

Letter in Support of the Movement in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Notes on Strategy & Tactics

Eric Mann



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Author's Introduction

I got involved in the Civil Rights Movement in 1964 when students from North Carolina A&T (a historically Black college) who had risked their lives to simply sit in at a lunch counter asked me, and other students, to join the “civil rights revolution.” I went to work with the Congress of Racial Equality in Harlem and the Northeast, and I have been “a soldier in the army” ever since.

During the height of the “two decades of the Sixties,” the Black Liberation Movement at home and the growing independence movements for self-determination in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, led by the National Liberation Front of Vietnam, shaped our antiracist, anti-imperialist perspective. My view, then and now, is that it will take a world-wide anti-imperialist united front to isolate and weaken the U.S. government to allow self-determination, ecological sanity, and an end to poverty, racism, and war in the world.

At this moment in history, our challenges are shaped by the New Orleans catastrophe, the crimes and punishments of the Bush Administration, the Democratic Party, the capitalist system, and the persistent and seemingly never-ending hatred toward Black people in this country by the white majority. And yet, there stands before us a great historical opportunity to help jump-start a Third Reconstruction in America, as part of a large antiracist, anti-imperialist united front in the U.S., in strategic alliance with the oppressed peoples and nations in the Third World, to confront the U.S. empire.

The present painful historical period offers a great deal of hope. The Bush Administration is on the defensive and isolated. The Black Liberation Movement, against tremendous odds, is showing signs of revitalization and new programmatic initiatives, as new allies, from Cuba to Venezuela, rise up to help the movement and threaten the political establishment. “Letter in Support of the Movement in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Notes on Strategy and Tactics” is an effort to contribute to the debate about the central question facing all of us in the movement, “What is to be Done?” This Letter began as an internal paper to the leaders of the Labor/Community Strategy Center and Bus Riders Union in Los Angeles, and, with the encouragement of my own organization and some comrades in the Gulf Coast, it has come to light as a public discussion paper.

Right now, some of the most advanced proposals for Black community and left movement intervention, as well as subsequent and impressive tactical plans, are being generated by the Community Labor United and the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project, as well as by an important paper by Saladin Muhammad of Black Workers for Justice, “Hurricane Katrina: 9/11 for the Black Nation,” both of which are quoted in some detail below. After the 1992 Urban Rebellion in Los Angeles, the Strategy Center’s Urban Strategies Group, published *Reconstructing Los Angeles—and U.S. Cities from the Bottom Up.*¹ During the 2000 presidential election, when the Strategy Center wanted to distance ourselves programmatically from the center-right Clinton-esque politics of Al Gore and the

white populism of Ralph Nader, a group of us published *Towards a Program of Resistance: We Make These Demands Against U.S. Imperialism*,² focusing on demand development. On the first days of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, I wrote a long essay, "Letter to the Movement on Iraq" whose audience, as with this publication, is the most active and dedicated organizers in the U.S., in particular those focusing on the needs and aspirations of the low-income, working class of color. I believe these publications will be of help to the movement in the Gulf Coast, and many of the ideas in this Letter are derived from that work.

I hope that "Letter in Support of the Movement in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast" encourages more strategy papers so that the left movement can have the benefit of strategic and tactical debates and the ultimate unity needed to win.

*Eric Mann
Los Angeles, September 29, 2005*

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Section One.

Overview: History Can Guide Us

“Then came this battle called the Civil War, beginning in Kansas in 1854, and ending with the presidential elections of 1876, twenty awful years. The slave went free, stood a brief moment in the sun, then moved back again towards slavery. The whole weight of America was thrown to color caste.”³

W.E.B. DuBois, Black Reconstruction in America

“But what can we do with the Negroes after they are free. I can hardly believe that the South and North can live in peace unless we get rid of the Negroes. Certainly they cannot, if we don’t get rid of the Negroes who we have armed and disciplined and who have fought with us, to the amount, I believe, of some 150,000 men. I believe it would be better to export them all to some fertile country with a good climate, which they could have to themselves. You have been a staunch friend of the race [the Black race] since you first advised me to enlist them in New Orleans... What then are our difficulties in sending the Blacks away?”⁴

President Abraham Lincoln to General Benjamin F. Butler, (April 1865)

“We need new friends, we need new allies. We need to expand the civil rights struggle to a higher level—to the level of human rights. Whenever you are in a civil rights struggle, whether you know it or not, you are confining yourself to the jurisdiction of Uncle Sam. No one from the outside world can speak out in your behalf as long as your struggle is a civil rights struggle. Civil rights comes within the domestic affairs of this country. All of our African brothers and our Asian brothers and our Latin-American brothers cannot open their mouths and interfere in the domestic affairs of the United States.

But the United Nations has what's known as the charter of human rights; it has a committee that deals in human rights. When you expand the civil rights struggle to the level of human rights, you can then take the case of the Black man in this country before the nations in the UN. You can take it before the General Assembly. You can take Uncle Sam before a world court. But the only level you can do it on is the level of human rights....

Uncle Sam’s hands are dripping with blood, dripping with the blood of the Black man in this country. He’s the earth’s number-one hypocrite. He has the audacity—yes, he has—imagine him posing as the leader of the free world. The free world! Expand the civil rights struggle to the level of human rights. Take it into the United Nations, where our African brothers can throw their weight on our side, where our Asian brothers can throw their weight on our side, where our Latin-American brothers can throw their weight on our side, and where 800 million Chinamen are sitting there waiting to throw their weight on our side.

Malcolm X—“The Ballot or the Bullet” April 3, 1963, Baltimore, Maryland

The System Fails, the Movement Regroups

In Louisiana, just a few weeks after Category Five Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, 49 movement organizations from throughout the region met to develop a common strategy and tactical plan. Gathering in Baton Rouge, they formed The People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project (PHRF). Their main goal: to create a Black-led, multiracial, progressive reconstruction plan for New Orleans and the region that could challenge the white, corporate take-over already underway. The group also discussed how to use the painful opportunity of the man-made disaster, the racism of the Bush Administration, and the vacillation and spinelessness of the Democrats to help create a new movement with an independent, community-based program.

Curtis Muhammad from Community Labor United (CLU) highlighted the daunting challenges to survival and movement building that grassroots groups are facing. "We must struggle to function with no electricity, no sewage treatment, no city services. We are also faced with the task of physically locating our members after the government dispersed the poorest people the furthest away."⁵

Not only are CLU, PHRF, and other grassroots groups such as Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) dealing with urgent life and death challenges, they are trying to develop an alternative, grassroots Black-led development plan for the Gulf Coast. They face an even greater danger: the plan of the Bush Administration and the two-party elite to "bulldoze New Orleans," drive out the majority Black population, and rebuild—what Muhammad characterized as code for "condos, casinos, and hotels"—the city as a depopulated theme park with a majority white, affluent population.

The so-called natural disaster of "Hurricane Katrina" is actually the man-made disaster, of U.S. imperialism in general and the Bush oligarchy in particular—where global warming (driven by the emissions of the U.S. economy), imperialist overextension in Iraq, the crudest versions of structural and individual racism, the crises of the cities, and the national oppression of Black people (in particular in the South) all tragically intersect.

There are historical moments when a convergence of events creates a crisis for the system, a governing crisis when the ruling class loses public support and legitimacy. Movement forces that have previously been weak and divided find a rallying cry, a moment of focus, and can launch a programmatic and ideological struggle that pushes the system back on its heels. New Orleans—the city, but also as a symbol for the greater Gulf Coast, the Black movement in the South, the Black movement in the U.S., the Third World within and without the territorial boundaries of the U.S.—offers such a historical challenge and opportunity.

There is a long history inside the Black Liberation Movement of the call for "the right of self-determination." When a people suffer such a longstanding, cruel and unusual set of punishments from the TransAtlantic Slave Trade to slavery to Jim Crow to the present period of continued white assault on Civil Rights, more structural demands against the system in the

voice of a people are needed. The New Orleans and Gulf Coast situation has created, not a snapshot of this continuing history of oppression but, a full-length film for an international audience. This cinema vérité exposes the brutal poverty, racism, neglect, and suffering imposed on the Black people of virtually all classes in the South and throughout the United States. Progressive people of all races in the U.S. and throughout the world are needed to support the most profound and radical proposals from oppressed communities, as well as to take seriously and expand the support for demands for reparations, Black institutions, and Black control of Black people's future.

Imperialism as a system operates by oppressing and super-exploiting whole nations and peoples, and it uses the ideology of racism to subjugate peoples of color throughout the world; therefore, an international, anti-imperialist united front is not simply a slogan, but a strategy to situate the many creative demands generated at the grassroots. In this way, we can try to unite all who can be united to isolate the Bush Administration and the right-wing of the Democratic Party and build a broad antiracist, anti-imperialist united front that will demand: (1) the right of self-determination and the highest level of material aid, under community control, to the oppressed Black people in the Gulf Coast, and (2) the U.S., get out of Iraq. Obviously there are many other critical demands for all oppressed nationality communities, and aid must be extended to poor whites as well. There are many other righteous critical grassroots fights that others, including our own organization, are taking up. But at this moment in history, those two focal demands can provide strategic and programmatic coherence in the current political context.

Re-Opening the Historical Record of the Achievements of the Black Liberation Movement—a Critical Building Block for a New Reconstruction

We are living in a historical period when the greatest blow against the progressive movement and the Left is the theft of the history of our intellectual, moral, and political victories against the system and, in particular, the efforts to obliterate the profound contributions of the Black Liberation Movement. The roots of any multiracial, international movement of resistance to the profound racism in New Orleans and Gulf Coast situation lie in rebuilding this historical record.

This foundation has been built by the abolitionist work of Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and John Brown, the Black Reconstruction of 1865-1877, the century of struggle against Jim Crow, the 1950s—1970s Civil Rights Movement and Black Liberation Movement, SNCC, CORE, and the Black Panthers, the Gary Indiana Black Political Convention meeting of 1972, the intellectual work of W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, Harry Haywood, Fannie Lou Hamer, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Amiri Baraka, Herbert Aptheker, and, as part of a world anti-imperialist Left, the work of Yuri Kochiyama, Rejis Tijerina, Mickey Schwerner, Andy Goodman, and James Chaney, and the powerful Third World Support from the Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned nations in 1955, to the victory of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front in 1975.

The First Reconstruction

In 1865, only 140 years ago, when the Black people of the South won their freedom from slavery, an alliance of Black Freedmen and women, Southern poor white allies, and Northern allies (if mainly to consolidate the victory over the rebellious and racist South) came up with a program for Reconstruction. This plan was based on the material power of more than 150,000 armed Blacks who had rebelled against slavery and fought with the North in the Civil War, backed by four million more potentially armed Blacks.

This historic Reconstruction movement had a clear program that included the full enfranchisement of Black people in the South; the election of Black and progressive people to office; a major land reform program to bring land back to those who had tilled it as slaves; and profound infusions of funds for Black public education and training. This overall progressive program reached out to, and for a moment included, significant numbers of poor whites—who for centuries had been the henchmen of the slave owners but, without land or jobs and faced with the material reality of Black power, sought the possibility of a multiracial working class movement led by former Black slaves. This miraculous decade in U.S. history was also marked by new legal status for Black people with the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution which outlawed slavery, made Black people U.S. citizens, and extended the franchise to Black males. None of this would have been possible without the presence of Northern troops in the old “Confederacy.” These troops restricted the brutality and counter-revolution of the Southern white planters class and provided armed support for the progressive experiment—in alliance with the Radical Republicans, and antiracist white liberals who understood the dangers of racism, feudal slavery, and Northern capitalism. The Southern white hatred of “the North” and “the federal government” stems from this revolutionary period in which the white supremacists and plantocracy, for once, were under restriction and even temporary subjugation.

First Racist Counter-Revolution: Jim Crow Apartheid

This unique and fragile experiment of Reconstruction was overturned twelve years later by an alliance of Southern planters and Northern capitalists, the so-called “Hayes-Tilden compromise of 1877.” That ugly backroom deal re-established white plantation power in the South and removed the urgently needed Northern troops, allowing Southern whites to reimpose the plantation economy based on the super-exploitation of Black wage labor. This racist Jim Crow system of segregation and subjugation—also present in the less severe but still profoundly racist practices in the North—created a reign of terror against Black people for a full century under a formal system of apartheid and white supremacy. The story of how the Black-led Reconstruction offers a model of hope and shapes the terms of Black resistance and multiracial Left organizing to this day is the subject of one of the greatest books in the history of the written word, *Black Reconstruction in America* by W.E.B. DuBois, which serves as the fundamental theoretical and analytical frame of this Letter.

The Second Reconstruction: The Civil Rights Revolution

One hundred years after the end of the Civil War and almost a century after the white South staged its first counter-revolution, Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act—efforts at the national level to repair the profound damage of the Hayes-Tilden compromise and the ravages of Jim Crow.

