

# New Orleans different without all its natives

By George Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW ORLEANS - It does not matter how many photos you've seen, how riveting the videotapes have been as they splashed across the television screens, with desperate voices crying out in the background, or listening to the emotional congressional testimony of displaced residents of New Orleans. None of those experiences — or even all of them combined — can prepare you for the experience of entering the city's lower Ninth Ward, where Hurricanes Katrina and Rita roared.

Almost seven months later, it is still hard to believe your eyes. This is the worst of the worst. Debris is piled high in no particular order — on the streets, next to houses, under fallen trees. Whether made of brick or wood, most of the houses are missing windows, doors and people.

Roofs can be found where you'd least expect them: on top of overturned automobiles, crumpled under trees, crushed to the ground. There are signs of life slowly returning, but for most part, the residents have not returned. And it's uncertain if they ever will.

Based on some of the news accounts, it is not hard for a visitor to come here believing that the entire city is as devastated. It's not. Less than 10 minutes to the north, in the more

affluent neighborhoods, one can tell that Katrina and Rita visited. But it's also evident that they didn't stay long.

Of course, there is physical damage and power remains out on many streets. Still, most of the homes are habitable and, oddly, have increased in value because of the hurricanes.

Take the home of Terry Jones, publisher of the *Louisiana Data News Weekly*, for example. Terry took me on a tour of his home and neighborhood. There is damage in the basement, where he had his office, and a stack of damaged computers are parked just steps from his garage.

Climb one flight of stairs, ignore the lack of power, and you'd never know his home had withstood two hurricanes. The glistening wooden floors are still buffed, an impressive art collection is untouched and closets are stuffed with clothing ready to wear.

Stop downtown, in the New Orleans that most tourists see, and you'll notice that there are some stores boarded with wood. The Popeye chicken joint on Canal Street isn't popping. And while not a ghost town, there is not the bevy of people that usually crowd



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the street. A few people were begging on the streets — some seemed to be living there — perhaps a clear sign that more than the wealthy are returning to the Crescent City. At night, the French Quarter still attracts people in perpetual motion, casually darting in and out of the bars or otherwise making fools of themselves.

Looking at the northern part of the city and downtown together provide enough reassuring signs that New Orleans is down but hardly out. While it may take years to restore its lost luster, residents are hopeful that if the federal government does not abandon them, one of the nation's greatest cities can be great again.

As marchers assembled at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, where mostly poor and mostly Black residents huddled for three days and walked up the ramp to I-10 on Sept. 1 toward Gretna, I realized we were retracing the path of those stranded. I tried to imagine what it felt like to be frightened, carrying all of your earthly belongings on your back, not knowing if relatives and friends were alive or dead.

## Make your covenant to African-American financial strength

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Another State of the Black Union has come and gone, and now we have something we can use to economically empower Black folks in America. We have something of substance, something meaningful, something both the Democratic and Republican National chairmen support. And then there's the new book, "The Covenant." It's selling like ice cream on a Sunday afternoon, making a lot of money I'm sure. What could be better? We finally have an agreement, a treaty of sorts, which could well be the elixir we have been seeking to cure the ills of Black people.

Admittedly, I did not watch the televised

panel discussion. Didn't need to. I already know the State of Black America. As I said in a 2005 article, I am more concerned about the Fate of the Black Union.

The state of the Black union stares us in the face everyday. I did not watch the show, but I have heard and read the reviews. They tell me Minister Louis Farrakhan upbraided some folks. Other than that excitement, and except for a few newcomers, was it the same folks saying the same things for the, what is it now, fifth year in a row? If so,



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by now we should have a pretty good handle on our state of affairs.

The questions now are: What are we doing? What are we going to do?

But haven't those always been the appropriate questions? I pray there will be something of substance that comes from this affair. After all, if Black America's best and brightest, those "exceptional" men and women, who for nearly five hours shared their intellect and expertise, if they cannot lead us to salvation, who can? Who will? I almost

I thought about what it must have felt like at the end of the four-mile walk, to face law enforcement officials in Greta, waiting at the foot of the bridge, telling desperate people that they would not be allowed into the city. How could anyone be so heartless?

City officials claim they were overcrowded and couldn't handle any more people. But those that had marched over the bridge knew that the twin evils and race and economics had never worked in their favor. And that was not about to change now. Instead of being welcomed to dry land, they were being forced at gunpoint to return to the squalor and uncertainty they had fled.

