

The Right to Return

Muriel Lewis

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the city of New Orleans leaving the nation shocked at the destruction it caused. From this day forward, New Orleans natives knew that life as knew it would never be the same. People of all ages, races, religions, and social classes were affected. Mother Nature had taken her toll on a great city leaving its citizens to start all over from scratch.

The people of New Orleans have been dispersed across the U.S. hoping to one day to come back to a place that they once called home. Most victims of Hurricane Katrina from the city of New Orleans were born and raised here, now they are probably in place they never have visited. Whenever you travel to another city and come in contact with a New Orleans Hurricane Katrina victim, somewhere in their conversation might be “ There’s no place like New Orleans, I wish I could go back.” What do politicians say to this besides *Call FEMA* or *You have to fix your home in four months or you will be forced to sell?* They say nothing! The majority of the New Orleans citizens have either already paid for their homes or are still paying their mortgages. Due to the hurricane, they have lost jobs, and they barely make enough money now to pay a light bill. How do you expect these people to have their homes repaired, or travel from where they have been displaced to check on their homes? So many New Orleans citizens were poor African Americans, living from paycheck to paycheck. How do you expect these people to come up with money to pay for their homes?

The Mayor of New Orleans says, “Let us give our citizens four months to prove they can bring their neighborhoods back to life or face the prospect of having to sell out to a new and powerful redevelopment authority.” To that, I say, that would be a great idea *IF* he could provide transportation, food, and temporary housing in the city until this task is completed. There is a problem with that scenario. There are a few million people who have been displaced, this would really make the task very difficult. Also, there are not enough funds to transport, feed, and house all of the victims. So actually, what these people are being given is a NO HOPE deal from this four month policy. What should be said is the truth, “You are going to sell your home because you are too poor to rebuild it, we are going to have the Crescent City Redevelopment Corp buy your homes, and then after a period of time, we will give you the option of buying back your home, which you still will not be able to afford.” What the Mayor does not understand is without citizens you have no city. Put the citizens back into the city and you will begin to

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reestablish a great city. How do expect people who have never lived in New Orleans to understand a culture that has been around for centuries passed from one New Orleans family to another? The answer is *YOU CAN'T!* That is like a penguin flying and an eagle belly flopping; it just is not in their nature. It is easier for one to say “Knock down these homes.” than to say “Let’s bring these people home to rebuild.”

Representative Baker asked an interesting question, “If not this, what?” He was referring to his Bill as a course of action. We have understood your plan, but we do not agree with it. Baker has been so concerned with the flood insurance that he passed a bill that tells home owners that only 60% of their homes will be accounted for and they would have to sell their homes also. Why don’t you take a look at the Bill that you voted against? The Bill introduced by the Congressional Black Caucus called the Hurricane Katrina Recovery, Reclamation, Restoration, Reconstruction and Reunion Act of 2005 Title XI:

Requires FEMA to reimburse entities that performed services that should have been performed by FEMA following Hurricane Katrina if the entity requests reimbursement and allows retroactive purchase of flood insurance by Hurricane Katrina victims who did not live in a designated flood plain.

Also, Congress passed a \$29 billion aid package for the Gulf State region. The package gave Mississippi about five times as much per household aid as Louisiana received. This was the testimony to the clout of Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi.

These are our answers to Representative Baker’s question “If not this, what?” What will you do about it?