

## ***Framing Race and Class in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina: A Natural and Unnatural Disaster***

By Shannon Seibert and Elaine Elinson  
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**Shannon Seibert** was the Equal Justice Society Law & Communications Irmas Fellow from Sept. 2005 through late-2006, funded through the Irmas Fellowship and Public Interest Law Foundation programs at the University of Southern California. **Elaine Elinson**, media relations advisor to EJS, has worked as an advocate for the civil rights community in California for more than two decades. The **Equal Justice Society**, co-founded and led by Eva Paterson, is a national advocacy organization strategically advancing social and racial justice through law and public policy, communications and the arts, and alliance building. This report may be downloaded at [www.equaljusticesociety.org/katrina](http://www.equaljusticesociety.org/katrina). For questions related to this report, contact Keith Kamisugi at [kkamisugi@equaljusticesociety.org](mailto:kkamisugi@equaljusticesociety.org) or at 415-288-8710.

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### ***Executive Summary***

The issues of race, class and government action brought so forcefully into focus in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina provided a unique framework with which to analyze media coverage of these fundamental issues. In its long term effort to "put race back on the table" and reframe the public conversation about race and government accountability, EJS examined coverage by different kinds of media of this unique natural and unnatural disaster in an effort to understand how the story of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath were being presented to American audiences.

This study includes three aspects: a detailed media scan of rightwing newspapers; a synthesis of several studies of mainstream media; and an examination of the efforts by progressive organizations to project their messages into the media.

The media scan of conservative papers -- the *New York Post*, *Washington Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and the *Orange County Register* from September 2005 to January 2006 -- reveals the

systematic messaging and tactics of the Right. Here we examine how the conservative press distorts the issues of race, racism, and the role of government in addressing the disaster.

The review of the mainstream media - *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, primetime network news, etc. - reveals moments of stellar in-depth reporting, coupled with a waning of interest and coverage in an unconscionably short period of time. The efforts by progressive social justice organizations to help frame the public conversation were rapid, thoughtful and politically sophisticated, yet lacked the necessary resources and coordination to sustain a long-term effort.

There is no doubt that future American disasters will disproportionately impact people of color and the poor in this country. It is vital that we understand the stance and role of various kinds of media and the impact that their messages have on public opinion and public policy. It is equally vital that we develop the resources, tools and skills to be able to deepen the public discourse around the pivotal issues of race, racism and government accountability.

## **Introduction**

Two years after the nation's witnessing of the devastation in New Orleans, it has become a matter of common knowledge that Hurricane Katrina ripped the veil off America's often hidden visage of race and poverty. No amount of "spin" in the first days after Hurricane Katrina could dispute the reality of hours stretching into days while tens of thousands of people remained stranded on rooftops and overpasses in smoldering heat without food, water, or medicine. Neither could be disguised the federal government's apathetic approach to rescuing the tens of thousands left behind, nearly all of whom were African American.

With the horrific images came an awakening of interest of a long-slumbering public in the fate of their fellow Americans. Widely heard throughout the media in those early days and weeks was the common refrain "the story of Hurricane Katrina has changed the way Americans view poverty."

For their part, journalists and pundits -- those who determine what will be communicated as news to the American public -- agreed that the story of the hurricane's aftermath, the government's inadequate preparation and response, and the reality of poverty and racism in America was one that would last long beyond the typical "shelf life" of a news story.

At the same time, activists on the ground in the South and across the nation mobilized incredible resources and dedicated vast amounts of time and energy to assist evacuees with immediate needs of food, clothing, and housing and organized politically to keep the aftermath of Katrina at the forefront of national consciousness.

Yet, two years later, despite the lack of electricity, water and other public services in parts of the Ninth Ward, mayoral elections in which more than half the evacuated city was provided no feasible way in which to participate, and one-third of the city's population still unable to return home, coverage of Gulf area victims in the media has largely evaporated, and American interest has

markedly waned. As noted by *Washington Post* columnist Howard Kurtz, "Most of those left behind in the storm were poor and black...and it seemed, briefly, that we were on the verge of a national conversation about race and poverty. But it never materialized."<sup>1</sup>

What happened? How did the largest natural and manmade disaster ever experienced in this country fade so rapidly into the background, its victims all but forgotten? Why did journalists, once visibly shaken at the images pouring through our screens, suddenly lose interest in a story with such wide-reaching implications? What must progressives do to encourage media interest and accurate reporting on issues of the realities of racism and poverty in America?

In this era of the 24-hour news cycle, the media largely dictate not only what issues Americans discuss over coffee, but also how they think about and discuss those issues.<sup>2</sup> Quite obviously, if something is not reported upon, then the public will not know to talk about it, absent information from "alternative" sources. But just as importantly, the way in which media present the images and events, the context, understanding, history they provide to explain the images and events, and the language they use to provide those explanations influence even the most highly sophisticated news consumer.

Progressive organizations and foundations have only recently come to realize the important role communications plays in achieving the goals of the progressive community. Foundations such as the Open Society Institute and Ford Foundation are increasingly funding communications departments within activist organizations.

Academics such as George Lakoff have gained fame offering "framing" as the answer to progressives' ills. While questions remain in the framing discussion - to what extent framing our message should be focused upon and how our message should be framed - it is indisputable that progressives must develop our communications

capacities, strategies, and knowledge to enhance our ability to be effective advocates.

The issues of race, class, and government action brought so forcefully into focus in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina provided a unique framework in which to analyze media coverage of those issues. By looking at the opposing sides of the communications battle - the Right's strategies and the Left's ability to transmit our messages through the media - we hope to offer insight into how best to neutralize the Right's messaging while developing an understanding of progressive messaging efforts so that we may continue to improve our communications strategies.

Part One of the report focuses upon the conservative media's efforts to spin, ignore, or distract from the issues of race, class and governmental duty unveiled by Hurricane Katrina. Part Two focuses on specific opportunities for framing and messaging presented to progressives by Hurricane Katrina and the extent to which the progressive community took advantage of those opportunities. To the extent Part Two of the report, which is based upon several organizations' recommendations and analyses, illuminates missed opportunities for the progressive community, the information is provided in the spirit of recognizing our shortcomings so that we may better prepare for the future.

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### ***Part One: Conservative Spin***

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Faced with irrefutable images broadcast on television screens and splashed in full color across newspaper pages, the Right must certainly have been in a temporary stage of crisis: How, given these powerful images, could they prevent issues of racial justice and governmental responsibility from dominating the national debate?

If the country's rapid turn from the victims of Katrina and the mass onset of amnesia among the public is any indication, it would seem that the Right was successful, once again, in steering the debate away from issues dangerous to its agenda.

To determine just how the Right did this, the Equal Justice Society performed a media scan of conservative "mainstream" papers from September 2005 to January 2006 to learn more about the messaging and tactics of the Right.

The media scan focused upon four publications: *The New York Post*, *The Washington Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Orange County Register*.<sup>3</sup> The four papers were chosen because, despite their ideologically conservative underpinnings, they are marketed as newspapers, not opinion journals. This allows journalists writing for the paper to embed ideological messages into the reporting of hard news while claiming to uphold "journalistic" values (i.e. that of neutral observer) - an approach that is used with varying levels of success among the papers.<sup>4</sup>

Before discussing the messaging and strategies of the conservative press as a whole, it is worth noting that each paper had a slightly different approach to reporting on Katrina.<sup>5</sup> *The Orange County Register* focused almost exclusively on economics - the economics of being an evacuee and the economics of helping an evacuee. *The New York Post* all but ignored the issue, with only seven articles mentioning race or class in relation to Katrina. *The Wall Street Journal*, with the exception of a few human-interest stories noted in Footnote 2, focused primarily upon the political fallout and prospects in the aftermath of Katrina. *The Washington Times* dealt most aggressively with the issue, devoting a number of articles to race, class, and government.

### **Conservative Messaging: Race**

Following is a list of the four basic messages promoted by conservative journalists and commentators when reporting on or discussing issues surrounding Hurricane Katrina:

**Message No. 1: "Racism could not have played a role because Blacks held positions of leadership."**

By focusing on the role played by Black politicians and leaders, such as Mayor Ray Nagin, Congressman William Jefferson, and Jesse Jackson, reporters and editorialists for conservative papers established a foundation from which to argue that Blacks were not discriminated against because Blacks were in positions of leadership. This approach allowed the Right to acknowledge reality – that those left behind were predominantly Black – but eliminate racism’s influential role in that outcome from the discussion.<sup>6</sup>

- “...how, when black politicians themselves played a prominent role in what happened, can we be talking about racism?”<sup>7</sup>
- “It appears that Ray Nagin, New Orleans’ black mayor, was grossly negligent...Where was black Congressman William Jefferson, who has represented New Orleans for eight terms in the U.S. House of Representatives?...Where was [Jesse Jackson] as Katrina thundered toward New Orleans, with a population almost 70 percent black and poor?”<sup>8</sup>
- “Some in the black community are beginning to question what happened to the black leadership during the Hurricane Katrina disaster...While a few black leaders...have singled out the president for blame, others say Mayor C. Ray Nagin, who is black, is responsible for the dismal response to the flooding that stranded thousands in the city’s poorest sections.”<sup>9</sup>
- “The truth is, black people died not because of President Bush or racism, they died because of their unhealthy dependence on the government and the incompetence of Mayor Ray Nagin and Governor Kathleen Blanco.”<sup>10</sup>
- “If black folks want to blame someone for this tragedy, they only need to look in the mirror. Hopefully, this will help people realize the folly of depending on the government or leaders and serve as a notice to avert future tragedies in other cities.”<sup>11</sup>

**Message No. 2: “Any discussion of racism is, at best, counterproductive because it distracts from helping those in need and, at worst, an act of political opportunism.”**

The primary argument here is that any time spent discussing historical or modern-day racism is counterproductive because that discussion diverts attention from the immediate or “real” problems of housing, education, and job training for evacuees. Conservative press and commentators effectively position the two issues within a zero-sum paradigm: the nation can either talk about existing racism and structural inequities that led to the disaster *or* it can take action to help those who are suffering. This arrangement implies that those who would spend time analyzing the issues of race and class are unfeeling, cerebral elites who care nothing for the plight of people desperately need of jobs, housing, and education. Because this messaging establishes that discussion of structural inequality harms the very people the discussion is intended to help, it removes from the realm of possible discussion the role of historical and current racism on modern-day housing, employment, and education.

