orleans now understand that the existing charters can't succeed with out a public dumping ground for high-need, high-cost students. The authors argue that the

remaining 31% of students in the public system should have access to better services in the state-run RSD schools, more magnet schools and be integrated into suburban districts. These are fine ideas but their own report shows that 80% of the students in the remaining public system are failing the 8th grade high-stakes LEAP exam. It is not likely that middle class parents will send their children to school with these disadvantaged students nor is it likely that New Orleans white suburbs will bus these students into their communities. The solution to the education debacle in New Orleans starts with drastically regulating and reforming the existing charter schools to prevent them from practicing selectivity and creating a separate and unequal system. The authors posit a useful theory that many critics have already advanced in the last several years: that New Orleans now has a two-tiered system of high-performing and low-performing schools. But they devote a great deal of time to racial segregation/integration, which is not a central issue in a virtually all-black system. The New Orleans system of private/public schools is primarily characterized by academic and class segregation within the black population. The question before us is do charters inherently create good schools by creating bad schools, i.e. are charters simply recruiting and retaining low-needs, low-cost students and dumping the high-needs, high-cost students in the remaining public system? At the heart of the debate is the question that every researcher has to address: is the competitive free market model the best means for equity in education? Changing the opportunities of the students who are languishing in the public system will not correct the problems that are the inevitable outcome of market forces that compel charter schools to accept or reject students based on profitability. Lance Hill, Ph.D. Executive Director Southern Institute for Education and Research Tulane University "The Law in its majestic equality forbids both the rich and the poor to sleep under bridges." Anatole France

Thursday, July 22nd, 2010 - New Orleans School Teacher Blasts Teach For America and Charter Schools

The video is shaky, but stay with it. This is a powerful message from a veteran New Orleans schools teacher. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OijEycdeGqY>

Tuesday, August 24th, 2010 - More History Denial on Katrina Recovery

Today the New Orleans Times-Picayune published their first full story on the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC) "greenspace" plan. Predictably, it revises the history of the plan that they editorially endorsed and that Brown University researcher John Logan said would eliminate 80% of the black population. One popular misconception reiterated in the article is that the only areas slated for demolition were those under the "green dots" on the planning map. In truth, the BNOBC plan, first proposed by the Urban Land Institute in November 2005, was designed to demolish all homes that flooded—and using that flood criteria, the result would have been the demolition of virtually all black neighborhoods. Race was a key factor in given that the white Lakefront area was explicitly exempted from demolition (see attached map). The homes under the green dots were simply reserved for conversion to parks and retention ponds—"greenspace." In the end, under the BNOBC plan, most of New Orleans residential neighborhoods would have reverted to woodlands and swamps. Granted, the BNOBC plan did contain a 120 day "planning period" in which neighborhoods had to prove they could recover or

face demolition, but given that the residents of these neighborhoods were scattered to 5,500 cities in 48 states and most had no jobs, no means of returning, and it was illegal for residents to stay overnight even in their gutted homes in New Orleans East, the BNOBC planners knew that no neighborhood could re-convene and meet the criteria or deadline. The best evidence of that the “neighborhood planning process” was a charade is found in the plan budget on page 57 of the BNOBC report below (<http://bit.ly/BNOBCGreenspacePlan>) which allocates \$12.7 billion for “heavily flooded/damaged home acquisition” and “demolition and site remediation.” The budget was sufficient to ensure that virtually all homes in the flooded residential areas would be demolished. In addition, although over 40% of blacks rented pre-Katrina, not one penny was budgeted to rebuild rentals. More than simply a “green dot” problem, the fear that blacks had was of a vastly greater removal policy. As the Brown University report found: “The city of New Orleans could lose up to 80 percent of its black population if people displaced by Hurricane Katrina are not able to return to damaged neighborhoods, according to an analysis by a Brown University sociologist. Professor John R. Logan, in findings released Thursday, determined that if the city’s returning population was limited to neighborhoods undamaged by Katrina, half of the white population would not return and 80 percent of the black population would not return.” Finally, the current level of blight is not, as the Times-Picayune suggests, the result of the failure to demolish homes and relocate residents. Since the plan was never to rebuild the city in its entirety, the city never requested funding to rebuild the damaged roads, water lines, and sewerage system for the entire city. Entergy, the local electric company, asked for and received \$400 million in a federal bailout funds to rebuild the electrical grid for the entire city. New Orleans would have adequate infrastructure today if the elite planners had not been preoccupied with keeping most of the population out of the city. Most of the current blighted homes are a result of the failure of the planners to request any funds to restore rentals and then subsequently the state’s policy of allocating home-owner rebuilding funds in a racially discriminatory way, according to a recent federal court ruling. All of these injustices can be remedied and all neighborhoods restored if the political leadership, locally and nationally has the will to make people whole again.

