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***New Orleans Unmasks  
"Apartheid, American Style"  
by Jason Miller  
Guest Commentator***

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What is the recipe for a toxic sludge potent enough to destroy a heavily populated city and inflict infection with a mere splash? Start with a force of nature powerful beyond belief. Mix in an ample supply of sewage, garbage, brackish water from Lake Ponchartrain, floating corpses of humans and animals, and various and sundry noxious chemicals. Blend well with a system of seriously inadequate levees resulting from cuts in federal funding. Of course this concoction would not be complete without heaping portions of racism, spiritual emptiness, and avarice fueling slow and inadequate federal relief efforts.

***Heart of darkness revealed***

The New Orleans debacle exposed America's "heart of darkness" to the world as its leaders allowed their own tens of thousands of Americans to suffer or die. Many throughout the world were aware of the damage the US government was capable of inflicting upon people of other nations, but Hurricane Katrina showed what America's decision-makers were willing to do to their own. The twin evils of raw capitalism and imperialism were on full display as the human race watched the events unfold on the Gulf Coast. As Mother Nature unleashed her ferocity, Americans witnessed the destruction of a jewel of a city and the pleasant fiction of the "American Dream" in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

With the eyes of the world upon its sole remaining superpower, President Bush, who fancies himself to be a monarch, remained on vacation, strummed his guitar, and led a federal response to the disaster which moved with the speed of a wounded snail. Several days into the aftermath, the "Queen Mum" surveyed the conditions under which the survivors were living and remarked how things were "working very well" for the "underprivileged." As the lies unraveled and the truth was revealed, the people learned that the Bush administration had significantly reduced funding for fortification of the levees protecting New Orleans. They realized that FEMA, whose purpose is to provide federal aid in the event of natural disasters, had been absorbed by Homeland Security and the military industrial complex. As humankind watched the nauseating events in New Orleans unfold, they realized that George Bush cared so little about the welfare of his people that he would appoint a grossly incompetent crony to head the federal organization upon which people

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counted to save them in the event of a disaster. American citizens have been in denial about the cruelty of their government's foreign policy for years, but now that their leaders have imposed that truculence upon fellow Americans, it will be difficult to evade the painful reality of the depth of the corruption and malevolence of the United States government.

### *Who do they think they are fooling?*

Even the typically compliant mainstream media made strong note of the skin color and socio-economic status of most of the hurricane survivors, whom the federal government left to fend for themselves for several days. Stranded on roof-tops, taking refuge on islands formed by broken slabs of highway, hiding in attics, or clinging to survival inside the miserable, dangerous squalor of the "Super" Dome, tens of thousands of poor black Americans exposed a truth they have known for years. To the soulless plutocrats, aristocrats, white patriarchs, and "captains of industry" who rule the United States, black people are expendable, particularly if they are poor. The power-brokers in the US federal government only provided assistance for two reasons. One was to prevent civil unrest amongst the Proletariat. Secondly, they needed to provide window dressing in their desperate attempt to maintain their facade as champions of "freedom and democracy" so they could continue to justify their ongoing quest for global domination.

It staggers the imagination to think that The Big Easy (the home to Mardi Gras and the birthplace of jazz) has essentially been reduced to memories. The perverse emphasis on property, power, and wealth over humanity by a government "of the wealthy, by the wealthy, and for the wealthy" caused the demise of New Orleans. Under this twisted paradigm, the city was doomed when the hurricane struck. 68% of the population was black. Less than half owned their homes. Almost 30% lived below the poverty line. An estimated 134,000 residents did not have cars or other viable means to evacuate. The demographics virtually ensured that the Bush administration would render aid slowly and ineffectively, resulting in suffering and death on a scale usually associated with third world nations.

Hurricane Katrina's devastation and the US government's anemic response revealed the malevolent and wicked face which lurks beneath the mask of "freedom and liberty." Touting America's systems of capitalism and democracy as models for the rest of the world, the leaders of the United States have carried out an agenda of imperialism since our nation's inception. Sorry, Mr. Rove (and your staff of cunning Orwellian propagandists), but a true republic would not maintain a perpetual system of apartheid (which in Afrikaans means "separateness"). Certainly many laws have been passed to enhance the civil rights of blacks in the United States, but racism, bigotry, and separatism are still very much alive, both overtly and covertly. New Orleans provides a grim reminder that "Apartheid, American Style" is thriving in this nation.