A corollary to this is the accusation that any discussion of race or racism is an act of political opportunism, undertaken only to increase the power or influence of the leader/speaker who is demanding that race and class issues be addressed. In this light, discussing race or racism is painted as an evil, empty, self-serving endeavor – a mere act of pandering, nothing more.<sup>12</sup> Complementing this line of reasoning is the assertion that discussion of race, class, poverty only fans the flames of racial tension and harms the nation’s efforts to achieve racial parity.

- “If we allow political opportunists to again allege racism to deflect our attention from solving the real problems of fixing our families and educating our children, surely more tragedy awaits us.”<sup>13</sup>
- “With TV and press focused on politicians spitting at each other amid a natural

catastrophe, average people in communities across the nation, aided by many can-do private companies, opened their doors to the genuine homeless people of New Orleans.”

- “This could have been a special, defining moment in America. Maybe it is, anyway, despite the best efforts of the race hustlers.”<sup>14</sup>
- “What we are witnessing is a well-honed black political public-relations operation geared to obfuscation, stoking hatred and fear, and nurturing helplessness and dependence among black citizens. Such efforts keep black politicians powerful, diversity businesses prosperous and blacks poor.”<sup>15</sup>
- “No one can point to a single example of white mistreatment of black...but the race hustlers are determined to manufacture racism where there is none.”<sup>16</sup>
- “With images of the city’s bereft black population replaying hourly, the aftermath of a natural disaster was reprogrammed into an act of man-made racism. The nation’s politicians, rather than damp down this falsity, exploited it, falling on each other with long knives and hurling charges of incompetence, neglect and again, racism.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Message No. 3: “The outpouring of generosity proves that American people are not racist”**

This messaging allows the Right to acknowledge the reality that poor people of color were disproportionately affected, while twisting the fact to suit their message. In this frame, it is acknowledged that African Americans were hit harder, but the blame is put on Mother Nature, while the people of the United States are positioned as heroes, who reached out their (white) hands to help those (Black) people in need. From this perspective, any discussion of racial realities in America is a “downer” and disparages the work and generosity of “good Americans” who have rallied to help. Perhaps most destructively, implicit in this

message is the assumption that only overtly racist actions constitute racism.

- “That Americans would somehow in a color-affected way decide who to help and who not to help – I just don’t believe it...*Americans are generous to each other, and I think you’re seeing that people are opening their homes to people who are displaced and have to be evacuated.*”<sup>18</sup>
- Rarely if ever in the nation’s history have so many Americans gone out of their way to lend a hand to their suffering neighbors...[I]f anyone has put strings on any of this, racial or otherwise, it escapes everybody.”<sup>19</sup>
- “The story of the fortnight is an outpouring of good will...yet the television networks and many of the newspapers persist in portraying the story of Katrina as a story of racism, bigotry, greed, indifference and abdication of responsibility. No one can point to a single example of white mistreatment of black. The stark photographic images, in fact, show white hands reaching out to relieve black suffering...but the race hustlers are determined to manufacture racism where there is none.”<sup>20</sup>
- Reporters’ clichés about ‘racist’ America were often at odds with the evidence of their own film footage. Black and white pulled together in Mississippi and avoided social chaos. Billions in aid, both private and public, poured into New Orleans from Americans worried sick over fellow citizens, regardless of race.”<sup>21</sup>
- “Katrina’s dislocation of hundreds of thousands of people from Gulf Coast states is inspiring extraordinary acts of charity... To Jerome Lyons [N.O. evacuee], the wave of help in Houston seems more powerful than the hurricane. ‘All races, all colors, all express their love,’ he says...[Lyons] says strangers have given him money on the street to help him get a new start.”<sup>22</sup>

- “As Americans donated millions of dollars, they discussed how race and class influenced relief efforts.”<sup>23</sup>

**Message No. 4: “The possibility of racism playing a role in the outcome is simply unfathomable.”**

This approach meshes well with the current political trend toward outright denial of reality. When combined with indignation, such denials can be effective in silencing questions, as space within which to have a discussion about race is denied. Also effective is mockery of any person who dares question the motivation or intent behind the government’s action or inaction. Finally, this approach taps into Americans’ sense of national self-righteousness and reinforces conservative readers’ internal beliefs that modern-day America has purged itself of racism.

- “It is inconceivable that there could have been some all-knowing racist guiding hand orchestrating the chaos and disorganization that characterized what occurred....”<sup>24</sup>
- “*That Americans would somehow in a color-affected way decide who to help and who not to help – I just don’t believe it...Americans are generous to each other, and I think you’re seeing that people are opening their homes to people who are displaced and have to be evacuated.*”<sup>25</sup>
- “The storm didn’t discriminate, and neither will the recovery effort...When those Coast Guard choppers...were pulling people off roofs, they didn’t check the color of a person’s skin.”<sup>26</sup>
- “A huge majority of Americans agree with Bush – 80 percent say the race wasn’t a factor, the CNN poll found.”<sup>27</sup>
- “High percentages of blacks tell pollsters they believed race played a role in the slow response by all levels of government.”<sup>28</sup>

## **Conservative Tactics: Race**

When discussing race, conservative commentators and journalists regularly adopted one of four strategies: Offer effusive praise for the Civil Rights movement and leaders of the past while denouncing current-day leaders; Attack organizations or people that attempt to direct the conversation toward race; Provide a radical-sounding quote by someone considered out of the mainstream; Create a feeling of defensive unity among Americans by focusing on international critiques.

### **1. Lavish praise on Civil Rights movements and leaders of the past while denouncing present-day issues.**

The 1970s conservative strategy of forcefully denouncing overt racism is well documented by progressive thinkers who have studied the right.<sup>29</sup> Accompanying this strategy is the lavishing of praise upon *past* Civil Rights leaders and issues by conservatives in the media. Conservative commentators often compare today’s Civil Rights movement to the “righteous” movement of the 1950s and 1960s, providing them a non-racist veneer behind which to hide while attacking or belittling modern-day Civil Rights leaders. Further, by comparing pre-1960s United States to that of modern-day United States, conservatives establish the comparison as being between “then” and “now,” rather than between what “is” and what “should be.” In addition, the focus upon the violently racist times of slavery and Jim Crow ago allows conservative commentators to argue that the Civil Rights movement succeeded in its efforts to create racial equality and that modern-day America is devoid of racism.<sup>30</sup> Following are examples.

- “Railing against President Bush’s handling of Hurricane Katrina, Rangel told a cheering crowd: “George Bush is our Bull Connor.”...comments like his on Thursday certainly don’t serve the state’s or city’s long-term interests...Of far greater concern is the embarrassment

Rangel's comments represent to the civil-rights movement. What an insult to the people in this country who actually fought segregation, including those who died doing so – who actually faced those fire hoses and those dogs and countless other acts of violence and state-sanctioned racism...would a touch of common decency be too much to ask for the future?"<sup>31</sup>

- "To suggest that I have in some way discredited Dr. King is simply the knee-jerk, apoplectic hysteria of those who find fault with anyone not espousing their leftist mantra of self-segregation and special rights."<sup>32</sup>
- "Rep. Charles Rangel...[has] outdone himself by comparing President Bush to the revolting Southern racist "Bull" Connor, who sicced attack dogs on black protesters in 1963."<sup>33</sup>
- "President Bush...declared that persistent poverty caused by *past* racial injustice in the South must be swept away when the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast is rebuilt."<sup>34</sup>
- "Popular music in New Orleans was born out of intense suffering. Nineteenth-century slaves gathered downtown on Sundays, their one free day of each week...the slaves remade African music in America and perhaps, if only for a fleeting few moments, forgot their desperate plight. Indeed out of such hopelessness, the slaves of New Orleans fashioned a joyful noise...After the end of slavery, New Orleans remained a brutally segregated city... "white's only" Dixieland bands took much of the credit for "inventing" jazz."<sup>35</sup>

## **2. Attack media organizations that aired/published administration critics or that devoted time/space to analyzing issues of race and class in America.**

The attack upon media or people who attempt to discuss issues of social import is also well documented by progressive authors. Building upon

the widespread notion of "liberal bias" in the media that conservatives have carefully cultivated, the conservative press avoided political labeling in the aftermath of Katrina. Instead, conservative commentators chided celebrities, politicians, and media organizations for discussing race, dismissing them as irresponsible, elitist, or lacking in intelligence.

