

Where's the Outrage?
October 2005*

Did you see what I saw in New Orleans?

What did Hurricane Katrina reveal to us about the Bush administration? I'm not sure that most folks saw what I saw. As a trauma surgeon who had colleagues at Charity and Tulane Hospitals in New Orleans, I followed all of the developments out of the Gulf Region from here in Asheville with great interest. Images of hundreds of people hip deep in flood water bombarded the air waves. We read that thousands of New Orleans citizens packed into the Super Dome. The conclusion that many commentators came to was that President Bush and his administration hate black people. This is a mistake. Katrina was not about black and white. It was about rich and poor. Bush doesn't hate poor folk, he has just left them behind.

This should not be a surprise to anyone in America. Review his record on tax cuts. Even the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank admitted that the majority of the tax cuts helped the upper classes but did little to assure that new jobs and better incomes would trickle down to the poor of America.

Earlier this year the Bush Administration was overwhelming us with cheerful comments about our recovering economy; but the hard data about this so-called *recovery* tell a different story. According to the Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, during the first four years of the

Bush Administration the median income for U. S. citizens fell by more than \$1000. The number of Americans who *work* but still live below the poverty line increased by over 500,000. Equally troubling is the fact that the number of working Americans who do not have healthcare insurance rose by over 700,000.

Bush's war against the poor does not stop here. His Social Security reform would be devastating to the poor. Simply put Private Accounts which removes the safety net that is Social Security would all but insure that the poor could never get ahead.

Another area of President Bush's legislative agenda, the new laws having to do with the formation of the Department of Homeland Security, is also cause for alarm. Some of his legislation has removed some basic workers' benefits. While everyone would agree that to assure our homeland's security, some freedoms may have to be temporarily curtailed, how can we sit quietly while the government removes so basic and American a right as collective bargaining?

One of the truly helpful and humane provisions our government has made for the poorest among us is the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. This program's sole purpose is to help poor Americans pay their heating bills in the winter. In 2003, North East endured one of the coldest winters on record, With no explanation, President Bush refused to release the money to earmarked for the home energy assistance program. In response ACORN—The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now—organized sit-ins. Finally, the senate responded to this pressure, by-passed the President, and approved releasing the funds so poor families could have warm homes in the winter. But this not the end of story of the Bush Administration's

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dubious handling of LIHEAP and other programs to assist the working poor of this nation. The Bush administration has proposed deep cuts in the programs for each of the last three years including this year. Congress in its wisdom has again over ridden the administration's directives on this program.

So, what did you see in the aftermath of Katrina? If you looked beyond skin color and the media hype about the troubles in New Orleans, you saw the same thing that I saw. Not rude, ungrateful black indigents. You saw poor Americans of every color, many of whom were grateful for the help their fellow citizens offered them; but many were justifiably frustrated. If you looked at the stories in Mississippi, you saw thousands of poor white Americans without homes and FEMA assistance. If you looked at what was happening in Alabama, you saw poor Americans of many colors trying bravely to cope with a disaster. If you considered all of these areas in the deep South where natural disasters wreaked havoc, you saw that some how Mr. Bush and the Republican leadership have done something very sad for America. They have reversed the Robin Hood legend. While Robin and his merry men were British, we Americans have always prided ourselves for being the heirs of those heroes who risked so much to help those in need. Sadly, the Bush administration seems more related to the Sheriff of Nottingham and his cohorts, for it has taken from the poor and given to the rich.

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