In 1965-1968 during the revolution of rising expectations, urban rebellions took place in Watts, Detroit, Harlem, Newark, Cleveland, and Washington D.C. For many young people today who were not even born at that time, it may be hard to imagine that 458 cities experienced Black-led rebellions between 1967 and 1969. During that period, there was considerable international support for the demands of Black people, from the Soviet Union, Peoples Republic of China, and Third World nations throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. There was even significant, if minority, white sympathy for why Black people would rebel.⁶ This sympathetic focus was not on “looting” but rather on police brutality, poverty, and structural racism, including the assassination of Dr. King, understanding that these realities would generate such mass outrage.⁷

In retrospect, the profound mass militancy and structural victories of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Liberation Movement can be understood as a Second Reconstruction. This Second Reconstruction also had a clear program. From 1955 to 1975, “the two decades of the Sixties,” there was a strong and exploding Black movement, growing Latino/Chicano and Asian Pacific Islander movements, the resurgence of the American Indian Movement, and large antiracist organizations of white students, such as Students for a Democratic Society. This multiracial, Black-led Left was a major force in U.S. society. It was both in unity and in struggle with a significant liberal wing of the Democratic Party that was elected during the 1960s in opposition to moderates and the Right.

The Black Liberation/Reconstruction program included an end to police brutality, and proposals for civilian and (Black) community control of the police; comprehensive jobs and social services, the concept raised by the Communist Party during the 1930s of “jobs or income now;” federal “anti-poverty” programs that included dramatic expansion of benefits and eligibility for Aid to Families With Dependent Children; Head Start programs for pre-schools kids, massive funding for Black and inner city schools; a breakthrough in large-scale hiring of Black people for private and public sector jobs; powerful government protections for voting rights and anti-discrimination; and the two demands the system hated the most—“Black Power,” reflected in Black control of community institutions, and “U.S. Out of Vietnam,” the growing sentiment in Black communities to bring Black (and Latino, Asian, and working class white) soldiers home and allow the Vietnamese people the right of self-determination.

Many “non-violent” if militant civil rights activists, especially before the 1963 March on Washington, initially felt that the demands for equal protection of law, already in the 14th amendment, full equality, civil rights under the system, and full democratic rights would be

eventually acceptable to the system. But out of their experience of the Kennedy Administration's weak protections for civil rights workers and conciliation with Southern Dixiecrats, and the treacherous role played by J. Edgar Hoover and the F.B.I. to sabotage more than enforce civil rights laws, they came to understand just how revolutionary the simple demand for "equality" and an end to racial segregation proved to be.

Many radical reformers were transformed into revolutionaries by the shots of the Klan, the blows of police Billy clubs North and South, the assaults of high powered water hoses, and the racist killings that just would not stop—from Emmit Till to Medgar Evers to the four young girls who were the victims of the Birmingham Church bombing, Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney, the murders of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Fred Hampton, and yes, the assassinations of John and Bobby Kennedy. In 1972, poet and organizer Amiri Baraka and Gary, Indiana Mayor Richard Hatcher helped convene perhaps the broadest Black united front in U.S. history: the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana which generated a series of comprehensive political demands, including holding Black elected officials accountable to the Black community, organized under the concept of a Black Agenda. Similarly, the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program was comprehensive and radical, ending with a quote from the Declaration of Independence in which the U.S. "seceded" from England. This was followed by the tenth "key" demand,

"We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace. As our major political objective, a United Nations supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the Black colony in which only Black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of Black people as to their destiny."⁸

The Black movement during the mid-1960s and 1970s developed a strong internationalist and Third World orientation focusing on solidarity with the people of Africa, and support for the anti-Apartheid movement, and the most militant opposition to the Vietnam War. Muhammad Ali's "No Viet Cong Ever Called Me a N----r" helped mobilize many Black and Latino youth, including those already in the armed forces, to refuse to kill Asian youth fighting for self-determination. The connection between racism and oppression at home and abroad was highlighted by SNCC's cry, "Hell No, We Won't Go" to the war in Vietnam, Martin Luther King's "the United States is the worst purveyor of violence in the world," and the Chicano Moratorium, the largest Latino antiwar demonstration with more than 30,000 participants.

The Movement had a worldview and an international strategy. It had significant and powerful grassroots movements on the ground, general unity between Black groups themselves (with of course, tremendous tension and conflict), and a multiracial alliance that included significant antiracist white support and involvement.

Second Racist Counter-Revolution: The New Right

The story of the Second Racist Counter-Revolution that followed the Second Black Reconstruction in America begins with three simple points: (1) it happened; (2) we are still living through it; and (3) “New Orleans” is a powerful and painful reflection of its impact as well as an opportunity to launch a Third Reconstruction—a social revolution based on an international alliance against racism, national oppression, and empire.

The national Black community has been under attack from a ferocious counter-revolution almost before the Civil Rights revolution got off the ground. The “white backlash,” which included white voters abandoning the Democratic Party in droves, began from the first day the federal government sent any troops to protect civil rights workers, from the first day one Black person got a job through an affirmative action program, from the first day one Black person was registered to vote through civil rights organizing.

By 1964, the country was split. The Democratic Party, through the election of Lyndon Johnson, tried desperately to hold together a white and Black coalition. But, despite significant if minority antiracist white support for civil rights, and an unusual well of decency among a significant minority of whites, including some in the South, the vast majority of white people and white voters were and are strongly to rabidly anti-Black. They had voted Democrat for a century to punish the Republicans, the party of Lincoln, for defeating the Confederacy in the Civil War, and for sending federal troops to the South after the Civil War to enforce the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. They voted Democrat one last time in 1964 out of history and reflex, and out of support for the racist Dixiecrats who still controlled every Southern state and virtually all the key positions in Congress. They saw Lyndon Johnson, a Southerner from Texas, as a traitor, and after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and just three years of the federal government trying to enforce those laws, they bolted en masse to the Republican Party, where they have wallowed ever since.

By 1968, Richard Nixon was campaigning on a Southern Strategy that assured the white South, through the racialized coded discourse of “law and order,” that he would not enforce civil rights. The white South rewarded him by voting Republican for the first time in its history. But the Nixon vote was not even the worst development. In the same election, George Wallace, Governor of Alabama and an arch-right-wing racist, ran on a state’s rights and “defense of segregation” platform, arguing that even the Republicans were not racist enough. Nixon carried most of the Southern states, with Wallace carrying, that is winning, the electoral votes in the Gulf Coast states—Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Georgia. Nixon barely won the popular vote, with 43%; Hubert Humphrey, the Democrat, with 42%; and Wallace with 13%, including many white working class votes in the North, where white anger about Black power and the urban rebellions had reached a fever pitch.

Just as with the First Reconstruction, the counter-revolution did not simply try to stop the progress of civil rights; it tried and succeeded in inflicting a subsequent reign of terror against Black people, to reverse, not simply halt, civil and economic rights. Richard Nixon’s and

George Wallace's plans worked, and now the Republicans *and* the Democrats abandoned the Black community. With the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, the brilliantly manipulative 1978 Bakke case in which a white applicant for medical school claimed the now infamous "reverse discrimination" (and was upheld by a 5 to 4 vote of the Supreme Court), and the later rise of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, a right-wing counterrevolution based on neoliberalism and counterinsurgency was in full swing. By the late '70s and early '80s, the Civil Rights Movement was in full retreat, as the Black community has been punished by Republicans and Democrats, had suffered painful and debilitating splits, and could not organize nor fully contemplate a third road.

In 1984 and 1988, the Rainbow Coalition, led by the presidential challenge of Jesse Jackson, showed the enormous potential for a Black-led, multiracial, progressive politics in the United States—and the possibility of aggressively challenging the Right. But in 1988, after Jackson came in an amazing second to Michael Dukakis in the Democratic primaries, the Democratic Party silenced him and his demands, and Jackson refused to cause the uproar it deserved out of "party unity." What had begun as an "independent" Rainbow Coalition challenging the Democratic Party had been subsumed into the party itself. After Reagan's 1984 rout of moderate liberal Walter Mondale, the pathetic performance of alleged liberal Michael Dukakis, and the racist and successful "Willie Horton" ploy of George Bush Sr. in 1988, the Democratic Party, losing white votes right and right, was in an internal crisis.⁹ The Democratic Leadership Council, led by Bill Clinton, vowed to move the party to the "center," to downplay discussions of civil rights, and to try to win back white voters with a "colorblind" economics-oriented appeal: "It's the economy, stupid!"

Each year from 1968, the Democrats have moved further to the Right on race. Unfortunately, unlike the racist Democrat George Wallace, Jesse Jackson was not willing to abandon the Democrats and run an independent *antiracist* campaign to punish the Democrats if necessary, in an effort to build an independent Left that could at least try to push the Party back to a civil rights orientation.

By 1992, Arkansas Governor Clinton implored Black leaders, sick of 12 years of Reagan and Bush, to accept his assessment that in order to win a national election, they needed two white men from the South to run, (Clinton and Gore) and to work like hell to keep the remaining white voters inside the Democratic Party. In return, Clinton promised, if elected with no civil rights pressure to his left, to provide a massive number of Black appointments and contracts, which he did. In exchange, his two administrations undermined due process and habeas corpus with the Effective Death Penalty Act, ended "welfare as we know it," and sabotaged the movement in California to protect affirmative action. The Clinton Administration put the movement on the defensive with the reactionary slogan, "affirmative action, mend it don't end it" (as if Blacks had already gotten too much) combined with guaranteeing the defeat of the civil rights opposition by withholding promised Democratic Party funds from the "No on 209" Campaign. In practice, Clinton gave ideological support to the racists, while he, in perhaps his most disgraceful move, privately bragged to his Black supporters that he was "the first Black president."

The Clinton debacle was followed by the racism of Gore and then Kerry. Gore didn't even challenge the 2000 presidential election results in Florida, allowing the conservative Scalia/Thomas Supreme Court to throw the election to Bush. (Michael Moore's greatest historical contribution may be his popularization of the excruciatingly painful scene of Black congresspersons trying to defend Al Gore and protest the election results, while Gore turned against his most loyal, devoted Black supporters in the futile hope to placate, once again, white Southern and suburban voters for future elections.) By 2004, John Kerry, who ran one of the worst campaigns with regard to the Black community and civil rights, was paid back for this racial appeal to white voters by this very voting block, especially white male voters, voting instead for George W. Bush in record numbers.

One final "fact" on how brutal the second counterrevolution has been on the Black community.

"The number of people in prison, in jail, on parole, and on probation in the U.S. increased by 300% from 1980 [since the election of Ronald Reagan] through 2000, to more than 6 million. The number of people in prison increased from 320,000 to almost two million in the same period. This buildup has targeted the poor, and especially Blacks. In 1999, though Blacks were only 13% of the U.S. population, they were 50% of all prison inmates (1 million people). In 2000, one out of three young Black men was either locked up, on probation, or on parole."¹⁰

This incomprehensible level of pain and suffering is the bitter harvest of the tragically bipartisan White Supremacy as National Policy, explains why some Black organizers put forth an analysis of a nationally oppressed people, and sets the historical frame for the events of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

Gulf Coast: The Third Reconstruction?

As we turn to proposals for action and remedy, those Black groups and individuals in New Orleans, the Gulf Coast, and throughout the U.S. who choose to explain their dilemma, their experience, and their demands in a Black-centered, civil rights, antiracist, and self-determination framework should be supported by all progressive people. Progressive people of all races need to show intellectual and political solidarity. Let us register the profound courage that is required to put forth that oppositional point of view, recognizing that there will be a strong bi-partisan "backlash" against Black groups and individuals who choose to think and express themselves in this context.

This movement has already put the Bush Administration and the Democrats on the defensive. Responding to Black rage—articulated in Kanye West's angry observation, "George Bush doesn't care about Black people"—Bush was forced to say in his September 15th speech to the

country, "Poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunities of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action."¹¹ Headlines on the internet actually read, "Bush talks about poverty," as if it was a major news scoop.

Still, as we will see, Bush's proposal for "enterprise zones" and his \$61 billion corporate giveaway betray his real intentions. His much more powerfully coded "New Orleans Will Rise Again" is little more than the longstanding Dixiecrat theme "The [white] South Will Rise Again." Still, this is a reflection of the power of a resurgent movement, as Jesse Jackson has twice gone after Bill Clinton, by demanding that the Clinton/Bush Sr. Katrina response team appoint Black leadership to help head up the relief efforts, and by fingering Clinton's lobbyists, not just Bush's, for the corporate raiding in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.¹²

The heroic work of movement groups in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast is helping to shape the terms of the debate. Today, not just in New Orleans, but throughout the Gulf Coast states of Alabama and Mississippi, throughout every major urban center from New York to Houston to Los Angeles, there is an urgent need for a Third Reconstruction. This effort should be led by a Black/Latino alliance as part of the broader alliance of all oppressed nationality peoples, Asian/Pacific Islander, Indigenous peoples, reaching out to antiracist and progressive whites, and allying internationally with the peoples and nations of the Third World to challenge the decadence and racism of the U.S. empire.

We must use all of our resources and resolve to try to ensure that the Black community and a multiracial movement can make an historic intervention to demand Black self-determination and the Right of Return for all 350,000 Black people in New Orleans and the Black community throughout the Gulf Coast. Only if people get home will there be a social base for a long-term struggle for power. That single demand, the Right of Return, is the key link to reconstruct a foundation of the people of the Black Belt South. We must not allow the corporate class to use this tragedy as a profit binge with public funds while the white corporate, upper, and middle classes occupy the Black community's assets.

Unity and Struggle with the Democratic Party

There is the grave danger that the majority of those in the Democratic Party will play their usual opportunistic game. The Democrats may hope that Bush falls flat on his face on the Iraq issue, the privatization of social security, and the racism and criminal negligence of his New Orleans response—without their Party raising any substantial demands to help Black people, challenge the corporate raiders, or in any way antagonize the white Southern, suburban, and racist voter.

