

## When government fails

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### The pathetic official response to Katrina has shocked the world. How will it change America?

ONLY those with a special pass, and under armed guard, can now go to the centre of New Orleans. The city, officials will tell you, is far more dangerous than is generally believed. But just a few people, such as scientists needing to retrieve experiments, are being allowed in.

Slowly, falteringly and much too late, America began to respond this week to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina. Troops and supplies poured into New Orleans, even as survivors were bused away. The broken levees are being fixed, and water is even being pumped out. By the weekend less than 60% of New Orleans, rather than 80%, remained under water. Police were continuing to remove any remaining people, sometimes by force. The death toll is still unclear. Ray Nagin, New Orleans's mayor, talked last week of 10,000 dead, though other officials now say it could be a lot fewer than that.

As relief stumbles along, the political blame-game is in top gear. George Bush and the federal government have come under fierce attack. Though a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll found that only 13% supposed the president should take most responsibility for the relief effort, or lack of it, both Republicans and Democrats were appalled at Mr Bush's failure to grasp the scale of the catastrophe; shocked that his senior staff were absent, or on holiday, while thousands of Americans were stranded without food and water; and aghast at the bumbling response of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is charged with coping when disasters strike. America's enemies, from Cuba to Iran, lined up with unconcealed smirks to offer doctors and aid.

Karl Rove, Mr Bush's political Svengali, moved into damage-control mode. Top officials, from Donald Rumsfeld to Condoleezza Rice, were packed off to visit the disaster zone. Mr Bush himself went back again to hug refugees, and said, unpromisingly, that he would launch an investigation. The White House spin-machine whirled into action, trying to shift blame to local and state officials. The federal

government, claimed Michael Chertoff, head of the Department of Homeland Security, had only a supporting role to play; it could not, he implied, do much if the locals were incompetent. That did not, however, stop the administration from unceremoniously relieving FEMA head Michael Brown of hurricane duty on Friday September 9th and packing him off to Washington while Thad Allen, a vice-admiral in the coast guard, took his place. On Monday, Mr Brown announced that he was resigning from the agency.

Local and state officials have fought their corner. Kathleen Blanco, the Democratic governor of Louisiana, refused to let the federal government take control of the National Guard relief effort in her state, fearing this would allow the Bush team to blame her for any earlier incompetence. Instead, she hired James Lee Witt, the head of FEMA in the Clinton administration, to advise her on disaster relief.

Pundits explained the government's failure in every way they pleased. Anti-war types blamed Iraq, particularly the fact that thousands of National Guard troops had been sent there. Environmental types blamed Mr Bush's lackadaisical attitude to wetlands. Many Democrats saw it as proof that Mr Bush and the Republicans cared nothing for America's poor and black. Liberals argued that Katrina showed why, as James Galbraith, a vocal leftist economist at the University of Texas, put it, the "government of the United States must be big, demanding, ambitious and expensive."

The question of racism bobbed quickly to the surface. Jesse Jackson, a one-time presidential hopeful, set the tone. Inspecting the crowded pavement outside the convention centre in New Orleans, he said: "This looks like the hull of a slave ship."

Absurd though the comparison may be, America's racial rift has been re-opened. Almost all the desperate-looking victims on the television news are black. That partly reflects demography—New Orleans is two-thirds black. It also reflects poverty. Those who failed to leave town typically did so because they had no means of transport. Some 35% of black households lacked a car, compared with 15% of white ones.

## **Wilberforce's home town clinging to racism of 1960s, report warns**

**Martin Wainwright**  
**Tuesday July 26, 2005**  
**The Guardian**

The birthplace of Britain's great emancipator, William Wilberforce, is in danger of squandering his legacy of tolerance and equality, according to a study that says racism has "turned the clock back 30 or 40 years" in the port city of Hull.

The report, commissioned by the local council, police and the Crown Prosecution Service, finds a casualised acceptance of racist behaviour and language in a significant part of the population, which on occasions becomes very explicit, offensive and violent.

Outsiders have been astonished to find "a timewarp in attitudes, as if the clock has been wound back to the struggles of the 1960s in other, now multicultural, cities," it says.