In an address to Howard University in June 1965, President Lyndon Johnson stated:

*"You cannot take a man who has been in chains for 300 years, remove the chains, take him to the starting line and tell him to run the race, and think that you are being fair."*

Three months later, he signed an Executive Order requiring affirmative action by federal government contractors. Johnson understood that the journey toward equality for blacks in the United States had been a long and tortuous one, and even two hundred years after the Civil War, their struggle was far from over.

America's wealthy, predominately white power-brokers dominate the US government by utilizing their money to win elections, buying elected officials through campaign finance, applying expensive lobbying efforts to sway votes and decisions, and exerting influence through powerful corporations. When will they take responsibility for the plight of black citizens in the United States and rectify the gross injustices of US Apartheid?

### **Shameful history exposes the true nature of the beast**

In 1619, the first slaves arrived at the British colony of Jamestown, thus starting the future United States of America down a path of moral repugnance and turpitude. By 1850, there were 2.5 million enslaved Africans in the United States. The agrarian economy in many southern states was so dependent upon slavery that they were willing to secede from the Union and to initiate the Civil War to ensure the perpetuation of an evil institution which had enabled them to build a thriving economy with the blood, sweat and tears human beings. White slave owners, a small minority of the population in whose hands rested most of the Confederacy's wealth, were able to convince poor, ignorant Southern whites that preserving slavery was critical for them as well. So compelling was the slave-owners' argument that poor white Southerners died by the tens of thousands defending the "great institution" of slavery.

In 1865, the Union triumphed and the Thirteenth Amendment made chattel slavery unconstitutional. Despite these events, the lot of black Americans, particularly in the South, improved little. "Mr. Jim Crow" saw to their continued suffering. In 1830, a white minstrel show performer named Thomas "Daddy" Rice blackened his face and danced an absurd jig to the song "Jump Jim Crow" as he mimicked a crippled, elderly black man singing and dancing. Jim Crow became a popular character in American culture and grew to represent "black inferiority." Faced with the Constitutional mandate to abolish slavery, vanquished states in the post-bellum South began to pass laws to ensure government-mandated suppression of the civil rights of black Americans. Jim Crow laws became common in most southern states starting in 1890.

Ironically, the US Supreme Court opened the door for Jim Crow segregation laws. In 1883 it ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional. The gist of the ruling was that the Fourteenth Amendment did not prevent individuals or private businesses from discriminating against black people. In 1896 the highest court of the "Bastion of Freedom" upheld a lower court ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which affirmed Louisiana's law mandating that blacks ride in separate railroad cars. The ultimate arbiters in the "Land of the Free" made a ruling in *Cummings vs. Richmond County Board of Education* in 1899 which enabled local governments to maintain "whites only" schools and close schools for blacks based on claims of financial hardship.

Throughout the Jim Crow era, blacks faced many hardships. They were denied access to public areas and accommodations, like hotels and restaurants. Public restrooms and water fountains were designated for "Whites Only" and "Coloreds." White and black workers were separated. Schools were segregated. Gerrymandering, voter intimidation, fraud, manipulation by white landlords, literacy tests and poll taxes prevented many blacks from exercising their right to vote. Crop lien laws, which allowed creditors to charge outrageous interest, and the system of sharecropping reduced black farmers to little more than indentured servants as their debt perpetually exceeded their income. Debts were enforced by local police, creating a system of debt peonage. Stiff penalties for minor crimes often committed by itinerant blacks (i.e. five year prison sentences for stealing a pig) stocked the penal system in the South with slave labor. Prison farms and chain gangs became the order of the day, with black convicts returned to enslavement under unimaginable living conditions.

Vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan did their part to suppress the black race and guarantee they suffered. Nearly 5,000 blacks were lynched between 1890 and 1968. Virtually all of these atrocities occurred in former Confederate states. Many more than just the perpetrators were complicit in these murders. Railroads sold tickets for the express purpose of attending these executions committed by mobs. Many of the killings involved brutal torture prior to actual death. White families brought their children to watch lynchings. After the murders, participants and onlookers bought and sold body parts of the victims as "souvenirs".

