

Race And Class In Katrina's Aftermath

What Katrina Told Us About Race and Class In America

By **ROBIN BROWN**

August 28, 2006— - In looking back at the year since Hurricane Katrina ABC News took a look at the issue of race and class that was exposed after the storm. We asked a number of Americans, some notable national figures and others who are less well known but who live and work in the region, about these issues. The question we asked:

"Hurricane Katrina highlighted the problems of race and class, both in the affected region and nationally. After the storm, there were calls to deal with those problems. Has any progress been made over the last year? Who is leading positive efforts, and who's to blame for a lack of progress? What do you think could/should be done to address these issues?"

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON

Author and Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities

University of Pennsylvania

Very little progress. The tragic reality is that America failed to take advantage of a wonderful opportunity to engage in discussions about race, class, and poverty and further to do something substantive about that. So in the aftermath of one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the nation, an even more foreboding man-made disaster has occurred and that is indifference to the plight of the poor or barely registered concern about the fundamental issues that make poor people poor-- lack of access to education, incredible social and economic inequality that prevail and, in New Orleans in particular, the failure to rehabilitate that community so that the most vulnerable citizens will be able to thrive.

Many of the positive efforts are being made by grass roots organizations in and around New Orleans where people are exercising extraordinary self investment to protect themselves and to furthermore highlight and underscore some of the major problems in their areas. Beyond that I think that certain institutions of higher education which have tried to focus a big spotlight on these problems are working in the right direction, as well as certain media outlets that refuse to let the government or politicians off the hook.

On the other hand, there has been little movement in the federal government for the relief of the poor. I think there's been a huge failure among politicians and policymakers, and as a result of the failure of imagination among them, I think we're inching closer toward the fear that critics had at the beginning of Katrina that it would become whiter and richer and more conservative and that African-American interests would be progressively closed out. While it's too early to say that's indeed the case, it does appear that the poor people are having a much tougher time.

What could be done is that the federal government could take a much more aggressive role in 1) filtering resources directly into the gulf region, 2) making certain that there is a strong relationship between local, municipal and state government, and the federal government, in the delivery of resources. Three, I think that there could be a greater emphasis upon programs that will have long term effect on the economic rehabilitation of the region. Fourthly, I think what's very important is to understand that while New Orleans may no longer be the "Chocolate City" of old, it is at least a peanut butter city now in the sense of browns and blacks coming in stronger numbers, browns because of the work opportunities there, Latinos and the like. Which means that the Vietnamese fishers who live there, the Native American fishers and farmers, along with the Latinos and African-Americans constitute a very strong minority presence and there's a strong possibility that the government could enable those populations to become more strongly tied to the local economy and it would be reciprocally helpful. It would help the local economy in terms of the jobs that need to be filled that very few people want to fill and on the other hand it could boost the prospects of those working class and working poor people by giving them a decent wage and allowing them to rebuild the infrastructure of the communities that they find dear.

More broadly what should be done is that this nation has to have a conversation about race, class, and poverty. Obviously you can't force people to think about these issues in one particular fashion, but you can invite them to become critical about the means toward the American dream that we have adopted. Are we doing the right thing? Why are so many people who are poor locked out of that American Dream, and it's not because they are lazy or dumb or stupid or disinclined to work, it's because we've failed as a nation to provide opportunity to the most vulnerable. So a real conversation on poverty would be helpful.

One of the tragedies of New Orleans is that there is such concentrated poverty and poor black communities are stocked with poor black schools. Which mean that poor black people in poor black neighborhoods who attend poor black schools have a poorer level or standard of existence. If we can address those issues, a lot of the problems can be addressed.

SEN. MARY LANDRIEU, D-LA

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were colorblind. Lives, hopes, dreams and neighborhoods were destroyed, regardless of race or class. But the fact remains that lower income people, as well as seniors living on small fixed-incomes, are often more vulnerable to the losses caused by major natural disasters because they often lack the means to afford long-term displacement, family relocation, job interruption and loss of income, not to mention medical care and uncompensated property damage.

The effects of these catastrophic hurricanes sadly demonstrated so many of life's inequities, but out of the destruction and suffering people did come together and they forged common bonds that cut across racial, class and regional lines.

BRUCE GORDON

NAACP President & CEO

Those are big questions as I'm sure you realize. The first thing I would say to you is that I think that there has been very little progress on addressing the race and class problems that Katrina exposed. Very little progress in terms of what is happening nationally. At the gulf coast level, the restoration process is painfully slow. Schools are not reopening at any meaningful pace, homes are not being rebuilt, people are not being able to, if not rebuild their homes, recover the equity or the value of their assets so that they can move on with their lives, jobs are not being created. The environment in the gulf coast, particularly in New Orleans, does not indicate at all that there is a commitment to really turning the situation around. So there is very little progress.

On a national basis when you focus on the class issue, a perfect example of little progress is the fact that the minimum wage rate has still not been increased. There has been an attempt to do that for a couple of years. The fact that the minimum wage was not increased most recently through the House and the Senate because it was tied to a state tax relief suggests that trying to tie the needs of the poor with the unnecessary, at this point in time, increased advantage to the rich really demonstrates that there is a class system that is focused on advantaging those who are already advantaged at the expense of those who are struggling to make ends meet. So I think that there is very little progress since last year.

