

New orleans



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The paper "New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina" is a delightful example of a case study on environmental studies. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, there has been much debate about who is to blame for thousands losing their lives. A well-known evangelist has gone as far as to make a public statement, accusing the residents of New Orleans of bringing the hurricane as God's wrath for sin. Poor emergency planning, lack of federal funding for construction of safer barriers, poor federal government response, lack of cooperation from local and state officials and greed of developers who built on what was once swampland have all been cited. Many U. S. citizens have been quick to respond to the need for physical and monetary help, ignoring the blame and accusations. Churches, universities, youth groups, and many other charitable organizations have given their time and talent to help with the recovery and rebuilding process. However, the slow or poor response on the part of government officials begs the question of whether class and race play a part. It is a legitimate question, considering the many negative comments in the media after the disaster, often shifting blame to the residents living in the Lower Ninth Ward. Many were accused of not listening to evacuation requests, yet many tried, without transportation, to find buses and taxis to no avail. This is just one of the realities pointed out in the Letter from New Orleans by John Lee Anderson, entitled Leaving Desire: The Ninth Ward after the hurricane. Others say that residents of the Lower Ninth Ward should have been smart enough to know they were living in an area that previously swamped land and that the levees would surely destroy their homes. Many families in the area are third or fourth-generation residents. They had established roots and ties in the community.

When the public hears a well-known television evangelist make a public

<https://assignbuster.com/new-orleans/>

statement that Hurricane Katrina was God's wrath for sin, it causes much contemplation about how much prejudice does exist. New Orleans has a high crime rate. So does Los Angeles, Memphis, Dallas, Richmond and some other major cities along the east coast. Interestingly, blaming the people of New Orleans almost seems to be what the nation's leaders and government agencies were suggesting, with their lack of cooperation and outrageously slow actions, in a great time of need. The investigation of class and race influencing disaster management decisions is a worthwhile undertaking. Though a much smaller city than New Orleans, the city of Plantation, Florida has Outlined its own step by step process for handling the aftermath of hurricanes. " The City's Post Disaster Management Plan (PLAN) was developed to cope with the consequences of such an emergency and outline how the recovery period will be handled" (Plantation Fire Department, nd). To further investigate the phenomenon of classism and racism, evaluations of the emergency plans of other major cities, comparable in demographics, might provide more useful insights. Many of the coastal towns in Florida and along the rest of the Gulf Coast are relatively small. The east coast of the United States, from Virginia to Florida, has also been hit hard by hurricanes at various points in U. S. history, though some may not be as highly populated as New Orleans. Such information might suggest that housing large populations along coastal waters are simply not a good idea, regardless of socioeconomic status.

As response times for government agencies were extremely slow after hurricane Katrina, it might also be wise to investigate which government agencies do the most good in such emergencies. Perhaps funding for agencies like FEMA would be better spent elsewhere, such as Red Cross,

<https://assignbuster.com/new-orleans/>

National Guard, and more local agencies. FEMA has been notoriously slow in other parts of the country that have experienced disasters. “ The response to Hurricane Andrew raised doubts about whether FEMA is capable of responding to catastrophic disasters And whether it had learned any lessons from its responses to Hurricane Hugo” (GAO, 1993). In Appalachia, another area where many of the residents are poor, many are still waiting for their relief funds from floods that damaged homes in 2001. Breaking down the process of how funds are determined and distributed, by talking with or interviewing residents of other nationally declared disaster areas might provide a more rounded picture of how such agencies respond.

It would be interesting to discover any psychological effects of living through such a disaster as Hurricane Katrina and how the attitudes of others may affect the emotional well being. Perhaps one of the reasons Lionel Petrie left his home so reluctantly is that he knows that it would be a long time before he got any help with his home, if ever. This would require finding and interviewing several hundred Katrina victims. It would not be an easy task, considering the numbers that have not returned. Some could be tracked through schools and tax records. It might be easier to interview victims that remained or have returned to New Orleans. Comparing their responses with those victims of other disasters might also help identify any consistencies or patterns.

There is much to learn about the views, attitudes, and prejudices toward disaster victims of various socio-economic and ethnic groups. By investigating other instances where federal, state and other governments have appeared to fail in protecting or aiding the most vulnerable citizens, we can begin to question ethical and moral behavior in a more academic forum, <https://assignbuster.com/new-orleans/>

possible helping the shape policies and procedures that affect the poor and less fortunate. Sharing such data with charitable and helping organizations could better enable them to make decisions and organize emergency activities that help a greater number of citizens.

Whether government agencies change how they operate or continue to fall short, there are other groups and individuals who are more than willing to do whatever it takes, regardless of the status of disaster victims. It would be useful for disaster relief workers to understand the hesitations of people such as Lionel Petrie, who will make sure their families are safe but believe their main purpose is to save the family home. By understanding their motives and self-views they might be more easily convinced to focus on saving themselves over their property.