- In response to *Time* magazine's featuring of Kanye West on its cover after West stated that George W. Bush does not care about Black people: "[West's] political commentary apparently passes as evidence of a powerful intellect to the milquetoast editors of *Time* magazine, only too happy to put West on the cover of their dated publication before his race-baiting appearance..."<sup>36</sup>
- "West is a brilliant artist, after all, although he is culling from the same old material of the far-left entertainment industry."<sup>37</sup>
- "As usual, the international media has served as an echo chamber of the American media...Just as CNN was ready from day one to look for people to interview to blame the federal government, so were media the world over ready to blame President Bush for the actions of Mother Nature."<sup>38</sup>
- In response to *Economist's* reporting that "Since Hurricane Katrina, the world's view of America has changed. The disaster has exposed some shocking truths about the place: the bitterness of its sharp racial divide, the abandonment of the dispossessed, the weakness of critical infrastructure," the *Washington Times* responded that "jumping to conclusions and implications of collective guilt...are just outrageous."<sup>39</sup>
- "The story of the fortnight is an outpouring of good will...yet the television networks and many of the newspapers persist in portraying the story of Katrina as a story of racism, bigotry, greed,

- indifference and abdication of responsibility.”<sup>40</sup>
- “The wired media’s one constant is not amazing human resilience but hyped gloom...For all the media efforts to turn the natural disaster of New Orleans into either a racist nightmare, a death knell for one or the other political parties or an indictment of American culture at large, it was none of that at all. What we endured instead were slick but poorly educated journalists, worried not about truth but about pre-empting their rivals with an ever more hysterical story, all in a fuzzy context of political correctness about race, the environment and the war.”<sup>41</sup>
  - “Let a pontificating PBS “News Hour” conduct more televised roundtables with grim-faced elites searching out purported racism”<sup>42</sup>
  - “With images of the city’s bereft black population replaying hourly, the aftermath of a natural disaster was reprogrammed into an act of man-made racism. The nation’s politicians, rather than damp down this falsity, exploited it, falling on each other with long knives and hurling charges of incompetence, neglect and again, racism.”<sup>43</sup>
  - “Doom, gloom and falling skies is always the recipe for disaster reporting...Now it turns out that white folks, not black folks, suffered disproportionately...Nearly all of the sob-sister reporting focused on the black Ninth Ward, but the middle-class, mostly white Lakeview neighborhoods were equally devastated. Such fly-specking of the statistics is sad, because a hundred percent of the suffering was human. In modern America, where race-hustling is a growth industry, it’s sometimes difficult to keep the human statistic in mind. The floodwaters behind the levees the feds promise to rebuild higher and stronger are equal-opportunity killers. The good news is for everybody.”<sup>44</sup>
  - “[S]hould the media apologize to America?...the breathtaking misinformation disseminated by hysterical reporting during the Katrina crisis...So, we wonder: Why did the media assume that the poor black people afflicted by Katrina would act so barbarically?...That’s the same media that tagged the Bush administration as racist b/c it failed to respond quickly enough to an event that now appears to have been something less than apocalyptic.”<sup>45</sup>
  - “The Democrats and a lot of the press are trying to paint it that President Bush and the Republican Party did not go to the rescue of poor blacks who had not evacuated New Orleans.”<sup>46</sup>
  - “A floodtide of media-made melodrama and political recrimination broke the levees of perspective that once helped to keep volatile public events in manageable context. One recalls how TV’s anchors and reporters covered the Challenger disaster or even the Kennedy assassination. Now the media weeps along with the nation.”<sup>47</sup>
- 3. Belittle ideas of racial justice by ensuring the ideas are attributed to or supported by someone considered “outside the mainstream.”**
- “The Rev. Jesse Jackson said racism is partly to blame for the deadly aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and he called Mr. Bush’s response to the disaster ‘incompetent.’...‘Today, as the president comes to Louisiana...he would do well to have a plan more significant than a ceremonial tour,’ Mr. Jackson said. ‘His whole response is unacceptable.’”<sup>48</sup>
  - “[T]he race hustlers are determined to manufacture racism where there is none. Not just the rapper who accuses George W. Bush of genocide, of having arranged through neglect the breaching of the levees so as to wash black Orleanians to a water death. Rep. William Jefferson, the New

Orleans congressman, says, 'If these people hadn't been poor and black, they wouldn't have been left in New Orleans in the first place.' The Rev. Jesse Jackson accuses the Red Cross of consigning the black refugees from the storm to their doom: 'The rescue has been slow because some see us as foreigners 2/3 human.'<sup>49</sup>

- *Washington Times* article reporting upon Louis Farrakhan's speech in Washington D.C.: "[W]e need to look at a class-action suit on behalf of the citizens of New Orleans who have lost everything....The government has not acted responsibly to give (residents) back what they have lost and return them to their homes,' [Farrakhan said]...Mr. Farrakhan also called for reparations for slavery...Many nodded in agreement with points in Mr. Farrakhan's speech, often saying 'yes, sir,' or 'that's right,' at key points."<sup>50</sup>
- Quoting or referencing rumors that the levees were blown up in an act of racial cleansing without reference to historical reasoning behind such rumors<sup>51</sup>

#### 4. Focus on international critiques of United States' policies and actions

Focusing on international criticism of the United States appears to be an organizing tool of the Right, providing it with an "other" against which Americans can unite. This allows for the fostering of a sense of commonality and righteous indignance. By building unity around a defensive position, conservative leaders can label any message coming from the "other" (international organizations, media, or individuals) as attacking American integrity, thus discrediting the message itself. Because the critiques of domestic social justice leaders are similar to those posed by the international community, those critiques also can be dismissed as anti-American.<sup>52</sup>

- "European reporters flocking to France were all ears when former 'James Bond'

actor Pierce Brosnan...blasted the Bush administration's 'shameful' response to Hurricane Katrina."<sup>53</sup>

- "So there it is, the underbelly of America – exposed...For Americaphobes, the events of the past 10 days have proved something of a feast. The subtext, and often the main text, of much of the reportage from New Orleans has been what a nasty, divided, unjust place the U.S. has been revealed to be....it strikes me that there is more than a little smugness in the reporting as well. British journalism reveling in racial division [on] the other side of the Atlantic rarely seems to trouble itself to look at the ethnic splits this side of the pond."<sup>54</sup>
- Following a headline stating, "Post-Katrina frenzy; Foreign media whips up false storm," the *Washington Times* reported on, "the unseemly international display of 'schadenfreude' over the fall of the mighty United States...mixed with sanctimonious sniffing at the sight of poor, black Americans stranded in [] New Orleans..."<sup>55</sup>
- "As usual, the international media has served as an echo chamber of the American media...Just as CNN was ready from day one to look for people to interview to blame the federal government, so were media the world over ready to blame President Bush for the actions of Mother Nature."<sup>56</sup>
- In response an edition of *The Economist*, which printed "The Shaming of America" over a picture of a weeping Black woman on its cover, the *Washington Times* called it "most appalling" and queried, "Shaming? Since when is it a shame to be hit by the worst natural disaster in your nation's history?...Did the Economist blast the 'shaming of France' in August 2003, when a heat wave killed an estimated 11,000 mainly elderly people...?"<sup>57</sup>
- When the same edition of the *Economist* reported, "Since Hurricane Katrina, the

world's view of America has changed. The disaster has exposed some shocking truths about the place: the bitterness of its sharp racial divide, the abandonment of the dispossessed, the weakness of critical infrastructure," the *Washington Times* denounced the article, declaring the publication's "jumping to conclusions and implications of collective guilt" "outrageous."<sup>58</sup>

- Under the headline, "Post-Katrina criticism haunts French as riots erupt," *The Washington Times* reported, "French journalists used Hurricane Katrina to bash both the Bush administration and America itself, turning the natural disaster into a political bludgeon just days after it struck."<sup>59</sup>

### **Messaging and Tactics: Government**

Not as much space was dedicated to spinning government's role and responsibilities, but nonetheless present was conservative messaging and tactics about the role and responsibilities government should play and have in American society. The general theme, "Government is inherently incompetent," was supported by two subthemes: Government regulation contributes to the harm caused by the natural disaster; and, Those who depend upon the government for survival are at fault. In addition to these arguing these points, the tactic most commonly used was the highlighting of good deeds performed by individual people and organizations.

#### **1. Theme: Government is inherently incompetent**

Conservative commentators have used the failure of government in Katrina to implicitly (or explicitly) argue that (1) government is by nature incompetent, (2) the private sector should be looked to for solutions, and (3) because government is incompetence is inherent, it is also indiscriminate; thus, the fact that a disproportionate number of minorities was affected

is unfortunate, but merely an incidental function of government's general incompetence, not of inequity or racism. Examples include:

- "Government incompetence isn't news...it's also not news when black politicians call it racism when the unfortunate victims of this incompetence, because they are poor and unprepared, are largely black."<sup>60</sup>
- *Orange County Register* editorial suggests that the problem was a governmental agency (FEMA) that doesn't "take deadlines very seriously," "top-heavy bureaucracy," and "the failure of agencies to communicate with one another." The answer suggested by the *Register*: "disassembl[e] and downsiz[e]" FEMA.<sup>61</sup>

#### **2. Theme: Government regulation contributes to harm**

In support of conservatives' well-known belief that government regulation is harmful, one story in particular stood out: An Oct. 19, 2005 article reported on the experience of Michael Coleman, a New Orleans waiter who fled to Orange County.<sup>62</sup> In telling the story of Coleman, the journalist weaves in messaging about the additional hardship face by Coleman as a result of California's employee-protection laws. Two excerpts are particularly telling:

- "At [New Orleans restaurant] Bacco, Coleman pulled in more than \$1,000 a week working double shifts and long hours without breaks in the Big Easy. Here, strict California laws prohibit such work schedules in restaurants. On a good week in Anaheim, he pulls in \$600. It's a tough financial adjustment."<sup>63</sup>
- "California law requires he take a 30-minute break during a six-hour shift. He's also not allowed to work the kind of back-breaking hours that servers in New Orleans *take on proudly* to survive in the dining Mecca."<sup>64</sup>

### 3. **Theme: Dependence upon government is the problem**

By painting dependence upon government as an evil that lies at the root of the problem, conservative commentators effectively turn the tables and place the blame upon the victims.

