

Contextualizing Katrina:
Resources On New Orleans History and Culture for Visiting Activists
and
Confronting Racism Resources for White activists

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Section One: Contextualizing the Impact of Katrina: race, class, history and culture

A Basic History of New Orleans from Lonely Planet Travel Guide

Today, the steady growth of tourism - despite reports of the city's high crime rate - makes up an increasing share of the employment opportunities in New Orleans. Like most US cities at the end of the millennium, New Orleans benefited from trends toward urban revival, and crime has dropped in recent years. Still, New Orleans remains largely a poor city with a small tax base to support public schools and social programmes. Gentrification has mostly highlighted a growing divide between the haves and have-nots. And, still, the divide is defined primarily by race. Nothing, however, can subdue the resilient spirit of this most seductive of cities.

As the 20th century dawned, New Orleans struggled to get itself back on track after the turmoil of Reconstruction. It snapped out of the Great Depression as WWII industries created jobs, and continued prosperity in the 1950s led to suburban growth around the city. Desegregation laws finally brought an end to Jim Crow, but traditions shaped by racism were not so easily reversed. As poor blacks moved into the city, many middle-class whites moved out. New Orleans' population quickly became predominantly black. The city's tax base declined, and many neighbourhoods fell into neglect. However, the French Quarter, which had become a dowdy working-class enclave after the Civil War, was treated to restoration efforts, and it emerged primed for mass tourism, which was becoming one of the city's most lucrative industries. Even as the oil and chemical industries boomed in Louisiana, spurred on by low taxes and lenient environmental restrictions, New Orleans fastened its eyes on the tourist dollar. In the mid-1970s the Louisiana Superdome opened. The home of the city's NFL team, the Saints, it has also hosted Superbowls and presidential conventions and sparked a major revenue-earner for New Orleans: trade shows. All around the Superdome, new skyscrapers rose in the Central Business District, but by the end of the 1980s, the local oil boom went bust.

Nomadic Paleo-Indians probably spent time in the New Orleans area over 10,000 years ago. By the time the French founded the city in 1718, seven small tribes known as the Muskogean inhabited the Florida Parishes north of Lake Pontchartrain and, occasionally, the banks of the Mississippi River. Other tribes south of New Orleans inhabited the bayous in Barataria and the lower course of the Mississippi River.

In 1699, brothers Pierre Le Moyne and Jean-Baptist Le Moyne de Bienville became the first Europeans to ply the Mississippi upriver from the Gulf of Mexico. Guided by a Native American, they sailed north, pausing to note the narrow portage to Lake Pontchartrain. Less than twenty years later, Bienville returned to lay out *Nouvelle Orleans* on that same spot.

Early settlers arrived mostly from France, Canada and Germany, while the French imported thousands of African slaves. Despite the influx, however, colonial mercantilism proved an economic failure in New Orleans and the harsh realities of life there kept further civilian immigration at a minimum. The colonists developed an exchange economy based on smuggling and local trade, while their city earned a reputation for its illegal enterprise and swarthy character.

In 1762, the French ceded the Louisiana territory to the Spanish in exchange for help in France's war against England. During this time, French refugees from Nova Scotia (*Acadia*) began arriving, following the British seizure of French Canada. (The British deported thousands of Acadians for refusing to pledge allegiance to England.) Unfortunately for the Acadians - or Cajuns, as they are now called - no one had told them they were to become Spanish subjects. Creole society turned their noses up at them and banished the Acadians to the bayous west of the city, where they continued their livelihood of raising livestock.

France regained possession of New Orleans in 1800 and took up an offer to buy it from Thomas Jefferson, who

coveted the river capital to proceed on a path of western expansionism. Preferring it fall into American rather than British hands, Napoleon sold the entire Louisiana Territory at a price of USD15000000. On 20 December 1803, the French tricolor on the Place d'Armes was quietly replaced by the American flag.

In town, the response to American control was less than welcoming. Protestant American culture was seen as domineering and vulgar. In 1808, the territorial legislature adopted elements of Spanish and French laws - especially the Napoleonic Code - elements of which persist in Louisiana to the present.

By 1840 it was the nation's fourth city to exceed 100,000 inhabitants. Americans gained control of the municipal government in 1852 and by 1850, New Orleans had become the South's largest slave-trading centre. Though Louisiana was the sixth state to secede in 1860, New Orleans actually voted three-to-one to preserve the Union and became the first Confederate city to be captured.

After the fall of New Orleans, about 24,000 Louisiana blacks served in the Union forces and played a key role in the Reconstruction. After occupying troops left in 1877, many civil rights gains were lost as Jim Crow segregation became commonplace, with skin colour serving as the ultimate arbiter for people who chose not to trace their lineage. Governor Huey Long reportedly summed up the distinction by noting that all the 'pure whites' in Louisiana could be fed 'with a nickel's worth of red beans and a dime's worth of rice'.

By the early 20th century, New Orleans was ripe for the musical revolution that gave birth to jazz. Blacks had long congregated at Congo Square every Sunday to dance and sing to an African drumbeat - the only place in the South where this was permitted. Eventually, the indigenous musical genre called jazz took shape, with many early jazz musicians performing in the red-light district. From: http://uk.holidaysguide.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-239611-new_orleans_history-I

Notes From Inside New Orleans

by Jordan Flaherty, from Left Turn

I just left New Orleans a couple hours ago. I traveled from the apartment I was staying in by boat to a helicopter to a refugee camp. If anyone wants to examine the attitude of federal and state officials towards the victims of hurricane Katrina, I advise you to visit one of the refugee camps.

In the refugee camp I just left, on the I-10 freeway near Causeway, thousands of people (at least 90% black and poor) stood and squatted in mud and trash behind metal barricades, under an unforgiving sun, with heavily armed soldiers standing guard over them. When a bus would come through, it would stop at a random spot, state police would open a gap in one of the barricades, and people would rush for the bus, with no information given about where the bus was going. Once inside (we were told) evacuees would be told where the bus was taking them - Baton Rouge, Houston, Arkansas, Dallas, or other locations. I was told that if you boarded a bus bound for Arkansas (for example), even people with family and a place to stay in Baton Rouge would not be allowed to get out of the bus as it passed through Baton Rouge.

You had no choice but to go to the shelter in Arkansas. If you had people willing to come to New Orleans to pick you up, they could not come within 17 miles of the camp.

I traveled throughout the camp and spoke to Red Cross workers, Salvation Army workers, National Guard, and state police, and although they were friendly, no one could give me any details on when buses would arrive, how many, where they would go to, or any other information. I spoke to the several teams of journalists nearby, and asked if any of them had been able to get any information from any federal or state officials on any of these questions, and all of them, from Australian tv to local Fox affiliates complained of an unorganized, non-communicative, mess. One cameraman told me "as someone who's been here in this camp for two days, the only information I can give you is this: get out by nightfall. You don't want to be here at night."

There was also no visible attempt by any of those running the camp to set up any sort of transparent and consistent system, for instance a line to get on buses, a way to register contact information or find family members, special needs services for children and infirm, phone services, treatment for possible disease exposure, nor even a single trash can.

To understand the dimensions of this tragedy, its important to look at New Orleans itself.

For those who have not lived in New Orleans, you have missed a incredible, glorious, vital, city. A place with a culture and energy unlike anywhere else in the world. A 70% African-American city where resistance to white supremacy has supported a generous, subversive and unique culture of vivid beauty. From jazz, blues and hiphop, to secondlines, Mardi Gras Indians, Parades, Beads, Jazz Funerals, and red beans and rice on Monday nights, New Orleans is a place of art and music and dance and sexuality and liberation unlike anywhere else in the world.

It is a city of kindness and hospitality, where walking down the block can take two hours because you stop and talk to someone on every porch, and where a community pulls together when someone is in need. It is a city of extended families and social networks filling the gaps left by city, state and federal governments that have abdicated their responsibility for the public welfare. It is a city where someone you walk past on the street not only asks how you are, they wait for an answer.

It is also a city of exploitation and segregation and fear. The city of New Orleans has a population of just over 500,000 and was expecting 300 murders this year, most of them centered on just a few, overwhelmingly black, neighborhoods. Police have been quoted as saying that they don't need to search out the perpetrators, because usually a few days after a shooting, the attacker is shot in revenge.

There is an atmosphere of intense hostility and distrust between much of Black New Orleans and the N.O. Police Department. In recent months, officers have been accused of everything from drug running to corruption to theft. In separate incidents, two New Orleans police officers were recently charged with rape (while in uniform), and there have been several high profile police killings of unarmed youth, including the murder of Jenard Thomas, which has inspired ongoing weekly protests for several months.

The city has a 40% illiteracy rate, and over 50% of black ninth graders will not graduate in four years. Louisiana spends on average \$4,724 per child's education and ranks 48th in the country for lowest teacher salaries. The equivalent of more than two classrooms of young people drop out of Louisiana schools every day and about 50,000 students are absent from school on any given day. Far too many young black men from New Orleans end up enslaved in Angola Prison, a former slave plantation where inmates still do manual farm labor, and over 90% of inmates eventually die in the prison. It is a city where industry has left, and most remaining jobs are are low-paying, transient, insecure jobs in the service economy.

Race has always been the undercurrent of Louisiana politics. This disaster is one that was constructed out of racism, neglect and incompetence.

Hurricane Katrina was the inevitable spark igniting the gasoline of cruelty and corruption. From the neighborhoods left most at risk, to the treatment of the refugees to the the media portrayal of the victims, this disaster is shaped by race.

Louisiana politics is famously corrupt, but with the tragedies of this week our political leaders have defined a new level of incompetence. As hurricane Katrina approached, our Governor urged us to "Pray the hurricane down" to a level two. Trapped in a building two days after the hurricane, we tuned our battery-operated radio into local radio and tv stations, hoping for vital news, and were told that our governor had called for a day of prayer. As rumors and panic began to rule, they was no source of solid dependable information. Tuesday night, politicians and reporters said the water level would rise another 12 feet - instead it stabilized. Rumors spread

like wildfire, and the politicians and media only made it worse.

While the rich escaped New Orleans, those with nowhere to go and no way to get there were left behind. Adding salt to the wound, the local and national media have spent the last week demonizing those left behind. As someone that loves New Orleans and the people in it, this is the part of this tragedy that hurts me the most, and it hurts me deeply.

No sane person should classify someone who takes food from indefinitely closed stores in a desperate, starving city as a "looter," but that's just what the media did over and over again. Sheriffs and politicians talked of having troops protect stores instead of perform rescue operations.

Images of New Orleans' hurricane-ravaged population were transformed into black, out-of-control, criminals. As if taking a stereo from a store that will clearly be insured against loss is a greater crime than the governmental neglect and incompetence that did billions of dollars of damage and destroyed a city. This media focus is a tactic, just as the eighties focus on "welfare queens" and "super-predators" obscured the simultaneous and much larger crimes of the Savings and Loan scams and mass layoffs, the hyper-exploited people of New Orleans are being used as a scapegoat to cover up much larger crimes.