Though it would be great to think that racism does not exist, there are moments or occurrences that make us question this belief. The controversy over the area of New Orleans, known as the Lower Ninth Ward, caused some very strong emotions and battles, after the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Though other areas along the Gulf Coast were also hit very hard, this particular area suffered extensive damage, due to the location near levees that did not hold. The area is highly populated and though a poor section of the city has a rich history and is home to several generations of families. After the hurricane, many residents of the Lower Ninth Ward were unable to leave, trapped in their homes with water quickly rising around them, up to the roof in many cases. Some had to cut holes in the roof so they could sit on hot tarpaper until rescued. Many residents had not left because there was no money and they had no cars. Even bus service was hard to access for these residents. Though the Superdome was opened afterward for those who did

<https://assignbuster.com/new-orleans/>

not have a place to go, there was little planning on how to evacuate residents of this area prior to the storm, other than the Mayor's order for everyone to leave. From the start, it appears as though these residents were ignored or forgotten about. In the New Yorker - Letter from New Orleans The Lost Year: Behind the failure to rebuild, by Dan Baum, there is a discussion about how the Lower Ninth Ward had been neglected and ignored by the city for decades.

Because the area consists of predominantly African American residents, it would appear that this neglect was intentional. " Even as the city remained underwater, prominent politicians and businessmen began speaking of Katrina as a quick fix for generations of mistakes and neglect, a deus ex machina that would finally eliminate poverty in New Orleans" (Baum). Some statements made were even harsher. The attitudes in such comments suggest that the extensive destruction of the Lower Ninth Ward would eliminate a certain class and race of people from New Orleans.

Though some argue that the poor residents that had been neglected for years may have viewed the actions and words of politicians as a personal affront, it appears that way too many outsiders as well. The thousands of volunteers and groups that came to help rebuild in the Lower Ninth Ward did not seem to think the residents of this area undeserving or as bringing problems on themselves. In fact, many residents of this area helped each other after the storm, finding a place to stay, helping with rescue efforts, or providing food when possible. The attitude of Lionel Petrie depicts a hard-working man of strong character and will, who had sent his family away to stay with relatives. He was hesitant to leave when rescuers arrived, not because he was leaving family, but because of his roots and memories.

Lionel Petrie knew all his neighbors and was able to help rescuers locate those that remained. As a small business owner, he knew all the small shops and business owners. While it is true that he also knew the areas to typically avoid, considered high crime areas, he is a typical example of the culture and heritage that was alive in the Lower Ninth Ward before the storm.

There is no sense in assuming that because he is a man of color, he does not deserve help in rebuilding his home for his family. It has been suggested that many of the residents in this area, who live on public assistance expect handouts. Perhaps this is why President Bush ultimately approved far less in federal aid than initially promised. It seems as though he listened to all the rhetoric about residents in the Lower Ninth Ward. Though there are many receiving government benefits, they were also homeowners. Many worked more than one job or worked long hours in their own shops, like Lionel Petrie.

Initially President Bush offered millions more in federal money than New Orleans eventually received. FEMA also offered funds for some residents, with conditions that they did not have flood insurance but also did not live in low lying areas. It was thought initially that residents of the Lower Ninth Ward were not eligible. However, the neighborhoods are not the lowest lying area in New Orleans and actually sit a few feet above sea level. They are situated near the levees. It appears again, as though the storm became a way for politicians to try and eliminate the largest African American population in New Orleans, by keeping them from rebuilding or coming back.

The lack of timely funding and political indecision with respect to rebuilding the Lower Ninth Ward created a rift that appears as a racial divide. Mayor

<https://assignbuster.com/new-orleans/>

Nagin himself seemed to support the notion that the Lower Ninth Ward should not be rebuilt. Though an African American, with relatives and acquaintances who actually lived in this area, it is said that he lives in a white society. It was not until many political and citizens' action groups began to bring attention to the fact that the Lower Ninth Ward deserved rebuilding like other areas, that he changed his mind.

Even as the entire city has been rebuilding slowly, it wasn't until a few determined residents began rebuilding their own homes and helping neighbors, that other non-profit organizations, such as Brad Pitt's foundation Make it Right, began its rebuilding project that the Lower Ninth Ward started to become inhabitable again. " Some parts of the city (the French Quarter, the Garden District, and Uptown) are in a full recovery process, but others - including Lakeview, New Orleans East, and the Lower Ninth Ward—still show only limited recovery" (DeVita). Neither the federal government nor FEMA has had a large part of helping the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhoods recover. It is the efforts of charity groups and other organizations that rebuilding has begun.

Though the area and crimes rates were sometimes cited as reasons to reconsider whether the Lower Ninth Ward should be rebuilt, these excuses have strong racial implications and make many assumptions about the majority of former residents. It is clear that rebuilding and related funding failed to help the neediest residents return to their homes. It is also clear that until pressured, even local politicians seemed to bend to popular opinions, about the type of people living in the Lower Ninth Ward. They should have defended these residents, many of whom are hard-working like Lionel Petrie.

The fact that they did not act until pressured would indicate that some form of prejudice exists in many government leaders and officials. The underlying assumption that the poor who rely on welfare benefits to help them get by don't deserve housing is evident. However, many resident groups and organizations within the Lower Ninth Ward have continued to push for aid and for anyone who can help to get involved. Many of the volunteers are residents of the area who were fortunate enough to rebuild on their own. They should not have had to resort to organizing and rallying to get their neighborhoods and homes rebuilt.