- “The truth is, black people died not because of President Bush or racism, they died because of their unhealthy dependence on the government and the incompetence of [Nagin & Blanco].”<sup>65</sup>
- “If black folks want to blame someone for this tragedy, they only need to look in the mirror. Hopefully, this will help black people realize the folly of depending on the government or leaders and serve as a notice to avert future tragedy in other cities.”<sup>66</sup>
- “Republicans in the White House...say the fact that one in five residents of the states hardest hit by Katrina...live below the poverty level proves that traditional government programs of handouts for the poor do not work.”<sup>67</sup>

### 4. **Tactic: Highlighting good deeds and efforts of individuals**

Conservative papers, in particular the *Orange County Register*, placed a large focus upon individual stories in the wake of Katrina. Though this approach is partially a function of journalistic culture – highlighting human-interest stories to grab the reader’s attention – the effect of this approach is to distract from institutional issues, such as government responsibility or the effects of discriminatory policy. By structuring a story around an individual, it becomes nearly impossible to broaden the discussion to the institutional forces at work behind that individual’s predicament or efforts to help.<sup>68</sup> The following are examples of individual good-will stories from the *Orange County Register*:

- The pastor of Christ our Redeemer A.M.E. Church in Irvine organized church members and students to travel to the Gulf to help rebuild.<sup>69</sup>
- An article about an Orange County churchgoer who traveled to the Gulf to “lift the spirits” of inmates in jail.<sup>70</sup>
- An article providing a laundry list of good-deeds in the Orange County area performed by school children, local businesses, churches, and politicians.<sup>71</sup>
- An article detailing the Orange County Sheriff’s efforts to replenish a “grateful Jefferson Parish department’s supplies.”<sup>72</sup>
- An article exalting a former pastor and his wife who gave \$50,000 to churches to distribute among their members, who were to help Katrina survivors with the money. The journalist reported that one churchgoer had an epiphany while listening to morning talk radio: “On station after station, people were criticizing the government for failing to do enough for Katrina victims. That’s where the community church comes in, she thought. ‘We feel like the local church can do more than any government,’ she said.”<sup>73</sup>
- An article explaining to *Orange County Register* readers how they can donate on a budget.<sup>74</sup>
- The story of an Orange County nurse who traveled to Biloxi in response to a call for volunteers.<sup>75</sup>
- A group of women calling themselves “Girly girls” traveled to Houston from Orange County to pass out cosmetics and skin products to make survivors feel better.<sup>76</sup>
- The story of a Vietnamese family that lost everything when it fled the storm, but is grateful to be starting over in Orange County, where everyone has been so helpful.<sup>77</sup>
- School children in Mississippi sent thank you’s to California schools who sent help to the Gulf.<sup>78</sup>

A final observation comes from the “Letters to the Editor” pages of conservative papers. Though the readers who write in to the opinion pages of conservative papers are not our targeted community, their opinion is a good gauge to use to determine the effect of the messaging and strategies of the Right. Following are two particularly telling excerpts that neatly capture the belief systems created or supported by conservative messaging and strategy:

- “I expect that [Rev. Jesse Lee] Peterson will be trashed by the black left for stating a politically incorrect truth: that the victims of Hurricane Katrina would have been able to relocate if they were self-sufficient as opposed to being dependent on the largesse of the federal government. Peter’s critics will inevitably label him an ‘Uncle Tom’...which will just go to show that the liberal-left’s slurs are as tired as they are inaccurate.”<sup>79</sup>
- “I have had it with race-baiting, do-nothing liberals who root against our nation’s success – both at home and abroad....I despise attempts to turn tragedy into political capital...If liberals really want to help, they can send money to the American Red Cross, take in a displaced American citizen or grab a shovel...It is time for liberals, Democrats, and the elite media to evacuate their...ways....Put America first.”<sup>80</sup>

The Right has enjoyed many years of near-monopoly over all aspects of the debate over race in the United States. Not only have they largely defined which issues will be discussed, but have identified the language that will be used for that discussion. The hope is that an understanding of the methods employed by the Right to affect public understanding and perception of race, socially conscious communicators can begin to neutralize the messaging and re-educate the American public.

It is widely acknowledged that the poor and people of color are disproportionately affected in times of catastrophe. Katrina was unusual only in

that the reality of racial and economic disparities were displayed in the national media for all to see, whereas those disparities previously were reported upon only rarely by the mainstream media. In future times of disaster, progressives will have the opportunity to insist that race and class be brought to the forefront of the debate. Therefore, they must be prepared to neutralize the messaging and strategies that will be used by the Right. Understanding what those messages and strategies are is the one part of developing that strategy. Another is identifying specific opportunities presented by situations such as that facing the victims of Katrina and learning how to best frame their messages for the widest impact on the American audience. To do so, it is necessary to look at possible communications strategies that could have been implemented by progressives in the days, weeks, and months following Hurricane Katrina and the extent to which progressives successfully implemented those strategies.

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### **Part Two: Opportunities for a Progressive Response**

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While it is important to be prepared to counteract the Right’s strategies, it is also important that the Left learn to take advantage of news “windows” when they are presented and frame the debate before the Right has the opportunity to do so. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the starkness of the images and the resultant disbelief that such a disaster “could happen in America” presented progressives with a rare opportunity to educate the American public about the reasons for high poverty rates among communities of color, the realities of structural and historical racism, and the direct causal relationship between financially starved government programs and increased vulnerability of millions of Americans. Two years after the initial tragedy, we have the advantage of hindsight to look at the opportunities presented to progressives during that time to learn we may more effectively communicate our message through the media.

The images streaming through televisions and splashed across the front pages of newspapers throughout the nation put a face on the reality of race and poverty in America. The images made undeniable the suffering of thousands stranded in New Orleans; They made undeniable the fact that almost all of those left behind were African American; They made undeniable the absence of government assistance in a time of great tragedy. What the images did not do – nor could they, standing alone, have done – was provide the public with an understanding of *why* such a tragedy occurred. Without context to explain the images, the viewer is left to her own devices – knowledge, preconceptions, stereotypes – to interpret the images.

For most of us on the Left, the tragedy was the natural outcome of a number of underlying faults in our political, economic and social systems: reduced government protections for the poor, historical racism, and modern-day systemic and systematic racism. That the suffering felt in times of disaster would disproportionately fall upon poor communities of color comes as no surprise to those of us on the Left. “Of course the poor and communities of color suffer disproportionately,” we exclaim, incredulous. “Those are the very communities who have been denied opportunities for advancement through decades of economic, political and social disenfranchisement, thus depriving them of the resources allotted to their White counterparts and resulting in tragedies such as those witnessed in the wake of Katrina.”

As noted by progressive commentators, “Hurricane Katrina exposed far more than rank incompetence and negligence by Bush administration officials.”<sup>81</sup> It exposed the failure of a system that denies opportunity to members of society based on the color of their skin and the failure of a conservative philosophy that promotes the tearing down of government protections for the most vulnerable in society.

The conclusion is logical, a matter of simple common sense – to progressives. Most news consumers, however, simply don’t have the

information to reach this logical conclusion.<sup>82</sup> To reach this conclusion, a viewer would have to have a working knowledge of the consequences of historical, systemic, and systematic discrimination, as well as the consequences of years of slashing of government programs designed to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Absent this understanding, or accurate and thoughtful reporting to provide context to the images, readers and viewers resort to preconceptions and misunderstandings – or those provided by the most effective communicators in the media – to determine at whom or what their outrage should be directed.

Understanding the potential for progressive communicators to influence the debate, progressives across the country spoke out about the need to immediately take control of the debate in the weeks and months immediately following the Gulf Coast hurricanes. In a Sierra Summit speech on September 10, 2005, George Lakoff explained that the Bush Administration was already busy framing the issues and offering explanations such as “Bad things just happen; it’s no one’s fault” or “The people being shipped out will have better lives elsewhere” to the American public. “Unless the real truth is told starting now,” he urged, “the American public will accept [the Bush Administration’s explanations] for lack of an alternative.”<sup>83</sup>

As early as September 9, 2005, the Praxis Project published a strategic memo, explaining that the challenge faced by social justice advocates would be to “shift[] the public’s view that this is a natural disaster and charges of racism are ‘un-American.’”<sup>84</sup> Praxis urged advocates to focus on three goals in their Katrina media work: 1) Pushing officials for adequate resources to bring about the complete and immediate recovery of the affected areas; 2) Reinforcing the message that this is another example that racism exists, is structural, and must be confronted; and 3) Elevating the voices and leadership from the region. From these goals, Praxis developed talking points, “Sound Bites,” and “Context Bites” to assist social justice communicators in discussing Katrina with the media. Among their suggested messages:

- As much as hurricanes are “natural” disasters, the huge death toll of Katrina was caused by manmade policies and neglect.
- On several occasions, federal funds were denied to create mechanisms that could have prevented the tremendous loss of life.
- Government has become a gated community. If you don’t have money, forget about getting access to its services.
- The patterns of racism are undeniable: Chronic underfunding, rampant redlining and divestment transformed New Orleans from a city to a deathtrap for tens of thousands of residents, mostly black and poor.
- Whether intentional or not, racism hurts. If I drive recklessly in your neighborhood, does it matter if I meant to hit your child when I do? Public policy has been reckless in communities of color[, and] the Katrina aftermath is but the latest and gravest example.

The SPIN Project also developed and made available through the Internet post-Katrina framing recommendations that provided examples of how to message around specific issues. In a six-page memo, SPIN offered framing recommendations, framing considerations, and strategic communications advice. Among their recommendations were themes on which messaging strategies should be focused:<sup>85</sup>

- **Frame Broadly:** Most of us know that this issue is about more than a September 2005 hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico. It’s about racial and economic injustice, eviscerated government and indifference to the environment. It’s about how the government and other institutions will rebuild the Gulf States in the next 5-10 years and beyond. We need to ensure that media outlets tell the broader story – that government has neglected the vulnerable among us, and that poverty and racism still plague us. We need to make sure they

understand that every city and town in America shares similarities with New Orleans.

- **Safety and Security:** Bush won the 2004 election based on the perception by many voters that he would keep them safe. Katrina destroyed that illusion. Americans, especially the poorest and people of color, are not safe. This means the federal government failed to meet its primary duty.
- **Role of Government:** Katrina made terribly clear that government has a very important role to play in our society: protecting its citizens. The hurricane hit a city whose defenses had been eviscerated by years of “small government conservative” neglect...Money to upgrade and repair New Orleans levees was cut in 2006; something has to give when we’re spending hundreds of billions of dollars in Iraq...Government, when properly funded and managed, is the only institution that can protect us from disasters of this magnitude.
- **Emphasize the Victims’ Humanity and Heroics:** After September 11, 2001, victims were instantly canonized. After Katrina, many victims were blamed. We need to remind audiences of the basic humanity of those killed and displaced by the hurricane. They are also heroes, survivors of a government indifferent (if not hostile) to their well being.<sup>86</sup>

In addition, SPIN provided Talking Points around issues of racial and economic justice, housing, the environment and health care, using realities brought to the forefront by Katrina as an introduction to a discussion of the realities of racism, conservative financial policy, lack of affordable housing, environmental racism and global warming, and the need for quality healthcare.<sup>87</sup>

In an October report, the Center for Social Inclusion discussed the underlying values

progressives should promote in their discussion of the issues brought to the forefront by Hurricane Katrina in order to transform public discourse on race and poverty in the United States.<sup>88</sup>

CSI explained:

Today, our dominant frames are individualism (pull yourself up by your bootstraps) and limited government (government is the problem, so we must limit it to create individual opportunity)...Hurricane Katrina is a real world event that presents a strategic opening for changing how the American public thinks about race and poverty and the role of the government in providing for the public welfare...The post-Katrina context provides social justice advocates with an historic opportunity to break the dominant frames of individualism and limited government and to activate frames of interconnectedness (communal responsibility) and strong government (government as the collective and racially inclusive “we”). It also provides an opportunity to redefine widely shared cultural values of fairness and opportunity to create support for a strong government, through which we can most equitably support each other and build healthy, sustainable communities.

