



Deadly Waiting Game Beyond Katrina: A Community Response to Government Inaction

*NIEHS Worker Education Training Program
Rebuilding Communities – Voices from Katrina*

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Deep South Center for Environmental Justice

Dillard University

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**I Know
What It
Means To
Miss New
Orleans**



Before Katrina

Before Katrina

- The city of New Orleans nearly 70% African American.
- All major political offices held by African Americans (mayor, police chief, city council, and school board).
- A sizeable black middle class.
- An even larger lower middle and working class.

Before Katrina

- Extremely high poverty rate.
- 35% poverty rate with 80% of those in poverty African American.
- Low paying jobs supported by the tourism industry.
- The hotel industry grossing larger profits in New Orleans than in other comparable cities.

Before Katrina

- Enormous health care problems with inadequate health care delivery and looming health disparities among African Americans.
- Insufficient state and local funding for health care.

Before Katrina

Environmental contamination including Superfund sites, Brownfields sites, and other toxic facilities in close proximity to communities and schools.

Before Katrina

Gentrification of historically black neighborhoods and housing projects replaced by high cost condominiums and single family homes.

Racial Polarization Issues

- Residency requirements for police officers.
- Chartered schools.
- State take over of public schools.
- Indictment of black political officials.
- City contracts.
- Livable wages.
- Racialized space (Eastern New Orleans, Lower Ninth Ward, Upper Garden District, Lakeview)



Katrina





After Katrina















What Happened?



- *Levees Breached*
- *Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO)*
- *Coastal Erosion*

**And the richest, most powerful and
technologically advanced nation on earth...
USA!!! Go Corps of Engineers!!!**



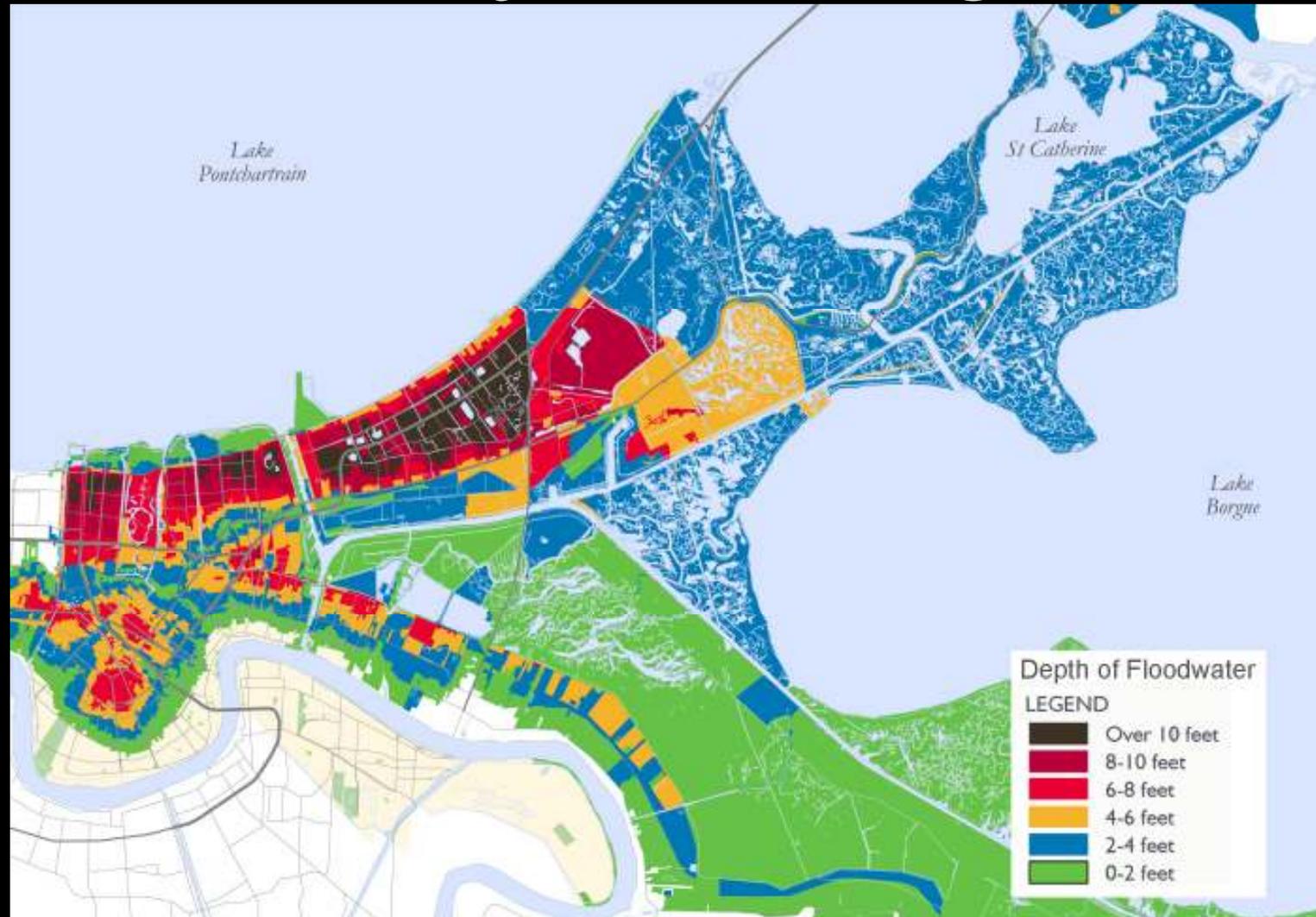
Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO)