August 24, 2010 Times-Picayune article on BNOBC “greenspace” plan <http://bit.ly/greenDotArtcile> Revised Times-Picayune Map published August 23, 2010 (leaves out “flood-damaged” neighborhoods targeted for demolition. See attached map originally published) <http://bit.ly/revisedmap> Original BNOBC Plan with \$12 Billion Budget for buying and demolishing homes <http://bit.ly/BNOBCGreenspacePlan> Brown University says plan would have eliminated 80% of black community <http://bit.ly/80percentBlacksOut> Lance Hill, Ph.D. Executive Director Southern Institute for Education and Research Tulane University MR Box 1692 31 McAlister Drive New Orleans, LA 70118 (504) 865-6100 fax (504) 862-8957

Tuesday, September 7th, 2010 - New York Times on post-Katrina “greenspace” Plan to Demolish Black Neighborhoods

From Campbell Robertson's New York Times' article on the 5th Katrina anniversary. He references the infamous BNOBC "greenspace plan" which is, to my knowledge, the first acknowledgment in the national media of the post-Katrina "exclusionist movement" that sought to change New Orleans' racial and class composition. <http://nyti.ms/NYTonGreenspace> "But the disillusionment goes both ways. Residents in neighborhoods outside of the center, like Gentilly, New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward, still remember in anger that decisions were being made about the future of the city by those who had been able to return quickly - white people, for the most part - without the participation of the citizens whose neighborhoods would be most drastically affected, if not eliminated altogether. They remember learning, while still scattered around the country, that they would have four months under the proposal to defend the very existence of their neighborhoods. For many, the anger of that period is what led to the robust civic engagement that the city now celebrates. And it has not gone away."

Wednesday, October 13th, 2010 - LEAP Scores: 2010 New Orleans LEAP Scores by School Type

Posted by: Lance Hill LEAP scores 2010 by School Type. This was prepared by Research on Reforms. Previous published charts did not indicate school type (charter or public). I think the patterns are fairly obvious and give special attention to the separate 4th grade Math and English scores of some public schools that have been operating for four years under the state-run Recovery School District (RSD). Eight grade LEAP scores in the remaining RSD direct-run public system (the depository of students that the charters refuse to admit or retain) are at an 80% failure rate for the fourth year in a row. Chart size can be increased with your zoom button and will print out as three pages (4th, 8th, and GEE). Yellow (indicating schools in which 50% or more of children are failing) will only print out on color printer. Please free to post. <http://www.researchonreforms.org> Lance Hill, Ph.D. Executive Director Southern Institute for Education and Research Tulane University MR Box 1692 31 McAlister Drive New Orleans, LA 70118 (504) 865-6100 fax (504) 862-8957

Tuesday, November 30th, 2010 - Diane Ravitch New Orleans Video Presentation - Dillard University, October 2010

Link to Diane Ravitch presentation, Dillard University, New Orleans, October 27, 2010. This video runs 58 minutes; the question and answer period was edited down for time purposes. The video can be viewed in streaming or downloaded to make a DVD copy for non-profit educational purposes: <http://bit.ly/RavitchNewOrleans> This presentation covers teacher training, school privatization, "media blindness" to the misleading hype private market reforms, and a critique of the film "Waiting for Superman." Excerpt from Ravitch presentation on lack of media attention to problems in the New Orleans model of school reform: "But somehow the media just seems fixated on the idea that the only thing that moves people is dangling this little bit of money in front of them. And I think in the same way New Orleans is a victim of this kind of media blindness. . . somebody is going to want to break that pattern and find a different story. And I hope that person comes along. That may not be 'Superman'; it may just be a really smart reporter."

