

# NATIONAL NEWS

## College students key to New Orleans' recovery

Drew Daniels  
BLACK COLLEGE WIRE

College students must play a major part in the rebuilding of New Orleans, a hurricane recovery activist told an audience gathered at Dillard University to commemorate the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina.

"Students learn to be civically engaged if they are civically engaged in college," said Marcus Littles of the Louisiana Disaster Relief Foundation.

Dillard President Marvalene Hughes told those at the forum that students are eager to be part of the recovery efforts. "Students are required to have 140 units of community service hours completed upon graduation," Hughes said. "Since Katrina, students have asked to take that limit off because they know they will exceed that."

About 300 residents, students and activists filled Dillard's Lawless Memorial Chapel in New Orleans to participate in a recent forum to focus attention on the conditions still facing the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast. The event featured activists who discussed such issues as affordable housing, quality education and environmental safety.

"The federal government should take over the responsibility of redeveloping and repairing this infrastructure, getting these schools rebuilt, getting these clinics back in and getting these libraries back up," said Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif.

Community organizers expressed concern at the forum about lack of progress in the rebuilding of the entire Gulf Coast region. Groups of business, civic and entertainment organizations expressed those concerns to government officials.

But Rep. William Jefferson, D-La., said the recovery is not just a state and local problem.

"We want to make sure people across the country understand that this is a national issue because of the incompetence of the administration, after the storm," he said.

According to Jefferson, 58 of 128 schools are open in New Orleans and the New Orleans school district is about \$60 million in debt.

Jefferson also announced that about 60 percent of New Orleans residents have returned, up from about 50 percent this time last year.

College students comprise a significant part of the returning population. Administrators report that enrollment has climbed to between 60 percent and 75 percent of pre-Katrina levels at most of the New Orleans universities.

"As college students we have a large voice," said Christopher Stewart, a Dillard senior political science major from Dallas. "Being active around Hurricane Katrina projects is a way we can help rebuild and improve the communities in which we attend school every day."

## New Orleans: Then and Now

Natalie Pompilio  
MCT WIRE SERVICE

When Hurricane Katrina struck on Aug. 29, 2005, it was labeled the most destructive natural disaster in U.S. history, killing 1,800 people across the Gulf Coast and leaving more than 800,000 people homeless.

Here is a snapshot of how New Orleans has changed.

□ **Population:** The Greater New Orleans Community Data Center estimates the current population at 294,000, a figure supported by U.S. Postal Service statistics. Other organizations put the figure around 274,000. The pre-storm population was around 450,000.

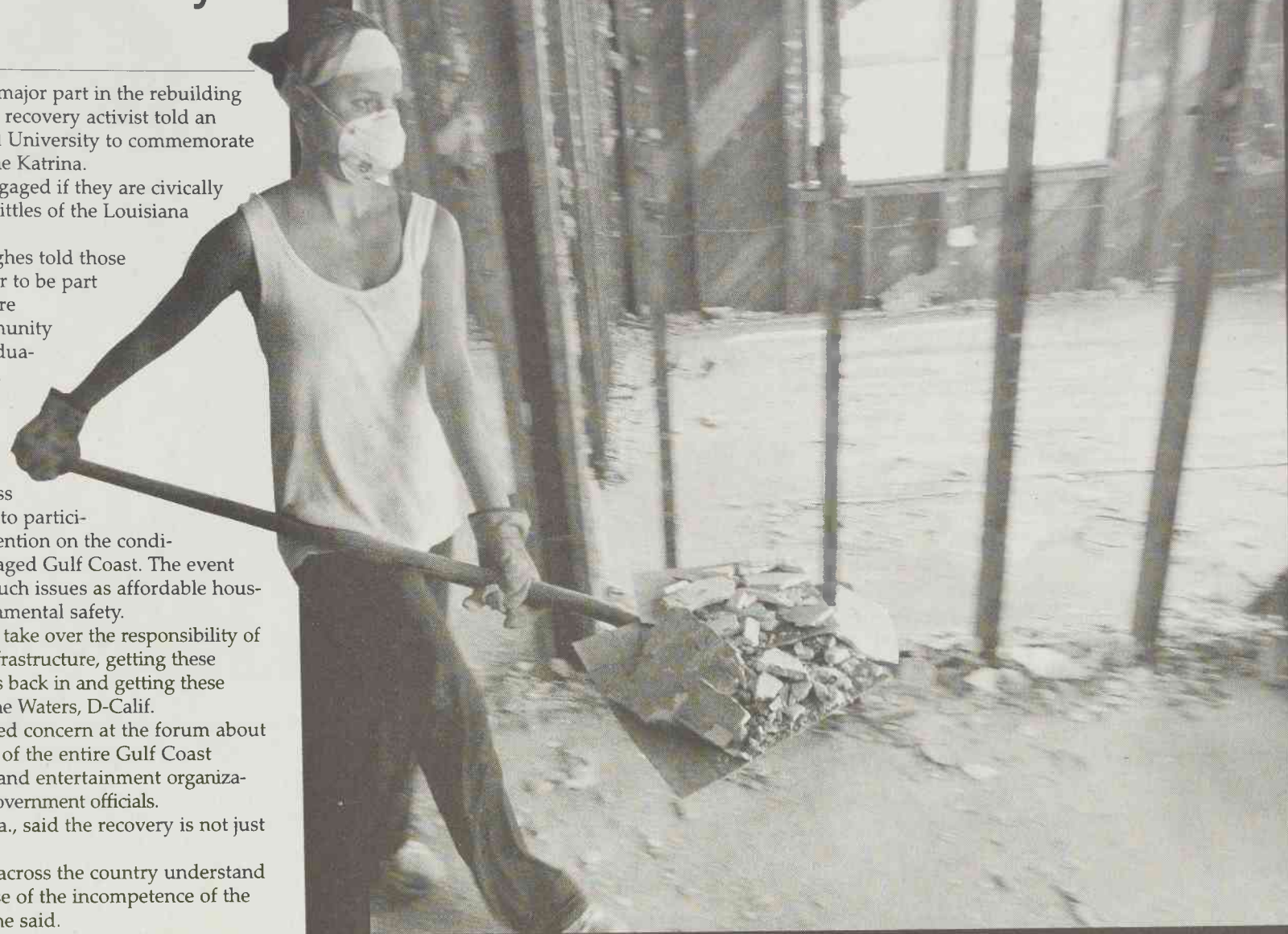
□ **Demographics:** Hispanic immigrants, many from Mexico, are a growing population. They are the laborers who are rebuilding the city. Their culture is slowly melding with that of this multi-national city.

