

Hurricane changed New Orleans forever

Continued from page 6A

such as Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh and Larry Elder. Elder said in a Sept. 22 column published in the Jewish World Review online: "For many people, past discrimination means present and future discrimination End of discussion..."

"Though the conspiracy theories may appear outlandish to some, there is proof that something like this happened in the past.

It happened when Hurricane Betsy deluged New Orleans in 1965 and in the Mississippi Flood of 1927, as John M. Barry discusses in his book "Rising Tide."

The book discussed the social and political forces that precipitated the flood and pointed to possible reasons for deliberately flooding St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes where poor whites and blacks lived. Back then, a club of rich bankers ran the city and made the fatal decision to blow the levees in order to save their businesses.

"Daily, hundreds of thousands of dollars were being withdrawn from banks. If the fear grew great enough, if a run developed on the bank, it would hurt, and perhaps destroy, weaker banks. Short-term credit was disappearing, period. Long term, if the nation's businessmen lost confidence in the safety of New Orleans serious damage could result," Barry wrote on page 231. "...Pool's bank was the most vulnerable in the city; he had aggressively loaned money to sugar planters. A crevasse on the river's west bank could destroy them, and his bank dynamiting the levee on the east bank might also relieve them.

Pool argued, "The people of New Orleans are in such a panic that all who can do so are leaving the city. Thousands are leaving daily. Only dynamite will restore confidence."

That flood was the final straw for thousands of black laborers, who left the Delta in droves, forever changing the economic and social structure of the area.

Though for different reasons, some see the same forces at work now.

"Same thing—politicians,

corruption, greed...they wanted this area to widen the canal for cruise ships," said Pamela Everage, 39, a Ninth Ward resident who works on a cruise ship in Hawaii.

Others see the flood and the subsequent dispersal of poor blacks to far-flung places across the nation as an ethnic cleansing of New Orleans.

Naomi Klein, in article titled "Purging the Poor," published in the Oct. 10 issue of The Nation magazine said New Orleans is already displaying a dramatic demographic shift since most of the people who can return are white. Additionally, she said, given high vacancy rates in many parts of the city—French Quarter, Garden District and Jefferson Parish—many evacuees could be housed in the city.

"Roughly 70,000 of New Orleans' poorest homeless evacuees could move back to the city alongside returning white homeowners, without a single structure being built," she stated.

Mayor Nagin and others have said the flood presented an opportunity to restructure and rebuild smaller, better neighborhoods for the city's inhabitants.

To many, that's an indirect way of saying it will be a whiter New Orleans. In fact, the New York Times published a story recently under the headline, "In New Orleans, Smaller May Mean Whiter."

It noted, "...Race has become a subtext for just about every contentious decision the city faces where to put FEMA trailers, which neighborhoods to rebuild; how the troubled school system should be reorganized; when elections should be held..."

No place for the poor?

Bringing back poor people is rarely discussed.

"All the talk about a smaller, better New Orleans is tantamount to not rebuilding low-income public housing," said Robert Bullard, a professor at Clark Atlanta University and an environmental justice activist. And not rebuilding those houses is singularly unfair to black people, whose lives are often invested in their homes.

"Ninety percent of black wealth is tied into their homes so you're not only destroying Black neighborhoods, you're destroying black wealth."

'It won't be the same'

Fenelon, the New Orleans taxi driver, added, "The mayor talking about building houses that are better than the ones people lived in but will they be able to afford those houses? They don't talk about that."

He continued, "It won't be the same...you're trying to get rid of us, you know," he said. "You got white folks that come all the way from Baton Rouge every day to get to work. Think about how much easier it's going to be for them to have some property right down here that will take them just five minutes to get to work."

In fact, Alphonso Jackson, secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development said he advised Mayor Nagin to not rebuild the Ninth Ward, according to a Sept. 29 Houston Chronicle article, and predicted that the city would lose a significant portion of its African-American citizenry. African Americans previously comprised 67 percent of the city's residents.

"Whether we like it or not, New Orleans is not going to be 500,000 people for a long time," he is quoted. "New Orleans is not going to be as black as it was for a long time, if ever again."

Mayor Ray Nagin created a controversy when he said in a Martin Luther King Day speech: "It's time for us to come together. It's time for us to rebuild New Orleans—the one that should be a chocolate New Orleans. This city will be a majority African-American city. It's the way God wants it to be. You can't have New Orleans no other way. It wouldn't be New Orleans."

Under a barrage of criticism, Nagin quickly retracted that statement.

Fenelon, the taxi driver, says he understands the tension over rebuilding New Orleans.

"I tell you boy, a lot of politics have everything to do with it. It's all politics," he said, adding, "There ain't no real love for us black people, especially in the ghetto."



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DuSable officially recognized as founder of Windy City

By Mema Ayi
THE CHICAGO DEFENDER

CHICAGO — After more than a century and a half, the city's founder will be officially recognized in city agencies and commemorations, thanks to an ordinance passed recently.

Sponsored by Alderwomen Toni Preckwinkle and Leslie Hairston, official commemorations of the city's founding will include mentions of the city's first non-native settler, Haitian-born Jean Baptiste Point DuSable. Chicago is celebrating its 169th birthday.

"DuSable was the visionary who created this cultural destination point where other immigrants could settle," Hairston said. "So I would encourage all city agencies to promote (DuSable) during the month of March."

In 1779, DuSable built a cabin along the north bank of the Chicago River, near the present-day site of the Tribune Tower.

Thirteen years ago, a plan proposed by Preckwinkle and Ald. Madeline Haightcock (2nd) to rename the south end of Lake Shore Drive after

DuSable was "shot down" and killed in committee, Preckwinkle said.

"We got what can only be described as a hostile reaction," said Preckwinkle.

Now, Preckwinkle will settle for DuSable's legacy being officially recognized. "This will acknowledge the critical founding role DuSable played in Chicago's history," she said.

Alderwoman Dorothy Tillman suggested the City Council go further in its recognition of DuSable with a statue. Though busts of Blacks can be found, there is just one statue in the city.

"This will really begin to get

him into the history books, but I hope we move on to the next step," said Tillman, who suggested a DuSable statue. "You won't find a full statue of a black man anywhere in this city except at 47th and King Drive. And we should do no less for DuSable."

Due to the longtime official omission, Chicago's schoolchildren do not know of DuSable because city agencies, including the Board of Education, do not officially recognize him as the city's founder, said Alderwoman Freddrenna Lyle, another sponsor of the ordinance.

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