

# New Orleans' Violence was Exaggerated

## Many of the ugliest reports prove false

(AP) — On Sept. 1, with desperate Hurricane Katrina evacuees crammed into the convention center, Police Chief Eddie Compass reported: "We have individuals who are getting raped; we have individuals who are getting beaten."

Five days later, he told Oprah Winfrey that babies were being raped. On the same show, Mayor Ray Nagin warned: "They have people standing out there, have been in that frickin' Superdome for five days watching dead bodies, watching hooligans killing people, raping people."

The ugliest reports - children with slit throats, women dragged off and raped, corpses piling up in the basement - soon became a searing image of post-Katrina New Orleans.

The stories were told by residents trapped inside the Superdome and convention center and were repeated by public officials. Many news organizations, including The Associated Press, carried the witness accounts and official pronouncements, and in some cases later repeated the claims as fact, without attribution.

But now, a month after the chaos subsided, police are re-examining the reports and finding that many of them have little or no basis in fact.

They have no official reports of rape and no eyewitnesses to sexual assault. The state Department of Health and Hospitals counted 10 dead at the



Phil Turner (from left), Missy Dutcher and Dottie Burt dance in front of Alex Patout's restaurant Sunday in the French Quarter of New Orleans. Dutcher and Burt were celebrating their return to the neighborhood with Turner, who lives in the devastated Ninth Ward and weathered Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. (AP photo)

Superdome and four at the convention center.

Sally Forman, a spokeswoman for Nagin, said the mayor was relying on others for his information about

conditions at the evacuation sites. "He was listening to officials, trusting that information they were providing was accurate," she said.

To be sure, conditions at both sites were chaotic. Water was rising around the Superdome, home to 20,000 evacuees. Toilets were backing up, garbage was rotting, fights were breaking out. Food was in short supply at the convention center, where about 19,000 people took shelter from the rising waters. The temperature was climbing. The elderly and very young were desperate for food, water and medicine.

A completely false report during the emergency came from a guardsman who said that soldiers had discovered 30 to 40 bodies inside a freezer in the convention center's food area. Guardsman Mikel Brooks told a newspaper reporter that some of the dead appeared to have met violent ends, including "a 7-year-old with her throat cut."

When the convention center was swept, however, no such pile of bodies was found.

Lt. Col. Jacques Thibodeaux of the Louisiana National Guard said reports of violence at the Superdome and the convention center were overblown.

"The incidents were highly exaggerated" - the result of fear and hopelessness, he said. "For the amount of the people in the situation, it was a very stable environment."

Thibodeaux said his guard unit received no reports of rape.

Bill Waldron, a homicide detective from Florida in New Orleans for a murder trial, was stuck in the convention center until Sept. 1. He said he saw a couple of fights between young men, but "no murders, no rapes." He said that he did see people dying, but that those deaths were most likely a result of the heat and lack of water.

## First Black Congressman Honored

(AP) — In 1870 Joseph Rainey became the first black person elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. On Sept. 21 he became the first to have his portrait hung in the House.

The oil painting of the South Carolina congressman was unveiled before members of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and family descendants.

Rainey's painting, said Rep. Chaka Fattah, D-Pa., corrects a situation where there are "hundreds of portraits on the House side and not one reflects a person of color."

Rainey, born into slavery in 1832, served in the House during the Reconstruction Era period of 1870 to 1879, when he worked to



Members of Congress applaud as a painting of former Rep. Joseph H. Rainey, R-S.C., the first black person elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, is unveiled on Capitol Hill.

advance the civil rights of newly freed slaves. He was one of a small number of black people elected to seats representing parts of the former Confederacy after the Civil War.

## Oregon Soldiers Killed in War

(AP) — Two Oregon guardsmen from Pendleton were killed Sunday in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan, officials said.

Sgt. Tane Baum, 30, and Warrant Officer Adrian Stump, 22, were among five soldiers killed when their CH-47 Chinook helicopter crashed near Daychopan district in southern Zabul province.

ince.

Kulongoski's office said Monday that a surface-to-air missile was fired at the helicopter, but military officials said that was based on an initial, unconfirmed report.

"There is no indication at this time that this is a result of hostile fire," U.S. military spokesman Lt.

Col. Jerry O'Hara said.

Braibish said the Chinook had just dropped off some soldiers and was returning to its base when it went down.

The deaths brings to 47 the number of soldiers from Oregon or with strong ties to the state who have died in the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## Next Court Pick Anticipated

President Bush hinted on Monday that his next nominee for the Supreme Court would be a woman or a minority, saying that "diversity is one of the strengths of the country."

The president also expressed optimism that the Senate would

confirm John Roberts as chief justice this week — which seems virtually certain.

Two-thirds of the 100 senators — Republican and Democrats alike — had already announced their support of Roberts, the conservative federal appeals court

judge, as the successor to the late William H. Rehnquist.

Opponents to Roberts questioned his commitment to civil rights and expressed concern that he might overturn the 1973 court ruling that established the right to abortion.

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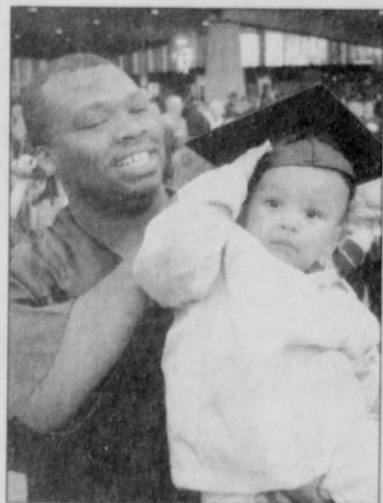
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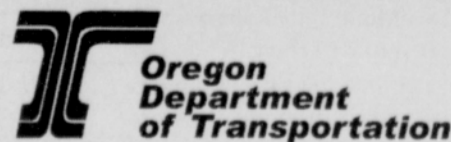
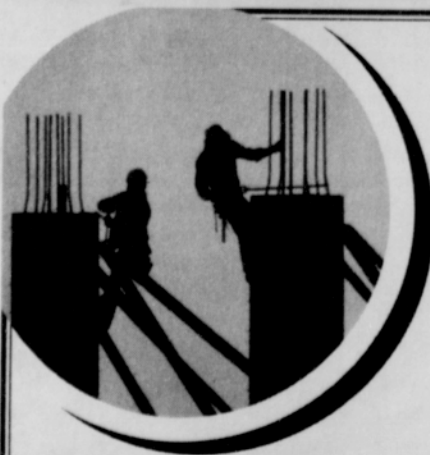
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To meet the need for construction workers, the Oregon Department of Transportation recently unveiled its Workforce Development Plan that is designed to:

- Boost diversity in employment
- Provide apprenticeship opportunities
- Increase training resources
- Offer opportunities for highway construction jobs

To learn more about the ODOT Workforce Development Plan and how you can get involved, visit ODOT's web site:

[http://egov.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/OTIA/bridge\\_delivery.shtml](http://egov.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/OTIA/bridge_delivery.shtml)

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