### **Progress toward equality at last**

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Slowly and steadily through the course of the Twentieth Century, black Americans made progress toward equality and civil rights. In a significant blow to the "separate but equal" doctrine, in 1954 the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Tireless, courageous efforts by people such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Medger Evers applied tremendous pressure on the federal government to protect the civil rights of black Americans. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed Jim Crow laws, prohibited employment discrimination, and enhanced the voting rights of blacks. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 went further in protecting the rights of blacks to vote by abolishing literacy tests. To this day, the right to vote remains state-granted, but the Voting Rights Act and three Constitutional amendments prevent states from discriminating in granting the right. The push for a Constitutional amendment granting the right to vote to all Americans continues.

### **Renaissance of inhumanity**

Sadly, despite these strides, black Americans still lag far behind their white counter-parts. Under the brutal "trickle down" economic policies which started in the Reagan era, the rich have enjoyed a succession of generous tax cuts and businesses are operating in an increasingly deregulated environment. Black Americans have simultaneously experienced a serious decline in their situation. Chanting the mantra that less government is better, US policy-makers have diligently worked to diminish domestic spending and decrease taxes on the wealthy (progressive taxes). Despite the subterfuge, their true objective has been to line the pockets of the wealthy by diverting federal money previously spent toward humanitarian ends (like education and health) to military and defense, which benefits the many affluent who have heavy stakes invested in the military industrial complex. The end result has been an increase in regressive taxes to make up for revenue lost on tax cuts for the rich, obscene federal deficits, and a serious decline in funds available for education, health care, assistance to the poor, and *emergency preparedness*.

### ***Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said:***

“There is nothing new about poverty. What is new is that we now have the techniques and the resources to get rid of poverty. The real question is whether we have the will.”

Since Reagan, the US government has consistently employed policies demonstrating a lack of will to eliminate poverty. Who has born the brunt of the obsession with greed and power which has been such a detriment of humanity?

For a concrete example, look no further than the disaster in New Orleans (bear in mind that 68% of the population was black), the 360 deaths verified as of 9/10, the government's emphasis on containing looters over rescuing victims, and the countless people who have been rendered homeless and jobless. Appropriate funding to strengthen the levees and a quick and appropriate federal response to the hurricane could have alleviated much of this suffering.

For statistical evidence, consider the 2004 US Census figures. While the overall poverty rate in the United States stood at 12.7%, the poverty rate for blacks was 24.7% compared with 10.8% for whites. Only 11.3% of white Americans did not have health insurance while 19.7% of blacks lacked coverage. At \$30,134, the black median household income came in at the bottom of the ladder compared to other race groups.

As of August 2005, white unemployment came in at 4.2% while blacks were jobless at a rate of 9.6%. Black infants are more than 2.5 times as likely to die before age one as white infants. In 2001, the average net worth of a white household was \$468,200.00, while blacks rang in at a mere \$75,700.00. The disparities are indeed staggering.

### **Separate and unequal**

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A "separate and unequal" educational system continues to exist in the US. How can this be, you ask, after the federal government ordered school desegregation? "White flight" to the suburbs and inequitable distribution of education dollars are the principal reasons. Using their higher economic means, many whites have fled deteriorating urban cores for the haven of the suburbs. A 2004 report by the Harvard Civil Rights Project found that in the Midwest, 46% of black children attend schools in urban areas which are 90 to 100% black. Of these children, 88% are from poor families. The HCRP report found that nationwide, America's schools spend an average of \$1500.00 less per black student than they do on white students. Poor black students attending under-funded schools face decrepit buildings, archaic classroom materials, under-qualified teachers, over-crowding, and simplistic curriculum which emphasizes rote memory over the development of critical thinking skills. The end result statistically? While 91.8% of white students graduate from high school, blacks graduate at a rate of 83.7%. Renaissance of inhumanity Perhaps even more damning is the fact that only 17% of blacks have college degrees versus 30% of whites.