To do this, CSI suggested that progressive communicators develop strategies to combat frames of individualism and limited government through analysis and commentary that evokes a sense of interconnectedness and communal responsibility, devotes greater attention to structural causes of poverty and racism, and explains how limited government burdens not only the poor, but also the middle class.<sup>89</sup> Regarding structural causes of poverty, CSI recommended referencing social science and scholarship on structural and institutional barriers to getting out of poverty and discussing concentrated poverty’s connection to opportunity structures.<sup>90</sup> CSI also urged advocates to offer “positive frames” – frames that offer a

positive vision to move people toward, such as fairness, strong federal government for all of us, and interconnectedness – as an alternative to the dominant frames of “individualism” and “limited government.”<sup>91</sup>

### **Media Analyses – The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

Media analyses conducted by progressive organizations and media watchdogs found a number of instances where a contextual explanation of race and poverty, structural racism, or government responsibility were successfully communicated through the media.

The New Standard noted that “[a]fter initially chastising the ‘stubborn folly’ of residents who did not evacuate New Orleans, some media outlets began reporting the curious fact that those people were overwhelmingly African-American and poor, with little means of getting out.”<sup>92</sup> On September 2, the *New York Times*, in an article titled “From Margins of Society to Center of the Tragedy,” explored the connection between race and who was left behind and noted “a growing sense that race and class are the unspoken markers of who got out and who got stuck” in New Orleans.<sup>93</sup> The New Standard, however, noted that the *Times* article made only a “weak attempt” to offer an institutional explanation of this by relaying a quote from an unnamed national official: “Just as in developing countries where the failures of rural development policies become glaringly clear at times of natural disasters like floods or drought...some of the United States’ poorest cities have been left vulnerable by federal policies.”<sup>94</sup> Two days later, *Times* reporter Jason DeParle noted that “what a shocked world saw exposed in New Orleans last week wasn’t just a broken levee. It was a chasm of race and class, at once familiar and startlingly new, laid bare in a setting where they suddenly amounted to matters of life and death. Hydrology joined sociology through the story line, from the settling of the flood-prone city, where well-to-do white people lived on the high ground, to its frantic abandonment.”<sup>95</sup>

Two weeks later, *Newsweek* published a scathing cover story titled, “The Other America.”<sup>96</sup> In the report, journalist Jonathan Alter explained:

It takes a catastrophe like Katrina to strip away the old evasions, hypocrisies and not-so-benign neglect. It takes the sight of the United States with a big black eye—visible around the world—to help the rest of us begin to see again. For the moment, at least, Americans are ready to fix their restless gaze on enduring problems of poverty, race and class that have escaped their attention.<sup>97</sup>

Alter attempted to grapple with the issue of poverty in America, quoting Johns Hopkins University sociologist as explaining that “Americans tend to think of poor people as being responsible for their own economic woes, but this was a case where the poor were clearly not at fault. It was a reminder that we have a moral obligation to provide every American with a decent life.” However, a few paragraphs later, Alter wrote, “After 40 years of study, the causes of poverty are still being debated. Liberals say the problem is an economic system that’s tilted to the rich; conservatives blame a debilitating culture of poverty. Clearly, it’s both—a tangle of financial and personal pain that often goes beyond insufficient resources and lack of training.”<sup>98</sup>

In an examination of print and internet media, the Center for Social Inclusion (CSI) found that at least one piece in the *Seattle Times* applied a structural lens to the failed evacuation of the poor from New Orleans and the pre-existing poverty of the evacuees in reporting on Hurricane Katrina’s implications for anti-poverty policy.<sup>99</sup> In the article, journalist Jonathan Tilove noted that “those with the fewest resources and connections were the least likely to get to safety on their own” and drew a connection between a community’s opportunity structures and its prospect for escaping poverty.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, an article in the *Washington Post* hinted at White privilege, citing a professor’s expectation that “middle-class Gentilly and wealthy Lakeview –

just as prone to severe flooding – will nevertheless be rebuilt, while the Lower Ninth Ward [will be] abandoned.”<sup>101</sup>

Another article published in the *New York Review of Books* provides hope. In the September 8, 2005 issue, Darryl Pinckney highlighted the effects of racial segregation by noting that the predominantly White suburbanites of New Orleans were able to escape the brunt of the disaster, due to their location on higher and drier ground.<sup>102</sup> Contextual discussion even broke through on broadcast, when Women in Media & News helped *ABC News Now* book *ColorLines* magazine’s Rinku Sen on their cable show “Top Priority.”<sup>103</sup> During her appearance, Sen discussed the impact of race and class in the wake of the natural disaster, the recovery and relief efforts, and the unnatural political aftermath.<sup>104</sup>

Yet, despite the initial signs of hope and despite the media’s initial interest in the subject, analyses conducted in the year since Katrina have largely found that the mainstream media failed to provide context for the tragedy, focusing instead on rumors of violence and mayhem, and quickly lost interest in the plight of hundreds of thousands of evacuees and the causes for their suffering.

A review of broadcast transcripts from the three major cable news networks over a full week — Saturday, August 28 to Saturday, September 3 — for coverage of the race and class issues exposed in Katrina’s wake by Think Progress concluded that the three major cable news networks “are still, to a greater or lesser extent, ignoring the ‘elephant in the room.’”<sup>105</sup> The report found that of roughly 1,300 news segments aired on the three networks in the seven days following Hurricane Katrina, race or class issues were the primary or substantial focus in only 22 segments.<sup>106</sup> Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting’s *Extra!* reported that media analyst Andrew Tyndall found that for the eight months following Katrina, “network newscasts spent an average of four seconds per night on poverty issues – up from an average of two-and-a-half seconds in

the years before Katrina, but still only half the time devoted to the doings of the stock market.”<sup>107</sup>

In its examination of print and internet media, CSI found that “The Right’s frames of individualism (poverty results from culture or failures of individual responsibility; racism as solely the intentional acts of individuals) and limited government (ideology of small government for social welfare programs and privatization of government services) were common in both conservative and mainstream coverage of Hurricane Katrina.”<sup>108</sup> The study further identified “Blacks as the racial other” as a common refrain in mainstream coverage, reinforced by narratives of Blacks as lawless and symbols of Black “looting.”<sup>109</sup>

Conducting a review of broadcast coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, University of Delaware researchers found that the dominant themes in broadcast coverage were “finding damage,” “finding death,” “finding help,” “finding authority,” and “finding the bad guys.”<sup>110</sup> With the media’s heavy reporting – and misreporting – on looting, murder, rape, and shooting, the “bad guys” all too often were presented as the Black New Orleanians who were left behind.<sup>111</sup> Another analysis that focused on the relationship between race and coverage of the crisis found that the exaggerated and inaccurate reports regarding criminal activity in Katrina’s aftermath was consistent with a “disproportionate media tendency to associate Blacks with crime and violence.”<sup>112</sup>

ZNet’s Paul Street explained that “we can expect [corporate media] to quite naturally frame Katrina and its aftermath around a number of privilege-friendly and power-preserving concepts... Their job is ideological damage control: putting the lid on the race-class-empire can.”<sup>113</sup> In an “anecdotal sampling” of electronic and print media, Street detected a number of disturbing trends in mainstream coverage:<sup>114</sup>

- Reporting on Katrina as essentially a “natural disaster,” thereby supplanting the “sociology” of the tragedy with “hydrology and meteorology.”

- Focusing on “incompetence” in disaster relief management as the main socially constructed factor to merit attention, effectively ignoring the effects of hyper-segregation and the slashing of government programs.
- An obsessive focus on real and alleged Black “looting” while describing white survivors as “finders.”
- A special focus on individual coping and surviving stories, thereby turning attention away from the structural and societal factors that created the disaster.
- A disproportionate focus on evacuation hold-outs and the efforts of public authorities to “convince them to leave their flooded homes,” leading White viewers and readers to blame the victims for their plight.

Equally distressing is the rapidity with which the media lost interest and the dearth of reporting a year after the storm, despite the tens of thousands of evacuees who remain homeless, scattered across the country. An *Extra!* analysis of media coverage in the nine months following Katrina found that “with few exceptions, the media’s rediscovery of impoverished Americans lasted barely a month.”<sup>115</sup> Noting that individual journalists did periodically focus on the well-being of New Orleans evacuees in the months after the hurricane, *Extra!* explained that the stories “seldom went beyond tales of individual tragedy, examining neither the systemic causes of their destitution, nor what could be done to alleviate their woes.”<sup>116</sup>

A recent article in London’s *Guardian* put it bluntly:

Like teenagers discovering sex, the American media developed an intense fascination with the mundane facts of American life following the hurricane: namely, the glaring disparities of race and class that persist and pervade. Having gorged themselves on the undeniable evidence of glaring

disparities in race and class, they soon got sick and went to sleep...[T]here is no dramatic backdrop to the systematic and systemic exclusions of African-Americans this time around. It's as though corpses have to be floating down the street and thousands stranded without food or water before racism is once more worthy of note here.<sup>117</sup>

### Why the Bleak Results?

A variety of factors were and are at play in the shoddy media coverage of race and class in Hurricane Katrina's aftermath. At issue are a number of competing factors, including the complexity of race and class issues, media resources and priorities, and social dynamics.

