Hurricane Katrina: America’s Unnatural Disaster

How about Some Food For Thought?

Katrina was the eleventh tropical storm, fifth hurricane, third major hurricane, and second Category 5 hurricane of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season. It formed over the Bahamas on August 23, moved through the Caribbean Sea, and made landfall near the mouth of the Mississippi River on August 29. The flooding was unprecedented along the Gulf Coast. In Louisiana, the flood protection system in New Orleans failed in thirty-three different places. Nearly every levee in metro New Orleans breached as Hurricane Katrina’s 140-mile-an-hour gale force winds, torrential rain, and thunderous floodwaters rolled eastward through the city, flooding 80 percent of the metropolis. As the city became blacker, it also became poorer as blacks were systematically denied work and a living wage. In 1960 New Orleans was 35% black; today the city is over 60% black.

“We don’t even know exactly who died. After September 11, 2001, the New York Times launched ‘Portraits of Grief,’ an ongoing series dedicated to documenting everyone who had died in the World Trade Center on the day the buildings fell. Times writers attempted to contact the relatives or friends of each of the 2,749 people who are thought to have died in the collapse of the towers. They wrote 2,310 full portraits until the last page ran in March 2003. This was a massive dedication of staff and time and resources. New Orleans received no such effort; no team of researchers was assigned to find out who died and what their stories were.”

— Jordan Flaherty, Floodlines: Community and Resistance for Katrina to the Jena Six, 65

The have-nots, all of us are born. The haves in New Orleans and the Greater Gulf Coast, therefore, had the resources to escape or withstand Katrina’s wrath, while the have-nots were fully exposed to destruction, dislocation, injury, and death. As Hartman and Squires argue:

Excerpts taken from Hurricane Katrina: America’s Unnatural Disaster
But what about Mother Earth?

“Katrina left a range of environmental problems in her wake, including contaminated water; multiple oil spills, typically from above-ground tanks; leaking underground tanks containing fuel and chemicals; flooded sewage treatment plants; and flooded buildings, lagoons, lots, and individual containers containing a wide array of toxic chemicals that were washed out into the ambient environment.”

“If and when [the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)] runs out of external funding, the resulting squeeze could cripple EPA’s capacity to do anything but cope with the Gulf Coast’s problems.”

“The cleanup and rebuilding effort now beginning also raises questions of justice. Community members and environmental justice leaders have raised serious concerns about when and how the contaminants left by floodwaters will be cleaned up, citing evidence of inequities in environmental cleanups more generally.”

“...could the environmental damage have been avoided if planning and enforcement had adequately accounted for the inevitable flood that Katrina finally brought? The answer is straightforward: Katrina could have not have been stopped, but much of the environmental nightmare could have been.”

WHERE WAS NATURE IN THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA?

Excerpts from An Unnatural Disaster: The Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina
Why was the environmental impact of Katrina neglected?

THE INDUSTRIALIZATION OF NATURE
Nature is exploitable, manufacturable, malleable. We can industrialize it, commodify it, rape it. We can transform it, reorganize it, uproot it. Nature is an “idea” that can be tailored to justify our actions. Nature is profitable, marketable, expendable. We can own it. We can destroy it. She is no longer a living, breathing body, So why should we give her a voice?