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on issues affecting African Americans
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Never Mind the Hurricane - Beware of N.O. Police!
By Chris Stevenson
BlackCommentator Guest Columnist

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While Hurricane Gustav has already hit the shores of New Orleans, thus far it does not have the sting of Katrina. People are seeing a strange coincidence between Katrina and Gustav because of Gustav's arrival three years later, almost to the exact date. What they need to notice is a storm of a different nature that started just before Katrina hit the shoreline and continued for weeks afterward - the wave of police brutality and shootings on unarmed black men. Eighteen days before Gustav, on August 13th a New Orleans Judge, Raymond Bigelow, threw out all charges against seven officers. History has taught us that in N.O., a hurricane can be the least of your problems.

Most devastating has been the string of police and government-led shootings, beatings and skirmishes. Though so far things have gone much smoother than with Katrina, what kind of welcome awaits New Orleans' citizens after the storm? Back on 9/4/05 several people were shot in the aftermath of Katrina while crossing the Danziger Bridge, simply to get food at a grocery store. Those would be Judge Bigelow's boys. Not only were they cops, but they failed to give any warning of their presence; they just jumped out the back of a rental truck and started shooting, killing two (including a

40-year-old-disabled man, Ronald Madison, and 19-year-old, James Brissette), wounding four more. Four of the officers were charged with first-degree murder; three more were charged with some level of attempted murder. I don't know about some of you, but I speculated on how sick these officers' mindsets had to have been to undertake such a despicable task. This is more than just too much testosterone, this is outright insanity on two fronts:

- Firstly, using the disarray produced by a tragic event as a pretext to initiate the shootings.
- Secondly, the officers apparent hubris was fueled by what they knew to be long-held local sentiments about blacks by mostly-white high officials within their town and vicinity.

The immediate problem came with a national news network planting the words "looters" and "finders" in the minds of not just viewers, but dirty south law enforcement. Need I remind you, much of this began with blacks simply trying to cross a bridge? Quite a few of you may remember, just before Katrina, a crowd of mostly blacks were trying to cross the Crescent County Connection Bridge which goes into Jefferson Parish (a White Flight township from the '60's). The story goes that deputies under orders from a bizarre Chinese southern bigot Sheriff named Harry Lee (deceased), prevented evacuees from crossing that bridge, allegedly some of them fired shots into the air. On the other hand, police officers from Gretna, a town inside Jefferson Parish, were either preventing the N.O. citizens from crossing the bridge or blocking the exits into Gretna.

And who can forget video footage of N.O. Police beating Robert Davis, a retired elementary school teacher on 10/09/05? Two officers, Robert Evangelist and Lance Schilling, were fired; the other two were said to be federal agents. Another enabler, Judge Frank Marullo, who heard the case without a jury, walked Evangelist on 7/05. Schilling shot himself days earlier on the 10th, just missing his discharge (pun intended). Need I mention Blackwater? Eighteen days and 1.9 million Gustav evacuees later, police temperament - like levees - can make or break a potentially successful return and recovery from the storm.

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
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