City, state and national politicians are the real criminals here. Since at least the mid-1800s, its been widely known the danger faced by flooding to New Orleans. The flood of 1927, which, like this week's events, was more about politics and racism than any kind of natural disaster, illustrated exactly the danger faced. Yet government officials have consistently refused to spend the money to protect this poor, overwhelmingly black, city.

While FEMA and others warned of the urgent impending danger to New Orleans and put forward proposals for funding to reinforce and protect the city, the Bush administration, in every year since 2001, has cut or refused to fund New Orleans flood control, and ignored scientists warnings of increased hurricanes as a result of global warming. And, as the dangers rose with the floodlines, the lack of coordinated response dramatized vividly the callous disregard of our elected leaders.

The aftermath from the 1927 flood helped shape the elections of both a US President and a Governor, and ushered in the southern populist politics of Huey Long.

In the coming months, billions of dollars will likely flood into New Orleans. This money can either be spent to usher in a "New Deal" for the city, with public investment, creation of stable union jobs, new schools, cultural programs and housing restoration, or the city can be "rebuilt and revitalized" to a shell of its former self, with newer hotels, more casinos, and with chain stores and theme parks replacing the former neighborhoods, cultural centers and corner jazz clubs.

Long before Katrina, New Orleans was hit by a hurricane of poverty, racism, disinvestment, deindustrialization and corruption. Simply the damage from this pre-Katrina hurricane will take billions to repair.

Now that the money is flowing in, and the world's eyes are focused on Katrina, its vital that progressive-minded people take this opportunity to fight for a rebuilding with justice. New Orleans is a special place, and we need to fight for its rebirth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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"LAWLESSNESS"

By Walter Johnson

The word of choice to describe the last several days in New Orleans seems to be "lawlessness" (NYT, 9/2), either that or its rougher-edged synonym "anarchy." These words suggest that what has happened in New Orleans is that the absence of functioning civil authority -- the absence of law -- has resulted in the terrible scenes of debasement which run in an endless loop on our television screens. And because New Orleans is the way it is, largely poor and largely black, they symbolically identify African-Americans with that state of lawlessness; never more clearly so than with the photo run on the front page of the Daily News today under the heading "Anarchy" -- a broken white body being hauled out of the Superdome.

I suppose the idea behind these words and behind the stupefied amazement that anyone would ever do something as depraved and counter-productive as shoot at a helicopter that was trying to medivac old ladies or hijack a truck carrying desperately needed water to refugees who needed it to mix their baby formula, is that the abandoned citizens of New Orleans should simply behave in an orderly manner and sit tight: so many Negroes sitting on the veranda of the Superdome waiting for the U.S. government to bail them out. They should be patient.

Here's the thing: they have been waiting. For years. For decades. And the law hasn't done them any favors. They have been suffering not from lawlessness, but its opposite: laws which have allowed corporations to loot their resources and destroy their environments; laws which have plowed millions and millions of dollars into subsidizing the exodus of whites from the city of New Orleans (the oft-mentioned, now-destroyed Ponchartrain Causeway was one such project, a huge federally funded corridor built so that white suburbanites could beat a retreat from the city as soon as they picked up their paycheck); laws which have used the image of duck-hunting sportsmen as a justification for allowing an unscrupulous firearms industry to flood our cities with handguns and assault weapons; laws which have allowed property to go untaxed and schools unfunded; laws which have left their children vulnerable to police violence and harassment even as their elders go unprotected; laws which have steered resources away from a levee system that everyone always knew was inadequate and toward a war that everyone always knew was unnecessary.

To say that the disaster that has befallen New Orleans has been decades in the making is to slightly mis-state the case. This disaster has been ongoing for decades. Chronically rather than acutely, out of the sight of the spectacle-driven media. (Is it any accident that the one-to-one correspondence between the Superdome and the Astrodome, the two great sites of gladiatorial spectacle rendered the piteous thousands at the Convention Center almost invisible, assembled there to be forgotten as they died on the sidewalk?). These people have been forgotten. Excluded. Left Behind. And now that the process has finally reached its conclusion, now that the car-less and card-less and the old and the lame and the addicted and un-educated and impoverished of New Orleans have finally reached the breaking point and staggered out into public view, they are being scolded for not waiting patiently enough for the very governments that have for so long abandoned them to get their attention focused and come in their and rescue them. Really: is it any wonder?

For a lot of Americans, the city of New Orleans and the rest of the Gulf Coast represent "the past." There are two parts to this identification of a place with a time: there is the Creole gentility and old-time Jazz past identified with the French Quarter and there is the violent racist pre-Civil Rights past that the South -- no matter how many aging klansman murderers are jailed -- is never seen to have quite left behind. But what if "the South," this imagined South, represents not our past, but our future: a world without environmental and labor protection; a world where white people have huge iron fences around their houses and black people live behind bars; a world where white flight and capital flight have left young black people with a poisoned choice between lives in the military or life in the Supermax; a world in which plaid uniforms, standardized tests, and "intelligent design" are promoted as solutions for schools where students are lucky if they can find a flushing toilet.

What if when we look at the desperate, angry people on the television screen we realize that we are seeing not

the result of anarchy but of the rule of law? What if we are seeing not some atavistic upwelling of the nation's lawless past, but a premonition of its future?

Walter Johnson
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New Orleans' Racial Divide: An Unnatural Disaster

by Emma Dixon

When Hurricane Katrina tore up the roof of my house, it didn't care that I'm black. My white neighbors, like my black neighbors, saw trees fall on their homes and saw their refrigerators rot and mold. They, like I, lived without electricity or phone for over a week after that color-blind natural disaster.

But an unnatural disaster hit us as well, the institutionalized racism that began centuries ago. The flooded areas of New Orleans were three-quarters black, while in dry areas, African Americans were a minority. Over the years, many well-off white people have left the city for gated suburban communities. The remaining whites tend to live on higher ground.

The unnatural disaster of racism swept away the savings accounts and credit cards with which poor black people could have bought their escape. A century of Jim Crow laws barred black families in the South from certain schools and jobs. Social Security benefits were not available at first to domestic and agricultural workers, the occupations of most African Americans at that time. Due to discrimination, most black WWII veterans were unable to use the GI Bill, which gave most white veterans the homeownership and college educations that have made their children and grandchildren so prosperous.

The unnatural disaster of racism swept away the cars with which poor black people could have escaped Katrina. Almost a third of residents of the flooded neighborhoods did not own the cars on which the evacuation plan relied. If the promise to the freed slaves of 40 acres and a mule had been kept, then six generations later, their descendents would own more assets, and the mule would now be a Buick.

Nor has this unnatural disaster abated today, as I learned from my own experience. Almost immediately after Katrina hit my town, I saw spray-painted signs warning that looters would be shot and killed. I was warned by a white neighbor not to move around too much lest I be mistaken as a looter.

When my daughter came to get me from my damaged house and drove me to her home in Indiana, we were turned away by a white motel clerk in Illinois on the pretext that there were no vacancies. A later phone call confirmed what their sign said, that rooms were available. I also experienced first-hand racial discrimination in gas lines, and in food and water distribution lines by a police officer.

The world noticed that the evacuees stuck in the SuperDome and those turned back at gunpoint at the Gretna bridge were mostly black. But who noticed that the first no-bid federal contracts went to white businessmen, cronies of white politicians?

It's hard for me to believe, but this persistent racism is invisible to many white people. A Time Magazine poll taken in September found that while three quarters of blacks believe race and income level played a role in the government response to Hurricane Katrina, only 29 percent of whites felt the same.

The color of money is green, but the color of poverty has a darker hue. Families in the flooded black neighborhoods of New Orleans had a 2004 median income of only \$25,759 a year, barely more than half the

national average. Why? Louisiana is a low-wage, anti-union state. Many workers have pay so low that they receive public housing and food stamps. New Orleans voters made history by approving a citywide living wage in 2002, but a court blocked it, allowing poverty wages to continue.

Last week I drove home to Louisiana. In my neighborhood I hear the constant buzzing of chain saws removing uprooted trees, and the sounds of hammering as roofers repair endless numbers of damaged roofs. The fragrances of Pine Sol and bleach tinge the air as residents attempt to save refrigerators and rain-soaked carpets. I thank God that my family and I survived the storm, and that the recovery has begun.

Yet I ask myself when the other recovery will begin.

Katrina revealed the racial wealth divide in New Orleans and the unnatural disaster that caused it. When will we rebuild our society so that everyone, regardless of race, has the means to escape the next disaster?

Emma Dixon , of Mandeville, Louisiana is a financial literacy educator with United for a Fair Economy .

Similarities between tribes and the 9th Ward

Cedric Sunray

Native American Times, September 6th 2005

The word tragedy can hardly signify the extent of the pain being suffered by many in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. While America comes to grips with the enormity of the despair, people, many of them black, in the previously unheard of 9th Ward of New Orleans (one of the country's most impoverished ghettos), already understand the touch, taste and sound of generations of poverty.

A poverty created by a very real caste system, which exists here in the United States of America. And Indians are no exception.

Indian Country has it's own 9th Ward of faceless individuals and families who have been some of the hardest hit over the course of this past week. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) won't be assisting them anytime soon. The United South and Eastern Tribes (USET) won't be shipping supplies their way. And by all current accounts, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has also left them out of the loop. The reason: federal recognition.

The United Houma Nation in Southeastern Louisiana and the MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians located just north of the City of Mobile, Alabama have been forgotten. The United Houma Nation will not receive final word on their petition before the Bureau of Acknowledgement and Research (BAR) until September 2006 and the MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians pending bill HR3526 is currently being reviewed in Washington D.C.

Though forgotten in legal terms. Poverty hasn't forgotten them. Racism hasn't forgotten them. Help, it seems, has. While the federal government and national Indian organizations intent on assisting federal Indian tribes-many of whom need little assistance-send money and supplies from one casino wealthy southeastern tribe to another, the United Houma Nation's eastern territory sits submerged under the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Homes, vehicles, personal mementos and their traditional lands have disappeared. From Boothville in Plaquemines Parish to New Orleans, Houma Indians have had their lives turned completely upside down. When the phone rang last Wednesday my heart was in my stomach. My Aunt Dove was calling me to let me know that they had escaped New Orleans and made it many miles north to Clinton, Louisiana. Her beloved pets had not. Many of her irreplaceable photos of tribal history and family had remained as well. She was all right

though shaken. The previous evenings had been filled with emotion and non-stop phone call attempts by my wife and I. Two days later, the Houma's Vice Principal Chief Michael Dardar would call. He and his family had also escaped. His words to me were simple. "There is nothing left down the bayou. Our home is gone. All the people home is gone." News from the MOWA reservation, though better, wasn't that great either. Tribal citizens had extensive roof and water damage. No electricity or phone service for a week meant no edible food in refrigerators or contact with the outside. Our tribal school, they told me, had been closed since the hurricane struck. Needed repairs are upcoming.

The MOWA Choctaw and United Houma Nation are one and the same. As communities of primarily impoverished and identifiable Indian people, we have never had the best of what America has to offer. The prosperity parade doesn't march down the roads of our communities. And neither will assistance. Our lack of federal recognition has placed us at the mercy of federal bureaucrats and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. We are the neglected of the neglected.

