

Black New Orleans 10 Years Post-Katrina

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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August 29 marks the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. A personal note: Its devastation and ugly aftermath inspired me at the time to begin writing about major world and national issues along with media work pro bono.

It bears repeating some what that first article said - calling Katrina less what nature wrought, more a conspiracy of federal, state and city government along with business interests against the area's most vulnerable residents - mainly its poor Black population.

Over a million people were displaced. Over 1,000 died. Cashing in on disaster followed. Former Republican congressman/current lobbyist Richard Baker said at the time: "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it but God did."

New Orleans developer Joseph Canizaro added: "I think we have a clean sheet to start again (and take advantage of) big opportunities."

Their scheme: Erasing poor communities, replacing them with upscale development. Battered Gulf coast areas became a laboratory for disaster capitalism pioneered in Iraq.

Some of the same familiar names were involved - Halliburton, Bechtel and other profiteers aiming to cash in big. Plans were made in advance. Execution followed storm damage.

Davis-Bacon law guaranteeing prevailing wages on federally funded or assisted construction contracts was suspended - letting contractors employ undocumented workers at poverty wages and no benefits.

Blackwater USA and other paramilitaries were deployed straightaway - in full battle gear, patrolling streets in SUVs or unmarked cars with no license plates.

Army combat troops, National Guard forces, US Border Patrol operatives, and out-of-state police followed. Devastated New Orleans became a battleground.

In August 2013, Loyola University New Orleans Law Professor [Bill Quigley](#) wrote about conditions in New Orleans eight years post-Katrina.

Nearly 100,000 (largely Black) people "never got back," he said. "(T)he city remains incredibly poor, jobs and income vary dramatically by race, rents are up, public transportation is down, traditional public housing is gone, life expectancy differs dramatically by race and place, and most public education has been converted into charter schools."

Quigley explained city population declined from 455,000 pre-Katrina to about 369,000 in

2013. Nearly half of working-age Black men were unemployed.

Area African-American households earn half as much as white ones. Jobs continue shifting to urban areas. New Orleans public housing is gone. Poverty is double the national average.

Public transportation is woefully poor. Public education changed dramatically - to 80% quasi-public charter schools, an interim step toward likely privatization.

Imprisonment rates are four times higher than the national average. Quigley called New Orleans losing 948 square miles of coastal wetlands from 1932 to 2010 "the biggest crime of all."

On August 27, he [commented](#) on New Orleans 10 years post-Katrina, saying tens of thousands of the city's "sickest, oldest, poorest, youngest, people with disabilities and the like" were left behind.

Plans were to eliminate all unwanted residents. "Well, you can't leave if you're in a hospital. You can't leave if you're a nurse."

You can't leave if you are a patient. You can't leave if you're in a nursing home. You can't leave if you don't have a car. All these things.

They didn't...plan for that. And so, we're talking about somewhere in the neighborhood, I think, of 100,000 (unwanted) people probably (remaining) in the metropolitan New Orleans area.

When Katrina struck, lots of nursing home and hospital deaths occurred, Quigley explained. "The jail was full, 7,000 or so prisoners there without electricity, water, everything...(P)eople (were) stranded on house tops..."

Mandatory evacuation was ordered, but there were no buses, no trains. Anyone without transportation had no way out.

Tourist, business and other areas important to New Orleans largely recovered - "100,000 of our sisters and brothers in the African-American community never made it back, ever," Quigley explained.

And returning poor people are worse off than ever. "Recovery has been a tale of two cities." Privileged residents are well served. Blacks, the elderly, disabled and other disadvantaged ones were left out.

Bush and Obama administrations did nothing to help - serving rich and powerful interests exclusively, ignoring others most in need.

On August 27, Obama visited New Orleans for the first time as president, ignoring needs of its most disadvantaged throughout his tenure.

He lied claiming "(m)y administration is going to stand with you and fight alongside you until the job is done, until (the city) is all the way back. All the way."

Promises made throughout his tenure were systematically broken. America's most disadvantaged in New Orleans and nationwide are more on their own unaided by all levels of

government since pre-Great Depression days. Nothing in prospect suggests change.

New Orleans remains a window on America's future. Survival increasingly depends on the ability to pay. Those unable are neglected, abandoned, ignored and forgotten.

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His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

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