Surge



Major Flooding



- *108,731 households had over 4 feet of flood water;*
- *50% of all New Orleans households.*

Where Are People Now?

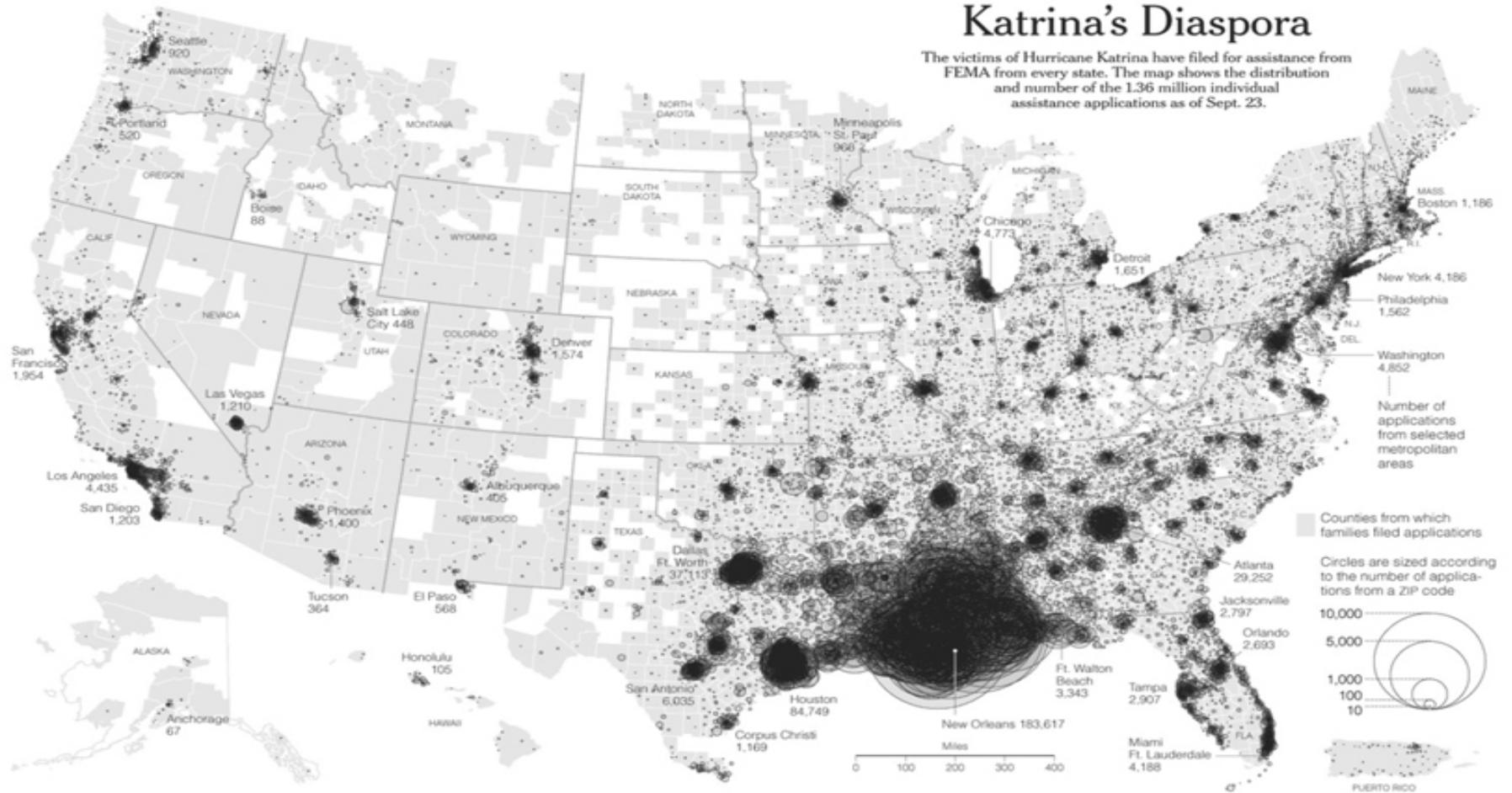
The New York Times » National » Image » Katrina's Diaspora