You see, it is easy to forget about people, when you marginalize them and pretend they no longer exist.

Just ask the people in New Orleans's 9th Ward.

New Orleans: A Choice Between Destruction and Reparations

By David Billings

There is this monument to white supremacy in New Orleans. It is called the Liberty Monument. It commemorates the 1871 Battle of Liberty Place in which local white militia attempted to wrest control of the city from the Reconstruction forces after the Civil War. Thirty-three militia were killed. In their honor, this monument stood at the foot of Canal Street for over 125 years. It stood even as the city became majority African-American in population and even as successive black mayors attempted to have it removed. It was finally moved—around the corner—in 1999 to a spot just outside the city's French Quarter and next to its waterfront. The Liberty Monument survived Hurricane Katrina.

Just about everything else in New Orleans was destroyed.

The Liberty Monument symbolizes New Orleans to me. During the thirty-four years I lived in the city, from 1971 to 2004, that monument reminded me of who really controls the city. White people do. We own it all.

Before Katrina, black folks staffed New Orleans. Black folks worked it. But white folks ran it. The statistics are startling. Less than a third of the population of Orleans Parish was white (27%) and two-thirds was black (66%), but according to local nonprofit agencies, almost all of the wealth in New Orleans has been held in the hands of whites—mostly the very rich white folks who have been there for generations and profit handsomely from its resources: the river, oil and gas, tourists. Theirs are the houses of the stately Garden District and St. Charles Avenue, and the tucked-away, hidden enclaves of the French Quarter. They survived Hurricane Katrina.

Just about everything else in New Orleans was destroyed.

Here are two scenarios for New Orleans.

SCENARIO I: New Orleans as a new Disney World

New Orleans will be a different city when it is rebuilt. Old money will stay wealthy. But new money will rebuild New Orleans and get even richer. The future of New Orleans will be Disney World: not the California

or Florida version, but a raunchier version—more like Vegas or Rio. It will be replete with gambling casinos and restaurants galore. It will have music clubs and second-line parades. Bourbon Street will have strippers and Café du Monde will still sell beignets, but it will all be fake. “Faux New Orleans,” if you will. Sanitized, commercialized, tourist-flavored New Orleans available to all at a price only a few will be able to afford.

It will have to import its funk.

Workers will have to be trained to dance in second-lines and flambeaux carriers will be outlawed as fire hazards. Mardi Gras parades will continue on St. Charles and down Canal Street, but the bands will be hired and brought into town and the crowds will be made up of people from the Midwest and points north. Few locals will remain.

Just about everything else in New Orleans will be destroyed.

In this scenario, there is no way all those poor folks are going to be allowed to return home. The poor folks you saw screaming for help on television. The people who were trapped on rooftops and nursing homes and hospitals and evacuation centers as the waters rose and the food and drinking water ran out.

They will be dispersed across America. They are not the type of poor people likely to elicit this country’s sympathies. Not for very long.

The United States likes poor people to be docile and compliant, certainly grateful and appreciative for the help given them. However late and however limited this help might be.

But many of New Orleans flood victims were anything but grateful. They were angry and frustrated over years of neglect, injustice and unfair treatment. While Katrina was the most recent example of institutional breakdown when it came to poor black people in New Orleans, it was not the first.

In 1927, during the Great Mississippi River Flood so well chronicled in John Barry’s book *Rising Tide*, the levees were bombed to save the French Quarter and the Central Business District at the expense of the poor and working-class people of the city’s Ninth Ward and the immediate areas adjacent to them, St. Bernard Parish.

Hurricane Betsy in 1965 would breach the levees again and flood those same areas. One would be hard pressed to find any living resident of the Ninth Ward who does not believe those levees were again bombed to save the rich white parts of town.

Yet New Orleans has a long history of resisting white rule and control. The largest rebellion by enslaved Africans in the United States took place in 1811 right outside New Orleans. Forces led by Charles Deslondes marched on the city. They were called murderous savages and looters. They instilled deep fears in the white folk. Governor Claiborne called out the military. Deslondes was captured, his followers killed and hanged. They were beheaded and their skulls stuck on fence posts as a gruesome reminder of what happens in New Orleans to lawless thugs, looters, anarchists.

At the opening of the 20th century, Robert Charles, a young black man from Woodville, Mississippi, was so outraged when he witnessed everyday official brutality and murder of African-Americans in New Orleans that he set out to kill white people. Barricaded in a Central City house, he managed to shoot twenty-seven white people, including seven police officers. What he also struck was those deep fears buried in the psyches of white people of black men with guns. Massive reprisals of whites against African-Americans resulted in scores of black deaths.

In 1972, Mark Essex, a twenty-three-year-old Navy veteran from Emporia, Kansas, went on a shooting spree that ended on the top of a Howard Johnson’s hotel across from the New Orleans City Hall. Essex, African-

American, held off the entire police department and National Guard of New Orleans (at that time still almost totally white in an already black-majority city). Essex killed five police officers, including the Deputy Chief Louis Sergo. Black people watched from chairs they set up across the street from the Howard Johnson's. They were not afraid since they knew Mark Essex was not shooting at them. When Essex was finally killed, 200 bullets were found in his body.

So when Hurricane Katrina struck and the city flooded, the poor people who shoved and pushed, shouted and cried, knew what was happening. Alternating between being scared senseless and enraged, they knew this was not the first time the systems of the state had failed them. It was just the latest.

New Orleans' poorest people have been dealt with as nothing all their lives. Jobless for generations, they were ignored by the city's schools. At the time Katrina struck, 50% of New Orleans adults aged eighteen to sixty-five were virtually illiterate (sources: 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey and www.gnocdc.org). Before Katrina, 65% of New Orleanians were renters. Most public housing had already been gutted. Five years prior to Katrina's ravages, a federal policy of neglect and disinvestment we can call "Hurricane HOPE VI" had already destroyed four major public housing developments named Desire, Florida, Magnolia, and St. Thomas.

Poor black people were in the way before Katrina and they would be in the way afterwards. They have no claim on the new New Orleans.

The new New Orleans will be filled with mixed-income developments, subsidized and guaranteed by the government. These mixed-income communities will be carefully monitored to control the percentages of poor people in any given neighborhood. As Congressman Richard Baker (R-LA; 6th Congressional District, Baton Rouge) was overheard saying shortly after the storm waters wiped out huge swaths of the city: "Mother Nature accomplished what we couldn't. She emptied the housing projects of New Orleans."

The people in charge of New Orleans didn't give a damn about poor black people. So some of the poor black people didn't give a damn either. Somewhere deep in their psyche they knew they could all be locked up and forgotten and white folks would not shed a tear. So some of them broke into white folks' homes and businesses. One don't-give-a-damn deserves another.

In this scenario, a rebuilt New Orleans will be a free-market paradise rooted in unbridled capitalism and anti-public-sector values. Finally, in the heretofore most unlikely of American cities, public officials can hand out private school vouchers rather than reconstruct a failed public school system. Finally, they have an opportunity to put faith-based initiatives to work because black preachers have lost their base. Because everything else in New Orleans has been destroyed.

Or has it?

Let's take a look at:

SCENARIO 2: Reparations for New Orleans now!

Why not rebuild New Orleans as the first major down payment of reparations for the descendants of Africa kidnapped and enslaved in the Americas? Instead of a New Orleans Disneyland built by riverfront developers for condo-buying real estate investors and pleasure seekers, let New Orleans represent a counter-diaspora. Let's rebuild the city with African-Americans and other peoples of color in the lead as a testimony to this nation's efforts to destroy white supremacy once and for all. Let's guarantee that those families spread so far afield by Katrina will design and lead the reconstruction. Let's implement a Second Reconstruction. And this time we will get it right.

Let's rebuild New Orleans with equity in mind, rooted in the strengths that made it America's most unique city.

Let's use government resources to invest in and preserve some of America's greatest cultural heritages.

Let's rebuild City Hall in Louis Armstrong Park—in the heart of Treme, the oldest African settlement in the United States. Build it around Congo Square, the one location that Africans were allowed to gather for celebration, dance, and (unbeknownst to white people) organizing—not as a neglected artifact of slavery past, but as the cultural rooting of a liberated future. Far-fetched notion? Well, Congo Square survived Katrina.

Not everything in New Orleans has been destroyed.

There are thousands ready to rebuild and who have a plan.

Community Labor United (CLU) is one. CLU is organizing evacuees to actively participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans. In their call to action, just four days after the storm, CLU stated, “We 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 rebuilding casinos, hotels, chemical plants and the wealthy white districts of New Orleans.... We will not stand idly by while the disaster is used as an opportunity to replace our homes with newly built mansions and condos in a gentrified New Orleans.”

The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond is another. It has called for an investigation by the United Nations. “This calamity demonstrates how racism manifests itself in every institution in this country,” said Ron Chisom, co-founder of the twenty-five-year-old organization headquartered in New Orleans. Core trainer Daniel Buford said from the West Coast office of the Institute, “We need the United Nations to oversee an international public works campaign similar to the post-tsunami rebuilding efforts in South Asia and the Pacific. We can't allow this tragedy to become a ‘cash cow’ for those who always benefit from war and crisis... Only an international body can guarantee that.”

There are many others steeled for resistance. Many of us who love New Orleans, despite its racist history, are looking toward building its future with anti-racist fervor.

Not everything in New Orleans has been destroyed.

Alas, the Liberty Monument still stands. Protected by its proximity to the huge concrete barriers that hold the Mississippi at bay, it is a constant reminder of the axiom that regardless of how much things change, some things remain the same.

David Billings is a core trainer and organizer with The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. He is an ordained United Methodist minister, and in 1986 co-founded European Dissent, a collective of white anti-racist activists. A native of McComb, Mississippi, David lived in New Orleans for three decades, moving to New York City in 2004.

An Unfragmented Movement: Interview with Shana Griffin

by Joanna Dubinsky

"I'M NOT INTERESTED in developing an action plan to rebuild/organize a people's agenda in New Orleans without a gender analysis and a demand for community accountability."

I

It had been two weeks since Katrina's floodwaters and the government's indifference was unleashed on the city of New Orleans: two weeks spent in anguish and outrage—searching for information, analysis, and hope. I was thinking about how to wrap my mind around everything — especially wondering where the feminist analysis

was — when this email demanding gender analysis popped into my email inbox.

I wasn't surprised that it came from Shana Griffin, life-long resident of New Orleans, activist, organizer and self-described Black feminist. I had known Shana for several years, through sometimes common political work and overlapping social circles. I immediately shot an email back, and we promised to talk. In our exile Shana and I have crossed paths several times, including the Penn Center in South Carolina, the location of the second meeting establishing the People's Hurricane Relief Fund & Oversight Coalition. It was at this meeting where fellow survivors selected her to be on the nine-person Interim Coordinating Committee. We've been on conference calls and seen each other twice in New Orleans since my "permanent" return. Shana is living in the diaspora -- her temporary home base is Philadelphia, where her son Jamal is enrolled in school until his New Orleans school reopens in January. In our too-brief conversations, we agreed to set aside time to discuss building the movement for self-determination in New Orleans. I decided that it should be an interview, because there are too few voices -- especially women's voices — coming out of New Orleans, and I wanted hers to be heard.