Now, displaced residents still face a future of uncertainty. There is a lot of talk about bringing back New Orleans. Code words, such as "smaller footprints," are used to disguise a hidden blueprint, a blueprint that excludes poor Black people.

Even a Black city councilman spoke of not letting jobless people return to public housing.

But New Orleans will not be New Orleans until it can bring back the people that made the greatest sacrifice on this side of death.

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On the "Covenant" website, it says: "It is not our intent to define, determine, or prioritize these issues, nor to conclude how they are to be remedied. That's where you come in." I guess I just answered my questions.

Of course, no one is going to save us but us, those who are willing to sacrifice, to fight, to speak up and speak out, and those who are unafraid to stand up and be counted as Black. So the onus is on us. Black people must make a covenant with Black people. Made yours yet?

Have you made your covenant with individual Black politicians — and White ones, (See Clingman, Page 12)

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the United States argue that these undocumented workers take jobs that other people don't want.

Where's the proof? Instead of just saying that they take jobs other people don't want, why don't they prove it? African-American males' unemployment rate is exploding and they have been methodically displaced from entry level and semi-skilled blue collar jobs by illegal immigrants who allegedly work cheaper and harder. Offer some of the jobs to African-American males who have been beating the bushes trying to find work, only to have the doors slammed in their faces time after time and then tell us they don't want the jobs.

Has anyone offered any of the jobs that these immigrants are getting to them? No and why not?

Because contractors preferentially hire illegal immigrants over Black males, and Mexicans in industry after industry replace them for less pay. Not until the flow of illegal immigrants ends or fines are carried out will just about any employer think of hiring and giving Black males a chance. And why should they as long as the status quo is not challenged.

As long as there are five illegal immigrants begging for a job, the hiring and firing is risk-free. And if one of them doesn't work out, you can just pick up the next one at the convenience store or in line at Home Depot and Lowe's. The Black males will continue to be at the bottom rung of the ladder, even though they are legally American citizens.

This immigration debate is not about immigrants, it's about money and politics. It is not entirely benign. It benefits people that are in the "owner class." It's about money in that White males all over this country are making money hand over fist by using this cheap labor which, once again, displaces the most vulnerable in our society — Black males. It also screws the counties that have to pay the medical, welfare, schooling and law enforcement costs of illegal immigrants.

Many argue that illegal immigrants pay taxes, and a lot of them might. But go to Home Depot, Lowe's, Star Nursery or any number of places here in Las Vegas where illegal immigrants hang out daily looking and waiting for work as day laborers for cash (paid to them by those who use their services for small household or business jobs) and tell me that any of them are paying any kind of taxes on the income. I don't think so.

It's about politics, and it was evident in that political action in 1986 when Reagan started allowing immigrants to come to America to offset the Black vote. The same thing holds true today.

Senator McCain is a Republican considering running for President, and since the Republicans can't seem to garner the Black vote, they must have something to offset it. What better way than to give 11 million to 12 million people some version of legal standing in this country? The Democrats are signing on in hopes that the illegal immigrants will see them as Blacks have seen them for years: the party of the socially conscious.

If any of the illegal immigrants are sincere about being in this country, why don't they do the following things:

(1) Go through the proper channels to become law-abiding American citizens, just like many of their other countrymen and women who have and still do contribute to America in a myriad of ways.

(2) They, like so many other immigrants who have come to America, need to learn to speak English. Countries all over the world learn English, but here we're being told that we need to learn Spanish in our homeland to accommodate someone else. Why?

(3) They must pay taxes in the United States — and if they don't, they should be deported immediately.

(4) And last, but not least, if they want to become U.S. citizens, why is it that every time they assemble they are carrying the Mexican flag? I understand their patriotism to Mexico, but they're fighting to stay in here. So, when in America, do as the Americans do.

We must stop providing to them all the rights citizens have and implement laws that will bring them out of the shadows and into the light, which helps them and us. If they want to be here, do so legally and go through the process.

As for the federal government, instead of just opening up our borders and making it a free-for-all, their first priority must be to protect our borders. September 11, 2001, showed us that not all immigrants want to share in the American dream. Some people want to make it a nightmare, and if we don't know who is coming over our borders, we don't know what they might do. There must be a tracking and verifying mechanism in place to know who is in our country. And if illegal immigrants are truly about doing the right thing in this country, they won't have a problem with that.