

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community
1531 Camden Road Charlotte, N.C. 28203
Gerald O. Johnson CEO/PUBLISHER
Robert L. Johnson CO-PUBLISHER/GENERAL MANAGER
Herbert L. White EDITOR IN CHIEF

OPINION

Hurricane reminds America to take action

A year after devastating storm, government has done little to prepare for future

The powerful images of human suffering in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast that have been re-branded in our consciousness by the Spike Lee documentary and other commemorations, not only tear at the heart of anyone who has a heart, but are also the things that motivate — or should motivate — people to action. To make it simple, what do we do about Katrina?

George Bush recently answered a question at his press conference about Katrina, referring to the sheet in front of him, citing the billions of dollars that had been appropriated for this and that purpose.

While I could cite them, that is besides the purpose when compared to the gross inaction by the administration, given the urgency the situation demands. Now, one year later: 100 million cubic feet of debris remains on the ground that could have been removed, 50,000 families that were displaced are little closer to having the facilities in their communities of electricity, waste disposal, usable water, and other basic things; jobs are being in-sourced to immigrants, while evacuees cannot return to take them, and the Army Corp of Engineers still is not committed to rebuild the levees to withstand a force greater than a category three hurricane.

All in all, the city of New Orleans does not appear to have a workable reconstruction plan in place that would give displaced citizens the confidence that if, or when they return, they will be secure from the ravages of events like hurricane Katrina.

One year later, we still ask where is the government of the United States, with the troops that should be deployed to control crime, to pick up the debris, to supplement the administrative competence of FEMA, still a nightmare agency for people to work with? The answer is that the federal government appropriated the money and walked away to let the states handle the burden, making a liar out of Bush, who came to New Orleans and said that his goal was to move "quickly," "with bold action," that he would "do what it takes" to make people whole.

The administration's priorities seem to be in the Middle East, where they not only appropriate money, but send the troops. In fact, so many troops that they don't have enough troops or money to fix the problems posed by Katrina. Doing something about the problem of Katrina seem to be related to stopping the flow of resources into the Middle East in a failed military adventure.

This failure of government to address the urgent crisis of Katrina is now on George Bush's shoulders. But this fall, Democrats are positioned to win the Congress, but they don't have the Katrina crisis as their priority, either. Their six-point campaign agenda features such issues as: National and homeland security, energy independence, health care, jobs, college access and retirement security — but they do not address the human crises involving displaced people and damaged property and lives caused by Katrina.

But what if we said to candidates running on the Democratic Party line, "no votes unless you pledge to fix Katrina." Holding an election this year, where a party is depending upon the votes of millions of Blacks, where hundreds of thousands of them have been uprooted, and not demand that they address it in return for their votes is a sellout of the power that was to come from the Voting Rights Act. People campaigned to reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. But for what, just to vote? The power of the vote comes not from just voting, but instructing those who win election on the strength of the Black vote to do something that makes the Black community whole. How can we answer Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers and the others who gave their lives for the effective citizenship if we simply give that power away?

I am aware of the quasi-sophisticated view that if we demand, we could lose. But I also know that many Whites who voted for George Bush are caught up in the throes of this crisis, need the help of government, feel sold out and badly want change. In fact, their loyalty to a conservative, anti-government politics will be tested now that so many whites in the gulf need government assistance. They now know what it means to be ignored, subordinated, and treated as second-class citizens in their own land.

So we must do as we have always done: lead in a progressive direction, and others will follow. Demand that the damage of Katrina be addressed, and don't vote for candidates who will not pledge to see it happen.

RON WALTERS is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Institute and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.



Hurricane Katrina's other victims

GULFPORT, Miss. — Residents of Mississippi's Gulf Coast have been victimized more than twice in a year. First, it was Hurricanes Katrina and Rita doing the damage. And for the past year, most of the public attention stemming from the natural disaster has been centered around New Orleans, relegating residents here to second-class status.

Just as Pluto has had its planet membership revoked, many residents in this area feel they, too, have been kicked out of the universe.

That became clear to me over the weekend when I was invited to moderate a Town Hall meeting in Gulfport sponsored by the Mississippi State Conference NAACP and Oxfam America, a human rights group.

One by one, people thanked me for visiting the gulf and expressed disappointment — sometimes anger — that their needs are not receiving as much attention as displaced residents from New Orleans.

NAACP National President Bruce Gordon, actor Danny Glover and other activists were taken on a tour of East Biloxi, a poor community within the shadows of the state's thriving casinos. Hurricane Katrina left behind a calling card — missing roofs, rows of uprooted houses, blocks of empty land that once constituted neighborhoods and a string of deaths.