JD: First, for some background for folks who don't know much about New Orleans, what was it like, for you, coming up in New Orleans?

SG: I grew up in a socio-economically isolated setting, the Iberville Housing Development (the public housing project near the French Quarter), in a predominantly Black neighborhood. So from an early age, I was able to look at the disparity of access to resources between my neighborhood and the rest of downtown.

My mother wouldn't let me go to the school in the neighborhood; I went to school in the French Quarter. My school was 60% white and 40% people of color, mostly African American. At the time, the French Quarter was less white than it is today -- it was more mixed -- and I would go from that setting back to my home setting, which was all Black. I knew something wasn't quite right, but I couldn't name it. I didn't know how to talk about it.

Also I grew up in a household with eight kids — four boys, four girls — and with my mom and dad, that was household of 10. We were also one of the few households that had both parents in the house. And that was interesting, coming from a family that had equal boys and girls, examining how my mom responded to her sons, as opposed to how she responded to her daughters. And being a twin, with a twin brother, I could see how -- not just my mom — my entire family and other individuals responded to him being a boy and me being a girl. So how you were supposed to respond to different gender roles became very clear to me at a young age. And being in a socio-economically isolated place, I was acutely aware of the fact that poor people worked extremely hard — everybody I knew worked — but they still had very little. At school, some of the white children would talk about how their moms didn't work; yet they had so much.

This was something striking about growing up in New Orleans. In terms of culture, you can look at the Black Mardi Gras vs. the traditional/French Quarter or white Mardi Gras experience to see the difference.

JD: Could you talk about that a little bit more?

SG: Actually, I'm not a very big fan of Mardi Gras. (We both laugh). Not at all. But the experience is just so different for Black and white people. The self-presentation, the art forms of Black people are very different.

In the Black community, Mardi Gras is when you step-out; it is when you exhibit your style. One of the worst things you can do on Mardi Gras day is bump into a Black person and pour some beer on their outfit; it would almost be like violating their honor. I don't know how else to describe it, but it's a presentation of cultural

identity. There is a sense of style; people exhibiting their style.

But Black Mardi Gras is also about location; where people congregate. Have you ever been around Orleans & Claiborne on Mardi Gras?

JD: Yeah, I've been there. It is different than Uptown or French Quarter Mardi Gras!

SG: Black people (in New Orleans) present themselves in a number of ways: you think about the Social Aid & Pleasure Clubs, the Black Men of Labor or — during Mardi Gras — the Mardi Gras Indians, baby dolls and brass bands. Mardi Gras is just one part of this is year-long activity of self-presentation, style, celebration, festival and ritual in Black New Orleans.

JD: How did your experiences coming up — you mentioned seeing this disparity between the Black and white communities of New Orleans, and your experience around gender in and outside your family — influence you becoming an organizer and a feminist?

SG: I spent 23 years of my life in the Iberville Public Housing Development, so it shaped not just my life work, but my identity, in terms of me identifying as a Black feminist. Being in this densely populated, yet socially isolating environment — isolated from economic and political resources — had a big imprint on me in terms of organizing.

My mother was the president of the Iberville Housing Council for 15 years, a pretty long time. I had to participate in different community events, as it relates to the neighborhood. So we had this sense of obligation — myself and my siblings— whether it was participating in a neighborhood cleanup, or distributing school supplies, or distributing Christmas Gifts in the neighborhood.

Also, the very first job I had was at a homeless clinic; I was 15 at the time. Having this experience of living in a housing development and then working at a homeless shelter also illustrated to me how services provided reflect the needs of men, but don't always address the needs of women and other communities who are also marginalized — queer, transgendered, gay/lesbian communities, immigrants and native people.

But my mom's housing organizing was the catalyst by which I became politicized. Being in that environment, I was also acutely aware of relationships between poverty, substance abuse, inter-relationship violence, institutional racism, savage inequality around education, as well as the over-policing of communities of color. That environment — the social ills of that environment — is reflected in all of the organizing that I have engaged myself in. I look back on movement building that I have done, I have tried to bring all these things together which in organizing are usually separated. But we don't just experience gender-based violence, we don't just experience racism, or privilege for that matter — we don't just experience one thing in a vacuum — and my life's work has been to bring these things together, to create an unfragmented movement.

JD: Could you talk more about your organizing work — such as your work with INCITE! [Women of Color Against Violence National Collective – ed.] or your anti-prison work — and how you see building these projects as building an unfragmented movement?

SG: When I come to a meeting — when I build a project — I want to engage my whole person, not just one piece of myself that is engaged in, say, education work, while ignoring all the feminist organizing that I do. So one of the things that I think is crucial for me, if I'm at a table, is that table has to be round, and it has to engage my whole person and experiences of others who may not be at that table, or else I have to step back.

Before I became a member of INCITE! National, I was already thinking about interrelationship violence. I don't know one woman who has not been sexually violated at one point in her life -- whether that was a sexual assault by a friend or family member, a rape by an acquaintance, or being engaged in a relationship where they had to submit to something that was uncomfortable to them out of fear of how that person would respond to them.

That is one piece of it. The other layer is that I have three sisters-in-law, and all three were sexually abused by a family member. My mother was sexually violated by her sister's husband, when he attempted to touch her in ways that were inappropriate. She was also raped by my father, which led to her first child being born. And all of her sisters experienced some sort of sexual violence.

So this experience, coupled with the experience of all the women I know, just showed to me that violence against women has almost become a norm. Because of this, my mom wouldn't let me participate in slumber parties, because she didn't trust the father, brother or uncle of the child.

When I was teaching, I was talking to my students about domestic violence and sexual assault, and what their rights and responsibilities are. And one student could not believe that I had been in a relationship where my partner never slapped me. It just shows how deep this, how normal it is, the expectation that two people who "love" each other would hit on each other, or emotionally or financially abuse each other.

Before even coming to INCITE! I had this awareness of different levels of violence that women experience in their lives, especially women of color. I was the Graduate Coordinator of the UNO Women's Center, but my biggest critique with that work was that this wasn't just happening on college campuses — college students come from communities, right?

When I was doing that work, I was doing work with Education Not Incarceration, which gave birth to Critical Resistance Chapter in New Orleans. But when I was doing this anti-prison work — discussing the abolition of prisons — there was no space to dialogue about the violence that women experience within our community. I was like: yo! —we're talking about the state violence that is done to our community, but not talking enough about the violence which is done within our community.

So coming to INCITE! was like coming home, because we could talk about and challenge both — the violence perpetrated by the state against communities of color, and violence within communities of color. But to add another layer to that, we also look at the violence the state perpetrates against other communities around the world, and even in North America, if you look at indigenous peoples, and how communities of color here benefited from that violence.

And moving forward with both of these movements, anti-violence and anti-prison work, and taking it another step, we said we have to do the work — the organizing — together, we can't just focus on one without the other. That is another example of engaging the whole person, not dividing them. I can't just walk into a room and say I'm a Black person. I'm a Black woman, who is a daughter, who is a mother, who teaches — so this is about not trying to divide myself in this work, or dividing the people in our communities.

I became involved in INCITE! locally in 2000; by fall of 2003 I was nominated to become part of INCITE National Organization. And INCITE National has a relationship with Critical Resistance National.

JD: We'll get back to organizing when we talk about Post-Katrina work. Could you talk about your experience evacuating from Katrina, and also explain past evacuation experiences to give folks context who have never lived in a hurricane-prone place?

SG: All my life I was aware of the devastation that Hurricanes Betsy and Camille caused to the city of New Orleans. Growing up, I was also aware that the Big One was going to come, but no one knew for sure when it would occur. Public housing was actually one of the safest places you could be during a hurricane. Many developments were on higher ground, built high off of the ground, and many of the buildings were very strong. I was born in 1974, and we never evacuated growing up.

When we didn't live in the housing development anymore, we had to rethink a strategy to ride out a storm. My family first evacuated in 1999; five years later, in 2004, I evacuated for Hurricane Ivan. I didn't want to leave, but my mom left with my son the day before. I didn't leave because I was afraid of the hurricane, I was afraid of making my mom upset!

Again, the city just experienced some rain, not much else. Many people realized that the city didn't have a solid

evacuation plan. Most people went west, and we went east to Atlanta to avoid the traffic. By the time we left, twelve hours after my mom, they were only [the equivalent of] two hours away from New Orleans.

In terms of Hurricane Katrina, it was strange because the hurricane wasn't even on my radar. I spent all day Friday at UNO, trying to determine what else I needed to do to graduate from my graduate program, and on the way home I stopped at the new community center, where Joe's Cozy Corner used to be, after school services for kids and assistance for women experiencing domestic violence. A friend of mine, also part of the INCITE! Chapter, stopped by to see how we could support this work.

Up to that point, how they had been reporting it on the news made it seem like it wasn't a threat to New Orleans. So it caught many people off guard...

JD: Yeah, that is what everyone says, I know we went to a movie Friday night and I had a meeting on Saturday, we went out to eat for lunch, and then, within an hour we had decided to leave, packed up and went...

SG: On Saturday, we were at garage sales. We went to the Farmer's Market. We bought stuff, and then we got home and said "oh shit!" the hurricane is headed this way. I talked to my mom, and we knew we were going to leave.

So it wasn't an issue of not leaving, it was how we would leave, when to leave, and how we would check in with other people to see what they would do. There was no preparation time. My mom left on Saturday with my son. We went to the grocery store and about half the people were staying, and half were leaving, but everyone was stocking up.

Saturday night, watching the news, Mayor Ray Nagin said that if he had the authority to issue a mandatory evacuation he would. He had heard from many meteorologists that the storm would topple the levee system, and he said those in low-lying parishes and low-lying areas in Orleans should leave. Governor Blanco said to pack as if you were going on a camping trip, which wasn't very culturally sensitive, because many people in Orleans have never been on a camping trip.

Mayor Nagin asked that those with the resources in the Lower 9th Ward and New Orleans East should evacuate. It was interesting to listen to the language — nothing about those without resources evacuating, nothing about how they would get out. And at first the Superdome was a shelter of last resort for those with special needs.

On Sunday morning there was a feeling I'd never experienced in the city. Everyone was running around, getting gas. There were these people who I think were homeless, and I had never seen such sadness in my life. They were just watching people get gas, and they were just standing there. Their faces seemed to say "What about us?"

Looking at them, I started to cry. I thought about the work that I used to do coming up, and people being left behind, wondering if I would see these people again, thinking that we would be back in a few days.

After we'd been on the road for an hour, the mayor announced a mandatory evacuation of the city. He had found somewhere in the city charter something that provided him the authority to issue a mandatory evacuation. It was the first time it had ever been done in the city.