As I focus on the gulf region I think that the number one cause of the problem is the failure of the federal, state and local government agencies involved in restoration to work together to cut through the bureaucracy and actually get things accomplished.

On a national basis, I would suggest that we have competing priorities and that dealing with these issues of the poor in this country right now is a low priority. There is more attention, there are more resources being invested in international policy and not sufficient attention being focused on domestic policy. So I don't believe that the issue of race and class in America is a priority issue and therefore it's not getting attention.

I still believe that particularly as I think of the Gulf Region there are solvable problems there. The conditions that people are struggling with are addressable. All it takes is a clear focus, a clear commitment, it takes some creativity, and it takes some determination.

I live in part in New York City. I live 6 blocks from ground zero. I witnessed first hand, on the front line, what happened on September 11th and what happened in the aftermath to turn it around. The movement, the pace of movement, the level of commitment, the commitment to resources, all of the things that were necessary to turn around a devastating situation in lower Manhattan, all those things they happened. Until that commitment really exists in the Gulf Region comparable to what existed in lower Manhattan, I believe that we will continue to be disappointed month after month, year after year. And the poor and disadvantaged and working class of the Gulf Coast will be no better off than they were prior to Katrina.

JED HORNE

Times Picayune Metro Editor

At the local level I do think there has been progress. For all the ugliness of some of the ways of racial thinking and racism manifested itself in the immediate aftermath of the storm. Here on the ground I think a lot of groups within the city have been thrown together and stirred together in the giant blender that was Katrina in ways that have actually contributed to understanding across barriers of race and class.

There is very little leadership here on the ground and that's the sad truth of it which has resulted in a stalling out of the recovery effort in a lot of different ways. The progress is made at the grass roots level as neighborhood organizations come together, as neighbors come together, as issues are addressed collectively by people here on the ground perhaps in the absence of municipal leadership we've been seeing an invigorated neighborhood leadership.

I think the flip side of the progress at the grass roots level is the sometimes foolish rhetoric that we hear from of the mayor, of from federal leadership where there's race bating in attempts to pander racially to different groups. We had an election unfortunately in the middle of our recovery effort which resulted in the usual follies that one can expect from politicians. The Nagin "Chocolate City" speech was generally regretted and apologized for by the mayor but that was really only the most absurd manifestation of the kind of racial pandering and race bating that has occurred here from on high.

Race is a problem that has bedeviled life in the United States and in the South for hundreds of years. I don't pretend to have a quick and easy prescription for eliminating it from our discourse and from our decision making. I think it requires vigilance and intelligence of people t simply expose themselves to the reality, the human reality, of city life and to be vigilant about the copout that is represented by stereotypical thinking and racism. The failure of imagination, we've seen a failure of initiative at the federal level in terms of responding to the crisis that was Katrina. We need to work on those problems by a failure of imagination in which we see all of ourselves as human beings confronting an enormous municipal challenge.

ROMUALDO GONZALEZ

Immigration Attorney in New Orleans

I saw this morning on one of the television stations, the focus was on the black and white race division. The first thing that came to mind was I'm sorry they're leaving out the Brown. There seems to be such a touchy factor that nobody wants to touch it, like it's nonexistent at the moment. I think it's going to become very acute, because there is the injection of a complete new migration into this area, which I'm specifically referring to the workers that have come here to participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans. It has brought a complete new complexion to this already serious problem by injecting a whole new class into the gumbo. It's frightening that nobody wants to face it. On the one side you have people who say we need these workers to come in, but they don't want to say that publicly.

You know we had our Mayor say something derogatory, his comments about 'not wanting Mexicans to get all the jobs'. I thought that was a horrendous thing to say at the moment, it didn't matter what color their skin was, or whether they spoke at all, we needed bodies here. I thought it

was a time when our politicians should be facing the issue, seeing how to accommodate this manpower need versus immigration problems our country has. I felt it was about time a crisis like this would highlight this overall problem and perhaps get some action. I thought it was a good opportunity for our state and our area. It's perception not reality that drives racial problems. And if the perception is that the Mexicans are taking all the jobs, that's bad for overall relations because it all of a sudden pits one group against the other.

I think we need to get past all that and our politicians have to assume compassion and leadership at the same time. They need to say we have a city to bring out of the muck, we had a bad run last year, let's go forward. And everybody who wants to help is welcome.

MARC MORIAL

National Urban League President

Former Mayor of New Orleans

There is slow progress. I mean, where there is progress it's because of the nerve, ingenuity and desire of individuals and community based institutions to help people return. The foot-dragging, and to some extent lack of coordination which has really slowed down the recovery, has taken place at all levels of government. And you've got to distinguish between Mississippi and Louisiana. Louisiana, of course, was far more devastated than Mississippi, but Mississippi was significantly damaged and Mississippi's recovery has moved ahead a lot faster it seems, although both are slow. I think you've got to place responsibility at all levels of government.

I believed from the very beginning that the government, the federal government, should have created a super reconstruction agency, a gulf coast authority, to help coordinate this. Because you've got so many government agencies trying to do so many different things that you just don't get a sense that everybody's on the same page and that's why it's been slow. But you can't take away the fact that there are many, many individuals who on their own, on their own motion, on their own volition are rebuilding their homes and rebuilding their lives.

