

Fast Spectacle: Reflections on Hurricane Katrina and the Contradictions of Spectacle

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Recent years have witnessed the rise of a vast and rapidly expanding literature on the nature of spectacle and the ways in which spectacular images and entertainment codes increasingly saturate contemporary society and culture. For Douglas Kellner (2003; 2005), spectacle refers to the dominance of media culture and the increasing ubiquity and pervasiveness of celebrity, scandal, and tabloid journalism in every realm of society. In the work of George Ritzer (2005), spectacles are dramatic public displays that are designed by corporate interests to enhance the predictability, calculability, and efficiency of consumption. The growth of theme parks, shopping malls, tourism, casino gaming, and other “cathedrals of consumption,” according to Ritzer, intimate a new society where spectacles are no longer ephemeral or isolated events but are the defining features of consumer capitalism. According to political scientist Murray Edelman (1977), spectacle is a discursive tool that political elites use to construct otherwise mundane events as “crises” in an effort to justify government interventions. Such a strategy also serves to legitimize elite interests, strengthen their power, pacify resistance, and delegitimize alternative explanations of reality. The diverse work of these and other scholars suggest a growing interest in understanding the meaning and significance of spectacle in everyday life. Yet despite much commentary and debate, few scholars agree on how analysts should conceptualize spectacles, what should be the appropriate levels of analysis for assessing the causes and consequences of spectacle, and what data sources researchers should use to examine the impact of spectacles. While many scholars argue that spectacle is increasingly permeating life and culture they disagree over the form, causal impact, and process of development.

The multifaceted nature of the research and commentary on spectacle reflects scholarly engagement with the pioneering insights of Guy Debord (1994) and his collaborators in the French avant garde group the Situationist International (1957-1972). In his major treatise, the *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord developed the concept of spectacle to refer to a new age in the development of capitalism, a shift from a system of commodity production to one organized around the production and consumption of spectacular imagery. As “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image,” the spectacle is a process of separation whereby new modes of reification and alienation manifest in the sphere of culture.[1] On the one hand, the spectacle refers to a theatrical presentation or controlled visual production that is the antithesis of a spontaneous festival. On the other hand, the spectacle refers to the dominance of the commodity-image that reflects and justifies the existing system of exploitative production. As the “self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence” (#24), the spectacle represents the annihilation of collective life and the development of an atomized society of alienated consumers. The popularity of Debord’s thesis and work is reflected in the plethora of scholarly commentary, books, articles, and translations that have been published over the decades (Gray 1974; Blazwick 1989; Bonnett 1989; Sussman 1989; Wollen 1989; Plant 1992; Andreottie and Costa 1996; Bracken 1997; Sadler 1998; Jappe 1999; Edwards 2000; Pinder 2000; Wollen 2001; Swyngedouw 2002). Yet critics have assailed Debord’s work for its vacuous and ambiguous quality; attacked his conception of the spectacle as monolithic entity that effaces human agency; and rebuked his conception of individuals as cultural automatons who are duped and controlled by entertainment and

mass media (for an overview, see Gotham and Krier 2007).

My intent in this paper is to reveal the interconnected processes, multiple logics, and contradictory nature of spectacles using a study of the Hurricane Katrina disaster and its aftermath in New Orleans. Hurricane Katrina is important to study for several reasons. First, Katrina was the first major disaster in which visual images of a devastated U.S. city were flashed around the world in a spectacular fashion. There have been other instances of war, terrorist strikes, and natural disaster but never before had the suffering and massive displacement of a flooded city been dramatized before a global audience. Riveting images of poor people crammed into the Louisiana Superdome without food or water drove home the fact that those left behind were the poor and elderly. Entire neighborhoods remained uninhabitable weeks after the storm with no functional services—water, electricity, sewerage, transportation, gas, schools. As the consequences of the disaster unfolded, critics attacked the poor government response, the role of the Iraq War in siphoning resources for hurricane recovery efforts, and the impact of race and class in hampering rebuilding. More important, the disaster has reinvigorated national debates about social inequality, poverty, segregation, and failed social policy. In the months since the disaster, scholars and researchers have offered a variety of perspectives on the causes and consequences of Katrina's damage and devastation. The plethora of critical commentary combined with the bitter controversies and political fallout unleashed by Katrina suggest a future of intense scholarly debate and research on urban vulnerabilities, disasters, and public policy.