And yet there are rays of hope for a progressive alliance. The Congressional Black Caucus and Jesse Jackson have provided the most militant and clear antiracist critique of the existing situation. Democratic National Committee Chair Howard Dean made some decent statements to the virtually all Black National Baptist Convention. He said, "We have to come to terms

with the ugly truth that skin color, age, and economics played a role in who survived and who did not. And this question, 40 and 50 years after Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement, is: 'How could this still be happening in America?'"

Dean also challenged the Republican plan to make permanent the elimination of federal inheritance taxes, and asked, "If there's an extra \$750 million in the budget, let's ask the American people, 'Shall we give that to 3,000 of the wealthiest people in America, or shall we rebuild New Orleans and rebuild Mississippi and rebuild the school system in Chicago, New York, Indianapolis, and Los Angeles?' He also questioned the use of funds for the war in Iraq, challenging "Two hundred billion dollars—could that have saved lives in New Orleans by rebuilding the levees that everybody told us needed to be done? We need to make moral choices in America."¹³

Dean's progressive statements, which he is aware will be used by the Republicans in the 2008 Presidential election, take place at a time when progressive Democrats, led by Ted Kennedy, Hilary Clinton, and Barack Obama, are challenging the record of John Roberts, Bush's evasive Right-wing nominee for the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Kennedy has tried to get on the record Robert's opinions on the legal issues of affirmative action, voting rights protections for Blacks, and a woman's right to an abortion. Hilary Clinton recently announced she would vote against Robert's confirmation because he refused to take a strong stand on "civil rights, voting rights, and women's rights."

At this point, there is a need for a united front between movement people on the ground and what is left of the progressive tendencies within the Democratic Party. We are not strong enough to go it alone; they are not strong enough to fundamentally challenge the Republicans and the Right. Our job is to build our own independence politically, to enter into united fronts with forces to confront Bush and the far right, and to come out of every alliance and coalition with a stronger independent political base.

This united front with the Democrats, under certain circumstances, does not at all preclude independent and third party initiatives, as a way to build the independence and power of a more radical movement not tied to the Democrat's right wing or its endless and elusive pursuit and prioritization of the most reactionary and racist white voters. The exciting possibility of a Harry Belafonte/Danny Glover Third Party presidential ticket in 2008 (both as a serious proposal and a symbol of the type of ticket required) would offer an option that could force the Democrats to fight for the Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and progressive white vote. It would offer an alternative to the disgraceful behavior of the Gore and Kerry campaigns, in which Blacks and Latinos were told to be seen and not heard.

New Orleans and the Gulf Coast offer an historic opportunity to build more unity in the movement, to drive the national and international discourse to the left, to offer help to a beleaguered Black community that is still the most consistently progressive force in the country, and to help reconstruct a new Reconstruction—from the bottom up.

Section Two

Program and Demands: Supporting the Movement in the Black Belt South

Notes on a Third Reconstruction: Framing Programmatic Concepts

Here are some reflections and elaborations of demands already proposed by groups in the Gulf Coast, as well as further suggestions based the Strategy Center's experience and readings in Black history to contribute to those discussions and debates.

1) The Right of Self-determination for Black People in the South and Throughout the U.S.

There has long been a debate among Black people about how to define their legal, political, cultural, and governmental relationship to the U.S. The various assessments have led to numerous ways to understand and talk about this relationship: citizens who suffer from discrimination, oppressed people, a national minority entitled to certain rights based on historical discrimination, internal colony, oppressed nation in the Black Belt South with the right of self-determination up to and including the right of secession, an oppressed nation dispersed throughout the United States with a special homeland in the Black Belt South, or a people that are subjugated by national oppression. There also have been comparable and complementary discussions about Black people's relationship to Africa and the peoples and nations of the Third World, other oppressed nationality peoples inside the U.S., and white allies. At times, these formulations have generated enormous energy and clarity inside the Black movement, at other times, these different analyses have generated anger and splits. The differences are a product of a righteous history of resistance to a common oppression and an effort to generate a very difficult set of tactics based on the best analysis possible of an oppressed people's situation and options. While a principled struggle for clarity and unity on these questions may be beneficial at this time, it is not necessary to have unity on this analysis in order to have a basic unity about the historic special conditions of Black people in the U.S. as well as a basic unity about demands for special actions in the present.

Given the overriding objective to help build broad national and international support for the beleaguered and strategically pivotal Black community in the U.S., it is not the purpose of this Letter to advance a singular position in such an important conversation. The goal is that at a time when Black people have experienced and are experiencing another in the long line of innumerable abuses, and forces in the Black community are putting forth views that call for self-determination as a people, the right to return "as a people," the right to control their destiny in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast "as a people," the right to make demands against the United States to the United Nations "as a people" it is urgent that allies of all nationalities give the strongest possible support for that right of self-determination and provide support to those groups in the Black community putting forth those views.

The theme of Black self-determination in relation to the United States begins with the first African slave on U.S. soil and spans more than 300 years of resistance, including Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman; the militant abolitionists; the leaders of the First Reconstruction; Marcus Garvey and the "Back to Africa" Universal Negro Improvement Association; the Black communist tradition of Harry Haywood and his cry for "Negro Liberation"; and the 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolutions on the Afro-American National Question. It continued through the work of W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson and their "We Cry Genocide" appeal to the United Nations; SNCC's and Muhammad Ali's refusal to fight in the war in Vietnam; Malcolm X's focus on human rights; the demand for Black land and separation; the concept of a progressive Black nationalism that reaches out to allies of all races; the Black Panther Party concept of a Black plebiscite; the Gary Indiana Black Political Convention slogan, "It's Nation Time"; and Martin Luther King's admonition that Black people in the U.S. must ally with the nations and peoples of the Third World.¹⁴

The common fundamental premise of these past movements and leaders is that Black people suffered, and, still suffer, an egregious, qualitative, and excruciating form of racism, national oppression, and super-exploitation inside the United States—which is reflected so vividly in New Orleans. As a result, they are entitled to some special forms of super-rights, such as a special status designation that would allow them to bring their collective grievances as a racially oppressed people to the United Nations. In surveying the all-Black scene in the Superdome, of Black people piled upon Black people, Dr. Robert Bullard observed, "Now how is it that New Orleans is 70% Black and 30% white but the Superdome was all Black? Where were all the white folks if this is supposed to be about 'the poor'? Of course, class is a factor, but in the United States, race trumps class if you want to understand how the system operates."¹⁵

The demands of the Community Labor United and the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project conclude with: "The Coalition is also appealing to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to investigate the conditions before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina." Only a nationally oppressed group inside a nation state, like Black people, have such grounds for appeal under international law. The Bush Administration, of course would reply that "citizens" of New Orleans have full rights and mechanisms for resolution of their problem under the U.S. constitution. In this context, the assertion by Black organizations of their independent identity and subsequent claims against the United States government, such as reparations or human rights hearings at the U.N., will shape the entire movement strategy about the future of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

2) State Unity of the Black Belt South: New Governmental Districts for Black Power

Radical politics requires radically new ideas. The Black Left during the 1930s, especially the Communist International represented by Harry Haywood in the U.S. Communist Party, developed a theoretical position that in addition to full equality throughout the United States,

Black people in the South were an “oppressed nation” with the right of self-determination in relation to the U.S., a view that DuBois also advanced, especially during his Black Reconstruction period. One of the transitional demands of this Black Nation theory was “the governmental unity of the Black Belt South.”¹⁶ This view also had considerable influence during the 1960s and resurfaced after massive Black opposition to the segregationist role the electoral college system played in both George W. Bush victories. This analysis and strategy proposed that, instead of being trapped inside both majority white states and inside the “winner take all” electoral college (which has led to the white population taking all), Black people, in their areas of concentrated majority, could occupy a unified set of Black majority states with one coherent Black governmental body (with a great deal of Electoral College votes), consisting of all the Black majority counties in the South, moving across state lines to create new governmental districts that would be Black majority and Black governed.

From the work of Marcus Garvey to Malcolm’s charge that Black people should take their national demands for land and self-determination to the United Nations to the Black Panther’s discussion of a plebiscite, the concept of a Black nation has had a great ideological impact on many leading thinkers, even if the actuality of achieving it was always very difficult to execute. While support for the concept has ebbed and flowed depending on the strength of the movement at any given time, it also has been a surprisingly “practical” and immediate concept in some shorter term and transitional demands, such as the fight for majority Black electoral districts (although most proposals have been overturned by the Supreme Court).

The New Orleans story raises the question: What forms of political power can Black people in the South exercise if they are trapped inside white majority states? What is the future of 20 million Black people in the South who, in state after state, are outvoted by racist white majorities and the electoral college system? Despite their massive total vote—for which generations risked and gave their lives—the Black vote is systematically diluted and sabotaged. As Bob Wing documented in his article, “White Power in the 2000 Election:”

“The electoral college negates the votes of almost half of all people of color. For example, 53% of all Blacks live in the Southern States, where this year (2000), as usual, they voted 90% Democratic. However, white Republicans out-voted them in every Southern state (and every border state except Maryland). As a result, every single Southern Electoral College vote was awarded to Bush. While, nationally, whites voted 54-42 for Bush, Southern whites, as usual, gave over 70% of their votes to him. They thus completely erased the massive Southern Black (and Latino and Native American) vote for Gore in that region.”¹⁷

How to rectify this grim situation? One hope is to change the minds of Southern white voters, a project that has been tried to no avail for hundreds of years and is becoming an even more remote possibility in the present. Other more promising ideas are for Black people to demand sovereignty and the right of self determination in their own areas of population majority and to find ways to leverage 20 million people on the

national political system. There have been serious discussions about the creation of new Black states with majority Black populations and reforms in the electoral college system to allow for proportional representation. For example, Harvard Law School Professor Lani Guinier has discussed the importance of Black majority electoral districts, though her nomination to the Justice Department was jettisoned by Bill Clinton when white racists in Congress labeled her the “quota queen.” Still, taking these arguments to their logical conclusion suggests redrawing racial boundaries in the South (and North) to create Black majority Congressional districts and Black states, to free Black people from mandatory “white majority rule.” At the very least, the demand to rebuild New Orleans as the Black city it was before the man-made hurricane could be an important step in this process.

3) Reparations: The Debt America Owes

In his book *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, Randall Robinson calls for comprehensive Reparations to the Black community.¹⁸ The former director of TransAfrica Forum, Robinson argues that the U.S. must account for the crimes of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade, the deaths of 25 million Africans en route, and the centuries of slavery and Jim Crow apartheid. He calls for massive social programs—far beyond the offer of “an apology and a check” to uplift Black people as a people. Central to Robinson’s brilliant book is the idea that Reparations is not a “one shot deal” or a “separate issue” but rather an integral part of reshaping the Civil Rights, antiracist, and Black Liberation movements. Such an analysis calls for a material assessment and remedy for a level of psychological, cultural, and material pain and suffering that is almost beyond comprehension, that lasted for centuries, and that exists to this day. Consequently, the remedies also must be massive, focused on the Black poor, and implemented for decades until the problem is solved.

At the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, the discussions of Reparations to the Nations of Africa, to Black people in the U.S., and to all of those in the African Diaspora were complex. And, as could be expected, the debates were pointed as well as comradely. But one point of at least momentary consensus was that the concept of Reparations for crimes against humanity would be best served as an integrated overview of demands already being made—for example, freeing all Black people from prison as a remedy for widespread racial discrimination in an explicitly racist criminal justice system, or demanding Jobs or Income Now for all Black people, or a massive government fund for Black people over a 50 year period that would include income support, housing, and land, including the famous 40 acres and a mule.¹⁹ In this context, it would be interesting to see groups in New Orleans integrate aspects of Reparations into a coherent set of demands to address the racism of the actual hurricane planning, relief, and rebuilding efforts. Could such Reparations demands take George Bush up on his epiphany that poverty is “rooted in generations of racial discrimination” (based on the obvious racism of 350,000 stranded and drowning Black people on every TV set in the world). Saladin Muhammad of Black Workers for Justice observed that

when we returned from the World Conference Against Racism, there was enthusiasm about a Reparations-centered series of antiracist demands on the U.S., but that momentum was obliterated by the events of September 11, 2001, less than a week after most of us in the U.S. returned from South Africa. The New Orleans and Gulf Coast movement has the chance to rebuild a significant Reparations component of the demands and to rescue the victories of WCAR.²⁰

Specifically, a Black united front in the Gulf Coast could call for specific federal aid to Black communities that would bypass the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Office of Homeland Security, and the Red Cross, and instead go directly to grassroots movements with specific social programs that warrant priority funding—such as programs to organize Black collective land, parks, hospitals, farmers cooperatives, rehab centers for released Black and all prisoners—conceptualized as part of the broader movement for Reparations.

A critical Reparations demand might be: land, collective and cooperatively owned by Black people, with government funding for a new generation of Black farmers. In 1910, nearly one million Black farmers in the U.S. owned a total of 15 million acres; today, there are fewer than 18,000 Black farmers, representing less than 1% of all farms and owning less than 1 million acres.²¹

For a century and a half, Black people have been driven off their land, driven into the cities with little or no income, and now dispersed throughout the U.S. The story of how the federal government, corporate agribusiness, and white vulture farmers conspired to steal and embezzle land from Black farmers, using horrific tactics such as beatings and murder, is almost too painful to contemplate let alone tell.

