

# OPINION

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## Insular Whites Untouched by Racist Reality

### Why views on disaster differ

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Every so often, something in America happens that reminds the general population that white and black Americans are reading different pages in very different books.

In the 1990s, the L.A. Riots and the O.J. Simpson "not guilty" verdict proved that this country's race problem didn't go away post-integration, but was merely swept under the rug.

In this decade, the Hurricane Katrina disaster or more appropriately it's handling is our wake up call. A recent USA Today/CNN Gallop Poll reveals the races are sharply divided on the subject of the victims themselves, the President's handling of the situ-

ation and the reasons the government was so slow to respond.

According to the poll, 6 in 10 blacks say that the government responded slowly because the majority of the victims were poor and black, while nearly 9 in 10 whites say race and class were not a factor. Even more mind-boggling is the reality that 71 percent of blacks said the disaster response strengthened their belief that racial bias is still a problem in the U.S. Only 32-percent of whites agreed.

There is no doubt that the reasons for this difference in perception can be attributed to the disparity in the historical and current realities of black and



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white Americans.

America's historical reality is that blacks were once considered chattel and were bought and sold as such. When we were counted as human beings, we weren't considered whole, instead we were thought to be only 3/5ths of a person. Throughout all this, many whites were able to gain money, prestige and power, often on the backs of our people.

Fast-forward to modern times and blacks continue to face dis-

crimination. Racial bias in hiring, housing, education, lending practices and the courts have reinforced the idea that African-Americans are not fully valued in this country.

Exasperating the differences in perception is the fact that many whites are removed from the reality of race in this country. If whites choose to do so, they can go their entire lives and have limited contacts with blacks and other minorities. They don't have

to learn our history in school, they don't have to live amongst us and they don't have to see us in the workplace. Blacks, on the other hand, don't have that luxury. From very early on, we are assimilated into an American culture that has oppressed us.

President Bush says that race did not play a role in the way the massive flooding in New Orleans was handled. Nevertheless, the majority of the suffering, dependent faces on television and in newspapers and magazines belonged to our brothers and sisters.

The President's own mother, during an interview on National Public Radio's Marketplace commented that many of the displaced individuals were already

underprivileged, so living in the Houston Astrodome were they were evacuated was "working very well for them." This statement lacks compassion and shows a lack of understanding of the pervasive problems of race and class in this country. President Bush is not his mother, but the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

We can no longer accept that some things will always be different for us, that we will always see things differently than whites. White America must understand how race and class divisions affect our communities. Until they 'get it,' the bias that thwarts our progress will continue.

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

## Lives Ignored Once Again America's embarrassing disaster

Lives, dreams and hopes were smashed to less than nothing in both the storm and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. No matter how you look at it, we blew it.

We failed on our own soil. Federal Emergency Management Agency leaders and other agencies very slowly rose to the occasion. Why? Although something like this could have thrown off any nation, there's much deeper problem here in America.

The poverty level of many of those affected by Katrina is

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by Ron Weber

shameful. It is both embarrassing and a humiliation across the globe. While we pretend to be the great savior and champion around the world, we forgot our own at home once again. Was it because the area was so

predominantly black? As much as I hate to say so, this answer may be truer than what we want to admit.

America's racism has reared its ugly head. Yes, we have made improvements. But, once

again, we have not gone far enough. The fact that every continent and country on this earth saw our poor citizens, mostly black, left alone in a time of need is bad enough. But to see the face of third-world poverty here in this country exposed to the whole world is just plain sickening.

The disadvantaged in America quite honestly had been forgotten once again. Many citizens across the country have been so busy worrying about terrorism, war, politics and life's other calamities

that we did not realize how down and out so many of our own people were and still are.

In the 1800s, Frederick Douglass brought attention to the plight of Southern blacks to huge audiences of disturbed Northerners and throughout Europe. They too "sort of knew" that things weren't too good in the South. But their daily lives kept them in the dark. Douglass had to put it in front of them.

Although God promised not to flood the whole earth again, he never said he wouldn't put part of it under water. It is as though he has done what he did to bring the problem of

racism and poverty to the surface once again.

Let's all hope that we take a closer look at the problems of racism and poverty this time. Instead of trying to save the world, our leaders should be looking a whole lot closer to home.

A well-known chant after the 9-11 tragedy was "Never Again." When I see the kind of treatment that America's poor and minority populations still receive, the thought "Never in the First Place," comes to mind.

Ron Weber is a frequent speaker on African American history and a regular contributor to the Portland Observer.

## Letter to the Editor Disgust and Dismay

The federal government's response to the crisis facing hundreds of thousands of American citizen's in the Gulf Coast states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama fills this reader with disgust and dismay.

The result of 20 plus years of attempts by the conservative movement within the Republican Party have contributed to a complete and utter breakdown of how our government can respond to the most basic needs of its citizens after a catastrophic event. Food, water, clothing and shelter were woefully inadequate and far too late in arriving. We have also uncovered the under-belly of shame and neglect in our racist and

classist society.

The time to address these fundamental failures has come. The ability to investigate and correct these problems ca not lay in the hands of those who contributed to their creation. It is time that we, as a united America; rich and poor, black and white and all of the diversity in between demand that we find a solution which will help us to rebuild not only the States of the Gulf Coast - but also the foundations of our system of government.

The Rev. Dennis J. Parker  
Southwest Portland

### Guard Recruitment Wrong

With rage, I read that the National Guard is tasked with recruiting the homeless and hungry from the Gulf Coast. So, poor people in New Orleans, a place Rev. Jesse Jackson so aptly said has been made from "the bottom of the slave ship," and have been shafted since birth to fund corporate military government inequalities, are shafted again to wage battle against Iraq.

The illegal U.S. war was funded instead of their city's levees and now the displaced residents are being invited to offer themselves up to next round of cannon fodder.

Aaron Neville is right when he achingly sings, "They want to wash us away." We cannot allow these ignorant monsters, who continue to savage the Gulf and its inhabitants, to have their sins washed away

This time, our flood of righteous anger must engulf and sink them forever in their own criminal indifference to humanity.

Claudia King  
Northeast Portland

### Sham and a Shame

How can it be considered a fair process when Supreme Court nominee John Roberts refuses to answer over 100 questions?

This is a position for the highest justice in the land. In my mind, we should refuse to acknowledge John Roberts as a candidate of the court. This is a sham and a shame.

Trouble is he will probably be confirmed because that is what this country has been reduced to - a sham.

Colin Jury  
Beaverton

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