I think there needs to be more of a sense of urgency at every level of government. And I think that, for example, in New Orleans it's inconceivable to me that a year after Katrina they've not come up with a comprehensive rebuilding plan, that they're still fighting over who will be in charge of the plan, they're fighting over who in fact will oversee the plan, what the contours and the specifics of the plan are going to be. And that's because there's a battle in New Orleans that was started right after Katrina when a number of business leaders really pursued a course that I thought was morally wrong. And that was a course to shrink the city to prevent certain neighborhoods from being rebuilt. It just so happens that not all of those neighborhoods, but a majority of those neighborhoods were African-American neighborhoods. That provoked, I think, a very expected and necessary response where people said no that's not right, I have just as much of a right to return and rebuild my home and my neighborhood as you do. So that's been the tension. It's been a tension somewhat of race, it's been a tension of class, it's been a political tension, it's been a fight amongst neighborhoods. I have said from the beginning, it's my view,

that all neighborhoods should have and equal opportunity to rebuild and that government should not unilaterally redline or write off any neighborhood in this process.

TED SHAW

NAACP Legal Defense Fund

I think that any honest assessment of the events over the last year since Katrina has to lead to the conclusion that we haven't done the job that was contemplated or necessary either with respect to New Orleans or the region itself or with respect to the broader issues of race and class that were exposed by Katrina and that people talked about in it's immediate aftermath. In fact I think what we're left with is a new phrase that describes the phenomena that has always afflicted this country and that phenomena has been the kind of periodic awakenings to the continued problems of racial injustice and inequality. I think we can call them Katrina moments.

The underlying issues themselves of race and poverty that president Bush acknowledged when he stood in Jackson square and made the statements that the problems exposed by Katrina were rooted in generational discrimination and a legacy of slavery and segregation. Those problems are not being seriously addressed by this country.

Now New Orleans itself I think we have to say that the rebuilding effort there is woefully inadequate. In fact there are those who use Katrina as an opportunity to engage in a land grab power grab and to remake New Orleans in a new image. The right of return for all of the people displaced by Katrina should be guaranteed for those who want to come back home.

We (NAACP) were engaged very heavily with the municipal elections that were held in the spring time to guarantee the right to vote to all the displaced New Orleanians wherever they were and that was an uphill battle and uphill task. My concern was not whether one candidate or another was going to win or loose but it was to guarantee their rights as citizens to vote no matter where they were.

There's housing discrimination going on that is rampart now. Some people are being priced out of their new New Orleans and some of it is just blatant racial discrimination that we're hearing about in New Orleans and outside of New Orleans. In Baton Rouge for example where the housing market has been much tighter as a consequence of displaced people and all the contractors and other people who flock to Louisiana to make money in the aftermath of Katrina.

After this moment we now have returned to our usual state of denial about the massive significance of racial and economic inequality in this country and we do that at our own peril.

DREW DICKSON

Editor Tulane Hullabaloo

"I've always had a problem calling it a problem with race. I honestly see it more as a problem of economics. Poor people always get the shaft and it's just an unfortunate fact, especially in New

Orleans, that a majority of the poor people are black. At Tulane specifically, it's always been kind of a joke here that there are very few minority students, and that goes from Black to Asian to etcetera, etcetera. It's a very white campus, and lately, especially since last spring, that has started to change. I don't know whether it has to do with different types of students applying or a different approach on admissions part. But other than that I couldn't really say that I have seen any change whatsoever. Tulane reached out to both Dillard and Xavier universities who were very, very heavily hit by the hurricane. I believe it was Dillard who rented out a Hilton hotel and had classes there. They lived in this hotel because their infrastructure had been so terribly damaged, and there was a lot of help that Tulane extended to them also."

Honestly, in terms of major changes or major impacts, I got to say not really. Mostly because in order for things to change, there has to be progress, and there's been so little progress in terms of rebuilding and I feel like that there hasn't been room to see any changes."

"It's an interesting thing. We were just talking about the mayoral election the other day and how Ray Nagin really used race to win. The first time he was elected, he basically was elected by a white business constituency, and then after Katrina it was his political gambit to try change the constituency and turn race into his political card, which really in the South that's really a pretty typical thing. I'm from Memphis and we have a black Mayor who basically during election time, spouts off those same racial cues. I don't want to place a value on that, I don't know if it's good or if it's bad, it just is what it is. And so to some extent it might be the system itself. If you want me to say someone that I blame for failing to rebuild New Orleans, there's plenty of criticism for Ray Nagin. A lot of people have noticed since the election that he's basically disappeared. He's not there to make people feel better, he's not there to show that the city is working really hard. The lights in City Hall turn off at five o'clock essentially. It's just not there, there's no presence. Then there are the facts that while New Orleans is looking better, I was surprised that when I came back here a couple of weeks ago the progress that has been made since June, but it's just not enough, there's no rebuilding. I don't know where to place the blame, but a lot of it is just different levels. It's very hard for a lot of the most not well off people to come back purely because of economics even though they might want to and the mayor just hasn't done a terrific job of both enticing people back and making sure they have a place to come back to."

