

**The  
BLACK  
C o m m e n t a t o r**  
Commentary, analysis and investigations  
on issues affecting African Americans  
[www.blackcommentator.com](http://www.blackcommentator.com)

*Issue 175 – March 16, 2006*

*Bruce's Beat  
Walkin' to New Orleans  
Uphold the Right to Return, Rebuild and Remain  
Progressive Forces in Motion  
by BC Editor Bruce Dixon*

[click here to become a](#)

**bc PAID SUBSCRIBER**

(Use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page)

Printer Friendly – PDF Format



Copyright © 2002 - 2006  
[www.BlackCommentator.com](http://www.BlackCommentator.com)  
All Rights Reserved

The man-made tragedies of the Gulf Coast and its mother city New Orleans are never far from our thoughts these days. The eyes of black America, though half blinded by the lack of mainstream news coverage, remain fixed on the unfolding spectacles of profiteering, privatization and ethnic cleansing.

The wholesale displacement of black New Orleans seems to have been in the cards from the first hours following mass evacuation. The week after the hurricane this reporter made it down to Baton Rouge. I interviewed dozens of evacuees from New Orleans, Jefferson and Metarie in the big Red Cross shelters at Southern University, the convention center and elsewhere. I talked to local pastors, volunteers and business people who shared their churches, homes and resources with evacuees, and spent hours with Red Cross staffers running the big evacuee centers. It was immediately clear that the Red Cross was spending the generous donations of thousands of business people and millions of individual Americans on relocating as many New Orleans residents outside the Gulf Coast region as quickly as possible.

The busiest person at every Red Cross shelter of any size, I learned, was a staffer called the transportation coordinator. For one of the luckiest evacuees with checkable references and marketable skills I saw a transportation coordinator help arrange job interviews over the phone and hand out airline tickets for the whole family to Los Angeles. But for most, whether their homes and apartments were still under water or not, whether their entire families had been accounted for or not, the transportation coordinators had one solution. Get on the bus. Transportation coordinators did whatever they could to fill lines of daily buses. Buses for Texas, for Kansas City or Chicago, or parts unknown. We now know that many evacuees were lied to or never informed of their ultimate destinations.

Hence in *BC*'s September 8, 2005 *Radio BC* commentary broadcast on a number of stations around the country, *BC* co-publisher Glen Ford was among the first to note that the way the evacuation of black New Orleans was being carried out was creating facts on the ground which might inhibit their ability to ever return. By the following week, the pattern of unfolding ethnic cleansing was unmistakable, and the September 15 *Radio BC* declared that all of us, especially our representatives in the Congressional Black Caucus ought to be upholding the rights of Gulf Coast residents to Return, to Rebuild and to Remain. As Mr. Ford wrote:

"Iraqis in Des Moines and Detroit were allowed to vote for the new government in Baghdad. The people who have been displaced from New Orleans, Mississippi and Alabama should certainly have the same right, to direct the Reconstruction of their region. They have the Right to Return, the Right to Rebuild, and the Right to Remain. We demand that the Congressional Black Caucus treat these as inalienable rights."

From the first, the radical right has seized the opportunity to make the Gulf Coast a laboratory for its favorite schemes, most famously closing 120 of the city's 125 public schools, firing all the city's teachers and staff, voiding their pension and health care agreements and going to an all-charter system in which working class residents must scramble for the small number of available slots in schools that are still underfunded, and run by teachers and administrators with fewer professional qualifications and less effective oversight than before. But obstacle after obstacle is being thrown in the path of residents who want to return and rebuild their lives in the city of their birth, as powerful forces seek to ensure that displaced city residents including small property owners but most especially those who lived in rental property, are never compensated for any loss or allowed to return.

On one level, black and progressive America, including the African American churches have risen to the challenge. There are dozens of civic organizations with substantial followings of local residents and outsiders who are distributing relief supplies, rebuilding homes, businesses and community centers and advocates for individuals and for entire communities. All of them don't work together and all of them don't agree with each other on every little thing. But *BC* loves and salutes them all. The tragedy again, is that corporate journalism does not care to cover them or their stories.

By now, tens of thousands of students from across the country and around the world have given up a week, a Christmas vacation, a semester break or a whole semester to come to the Gulf Coast. These students are distributing supplies and assisting in grassroots rebuilding efforts. These enthusiastic and generous young people who hunger and thirst for justice are animated by the same spirit as students who made up the Freedom Movement of the 1950s and 60s. Forty years ago they would have been sitting in at lunch counters, or registering voters in rural Alabama. *BC* salutes them too. We are left to wonder how much might have been rebuilt already if our government diverted to these grassroots efforts a fraction of the resources it gives to criminal conspiracies like Halliburton.

This week, another of the grassroots relief and advocacy efforts stepped off on a 70 mile march from Mobile, Alabama through Pascagoula, Mississippi to New Orleans. Along with the contingent of students who lend their youthful energies to every such worthwhile undertaking, the Veterans Gulf March significantly includes representatives of active duty military families and vets of both Gulf Wars. Paul Robinson was a principal actor in the grassroots Katrina relief efforts *BC* highlighted back in September 15, 2005. The recent founder of Mobile's all-black chapter of Veterans For Peace, he is a leading participant in this effort, along with author, activist and former US Army Special Forces Sgt. Stan Goff.

"Every bomb dropped over Iraq explodes over the Gulf Coast," declares Robinson.

## The Black Commentator – Bruce's Beat

"Survivors and veterans, more than anybody else are entitled to point out the easy and simple connection between the evil our government does in the Middle East and the good it fails to do at home. If a fraction, just a fraction of the resources we spend on the killing machine in Iraq could be harnessed here in the Gulf Coast we'd be well on the way to making people's lives better than they were before.

"Just like our government says it doesn't count Iraqi dead, there are still missing, uncounted and un-accounted for US citizens here at home. People have to be healed and made whole. I am a vet and a Gulf Coast survivor. It's time for survivors and for vets to imagine a better way, to tell the truth and to make it happen. That's why we are walking to New Orleans."

The march will reach New Orleans this weekend. Along the way, and at their destination vets, survivors and volunteers will participate in the building of homes and community centers. There's a lot of building to be done. We encourage **BC** readers to keep up with the progress of the Vets Gulf March through this weekend via the regular bulletins on their web site, and to donate to defray its costs.

And again, we mean no disrespect to all the other valiant and worthy efforts to minister to, to heal, to empower Gulf Coast and New Orleans residents. On April 1 other formations will gather at New Orleans to demand the right to return, to remain and to rebuild. **BC** enthusiastically supports these forces too. There are so many in motion, and the implications of the dispersal and dispossession of a mostly black city are so vast as to be overwhelming for an outfit of **BC**'s limited resources. We want to embrace all the organizations and all the volunteers active in the Gulf region. The fate of New Orleans is the most important question before black America today, and will be for some time. This week and every week, whether we can be there in person or not, we are all walking to New Orleans.

Next week we will return to our usual stimulating fare of reader email. Till then...

Contact Bruce Dixon at [bruce.dixon@blackcommentator.com](mailto:bruce.dixon@blackcommentator.com).