

Opinion

Katrina's lesson: Ignorance will not protect us

by Damian Tatum

When confronting a disaster of the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina, it's safe to say that many truths, both subtle and obvious, elude us. They are elusive because we are blinded by anger, by grief, and by frustration. It is this blindness that makes placing the blame for a calamity treacherous; it makes the very word "blame" dangerous in itself.

As a born-and-raised New Orleanian, it would be all too easy for me to join the bandwagon and heap blame and scorn on the hapless ex-FEMA head Michael Brown, on the clueless Homeland Security Chief Michael Chertoff, or on President George Bush, who almost, but not quite, ended his vacation the day the greatest disaster in modern American history struck.

But it would be disingenuous to center the responsibility on them alone. Certainly, New Orleans' levee system was ailing long before Bush took office; he is only the latest in a long line of administrations who felt comfortable spending billions of dollars on worthless federal pork while an entire city dwelled under sea-level behind outdated walls built by low bidders and managed-it often seemed-in the Army Corps of Engineers' spare time.

Shall we then hold the Corps responsi-

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ble? Certainly they built the walls that failed. The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* now reports the breaches as "mysterious," citing experts who doubt that Lake Pontchartrain's storm-heightened waters ever reached the levels the walls were designed to withstand. If the construction was shoddy, the maintenance poor, or the design flawed, it makes sense to recognize the Army Corps of Engineers' culpability.

But that also doesn't sit right with me. The Corps serves at the command of the government; they had, in all fairness, routinely asked for bigger budgets to service and expand the levees. Work on the flood-wall system in New Orleans was years behind the Corps' schedule. Can we thus blame the Army?

What about the science they counted on to direct their efforts? For years, economic realities drowned out the voices decrying coastal erosion. Rivers were dammed, marshes were sliced to pieces by barge canals, and the wetlands atrophied. As a

result, New Orleans, once an inland river port surrounded by miles and miles of hurricane-absorbing swamp, has become an exposed coastal city, like Miami, Galveston, and Biloxi (all of which were destroyed by hurricanes at one point or another). Did scientists do everything they could to convince the authorities in Louisiana that the danger was imminent and growing?

What about those much-maligned local and state officials? Surely they recognized

the danger, surely they had an obligation to confront sub-par flood protection in an obviously threatened city, in the face of season-after-season of record-breaking hurricanes. And indeed, they had conducted practice drills, disaster planning, evacuation rehearsals, and, like the Corps of Engineers, every year they asked for more money for flood protection than they got. Governor Kathleen Blanco declared a state of emergency on schedule; New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin ordered a first-ever city-wide mandatory evacuation more than a day before Katrina made landfall. Well in advance, Nagin called Katrina "the storm we have long feared," and admitted that it would likely topple the levees. Is he at fault

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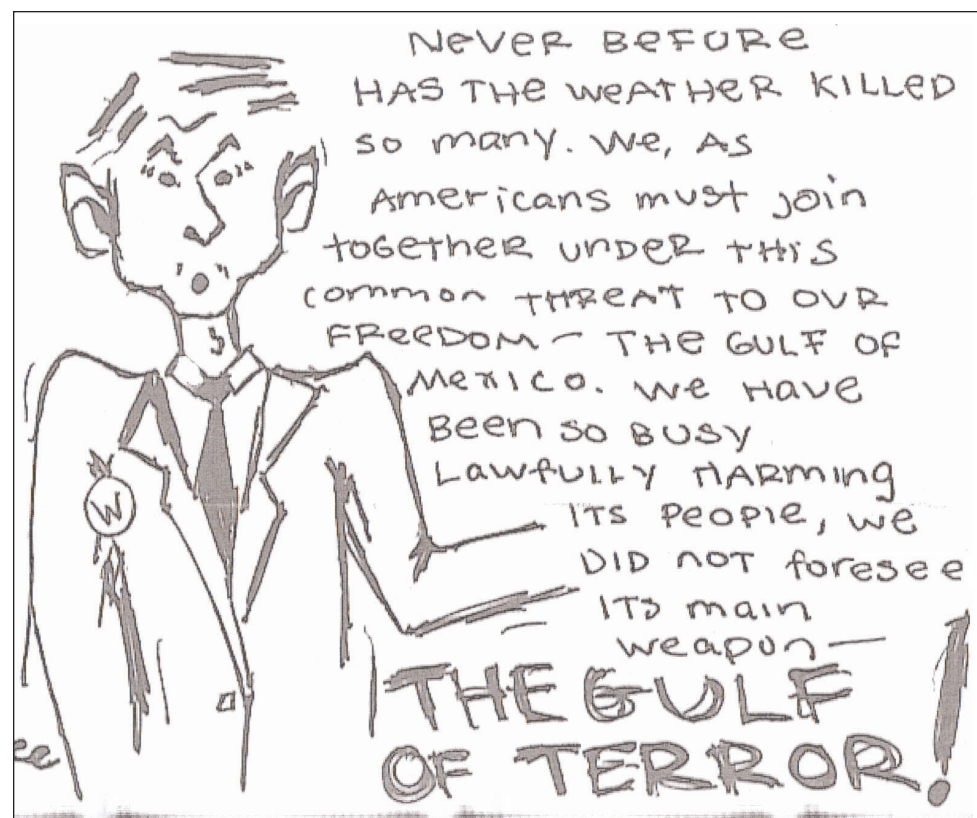
No Child Left Behind leaves students and teachers dissatisfied

by Jony Rommel

On January 8, 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law by President Bush. According to the Act, it should be our country's goal for every student to score on a proficient level or higher on standardized tests by 2014. Although its intentions to help improve the educational success of America's students are good, "the implementation of this legislation could definitely be better," notes State College High School social studies teacher, Andrew Merritt. If teachers are expected to witness a marked improvement in the academic performance of students, why are they feeling so dissatisfied, and if students are thought to excel, why are they more frustrated than ever before?

As reported by the creators of the Act, its principles are meant to be a continuation of the legacy created by *Brown vs. Board of Education*, by re-constructing education systems to be more inclusive, responsive, and fair. In my opinion, this is merely giving those who are uninformed a false impression of the Act. The main purpose of No Child Left Behind is to determine the amount of annual funding a school receives based on standardized test scores.

Each year, the desired score on tests, such as the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, is increased about 5 percent, with different schools varying in what is considered a successful score. Due to the Act, many schools now place a high



emphasis on reviewing standardized test subjects and teaching test-taking skills. Being that my mom is an elementary school teacher, I have heard her endless frustrations of how "teaching standardized tests" has become a distraction to the curriculum because of the time needed to go over test concepts. Students have also become dismayed by the strong focus on standardized testing. "I don't understand how I'm expected to learn if I have standardized tests all of the time. At a certain

point, it seems as if we're just being tested on how well we can take tests," states State College High School senior, Stosh Barnes-Ozog.

Another ludicrous aspect of the No Child Left Behind Act is that it expects all students to perform well on tests, including English-as-a-Second Language students and those with learning disabilities. Despite the fact that standardized tests are modified

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