Class problems have always existed and there's really not much you can do about it. Basically we'll always experience it as long as capitalism is structured the way it is, but you can do things to alleviate those problems. Make sure that people have jobs. Most people want to work, there are very few people who will just sit around and slouch. It's just a hard problem to solve, there's not one solution, there's not one cure all. It's very hard to get people from vastly different worlds to communicate effectively and constantly. Two types of people have two different types of backgrounds and it's very difficult to engage in that sort of long term dialogue that's necessary to affect even minor changes. Community service that Tulane students are engaged in is extremely important. Tulane, I believe, has completely reorganized the way that they do community service. It's now also a graduation requirement for students coming in this year. It's not like there's this southern mindset, the kind of stereotypical that there are two worlds that will never come together in terms of race, that doesn't exist, even though the remnants of that type of segregated area might still exist. I can imagine people thinking of New Orleans as a white

aristocracy, civil war remains, that's not the case at all. I don't have any ideas because it's just that complicated. We have to rebuild the city. A rising tide brings everyone up type thing."

"There's an impression that the only people who suffered in New Orleans were poor people or black people, and honestly that's just a media misconception. Everywhere in New Orleans suffered. You saw pictures of the lower 9th ward flooded and destroyed and that's just an easier story to tell. I mean in any kind of disaster poor people are going to suffer more because they can't replace what they lost, it's more difficult for them. One of the first levees to break, the first or the second, were up by Lakeview, you know one of the richest areas of New Orleans and they got six feet of water. I just want to move away from the idea that this is only a poor person's disaster. You can say that while most of the black people were forced to go to the Superdome or the Convention Center, that's true, but remember that it didn't get really bad in those places until that point after the storm when no one came to get them. You know it was obvious that the city needed to be completely emptied and nothing happened afterwards. If Katrina wasn't as bad as it was and the government hadn't failed in the aftermath it would have been less of a story.

You say that the storm kind of revealed problems of race and class in the country, and to people in New Orleans that's kind of strange to say because New Orleans has always been so obvious. In places like San Diego, I think is a good example, you could drive through the city all day and never see anything but good middle class houses. Pristine, completely in order estates, not even houses, you know it's perfect it's middle class, it's very well crafted. You don't see the housing projects, in New Orleans that's not it. New Orleans is a very honest city. Now whether that's because of it's past because it was established by pirates and thieves and thugs and prostitutes or just because the city has always been led by incompetent leaders whichever. But you drive to New Orleans and it's very obvious that you're in a predominately poor city not a very well off city. Even when you're in a rich area, that's pretty apparent. Everything's so meshed together. So it's just a misconception that's always bothered me."

PAUL BRATHWAITE

Executive Director, Congressional Black Caucus

It did highlight the disparities, the gaps between rich and poor, or middle class and rich in America. It also demonstrated the high level of poverty in several areas, or several Southern areas that were affected by the hurricane.

Since last year, since the President gave his speech in New Orleans in September of last year and made a commitment to focus on these "pockets of poverty", I believe that's what he called it, it did not get the sustainability that it needed from the top leaders in our country, the President and the Congress. And that could even extend to our governors around the country, but it really starts with our President because he has the bully pulpit.

A lot of things were illuminated, not much has been done. We need to reinvigorate those efforts.

Members of Congress, I'm going to be self-serving, members of our Caucus, Congressman Mel Watt from North Carolina, Barbara Lee from California and others have called for, both

nationally and internationally, a commitment by our government to address poverty in our country in a set amount of time.

There are also organizations like PolicyLink, it's an organization out in California that has taken it upon itself to try to identify best practices.

In terms of who's at fault, I think we're all at fault. I mean, we all as Americans should not be pleased when any of us, or a large pocket of our communities, live in poverty. And that poverty then translates into lives being lost when a catastrophe like Hurricane Katrina comes along and people end up dying simply because they could not get out because the government didn't plan properly, because they didn't have the wealth or resources to move. My guess is that if another hurricane came through there'd be more people that would be able to get out, but not everybody would be able to get out because, again, the resources just aren't there in families and/or at the government level to move people. And it's unfortunate. We should have learned our lessons from last year, but I'm not sure that we have.

There has to be the political will. Just like how we have a war on terrorism and supposedly we're willing to spend whatever it costs, there needs to be that same level of energy to ensure that people, Americans, our fellow citizens who are in need of the basic necessities, we're not talking about extravagant things, we're talking about having a decent job, having health care, having good schools to send their children to, that those things are within their reach. I think people want and expect their government and leading organizations, the people who are actually going to get something done, the government, nonprofits, corporations, the triumvirate of those three working together to address the problems that they continue to face in their lives. And for a large segment of our population it sort of keeps them back.

It is not acceptable that 37 million people live in poverty in the United States when we always say we're the only superpower and the richest country in the world. It's a stain on a list of accomplishments of what makes America great and we need to figure out how we remove that stain.

LARRY DELIA

Vice President and General Manager, WGNO and WNOL

"There has been progress made over the last year, but given the nature of the magnitude of this event, progress has to be defined differently. In general it's very, very slow and many people whether they live in the lower 9th ward or New Orleans East or Lakeview or Slidell some of the hardest hit areas whether they're rich or poor, many people are still in a holding pattern. They are for many, many reasons. Some people are still waiting for the federal assistance that they can get which is basically helping fill in the blank from where their insurance leaves off and those checks still haven't come out. I believe they're destined to come out either this week or next week. There are so many areas where the storm has hit in a very hard way, and they're still untouched. People want to rebuild and they're not sure because they're not sure if their particular neighborhood will be rebuilt. They don't know about their neighbor necessarily. There's a holding pattern and it's so unprecedented and people really have a lot of resilience here but

everyone's patience is kind of running thin and it's very difficult to deal with; however, there is progress. There is tiny little baby steps and eventually people will realize that and they'll still get through it, but it's taking a lot of a lot of patience.