The New York Times

October 2, 2005

Katrina's Diaspora

The victims of Hurricane Katrina have filed for assistance from FEMA from every state. The map shows the distribution and number of the 1.36 million individual assistance applications as of Sept. 23.



Applications by state

State	Count	PCT.
Louisiana	523,149	38.6%
Mississippi	383,840	28.3%
Texas	156,895	11.6%
Alabama	109,469	8.1%
Georgia	35,342	2.6%
Florida	31,005	2.3%
Tennessee	15,529	1.1%
Arkansas	11,027	0.8%
California	10,953	0.8%

Applications by distance from New Orleans

MILES	APPLICANTS	PCT.
0-100	626,232	46.2%
100-200	338,080	24.9%
200-400	184,169	13.6%
400-800	143,497	10.6%
800-1,600	45,371	3.3%
1,600-3,200	13,403	1.0%
3,200+	232	0.0%

Distances could not be calculated for 0.4 percent of applications.

Katrina Left Behind

Debris & Hazardous Wastes

- Katrina left behind an estimated 22 million tons of debris, with more than half, 12 million tons, left in Orleans Parish.
- Flooded homes containing over one million pieces of "white goods," such as refrigerators, stoves, and freezers require disposal.
- An additional 350,000 automobiles must be drained of oil and gasoline and then recycled; 60,000 boats may need to be destroyed; and 300,000 underground fuel tanks and 42,000 tons of hazardous waste must be collected and properly disposed at licensed facilities.
- Government officials peg the numbers of cars lost in New Orleans alone at 145,000.

TOXIC CONTAMINATION AND HEALTH THREATS

- Katrina caused six major oil spills releasing 7.4 million gallons of oil, or 61 percent as much as the 11 million gallons that leaked into Alaska's Prince William Sound from the Exxon Valdez in 1989.
- The storm hit 60 underground storage tanks, five Superfund sites, 466 industrial facilities that stored highly dangerous chemicals, and disabled more than 1,000 drinking-water systems, leaving e. coli in floodwaters far exceeding EPA's safe levels.

HOMES

- More than 110,000 of New Orleans 180,000 houses were flooded, and half sat for days or weeks in more than six feet of water.
- As many as 30,000 to 50,000 homes citywide may have to be demolished, while many others could be saved with extensive repairs.

SCHOOLS

- Katrina displaced just under 350,000 school children in the Gulf Coast. An estimated 187,000 school children have been displaced in Louisiana, 160,000 in Mississippi, and 3,118 in Alabama.
- The powerful storm closed the New Orleans school system and left a trail of toxic muck in classrooms and on playgrounds. Over 93 percent of New Orleans area 125,000 public schools children are African American.

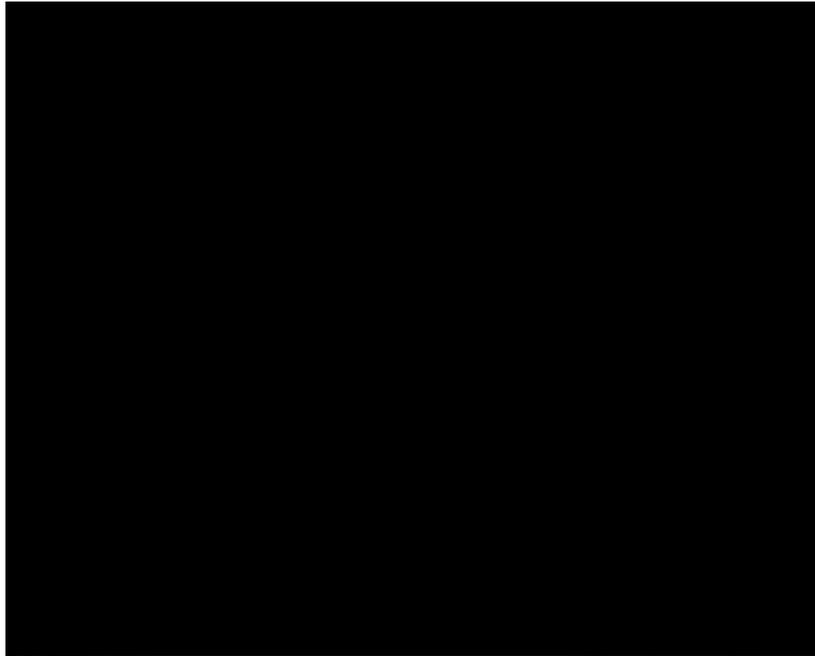
Katrina Changed Everything
August 29, 2005