Congressman William Lacy Clay (D-MO) has observed:

“The wholesale theft of land from African Americans is the greatest unpunished crime in our nation’s sordid history of race relations. Land ownership was the ladder to respectability and prosperity in the Old South—the primary means to building economic security and passing wealth on to the next generation. So when Black families lost their land, they lost everything. Typically, Blacks were forced off their lands with phony charges of non-payment of taxes or through claims of counter-ownership by other private or government entities. In other cases, African Americans were forced off their lands with threats of violence or the outright murder of Black landowners.”²²

The movement should demand that the federal government, as part of the estimated \$100-\$200 billion allocated for a “rebuilding plan,” use its powers of eminent domain against large corporate agribusinesses to secure a substantial area of prize farm land to be given free to Black farmers willing to till it, and even more land for Black farmers willing to create large-scale agricultural co-ops. Because there is virtually no way today for small farmers to

compete with the ruthless “Wal-marts” of agribusiness (firms such as Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland), the federal government should provide guaranteed markets and guaranteed profits for Black farms. This could be achieved through government procurement contracts with Black farmers to provide food to government agencies, food stamp programs, and expanded income support programs for New Orleans and U.S. residents. This could guarantee commodity prices and cost plus contracts for Black farms instead of guaranteeing profits for Halliburton and Bechtel. It could also take place at the same time as lifting all agricultural subsidies for U.S. monopoly agribusinesses that dump subsidized farm products in Third World countries.

In addition, the demand for land needs to be developed to address the particular housing needs of Black residents who rent. But, Black demands for land need not be subject to prior property claims or proof of prior ownership by individuals, but rather, based on a collective demand of an oppressed people seeking redress and reparations.

4) The Right of Return and the Resettlement of Black Evacuees

The central tactical demand of the Black and progressive movements in New Orleans, the Gulf Coast, and throughout the United States must be the effective Right of Return of 350,000 Black residents of New Orleans and comparable numbers in every other Gulf Coast city. If the Black population of evacuees is not aided in their return, there can be no material base for Black power and no political base to challenge the racist institutions in New Orleans, the white majority and anti-Black Louisiana, or the white majority and anti-Black U.S. Congress and President. Areas of Black majority are critical to any possible reversal of policies of racism and national oppression: They must be fought for and defended as if all of our lives depend on it.

A few weeks after the hurricane, Curtis Muhammad of Community Labor United reported, “We have been going from shelter to shelter and we fear that the system is trying to scatter our people to the winds. Just yesterday I went to shelters where four days ago there had been 3,000 people and now there are 150 people. There are no records of where people are, where they have been sent.”²³ Without a plan to prioritize the return of Black people to New Orleans, relocation has taken the form of mass kidnapping and dispersal.

As Beverly Wright of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice observed, “We need to go beyond the ‘right of return’ to the ‘effective right of return.’ We need plane tickets, bus tickets, housing, and a job or at least government benefits waiting for us when we do return. We cannot allow the Bush Administration and even many Louisiana white Democrats to support the forced and conscious dispersal of Black New Orleans and Gulf Coast evacuees to ‘new homes’ in Houston, Boston, Los Angeles, and Utah that effectively cements their disenfranchisement.” Wright asserted, “They must, every one of them, return home!”²⁴

New Orleans has never been a large city. At its height, the population was about 600,000 people and by the 2000 Census, 484,000 people, of whom more than 325,000 are Black. Already the policy to evacuate the city and institute a state of massive dislocation—without coherent plans to return all residents after the flooding—creates the frightening possibility of systematic Black removal. It is not contradictory to criticize the Bush Administration that the evacuation of the vulnerable was too late and, also, criticize that the repatriation of the vulnerable is unreliable, undependable, and, worse, unlikely to happen.

A “worst case scenario” for Black New Orleans residents is already beginning to happen. The federal government is razing much of New Orleans. The engineering problems of a city below sea level will be addressed through a massive construction project, which is already a government bailout and pork barrel project for the corporate elite. The poorest Black sections are uninhabitable and will take years to rebuild, while the most affluent white residents already have basic services and will create the core of the new population. Bush claims that New Orleans will “rise again” bigger and better this time, but who will live in it, who will reap the rewards of the rebuilding process? Will it be those who suffered the pain of the hurricane?

When the rebuilding is finished, new and improved, many affluent whites will be attracted to move in at rents and home purchase prices much higher than what low-income people can afford. A detailed article in the *Los Angeles Times* about land speculation by wealthy buyers while CNN is still flashing picture after picture of Black youth missing, was titled “Speculators rushing in as the Water Recedes.” The article describes the crime of gentrification and land speculation in the most understated but still clear way:

“The land rush has long-term implications in a city where many of the poorest residents were flooded out [and 84% of all those classified as ‘poor’ are Black]. It raises the question of what sort of housing—if any, will be available to those without a six-figure salary. If New Orleans ends up a high-priced enclave, without a mix of cultures, races, and incomes, something vital may be lost. Ann Oliver, of the Urban Land Institute in Washington, replied, ‘There’s a public interest question here. You don’t have to abdicate the city to whoever shows up.’”²⁵

New white, affluent settlers will make demands for more police, gated communities, and just enough Black and Latino people to work in Wal-Mart and sweatshops, clean homes and hotel rooms—another white city with a low-wage Black and Latino working class. Beverly Wright commented on the rapidly changing demographics, “If an election was held today in New Orleans, less than a month after the flood, the entire city government would be white, because the majority of the survivors who can stay in New Orleans today are white, and the French Quarter is spotless, fixed up by the FEMA, ready for tourists. Meanwhile, Black residents are dispersed all over the country.”²⁶

This racist redevelopment plan will be challenged in a life and death fight, because it is in motion already. The Black and progressive forces in New Orleans will need national movement support for the Right of Return of the Black population—not to provide “cultural diversity” but to provide widespread forces and resources for the right of the Black community to resist another forced dispersal from its historic home.

One idea being discussed by groups in Louisiana is a nation-wide Documentation Project, in which progressive activists in Houston, Baton Rouge, Boston, and Los Angeles can work to document the forced dispersal of Black people from New Orleans. Such a project will attempt to serve groups in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama while recognizing that the documentation of individuals may counterpose the Right of Return for those who want to rebuild their lives in New Orleans with the right to privacy and protection of individual evacuees from government databases. This would create a basis for the concrete demand to resettle the people who exercise their Right of Return as close to New Orleans as possible, and to demand permanent benefits—housing, income, medical care, new jobs—and the reconstruction of New Orleans Black housing base. *The Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project is demanding that the federal government “provide funds for all displaced families to be reunited.” The fight for a Black Reconstruction will involve the guarantee that New Orleans will be rebuilt as a Black majority city.*

5) Katrina was an Environmental Injustice: Environmental Justice Must Shape the Reconstruction

“We are long past the point where global warming is considered a myth. We are seeing its effects all around us—especially in my hometown of New Orleans, Louisiana, which is expected to experience an increased incidence of flooding that could potentially destabilize its economy and endanger its populace. We must be realistic about long-term solutions to global warming [by] reducing carbon emissions for the future benefit of African Americans and all U.S. citizens²⁷.”

Rep. William Jefferson, (D-LA) 2002

“Category Five Hurricanes are a rare breed. Since records have been taken, less than five percent of all hurricanes have gone on to be Cat Five storms. However, in just the past two seasons, the Atlantic Basin has had two such storms, Isabel and Ivan...hurricanes at its maximum level of intensity and extreme destructive power—with sustained winds of more than 155 miles per hour.”²⁸

Hurricane News 2004

The catastrophe in New Orleans is man-made. There are at least three interrelated reasons to place the blame at the feet of U.S. imperialism.

First, global warming is a relatively recent, man-made disaster, the product of 50 years of the most intense escalation of the number of autos on the planet, an increase in high horsepower supercharged engines, and failure on the part of world governments, most specifically the U.S., to address the problem and take the radical, revolutionary steps to reverse it. Second, cities have developed in a way so that the most vulnerable, poor, indigenous, and populations of color are situated in the most dangerous areas, denied transportation, food, and the resources to survive or escape. Third, the system will not fight for the lives of poor Black people with the same urgency and decisiveness exhibited towards white, affluent communities facing similar threats. While many mainstream environmentalists argue that global warming effects everyone (which is certainly true), there is clearly a disproportionate harmful impact from climate change; in fact, with the assault on the social safety net, as well as on programs for regulating environmental impacts, this differential impact can easily be seen as profound and intentional.

The man-made, racist, and class-biased global warming policies of continued auto use and the Bush Administration's blatant refusal to acknowledge that the problem even exists has left not just the most vulnerable in New Orleans, but it has put the entire global society on a collision course with capitalist excess and disaster.

Why was Hurricane Katrina "the worst natural disaster in American history?" Why has it happened now? One of the key reflections of the destructive impacts of global warming, which we learned through our participation in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, is what the Association of Small Island States calls "extreme weather events." Rather than a futuristic out-of-nowhere global warming crisis, such as that portrayed in the well-meaning film "The Day After Tomorrow," the climate-change crisis already exists in many Third World countries, as is made clear in the documentary "Rising Waters: Global Warming and the Fate of the Pacific Islands"; nations and peoples that have had anticipated and controlled flooding for thousands of years are now experiencing supersized floods, hurricanes and tornadoes. Coastal nations and peoples who previously had effective mechanisms to protect themselves from terrible but predictable weather events are now overwhelmed because coral reefs acting as natural levees that have protected islands from flooding are destroyed by warmer ocean temperatures. Torrential winds, rains, and floods go beyond "normal" terror, and yet the system tries to pawn these off as "natural disasters." Indeed, they are man made disasters.

"Last month in the journal Nature, Kerry Emanuel, professor of atmospheric science at MIT and author of the new book *Divine Wind: The History and Science of Hurricanes*, examined the intensity of hurricanes in the North Atlantic and western Pacific oceans since the 1930s. The total amount of energy the hurricanes released—a figure calculated from wind speed and duration—"has increased over the last 50 years by somewhere between 50% and 80%," he said. "That is a whopping big increase. And it is very well correlated with tropical ocean temperatures."

"The month in the journal Science, Peter J. Webster of the Georgia Institute of Technology and three colleagues reached a similar conclusion with different data. These researchers found that the share of hurricanes around the world reaching the most intense categories (4 or 5 on the Saffir-Simpson scale) was almost twice as large in the past 15 years as from 1975 through 1989. Only one-fifth of hurricanes reached those peak intensities in the earlier period, the researchers found, compared with 35% since 1990.

"Just as important, the researchers concluded these changes had occurred 'in all of the ocean basins.'...Released last year by NOAA's Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory, the study concluded that 'greenhouse-gas-induced warming may lead to a gradually increasing risk in the occurrence of highly destructive Category 5 storms.'"²⁹

Enele Sopoaga, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of island nation of Tuvalu to the United Nations, explains that the Alliance of Small Island States, with forty-four member island countries in the Pacific, in the Caribbean, in the Indian Ocean regions, and some in the South and Western African continent, is particularly concerned that the U.S. contributes about 25% of the CO₂ greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere yet will not agree to the Kyoto Accords. "The Alliance addresses the vulnerability of small island countries against, particularly, climate change. Any slight increase in the level of the sea will seriously affect the livelihood of the people living on islands. The scientists have predicted that over the next fifty years, the level of the sea could rise up to 2.9 meters, which is quite, quite big for an island country which is hardly three meters above sea level. It means serious economic, environmental, of course, and social impacts."³⁰

Dr. Paul Epstein, from Harvard's School of Public Health, points out that Third World countries are vulnerable to global warming provoked epidemics because secure housing, medical services, nutritional and medical care are unavailable prior to the man-made disasters. This man-made death and destruction is exemplified by a Category Five Hurricane imposed on decaying cities with vulnerable populations.

Barry Commoner has pointed out that since World War II, the development of massive horsepower cars, the proliferation of diesel and fuel-based power, and the use of chemicals to solve problems that have been resolved without ecological intrusions for millions of years has qualitatively increased massive emissions that are greater than the entire history of the world combined. The auto, oil, and highway industries create the greenhouse gases that generate global warming and climate change, which in turn cause the extreme weather events, which in turn are imposed on vulnerable peoples exposed, unprotected, and vulnerable to illness, dislocation, homelessness, despondency, and death. Entire communities, always poor and of color, are destroyed. At the time of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the most deadly earthquake and flood in recorded history, several Third World commentators observed that we should not simply say the Tsunami killed between 170,000 to 250,000 people, but rather 170,000 to 150,000 "poor people." Except for some unfortunate tourists, it was the poorest of

the native populations who absorbed most of the blows—those who could not evacuate, those without resources, those already sick and hungry, those living in the most vulnerable areas—as throughout the world, it is the Black, Latino, Asian, and Indigenous peoples who are the human sacrifices to the god of profit.