There are a lot of people involved from the governor to the mayor to the federally appointed people, the senators, the congress people, local business people, everyone is involved. As I said this so unprecedented that making a decision is a monumental thing. To make a decision to rebuild a particular section of town or not, you don't make those decisions lightly, and so that falls on the shoulders of the mayor and at the moment he's basically claimed that every section of the town is going to be rebuilt. It would be very, very difficult for him to come back and say we're not going to rebuild this area or that area. There are people who think places shouldn't be rebuilt. If swamp land was built on twenty or thirty years ago and was completely devastated, many people wonder what the wisdom of rebuilding that area is. There in many ways might be too many leaders and not enough single point leadership, but again it's a monumental task and I don't know that any one person can take on this entire project alone.

There are many here who believe the federal government has not responded quickly enough. Certainly everyone believed that during the storm, but after the storm people believe that the federal response is still slow. Generally speaking people believe that all forms of government are acting too slow, and there's a contingent of people that believe if a CEO with the likes of Jack Welch came down here to help organize and lead the effort side by side with someone like Mayor Nagin that that could be the kind of thing that's needed. You need a very, very strong business minded CEO that could really help execute the plan and make decisions. At the same time Ray Nagin has business experience, he was in the private sector and he certainly has the skills and knowledge of the culture of New Orleans. So there's some people that have said wouldn't it be great to have two side by side leaders like that one helping really execute while the other helps execute and also help preserve the city's heritage. I think the government in general is acting very slowly.

I believe that we have to start making some decisions. We have to start making decisions we have to start executing them. You can paralyze a process with indecision, and all of us who led through Katrina in our respected businesses or institutions, we all had to make split second decisions that we never ever made.

So what people have to do now is collect all the information, study it and then execute it, but by holding off in over analysis, and trust me these are very tough things to decide on and using the word over analysis is maybe a bad choice of words, but we have to start making decisions, and we have to start implementing them, and we have to start moving forward more so than we have been.

Race and class is an age old problem everywhere, as well as in New Orleans, and at the moment I think this is more about rebuilding the city and finding the proper ways to house people, get people back, get those people back to then throw them into the working environment. Some of the difficulty here in running a business is there are so many employees needed and they can't come back because they have no place to live whether they are rich or poor, white or black, it affects everybody. So it's really, to me, it's really about where people can live and where they can

go to school and all the infrastructure types of things that need to be rebuilt, decided on and rebuilt and then people will return. It has stalled. There is a small amount of rebuilding going on, but it has stalled and it needs to start up.

DR. NORMAN C. FRANCIS President Xavier University of Louisiana

Katrina and the aftermath of the last year have, I believe, given some people pause especially socially conscious majority Americans that when somebody says race and color still matter, they will say 'you may be dead right about that.'

A lot of people who had become comfortable thinking we had made significant progress in race relations were taken aback, because they felt that America had solved the major problems of racial disparities. They were shocked to discover the depth of poverty and helplessness. They had seen the statistics, but had never seen them in human terms. They saw those Katrina pictures, they saw how many of those faces were African-American, looking for help and needing it and waiting for it to happen.

In this last year we've seen an opportunity to have a clear discussion without code words, without the accusations of racism, on both sides, that often stop these kinds of productive conversations in their tracks. Then you can look at the facts and see what we should do to make a difference in improving the quality of life for all Americans.

I can't say what percentage of people have been enlightened, though. I still see people who aren't willing to have those honest discussions, both white and black. I had a cab driver tell me he thinks the levees were bombed. I could only say, 'I hope you don't believe that.' We as African-Americans don't help ourselves by believing that sort of thing, because then we ignore what the real problems are.

What the last year has highlighted is, hopefully, a greater understanding of what some of us have been saying all along: disparities are still out there, and we cannot live under the belief that race doesn't matter. It does. Let's get on with the business of saying, 'where does it matter, and where can we address and close those disparities?'"

SCOTT COWEN President Tulane University

I haven't seen a lot of progress. I think it's certainly on everyone's minds. We know that the storm exacerbated and heightened those issues in our community, but has there been a lot of change in the last year to really deal proactive with these issues, I'd have to say there has not been. Tulane University in concert with some of the other universities here like Dillard and Xavier, we are forming a group to deal with race and poverty. We're just in the early stages of deciding on how we want to address these issues and how we can do it individually and collectively as a set of universities but we ourselves are probably a year a way from doing something on a large scale basis. So I would have to say that there hasn't been a lot of progress in the last year other than awareness.

Race and poverty issues are very complex issues and there are not many communities of any size around the country that actually have dealt really proactively and positively with these over a period of time. So I think we have to be realistic about what can be done and try to understand what has worked in other communities and what hasn't and what would be best for New Orleans.

To be honest, we have so many issues we have to deal with coming out of Katrina, everything from the levees to rebuilding the neighborhoods to public education to our criminal justice system and I could go on and on. I don't think there's anybody to blame, I just think there's a lot to be done. There is just not a lot of people to get it done, so I think everybody's working extremely hard to rebuild the city and this issue whereas it is absolutely critical for the long term vitality of New Orleans is not something that's on everybody's screen right now because we have to deal with so much to repair the physical damage of our city.