When he was doing this, he identified ten shelters, including the Superdome, but there was also a shelter in the Lower 9th Ward area and the New Orleans East area. It was interesting because these were areas that he had already identified as low-lying areas. And he kept on saying the levees would be toppled. I had written down all the shelters, because I was going to be on the Y's crisis line that night, and I wanted to tell women in crisis where to go. My mother and son had gone to Texas, but we evacuated — 11 of us — to a friend's parent's house in Western Louisiana.

I was afraid to go to sleep, because I didn't know what the city was going to look like when I woke up. I remember waking up and hearing that the roof to the Superdome had just been ripped off. And I just started to cry, because I thought it was just a death-trap. Of course this was all sensationalized, only part of the roof had come off.

And the worst thing I could have done was call my mom; I couldn't even talk, and here is her baby daughter talking about how many people had died. She was telling me to calm down, that she couldn't hear what I was saying. I shouldn't have called my mom in tears. And she put the TV on, and I told her that I would call when I pulled myself together. And I started calling my friends to see where they were and to make sure they were safe. They kept on using this phrase — “structural failure” — to describe different parts of the city. New Orleans didn't get a direct hit, which we were all glad about, but there was a lot of damage. As Monday went on, you started to hear reports about water, and by the next day 80% of the city was underwater and you just wondered “what the hell happened?”

That is when the reality was starting to set in. And then they were telling people still in the city to get out and I was just yelling at the TV — how would they get out if they didn't have the money or resources to get out before? There was no plan to get people out of the city. There was so much going on, and I thought I had everyone accounted for, and then I realized there were 50 other people who I didn't know where the hell they were.

I just remember being angry at the TV, being angry at the focus on those who were looting. And who you saw were mostly women of color, specifically Black women with children, older people, people with disabilities — this was who was left, this was who was visible. Poverty became a “Black Marker.” But where were the white people, where were the other people in the city?

JD: And if you will remember the first night, you saw white folks — I think some were tourists — lined up to go into the Superdome, and after that you didn't see them very much. A few at the Convention Center.

SG: Yeah, what happened to the white people? You also didn't see anyone from the Vietnamese community, and there is a large Vietnamese community in New Orleans. And there are many Hondurans living in my neighborhood, documented and undocumented, but you didn't see them. Some communities were completely invisible.

So it became completely marginalized, and the image was of savage Black people. And the feeling was: why should we rescue these people? These people who are criminals, who are looting, who are raping, who are killing? The spin — it was the most awful thing I'd ever seen. And I felt like I couldn't watch the TV, but I also couldn't remove myself from the TV. But the only way I felt I could challenge it, was to watch it and try to be informed of what was going on.

It was the most isolating experience — I was in rural Louisiana, with 10 other evacuees, but I was the only one really from New Orleans, and I was the only Black person. And it was very difficult; West Louisiana isn't exactly the best place for a person in an interracial relationship to be. It was scary shit. I wanted to be with people who, if not my family, had similar experiences to me.

JD: I think many people who had evacuated were feeling hopeless and very isolated during that time. I was screaming at the TV, too.

SG: And where was the public outcry? I was thinking, this is insane! Kai, of Critical Resistance, called me and said “We need to do something! Maybe we should organize ‘Freedom Buses’ and go get people!” And I was thinking, that is a great idea -- but it won't work!

The reality was, the government was failing the people, and I was not surprised about that, specifically the community they were failing...But a lot of groups that identify themselves as progressive, radicals,

revolutionaries, leftist, or what have you -- we do not have the capacity to mobilize people, to rescue people and to provide relief. Yeah, we should have organized Freedom Buses, but how are we going to get the buses, how are we going to get into the city?

I started to think about activism and organizing in an imperialist nation, and how we all have the analysis but we also lack the resources and the people power to effectively move. It was a wake-up -- imperialism is real, and being in an oppressed community in a country like the United States, there is a level of comfort that we organizers and activists have, and that comfort — in terms of an imperialist privilege — prevents us from connecting with people so that we can effectively mobilize the resources we do have, not just to critique the government but to challenge the government in meeting the needs of the people in ways that are not met by traditional social service models.

JD: You are illustrating not just the lack of response of the government, but the weakness of the left and our response to Katrina. People are outraged, but we — the left — are not any stronger, we don't have any more capacity than we did on August 28th. But I think there is huge organizing potential in this moment, even though the task ahead of us is incredible. You've been in post-Katrina New Orleans, but you've also been in Philadelphia and other parts of the country. What has the progressive response been to in your estimation? And what potential is there for organizing? And what needs to be done to build this movement?

SG: I think those are very good questions. One of the things I've been thinking about is this statement the co-founder of INCITE!, Andrea Smith from the Cherokee Nation, made in 2000 at the first Color of Violence Conference at UC Santa Cruz — and I'm paraphrasing here — that there is a lot working against us, but the things we do have are numbers, we have the people, and if we aren't reaching out to people, organizing people from the grassroots, then we will always be stopped; we will always be beat.

We need to look at our work this way post-Katrina. There is a lot working against us, but there are so many resources that we have not acknowledged or tapped into, and that is the power of the people. And I'm not talking about people in an abstract way, because people have resources and skills and experiences that we have to identify and pull together.

So when we talk about post-Katrina organizing, we are talking again about building an unfragmented, an undivided movement. To build this we have to put all our own agendas aside and look to the people most adversely impacted, and that is the challenge. You see everyone grab, grab, grab for a piece saying "we are activists, we are organizers and we can do blah, blah, blah." But it isn't an individual thing — it is not "what can I do," but "what can we do" — it requires collective action. If there is one thing I've learned in INCITE! it is to create a pole for collective action, because it is not just about us.

There has been a lot learned from natural disasters, around the world, but not all this information has been shared: natural disasters, human conflicts, manmade disasters that we should have all learned from. Haiti was nearly destroyed a year ago from a hurricane. Where are the left and progressive forces learning from that experience?

If anything, for me, advocating for a grassroots response, stepping into the reality of it, I'm thinking: how do we create a more global awareness, how do we connect local to global? How do we see ourselves as a global society? As a Black person, this has made me more aware of being connected to a Black diaspora. Even when George Bush came down, he talked about "this part of the world" to distance himself from citizens of this country.

JD: Well, don't you think that fit in with the media discussion of refugees, to somehow "otherize" people from New Orleans to make them seem like they were from somewhere else?

SG: Yeah, but part of that was about how we view refugees in this country. Refugee is equated with something so negative, something so wrong, so "not us." So are the people they are seeing on TV so wrong, so not like

us?

I'm not advocating that people from the Gulf Coast are refugees; I don't think that is the most appropriate term. But I also don't think there is anything wrong with being a refugee, yet the media spin on it is so negative. And even Black leaders shouting "I am not a refugee!" — like it is such a bad thing. But when I saw the images of suffering in New Orleans, you could not deny that there are third world realities in the United States — and we need to connect with people around the world.

JD: I wanted you to expand more on the diaspora. It seems that many people in the United States make the assumption that folks from New Orleans just have to stay where they landed. Some — like Barbara Bush — even say that "they were underprivileged anyway, so this has worked out well for them." What does it mean to advocate for the right of return?

SG: What I was talking about earlier, about the social and economic isolation of where I grew up — that there were many social ills — but it was still a community. And when I think about New Orleans, I think about the over-incarceration, the inadequate schooling, the labor exploitation, the high level of violence against women, the sex industry that exists in the city, the housing crisis, unemployment, lack of HIV outreach and education — I mean there is so much shit — it is a very oppressive environment to live in.

But it is also one of the strongest communities to live in. That people can be denied to return to their communities of origin, city of origin — and I'm not advocating that New Orleans wasn't oppressive — but if you say someone is "underprivileged" you have to ask: Why was that allowed to occur? People didn't just walk away. They were forcibly removed. And many didn't know where they were going. And they are just expected to start over? How can you just start over when your safety net has been destroyed? Your family, your friends, your neighbors, your church, your schools are gone?

I'm not saying that people haven't been displaced around the world — they have. But to not acknowledge the trauma that they have suffered and endured after Katrina, the stress of worrying about other family members, and having to retrieve bodies and things like that. My own child has no desire to be back in New Orleans — I think it will change —but he's afraid of hurricanes. What impact has this had on children who waited on their rooftops or waded through the water?

What impact does it have to watch your mother die, and you have to roll your mother around in wheelchair? The desperation — what are you doing to us? Why aren't you here? While there are cameras and reporters in your face, but no help is on the way?

And the culture shock! New Orleans is more of a Caribbean city than a city in the South, or any other city in this country. It is a completely different culture. And there is just this expectation that you will adjust quickly. For those who want to return, they should not just have the right to return, but it should be qualified — they have the right to return to safe, clean environment with the resources to thrive. We need to be talking about sustainable human development. People have the right to return to a city that has quality affordable housing, and schools with the supplies they need to educate our kids.

It makes me think — if someone is hungry, and you give them food, it isn't necessarily what they need. And then you say, "You should be thankful, I just gave you this." And then it becomes a slap in the face. But there is the assumption that the communities where people have landed have met their needs, and that isn't true.

JD: Yeah, that is why the task ahead of us is so daunting, in terms of building a movement for the right of return and self-determination. I run into my neighbors, just back in town, and they say "Nagin told us to come back, but what are we coming back to? We have no electricity in my neighborhood, no infrastructure in our city, so I'm going back to where I was, because I can't live like this."

SG: Yeah, and even if people want to return: where will they stay? There is no affordable housing! And if you

don't return, you don't get any say in how the city is rebuilt, it will just keep moving along.

But if you go to New Orleans, there is life there. People are returning, people are rebuilding. And it is home. People want to go home. A damage has been done. Do we walk away, or restore?

My own personal story is that the house I lived in was destroyed; it got seven feet of water — there was damage from the top and the bottom. My mom's house in the 9th Ward got five feet of water, water sat in the house for weeks. I have a brother with a house in New Orleans East, which was completely destroyed. I have a sister in Mid-City; her roof was torn off and she got five feet of water, there was mold all the way to the ceiling.

My twin brother lived in an apartment complex, he lived on the third floor — he didn't receive any floodwater, but there was water on the first floor, so he had to move. He was living part time in New Orleans and part time in Oakland, so he just returned to Oakland. And I will return the third week of December, but I will be returning home without any family. None of my family can live in the city.

JD: Wow! And yours is just an example of one family — there are so many more stories like that. And in a way these circumstances are really forcing us to build the movement that you described before, an unfractured or undivided movement, cause there is really no way to divide all these complex issues.

SG: And it is something we've never done before, certainly not on such a large scale. And that is what attracted me to work with the People's Hurricane Relief Fund & Oversight Coalition.

I
f we are going to be organizing people to make demands, if we are going to be involved in the relief and reconstruction of New Orleans, it requires the rethinking and rebuilding of communities. How can we do that? And I think the workgroups and structure of the Coalition reflect that.

You can't rebuild a community without education. You can't rebuild a community without economic justice. You can't rebuild a community without environmental health and justice. You can't rebuild a community without safety and community accountability as it relates to the criminal justice system and violence against women. You can't rebuild a community without healthcare. You can't make demands without political oversight by the people.