Programmatically, an Environmental Justice perspective would propose that New Orleans be reconstructed as an “auto free city,” that is a city with many auto-free zones, auto-free days, auto-free rush hours, and other forms of restricted auto-use. The vision: a massive, federally-funded, clean-fuel bus and jitney, bicycle and pedestrian-centered free, public transportation system. In order to rebuild New Orleans in a way to reduce the danger of global warming and transit racism, this perspective would also demand dramatic reductions in emissions from Louisiana’s oil refineries in Cancer Alley, the 85 mile stretch on I 10 between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, as well as the grain elevators and steel plants, dramatically reduced highway construction except to repair roads that already exist,

A Black Reconstruction as part of a multiracial movement would go to the heart of the ecological crisis, and propose the unthinkable: cities in which people, in particular, low-income Black people, and not the auto, oil, highway, and chemical industries are prioritized

6) The Critical Role of International Allies: Take the Humanitarian Aid from Venezuela and Cuba, Take the Human Rights Case Against the United States to the United Nations

The Black community in New Orleans and throughout the Gulf Coast is up against an international alliance of capital, led by the U.S. ruling class. Historically, the search for allies among Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and antiracist whites has been given a major boost by an alliance with progressive forces in the Third World.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Fidel Castro offered to send 1,586 Cuban doctors and 36 tons of medical supplies. Although the U.S. government rejected aid from Cuba, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus responded with a critical press release on September 8, 2005 “Hispanic Caucus Urges Bush Administration to Accept Cuban Offer of Doctors for Hurricane Relief.”³¹

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez made a similar offer: “Venezuela could send aid workers with drinking water, food, and fuel to U.S. communities hit by the hurricane.” Chavez also offered discount gasoline to “poor Americans suffering from high oil prices and free eye surgery to Americans without access to health care.”³² While clearly in the spirit of international solidarity, this is a very courageous proposal. The United States and CIA think nothing of interfering in the internal affairs of other nations, including the “trial balloon” to assassinate Chavez put forth by Pat Robertson. Given the Bush Administration’s war on any progressive government in the world, the “me too” anti-communism of the Democrats, and the reactionary power of Miami’s *gusano* Cuban population, it is important that movement groups in New Orleans, the Gulf Coast, and throughout the U.S. take these offers seriously.

First, political and material support should not be refused, and, second, we should openly support the Cuban and Venezuelan governments and peoples and fight the Bush Administration's rejection of their much-needed aid.

During the 1960s, it was international pressure that saved the lives of many civil rights workers. Today, it is international pressure that will help shame the Bush Administration and the Democrats to respect Black demands.

W.E.B. DuBois, Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, SNCC, and Muhammad Ali, among many others, argued that Black people in America should ally with the peoples of the Third World. The idea is simple, but profound. Inside the United States, even the most powerful alliance of Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander communities, and a significant number of progressive, antiracist whites, cannot forge an electoral majority. But if we see the entire world as our arena of struggle and organizing, forces inside the United States can build alliances with the revolutionary and progressive peoples and nations of the Third World and, thereby, construct a "majority" movement internationally that is capable of countering the enormous military power and ruthlessness of U.S. imperialism. Thus, seeking international allies is critical to a successful strategy.

The United Nations is a central arena for building alliances. Black people in the United States suffer a national and racial oppression so egregious that it cannot be effectively stopped through processes that are under the jurisdiction of the U.S. This view, which has a long tradition, if a minority one, inside the Black community, asserts that a people so repeatedly wronged by a country must have the right of self-determination and the right to seek international redress of their grievances.

In 1951, W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson, two giants in U.S. history who were persecuted for their beliefs, brought a historic petition to the United Nations. Titled "We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People," the document charged that the policies of segregation, enforced poverty, mob and police abuse, degradation of culture, and continued subjugation of Black people with the full support of the U.S. government constituted a pattern of human rights abuse. And even though Roy Wilkins and others in the Black establishment fused their anti-communism and "patriotism" by red-baiting DuBois and Robeson, they could not prevent the charges from influencing world opinion and helping set the stage for later civil rights victories, as well as ongoing scrutiny of the U.S. for human rights violations.

In the 1960s, Malcolm X also focused on his theory of Black people as an oppressed nation with the right to land and self-determination. He rejected a theory of civil rights under the U.S. constitution as the master narrative for Black liberation. While he supported specific legal reforms under the mantle of civil rights, he felt the theoretical and analytical rubric was too limiting and ultimately self-defeating because of its dependence on the U.S. courts, capitalism, and the white majority. Instead, he advocated approaching the United Nations, calling on the international community in general, and Third World Nations in particular,

to require the U.S. to stop its racist policies towards Blacks in the U.S. or suffer sanctions. Today, there are voices in New Orleans and throughout the Black community urging dispersed evacuees to see themselves as part of a Black Diaspora movement that is seeking international support, and if necessary, calling for U.N. sanctions against the U.S. for human rights violations and criminal negligence against a nationally and racially constituted minority.

Saladin Muhammad of Black Workers for Justice in North Carolina argues that since the United States decided to reallocate massive resources for an unjust war in Iraq, de-funded FEMA, and refused \$250 million to the Army Corps of Engineers to improve the New Orleans levees, it, in essence, "decided" to let Black people in New Orleans die.

"U.S. imperialism has thus decided that it has the sole right to decide if the majority of African American and working class people and communities in the Gulf Coast Region have the human and political right to survive or not. This is clearly an international human rights question where the demand for self-determination must be applied as part of the resolution...asking the United Nations to conduct an investigation into the circumstances of the Katrina disaster to determine if the U.S. is guilty of human rights violations."³³

One tactical possibility would be to make an immediate alliance with the Association of Small Island States that is demanding that the United Nations take the most urgent actions on global warming and provide international relief to address the massive flooding of entire nations and peoples caused by the fossil fuel emissions of the advanced capitalist countries, especially the United States.

Another tactic would be to support Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez' serious proposal that the United Nations be moved out of the United States to a neutral site to set the conditions for a greater world democracy without the intimidating presence of the imperial bully.

7) No to the Police State! Yes to the Social Welfare State!

The TV shots of Black people in groups without food or water, with signs reading "Help me," and no assistance for days was bad enough. But when "help" finally arrived, it was in the form of police, national guards, and soldiers of the U.S. Army. "The arrival of the police state" is not what we need especially because the history of armed force against Black people is both bipartisan and ugly. Even as Black people were fighting to survive, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, a Democrat, announced the arrival of 300 "battle tested" Arkansas National Guard troops fresh from service in Iraq. Blanco warned, "They have M-16s that are locked and loaded. These troops know how to shoot to kill and I expect they will."³⁴ This effort to demonize and criminalize the Black community was reflected in the

initial hysteria in the national press about “looting,” even though the main thing Black people were doing was starving, demanding help, and dying.

The Bush Administration has used September 11 to further expand their police state plan. All disaster relief has been placed under the jurisdiction of the Office of Homeland Security. Consistent with that approach, rather than sending massive aid in the name of FEMA, President Bush considered sending federal troops into Louisiana by citing the “Insurrection Act,” which authorizes the federal government to unilaterally bring troops into a state despite the objections of the state government. The Democratic Governor clearly objected, and Bush rejected the option. Since that time, the emergency measures have been totally militarized, although nothing “military” was needed to rescue people and provide flood and humanitarian relief. The fact that the federal government was slow to activate its resources is criminally negligent, but that does not mean that next time we want a more rapid military occupation.

Disaster relief must be demilitarized. This will involve dismantling the Office of Homeland Security or, at the very least, excluding natural and man-made disasters from its jurisdiction. The Black Community and the Left could call for the reconstruction of a Civilian Conservation Corps and, as Bill Fletcher of TransAfrica suggests, the recreation of the Works Progress Administration program that worked so effectively during the Great Depression. In the immediate Gulf Coast context, it is critical to demand both an end to State violence and police abuse, as well as the creation of new civilian agencies on the spot:

Yes to the Social Welfare State! Yes to collective social policies that impact all Black people, all low-income people!

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the initial civil rights demands focused on “equal opportunity,” such as affirmative action and open housing laws. This led to major breakthroughs for Black people; they were then, at least in theory, able to afford better housing, gain access to better non-segregated schools, and have a shot at better paying jobs in major industries. But by the mid-1960s, Black radical thought had shifted to more collective and permanent solutions that went far beyond “equal opportunity” to oppose a class-driven capitalist system. In his growing emphasis on the Black poor, Dr. King (along with militant Black and left groups) shifted his key demands to collective relief for the Black poor and the poor of all races. Their demands included the government *creation* of jobs and a dramatic expansion of eligibility and benefits for Aid for Families with Dependent Children as compensation for centuries of slavery and Jim Crow. This led those at the grassroots to demand federally-funded Head Start preschool programs, a dramatic expansion of low-income schools, and public parks. In other words, they were advocating for a “social wage” where the government supplements the incomes of low-income people (and the entire society) by providing a full range of government services that support individuals, families, and communities. Demands for public and community control of the police furthered the “social welfare state, not the police state” politics of the Black Liberation Movement. Many working class and low-income white people express contempt for such social services, even though the majority of social service recipients have been white. These white people associate social services (and social-ism) with



Black people. The initial federal anti-poverty agency, the “Office of Economic Opportunity,” responded to some of those demands, and to the degree that they were implemented, Black income and conditions of life improved.

Many know the story of how Democratic big city mayors asked Congress to kill the “community action” components of the Poverty Program (frightened that grassroots organizing might make the “war on poverty” real by organizing the “maximum feasible participation of the poor” that the program initially promised). The story continued: later the Republicans and then Bill Clinton worked to kill the programs themselves. We all need to learn from this.

In New Orleans today, there is a need for collective demands that go beyond rebuilding to actually provide a network of social service programs; the old structures did not protect the city, nor its people, nor did they provide the social safety net needed before the storm. The Reconstruction that organizers seek today should address the comprehensive needs of a low-income Black community that is now dispersed. However, the \$61 billion the federal government has already allocated for “relief” will likely go to the corporate sector to rebuild the physical infrastructure of the city instead of also going toward rebuilding the lives of the Black middle class, working class, and urban poor.

A coherent and comprehensive five year social-service program should, at the least, include the following:

- *Jobs or income now.* An income support program is urgently needed. If 350,000 people received \$10,000 each, it would only cost \$3.5 billion per year, \$17.5 billion over five years. Direct stipends are the most cost effective way to bring funds to people, in turn, can also support Black and area businesses.
- *A newly built public housing system.* Because the massive high-rise public housing experiments of the 1970s were never developed with the resources that high-rise housing needs and, therefore, have been broadly criticized, the Right (and most liberals) have conveniently abandoned the concept of public housing altogether. The much vaunted “Section 8” private sector solution—through which low-income people get rent credits and private landlords reap the benefits while renters never get to own—can only be one element of the solution. If new landlords get massive government subsidies for brand new buildings, they will not want to rent to the poor, and especially the Black poor, whether it is subsidized or not. Low-rise, decentralized public housing units, including the dreaded (by many middle class white folks) *mixed income* housing developments, must be included in the plan. If the city has to be rebuilt, why not rebuild it right?
- *Increased social services.* Head Start programs, mental health services, and new public hospitals also create new public sector jobs at truly livable wages. The expanded social sector with government guaranteed high wages is a key component to a reconstruction effort.

- *Prevailing wages in all public projects.* It is mind-boggling that George Bush would dare to unilaterally remove the “prevailing wage” provisions of the Davis-Bacon Act. This at the same time while he is practically handing over “no bid, cost overrun” contracts to white collar criminals such as Bechtel, Fluor, and Halliburton. That means that no matter how much the companies charge to steal public funds, they are not even required to pay \$9 an hour, which is the typical “union wage.” Grassroots groups must demand that the Democrats force Republicans to abide by the prevailing wage provisions in all federal contracts in Louisiana and the Gulf Coast.
- *Post-evacuation disease prevention.* Curtis Muhammad explained that the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project is working to bring in technicians to generate clean and independent sources of electricity, deal with sewage problems, test the water and soil, provide medicine for people with chronic diseases, and perform epidemiological work to determine the lasting medical impacts of the disaster. Those who were unable to evacuate were exposed to water that was contaminated with feces, corpses, and industrial pollution. What are the immediate and long-term medical impacts of those exposures, and how should they be treated? A portion of the \$61 billion already allocated should go toward rebuilding a network of community clinics run by community residents.
- *Victims’ Fund.* One of the PHRF’s demands is to establish \$50 billion for a Victims Compensation fund. This allocation could provide the lion’s share of the social services demanded.

8) The Public Sector Must Lead, the Private Sector Must Follow Orders

Because the private sector’s main goal is to increase profits, it inherently works to pollute the environment, hire the lowest wage workers, lie, cheat, and steal on its financial statements, evict low-income people from their property, and cancel insurance policies to deny benefits. So-called “private” enterprise has generated slavery, sharecropping, peonage, unemployment, and world wars. The public sector, while also often corrupt and usually in the hands of capital, can, at least in theory, provide union wage jobs, unemployment benefits, public housing, public parks, and public mental health facilities. For example, the Social Security Administration is under attack by the Right because of the word “social” in its name, but in fact it is acknowledged as one of the most efficient, cost effective, and honest public agencies in the world. *The public sector can supplement low-wages with a “social wage,”* that is, socialized services to benefit the entire Black community as well as the entire multiracial, multinational working class. Private sector demands are still critical for a Reconstruction in New Orleans—from well-paying jobs to corporate clean-ups and reductions in pollution to affirmative action hiring at all levels for Black people, women, and all people of color. Such a Reconstruction could improve the arena for social services and public and private sector jobs

that would also benefit low-income whites, but as part of an overall plan that would place the interests and needs of the low-wage and unemployed Black workers at the center.