### *Challenge us and see what happens to you*

The Civil Rights Movement represented a serious threat to the dominance of the wealthy, white patriarchy dominating the federal government. Naturally, they responded by imprisoning those challenging their stranglehold on power. In doing so, they employed the typical guile of the US government. In 1971, the US prison population was 200,000. Today it is 2.1 million. Half of the US prison population is black. While having only 5% of the world's overall population, the United States now harbors 25% of the incarcerated population of the world. 13% of prisoners worldwide are black Americans. 30% of black American men experience incarceration during their lifetime. The most rapid growth in prison populations began during the Reagan era, with blacks leading the way. Federal sentencing laws passed in the 1980's virtually guaranteed that black Americans would swell the ranks of the incarcerated. These laws enacted federal sentencing guidelines for the distribution of crack cocaine (used predominately in poor black neighborhoods) 100 times more harsh than those for distributing white cocaine powder (often the "drug of choice" for more affluent whites). Contrary to the hysteria often created by the mainstream media (i.e. the over-blown reports of rampant looting, raping and shooting in New Orleans), a majority of the nation's prison population is serving time for non-violent crimes.

### **Legacies were meant to be continued, weren't they?**

Building upon the Reagan legacy, Bush II has continued to chip away at the federal disbursements to the poor, elderly and disabled, shrinking a safety net which the world's wealthiest nation has a moral obligation to provide for its less fortunate citizens. While bankrupting the United States to fund a grossly bloated military budget (the US accounts for 50% of world military spending to "protect" 5% of the world's population), Bush continues to chop domestic spending (i.e. funds to strengthen the levees in New Orleans). If you doubt that Bush's axe-swinging is disproportionately affecting the black population, consider that the poverty rate for blacks is 25% while the black population of New Orleans used to be 68%.

One way the merciless decision-makers in the United States justify their push to significantly diminish the social welfare system, including Medicaid, AFDC, and Social Security, in favor of private charity is to utilize the mainstream media, their instrument of propaganda, to re-enforce common myths about welfare. Contrary to the lies, poor women on AFDC (federal financial aid to single mothers) generally do not bear more children to garner more benefits. The average family receiving AFDC has 2 children. Many media "pundits" claim that the US has spent \$5 trillion on welfare since the 1960's and it has "not worked". To put this into perspective, consider that spending on AFDC from 1964 to 1994 was \$500 billion, less than 5% of defense spending during the same period. Most of the \$5 trillion of which the media puppets speak went to the disabled, the elderly, and the uninsured (via Medicaid). Another common misconception perpetuated by the mainstream media is that of the "black welfare queen." The truth is that a majority of those receiving benefits from federal entitlement programs are white, and many are elderly or are children.

**“Velvet” revolution unfolding**

If perverse individuals like George Bush, who is devoid of empathy and compassion, continue to impose their sick will upon America by diminishing domestic spending and increasing defense spending to seek global dominance, black Americans will continue to suffer. They will see significant declines in federal programs which aid them in their quest to reach a level playing field. The quality of their education will further deteriorate. Aid available to the 25% of black Americans living in poverty will continue to vanish. More will find themselves in prisons. Many black mothers will find themselves grieving for the loss of sons lured by slick recruiters (and a dearth of opportunities) to fight in America's latest imperial conquest. Urban cores will further decay, encouraging more "white flight". Despite the promises of Reagan and his successors, the money is not "trickling down" to black America. How many more travesties have to occur, and how many more cities must America lose before spiritually evolved Americans demand an end to "Apartheid, American Style"?

The illegal occupation in Iraq and the American Apartheid revealed by events in New Orleans provide ample evidence that it is time that “We the People” oust the scoundrels who are “leading” our nation. It is incumbent upon the poor and the working class, the true majority in the United States, to exercise our social consciences and wrest the power from the unworthy hands of the wealthy minority who now hold that power. They have proven their moral bankruptcy and ineptitude as leaders. A non-violent, “velvet” revolution is evolving and gaining momentum. If you have not done so already, I hope you join.

*Jason Miller is a 38 year old activist writer with a degree in liberal arts. He works in the transportation industry, and is a husband and a father to three boys. His affiliations include Amnesty International, the ACLU and the Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He welcomes responses at [willpowerful@hotmail.com](mailto:willpowerful@hotmail.com) or comments on his blog at <http://civillibertarian.blogspot.com/>.*