Those are the ingredients needed for a community. And I just think that holistic approach by this coalition reflects that. Now, is it easy? No! -- because it has not been done before. It is going to be a challenge moving forward, but this is the only thing -- the only coalition that is taking this holistic approach and building it from the grassroots.

One of the things you haven't seen written about Katrina — though you are starting to see it now — is about violence against women, and the gender and racial face of poverty. When the news media was called out that Friday after the storm, by the Black Congressional Caucus and Kanye West, they began to shift and talk about looting less and poverty and Black people's poverty. A few days later, they dropped the racial issue of poverty, and only focused on poverty -- which just reminds us how difficult it is for people in this country to talk about racism and white supremacy.

But there was no discussion — no mainstream media coverage — of the gender impact of Katrina — no feminist perspective out there. It just became convenient to talk about poverty, and not the gender and racial face of it.

I've been pushing for analysis within the People's Hurricane Relief Fund & Oversight Coalition, and INCITE! locally and nationally has been organizing around this. One of the co-founders of INCITE! New Orleans, Janelle White, wrote a statement connecting the personal and political. And Loretta Ross from SisterSong, a women of color reproductive rights organization, wrote a statement "A Feminist Perspective of Hurricane Katrina" just acknowledging the violence women have experienced, and how the aftermath and response just

perpetuated that violence.

To go back to anti-racism and anti-violence organizing — the immediate response from NOPD (New Orleans Police Department) about the rapes was that they had no reports of it. Rape and sexual assault are the most underreported crimes in this country! And to deny it, just creates this environment of violence — you cannot even stop it.

One of the ways to control people is through rape, through sexual assault. And for women of color, there is also the choice you have to make, when you report rape to the police, to question how this contributes to the overpolicing of your community. And if you are an undocumented woman, you have to question how does it contribute to your partner or your being deported? And for transgendered people, there is always the fear that you won't be believed.

JD: And the current ratio of men to women in the city is something like 5:1 — due to construction workers etc. — so in addition to what you've said, what do you think the challenges women face post-Katrina?

SG: I wanted to talk about that — not only has there been a huge racial shift in the city, there has also been a gender shift. This makes New Orleans a dangerous place for women, not only because there are more men than women, but because services for women are not in the city right now.

The YWCA was the main place survivors of sexual assault could go. The “Y” had a rape crisis program for, I believe, the last 25 years. The “Y” will not be reopening, because the building was destroyed. There is no other organization providing that service in the city of New Orleans; and most other domestic violence programs have either relocated to Baton Rouge, or have shut down.

What will the post-Katrina organizing response be to ensure that it is safe for women to return to their community? And also, who will be providing services for the needs of survivors of sexual assault, who have been re-victimized during Katrina, and now want to return home?

That also brings up one of the most difficult things for me. Being in the city with few children, which is mostly male and where most people there don't give a shit about you or the city. Most men there are cleaning up, doing construction, FEMA workers.

It is really hard to reclaim and rebuild your city when the people who care about it are not there. And I can't speak enough about my concern about the whitening of New Orleans. A city that was nearly 70% Black is now more like 10%. And this all goes back to the injustice you saw in New Orleans before Katrina — it has made it so much easier for these demographic shifts to occur.

I call it inequality by design. It is not surprising, but it becomes so surreal when you can actually see the reality of it.

JD: It is almost as if it has happened at such a hyper-speed — it was always happening before, but the rapidness with which it happened, it is almost difficult to wrap your mind around it.

SG: It just begs the question: Who is the city for? It seems by design that Black people were pushed out and Brown people — Latino immigrants — were brought in. You've created this situation where Black people and Brown people are fighting for jobs. But what many Black people don't see is the condition under which Brown people are working. This is another reason we need to build an undivided movement.

In terms of organizing, INCITE! wants to support a community-based health clinic, with a women's center component. We also want to establish a child-care co-op for returning families. We have to rethink our organizing strategy... I do believe in the possibility that we can save the things that were good about the city and change the things that were not.

Section Two: Confronting Racism Resources for White Activists

Some Key Terms (taken from “White People Confronting Racism Manual” Antje Mattheus and Lorraine Marino 2003)

Racism: A system of advantage (disadvantage) based on race. Or, as Judith Katz defines it, prejudice, plus power (white awareness, 1978). Racism is different from racial prejudice; racism has to do with the power that comes from one’s social ranking as a member of the dominant racial group. “Power” means the ability to determine where one lives, works, enrolls at school; the ability to influence school curriculum, organizational practices and policies (such as hiring, promotion, etc.), images used in media, law enforcement, the number of and quality of goods and services available and so on.

Prejudice: “to pre-judge. An inner process or attitude; thinking of someone negatively because of their group identity (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, etc.). People of all races can have racial prejudice and can practice racial discrimination.

Discrimination: Acting on one’s prejudice through denial of information, access, or opportunity because of group identity.

White Culture: A culture that derives from white, European cultures. Many organizations have assumptions based on white culture, so it is important to understand it. Elements of this culture are that whites are valued above people of color; history is told from a European-American perspective. White culture also includes art and artifacts; styles for speaking, writing and dressing; lifestyle; how status is shown, religion, family structure, and so on that favor Euro-American heritage. Some norms of white culture include a value on the individual, emphasis on rational thinking, competition, and ranking. Since white culture is viewed as dominant in the U.S., it is viewed as “normal”. Many of its aspects are invisible to most white people.

Privilege: The dominant group takes or easily receives benefits because of their group’s power- such as good jobs, high income, access to money, physical safety, good education, quality health services, good housing, respectful treatment, being held in high regard, favorable historic interpretations, etc. Privilege can show up in “simple” ways such as being able to hail a cab when you need one; or not being treated in suspicion while shopping. It also shows up in “not-so-simple” ways such as being reasonably sure you’ll find a place to live where your neighbors are welcoming or at least neutral; or, that you will be treated fairly when stopped for a traffic issue.

Cumulative Impact of Racism: The effect of repeated experiences of racism on a person of color. The effect of many accumulated experiences may result in a person of color strongly reacting to one particular act; however, the reaction is not only about that one incident but the pattern of racism that they experienced prior.

Collusion- To give one’s agreement through silence or by going along with prejudicial comments or acts of racism. For people of color, they may remain silent or appear to go along with offensive behavior as a matter of survival. Whites may misinterpret this reaction as validation that the situation or action is “ok”. Whites may also stay silent out of fear of breaking ranks with other whites or out of a lack of awareness; the effect, however, is to enable a tacit agreement amongst whites that perpetuates racism.

Intent/ Impact: Our intent is invisible to the other person; however, our impact is not. It is the impact, or effect of an action or statement that the other person experiences. Intent and impact are not the same, and this disconnect is often a source of tension across race. Whites (or members of a mainstream group) tend to focus on their intention, not the impact of their actions. So they may feel angry or hurt when someone’s reaction

does not seem to recognize their intention. People of color (or a marginalized group) focus on impact. For regardless of one's intention, the effect is still real. Some actions and statements are not in themselves racist; however, they may have that impact. For example, not paying attention when a person of color is speaking; this behavior on its own would not be called racist. But the effect of a white person as a dominant group member can have a negating effect. A key skill is understanding that both are present and to acknowledge one's impact rather than denying it.

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group

Peggy McIntosh

Through work to bring materials from women's studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there are most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in Women's Studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow "them" to be more like "us".

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions which I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin color privilege than to

class, religion, ethnic status, or geographical location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can see, my African American coworkers, friends and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place, and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

I usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work to systematically overempower certain groups. Such privilege simply confers dominance because of one's race or sex.

- I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
- I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
- I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
- When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
- I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
- If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
- I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
- Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
- I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
- I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
- I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
- I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
- I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
- I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
- I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.
- If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
- I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
- I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, out numbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
- I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
- I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
- I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
- If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
- I can choose blemish cover or bandages in flesh color and have them more or less match my skin.

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience which I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these prerequisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions which were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways, and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit in turn upon people of color. For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me misleading. We want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systematically. Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantages which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an unearned entitlement. At present, since only a few have it, it is an unearned advantage for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power which I originally saw as attendant on being a human being in the U.S. consisted in unearned advantage and conferred dominance.

I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance and if so, what we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the U.S. think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and dangers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantaging associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage which rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 continues to remind us eloquently. One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms which we can see and embedded forms which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of

my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the systems won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitudes. But a white skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to be now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power, and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Though systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and I imagine for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

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RACE, ANARCHY, AND PUNK ROCK: The impact of cultural boundaries within the anarchist movement

Otto Nomous, written for *Students United for a Responsible Global Environment*, April 2001.

"Yes that's right, punk is dead ... Punk became a fashion just like hippy used to be and it ain't got a thing to do with you or me."

- lyrics by Crass, The Feeding of the Five Thousand (1978).

Ever since the historic protests against the WTO in Seattle at the close of the last millenium, anarchism as a revolutionary theory has been sought after by an increasing number of people from wide ranging walks of life than ever before in recent memory. However, the undeniable fact remains that the make-up of the anarchist movement in the U.S. for the last couple of decades has been a largely homogenous one, i.e. predominantly white and middle class. It also happens to be the case that the vast majority of people who identify themselves as anarchists in the U.S. today are connected to "alternative" subcultures, such as punk rock, in varying degrees. As a person of color and an anarchist with roots in punk rock, I have become deeply concerned with the lack of diversity within the anarchist movement. As long as we fail to attract significantly diverse participation, thus remaining isolated and politically weakened, and fail to link-up with and support anti-racist struggles, we shouldn't keep our hopes up for any radical social transformation in this country. I began to realize that a significant part of the problem lies in the subcultural lifestyle of many anarchists, including myself. What

follows is an attempt to offer insight in finding answers for the ever-pressing quest for "diversity" within the anarchist community.

From the numerous situationist slogans that graced the lyrics of early punk bands, to the proliferation of anarcho-punk bands such as Crass and Conflict in the early eighties, punk rock as a subculture has had a unique history of having a strong relationship with explicitly anarchist and anti-capitalist political content over the years. Many anarchists today, including myself, are by-products of punk rock, where most become politicized from being exposed to angry, passionate lyrics of anarcho-punk bands, "do-it-yourself" zines, and countless other sources of information that are circulated within the underground punk distribution networks. Some are introduced to punk through the introduction to the anarchist social circles. Regardless of which comes first, the correlation between the punk scene and the anarchist scene is hard to miss, especially at most anarchist gatherings and conferences. It is by no coincidence that the punk scene also shares the familiar demographic as its counterpart, of mostly white, male, suburban, middle class youths.

It should be clear then, that the problem of the lack of race/class diversity within the U.S. anarchist movement will exist as long as it remains within the boundaries of any one particular culture, such as punk. To ignore this reality as merely an insignificant annoyance in an otherwise "politically correct" movement, and pretend that it can be solved as long as we recruit folks of color by being more "open," or if one analyzes the connection between global capitalism and white supremacy, would be a short-sighted mistake, albeit a frequently made one. It is critically important to realize how cultural boundaries can alienate other communities, how subtle forms of denial and guilt-complexes prevent real solutions, and why many of our attempts in the past have failed to provide new, effective approaches in achieving a truly diverse anarchist movement.