However, the fight over the direction of the \$61 billion in public funds must be lead by the Black working class, Black progressives, and the Black Left to generate a broad united front in support of their demands. The work of Community Labor United and the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project is critical in this arena, to provide the programmatic challenge to the corporate private and corporate public “make-over” of New Orleans that will further oppress and marginalize the Black poor and working class. If the Bush/Democratic Party master plan, still to be negotiated but already moving full-speed ahead, is not met with powerful resistance, corporate-oriented “community” and clergy forces tied to the Democratic Party and even the Republican Party will cut a deal, get their piece of the action, and once again abandon the fundamental needs of the community as a whole.

In Los Angeles, after the 1992 urban rebellion, L.A. mayor Tom Bradley and right-wing California Governor Pete Wilson colluded to reject massive public funds for the poor and to trumpet a “private sector” renaissance. They tapped Peter Ueberroth, the former head of the L.A. Olympic Committee and the Commissioner of Baseball, to lead a private sector “investment-based” fiasco called “Rebuild L.A.” Some groups in the Black community bought into the plan’s (empty) promise that massive private investment would lead to more jobs and higher income. In reality, the Black community experienced the deregulation of the corporations, the lowering of corporate taxes, the easing of already-inadequate environmental standards, and the creation of so-called “enterprise zones” (where employers could pay lower wages). This system of free-market chaos and deception was all held together with an increase in the police force whose brutality had generated the L.A. rebellion in the first place.

As a result, groups in L.A. fought among themselves for seats on the Rebuild L.A. board. Tremendous tensions between Black and Latino corporate-oriented community leaders led to fighting over funds and jobs that did not even exist. By the time Ueberroth exited Rebuild L.A. and snuck out of town under cover of night, the possibility of a public sector-driven movement was killed, and the private sector solution never existed let alone materialized. The Labor/Community Strategy Center formed the Urban Strategies Group, took on the federal Weed and Seed program in Los Angeles, and published a report with an alternative reconstruction plan for Los Angeles titled “Reconstructing Los Angeles—and U.S. Cities from the Bottom Up.”³⁵

It appears that this experience may be repeated in New Orleans. A facade of free enterprise zones and homesteading acts may only divert billions of public funds into private, corporate coffers as corporate welfare. At best, a few thousand community residents will benefit while structural aid to the 350,000 member Black community in New Orleans will be undermined.

Today, the New Orleans and Gulf Coast movements are presented with a critical opportunity to push back against 40 years of Republican and Democratic attacks on the social welfare state and to rebut the myth of private sector development. The “market” alone cannot provide

enough jobs with a living wage. If mass unemployment and low-wage labor characterized New Orleans *before* the disaster, what in the world will the “labor market” be like for under-skilled, historically-unemployed Black people after the catastrophe? Early reports are predicting unemployment rates of 25%—and for those fortunate enough to even get a private sector job, they face the suspension of prevailing wage requirements. The Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project (PHRF) represents more than 45 community organizations in the region and is “determined to oversee all aspects of the relief, recovery, and reconstruction of their homes, neighborhoods, and lives.” In a September 18, 2005 press advisory, PHRF called on the government to:

- Provide funds for all displaced families to be united.
- Allocate \$50 billion for reconstruction to the victims of the hurricane in terms of a Victims Compensation Fund.
- Accept representation on all boards that are making decisions on spending public dollars for relief and reconstruction.
- Place displaced workers and residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in public works jobs, offering union wages.
- Publicly account for and show the entire reconstruction process.³⁶

The renewed focus on the public welfare obligations of government and the rejection of private sector solutions leading the way will be essential to pressure the Democratic Party. The Party’s own Blue Dog group, a coalition of conservative-to-reactionary Democrats, is allying with Republicans to isolate what is left of progressive Democrats. Just as in Venezuela, where Hugo Chavez now talks about “land reform” after decades of “neoliberal” intellectuals trying to discredit it, the Gulf Coast movement has the opportunity to make counterhegemonic ideological and material demands that change the terms of the debate. Right-wing, “private sector” solutions are not simply a ghost of the past; but they are a real danger for the future of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. For example, the Cato Institute, a right-wing libertarian think tank, has appeared on CNBC’s “Market Watch” with proposals that include:

- Cap the aid to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.
- Privatize the port of New Orleans and even the highways.
- Challenge Louisiana’s and Mississippi’s “high tax rates” and lower tax rates to “attract private capital.”

Bush and the Democrats must be pressured to reverse their corporate welfare policies, such as the cuts in taxes on capital gains, corporate profits, and inheritance taxes; repeal the reduction and phasing out of the inheritance tax; raise the taxable levels of the highest 20% of the population; stop any cuts in social security benefits or eligibility; cut the \$400 million military budget by 10% a year (\$40 billion available just next year alone); and immediately withdraw from the illegal and imperial occupation of Iraq, freeing up hundreds of billions of dollars, and more importantly, freeing the Iraqi people.

Instead, Bush is continuing benefits to the wealthy, such as cuts in the inheritance tax, continuing the war in Iraq, continuing deficit financing, and now, under pressure from conservatives in his party, looking for "offsets" in the budget by cutting social service programs that are already on life support. The battle between the public sector and the private sector—and the battle within the public sector between social services and the police state—will shape not just the future of New Orleans but the future for all of us.

9) The plight of the urban poor, prisoners, and homeless people must be highlighted. We can't allow the government to pit one group of oppressed people against another, or even one group of Black People against another

Woodrow Coleman of the Bus Riders Union in Los Angeles recently observed, "Of course, New Orleans is the priority, but we can't forget about all the homeless and poor people who were on the streets in every city in the country before hurricane Katrina." New Orleans can use its momentary moral authority to spark a more fundamental debate about the intersection of race and poverty, as well as the growing cruelty of U.S. domestic policy.

The "prison capital" of the U.S., Louisiana has the largest prison population in the nation with 173,000 people in the state prisons. There are 5,100 prisoners in the maximum-security Angola Prison, which is located 60 miles northeast of Baton Rouge (named for the incarceration of so many former slaves who were originally from the African nation of Angola). This is also the largest prison in the United States (and among the most notoriously brutal). It is estimated that 85% of the prisoners in Angola Prison will die there. Seventy-five percent of the prisoners are Black, even though Blacks comprise only 32% of Louisiana's total population. Although Louisiana's population is only about 4.5 million, it has more prisoners than the reactionary state of California, which has 160,000 prisoners and a population of 35 million people. The United States is the world's largest jailer, and Louisiana is the largest jailer in the U.S. Many Black prisoners, after being incarcerated three to seven years, are released with just \$10, no place to stay, and no job. They are disenfranchised, not allowed to vote because they are designated as ex-felons.³⁷

In Louisiana, the care for the "victims" of Katrina did not extend to the prisoners who are on the chain gangs at Angola Prison, those on death row, those youth incarcerated for the most minor, petty, and punitive criminal laws (e.g. the "war on drugs") that are causing an

epidemic of imprisonment in the Black community. The extraordinary demands to meet the New Orleans crisis should include releasing most of the prisoners in Louisiana and a national campaign to care for the urban and rural poor in every major city in the country.

"Prisoners rights" in the midst of the storm

Human Rights Watch, in conjunction with Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC), has unearthed another of the attendant horrors of the Katrina disaster—the abandonment, near drownings, possible drownings, and 517 unaccounted for inmates from Orleans Parish prison compound.

"As Hurricane Katrina began pounding New Orleans, the sheriff's department abandoned hundreds of inmates imprisoned in the city's jail, Human Rights Watch said today. Inmates in Templeman III, one of several buildings in the Orleans Parish Prison compound, reported that as of Monday, August 29, there were no correctional officers in the building, which held more than 600 inmates. These inmates, including some who were locked in ground-floor cells, were not evacuated until Thursday, September 1, four days after flood waters in the jail reached chest level. 'They left us there to die,' said Dan Bright, an Orleans Parish prisoner...Many of the men held in jail had been arrested for offenses like criminal trespassing, public drunkenness, or disorderly conduct."³⁸

The dilemma of building public support for the plight of abandoned and possibly-drowned prisoners requires challenging the racism and public punitive posture that is the bedrock of the prison-industrial complex and the mass hysteria against prisoners. The "exposé" that prisoners were abandoned must compete with the outrage of those abandoned at the Superdome and those who are dispersed with no funds or jobs. The concept of 519 prisoners unaccounted for will generate at least as much worry about a "mass jailbreak" as it will about the plight of human beings, most of them "caught up" in a system of mass incarceration of the poor and the Black. This excellent investigative and organizing work by Human Rights Watch has led to the firing of the New Orleans police superintendent "because of the department's horrific performance in the Katrina disaster." The *New York Times* editorial section called on the city to "scrutinize correction officials and the officers who work for them."

This is the challenge of what is called "counterhegemonic organizing." You can't win a demand to punish those who brutalized and abandoned the prisoners, or an even more radical demand, such as freeing virtually all of those young men who should not have been in prison in the first place, if you can't win the argument that the Black, male, poor are human beings in the first place. This organizing challenge includes winning this argument inside the Black and Latino communities where Christian evangelism, "tough love," and a loss of hope of the redeeming possibilities of society are now the dominant and reactionary ideology. Still, the

gutsy work of Human Rights Watch and FFLIC in putting this issue in society's face, whether people want to hear it or not, and making demands on the prison system for the humane treatment of prisoners and the removal from positions of authority of incompetents, sadists, and racists are critical first steps.

The Gulf Coast Reconstruction movement must not only free the prisoners but include them among those who deserve a new opportunity in the "land of the thief and the home of the slave."³⁹

10) Immigrant Rights and Native Rights Are Everybody's Fight

The growing Latino population in the South is an important new ally for the Black community. A Black/Latino alliance is critical to challenging rightward shifts by both the Democrats and the Republicans.

On the national level, the Congressional Black Caucus' sponsorship and support of immigrant rights legislation is an encouraging development. Similarly, Bill Fletcher of TransAfrica Forum has appealed to Black activists and the Left to build a Black/Latino alliance with the challenge, "How can we forget about the tragedy of how Katrina has impacted undocumented workers as we fight to protect and defend the Black community?"

As relief efforts develop, the movement will have to act swiftly to protect the rights of undocumented people and their claims on the system—all this while the Homeland Security crowd clamors to lock them up, label them "terrorists," and ultimately deport them. The Black community, under siege itself and increasingly declared "illegal" in much of its daily life, has historically provided moral leadership for the entire progressive movement. Now, it must continue that tradition by declaring no person illegal, publicly defending immigrant rights, and calling for a ban on citizenship requirements for aid and reconstruction. Such a move would offer immediate help to the small but growing Latino community in the Gulf Coast while mounting a multiracial grassroots challenge to the two-party system.

Attacks on immigrants seeking disaster aid

Another man-made disaster is the Office of Homeland Security's pledge to arrest and deport any undocumented immigrants "caught" seeking food stamps, emergency rations, or evacuation from the city. As a result, Senators Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Barack Obama (D-IL.) have urged Department of Human Services Michael Chertoff to issue a statement reassuring the 40,000 Mexican immigrants, 10,000 Salvadoreans, 10,000 Brazilians, and 140,000 immigrants from Honduras who are victims of this disaster that they can come forward without fear of deportation. At least initially, their request was denied.

The Gulf Coast movement can demand firm commitments from the Bush Administration to:

- Provide Spanish-speaking relief workers, presently in short supply.
- Enact a “no deportation, no punishment, no harassment” pledge from all OHS, FEMA, and other relief staff so that all evacuees and victims, regardless of citizenship, are eligible for benefits including employment. While this would rightly help undocumented Latino immigrants, it will also help the tens of thousands of undocumented Black evacuees.
- Accept the offers of aid and services from Mexico, Honduras, Venezuela, El Salvador, and Cuba.

Developing concrete enforceable demands for the hiring of Blacks in all government contracts, including construction contracts, without exacerbating economic competition between Blacks and immigrant Latinos for construction jobs in the “rebuilding process.”

We are living at a time of great unrest and profound changes in the demographics of virtually every urban center in the U.S. Specifically, the growing Latino immigrant population is in part the product of U.S. government action. This action has included the “Monroe Doctrine,” which the U.S. has used to abuse and exploit Latin countries since the “white man’s revolution of 1776,” the theft and annexation of Northern Mexico in 1848, the continued wars of aggression and conquest in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Guyana, Panama, El Salvador, and virtually every Central and South American nation seeking independence and self-determination, extending to the current overt threat to assassinate and overthrow Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez.

In 1998, Hurricane Mitch had such a devastating impact on Honduras that more than 140,000 Hondurans emmigrated to Louisiana alone, now constituting the largest Latino subgroup there. Progressive Black leadership can embrace the growing Latino population as the new terrain of urban development, reach out to the immigrants community, offer aid, and make alliances before Latino immigrants are placed into a defacto alliance with white employers against Black workers.

Job competition is a very real problem because underlying the imperative to rebuild is the fundamental urgent need for the New Orleans port to operate. The port of South Louisiana is the largest in the United States in terms of tonnage moved. Much of the bulk of basic agricultural and industrial commodities of the United States moves down the Mississippi River to the ports at New Orleans. Thus, the decision by the Bush Administration to offer more than \$50 billion in construction contracts is just the beginning. While simultaneously suspending the Davis-Bacon “prevailing wage” provisions, the administration’s economic commitment encourages construction firms to recruit large numbers of undocumented workers, many of whom are from Mexico.

Author Gregory Rodriguez recently wrote an article in the *L.A. Times* with the provocative title, “La Nueva Orleans: Latino immigrants, many of them here illegally, will rebuild the Gulf Coast—and stay there.”⁴⁰ Many undocumented Latino workers, brought from Houston to New Orleans, have already been put to work on construction projects and housed in primitive trailer parks with no benefits and no access to the government support—a well-paid but captive labor force under the power and “protectionz” of white contractors.

