

OPINION

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Follow Disaster with Action Make jobs, housing top priority

The following is a Portland Observer editorial:

The horrifying deaths and images of the thousands of people left stranded and dying in the hours and days after hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast must be followed by action to eliminate wide disparities in America. This epic disaster and the inadequate response to save lives was not an equal opportunity killer.

Our government can start to make

good to the hurricane and flood victims by providing real housing and job opportunities. The long-term goal for both victims and all Americans must be a future that brings gainful employment, home ownership and good educational opportunities. These building blocks were missing in New Orleans and are missing across America in many neighborhoods left behind.

Economic freedom for all citi-

zens should be the priority of our government every day. But too often politicians and corporate interests slight the poorest Americans. Remember, it's been tax cuts for the rich, protections for corporate negligence and dividing Americans based on moral values that have been the hallmarks of President Bush and the Republican majority in the Senate and House of Representatives.

Bush's response to the spec-

tle in the Gulf was impeachable. He continued his vacation in Texas during the early days of the disaster, congratulated federal officials who utterly failed to get help to victims and falsely claimed there was no reason to believe the levies in New Orleans would fail.

Bush spoke more of support for Marshal Law and against looting than he did about saving lives and bringing the full force of govern-

ment to the rescue of people displaced and forced into disaster centers of squalor.

It was beyond belief to see mothers trying to keep their babies alive and others try to give comfort to sick and elderly parents and other family members who lacked food and water for days. The hype from the news media to the hysteria of crime overshadowed the goodwill of thousands of people helping each other through the ordeal.

Racism showed its ugly head when the African Americans leaving ran-shacked stores were described as looters while white residents were described as finders of live-saving resources. The term refugees was also disparaging to the U.S. citizens left homeless.

It is our hope that this disaster is a wake up call for America. We need a compassionate government and a smarter one.

Everyone Must Help Hurricane Victims

Poor African Americans hurt most

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Destruction and chaos is a frightening reality for residents in the states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. On Aug. 29, Hurricane Katrina, a Category 4 hurricane, tore into the region, leaving nearly 80-percent of New Orleans under water and ravaging other Gulf Coast communities.

Watch the evening news and you'll see who has been the hardest hit by this disaster: poor, African-Americans. These three states are among the poorest in the country, ranking at the bottom in terms of overall poverty and residents who live below the poverty line. Additionally, these southern states have large concentrations of African-Americans; over 60-percent of New Orleans' residents are black.

While our hearts should go out to all of those affected by this trag-

edy, we as African-Americans are obligated to offer support to our brothers and sisters in need.

When you consider that blacks, on average, earn less than whites, it's not hard to imagine that some blacks in the region were struggling to make ends meet. If it was difficult to put food on the table, it will be almost impossible for many families to rebuild once it's safe to return to their communities. Many will have no homes or jobs to go back to - the storm wiped away much of what they've worked so hard for. Before rebuilding talks even begin, these people - many with families - must first survive the next several months as displaced citizens or 'refugees' as the news media has labeled them.

Experts predict that this transient lifestyle will continue for the next several months; it will take at



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least that long before New Orleans is habitable again.

The havoc brought by Hurricane Katrina will go down in history as one of the greatest natural disasters this country has ever seen.

In December 2004, an earthquake, followed by a tsunami, hit Asia and Africa, destroying communities and killing thousands. President Bush pledged \$950 million in long-term U.S. support to help the tsunami victims rebuild. The American people donated money in record numbers, showing their compassion by providing the funds neces-

sary to recover from such a tragedy.

Now that the catastrophe is on our soil, we must dig even deeper. African-Americans especially

must contribute, to ensure that the blacks affected by this disaster are able to bounce back and once again become active participants in society.

When one of us is flourishing, it is our duty to help another who is suffering. No matter your income level, you are able to give - after all, you are doing much better than those in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. To offer support, contact the Red Cross, America's Second Harvest or Operation Blessing.

Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Looting and America's Poverty Crisis

BY EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON

Two things happened in one day that tell much about the abysmal failure of the Bush administration to get a handle on poverty in America. The first was the tragic and disgraceful shots of hordes of New Orleans residents scurrying down the city's hurricane ravaged streets with their arms loaded with food, clothes, appliances, and in some cases guns, that they looted from stores and shops.

That same day, the Census Bureau released a report that found that the number of poor Ameri-

pole. They have the lowest media income of any group. Bush's war and economic policies don't help matters. His tax cuts redistributed billions to the rich and corporations. The Iraq war has drained billions from cash starved job training, health and education programs. Increased American dependence on Saudi Oil has driven gas and oil prices skyward. Corporate downsizing, outsourcing, and industrial flight have further fueled America's poverty crisis. All of this happened on Bush's watch.

The poverty crisis has slammed

poverty numbers have steadily risen for not one, but all five years of his administration. There has been no sign of a turnaround. For that to happen, Bush would have to reverse his tax and war spending policies, and commit massive funds to job, training and education programs, and provide tax incentives for businesses to train and hire the poor. That would take an active national lobbying effort by Congressional Democrats, civil rights, and anti-poverty groups. That's not likely either. The poor are too nameless, faceless, and vast in numbers to



The looting in New Orleans, though deplorable, put an ugly public face on a crisis that Bush administration policies have made worse.

can have leaped even higher since Bush took office in 2000. While criminal gangs who always take advantage of chaos and misery to snatch and grab whatever they can, did much of the looting, many desperately poor, mostly black residents, saw a chance to grab items that they can't afford. They also did their share of the looting. That makes it no less reprehensible, but it's no surprise.

New Orleans has one of the highest poverty rates of any of America's big cities. According to a report by Total Community Action, a New Orleans public advocacy group, nearly one out of three New Orleans residents live below the poverty level, the majority of who are black. A spokesperson for the United Negro College Fund noted that the city's poor live in some of the most dilapidated, and deteriorated housing in the nation.

But New Orleans is not an aberration. Nationally, according to Census figures, blacks remain at the bottom of the economic totem

poor blacks hardest of all. Even during the Clinton era economic boom, the unemployment rate for young black males was double, and in some parts of the country, triple that of white males.

The tale of poverty is more evident in the nearly one million blacks behind bars, the HIV/AIDS rampage in black communities, the sea of black homeless persons, and the raging drug and gang violence that rips apart many black communities.

Then there are the children. One third of America's poor are children. Worse, the Children's Defense Fund found that nearly 1 million black children live not in poverty, but in extreme poverty. That's the greatest number of black children trapped in dire poverty in nearly a quarter century.

Bush officials claim the poverty numbers do not surprise them. They contend that past trends show that poverty peaks and then declines a year after the jump in new job growth. But the

target with a sustained lobbying campaign.

While the NAACP hammers Bush on the war, and his domestic policies, poverty has not been their top priority. The fight for affirmative action, economic parity, professional advancement and busing replaced battling poverty, reducing unemployment, securing quality education, promoting self-help and gaining greater political empowerment as the goals of all African-Americans.

That effectively left the one out of four blacks that wallow below the official poverty level out in the cold. The looting in New Orleans, though deplorable, put an ugly public face on a crisis that Bush administration policies have made worse. The millions in America that grow poorer, more desperate, and greater in number, are bitter testament to that.

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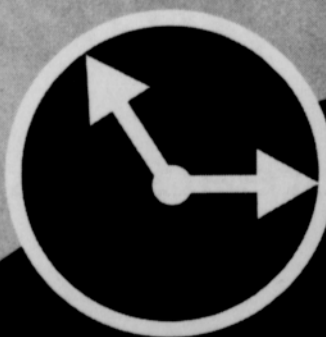
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