

Thoughts of Hurricane Katrina – 15 Years Later

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I found myself glued to the Weather Channel and CBS News watching and listening to video and reports of the devastation in New Orleans and Biloxi left by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. While ~~social anthropologists and sociologists~~ ~~theorists have found~~ ~~write~~ that people come together during times of disaster, what I observed of New Orleans strongly contradicted ~~theorists' the researchers'~~ claims. I was left wondering about the slow response and how it could be explained. By slow, I mean that more than three days after the category 5 hurricane, the city of New Orleans resembled a refugee enclave in a developing country.

~~In day 3 of~~ Three days after the Hurricane Katrina disaster left devastation in its wake, people in New Orleans were sitting on rooftops waiting for help to arrive; ~~people~~ Others were wading through waters in the town with expressions of wonderment ~~in on~~ their faces; ~~hundreds~~ Hundred of people, young and old, were sitting on a bridge in the hot, sweltering sun and heat waiting for help to arrive. No one on the bridge had even tasted food or water for over two days.

Clearly parched from the heat and lack of water, ~~o~~ One woman holds held a baby reportedly two weeks of age. ~~The infant is clearly parched from the heat and lack of water.~~ Two infants toddlers are were huddled together in a stroller, obviously afraid. There were elderly ~~Elderly~~ people with Alzheimers seemingly unaware of what was happening around them. Nearby, and their family members were clearly concerned about their care. ~~No one on the bridge has had food or water for over two days.~~

One man reportedly jumped to his death preferring death it to this unknown existence. The husband of an elderly woman dies died at her feet as she tries tried desperately to seek police help. She says said she was told by officers in a passing police unit that they "couldn't help" her. "They kept going," she said. Police cars and military trucks passed by people but ~~do avoided~~ not stopping. A woman and a man walking alone waved one down and ~~are were~~ able to hitch a ride.

The mayor of New Orleans reportedly reallocated police resources to control the looting of stores rather than continuing rescue efforts. ~~Back to the area of New Orleans w~~ Where functioning stores once operated. ~~A, a~~ a policeman aims aimed a rifle at a man telling him to drop the bag of goods he allegedly looted from a store. The goods appeared to be clothing. In the middle of such chaos, the scene and images were ludicrous. The priorities of officials were grossly misplaced and their actions misguided. ~~The mayor of New Orleans has reportedly reallocated police resources to control the looting of stores rather than continuing rescue efforts.~~

As I watched these scenes throughout the day, I ~~can't~~ could not help but wonder: about the where is absence of the nation's leadership. The mayor of New Orleans and governor of Louisiana ~~are were~~ visible at podiums and appeared worse for ~~the wear~~ -, downtrodden and nearing their breaking points. ~~They appear f~~ Fatigued and -, emotionally distraught, ~~yet~~

they seemed to be doing everything in their power to manage the ~~problem~~ crisis. Clearly ~~it is~~ ~~was~~ simply too much to bear and help ~~is~~ ~~was~~ needed.

Houston's ~~Mayor~~ ~~mayor~~ ~~XX~~ ~~is~~ ~~appeared~~ ~~shown~~ at a podium announcing that ~~Houston~~ ~~the~~ ~~city~~ will "step up to the plate" and do its part to help its neighbors. ~~The~~ ~~mayor~~ ~~He~~ opened the Houston Astrodome to the estimated 25,000 people who ~~had~~ sought shelter in the New Orleans Superdome. ~~The stadium had been an option for residents~~ before Hurricane Katrina tore off ~~the~~ parts of the roof and flooded the facility, leaving no running toilets or electricity.

~~The~~ ~~Governor~~ ~~governor~~ ~~Blagojevich~~ of Illinois ~~is~~ ~~announced~~ ~~shown~~ ~~telling~~ ~~the~~ ~~news~~ ~~media~~ that he ~~has~~ ordered 300 Illinois guards to New Orleans, along with 50 trucks to help in the recovery efforts. Yet I ~~am~~ still wondering ~~ing~~, 'where is everybody?' Where are the offers of help from other neighboring cities and states? Where ~~are~~ ~~is~~ the ~~national~~ ~~National~~ ~~guards~~ ~~Guard~~ with food, water, transportation, and medical assistance? Where are the U.S. senators and representatives for Louisiana, and where is ~~the~~ President, ~~Bush~~ given the magnitude of this disaster? ~~?~~ The scene ~~strikes~~ ~~struck~~ of sheer chaos and benign neglect.

I am not naïve. I understood ~~and~~ ~~even~~ ~~then~~ that it takes a while to mobilize resources ~~for~~ ~~to~~ ~~respond~~ ~~to~~ a disaster of this magnitude. But we ~~are~~ ~~were~~ purportedly the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth in terms of the quantity and quality of ~~its~~ ~~our~~ human, organizational and economic resources. Yet, we ~~did~~ not seem to be putting these to use. I wondered ~~ed~~ if this apathy ~~has~~ ~~had~~ anything to do with the race and social class of the overwhelming majority of people ~~affected~~ ~~impacted~~ by ~~the~~ ~~is~~ hurricane.

The video images clearly depicted ~~ed~~ poor African Americans as the victims of the New Orleans travesty. It ~~contrasts~~ ~~contrasted~~ sharply with the images streaming from Biloxi of middle class Whites ~~people~~ whose businesses and homes were destroyed by the hurricane. ~~Some of whom have already begun to rebuild.~~ In contrast to New Orleans citizens, the people in Biloxi appeared ~~ed~~ relatively well-rested, cleaned, fed, and able to exercise the options that ~~their~~ class privilege ~~allows~~ ~~for~~ ~~afforded~~ them. ~~Some had already begun to rebuild.~~

~~The~~ President ~~Bush~~ ~~is~~ ~~was~~ finally shown speaking from a podium about the years it ~~will~~ ~~would~~ take to recover from the disaster. ~~With his head down, he~~ ~~and~~ ~~pledging~~ ~~pledged,~~ ~~with his head down~~ that "we will do all we can to help." I found his statement to be flat and ~~both~~ his expression and gesture as passive and insincere. As ~~President~~ ~~Bush~~ ~~he~~ ~~is~~ ~~was~~ shown walking to the ~~Air~~ ~~Force~~ ~~Marine~~ One helicopter with his dog under his left arm, ~~his~~ ~~the~~ ~~President's~~ ~~facial~~ ~~expression~~ ~~demeanor~~ seemed to be one of 'I don't want to be bothered' and 'I am pissed that I had to leave my vacation early.'

~~The~~ ~~is~~ hurricane disaster seemed to be more of a nuisance to the ~~president~~ ~~President~~ rather than one ~~that~~ ~~demande~~ ~~d~~ responsibility and determination to address the needs of the ~~hundreds~~ ~~of~~ thousands of people displaced by it. This from the nation's leader. This from the President who ~~speaks~~ ~~spoke~~ repeatedly about freedom for the Iraqi people.

I ~~am~~ was left quite confused about the president's lack of commitment to fellow U.S. citizens. ~~Does our the health-well-being, and freedom, and sense of security of African Americans matter?~~ ~~Are~~ Were African Americans not seen as real Americans, but rather refugees? ~~WE truly free?~~ What about the health and freedom of American people Mr. President? I hoped my thinking was wrong. I hoped this negligence and apathy could not be explained by what these questions suggest. But if I was wrong, then where was everybody? I still ask myself that question today – 15 years later. What would be the national response if such a hurricane hit a poor, Black community today?