Conversely, “one recent poll of New Orleans evacuees living in Houston shelters found that fewer than half intend to return home.”⁴¹ In an interview with Tim Russert on “Meet the Press,” President Clinton projected, obliquely but clearly, that many Black people will not get back to New Orleans, a position now being popularized by media pundits.

“New Orleans, I think, will be repopulated at about the level that it was before the tsunami—I mean, before the hurricane, but it’ll be different people. Not all the people that left will come back.”⁴²

How these demographic shifts will take shape remains to be seen and depends largely on progressive Black leadership making the demands that will lead to the rebuilding of New Orleans as a multiracial predominantly Black city.

After the urban rebellions in Los Angeles in 1992, we saw ugly confrontations between bourgeois Black and Latino leaders, in which, for example, angry Black groups literally marched on construction sites employing Latino immigrants and physically drove them off the property. This was counter-organized by self-proclaimed Latino “spokespeople” who were anti-Black in their orientation, while disengaged white liberals watched from the sidelines. In the meantime, nothing was done to ensure Black jobs. Despite the limits of Antonio Villaraigosa’s politics and mayoral race in Los Angeles in 2005, he is the first candidate in L.A. history (and unfortunately, not Tom Bradley) who advocated a conscious Latino/Black alliance. This important breakthrough occurred more than two decades after former Chicago Mayor Harold Washington successfully pioneered the model of a Black/Latino alliance. Similarly, instead of wishing for the issue to disappear, there is a need for Black diplomats and coalition-builders in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast to grab this potential progressive alliance by the horns to reject all forms of anti-Mexican sentiment and anti-immigrant ideology, and to build a powerful coalition to confront the white, corporate power structure. Such an alliance can resist any appeals to “nativism” and xenophobia. This is a difficult, but winning strategy, based on respect for human rights and Black self-determination.

Native American Tribes: Forgotten and Abandoned

Native American tribes that stretch across the Gulf States of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi that faced the wrath of Hurricane Katrina have become Katrina's forgotten victims.

"What we are hearing is there has been no contact or minimum contact with most of the tribes, said Robert Holden, National Congress of American Indians, who estimates there are several thousand Native Americans living in the hurricane's path...There are at least six federally recognized tribes located in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. They include the Poarch Band Creek in Alabama, Coshatta India Tribe, Jena Band of Choctaw, and Tunicia-Biloxi Tribe in Louisiana, and the Chitimacha Tribe and the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi."⁴³

In a tribal area near Chalmette, Louisiana, nine miles east of New Orleans, people were using the local high school as a morgue. While they are in proximity to New Orleans, they didn't hear from anyone for five or six days.

The New Orleans tragedy offers an opportunity to construct a powerful multiracial alliance with leadership from a Black united front that reaches out to immigrants, Mexicans, Hondurans, Salvadoreans, and Indigenous peoples. This alliance can be strengthened by recruiting antiracist whites who can play a critical role in splitting the "white bloc," to prevent a unified white supremacist backlash. Such an antiracist united front can place the voices of the most oppressed and disenfranchised, and their extraordinary needs and rights, squarely in the face of the system.

Today, in the model of Martin Luther King's "Poor people's march," the Black community and, in particular the Black working class, has the opportunity to be seen as the fighter for all oppressed people, in a way that increases its political influence while dramatically reducing the power and influence of the Republicans and Dixiecrats.

11) U.S. Out of Iraq—Bring the War Home!

It is common for progressives to criticize foreign wars for their diversion of funds—such as the "fact" that the U.S. diverted \$71 million from disaster relief funding for New Orleans at the same time as squandering more than \$200 billion in the war in Iraq. In a letter to Dennis Hastert, the Republican Speaker of the House, Los Angeles Congresswoman Diane Watson was sharply critical of the government's response to Hurricane Katrina. She called for "aggressive federal assistance" and also demanded that the federal government "undertake a thorough reexamination of our nation's homeland security priorities as well as our continuing involvement in Iraq, which continues to be a major drain on the national budget."

But the war must be fought on a more frontal moral and political level. The invasion of Iraq is a brutal use of U.S. military and political power in the world. It is built on a foundation of lies: the non-existent Weapons of Mass Destruction; a fraudulent concern about Saddam's made-in-the-U.S.A. dictatorship when the U.S. sponsors the worst torturers and murders in the world; and the bold-faced lie that Iraq intended to attack the United States. Recent figures indicate more than 1,900 U.S. soldiers were killed and 14,000 wounded and that 10% of all soldiers are seeking psychiatric relief, as working class Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, Indigenous, and white kids are sent to kill and be killed in an unjust war. What of the Iraqi people upon whom this war is being inflicted? One website estimates 30,000 deaths, while another as high as 100,000. The invasion of a nation that had no intentions of any aggressive action against the United States, Bush's doctrine of "preemptive," and the wholesale murder of unarmed, non-combatant civilians are all violations of international law and any minimum standards of human decency. They are war crimes in the classic and legal sense and must be challenged on those terms.

During the height of the Civil Rights Movement, the demand "U.S. out of Vietnam" was a key civil rights and human rights issue. It was virtually impossible to talk about the racism in U.S. cities without talking about the racism of the war, impossible to decry police brutality at home without challenging U.S. brutality and war crimes in Vietnam. The white antiwar student movement played a critical role in initiating many antiwar marches and helping to build a multiracial antiwar movement. They also played a critical strategic role in turning the elite universities upside down—a serious blow to the system's long-term functioning. But the leadership of Black people—the entrance into the movement of Bob Moses of SNCC and the entire SNCC "Hell No We Won't Go" movement, Muhammad Ali's statement that "No Vietcong Ever Called Me a N----r," Martin Luther King's gut wrenching confession of his own hesitancy to call out the brutality against the Vietnamese people, and Eartha Kitt's open "insult" of first lady "Lady Bird Johnson" over the war—brought even greater international isolation and opprobrium upon the United States government, gave encouragement to the Vietnamese people, and gave the Black Liberation Movement tremendous moral authority with its own people, the U.S. people, and internationally.

Similarly, the New Orleans crisis cannot be separated from the Iraqi crisis of U.S. brutality. Let's call it what it is: U.S. imperialism is the cause of suffering for oppressed peoples and nations at home and abroad.

Recent CNN polls have reported "fewer than half of Americans believe the U.S. will win the war in Iraq, and 55 percent of those surveyed said it should speed up withdrawal plans and cut spending on the conflict to pay for rebuilding the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina."⁴⁴ The moral, political, and economic connections are clear. It would be a major breakthrough in challenging the moral legitimacy of the Bush Administration if all demands for the Black and low-income communities of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast were punctuated by "We demand the United States government immediately withdraw all troops from Iraq and allow the Iraqi people to plan for and, if necessary, fight about their own future under the principle of self-determination."

Conclusion: Counterhegemonic and Long-term Movement Building and Demand Development.

In 1989, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall, there was a widespread perception that the movement of the world Left had come to an end. Many bought into Margaret Thatcher's "there is no alternative" line. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, many progressive people felt, with good reason, that this would usher in a decades-long, seemingly "for-the-rest-of-our-lives" right-wing take-over, giving George Bush and his thugs a lifetime franchise to impose the military state at home and internationally.

Fortunately, history moves through a process of contradictions, and what seemed permanent and immutable yesterday may appear vulnerable and transitory today. As he fidgets in the national spotlight, George Bush's cultivation of the Black and Latino electorate is unraveling. Bush carefully crafted appeals to Black ministers and Latino conservatives led by the arch-right wing Christian evangelicals and Cuban émigrés. His defunding of social service programs, and his mean-spirited and racist "fiscal conservatism" are blowing up in his face. Playing the September 11 card is finally growing old, and U.S. isolation in Iraq is expanding the antiwar movement in the U.S. to even include Republican elected officials and voters. Bush is forced to allocate federal money to fund flood damage and repairs to New Orleans, creating the dreaded deficits he would never have incurred to provide social services for low-income Black and Latino communities. Meanwhile, global warming refuses to debate him, and instead, mocks his Neanderthal fundamentalist anti-science by sending hurricane after hurricane to pummel the U.S. coastline.

The fiscal crisis of the state is profound, not because there are not enough wealthy people and corporations to tax, but because the U.S. government refuses to tax them. The crisis exists, not because there are no funds for the poor and the unemployed, but because the U.S. government refuses to cut the military and highway budget to fund them. National scrutiny of the Gulf Coast situation is pushing the public debate about the federal government's responsibilities to the left, and 25 years of successful demagoguery by Reagan, Bush Sr. and Jr. to convince Americans to get "big government (code for social welfare state) off our backs" has not prevented this. However, it is far too early to celebrate, as the Bush Administration has many more weapons in its arsenal. And the multiracial Left is still very weak, disorganized, underfunded, and divided.

Yet, this crisis also offers an opportunity for the Left to heal and repair old divisions and increase its capacity. There is an opportunity for people to find the best in themselves and their own organizations and to find a regional, national, and international soapbox for our views. As Malcolm Suber of Community Labor United pointed out, "we have to fight our way into those arenas." It may be that in the first months, while the movement is still getting clarity on its objectives and forms of organization, Bush, conservative Democrats, and the corporate vulture class of Fluor, Bechtel, Brown and Root, and Halliburton will score the biggest victories for the forces of evil. But the fight is long, and at each stage, the establishment will make major mistakes that will create major opportunities for

counterhegemonic demands to challenge the ideological domination (hegemony) of the system and allow the movement to go on the offensive.

The ideas in this Letter, which are drawn from the Gulf Coast movement, from the experience of the Strategy Center in Los Angeles, and from the rich lessons of Left history in general and Black Left history in particular, are offered to give love, support, and solidarity to those on the front lines in the Gulf Coast as well as to help encourage national and international support for the life and death struggle of Black people in the South.

Movement Aid to Movement Groups

Strategic and tactical discussion is a critical component of solidarity, and ideas can be a material force in history. But at this point in history, direct material and financial aid to the groups on the ground in the Gulf Coast is also critical.

The Bush Administration and Congress have already allocated \$61 Billion in "rebuild aid" with a promise of much more to come. The Red Cross and many other organizations have also received billions of dollars in contributions.

But, who will ask where those funds are going and to whom? Who will look out for the needs and interests of the hundreds of thousands of low-income and middle-class Blacks, the immigrant Latinos, the Native tribes and peoples, and the progressive poor whites who are willing to live in a world in which they are not the majority or the priority? Who will defend the interests of the Black people who can trace their roots in New Orleans to the days of slavery or the early post-slavery period, people who have sharecropped and farmed and been driven off their land; people who never got their 40 acres and a mule but instead got the lash of the overseer and the wrath of the Klan and still held on for dear life, but now are driven out of their home and off their historic homelands? Who will offer a countervoice and counterweight to the corporate looters, the Bush Administration, and much of the Democratic Congressional leaders who follow the imperatives of U.S. imperialism?

We in the various progressive movements must find ways of giving the most generous and impressive aid to movement groups in the Gulf Coast. *Movement Aid must substantial.* We should each see ourselves as major donors to this cause. One of the clearest actions we can take is to give significant Movement Aid to groups in the Gulf Coast states that are rooted in Black low-income communities, fighting to have their voices and their demands heard by the power structure.⁴⁵

Throughout this Letter, the work of the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project has been highlighted because it has brought together 49 groups in the Gulf Coast to generate a coherent counter-offensive to the corporate and racist rebuilding plan, and, at least in the first round of this battle, it has provided an effective counter-voice to the system. (The Relief Fund can receive donations through the Vanguard Foundation, 383 Rhode Island Street, Suite 301, San Francisco, CA 94103.) Project South in Georgia,⁴⁶ the Liberty Hill Foundation in Los Angeles,⁴⁷ and several other organizations have compiled lists of groups doing important

work in the Gulf Coast. We urge people to give to several different groups, including those with whom you have a working relationship and those you know the best. But again, let's not get into fights about money. When in doubt, give to more groups, and give more money. Let's use our influence with foundations to encourage the continued funding of groups in the South and Southwest, in the most oppressed and vulnerable populations, to create the capacity and conditions so we can all fight to win in these times of great peril and great opportunity.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to many friends and comrades whose ideas and insights have guided this project and whose views I have tried to respectfully reflect in the discussion: Curtis Muhammad from Community Labor United; Xochitl Bervera from Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children; Dr. Beverly Wright from the Deep South Environmental Justice Center; Glen Ford from the Black Commentator; Robert Bullard of Clark Atlanta University; Bill Fletcher from TransAfrica Forum; Saladin Muhammad from Black Workers for Justice; and my colleagues at the Labor/Community Strategy Center: Damon Azali, Barbara Lott Holland, Francisca Porchas, Woodrow Coleman, Manuel Criollo, and Tammy Bang Luu.. Special thanks to Lian Hurst Mann who did major work on the conceptualization, editing, and implementation of this paper; to Layla Welborn for editorial assistance, and to Palak Shah, who invested editorial and research energy from start to finish.

Notes

¹ Urban Strategies Group, *Reconstructing Los Angeles, and U.S. Cities, from the Bottom Up*, Labor/Community Strategy Center, 1993. Available at www.thestrategycenter.org.