Friday, December 3rd, 2010 - Access Denied: SPLC Report on New Orleans Schools

Currently, there is link to this new report. Attached is the pdf. Excerpt: “Public education in post-Katrina New Orleans held the promise of providing superior educational opportunities to New Orleans children. Unfortunately, that promise is not equally available to all students. Despite the fact that federal law requires publicly funded schools to educate students who may have disabilities, many New Orleans schools are closing their doors to these students. The results are perverse: students with the greatest needs are denied the rich educational opportunities that school reform was intended to provide.” Lance Hill, Ph.D. Executive Director Southern Institute for Education and Research Tulane University MR Box 1692 31 McAlister Drive New Orleans, LA 70118 (504) 865-6100 fax (504) 862-8957

Wednesday, February 9th, 2011 - Census supports theory Katrina “pretext to run a bunch of poor black folks out of town”: James Gill column in Times-Picayune

<http://bit.ly/i4T5gJ> From James Gill Times-Picayune column today: “The census figures would appear to support the theory that Katrina provided a pretext to run a bunch of poor black folks out of town. More than 100,000 black evacuees have failed to return, and they sure wouldn’t recognize the place now. We’ve torn down the projects where many of them lived, elected a white mayor and district attorney and turned over most of the public schools to private charters. Still, although the city has taken on a much more Caucasian tinge, it is still about 60 percent black, so the storm gave the man only a limited opportunity to turn back the clock and resume control. The man is insufficiently organized for a conspiracy on that scale in any case, but there is little doubt that the demographic shift is not regarded as bad news in all quarters. Those “Thanks Houston” bumper stickers that popped up after the storm always did seem double-edged.”

Saturday, March 19th, 2011 - Should Japan Kill Disaster Victims as Happened in Katrina? Read Dr. Arthur Kaplan

Dr. Kaplan:

<http://bit.ly/fGWScl>

Actually his facts are not straight; most of the nine patients in this case were not on the edge of death—one was 63 and in good health had to be sedated to be killed—and all could have been evacuated; indeed, their bodies were moved seven floors down and concealed in a room before the hospital was sealed—without telling state officials.

Pulitzer Prize Winning Article on Katrina Memorial Hospital Killings <http://bit.ly/dXqsq9>

Wednesday, October 19th, 2011 - Poverty Skyrockets in New Orleans: 65% of Black Children Under Age of Five Living in Poverty: Lance Hill Commentary

Five years ago, as we began to monitor the Katrina recovery, one of the recurring issues we focused on was the lack of employment opportunities for returning displaced African Americans. Despite a total flow-through of \$40 billion in federal recovery funds, half of which has already been spent, we now discover that that adult poverty levels in the black community have risen to levels we have not seen since 1999. My commentary is at the following link: <http://bitly.com/qejFtn>

Thursday, December 8th, 2011 - Is the Youth Murder Increase in New Orleans a Policing Issue?

The New York Times recently did a story on the increasing murder rate in New Orleans. Most of the story focused on problems of policing and the criminal justice system. But is the problem a policing issue when the violent actors involved live in a futureless world fashioned for them by people who never wanted them to be part of the city's future? It is not uncommon to have vendetta shootings occur while police officers are clearly in the vicinity of the crime. The assailants have no regard for the consequences of their behavior because consequences imply a future. They care as much about each other as the nation cared about them for the last six years. Would the spike in violence have anything to do with the massive untreated trauma of Katrina? Would it have anything to do with the Census Bureau's recently released data (but never reported by the media) that the black poverty in New Orleans has risen to 1999 levels: 34% for adults and a stunning 65% for children under five? Or could it be attributed, in some part, to the rampant discrimination against local blacks in the \$20 billion in recovery funds? I don't recall a single recovery contract that required a single job be reserved for New Orleans residents or Katrina victims. Some people, like Dr. Bruce Perry, saw this violence disaster coming five years ago. While none of the policies that Perry proposed were ever implemented, all the long-term psychological effects he predicted became reality: Dr. Bruce Perry, 2006 (read this: its short, perceptive, and prophetic) <http://bitly.com/tL4d13> Rising poverty despite better educated population: <http://bitly.com/rDBmZs> Students suspended 10 times the national rate (Pushed Out Report) http://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital_library/resource_1587.pdf More than 50% of special needs students suspended at some charter schools (Newsweek) <http://bitly.com/vvQqz7> NYT piece on New Orleans Murders: <http://bitly.com/vRFGHW> Lance Hill, Ph.D. Executive Director Southern Institute for Education and Research Tulane University M.R. Box 1692 31 McAlister Drive New Orleans, LA 70118

Friday, May 18th, 2012 - Race and Politics in Post-Katrina New Orleans

Attached is an article on the racial dynamics of electoral politics in post-Katrina New Orleans. The New Orleans Tribune is an African American monthly and the recent at-large council seat

election has sparked a major debate within the black community. You can find the current issue by using you search engine to search for “New Orleans Tribune. “