

The truth about hurricane Katrina (or the American dream as a nightmare)^[1]

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The UN Development Report^[2] just published provides ample statistical proof, as Paul Vallely of the British daily Independent points out, that for many –well beyond those affected by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina– the great American Dream is an ongoing nightmare. It reveals for instance that the infant mortality rate has been rising in the US for the past five years - and is now the same as Malaysia, whereas America's black children are twice as likely as whites to die before their first birthday. It is therefore clear that even the UN –not exactly a radical organization– recognizes now that a system which relies on private business will create huge inequalities depriving millions of people, in the only superpower left, from full access to health, education and other social provision.

At the same time, as the country is being led by the political and economic elites, such as Mr. Bush, the result is the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq, with no weapon of mass destruction, no connection to 9/11, and no cooperation between Saddam and al Qaida. The most recent evidence of the Bush administration's disregard for people is the destruction of New Orleans. However, although the present Administrations' responsibility for the man-made implications of the natural disaster should not be disregarded, one should also not forget that the 'infrastructure' for the disaster was provided by the system itself, i.e. the market economy and representative 'democracy', which has been established in the last two centuries, and which –to the extent that it is characterized by a built-in minimization of social responsibility– inevitably leads to the aggravation of any natural disaster.

Hurricanes are natural phenomena we that can be tracked. Scientists have predicted what would happen in New Orleans if the levees were to fail.^[3] "The president of the United States, stated 'we had no way of knowing the levees would break'...he did not want to know. I am not sure who he was referring to when he use the word we. When one use's the word we in the English vernacular it is used by the person who is speaking at that moment to include his/herself and other beings. Since I am not a neuron in the president's brain I don't know who the other beings are. So I will not include them in this analysis. The president admitted to the American people that he did not know the status of the levees that gave way. With this knowledge and belief he made decisions that caused the lives of thousands. In early 2004, as the cost of the conflict in Iraq soared, President Bush proposed spending less than 20 percent of what the Corps said was needed for Lake Pontchartrain, according to a Feb. 16, 2004, article, in New Orleans City Business.^[4]

Days after the flooding in New Orleans GWB himself said he wasn't looking forward to taking this trip to the devastation that awaited him in New Orleans. Clearly, New Orleans represented the truth he, of what he wanted to avoid. The truth is that the devastation in New Orleans, as was stated above, is a result of the policies implied by the system of the

market economy. Bush did not want to see trans-generational poverty, disparity, and oppression that exist as a result of his neoliberal policies, which are, in turn, the policies implied by the present neoliberal globalization that the dynamic of the market economy brought about, so that capitalist profits and economic growth are maximized.

In this country the mind set exhibited by GWB and the “we” did not just begin yesterday. It can be traced back to colonial America, in a colonial society, during colonial times on colonial plantations. Then, slavery was legal and widely practiced and, its’ cruelties frequently defended by farmer, merchants, politicians, and clergy alike. Wars were fought to keep and spread this institution. The irrational, leaders of church along with political and economic elites intended to enslave a group of people forever. Any one who challenged their intentions were excluded from being a member of the dominant society and/or imprisoned. Others, such as John Brown, who advocated for the release of enslaved people and the abolition of slavery, were murdered. The enslaved who attempted to escape were either maimed and/or killed. These tactics by the slave owners were to ensure slavery’s longevity and, also, a way of preventing the exposure of what is fact and in accordance with reality. The fact is that slavery was and continues to be profitable for the dominant society. In fact, America amassed its riches from slavery. African peoples were captured and transported to the Americas to work. Most European colonial economies in the Americas from the 16th through the 19th century were dependent on enslaved African labor for their survival.^[5]

Capitalism is used to describe a particular economic system but it is also a way of thinking. Capitalism as a way of thinking is fundamentally individualistic, that is, the self interest of the individual is the center of the capitalist endeavor. This way of thinking draws on the Enlightenment’s idea of progress as well as the liberal concepts of individuality. The former implies that the large-scale social goal of unregulated capitalism is to produce wealth, that is, to make the national economy wealthier and more affluent than it normally would be.^[6] The latter implies that all individuals are different, that society is composed of individuals who pursue their own interests, that individuals should be free to pursue their own interests (this, in capitalism, is called "economic freedom").^[7]

Bush’s response to New Orleans is based on this way of thinking. Bush’s interest, which is also the interest of the oil-linked part of the US economic elite , is oil. It was this interest that led him to make the changes to FEMA that resulted in the decreased funding for ensuring appropriated disaster response and weakening infrastructure – issues that led to the demise of the city of New Orleans. So, the victims of the New Orleans tragedy are paying the price of Bush, pursuing his own interest, oil^[8] as well as the interests of the rest of the US elite, which benefits from low taxes and the consequent tragically inadequate social infrastructure in this country.

No fruitful thinking takes place in the minds of Americans. They are not willing to believe what their own eyes, nose, and ears are telling them. What Americans perceive as reality or the truth (defined by the English dictionary; “That which is in accordance with fact or reality; that which is.”) is guided by information received from corporate sources that make up, the mass media. The most common alternative to empirical evidence, authoritarian evidence, is what authorities (people, books, billboards, television commercials, etc.) tell you to believe. Sometimes, if the authority is reliable, authoritarian evidence is reliable evidence, but many authorities are not reliable, so one must check the reliability of each

authority before one accepts its evidence. In the end, one must be one's own authority by relying on critical thinking.

