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***Freedom Rider:
Where was Dick Cheney During Katrina?
by Margaret Kimberley***

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Where was Dick Cheney? In the days following the devastation wrought by hurricane Katrina, the Vice President of the United States became the invisible man.

The vice president's job is to succeed the president in case of death, impeachment or resignation, and to preside over the Senate. He also attends the funerals of world leaders not deemed important enough to merit the attention and time of the President. The Veep is certainly on hand for post hurricane photo-ops showing distraught survivors and destroyed homes.

Not only was Cheney AWOL, but the corporate media rarely made note of his absence. Millions of Americans asked one another, "Where is Cheney?" but the New York Times, the Washington Post and CNN never thought to address the issue that the rest of us discussed on our own.

When Cheney finally reappeared, his more than weeklong absence was still a media unmentionable. It was left to ordinary citizens to ask where he was as the indifference and ineptitude of his colleagues magnified an already enormous tragedy.

In recognition of that lack of information, here is a multiple-choice quiz designed to help solve the mystery.

What did Dick Cheney do during the hurricane Katrina catastrophe?

- a. Nabbed yet another no bid contract for Halliburton
- b. Planned nuclear war against Iran
- c. Helped John Bolton destroy the United Nations
- d. Reminded Judith Miller to keep quiet

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e. Stole the wages of workers in the Gulf

f. Had a heart attack and/or knee aneurism

All of these responses may be true, and only some may be true. We will never know and therein lies a huge problem for our country. It is an understatement to say that the Bushmen operate without transparency. They will tell us what they want, when they want, if they want.

The Vice President is the champion of administration secrecy. Despite his history of serious health problems he has never released all of his medical records to the press. In June of this year he paid a visit to the Vail Valley Medical Center under the name “Dr. Hoffman.” He allegedly went to see an orthopedic surgeon about an old knee injury. That sounds more probable now than it did at the time, but there were also rumors that he had an EKG on the same day. If the vice president uses an alias like a fugitive from justice or a reclusive celebrity, tales of a secret EKG are bound to follow.

Cheney is not only secretive about his personal health, but also about government affairs that concern everyone in this country. He was CEO of the Halliburton Corporation, the recipient of billions of dollars in taxpayer money for the so-called reconstruction of Iraq. Despite getting huge amounts of cash, Halliburton and other war profiteers have been unable to keep the lights on or the water running in Baghdad.

Not only does Cheney make sure that his people get paid, he has made sure that he gets paid too. Despite his claims of having no financial interest in Halliburton he continues to receive \$150,000 per year in “deferred salary” while also maintaining 433,333 unexercised stock options.

The New Orleans levees had barely broken when Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root scored yet another federal government contract and got its hands on more of our money. The story was that it wasn't really a new contract, just part of an existing contract with the navy. The defense seems to be that it was old corruption, not new corruption.

After getting more money for crony capitalism reconstruction, the second item on the agenda was to make sure that workers got very little of it. Bush suspended the Davis-Bacon Act, which mandates that prevailing wages apply in public works projects. Leave it to the Bushmen to take money from desperate people when they need it the most.

Just as there is nothing new under the sun, there is nothing new going on with Halliburton. Bunnatine Greenhouse experienced first hand what happens to anyone who notices the Halliburton elephant in the room.

Ms. Greenhouse was Chief Contracting Officer at the Army Corps of Engineers, its highest ranking civilian. She was highly regarded at that agency until she blew the whistle on Halliburton's no bid corruption in Iraq. When she began to ask questions about questionable contracts the inevitable harassment began. She filed complaints of race and gender discrimination and continued to tell the truth. At a congressional hearing she testified that Halliburton exhibited “the most blatant and improper contract abuse I have witnessed during the course of my professional career.”

Greenhouse suddenly received unfavorable performance reviews and was demoted. Punishment of whistle blowers has the intended effect of dissuading anyone with similar ideas from ever speaking up. When Halliburton's corruption in the Gulf Coast becomes a mirror image of its Iraq activities, few will be willing to share Ms. Greenhouse's experience.

Perhaps it isn't necessary to know where Cheney was in late August and early September. Whatever his location we know exactly what he was doing. He made sure that the business of using government as a

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private sector cash cow went on as usual. He made sure that while he and his friends got paid, the rest of us got nothing but the shaft.

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