A report issued jointly by the state NAACP and the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning's Center for Policy Research and Planning, citing HUD figures, show that 21 percent of owner-occupied housing units in the state suffered at least

some minor damage from Katrina. Approximately 22 percent of renter-occupied units suffered a similar fate.

Unlike Louisiana, where the Democratic mayor and Democratic governor have been roundly criticized for being inept, Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour has been able to project a different image. The former chairman of the National Republican Committee has President Bush's ear and has projected himself as effectively responding to Hurricane Katrina.

But a report by Oxfam titled, "Forgotten Communities, Unmet Promises. An unfolding tragedy on the Gulf Coast," paints a different picture.

"Almost \$17 billion in the form of Community Development Block Grant funds were designated this year for long-term housing recovery. It took Congress and the president four months to make the first appropriation; they made a second in June 2006. Eleven months after Katrina and 10 months after Rita, not one house in Mississippi or Louisiana had been rebuilt with those funds."

The governor has received a series of waivers from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, lowering the number of units that must be set aside for low-income residents. He has also set it up so that his administration, not the state Legislature, will have the final say over how most of those funds will be spent.

A doughnut of casinos surrounds East Biloxi, a community that has an equal proportion of Whites and Blacks (39 percent), along with growing numbers of Hispanics and Asians.

And as new casinos are constructed and others are allowed to build farther back from the shore, that hole in the middle is getting dangerously smaller.

There were nine casinos operating pre-Katrina. Mayor A.J. Holloway has predicted more than twice that many will be operational by 2010. Gaming officials expect revenue to rise from \$1.2 billion before the storm to \$4 billion by 2010.

There is a reason public officials are gambling on the casinos.

"By 2005, gaming was second in economic impact in

Biloxi only to the U.S. military, which had Keesler Air Force Base west of downtown," states the report. "The casinos accounted for almost \$20 million in local tax revenues — more than one-third of the city's general fund — and employed 15,000 people. State government coffers received \$334.6 million in taxes from gaming in fiscal 2005, with Gulf Coast casinos accounting for about 45 percent of the statewide market."

Before casinos were built in Biloxi, there were the usual boasts about how casinos would hire mostly from the local labor force. That hasn't turned out to be true. Or, in the immortal words of Bill Clinton, it depends on what is is.

According to one 2003 survey, only 16 percent of employed East Biloxi residents worked in casino-related occupations. Another study said an even larger percentage lived in more distant counties and commuted to work. Even when they find work, the average salary for a hotel worker in Mississippi is approximately \$20,000 a year.

But there are fewer housing units to rent. And those units available in the post-Katrina world are renting at two to three times their earlier prices.

This week, the eyes of the nation are focused mostly on New Orleans. While honoring the deceased in neighboring Louisiana, it is equally important to uplift the memories of those who died in Gulfport, Biloxi and surrounding communities. Their lives are just as valuable as those being honored in New Orleans.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. Website: www.georgecurry.com



GEORGE E. CURRY



Hurricane Katrina's devastation left the Gulf Coast in ruins and promises to rebuild communities unkept.

Intimidation won't work in college

In July 2006, I was chatting with a Western Alabama African American husband of a public school teacher who shared a story of how his wife had been the victim of



SHERMAN MILLER

shoot her.

The husband stated that his wife became emotionally frazzled, and he began to describe the high stress his wife underwent from this potential life threatening situation.

His African America wife comes across as a woman who holds strong convictions on helping students rise to their full potential. She confirmed that the student threat occurred, but she tried to minimize the seriousness of her stress. This teacher said that she chatted with other teachers who shared that this student had exploited this life threatening ploy in the past.

What was very disconcerting was that this teacher never revealed that the hellion student suffered any consequences for this clear case of teacher intimidation. As I recounted this story in light of the murders that have taken place in schools across the nation, I was concerned that if other teachers knew of

this student's intimidation tactics, why was he still in school?

As a college mathematics professor, I am a firm believer that you can discipline or teach but not do both in the college classroom if the students attempt to exploit gang banger teacher intimidation antics that may have worked in high school in my classroom, they quickly find themselves asked to leave. These intimidator students also learn that I spent my early life growing between two public housing projects so gang banger antics only strengthen my resolve to help them undergo an acculturation to the decorum of a mainstream college student.

What intimidator students

may find in colleges in general is that social promotion (teachers passing you to get you out of their classroom) is not something that college professors will tolerate. Hence, it behooves parents who are hoping their children are successful in college to see that they undergo a mainstream acculturation before entering college or intimidator students may find themselves flunking out of college in their freshman year. Thus parents might consider their financial losses in paying college tuition for students, hoping to brandish a hip hop gang banger persona that may be fine in the hood but tantamount to academic suicide on a college campus.

SHERMAN MILLER is a syndicated columnist.