What we're going to have to do is I think we're going to have to over time develop a community dialog on race and poverty begin to understand what has occurred in our community why has it occurred and what are some of the practical interventions we can do in New Orleans to begin to change the tide on race and poverty. I don't think there's a quick fix here I don't think there's a silver bullet where you just do this and everything is taken care of. It starts with awareness and continues on to education and then continues on into intervention. So I think we're in for the long haul here. Awareness is certainly there now we need education and then we're going to need intervention. I am also realistic to say it will take many many years for change; nothing over night is going to happen.

JUDSON MITCHELL Staff Attorney, Loyola Law Clinic

"I don't think so. I think that the city is so over burdened with just establishing basic services and basic safety that the larger social justice problems haven't been really looked at."

"There are a lot of folks who are doing a lot of grass roots efforts to promote the interests of low and middle income people. The first people on the ground actually in New Orleans were a group called "A Common Ground Collective" who have basically been running medical clinics, gutting houses, assisting people to get back in public housing since really September, I mean even really right after the storm. And they have done a lot to highlight issues of race and class and also they have actually taken steps, they've taken action, they've helped occupy certain public housing places, they've broken into schools that were closed and gutted them and tried to get them ready for people to live in. They've gutted many, many poor people's homes, so they've done a lot. There are also a lot of public housing advocates who have come out. I mean one of the things that, most notable things that came out of Katrina was that almost all the public housing stock was closed even if it wasn't damaged in any way and there are a great many public housing residents who want to come back to town. And there are many, many advocates, Elizabeth Cook, is someone that I can think of in particular who worked really hard to try to get the federal government to allow people back into public housing which is really not happening right now."

I think that the race and class problems that we have here in New Orleans are really not necessarily unique to New Orleans it's just the fact that we had a storm blow through and highlighted it, brought it all out into the open in front of the cameras for everyone to see, but all

this has been here and it is present in other cities. It's present in Washington, New York, Chicago, so I don't really think that in this situation the city of New Orleans, the state of Louisiana is in a great position to address poverty at all because there are so many other various problems that confront it. The question is who is supposed to address poverty on a nationwide scale and what have they done?

There's been very little effort to assist people to get back to New Orleans. Remember, most poor people were evacuated by gun point essentially, put in the nearest plane and dropped somewhere, it could be Salt Lake City, it could be Virginia, it could be Houston, and there's been very little effort made to try to get people back in town, and that's something the government could do more with at least in terms of providing people with advice. This "Road Home" program that we have which is supposed to help people rebuild their homes is not very well advertised in New Orleans itself and in other states where evacuees can be found. So a lot more could be done in getting the word out that there is a possibility to return, but I don't think it's encouraged really at this point.

I think the first thing that has to happen is we have to realize that New Orleans basically was built on the backs of wage laborers, people who were very low income is what made the city go. This place was about tourism and it was about restaurants and things like that and those workers are not back here yet. And not only are they not back here yet, even if they did come there's no place for them to stay. So the first thing that the city really needs to address is rental housing and low income and affordable housing. We've always had a little trouble with that in New Orleans, but now we have it really bad because almost all of the affordable housing stock was wiped about by Katrina and quite frankly the city can't run unless there is affordable housing for people who work here. I've had many clients who are say the immigrants who have come in from Mexico and other places, Honduras to do to work here and the only reason they can work here is because they are willing to live in gutted out houses basically flooded out, gutted out houses with no services and work all day and then live in that place at night. So really we need to encourage people who have skills or even unskilled people to come back. There's no trouble finding them jobs and the thing is, how do we help them get back into housing so that they can help build New Orleans? I think that's the first priority.

COKIE ROBERTS

ABC News Political Commentator, Native of New Orleans

I don't think much progress has been made and I think the subject has been dropped pretty quickly. But there are little pockets of people doing very positive things whether it's in Houston in Atlanta with the evacuees or whether it's in New Orleans and on the Gulf Coast where you see an unbelievable outpouring of individuals working with the people who were affected by the storms and that part of the American spirit is incredibly heartening.

One day when I was there for Save The Children on the Gulf Coast where that organization is putting together all the daycare centers because of course you can't go back to work unless you have a place to put the kids, there was a church group from Chicago down working on the school that had been blown away in Bay St. Louis and that school was 100 percent integrated. No issue

about black and white there in Mississippi, So I think that you see lot's of little wonderful positive moments but nothing on an organized and certainly not on a National scale.

DR. BEVERLY WRIGHT Director, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice Dillard University

"I see very little progress made except for the resolve of the people who live here who are definitely trying to get their houses fixed. In the area of environmental cleanup I would say the progress is basically stalled. Historically, African Americans and people of color have gotten very little assistance in terms of protection from the federal government as it relates to environmental exposure. And the response that we're getting from EPA is that the city of New Orleans is a clean bill of health, but when you look at their own numbers you know that it's not the case so it's almost like history is repeating itself. You take a city that was 72% black with a large number of people who own property being African Americans and the environmental response is what it's always been, absolutely nothing, denial about contamination and no assistance with dealing with contamination problems.