□ **Crime:** Statistics released this month show violent crime — including murders, rapes, armed robberies and assaults — is up 31 percent, compared with the same period in 2005 before the storm. At the current rate, the city is likely to end the year as the country's most deadly city. Police Superintendent Warren Riley says the figures are disturbing, but he believes the department is stabilizing after two years of rebuilding infrastructure, struggling to recruit officers, and negotiating a battered court system.

□ **Schools:** The city's public schools were in disrepair long before the storm. Different entities oversee the current system. The Orleans Parish School Board, which once managed all the schools, now has control of 17. The Recovery School District, now overseen by former Philadelphia Schools Chief Paul Vallas, manages 107 low-performing schools grouped together after the storm. Vallas also has loose oversight over a growing charter school movement. Parochial and private schools attract half the city's student population, estimated at 32,000 this year.

□ **Tourism:** The New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau reports the city's No. 1 industry is coming on strong: The convention and meeting business is back to 70 percent of its pre-Katrina levels and overall tourism is at about 60 percent. The French Quarter, the Garden District and the Magazine Street antique area — tourist-popular areas before the storm that were untouched by flooding — are thriving.

□ **Levee System:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reports that the levees are back to their pre-hurricane strength. Federal officials recently announced a plan that would significantly boost the city's flood-protection system by 2011. The proposal includes upgrading the levees to protect against a 100-year flood. Bush administration officials are expected to seek the extra \$7.6 billion in funding from Congress next year.

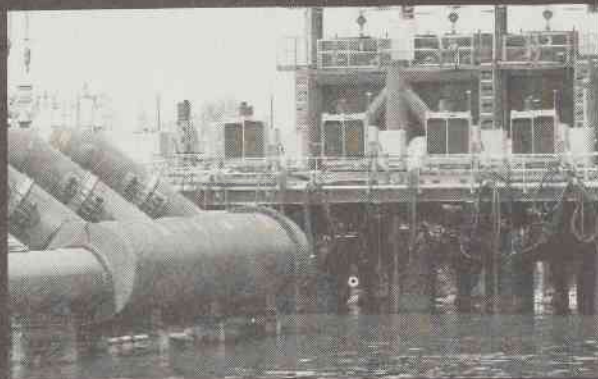


Photos courtesy of MCT Wire Service

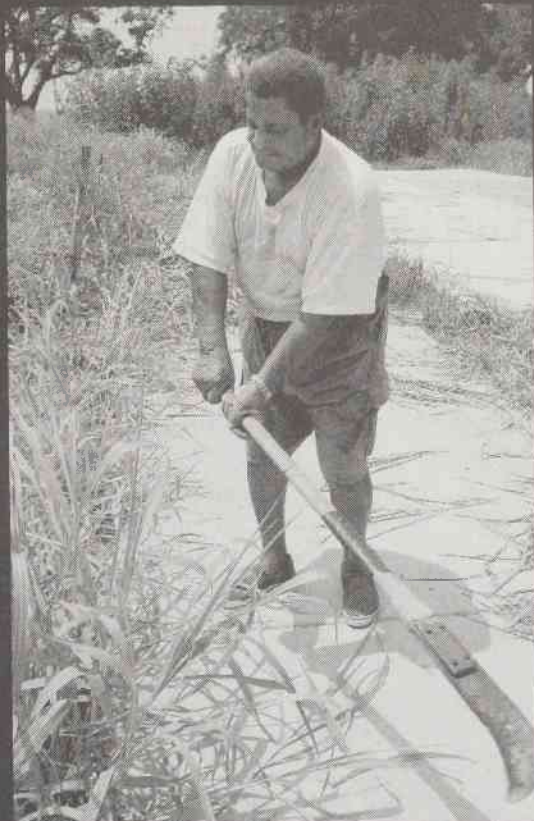
Reconstruction volunteer Kristin McNeal, 21, with the volunteer group College Students for New Orleans, carries rubble and debris while gutting an abandoned house in the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans.



Piles of garbage still sit in front of a Lower Ninth Ward house that was gutted two years after Hurricane Katrina flooded most of New Orleans.



ABOVE PHOTOS: Construction workers install large water pumps along the 17th Street Canal in New Orleans, Louisiana in an effort to help prevent flooding during future storms.



Residents of New Orleans are still working to recover and rebuild their city two years after Hurricane Katrina hit the coast with devastating force and flooding.