The study, by Hull University, records regular local use of terms such as "negro", "coloureds" and "Paki", frequent reference to minorities as "all the same" and "a lack of awareness or understanding of the development of debates about racial and religious acceptance over the past four decades."

The report was linked at its launch yesterday to national concern over community relations after the London bombings. Kath Lavery, Hull city council's equalities champion, said: "The findings sadly confirm what we said in the light of the horror of the attacks: that too many of our residents, albeit a minority, are still struggling to cope with the presence of ethnic minorities in Hull."

The report acknowledges that local people have seen a marked increase in ethnic minority numbers through the recent national dispersal programme for asylum seekers, but finds that racist attitudes have much deeper roots.

The survey team, led by Professor Gary Craig, was given detailed records of attacks, abuse and discrimination suffered by black and ethnic minority residents for more than 20 years.

"All reported frequent incidents throughout that period and continuing to the present time," says the report. "Virtually all - professional workers, students, manual workers, refugees and asylum seekers -

regarded Hull as having a racist culture, in which they often felt frightened and under threat, with their freedom to move around severely compromised."

The attitudes were a constant brake on Hull's spirited regeneration efforts, according to the study. Prof Craig said: "Wilberforce's progressive legacy of tolerance for slaves 'out there' has seemingly not been entirely preserved or very widely shared here at home."

Anna Whalen, the head of equalities for Hull city council, said many of the report's recommendations were already being implemented, and she highlighted the study's praise for initiatives designed to ease tension. "The people of Hull have also shown an awful lot of good nature in welcoming new communities to our city, and all that they bring with them," she said.

The report's balance is not optimistic, however, with Prof Craig warning: "The overwhelming consensus of respondents was that the state of race relations in the city was poor or worse, and that it could, if not addressed, become worse still."

But its analysis acknowledges the slow but eventual overcoming of past prejudices, recalling that hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Russia passed through the port in the late 19th century, "treated more like cattle than humans ... There were lurid portrayals in the media and populist campaigns were mounted against such migrants to the UK - accused of bringing disease and stealing jobs and houses."

## **Work test for home crims**

The Dominion Post (New Zealand), 01 August 2005

By VERNON SMALL

**Prisoners on home detention are to be pushed into finding jobs under a tough new work-testing regime to be put in place later this year.**

The new rule would in effect switch the burden of proof, from an assumption they could not work to an assumption that they could.

The aim is to find work for "suitable offenders" while still meeting the requirements of their sentence, Corrections Minister Paul Swain said.

The current automatic exemption from work testing would be dropped, and exemptions would be granted only for a good reason, such as attending court-ordered rehabilitation programmes.

Some offenders on home detention are in paid work but many receive either the dole or an emergency benefit.

There are about 500 offenders on home detention at any one time and about 2000 receive home detention each year. The average time on home detention is 14 weeks.

The new regime does not require a law change and could be accepted or rejected by an incoming government.

Associate Social Development and Employment Minister Rick Barker said the move was part of a strategy to make the transition from prison to work more successful.

"Inmates who leave prison and find work have a much better chance of staying out of trouble," he said.

More than a quarter of all prisoners return to prison within a year of release and 35 per cent are back in jail after two years.

Other new measures to help prisoners reintegrate into the community would see a Work and Income case manager and work broker assigned to every prison to get more freed prisoners into work.

They would assess work skills, identify job opportunities and match inmates to jobs in the region before release.

Mr Barker said the case managers would work with prison staff, the Community Probation Service and newly appointed "reintegration workers" who help prisoners rejoin the community.

The use of reintegration workers had been piloted in Wellington and Waikato and the scheme would be expanded to all regions in the next year.

Later this year prisoners would be offered more chances to get work experience and vocational training.

More than half of all prisoners have no formal qualifications.

Though the unemployment rate was at 3.9 per cent and there were skill shortages in the workforce, former prisoners were still struggling to find work, Mr Barker said.

The Government was spending \$800 million to add 2100 more beds to the prison capacity.

However, locking more people up was not the only answer, Mr Swain said.

"We have to do more to stop people returning to prison and getting them into work is one of the ways to achieve that goal.

"This is a major step forward in the Government's push to reduce reoffending rates."