Truth and capitalism cannot co-exist because the reality is New Orleans. Capitalism creates huge disparities resulting in unequal distribution of wealth, education, property, health care, and democratic voice. New Orleans and the President's response to the people is a micro-view of the way the poor and especially poor people of color have been dealt with by the group that assumes dominant power. Louisiana history begins with the French enslavement of the first the Native Americans and Africans.^[9] Incidentally, the spirit of self-sacrifice for the cause of freedom and democracy has always been present in the history of the African American fight to end slavery, challenging the hierarchical organisation of society.^[10] Today, Barbara Bush spoke at the Astrodome in Houston. "And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this — this working very well for them," This is very sad commentary of the type of thinking exercised by the elite.

Why aren't Americans in the street protesting the treatment of their fellow human beings? It took days before help came and when it did the survivors were greeted with smiles from the barrel of military guns.... We are all guilty because we are allowing this government to use our money to terrorize people of color throughout the world.

News reporters reveal how unreal they are when they ask questions like..."How do you feel about the armed people who came to save you?" and "Why didn't people leave?" The media is part of the problem by framing and propagandizing how they want the Americans to think and feel. Nothing was more apparent than calling the survivor's in New Orleans "Refugees." They put us; I mean my sisters and brothers on TV and ask them questions that don't address the real problems like the neglect and criminalization of their survival instinct. Andersen Cooper had the gall to utter the words "Ground Zero". "Ground Zero" are two words again used to frame and propagandize American thinking by evoking the image of the American flag still standing in the rubble and all the benefits that come with it. New Orleans is proof that those benefits only apply to the rich Americans. The word "refugee" is used to indicate that those Americans in "New Orleans" were not Americans, especially in the eyes of the Media who shape people's opinion. Americans should be ashamed. It's all about money changing hands in sums of millions and billions of dollars...^[11] Now it has been said that the hurricane relief cost will exceed the cost of the Iraq war... Are they joking? Congress? This is just another reason for this administration to steal more money. There is about 9 billion dollars unaccounted for. I don't hear the media looking for this money. However, hurricane survivors who look for food and clothing are called thieves and their actions are described as lawless, the lawless and corrupt Bush administration is continuing business as usual. Bush said that he will launch and lead an investigation into the response time.

I doubt if any one will pay for this outrageous crime. He will cover it up, because the investigation will lead to him as the culprit of mass murder. Bush and his administration did much more harm than Katrina. Bush must be charged with more than 10,000 counts of negligent homicide due to failure of Homeland Security to have in place emergency plans and material for disaster relief and immediate response. Even more doubtful is that anyone in power will blame the system itself for its obvious social inadequacy. Hilary Clinton and the supposedly 'progressive' part of the elite, followed by the reformist Left,

could, at most, blame the Bush ‘neocons’ but not a system which creates thousands of little New Orleans every day in America, as the large disparities in infant death rates based on race, wealth and state of residence show. Is there a greater proof of this than the fact revealed by the UN report that a baby boy from one of the top 5 per cent richest families in America is expected to live 25 per cent longer than a boy born in the bottom 5 per cent and that the US – with Mexico– has the dubious distinction of seeing its child poverty rates increase to more than 20 per cent?

[1] The information researched for this article relies on authoritative evidence. The sources used were approached and read with tentative skepticism. The decision to use data is based on empirical evidence and logical thinking. “Revolutionize the way we think, because knowledge depends on evidence and reason, arbitrary authority can only be its enemy.” (“The Enlightenment” Paul Brians March 11, 1998. Last revised May 18, 2000)

[2] UN. United Nations *Human Development Report 2005*.

[3] “The City in a Bowl,” NOW with Bill Moyers returns to the Mississippi River delta to examine another ominous effect of this crisis — the risk that a massive hurricane could drown New Orleans gets worse every single year. September, 6 2002.

[4] William Bunch author of the article “Did New Orleans Catastrophe Have to Happen?” Times-Picayune’ Had Repeatedly Raised Federal Spending Issues.”

[5] “How Slavery helped build a world economy” *National Geographic* Howard Dodson (2/3/2003)

[6] “European Enlightenment” Glossary ©1996, Richard Hooker.

[7] “European Enlightenment” Glossary ©1996, Richard Hooker.

[8] “The Bush Family ‘Oligarchy’” By Sam Parry.

[9] “Slavery in Early Louisiana” David P. Rider.

[10] Takis Fotopoulos, “[For whom an Inclusive Democracy?](#)” Class divisions and the liberatory subject today” *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (October 2004). It is in this way that the ruling elite influences the subjective perception of subordinate groups and adjusts it to an ‘objective’ reality which presupposes acceptance of the existing hierarchical structure of the totality.

[11] Published on Tuesday, June 29, 2004 by *the New York Times*, “Who Lost Iraq?” by Paul Krugman.