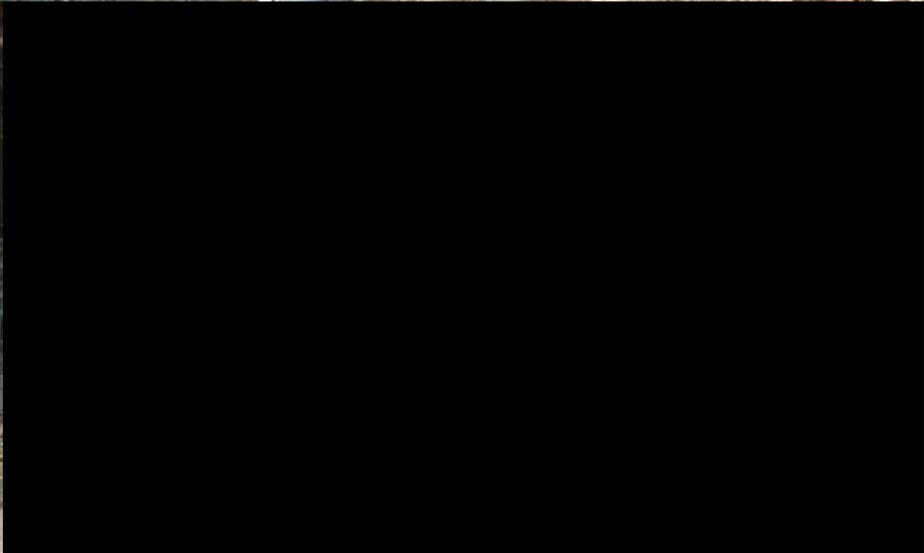
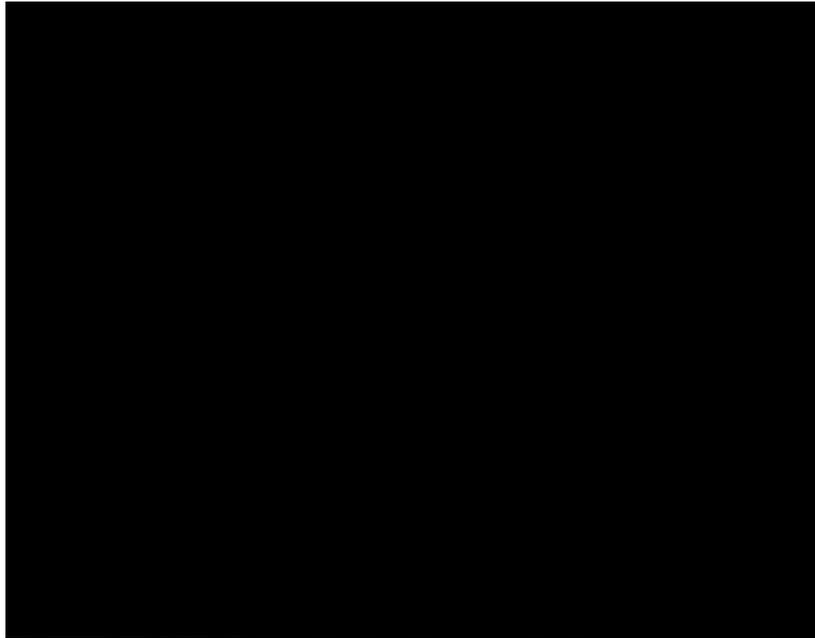
The Barge That Broke The Levee's Back











Katrina Left Behind
Debris & Hazardous Wastes

TOXIC CONTAMINATION AND HEALTH THREATS

HOMES DESTROYED

SCHOOLS CLOSED

The Building Plan

Where is New Orleans East?

