

Big Easy was debacle waiting to happen

By George Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I am angry. I am angry at the mayor of New Orleans. I am angry at the governor of Louisiana. I am angry at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I am angry at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), now part of the Department of Homeland Security.

I am angry at George W. Bush. I am angry because they were warned last November that New Orleans was one of the "Disasters Waiting to Happen" — and did nothing about it. Consequently, hundreds, if not thousands, of people are dead. Needlessly.

In an eerie prediction of what happened as a result of Hurricane Katrina, an article titled, "What if Hurricane Ivan Had Not Missed New Orleans?" was published in the *Natural Hazards Observer*, a major journal headquartered at the University of Colorado in Boulder. It was written by Shirley Laska of the Center for Hazards Assessment, Response and Technology at the University of New Orleans.

In other words, this was an article written by a reputable author in a reputable national publication that should have been read by people involved in disaster relief. If they had taken heed, many of the dead in New Orleans would be alive today.

Under the headline, "What if Ivan Had Hit New Orleans?" the author wrote, "New Orleans was spared this time, but had it not been, Hurricane Ivan would have:

- Pushed a 17-foot storm surge into Lake

Pontchartrain;

- Caused the levees between the lake and the city to overtop and fill the city 'bowl' with water from lake levee to river levee, in some places as deep as 20 feet;

- Flooded the north shore suburbs as much as seven miles inland; and

- Inundated inhabited areas south of the Mississippi River.

"Up to 80 percent of the structures in these flooded areas would have been severely damaged from wind and water. The potential for such extensive flooding and the resulting damage is the result of a levee system that is unable to keep up with the increasing flood threats from a rapidly eroding coastline and thus unable to protect the ever-subiding landscape."

Until I read this article, I had said one of the positive things that I hoped would come out of this disaster is that relief experts would realize that they need to make special provisions for the poor, elderly and homeless. In essence, I gave them the benefit of the doubt. Now, however, I realize that there is no benefit in doubt.

The warning was there in black and white: "For those without means, the medically challenged, residents without personal transportation, and the homeless, evacuation requires significant assistance."

Laska spelled it out in even more detail. During Hurricane Ivan in 2004, she con-



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tinues, "Residents who did not have personal transportation were unable to evacuate even if they wanted to. Approximately 120,000 residents (51,000 housing units x 2.4 persons/unit) do not have cars."

"A proposal made after the evacuation from Hurricane George to use public transit buses to assist in their evacuation out of the city was not implemented for Ivan. If Ivan had struck New Orleans directly it is estimated that 40-60,000 residents of the area would have perished."

The additional problem of people having the means to leave, but refusing to do so was addressed in the article.

"Researchers have estimated that prior to a 'big one,' approximately 700,000 residents of the greater New Orleans area (out of 1.2 million) would evacuate," Laska wrote. "In the case of Hurricane Ivan, officials estimate that up to 600,000 evacuated from metropolitan New Orleans between daybreak on Monday, September 13 and noon on Wednesday, September 13, when the storm turned and major roads started to clear..."

"The fact that 600,000 residents evacuated means an equal number did not. Recent evacuation surveys show that two thirds of non-evacuees with the means to evacuate chose not to leave because they felt safe in their homes. Other non-evacuees with means relied on a cultural tradition of not leaving or

were discouraged by negative experiences with past evacuations."

Those that dismiss environmentalists as kooks, should pay special attention to the observations about marshes.

"Loss of the coastal marshes that dampened earlier storm surges puts the city at increasing risk to hurricanes," the article noted. "Eighty years of substantial river leveeing has prevented spring flood deposition of new layers of sediment into the marshes, and a similarly lengthy period of marsh excavation activities related to oil and gas exploration and transportation canals for the petrochemical industry have threatened marsh integrity."

Using the Hurricane Ivan model to predict what would happen if a major hurricane struck New Orleans, Laska wrote: "Should this disaster become a reality, it would undoubtedly be one of the greatest disasters, if not the greatest, to hit the United States, with estimated costs exceeding 100 billion dollars. According to the Red Cross, such an event could be even more devastating than a major earthquake in California. Survivors would have to endure conditions never before experienced in a North American disaster."

It ended, "The hurricane scenario for New Orleans that these conveying risks portend is almost unimaginable. Hurricane Ivan had the potential to make the unthinkable a reality. Next time New Orleans may not be so fortunate."