In the days immediately following Katrina, the Democratic establishment remained conspicuously silent. On September 10 – nearly two weeks after the hurricane struck – one commentator lamented, “The Democratic response so far is playing right into Bush’s framing. By delaying a response for fear it will be called ‘partisan,’ the Democratic leadership is allowing Bush to frame the tragedy.”<sup>118</sup> That same week commentator Arianna Huffington expressed her frustration with the Democratic refusal to jump into the debate:

After an interminable week of silence on the administration's shockingly inept handling of the Katrina tragedy, Democratic leaders finally spoke out, with Harry Reid questioning whether the president's vacation hindered relief efforts and Nancy Pelosi labeling him ‘oblivious, in denial, dangerous.’ Missing was a direct critique of Bush's greatest vulnerability -- the tens of thousands of men and women and the hundreds of billions of dollars that he is squandering in Iraq instead of using them to really protect the homeland, including from Katrina and its aftermath.<sup>119</sup>

By the time the Democratic party shook itself free from the fear of “being called partisan” and entered the debate, the communications juggernaut of Bush et al. was running at full steam, spewing coherent messages and framing the issues so as to lead Americans to the conclusion that Hurricane Katrina merely proved the conservatives were right all along.<sup>120</sup>

On the other hand, the Bush Administration and its allies in certain sectors of the media put a great deal of effort into framing the rightwing response. As we have shown, their message focused on individual efforts and minimized any responsibility by the government. In addition, they denigrated civil rights leaders and others who insisted on pointing out the disparate responses by government in the white and black communities. Eighteen months later, when Bush gave his State of the Union address, he did not even mention Hurricane Katrina, and none of the media called him on it.

An additional factor may be what *Washington Post* columnist Howard Kurtz dubbed “Katrina fatigue”:

After eight months you assume they must be making some progress...But then you come here and see the devastation up close, and discover that things are far worse than you imagined...We all have defense mechanisms to shield ourselves against tragedy overload...Perhaps I believed that New Orleans must be making modest progress because it was comforting to think so...<sup>121</sup>

Another factor that weighs heavily is the structure of media itself. Determinative of what stories are covered and how they are covered are resources, journalistic culture, and the modern-day trend toward “infotainment” in lieu of information. Issues of race, class, and poverty are complex issues that require considerable resources to cover. Many news organizations may not feel they have the resources to do so; those that do often are lured by

the increased profits to be earned from the production of cheap, flashy news.

“When Katrina struck, television thrived on the dramatic footage of attempts to rescue thousands overwhelmed by water and wind or suffering under horrid conditions in such places as the Superdome,” Kurtz said. “But the painfully slow reconstruction of a city taking place today doesn't yield great video; the absence of progress is the story.”<sup>122</sup> As noted by Tim Wise, “In a media culture incapable of looking deeper than the next 30-second, 100-word sound bite, none of this [the facts] matters.”<sup>123</sup> Howard Kurtz agreed, “We are in a short-attention-span business, always chasing the Next Big Thing, whether it's the Duke rape case or Patrick Kennedy's car crash.”<sup>124</sup>

Media critic Robert McChesney explains that the problems of modern-day reporting “stem[] directly from the system of profit-driven journalism in largely noncompetitive markets.”<sup>125</sup> McChesney explains that as early as the 1830s, when profits began to be made in the world of journalism, reporting “outrageous stories for their entertainment value developed logically from the profit-driven journalism.”<sup>126</sup>

In his book *The Problem of the Media*, McChesney explains that “United States journalism evolved to incorporate certain key values in the professional code [though] there was nothing naturally objective or professional about those values.”<sup>127</sup> McChesney identified three deep-seated biases that are built into the professional codes that journalists follow: 1) To remove the controversy connected with story selection, professional journalism regards anything done by official sources as the basis for legitimate news; 2) Reliance upon news hooks as justification for coverage, thereby avoiding providing meaningful context and proper background because doing so tends to commit the journalist to a definite position and generates the controversy professionalism is determined to avoid; 3) Adherence to values conducive to the commercial aims of owners and advertisers and to the political aims of big business.<sup>128</sup> These principles result in a corporate

media that, according to ZNet's Paul Street, produce “reactionary and privilege-friendly narratives” in an effort to “close the American mind to the many ways in which Katrina might educate the populace about class [and] race...”<sup>129</sup>

A final causal factor may be found in the progressive community itself, namely the lack of coordination – especially in developing and implementing communication strategies – among us. Partially, this is a function of being taken by surprise; partially, it is a function of the need for increased alliance- and partnership-building on the Left. Though the tragedy that followed Katrina flowed naturally from the state of events preceding the storm, the enormity of the devastation, the extent of the suffering, and impotence of the government agencies caught even the most knowledgeable advocate by surprise. We have never faced such a situation before, and we simply were not prepared when it hit. Unfortunately, decades of conservative assault on our governmental and social infrastructure make probable such tragedy will once again occur; with planning, organizing, and communications-infrastructure development, the progressive community will prepared to respond if it does.

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## Conclusion

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Progressive advocates have long understood the need for increased understanding of the realities of poor communities of color in the United States. In the days and weeks following Hurricane Katrina, the Equal Justice Society and other racial justice organizations felt a small ray of possibility that, just maybe, the realities uncovered by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath would awaken the American public and invigorate a discussion about the need to rectify the racial, economic and social inequities that exist in this country.

That hope was strengthened as we, along with the rest of the country, witnessed journalists' horror at the unraveling tragedy – aghast that the poorest of the poor were left on sweltering rooftops, that fractured families were isolated in the Superdome

with the barest of support, that thousands were stranded without transportation, food, water and frail, elderly hospital patients were laid out on airport luggage carousels as they gasped for air. If the seasoned journalists were horrified, surely their audiences also were. Though we shared the shock and dismay over the inhuman conditions, we felt confident that the genie of ignorance could not be put back in the bottle, and that there would be a new insistence on in-depth coverage of racism, poverty, and social inequity.

However, this was not to be.

Our study has provided some insight on why this was so, and given us some direction for future work.

**1. The right-wing media made a concerted effort to minimize, and even disparage, the role that racism played in the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, to place blame for the tragedy on natural disasters and individual failings, and to attribute lack of responsibility by the federal government as mere “incompetence.”**

Though Katrina obviously pushed the issue of race “over the top” – meaning the issue of race had to be addressed in any kind of news coverage, the right wing media did their very best (and often succeeded) in creating a framework to push race to the background. They focused on four key messages [Racism could not have played a role because Blacks held positions of leadership; Any discussion of racism is, at best, counterproductive because it distracts from helping those in need and, at worst, an act of political opportunism; The outpouring of generosity proves that American people are not racist; and The possibility of racism playing a role in the outcome is simply unfathomable.]. These messages appeared in numerous news stories, editorials, features and columns.

As one advocate put it, “their [the right wing media] job is ideological damage control: putting the lid on the race-class-empire can.”

**2. Mainstream media with excellent resources assigned top-notch reporters who often presented outstanding, in-depth reports; however this coverage dwindled in the following months, bringing out Katrina stories only when an event – such as a court ruling or an anniversary – dictated.**

One group’s analysis of the broadcasts of the three major all-news cable networks concluded that they “are ignoring the elephant in the room,” spending less than half the broadcast time covering poverty issues than the stock market. Another group’s analysis of mainstream print coverage in the year following Katrina found that “with few exceptions, the media’s rediscovery of impoverished Americans lasted barely a month.”

We know that many reporters were shaken and moved by the experience of covering New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina. While some may have suffered “disaster fatigue,” many of them probably wanted to do more in-depth and continuing stories. They were prevented from doing so by the corporate leadership of their news organizations, who allocate the financial and personnel resources. This is a strong reminder that the financial bottom line dictates the kind of news coverage. As the mainstream media becomes more and more concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer owners, this problem will be exacerbated.

**3. Progressives are beginning to realize important role of message and media; several organizations were adept in looking at and formulating messages around the underlying issues of race, poverty and government accountability. Yet they lacked sufficient resources and coordination to have a major, lasting impact on media coverage.**

Despite the valiant efforts – efforts that continue to this day – of advocates to bring attention to the travails of those affected by Hurricane Katrina, the media, after a brief focus on the victims’ lives, have since largely turned a blind eye and moved on, leaving those affected once again voiceless.

The Equal Justice Society and others continue to believe that audiences are interested in understanding these issues and care deeply about the injustices that have a disastrous impact on the poor and people of color.

**4. In the future, we must maintain our strategic vision about bringing race to the forefront of the national discourse, and strengthen our communications resources, skills and capacities in order to do so. We know there are some concrete steps we can take:**

- At the time of a disaster, quickly recognize the window of opportunity we have with the media;
- Use the opportunity to insist that race and class are not forgotten, and in fact, are in the forefront of coverage;
- With background materials and experts, provide a context for the reporting of the racial and class aspects of a disaster;
- Be prepared for the distortions and omissions of the rightwing media, point them out, and push back to neutralize and discredit them;
- Continue to build bridges with specific reporters, editors and producers in the mainstream media, progressive media, ethnic media, and journalists of color, bloggers and other forms of new media;
- Recognize the increasingly shrinking hands of those who control the media –

and continue to explore ways of democratizing the media for more accurate coverage of all peoples;

- Seek additional funding resources so that we can analyze more thoroughly (e.g., through companies that can provide national media scans; subscriptions; increased web search capacity) and dedicate more time to this crucial effort.

Many of the factors that caused the poor reporting on Hurricane Katrina, and the poor reporting of race and class in general, can be addressed through effective advocacy. Of course, even the most sophisticated strategies would not be able to sway those within the media who are determined to ignore or distort the realities of race and class in the United States. However, many within the media are interested and willing, but simply do not have the knowledge, context, or resources to properly report on such realities. A strong communications infrastructure to support progressive advocacy efforts and increased coordination between members of the community to agree upon which language and strategies can be employed movement-wide will increase the clarity of the progressive message. With additional attention to this crucial arena, we can help provide a critical lens for a broader audience, and enhance our ability to change minds and hearts of Americans.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Kurtz, “The Media’s New Orleans Burnout,” *The Washington Post*, May 7, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Robert McChesney, *The Problem of the Media*.