- 98% African American
- 85% Homeowners
- 40% of the city's tax base
- 6 Exclusive neighborhoods w/man made lakes
- 2nd largest park in the city
- First generation homeowners
- First generation inherited property
- Largely middle class (Professionals)
- Lakefront Property

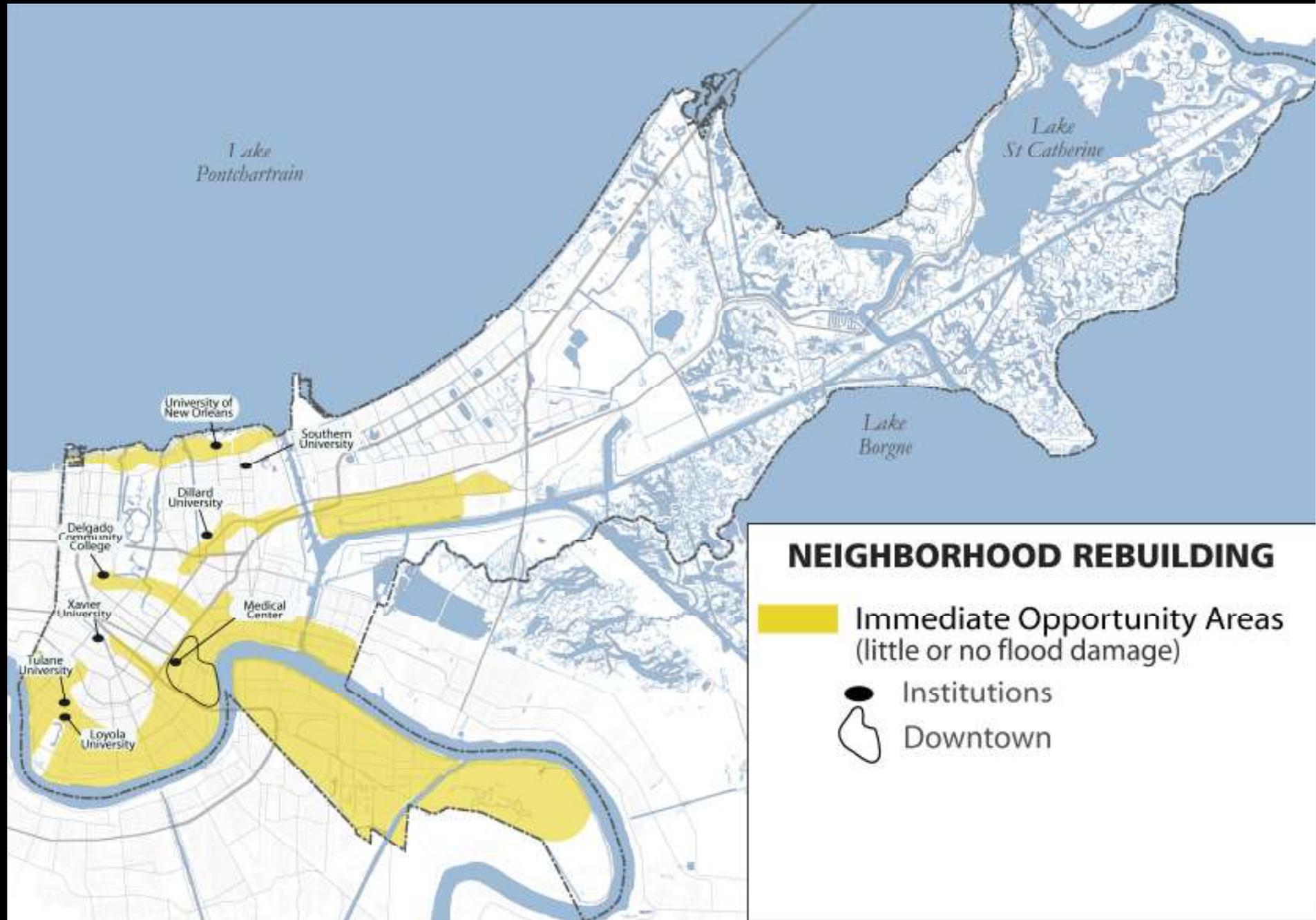
PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

The Bring New Orleans Back Commission will unveil a sweeping \$17 billion plan today that calls for a vast reworking of the city's neighborhoods and housing patterns. But in the four-month period when the fine print is hashed out over who can build where, all renovation will be halted in the flooded zone.