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

As economic racism grows, time to fight is now

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Too often, I see Black people lying down and allowing others to walk on them. In many instances, we simply accept whatever is doled out from so-called powers-that-be, and end up only complaining about it when it's all said and done. We have proof positive that we are discriminated against and mistreated in other ways, but we only talk about it, march about it, or ask folks to apologize for their transgressions. We participate in and even promote and perpetuate ridiculously flawed "economic inclusion" programs, succumbing to the notion that we are "minorities" and, therefore, in order to be treated fairly we must subject ourselves to being "certified" and validated before we can obtain work paid for by our own tax dollars. Why won't we take action commensurate to the problems we face?

I read an article that described how 300 Black contractors in St. Louis, Mo., who were literally fed up with how they were being treated, protested by blocking Interstate 70.

LaGrande

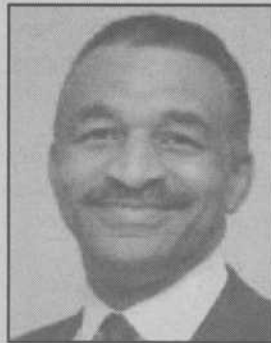
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That was us watching as our mothers and fathers and children died as we stood by helplessly, wondering how the cops and troops could bring guns and nightsticks but it would take four days to bring food and water — even though the news media got in the same day the disaster happened.

Whether New Orleans is our home or not, whether you've been there or not, as Black Americans we identify with every brother and sister we saw holding on to false promises and being fed nothing for days and days. The same false promises that we held on to for

While 100 of them were arrested, their actions spoke so loudly and clearly that positive change began to take place. A similar incident took place in East St. Louis, Ill., across the river from St. Louis when a group of angry contractors threatened to block an interstate highway there. Their threat was all it took to get things moving in their direction and brought instant concessions from the so-called powers-that-be.

In Nigeria, protesters, angry at the way Chevron and Shell are treating them and Nigeria's oil resources, are taking matters into their own hands by putting their bodies in the way of oil production. The locals say the big oil companies and other multinational organizations (I wonder who they could be?) are "colluding to keep the spoils for themselves," according to a report on National Public Radio. Apparently, actions taken by the Nigerians have certainly gotten the atten-



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tion of a lot big wigs. One Nigerian told a Chevron official that the crude oil belonged to Nigeria and the primary benefits from that oil should go to Nigerians. As I often point out, not only ownership but also control of income-producing assets are vital to our success.

Everyday in this country, Black people are mistreated in some form or fashion by the Establishment. We see it; we feel it; and we know it happens. Sadly, in most cases we merely talk about it; we seldom really do anything about it. We refuse to take matters into our own hands by risking something to secure our demands. We love to talk about Dr. King and what he stood for, but we are not willing to do what he did to achieve the ideals he espoused. Yes, he was non-violent, but his resolve to make change subjected him to violence from violent people. Nonetheless, he took action.

Let's show them that we came from a long lineage of Kings and Queens, and when the chips are down, it is truly us who are there for one another.

We must dig deeper than we've ever dug before; we must contribute to ensure that the Blacks affected by this disaster are able to bounce back and once again become active participants in society. It is our duty to help another one who is suffering. No matter your income level, you are able to give; after all, the Lord spared you and you are doing much better than the people in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi.

Are we just too afraid to do what must be done for our survival in this country? Are we satisfied with our condition? Are we unwilling to place ourselves in the line of fire in order to gain the rights and privileges of a people who helped build this country and created the wealth it enjoys from our labor? Will we go down in history as a people that gave in to discrimination, abuse, mistreatment, and unfairness, unwilling to fight for what is rightfully ours? Thus far, it looks that way.

Look around and see how we remove ourselves from the fight for justice for our brothers and sisters. Observe how we cower in the presence of White folks. Watch as our so-called leaders smile and acquiesce to wrongdoing by this country's political establishment. Monitor the results we get versus the results others get from legislation and programs put forth to help "minorities."

You will see, if you are willing to look, an array of disparities, a veritable laundry list of inequities that occur each day against

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Afterwards and while we're providing support, we must turn to God who has orchestrated this whole disaster.

His word says:

"If my people who are called by my name will turn from their wicked ways and humble themselves and pray, I will heal the land."

Brothers and sisters, this is just one of many disasters to come. The land is wicked and the participants are evil, and those of us who confess Christ better stay on our knees and pray without ceasing, because if Yucca Mountain is the next disaster, all of Las Vegas will be extinguished.