<sup>3</sup> To conduct the scan, we ran newspaper-database searches for the terms “race,” “racism,” “racist,” “racial,” “class,” and “poverty.” This approach was not intended to capture every article written about race or class by the conservative media. Rather, it was intended to capture those articles that dealt with race and class in the abstract, or policy-oriented, mode so that we can begin to understand how the Right formulates its messages and implements its strategies when faced with a situation such as that presented by Katrina.

<sup>4</sup> *The New York Post* and *The Washington Times* are avowedly conservative papers. *The New York Post* is owned by Rupert Murdoch’s company, News Corp, and *The Washington Times* is owned by Republican financier Rev. Sun Myung Moon. *The Orange County Register* continues to follow in the footsteps of well-known libertarian publisher, R.C. Hoiles. *The Wall Street Journal* is more complex. Widely known for the

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libertarian/neo-conservative views of its editorial board, the *Journal* also is commended for relatively neutral reporting on its news pages. Though the *Journal's* coverage of race/class issues came nowhere close to that of mainstream publications such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Journal* did attempt to explore issues of race and class. Most notable is a Sept. 8, 2005 article that compared the experiences of a wealthy white family to those of a poor Black family, with emphasis upon the ease with which whites were returning to their lives due to their privileged positions. Christopher Cooper, *Old-Line Families Escape Worst of Flood And Plot the Future*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, Sept. 8, 2005, at A1. A later *Journal* article, however, offered a much different understanding of race dynamics: The article, titled “Good Intentions,” documented the tension between a white lesbian couple and a Black family the couple invited into their home. Though the journalist seems to have made a good-faith effort to fairly represent both sides, the article ultimately left the reader viewing the white lesbian couple as compassionate and tenderhearted and the adults of the Black family as unappreciative, incompetent and criminal-minded. See Steven Gray, *Good Intentions: A Katrina Family Tries to Start Over in Minnesota Town; When Thornburys Open Home to Eight Evacuees, Life Becomes Complicated*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, Nov. 11, 2005, at A1.

<sup>5</sup> It also is worth noting that conservative papers devoted much less space to any discussion of race or class than did mainstream papers such as the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. The same search in the databases of the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post* turned up hundreds of articles in each paper in which race and class were discussed, compared to less than 100 articles in each of the conservative papers devoted to the topic.

<sup>6</sup> It is also worth noting that by focusing attention on the African American leaders who “made it,” blame is implicitly placed on those who are poor, allowing readers to feel comfortable blaming the victims for their predicament.

<sup>7</sup> William Jefferson, *Let's Keep Race Card out of Katrina Debate*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 11, 2005, at 1 (editorial).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Brian DeBose, *Blacks Fault Lack of Local Leadership*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 10, 2005, at 1. This article provides a quintessential example of the Right's strategy when dealing with matters of race – obfuscate the issue and redirect blame. Despite the article's headline, only two Black leaders are quoted as criticizing Black leadership: Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson (see below) and Earl Ofari Hutchinson. Hutchinson said, “In the past two decades, there has been a middle-class-focused leadership...talk about affirmative action and moving people into top management positions in corporate America...does not do anything for the black poor.” Hutchinson's quote is followed directly by a quote from Julian Bond, director of the NAACP: “It seems none of the government officials did anything about it to stop it...for anyone there,” Bond said. The combination of the article's headline, leading with Peterson's quote, jumping to Hutchinson's and then to Bond's quote, leaves the undiscerning reader with the misimpression that all three are directly blaming Black leaders for the Katrina tragedy.

<sup>10</sup> Brian DeBose, *Blacks Fault Lack of Local Leadership*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 10, 2005, at 1. This excerpt is a quote from Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson, founder and president of the Brotherhood Organization of a New Destiny (BOND). Rev. Peterson is touted on BOND's website as “the most courageous, outspoken critic of the civil-rights establishment in America today” and the “antidote to Jesse Jackson.”

<sup>11</sup> Brian DeBose, *Blacks Fault Lack of Local Leadership*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 10, 2005, at 1 (quoting Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson).

<sup>12</sup> This argument appears to be used primarily against Black leaders who call attention to race or economic inequality. White leaders largely escape the label of “opportunist” when talking about race. It seems the

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Conservative commentators/press avoid being called out on the blatantly racist application of the “opportunist” label by denouncing racism and heaping praise upon the Civil Rights leaders of the past.

<sup>13</sup> William Jefferson, *Let's Keep Race Card out of Katrina Debate*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 11, 2005, at 1 (editorial).

<sup>14</sup> Wesley Pruden, *Heroes of the Storm Abound in the land*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 16, 2005, at A4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Henninger, *Wonder Land: Washington's Year of Living Unseriously*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, Dec. 23, 2005, at A14.

<sup>18</sup> Brian DeBose, Stephen Dinan, *Racism Charges Swirl in Congress Amid Chaos*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 3, 2005, at A1 (quoting Condoleezza Rice) (emphasis added).

<sup>19</sup> Wesley Pruden, *Heroes of the Storm Abound in the Land*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 16, 2005, at A4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *Eye of the Press Storm*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 17, 2005, at A11 (editorial).

<sup>22</sup> Jose de Cordoba, James Bandler and Ann Zimmerman, *As Evacuees Pour In, A Flood of Generosity And Some Unease*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, Sept. 6, 2005, at A1.

<sup>23</sup> Courtney Perkes and Kimberly Edds, *Health in the Headlines*, The Orange County Register, Dec. 28, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> William Jefferson, *Let's Keep Race Card out of Katrina Debate*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 11, 2005 (editorial).

<sup>25</sup> Brian DeBose, Stephen Dinan, *Racism Charges Swirl in Congress Amid Chaos*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 3, 2005, at A1 (quoting Sec. of State Condoleezza Rice).

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Curl, *Bush Denies Race had Role in Recovery; Refuses to Play Katrina 'Blame Game'*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 13, 2005, at A4 (quoting Pres. George W. Bush).

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Orin, *Brown 'Bagged' – Disastrous Disaster Boss Out, Fire Hero In*, THE NEW YORK POST, Sept. 13, 2005, at 8.

<sup>28</sup> *No Katrina Tax; Bush: 'We'll Handle It'*, THE NEW YORK POST, Sept. 17, 2005, at 10. A comparison of the final quotes at footnote 24 and 25 illuminates the disparate treatment of white and Black public opinion in the conservative media: The language used to describe whites' public opinion – “A huge majority of Americans agree with Bush...[and] say race was not a factor” – is far more authoritative than that used to describe Black public opinion: “...blacks tell pollsters they believe race played a role...”

<sup>29</sup> See Jean Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1999.

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<sup>30</sup> This ties back to conservative messaging of race-discussion as political opportunism. If, as this argument goes, racism is no longer present in the United States, those who demand discussion of racial and economic inequities *must* be self-serving, political opportunists.

<sup>31</sup> *Rangel's Repugnant Ravings*, THE NEW YORK POST, Sept. 24, 2005, at 20 (editorial).

<sup>32</sup> John McCaslin, *Inside the Beltway*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Aug. 31, 2005, at A5 (quoting Mychal Massie, Project 21, on criticism of his comparison of John Roberts to Martin Luther King).

<sup>33</sup> Deborah Orin, *Rangel All Tangled in Race Rage*, THE NEW YORK POST, Sept. 30, 2005, at 20.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Curl, *Bush Offers 'New Hope' Against Poverty in South*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 17, 2005, at A1 (emphasis added).

<sup>35</sup> H. Andrew Schwartz, *City Where Jazz was Born; New Orleans' Musical Heritage Will Survive*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 9, 2005, at D1.

<sup>36</sup> Tom Knott, *Are You Ready for Some Drive!?*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 9, 2005, at C1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Helle Dale, *Post-Katrina Frenzy; Foreign Media Whips up False Storm*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 14, 2005, at A19 (editorial).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Wesley Pruden, *Heroes of the Storm Abound in the Land*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 16, 2005, at A4.

<sup>41</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *Eye of the Press Storm*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 17, 2005, at A11 (editorial).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Henninger, *Wonder Land: Washington's Year of Living Unseriously*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, Dec. 23, 2005, at A14.

<sup>44</sup> Wesley Pruden, *Down on the Levee, a Little Good News*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Dec. 16, 2005, at A4.

<sup>45</sup> *Letting the Air Out of Katrina*, THE NEW YORK POST, Sept. 30, 2005, at 30 (editorial).

<sup>46</sup> Ralph Z. Hallow, *Some State Democrats Balk at Faulting Bush in Disaster*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 13, 2005, at A4 (quoting Rep. Cheryl Chase (D-Arizona)).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Bill Sammon, *Bush Consoles Katrina Victims*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 3, 2005, at A1.

<sup>49</sup> Wesley Pruden, *Heroes of the Storm Abound in the Land*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 16, 2005, at A4.

<sup>50</sup> Tarron Lively, Keyonna Summers, *Farrakhan bestirs 'Millions' Rally; Mall Speech Calls for Suing Over Katrina and Urges Black Self-Governance*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Oct. 16, 2005, at A1. In fairness, it

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must be stated that the more explosive language used at the Millions More March – calling white people “devils,” for example – was not reported on by the *Washington Times*.

<sup>51</sup> See Greg Pierce, *Inside Politics*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Oct. 13, 2006, at A6; Tom Knott, *This Saint Clearly No Devil*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Nov. 18, 2005, at C1; *Notable 2005 Remarks*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Jan. 1, 2006, at B2 (quoting Farrakhan: “I heard from a very reliable source who saw a 25-foot deep crater under the levee breach. It may have been blown up to destroy the black part of town and keep the white part dry.”).

<sup>52</sup> This may argue against informing Americans of how much we are hated. If conservative papers are using international criticism of U.S. policies and approaches as an organizing tool, then maybe further discussion of international opinion would only make Americans more defensive and entrenched. On the other hand, it may all be in the framing of that discussion.

<sup>53</sup> John McCaslin, *Inside the Beltway*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 8, 2005, at A7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid* (quoting THE TIMES OF LONDON journalist Alice Miles).

<sup>55</sup> Helle Dale, *Post-Katrina Frenzy; Foreign Media Whips up False Storm*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 14, 2005, at A19 (op-ed).