Looking at the fact that most people who rear their heads at anarchist "movement" events are roughly between 16-30 years old, with background influences of "punk" or other "alternative" persuasions, it is easy to understand why such "movements" tend to alienate most people than interest them. Punk has primarily appealed to middle-class, straight white boys, who, though they are "too smart" for the rock music pushed by the multinational corporations, still want to "rock out." It is also a culture that is associated with alienating oneself from the rest of society, often times in order to rebel against one's privileged background or parents. There's really nothing wrong with any radical counterculture having its own, distinct character, of course. Indeed, it's probably very good for those included. But we have to admit it is exclusive. Plus, the anarchist movement today has determined its issues of importance. Rarely do these include community organizing or working for social change around issues that most people prioritize, such as against the more subtle forms of racism, ageism and sexism, for a living wage, health care, and so forth. We are often more interested in promoting anarchism and so-called revolutionary organizations than working to provide real alternatives among everyday people. The current anarchist movement, for this reason, is not very relevant to the actual lives of most oppressed people.

Quite disturbingly, my experiences have shown that instead of acknowledging their impact and actually addressing them, many white anarchists rely on either constant denial of their responsibilities or engage in patronizing, token gestures out of privilege-guilt complexes. For example, I have received quite a few very negative and defensive reactions from white anarchists whenever I would mention the words "white" and "middle class" in the same sentence. Some of them defiantly point out that they're actually "working class" because they grew up poor or have to work. What they fail to realize is that it doesn't change the fact that they are able to blend in and benefit from the current anarchist scene, which is predominantly middle class, and from white skin privilege.

It seems as though a fairly extensive arsenal of denial and rationale has been developed within the anarchist scene over the years. One of my favorite examples is from when I approached some members of a group that was organizing the anarchist conference that happened in L.A. during the Democratic National Convention with the fact that the group was almost entirely white punks. Many of them defended it by saying, "I believe in 'Free Association'" or "I'm not stopping anyone from joining our group. In fact, we'd like other people to join us, but they never do." Such remarks indicate just how little they understand that it is because they operate in comfort

zones that suits their subcultural lifestyle or upbringing, which many people cannot relate to. I believe this is one of the most serious and significant obstacles that anarchists face today. Until white anarchists figure out that they actually need to proactively break through race/class/cultural boundaries, they will only continue to perpetuate the isolated anarchist ghetto. One of the more insulting things I've heard not too long ago from a local anarchist, however, is "c'mon, I work with YOU. And you're not white... so I can't be racist." The thought of my(or any other person of color's) mere presence somehow legitimizing someone's attitude on race that is implicit in that statement is painfully absurd. But it reflects the reality that a lot of people still think in those ways. I have also encountered a slightly more subtle form of denial from anarchist discussion lists of people who insist that since the concept of race is a social construct, we shouldn't acknowledge racial identities and instead pretend as if such categories do not exist. What's funny is that they almost always identify themselves as being "white." It sure must be convenient as a white person to pretend that issues of race didn't exist, which reminds me of the similar line associated with the anti-Affirmative Action campaigns of how we now live in a "colorblind society" with "equal opportunities."

Of course, not all white anarchists are clueless about racial/class relations and their positions of privilege. In the Minneapolis anarcho-punk zine Profane Existence, Joel wrote circa '92, "We are the inheritors of the white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist world order. A prime position as defenders of the capital of the ruling class and the overseers of the underclass has been set aside for us....as punks we reject our inherited race and class positions because we know they are bullshit". However, no matter how well-intentioned, the anarchist scene has been for the most part so deeply entrenched in the lifestyle of the know-it-all, punker-than-thou, vegan/straight edge-fascist, fashion victims or young, transient, train-hopping, dreadlocked, dumpster-diving eco-warriors that not only do most people find it hard to relate to them but they themselves are at a loss when they actually try to reach out to other communities. A typical scenario I find when this is attempted usually only amounts to the aforementioned fluffy, token gestures of solidarity, such as visiting a local black revolutionary group's headquarters and staying just long enough to take pictures with a fist in the air or inviting a person of color to an all-white group just to ease one's guilt. But, to be fair, I must acknowledge that I know of a few exceptions of white/punk anarchists that actually attempt to do serious work with people of color and/or are committed to community organizing. The point I'm making basically is that the general tendencies of most white/punk anarchists tend to be to settle for the symbolic, and fail to support the real struggles of people to change the world precisely because they have a choice as opposed to people who have to struggle for their livelihood.

It would be useful to look at anarchist groups and projects such as Anti-Racist Action, Earth First, Food Not Bombs and various other anarchist collectives to find out the extent to which such groups are influenced by subcultural lifestyles and how they deal with the issue of diversity. They tend to be good at politicizing lots of people who may identify or feel comfortable with the distinct counter-culture, but they almost never go beyond the boundaries of their comfort zones. Our closest comrades aren't people chosen because of their politics alone- plenty more share our principles and political beliefs-but we never see them, because they don't share our style or cultural preferences. Furthermore, we have seen numerous infoshops spring up in many cities over the years. They usually stand out like an eyesore by becoming more of a punk activist hangout and turning off the people who live in the neighborhood who may have been interested in the project otherwise. We should also be conscious of the fact that many times these projects contribute directly to gentrification of low-income neighborhoods, as punk and anarchist sub-societies are not well-known for their ability to pay high rents. It will ultimately depend on whether they operate as trendy, social gathering spots for punk/anarchists or a place that is respectful of and actively involves the local community.

Undeniably, there is a strong connection between cultural lifestyles and comfort zones and the extent of diversity within any movement. Groups cannot make their racial nature and composition into side issues, an ongoing "process", or working groups. They've got to be right next to the groups' foremost goals. We can keep our subcultural milieu in tact, but our organizing efforts have to step well beyond it. At this point at least, it makes more sense to organize according to neighborhoods and values than according to aesthetic tastes and specific ideologies and develop a culture that draws people together. Anarchism will not solve racism without

the people affected by it. And we certainly won't be seeing any kind of a revolution made up of subcultural lifestyle ghettos.

Ten Things to Remember: Anti-Racist Strategies for White Student Radicals

by Chris Dixon

After many years as a white student radical (in high school and then college), I'm reconsidering my experience. I made a lot of mistakes and was blind in many ways, particularly as a white person. What follows are some lessons that I am learning, some strategies for reflecting on, interrogating, and disrupting racism in our lives.

1) Transforming the world means challenging and changing institutions and ourselves. Systems of oppression are ingrained in both and, accordingly, must be confronted in both. More than once an activist of color or an actively anti-racist white person has confronted me: "Why are you always rushing off to do solidarity actions with people in other parts of the world when you don't even make time to deal with your own shit?" They're right. As white student activists, we are in fact notorious for protesting injustices across the globe, yet neglecting to confront systems of oppression on our campuses, in our communities, and in ourselves. Being an effective student activist means making priorities, and at times we must prioritize slower-paced, not-so-flashy work over dramatic actions that offer immediate gratification. Being an effective white student activist means prioritizing daily dismantlement of white privilege--creating and participating in forums for whites to grapple with racism, allying with struggles that people of color are engaged in, constantly remaining open to our own mistakes and feedback from others.

2) Predominantly white activist organizations are built within society as it is and, as a result, are plagued by racism and other forms of oppression. We can minimize or deny this reality ("we're all radicals here, not racists") or we can work to confront it head-on. Confronting it requires not only openly challenging the dynamics of privilege in our groups, but also creating structures and forums for addressing oppression. For instance, two experienced activists I know often point out that, sadly, Kinko's has a better sexual harassment policy than most activist groups. Workers are accountable for their actions and victims have some means of redress. With all of our imaginative alternatives to capitalist and hierarchical social arrangements, I have no doubt that we can construct even more egalitarian and comprehensive ways of dealing with sexism, racism, and other oppressive forces in our organizations. And we must start now.

3) We absolutely should not be "getting" people of color to join "our" organizations. This is not just superficial; it's tokenistic, insulting, and counterproductive. Yet this is the band-aid that white activists are often quick to apply when accused of racist organizing. Mobilizing for the WTO protests, for example, I had one white organizer reassure me that we didn't need to concern ourselves with racism, but with "better outreach." In his view, the dynamics, priorities, leadership, and organizing style, among other important features of our group, were obviously beyond critical scrutiny. But they shouldn't be. We must always look at our organizations and ourselves first. Whose voices are heard? Whose priorities are adopted? Whose knowledge is valued? The answers to these questions define a group more than how comprehensive its outreach is. Consequently, instead of looking to "recruit" in order to simply increase diversity, we, as white activists, need to turn inward, working to make truly anti-racist, anti-oppressive organizations.

4) We have much to learn from the leadership of activists of color. As student organizers Amanda Klonsky and Daraka Larimore-Hall write, "Only through accepting the leadership of those who experience racism in their daily lives, can white students identify their role in building an anti-racist movement." Following the lead of people of color is also one active step toward toppling conventional racial hierarchies; and it challenges us, as white folks (particularly men), to step back from aggressively directing everything with an overwhelming sense of entitlement. Too often white students covet and grasp leadership positions in large campus activist groups and coalitions. As in every other sector of our society, myths of "merit" cloak these racial dynamics, but in

reality existing student leaders aren't necessarily the "best" leaders; rather, they're frequently people who have enjoyed lifelong access to leadership skills and positions--largely white, middle-class men. We need to strengthen the practice of following the lead of activists of color. We'll be rewarded with, among other things, good training working as authentic allies rather than patronizing "friends"; for being an ally means giving assistance when and as asked.

5) As white activists, we need to shut up and listen to people of color, especially when they offer criticism. We have to override initial defensive impulses and keep our mouths tightly shut, except perhaps to ask clarifying questions. No matter how well-intentioned and conscientious we are, notice how much space we (specifically white men) occupy with our daily, self-important jabber. Notice how we assume that we're entitled to it. When people of color intervene in that space to offer something, particularly something about how we can be better activists and better people, that is a very special gift. Indeed, we need to recognize such moments for what they are: precious opportunities for us to become more effective anti-racists. Remember to graciously listen and apply lessons learned.

6) White guilt always gets in the way. Anarcha-feminist Carol Ehrlich explains, "Guilt leads to inaction. Only action, to re-invent the everyday and make it something else, will change social relations." In other words, guilt doesn't help anyone, and it frequently just inspires navel-gazing. The people who experience the brunt of white supremacy could care less whether we, as white activists, feel guilty. Guilt doesn't change police brutality and occupation, nor does it alter a history of colonialism, genocide, and slavery. No, what we really have to offer is our daily commitment and actions to resist racism. And action isn't just protesting. It includes any number of ways that we challenge the world and ourselves. Pushing each other to seriously consider racism is action, as are grappling with privilege and acting as allies. Only through action, and the mistakes we make and the lessons we learn, can we find ways to work in true solidarity.