I think the thing that they have done is given a whole lot of money to extremely large contractors and so large contractors have made out very well after Katrina. Those of us who are affected or those of us who do the work, the small contractors, have gotten nothing. And so there's been a lot of talk about money but that money is not trickling down for example to small minority businesses or the businesses who were here before the storm. So we are really hurting.

The upside of that is the people of New Orleans are absolutely convicted in their desire to return home and for example we've implemented our own clean up program called "Safely Back Home" and we've completely cleaned up one solid block as a demonstration project in the city of New Orleans utilizing the Army Corps of Engineers and 180 volunteers. We have a small grant funding the program all coming from local foundations, not a dime from the federal government to do what is really necessary to get the people back in their homes.

"There's been a lot of progress in areas where businesses are. I mean, like right after the storm they came in and completely wiped down the French quarter where businesses are. There's no contamination there because they came in and did what they were supposed to do. They brought the big trucks in and washed out all the debris and washed down the streets but there's nothing done with where people live, and the work that has been done has been done by people themselves.

There are a number of organizations on the ground. For certain I would mention my center and what we've been doing. I am an author of something called *In the Wake of the Storm*, and I'm a Sociologist and so we put together our analysis of what's happening as it relates to race and class. There's the African American Leadership Project and there's NRCG that's still handling all the environmental issues around race and class. There's the organization for Civic Participation. And I also believe ACORN and the Hurricane Relief Fund have been doing some pretty outstanding things in regards to race and class. I think that our council people have been seeking out on what they see as desperate responses, bringing people home based on race. Our city council people

have been really involved in a serious battle I would have to say the most vocal person Cynthia Willard Lewis and Oliver Thomas.

Our mayor has even made statements about race and class now, he's finally got religion and I guess because it's been so difficult than he's finally seeing it for what it is and he's now making some pretty loud and vocal statements about race and class in the city. People keep forgetting that New Orleans is a very Southern city and that it is entrenched in issues of race. And class is just another layer to that but it's not the only layer, race still trumps class in the city and you can ask any middle, upper middle class even wealthy African American about the issue and the problems they've had, regardless of their education, is dealing with the system. And the fact that the city is so black, meaning in numbers, we're just finding the other parishes for a very long time and the media portrays them as a group of people here who are stupid and mumbling led by black people that we don't know what we're doing which is absolutely not the way black people are in this city. There are three black colleges in this city with a very large educated population. We have a large percentage of poor people here because we are 72% black, but that does not mean that we are ignorant and we don't know what's going on and we can't see the political games that have been played in this city.

So I think the people are beginning to realize that the people here know what they want and they want to come home and government works better when it follows not when it leads in other words if finds out what communities need and want and then they put things in place to make things happen. The government makes decisions about communities without their input you get kind of what has happened to us here, backwards motions rather than forward motions. We have to come up with a different plan, one that's inclusive one that says everybody's welcome. A lot of the city is the same as it was, black people were much too poor in this city, they were underpaid, they were fighting for an increase in minimum wage, couldn't get that. Now Burger King is paying nine dollars an hour, if Katrina did nothing else it raised wages of people in the city. Now there's no place for them to live, they can't come back. Our Mexican brothers and sisters or Hispanics are being exploited in ways that you can't imagine down here, and then it's also causing racial tensions because they are seen as taking jobs from African Americans and moving to the city, so it's all a big game being played manipulated by people who have a lot to gain by us not being able to come together by us not being able to come back, but we see the game and we're fighting against it."

"I would start with Homeland Security because Homeland Security got off the hook and they really should not have. Homeland Security, the Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA, and then you get down to city and local government because city and local government has the least power and the least amount of money. The federal government is just now moving money into the state and I really believe that the way the money is coming down favors political parties, Mississippi has just gotten more money and faster pace than Louisiana has which is the only Southern Democratic state left with a Democratic Governor. When you look at the amount of money Mississippi got compared to Louisiana, we had the most damage but Mississippi and Louisiana got the same amount of money. Now how does that make sense? The only sense you can make of that is that their political connections make a difference, and Mississippi has a Republican Governor that Governor was able to get more money than a Democratic Governor.

"We could all hold each others hands and say we shall overcome but you know that hasn't worked yet, and I'm being funny because it's just so difficult. First of all, I think so much of the way that we've been responded to is based on stereotypes of inferiority as it relates to African Americans. Nobody is dealing with the reality of the situation. People are just saying oh those people can't handle money. Mayor Nagin is not Mayor Guiliani, he's not being treated the same as Guiliani. They're trying to find all kinds of ways to side step our governing bodies here. They decided that everything that we did is corrupt which is not true and because of that many mistakes are being made. The people here have more faith in their own city council person that they can go to and say what's going on? Black people have always known that waiting on the federal government could be hazardous for your health, and they're proving it to be right, it's been no different. Had this happen in a place where the census track was a little different in terms of race I believe there would have been a better response, I really do. No one can make me believe that this would have happened in a very wealthy part of the country, you know where very rich white people live, like Manhattan, it never would have happened. And there's no comparison between the devastation from 9-11 and what happened here.

If we start treating everybody as Americans and as human beings and not basing it on stereotypes about race and class we might get a different response.