<sup>56</sup> Helle Dale, *Post-Katrina Frenzy; Foreign Media Whips up False Storm*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 14, 2005, at A19 (op-ed).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>59</sup> Jennifer Harper, *Post-Katrina Criticism Haunts French as Riots Erupt*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Nov. 11, 2005, at A24.

<sup>60</sup> William Jefferson and Sean Hannity, *Let's Keep Race Card Out of Katrina Debate*, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 11, 2005.

<sup>61</sup> Editors, *Feeling Secure? The Department of Homeland Security Already is Proving to be an Unresponsive Bureaucracy*, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Nov. 2, 2005 (editorial).

<sup>62</sup> This theme is predominant in the reporting on George Bush’s suspension of the Davis-Bacon wage protections and Republican efforts to lift environmental restrictions on refineries. Examples of this messaging are not included here, as those articles did not deal directly with race or poverty.

<sup>63</sup> Nancy Luna, *Southern Discomfort*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Oct. 19, 2005.

<sup>64</sup> Nancy Luna, *Southern Discomfort*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Oct. 19, 2005 (emphasis added).

<sup>65</sup> Brian DeBose, *Blacks Fault Lack of Local Leadership*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 10, 2005, at A1 (quoting Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson, founder of BOND).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph Curl, *Bush Offers ‘New Hope’ Against Poverty in South*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 17, 2005, at A1.

<sup>68</sup> It is worth noting that despite the rescue efforts of Black New Orleanians documented by activists such as Common Grounds, no reporting of these efforts was found in the media scan.

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- <sup>69</sup> Salvador Hernandez, *Katrina Aid Moves to a New Level*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 22, 2005.
- <sup>70</sup> Vik Jolly, *O.C. Church-Goer Lifts Spirits in Louisiana Town*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 18, 2005.
- <sup>71</sup> Christa Woodall, *Local Efforts in Aid to Katrina Victims*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 16, 2005, at 1; Rachel Olsen, *Community Rallies: Lemonade Stands, Ice Cream Store, Children's Clothing Store, Churches, Others Reach Out to Help Those in Need*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 8, 2005.
- <sup>72</sup> Peter Larsen, *Brothers in Arms Meet Up; Orange County Sheriff's Deputies Replenish a Grateful Jefferson Parish Department's Supplies*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 6, 2005.
- <sup>73</sup> Lori Basheda, *Couple Ask Churches to 'Pay It Forward'*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 6, 2005; Valeria Godines, *Church Expands its Talents, \$1,000 for Katrina Victims has Already Multiplied*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Oct. 19, 2005.
- <sup>74</sup> Kara McGuire, *Giving on a Budget; Some Suggestions for Helping in Katrina Relief or Other Causes When Your Purse Strings and Heartstrings Send Mixed Signals*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 3, 2005.
- <sup>75</sup> Manniello, *Through the Looking Glass*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Dec. 15, 2005.
- <sup>76</sup> Greg Hardesty, *Look Good, Feel Better*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Sept. 17, 2005.
- <sup>77</sup> Ngueyn Huy Vu, *Thankful for a New Start Hurricane Victims in O.C.*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Nov. 20, 2005.
- <sup>78</sup> Peggy Goetz, *Efforts to Help Katrina Victims Continue; School District Gets Notes of Thanks From Kids*, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, Nov. 20, 2005.
- <sup>79</sup> *Lack of Leadership in the Black Community*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 12, 2005, at A20 (letters).
- <sup>80</sup> *Broken Levees and the Katrina Blame Game*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Sept. 14, 2005, at A18 (letters).
- <sup>81</sup> George Lakoff, et al., "Framing Katrina," *American Prospect*, October 7, 2005. Available online at: <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=ViewWeb&articleId=10391>.
- <sup>82</sup> A Pew poll conducted September 8, 2005 found that only 32% of White respondents said the disaster demonstrated that racial inequality is still a major problem.
- <sup>83</sup> George Lakoff, "The Post-Katrina Era," Speech at the Sierra Summit, September 10, 2005.
- <sup>84</sup> "Framing Katrina: Strategic Memo from the Praxis Project and Youth Council Media," The Praxis Project, Sept. 6, 2005. Available online at [http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/katrina\\_memo\\_09-06-2005.pdf](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/katrina_memo_09-06-2005.pdf).
- <sup>85</sup> "The Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: Strategic Communications at this Important Political Moment," The SPIN Project, 2005. Available online at <http://www.spinproject.org/downloads/Katrina.pdf>.
- <sup>86</sup> *Id.*, pp. 1-3.
- <sup>87</sup> *Id.*, p. 4.

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<sup>88</sup> “Transforming the Public Discourse on Race and Poverty: Framing Opportunities after Hurricane Katrina,” Center for Social Inclusion. Available online at [http://www.diversityadvancementproject.org/media/Post\\_Katrina.pdf](http://www.diversityadvancementproject.org/media/Post_Katrina.pdf).

<sup>89</sup> Id., p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> Id., p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> Id., p. 10 – 11.

<sup>92</sup> The New Standard, Dane Baker, Sept. 11, 2005. Available online at <http://newstandardnews.net/content/index.cfm/items/2342>. (citing the Philadelphia Enquirer, August 31, 2005, editorial).

<sup>93</sup> Id. Citing David Gonzales, “From Margins of Society to Center of the Tragedy New York Times,” New York Times, Sept. 2, 2005.

<sup>94</sup> Id.

<sup>95</sup> Jason DeParle, “Broken Levees, Unbroken Barriers,” New York Times, Sept. 4, 2005.

<sup>96</sup> Jonathan Alter, “The Other America,” Newsweek, Sept. 19, 2005.

<sup>97</sup> Id.

<sup>98</sup> Id.

<sup>99</sup> “Transforming the Public Discourse on Race and Poverty: Framing Opportunities after Hurricane Katrina,” Center for Social Inclusion, p. 11 (citing Jonathan Tilove, *America’s Diaspora: How storm could reshape policy on poverty*, Seattle Times, Sept. 10, 2005.).

<sup>100</sup> Id.

<sup>101</sup> Id., p. 11-12 (citing Ceci Connolly, *9<sup>th</sup> Ward: History, Yes, but a Future? Race and Class Frame Debate on Rebuilding New Orleans District*, Washington Post, Oct. 3, 2005).

<sup>102</sup> Id., p. 11 (citing Darryl Pinkney, *On Our Own*, New York Review of Books, Sept. 8, 2005.)).

<sup>103</sup> “On Katrina’s Anniversary, Compare Corporate v. Indie Coverage,” Jennifer L. Pozner, Aug. 28, 2006. Available online at: <http://www.wimnonline.org/WIMNsVoicesBlog/?p=247>.

<sup>104</sup> Id.

<sup>105</sup> “By the Numbers: In Katrina’s Wake, Race and Class Largely Ignored,” Center for American Progress. Available online at <http://thinkprogress.org/2005/09/04/race-class-katrina/>.

<sup>106</sup> Id.

<sup>107</sup> Neil deMause, “Katrina’s Vanishing Victims: Media forget the ‘rediscovered’ poor,” *Extra!*, July/August 2006. Available online at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2933>.

<sup>108</sup> “Transforming the Public Discourse on Race and Poverty: Framing Opportunities after Hurricane Katrina,” Center for Social Inclusion, p. 4.

<sup>109</sup> Id., p. 6-7.

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<sup>110</sup> Russell R. Dynes & Havidan Rodriguez, “Finding and Framing Katrina: The Social Construction of Disaster,” Disaster Research Center, Oct. 21, 2005.

<sup>111</sup> Tim Wise, “Framing the Poor: Katrina, Conservative Myth-Making and the Media,” *CounterPunch*, Oct. 29-30, 2005. Available online at <http://www.counterpunch.org/wise10292005.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Samuel L. Sommers, et al., “Race and Media Coverage of Hurricane Katrina: Analysis, Implications, and Future Research Questions,” *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, Volume 6, Issue 1.

<sup>113</sup> Paul Street, “Framing Katrina: Dominant Media and Damage Control in the Wake of a Not-so Natural Disaster,” ZNet, Sept. 13, 2005, pp. 3-5.

<sup>114</sup> *Id.*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>115</sup> Neil deMause, “Katrina’s Vanishing Victims: Media forget the ‘rediscovered’ poor,” *Extra!*, July/August 2006. Available online at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2933>.

<sup>116</sup> *Id.*

<sup>117</sup> Gary Younge, “Big Business Sees a Chance for Ethnic and Class Cleansing,” *The Guardian* (London, U.K.), April 20, 2006.

<sup>118</sup> George Lakoff, “The Post-Katrina Era,” Speech at the Sierra Summit, September 10, 2005.

<sup>119</sup> Arianne Huffington, “Post-Katrina Talking Points,” AlterNet, Sept. 9, 2005. Available online at <http://www.alternet.org/columnists/story/25219/>.

<sup>120</sup> George Lakoff and John Halpin, “Framing Katrina,” American Prospect Online, Oct. 7, 2005. Available online at <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=ViewWeb&articleId=10391>.

<sup>121</sup> Howard Kurtz, The Media’s New Orleans Burnout, *The Washington Post*, May 7, 2006.

<sup>122</sup> Howard Kurtz, The Media’s New Orleans Burnout, *The Washington Post* May 7, 2006.

<sup>123</sup> Tim Wise, “Framing the Poor: Katrina, Conservative Myth-Making, and the Media,” CounterPunch.org, Oct. 29, 2005. Available online at <http://www.counterpunch.org/wise10292005.html>.

<sup>124</sup> Howard Kurtz, The Media’s New Orleans Burnout, *The Washington Post* May 7, 2006.

<sup>125</sup> Robert McChesney, “The Problem of the Media,” New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004, p. 57.

<sup>126</sup> *Id.*, p. 61.

<sup>127</sup> *Id.*, p. 68.

<sup>128</sup> *Id.*, pp. 68 – 73.

<sup>129</sup> Paul Street, “Framing Katrina: Dominant Media and Damage Control in the Wake of a Not-so Natural Disaster,” ZNet, Sept. 13, 2005.