

Were The Poor Of New Orleans Murdered?

By: Steven Black

There have been several articles and comments posted on IndyMedia implicating George Bush and his administration in the murder of the under class residents of New Orleans. Some have also accused Bush and his Administration of genocide. Some respondents have condemned these implications and put forth the argument that Bush and his Administration cannot be held accountable, with regard to murder, for a natural disaster. Others claim that he is, at worst, guilty of incompetence.

Rather than leave the question up in the air, this paper seeks to answer the question of whether the poor of New Orleans were murdered or whether, instead, they were merely victims of a natural disaster. Moreover, if we conclude that they were murdered, we then examine whether or not President Bush and his administration are responsible for their murder.

These questions are important. They are important not merely for the sake of ethics, but also as guides to how natural disasters should be handled in the future. The lives of all of us may depend upon how future governments view these questions.

What is Murder?

Murder, in a legal sense, is the unlawful taking of a human life. However, the law does not require that one actively take the life of another to be guilty of murder. People have been charged with murder for reason of gross negligence. For example, a group of teenagers were charged with murder for removing stop signs from intersections, an act which resulted in the death of a motorist. One could be charged with negligent homicide (a lesser form of murder) for allowing a garden hose to run into a street when temperatures are below freezing should a car skid upon the resulting ice-slick, crash, and kill someone in the process.

A parent can be charged with homicide for failing to feed her children. Indeed, parents can be charged with all sorts of crimes based on the neglect of their children. Parents, as adults in a position of authority, inherit through that authority responsibilities for those under their care. A parent can murder not for what she does but for she does not do.

Like parents, certain people within our society are vested with responsibilities by reason of their jobs or their official positions. Doctors have a responsibility to provide care to patients. Firefighters have a responsibility to put out fires. Ambulance drivers have a responsibility to take injured or sick persons to the hospital.

Let us imagine that your house is burning. The smoke is thick and you and the other members of your family have lost consciousness due to the smoke. Your neighbor calls the fire department. The dispatcher answers the telephone call and informs the chief that your house is on fire. The fire chief responds by watching television for a couple of hours and then instructs his firefighters to go to your house and put out the fire, but not to leave the firehouse until after waiting for an additional 48 hours. In the meantime, your house goes up in smoke and your family, now turned to ashes, goes up in smoke too. Is the fire-chief guilty of murder?

Well, let's see. The fire-chief did not light your house on fire. The fire-chief did come to your house, about two days later, to put out the fire. He did not actually do anything to kill you or your family. However, since it was his job to put out the fire in your house and do it as quickly as possible, is he not guilty of murder through negligence? Any court of law would conclude that he is guilty, at the very least, of manslaughter. Some would convict him of murder.

Let's suppose that rather than sit around and watch television for two days, the fire-chief sent his fire fighters to your house with the instructions of not allowing anyone to put the fire out. In this case, the fire-chief is not only permitting your house to burn down, but is preventing anyone who would wish to assist you from providing assistance. For example,

your neighbor comes running to your door intending to drag your dying family members from the house. Under the instructions of the fire-chief, the firefighters do not allow your neighbors to enter, thereby guaranteeing that your family members will die. How is this different from the previous scenario?

In the first scenario, the fire-chief has failed to do his job. He is definitely guilty of negligent manslaughter. In the second case, however, he has taken active measures to ensure the death of your family members. He has prevented their rescue. By all definitions he is guilty of murder.

George Bush's Response to Katrina

For decades New Orleans has been known to be under the threat of total destruction from hurricanes. It was well known that if a category five hurricane were to hit New Orleans straight on or nearly straight on, the city would be flooded and anyone left in the flooded areas would likely perish. The city is largely below sea level and protected from flooding by levees and a pump system.

Hurricane Katrina struck Miami several days before it struck New Orleans. At that time it was a category one hurricane. However, the amount of damage it did was unusually high leading many to speculate that it was more powerful than predicted. After leaving Miami, the storm quickly grew into a monstrous category five hurricane. Since the storm had already struck land and killed, it was well known amongst the public. Many tracked the storm with interest as it grew in the Gulf of Mexico. Within a few days it became obvious that it would strike directly at or near the City of New Orleans. Due to its strength dire predictions were made that this was the storm that everyone had dreaded. It was predicted that the storm would destroy New Orleans.