- Areas where rebuilding allowed now
- Building moratorium until neighborhoods prove viability
- Approximate areas of expected to become parks and greenspace
- Areas to be redeveloped, some with new housing for relocated homeowners



The Big Land Grab



NEIGHBORHOOD REBUILDING

-  Immediate Opportunity Areas (little or no flood damage)
-  Institutions
-  Downtown

The Big Losers

- The Majority African American Community
- The Black Majority Political Structure
- Minority Owned Businesses
- Minority Inherited Wealth (Land Loss)
- Loss Of Cultural Heritage
- Loss of Community
- Loss of Place (racialized space)
- Loss of the Black Middle and Working Class.
- Loss of Black Home Ownership
- Loss of Black Voting Strength

The Problem

- There is agreement between federal, state, local government, and environmental professionals (EPA, LDEQ, NRDC) on the existence of contaminants in the soil.
- The disagreement is over its meaning for risk to public health and a remedy.

Post Katrina

Chemicals exceeding RECAP standards included:

- heavy metals (arsenic, zinc, barium, cadmium);
- diesel range organics; and,
- polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (benzo[a]pyrene and benzo[b]fluoranthene).

These results, when compared to other US EPA data from across the city of New Orleans, appear typical of post-Katrina New Orleans. They also represent a health risk for long-term exposure.

The Problem

The Standards are different for agencies responsible for the protection of environmental health (EPA and LDEQ).

Post Katrina, it seems that the term or concept of “management or further evaluation” and “trigger further investigation and/or cleanup” have been dropped from the government’s area of responsibility.

Differences in Soil Screening Levels

Chemicals	EPA Soils Screening Levels	LDEQ RECAP Soil Screening Levels	Findings: Levels of sediments sample that should trigger investigation or cleanup.
Arsenic	0.39 mg/kg	12 mg/kg	30% of sediment samples
Benzo(a)pyrene	0.062 mg/kg	.33 mg/kg	43% of sediments sample
Diesel	No EPA Standard	65 mg/kg	59% of sediments sample
Lead	400 mg/kg	400 mg/kg	5% of sediments sample
Mercury	23 mg/kg	2.3 mg/kg	

8130 Aberdeen Rd. Soil Sediment Sample Site



8130 Aberdeen Rd. Soil Sediment Sample

Chemicals	EPA Soils Screening Levels	LDEQ RECAP Soil Screening Levels	Levels
Arsenic	0.39 mg/kg	12 mg/kg	Approximately 74 times greater than EPA region 6 soil clean-up level for residential
Benzo(a)pyrene	0.062 mg/kg	.33 mg/kg	Approximately 8725 times greater than EPA clean-up standards
Diesel	No EPA Standard	65 mg/kg	Approximately 14 times greater than LDEQ clean-up standards
Lead	400 mg/kg	400 mg/kg	Well below EPA & LDEQ Standards

A Community Response to Government Inaction

A Safe Way Back Home
Campaign

A Project of the Deep South Center for
Environmental Justice

Collaborations

A *Safe Way Back Home* campaign is a product of an unusual partnership between universities, labor, and environmental and community organizations. It offers neighborhood residents whose homes were flooded by Hurricane Katrina an opportunity to join forces with the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Dillard University, United Steelworkers, volunteer organizations, and environmentalists to take a proactive approach to cleaning up their neighborhoods.

Meet the Press





Suiting Up

In Class





Picking Up
Debris

Removing
Top Soil





Steelworkers at Work

Safeway Back Home Gang



Top Soil Removal and Landscape

Six inches of top soil including the contaminated sediment was removed from the front and backyards of 23 houses on one block. Each lot was re-landscaped with graded river sand and fresh sod. Sidewalks, curbs, and streets were pressure washed to remove all accumulated sediment to return the homes to a safe and livable condition.



The Sod Arrives

Volunteers at Work



The Red
Cross is Here



Laying Sod



“We’re Coming Home Safely... Clean and Green”

The Safe Way Back Home Demonstration Project is the first of its kind involving residents in the organization and clean-up of sediments in their neighborhoods. It has become a major catalyst of hope for displaced New Orleans residents.



Before



After





My Neighbors

are Coming
Home





A Safe Way Back Home

Block Party

Neighbors proudly display yard signs



Aberdeen Rd...Clean and Green



Aberdeen Rd. residents enjoy block party celebration.



Aberdeen Rd. residents pose with Councilwoman
Cynthia Hedge Morrell “District D” and Cynthia
Willard-Lewis “District E”



The Tipping Point!



The Tipping Point!



The Tipping Point!



The Tipping Point!





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