ANNE RICE

Novelist

I haven't been back since the storm. But I do receive constant reports first hand from people, through email, on the phone, and in person. What I hear is this: New Orleans is still a disaster area. People of all races and classes are suffering because the rebuilding is moving too slow, insurance companies are sluggish or non responsive, government red tape is creating a huge and unnecessary and demoralizing burden, and laws regarding new building or rebuilding are too confusing or simply not in place at all. Yet the people of New Orleans continue to show incredible love for their city and incredible courage. They simply will not give up on the efforts to restore New Orleans.

Blacks and whites are together in this. The history of New Orleans has always been one of racial mixture on many levels. People outside the city often don't understand how vital the racial mix is in New Orleans, and what locals have achieved in cooperation over the centuries.

The problem now has to do with insurance companies and the government; it has to do with people not receiving the services and assistance that they've paid for, through premiums to private companies, and through taxes to the government.

I wish I had more specific things to tell you. I hear specific things every day: huge water bills for fema trailers; insurance refusing to cover houses that people are trying to buy; lack of goods and services. It goes on and on.

JJ ROSENBAUM

Staff Attorney, Immigrant Justice Project

Southern Poverty Law Center

"Particularly with the employment context I think we saw the problems with race and class highlighted immediately after the hurricane when we saw many corporations luring migrant workers from all across the United States to do the reconstruction work with false promises of good wages and good working conditions and we're still seeing that behavior continue as local employers in New Orleans trying to use the Guest Worker program to bring in foreign workers now from places like Bolivia and Peru once again with false promises of good wages and working conditions that turn out to be lies. But what we're seeing developing is a movement in New Orleans of workers to fight back against that behavior and to promote the rebuilding of a city that includes survivors that have been locked out of those jobs and includes fair working conditions for everyone, particularly the New Orleans Workers Justice Coalition is a group that has been actively working with affected workers both African American workers and Latino workers, helping them come together and stand up together against corporate greed and not allow the most vulnerable workers to be exploited."

"Some of the most positive efforts in the employment context are being led by the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition which is a coalition of groups in the New Orleans area, with a grass roots base, demanding that the reconstruction of this city be done in a way to protect the survivors who want to return home and protect new immigrant workers who have come to New Orleans to participate in the rebuilding and to bring those groups together to demand justice and demand fairness and demand respect."

"Government in action has hindered progress on this point. For instance, the failure of the U.S. Department of Labor to immediately enforce the protections of federal law for workers in the hurricane allowed the outrage of levels of violations of minimum wage and overtime laws which we're all now still trying to deal with and trying to recover the wage theft that occurred immediately after the hurricane, and the same way the U.S. Department of Labor certified that no local workers were available and certified a prevailing, a low prevailing wage for hotel jobs in a context where there are many workers who are trying to come back to the city and trying to locate fair jobs at the living wage."

"I think that the U.S. Department of Labor should cease certification of guest worker jobs in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast and that the employers should be forced as the law requires to hire local workers at living wage rate and treat them according to the law."

CRYSTAL MOORE

Student Government President, Xavier University

"This is my senior year so I'm going into my fourth year at Xavier and with any city, each city has their own problems. When I first got back we were cleaning up a local neighborhood and a local official made a comment, why are ya'll cleaning this up? It's a predominately African American low income area so what was going through my head was why he wanted to know

why we're cleaning this up, like why are you cleaning this area up when nobody is living here. They weren't making progress, so we continued to clean and making progress in the city ourselves. I don't think it's one person in particular who you can blame. I do think the city is a very diverse city. New Orleans is a melting pot of different cultures and everyone gets along pretty well. The city is making great progress since the hurricane."

"The university is the hub of our community and New Orleans has several universities: Tulane, Loyola, Xavier, Dillard, SUNO, UNO, all these different universities and different communities throughout the city and when they came back they brought back a large amount of students plus faculty plus everybody who has to help operate these universities and that is what in my opinion brought the city back because when they came to these different communities, they brought the life back into it even though the area around it wasn't coming together. When Xavier came back on campus the local areas started to come back to life, people started to move back, progress was really being made. So in my opinion the universities are what's going to help bring people back because people are waiting to see what's really going on with education, can my child get educated here?"

"I don't think it's so much an issue of race, it's an issue of social classes. There can be two races, but the one who has money or has a good job may not be discriminated against as much as the poor so I think it's more an issue of class than race that's going on in New Orleans. I don't think you can pinpoint one person or one organization, like FEMA or the Department of Homeland Security or any political organization that you can pinpoint and say they're leading the way in the problem of race and class.

Post Katrina, a lot of different races, the Hispanic race is becoming very prevalent in New Orleans and there's a lot of different types of races that are coming in and they're working and there's no one particular to blame it's just we're here and we're making it work and the problems that are occurring in race and class, there's no surface level, they're a lot deeper into people's attitude."

"I think it starts with each person. Each person needs to open their mind up to different individuals status as well as social status, as well as what their ethnicity is, especially the people who lead large institutions and lead government agencies. Some people have a problem with the Hispanic population coming in and taking jobs in New Orleans well if people will understand why they're coming, and you're not taking that job, then it's okay for somebody else to come in. Become more open minded then I think we'll all be better along and more productive people.

I do believe that minorities need to be assisted in coming back. A lot of minority businesses, I would say zero to some, have returned because one they haven't received funding, two they weren't financially able to come back to New Orleans. So in assisting more minority businesses, I would like to see the government take a more active role in that and helping more minority businesses return to New Orleans."