The Mayor of New Orleans failed to force the evacuation of the city's residents. He failed to bus out the poor, leaving great numbers of the poor to the ravages of the storm. Obviously, since the President declared a state of emergency before the storm, the

President was aware that the storm was on its way and that it would destroy the City of New Orleans. With the prospect of a large American city facing total destruction, the President of the United States, as part of his job and responsibility, should have demanded the complete and total evacuation of the city. Indeed, he should have sent in the National Guard to force the residents to leave. All of the city's busses should have been commandeered and used to remove the poor residents of the city without transportation. Amtrak could have been diverted to New Orleans and thousands of residents could have been removed by train before the storm struck. The President could have overridden the Mayor's declarations and forced the evacuation of the city. He did not do so. Instead, the President went to a political fund-raiser.

Now, one might attempt to argue that the President would be overstepping the Mayor's authority if he did what I describe. However, the President has at his disposal resources and authority that the Mayor does not have. Given that hundreds of thousands of American lives were in the balance, the President had the responsibility to do all in his power to save their lives. He had the means and the authority. He chose not to use those means and that authority. He chose, in effect, to allow the poor of New Orleans to die.

Once the storm hit, one would expect a Patriotic man such as George Bush to do all in his power to rescue those Americans whom he failed to evacuate. However, all of the evidence indicates that the President did nothing at all to save their lives during the first few days. He did not instruct FEMA to save the lives of the people of New Orleans. He did not even seem to be aware that Americans, in the tens of thousands, were drowning in New Orleans. Yes, the FEMA director decided to do nothing at all about the situation in New Orleans during the first 48 hours after the storm hit, but George Bush is the FEMA director's boss and he should have not only noticed that FEMA was doing nothing but he should have ordered FEMA into action. He chose not to order FEMA into action. We must assume, then, that George Bush did not want FEMA to save the lives of tens of thousands of Americans dying in the waters of Katrina.

Private organizations began arriving on the scene before FEMA offered any help to the people of New Orleans. FEMA demanded that these private organizations NOT rescue the people of New Orleans and even prevented the Red Cross from providing aid to dying Americans. When Americans stranded in New Orleans tried to leave the city, they were stopped by National Guard and not permitted to exit places such as the Convention Center. This dramatically increased the loss of life. It was as if fire-fighters were preventing the occupants of a burning house from leaving and preventing frantic neighbors from saving the entrapped. If this is not murder, what is murder?

Many foreign nations offered immediate assistance to the United States of America. Russia even offered to send personnel to help with the rescue. Bush turned down this help and/or delayed it until tens of thousands of Americans had already died. If this is not murder, what is murder?

Once knowledge of the carnage became known ubiquitously, the President promised an investigation into “what went wrong.” Ironically, as most criminals would love to do, the prime suspect appointed himself as the lead investigator. Furthermore, FEMA, under the authority of the President, has demanded that no photographs be taken of the dead. This is a convenient method of covering up the evidence and preventing the world from truly knowing how many people died or even how they died.

The president now estimates that it will cost \$100,000,000,000.00 or more to address the disaster in New Orleans. It would have cost much less if the President had used our nation’s resources to evacuate the city before it was too late. Moreover, had the President not cut funding to the levees of the City of New Orleans, none of this may have happened in the first place. If the total cost of doing things “Bush’s” exceeds the cost of having done things the right way, we must ask ourselves, why did Bush fail to save the lives of New Orleans’ poor? Clearly, it has nothing to do with resources because he is consuming more resources by not saving their lives. The only possible explanation is that George Bush wanted the poor of New Orleans to die and took those steps necessary

to insure that they would die and die in large numbers. This makes George Bush not only a murder, but a mass murder and possibly even a genocidal maniac.

There is no question that George Bush is guilty of the murder of tens of thousands of New Orleans' poor. The next and equally important question is this: Just what is George Bush hoping to accomplish as President? Under George Bush we have seen more American civilians die in disasters than any other President since the Civil War. Just as the carnage of Katrina could have been avoided, so too could the carnage of 9/11 have been avoided. I suspect the Bush is not merely asleep at the wheel. I suspect that he is willfully killing us.