7) "Radical" doesn't necessarily mean getting arrested, engaging in police confrontations, or taking to the streets. These kinds of actions are important, but they're not the be-all and end-all of effective activism. Indeed, exclusively focusing on them ignores crucial questions of privilege and overlooks the diverse, radical ways that people resist oppression every day. In the wake of the WTO protests, for instance, many white activists are heavily focused on direct action. Yet in the words of anti-capitalist organizer Helen Luu, "the emphasis on this method alone often works to exclude people of colour because what is not being taken into account is the relationship between the racist (in)justice system and people of colour." Moreover, this emphasis can exclude the very radical demands, tactics, and kinds of organizing used by communities of color--struggling for police accountability, occupying ancestral lands, and challenging multinational polluters, among many others. All too frequently "radicalism" is defined almost solely by white, middle-class men. We can do better, though; and I mean we in the sense of all of us who struggle in diverse ways to go to the root--to dismantle power and privilege, and fundamentally transform our society.

8) Radical rhetoric, whether it's Marxist, anarchist, Situationist, or some dialect of activistspeak, can be profoundly alienating and can uphold white privilege. More than once, I've seen white radicals (myself included) take refuge in our own ostensibly liberatory rhetorical and analytical tools: Marxists ignoring "divisive" issues of cultural identity and autonomy; anarchists assuming that, since their groups have "no hierarchy," they don't need to worry about insuring space for the voices of folks who are traditionally marginalized; Situationist-inspired militants collapsing diverse systems of privilege and oppression into obscure generalizations; radical animal rights activists claiming that they obviously know better than communities of color. And this is unfortunately nothing new. While all of these analytical tools have value, like most tools, they can be used to uphold oppression even as they profess to resist it. Stay wary.

9) We simply cannot limit our anti-oppression work to the struggle against white supremacy. Systems of oppression and privilege intertwine and operate in extremely complex ways throughout our society. Racism, patriarchy, classism, heterosexism, able-ism, ageism, and others compound and extend into all spheres of our lives. Our activism often takes the form of focusing on one outgrowth at a time--combating prison construction,

opposing corporate exploitation of low-wage workers, challenging devastating US foreign policies. Yet we have to continually integrate a holistic understanding of oppression and how it operates--in these instances, how state repression, capitalism, and imperialism rest on oppression and privilege. Otherwise, despite all of our so-called radicalism, we risk becoming dangerously myopic single-issue activists. "Watch these mono-issue people," warns veteran activist Bernice Johnson Reagon. "They ain't gonna do you no good." Whatever our chosen focuses as activists, we must work both to recognize diverse forms of oppression and to challenge them--in our society, our organizations, and ourselves.

10) We need to do all of this anti-racist, anti-oppressive work out of respect for ourselves as well as others. White supremacy is our problem as white people. We benefit from it and are therefore obligated to challenge it. This is no simplistic politics of guilt, though. People of color undeniably suffer the most from racism, but we are desensitized and scarred in the process. Struggling to become authentically anti-racist radicals and to fundamentally change our racist society, then, means reclaiming our essential humanity while forging transformative bonds of solidarity. In the end, we'll be freer for it.

25 ways to tokenize or alienate a non-white person around you (or, 25 examples of the racism we witness on a regular basis)

by basil, billie, qwo-li, jenn and colin

1. walk up to that black girl you barely know in the co-op and say "what do you think of the new (insert hip-hop artist here) album."
2. ask one of the only arabs in your community to write the article for your newspaper on the situation in palestine.
 - a) then, after they write it, take their research, re-write the article and sign your name to it.
3. in a big group of many activists, say "how can we bring more people of color into our struggle."
4. in a big group of many activists, say "black people don't have the time to care about trees".
5. go up to the Makah woman at the unlearning racism workshop and say "I saw a program about Crazy Horse on PBS, he did alot for your people."
6. act like the only people of non-white ancestry in your community are the ones visible to you.
 - a) assume that light skinned people around you are white without ever knowing their ancestry.
7. talk about race as if the only groups are black and white.
 - a) talk about race as if the only groups are black, white and hispanic.
 - b) talk about race as if the only groups are black, white, hispanic and asian.
 - c) talk about race as if the only groups are black, white, hispanic, asian and native american.
8. picture a violent, irrational arab everytime the word "terrorist" is mentioned. ignore the arabs who do not fit into this stereotype.
9. look to a non-white person in the room everytime racism is brought up.
 - a) make sure they have the last and most defining word on the subject.
 - b) sympathetically and silently agree with everything they say.
 - c) thank them profusely.
10. fearfully avoid assertive non-white people in your community.

11. ask a native person; "do you make your own jewelry?"
12. use the identity of white anti-racist as a shield against accusations of racism.
13. ask an arab you don't know what they think about the war in iraq.
14. after a non-white person in your predominantly white workplace points out racism, ask "what are some of the positives of working here?"
15. get a racist white person to facilitate a panel on racism featuring non-white queer people for a predominately white audience.
16. pit light-skinned non-white people against each other based on how they identify racially and what you think is most correct.
17. say "i noticed a lot of black, filipino, and korean people who own grocery stores sell a lot of liquor."
18. when a multiracial native person tells you their heritages, say "what a magical mix."
19. tell a racially mixed black person, "you don't act black."
20. when you find out that someone is mizrachi, say:
 - a) "you're an arab jew? that's fucked up."
 - b) "what are you talking about? I've never heard of sephardi/mizrachi jews. what makes you think you're a person of color?"
 - c) "jews are from europe."
 - d) "there are no palestinian jews."
 - e) all of the above.
21. at the last minute, get 2 non-white people to facilitate a workshop on racism at your skill share and make sure none of the white folks from your organization attend the workshop. Profoundly, deeply thank the facilitators.
22. if a non-white person wants to organize a workshop at your conference specific to their ethnic community, before you "let" them, ask them "how many do you need?"
23. organize a conference with an all white organizing committee.
 - a) when non-white people organize at the conference and want to speak for themselves, accuse them of "hijacking" the event.
 - b) tell them you will publish their written statement on your website, and wait two years to do so.
24. if you see a black man speak about racism, say "he was so angry--but very articulate."
25. if you're white and confronted on your racism, cry.

What I Wish I Knew: My Own Goals for Anti-Racist Practice

by Catherine Jones

These are some principles that I've developed for myself so that I can stay focused on actually doing anti-racist work, rather than thinking and talking about it a whole lot. These all come straight from lessons I've learned from my experience of doing the work. I'm not saying that any of these statements is The Answer; this whole

list of stuff is more a reflection of where I'm at right now in my ongoing struggle to figure it all out. Maybe it'll work for you, and maybe it really won't. My main point in all of this is, if you want to do anti-racist work, do it. Don't wait until you feel like you're the perfect anti-racist. There's a whole big movement out there that needs you!

Do your homework. There IS stuff going on in your community. Find out what it is and how you can support the work.

Don't expect people or organizations of color to tell you how to be in solidarity with them, but be willing to modify or toss out any of your ideas if they think there's a better way for you to support them. Have a very rough plan that you can be flexible with and that's based on an authentic and accountable understanding--not just your own thoughts--of where people and organizations of color can use your support.

Be conscious about how you prioritize your work- spend a significant chunk of your time doing the stuff that really is unsexy and be conscious about what you do and don't commit your time to. If going to 8 workshops a week has you feeling too exhausted to do childcare at a meeting for low-income women of color, you may want to re-evaluate.

Build accountable relationships with other white anti-racists who can both support you and call you on your shit when it's necessary.

Take care of yourself but be real about it. Figure out the things that rejuvenate you and do them; take breaks when you need them, but don't use the excuse of "self-care" to get out of doing the work. Set realistic boundaries for yourself and stick to them.

Give Practical Support!!!! What are your resources that you can share with organizations of color? Maybe you can provide food or childcare or translation at meetings, maybe you can help phonebank for specific events, maybe you can volunteer to work at the front desk, give people rides, find out where a group can get donated computer equipment, or throw a fundraising party at your house. There are tons of ways for white folks to give necessary behind-the-scenes support to organizations of color. Figure out--don't assume you know--what people need, and find a way to help out.

Don't abandon the work if it makes you feel "uncomfortable." This is a pretty common feeling when white folks are actually working with people of color. Acknowledge that you feel this way, try and figure out why, get support from other white anti-racists who you respect, and keep going. Most of us have been there.

Don't wait for people to come to you out of the blue 'cause they won't. Be proactive about letting organizations and allies know who you are and what you do. Figure out when it's appropriate to get involved, and do it.

If the majority of your anti-racist work consists of educating other white folks on anti-racism, make sure to spend a lot of time focusing on ways the participants in your training or workshop can plug into racial justice struggles that are going on in their community. Work on developing tools for identifying existing struggles and developing a group's capacity to support those struggles in a practical, not just an ideological, way.

Make sure not to confuse anti-racist group dynamics with anti-racist work. And don't give up on one just because you're practicing the other.

Do authentic and accountable leadership development with emerging white anti-racists, especially around doing the work. Talk to newer white anti-racists about their work, what they've learned, and what's been challenging. Help them to build the practical skills they need. Be there for them.

Give props to white folks who are doing practical, behind-the-scenes anti-racist work in your community.

Find role models of your own, white folks who are doing anti-racist work in a variety of capacities. Seek out these folks in your own community. They're there.

Be willing to do what's needed. Maybe you really want to be working with some amazing and popular organization of color that doesn't actually have a whole lot of opportunities for you to plug in, while another organization down the street is doing less high-profile work but really needs some folks to help them with fundraising. Take the opportunity to be of use.

Take criticism from people of color for what it is--a gift.

If you have political disagreements with a person or organization of color that you're doing political work with, think critically about what your issues are and where they're coming from. Don't abandon your principles simply because a person of color may have a different take on a certain idea, but don't be afraid to challenge some of your deeply-held beliefs if you find that they don't hold up when you look at them with an anti-racist framework. Be open to criticism, even criticism of your politics, if it comes from an anti-racist perspective.

You're gonna make mistakes. You're gonna feel embarrassed when you do. This is not a reason to stop doing the work! In my experience, if people know that you're a generally accountable person who shows up and kicks ass when you're needed, they won't take it nearly as hard if you say or do the wrong thing every now and then. But learn from your mistake, don't make it again, and do what you can to smooth things over in a principled way.

Build authentic and good personal, as well as political, relationships with people of color.

Don't be a shrinking violet. Sometimes white folks think they're being anti-racist if they go to a meeting and don't do or say anything at all. You can step up to the plate without dominating. Just make sure the stuff you're stepping up to do is appropriate. (If you're not sure what's appropriate or not, start out by volunteering to do behind-the-scenes support work that someone else won't have to take a whole lot of time to show you how to do. As your relationship with the organization progresses you'll get a feel for how much leadership or visibility they want you to take.)

This is my motto--say less, think less, do more. Remember that you're not a whole lot of use to the movement if you're sitting in a workshop. Put your knowledge to use. The struggle needs you!

(...and Don't Talk Too Much At The Meeting. Really.)

*feedback, rants, insight, or arbitrary observations can be addressed to **cjones14 at tulane.edu***