² Program Demand Group, *Towards a Program of Resistance: We Make These Demands of U.S. Imperialism*, Lian Hurst Mann, editor, 2003, Available at www.thestrategycenter.org and www.ahoranow.org.

³ W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1962), 30.

⁴ Ibid. 149

⁵ Curtis Muhammad, Interview with Eric Mann and Damon Azali, *Voices from the Front Lines*, KPFK 90.7 FM, Los Angeles, September 12, 2005.

⁶ In 1967, I was living in the Black community (South Ward) in Newark, New Jersey during the urban rebellion. From my apartment, surrounded by national guard troops that killed 23 people and injured 725, I wrote an article "Newark—It was like a happening"" to a predominantly white audience, trying to explain to even white liberals why Black people would rebel and why they should support such urban rebellions.

⁷ As researcher Palak Shah explained, "There is wide variance in how many rebellions occurred during the 1960s, mostly because researchers have focused on cities with large Black populations, newspaper reports only, and/or excluded uprisings in schools and smaller cities. A study led by sociology professor Daniel Meyers that analyzed this bias located 1357 "riot" events. He claims that even the most complete studies contain only 752 events and this is over an 8 year period (1964-1971). According to his tabulation, 458 cities experienced at least one rebellion from 1967-1969. Dr. Daniel Meyers, "Racial Riots in the United States, 1967-1972" University of Notre Dame., <http://www.nd.edu/~dmyers/team/frp.html>

A New York Times article stated, "From 1964 to 1971, there were more than 750 riots, killing 228 people and injuring 12,741 others. After more than 15,000 separate incidents of arson, many black urban neighborhoods were in ruins." Virginia Postrel, "The Consequences of the 1960's Race Riots Come Into View," The New York Times, December 20, 2004

⁸Black Panther Party Platform and Program, African American Historical Documents. Available at www.africanamericans.com/BlackPantherPartyPlatform.htm

⁹Willie Horton was a Black prisoner, incarcerated in Concord State Prison for first degree murder, who was released under a week-end furlough program in 1986, under a program established by the Massachusetts legislature and supported by then Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. Horton never came back to prison, and while out on the streets, he viciously stabbed a man and raped his wife. During the 1988 presidential election, George Bush ran pictures of Horton and charging "liberal" Dukakis with allowing Black men to roam the streets committing crimes. Bush's campaign manager, Lee Atwater (a clone of Karl Rove, bragged that "before this election is over, Willie Horton will become a household name." It is widely agreed that the "Horton" incident scared the hell out of white voters and was a major factor in Dukakis' defeat and Bush's election.

¹⁰Third World Traveler, Prison Watch, www.thirdworldtraveler.com/prison_system.html

¹¹Terrence Hunt and Nedra Pickler, "Bush: New Orleans 'will rise again,'" *Chicago Tribune*, September 15, 2005

¹²Jesse Jackson, "Hurricane Looting Not Over Yet," *Chicago Sun Times*, September 13, 2005.

¹³"Dean: U.S. must face 'ugly truth' about Katrina," CNN.com, September 8, 2005

¹⁴The sources for most of these references can be found in *Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader*, Clayborne Carson editor (New York: Penguin Books, 1991)

¹⁵Dr. Robert Bullard, Telephone interview with the author, September 8, 2005.

¹⁶Communist International, Resolutions on the Afro-American National Question, 1928 and 1930.

¹⁷Bob Wing, "White Power in Election 2000," *Colorlines Magazine*, Spring 2001. Available at www.arc.org

¹⁸Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Black*, (New York: Dutton, 2000).

¹⁹See Eric Mann, *Dispatches from Durban: Firsthand Commentaries on the World Conference Against Racism and Post September 11 Movement Strategies* (Los Angeles: Front Lines Press, 2002. Available at www.frontlinespress.org

²⁰Saladin Muhammad, conversation with the author, September 26, 2005. See Eric Mann, *Dispatches from Durban*.

²¹A beautiful, if heartbreaking film that documents these crimes against Black farmers is Homecoming: The Story of African American Farmers, available at www.pbs.org. The figures are from the PBS companion website to the film. Also see Anuradha Mittal and Joan Powell, "The Last Plantation Backgrounder," Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy, Winter 2000.

²²Statement of Congressman William Lacy Clay (D-Mo) On Black Land Loss, February 7, 2002, www.house.gov/clay/pr020207.htm

²³Curtis Muhammad, interview on *Voices from the Front Lines*, Eric Mann and Damon Azali co-hosts, KPFK Pacifica Radio, 90.7 FM, www.kpfk.org September 12, 2005. Readers can download the show, which featured additional guests Glen Ford of the *Black Commentator*, and Xochitl Bervera of Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children, at the Labor/Community Strategy Center's website, www.strategycenter.org, look for the Voices from the Front Lines link.

²⁴Beverly Wright, Voices from the Frontlines, KPFK 90.7 FM, interview with Eric Mann and Damon Azali, September 16, 2005.

²⁵David Streitfeld, "Speculators Rushing in as the Water Recedes", Los Angeles Times.com, " September 15, 2005

²⁶Beverly Wright, interview with the author, September 18, 2005

²⁷Statement of Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and Redefining Progress, on Global Warming and the Impacts on the African American Community, thanks to Ansje Miller of RP for her help.

²⁸Hurricane News, www.hurricainville.com/catfiveintensity

²⁹Ronald Brownstein, "Hard Choices Blow in the Winds of Katrina, and Now Rita," *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 2005, A10.

³⁰Transcript of interview with Enele Sopoaga, "Island Nation of Tuvalu Threatened By Rising Waters Caused By Global Warming," Tuesday, December 28th, 2004 on the Democracy Now Pacifica radio.

³¹Statement of Congressional Hispanic Caucus, "Hispanic Caucus Urges Bush Administration to Accept Cuban Offer of Doctors for Hurricane Relief" September 8, 2005. All 21 Members of the Caucus endorsed the statement.

³² "Venezuela Offers Fuel, Food, to Hurricane Hit-US," *Agence France Presse*; August 29, 2005.

³³ Saladin Muhammad, "Hurricane Katrina: The Black Nation's 9/11!" September 5, 2005.

³⁴ "LA Governor Warns Troops Will 'Shoot and Kill,'" Reuters News Service, September 1, 2005, Yahoo! News.

³⁵ See Strategy Center Publications, "A Call to Reject the Federal Weed and Seed Program" and "Reconstructing Los Angeles—and U.S. Cities—from the Bottom Up" available from www.thestrategycenter.org. Note that back in 1992 we countered "Rebuild L.A." with "Reconstructing LA" carrying out the political line advocated in this paper.

³⁶ Peoples' Hurricane Relief Fund and Community Labor United, Media Advisory, "Peoples Hurricane and Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project Expands," September 19, 2005.

³⁷ Uriah J. Fields, "Katrina and Race" www.authorsden.com, September 06, 2005.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch, press release, "New Orleans: Prisoners Abandoned to Floodwaters: Officers Deserted a Jail Building Leaving Inmates Locked in Cells," New York, September 22, 2005.

³⁹ W.E.B. DuBois, Address to the Nation, Delivered at second annual meeting of the Niagara Movement, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, August 16, 1906, www.wfu.edu

⁴⁰ Gregory Rodriguez, "La Nueva Orleans," Los Angeles Times, Current, September 25, 2005, 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bill Clinton, interview with Tim Russert, Meet the Press, September 18, 2005, transcript on MSNBC.com

⁴³ C. Stone Browne, "Katrina's Forgotten Victims: Native American Tribes," Imdiversity, Pacific News.org.

⁴⁴ "Poll: Fewer than Half think U.S. will win in Iraq: More than half say country should speed up withdrawal," CNN.com, September 22, 2005

⁴⁵ The Labor/Community Strategy Center is using our weekly radio show, Voices from the Frontlines, as a fundraising vehicle for the Gulf Coast. We are also organizing an L.A. fundraiser for the Gulf Coast in alliance with others, making organizational contributions, and taking up collections from the staff and members of the LCSC and Bus Riders Union.

⁴⁶ Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project, Vanguard Foundation, 383 Rhode Island Street, Suite 301, San Francisco, CA 94103. Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide, 9 Gammon Ave. Atlanta, Georgia 30315, Phone: 404.622.0602, Fax: 404.622.6618, E-mail: general-info@projectsouth.org <http://www.projectsouth.org>. Liberty Hill Foundation, 2121 Cloverfield Boulevard, Suite 113, Santa Monica, CA 90404, Phone: (310) 453-3611, Fax: (310) 453-7806, Email: info@libertyhill.org.

⁴⁷ Liberty Hill Foundation, "Donations for Hurricane Katrina Relief and Rebuilding," September 8, 2005.

Available at <http://www.libertyhill.org/common/donations%20for%20hurricane%20katrina.htm>

From the Frontlines: The Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and the National Lawyers Guild have just issued a Freedom of Information Act request to the U.S. government to locate ALL of the evacuees from Louisiana—a critical demand in carrying out the Effective Right to Return. It is reprinted in full because of its significance, a perfect example of the type of organizing that is needed, and is happening!

MEDIA ALERT

COMMUNITY LABOR UNITED

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE September 27, 2005

PEOPLE'S HURRICANE RELIEF FUND

AND OVERSIGHT COALITION

Contact:

People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition Contact:

Malcolm Suber (504-931-7614)

National Lawyers Guild Contact:

Taylor Pendergrass, National Vice President (303-442-0802)

PEOPLE'S HURRICANE RELIEF FUND AND OVERSIGHT COALITION ("PHRF") AND THE NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD ("NLG") FILE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND LOUISIANA OPEN RECORDS ACT REQUESTS TO LOCATE EVACUEES

Friday, September 22-In response to the ground swell among community activists and concerned citizens from the evacuated areas in Louisiana due to Hurricane Katrina, PHRF and the NLG made requests pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA") and the Louisiana Open Records Act to locate the names, residence, and current contact information for those persons evacuated from the State of Louisiana during and after Katrina. PHRF and the NLG requested the following information: 1) the identity and location of each individual

evacuated from the State of Louisiana from August 26, 2005 through the present as a result of Hurricane Katrina; 2) identification, information, and whereabouts of each individual from the State of Louisiana who FEMA has provided emergency assistance to as a result of Hurricane Katrina; and 3) the identity and location of each organizational entity, in any State, to which FEMA has provided emergency assistance of goods or financial resources toward provision of shelter, immediate and temporary/long-term, and other services to persons evacuated from any place in the State of Louisiana as a result of Hurricane Katrina so that all of those directly affected and displaced have the opportunity to include their voices in the rebuilding of their communities.

"The people of New Orleans will not go quietly into the night, scattering across this country to become homeless in countless other cities while Federal relief funds are funneled into the rebuilding of casinos, hotels, chemical plants, and wealthy white districts of New Orleans like the French Quarter and the Garden District. We will not stand idly by while this disaster is used as an opportunity to replace our homes with newly built mansions and condos in a gentrified New Orleans." - *Statement of the Displaced New Orleans Community, Community Labor United, People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition.*

The FOIA requests were served upon the Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA"), the Department of Homeland Security, and the Louisiana Office of Emergency Preparedness and Homeland Security. PHRF and NLG plan to disseminate this information in order to ensure transparency from FEMA and other major organizations raising funds and resources in the name of hurricane relief. This information will also be used to facilitate the return of hurricane survivors, and ensure local, grassroots leadership and participation in every phase of rebuilding.

Organizing nationally, the PHRF is committed to supporting the leadership and oversight by evacuees in all aspects of the rebuilding process including family reunification, legal and health support, education and delivery of urgently needed supplies. The NLG is part of this national demand for the community-based reconstruction of New Orleans.

"We are dedicated to being an integral part of the return to the way the Gulf Coast can be, not what it was, or what large corporations would have. The Gulf Coast should be built with the people, and for the people, not on top of us." *National Lawyers Guild.]*

Several of the groups that make up the growing PHRF come out of Community Labor United ("CLU"). Formed in 1998, CLU is a coalition of progressive organizations based in New Orleans, whose mission is to build organizational unity and support efforts that address poverty, racism, and education. CLU focused their organizing and collaborative action efforts in the areas hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina.

Founded in 1937, the NLG, comprises over 6,000 members and activists in the service of the people. Its membership and chapters span across the country and is based out of New York.

Community Labor United (CLU), New Orleans

Partial List of Participating Organizations

ACORN New Orleans

Agenda For Children

Ashé Cultural Center

Christian Unity Baptist Church

Committee for the Support of the Angola 3

Crescent City Peace Alliance

Critical Resistance

Dillard University (Faculty and Staff from various Departments)

Deep South Center for Environmental Justice

Frederick A. Douglass Community Coalition

Friends and Family of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children

Green Party New Orleans

Guardians of the Flame (A Mardi Gras Indian Club)

INCITE! New Orleans Chapter

Junebug Productions (A theater company)

Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana

Information Works ((A Research and Data organization)

Louisiana Research Institute for Community Empowerment (LaRICE)

NAACP New Orleans Chapter

The Nation of Islam

New Orleans Welfare Rights Organization

Pax Christi

Parents For Educational Justice

People's Institute for Survival & Beyond

Plessy Park Project

Students at the Center

Teens With Attitude

Tulane University Faculty and Staff of Deep South Humanities Program

UNITE Local 652

United Teachers of New Orleans (AFT)

UrbanHeart (An after School Program for Frederick Douglass feeder schools)

Xavier University (Faculty and Staff from of Social Sciences Departments)

People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition Community Labor United

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