Figure 1. Hurricane Katrina was one of the deadliest and most destructive hurricanes in U.S. history, with over one thousand deaths and estimated damages ranging from \$100 billion to \$200 billion dollars. The Hurricane caused catastrophic property damage along the Mississippi and Alabama coasts with approximately 90,000 square miles of the Gulf Coast region designated as federal disaster areas, an area almost as large as the United Kingdom. In New Orleans, Katrina flooded 80 percent of the city, including 228,000 occupied housing units (45 percent of the metropolitan total) and over 12,000 business establishments (41 percent of the metropolitan areas total businesses). Those who lived in flooded areas included more than 70,000 elderly people and 124,126 children. Katrina forced the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of residents from southern Louisiana and Mississippi including nearly everyone living in New Orleans and surrounding suburbs. In the weeks after the storm, the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) distributed aid to over 700,000 households, including 1.5 million people directly affected by the storm. All told, 1.1 million people, 86 percent of the metropolitan population, lived in areas that were in some way affected by Katrina, either through flooding or other forms of damage. More than 20 months after the hurricane, more than 130,000 people who applied for federal assistance have yet to receive any compensation for their flooded homes (Source: Whoriskey, Peter. May 12, 2007. "\$2.9 Billion Shortfall Seen in Katrina Aid: Uncertainty Plagues Louisiana Homeowners." *Washington Post*, p. A2. As of May 2007, more than 250,000 lawsuits had been filed against the federal government from people demanding compensation for the flood damage caused by the levee breaches. The volume of claims is a measure of the prevalent sense in the city that the federal government created the disaster and that it has failed to live up to President Bush's promise to do "whatever it takes" to rebuild the Gulf Coast (Source: Peter Whoriskey. May 13, 2007; "Victims of Katrina File Rash of Lawsuits; Federal Government Faces More Than 250,000 Claims." *Washington Post*. P. A03).

In this paper, I examine the various facets of Hurricane Katrina and its consequences as a media and political spectacle, a class and race spectacle, and cultural spectacle. Against Debord's conception of the spectacle as a single totality that dominates society from the top down, I maintain that there are a variety of different types of spectacles that are multidimensional and contradictory. I develop a nuanced approach that analyzes divergent sites of spectacularization, the conflicting meanings and effects of spectacles, and the role of human agents in shaping meanings and representations of different spectacles. On the one hand, we can view spectacles as ideologies that supply legitimations to divert attention away from the exploitative conditions that characterize U.S. society. On the other hand, spectacles reveal and display the technologically dynamic and crisis-prone nature of contemporary capitalism. In this sense, spectacles are not homogeneous and monolithic entities that enslave the masses but are traversed by relations of domination and resistance. Spectacles are plural, conflictual, contested, and power-laden. In this sense, spectacles reflect what Timothy W. Luke (2005) calls "global flowmations" or discourses and practices of compressed time-space flows of capital, information, commodities, culture, and people. Following Agger, I explore spectacles "dialectically, with nuance, avoiding sheer condemnation and ebullient celebration."^[2] My goal is to explain how different spectacles are represented, how they are produced and consumed, and what mechanisms regulate their use. I argue that spectacles express the contradictory nature of Fast Capitalism at the same time they "capture the social and psychological contradictions of a fast-paced economy: exhilaration and worry, change and uncertainty, possibility and risk, mobility and longing" (Goldman, Papson, and Kersey 2006). Thus, I use the metaphoric phrase "fast spectacle" to refer to the increasing speed, proliferation, and accelerating circulation of spectacular images, entertainment codes, and shock-like tendencies in everyday life. A dialectical analysis seeks to identify and explain the conflicts, contradictions, and crisis tendencies within the different types of spectacle and illuminate their connections to contemporary power relations and larger processes of capitalist development.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx ([1857] 1973) pointed out how the growth-oriented nature of market capitalism generated social contradictions that could threaten and undermine the relations responsible for commodity production. Marx explored the implications of capitalism's contradictory dynamics of treating labor power as a commodity that shapes the nature of economic exploitation, the stakes of class struggle between capital and labor, and the competition among capitals to secure the most effective valorization of labor-power. An analogous argument can be made for the production and consumption of spectacle via tourism, entertainment, media culture, public discourse and imagery, and other high profile and dramatic displays. Spectacles have a long history and have always been important in the major shifts associated with time-space compression, distanciation, and intensification (see Caprotti 2005). What is novel in the current period is the growing application of spectacle to the production of space in developing the forces of production; and the increased importance of spectacle as a fictitious commodity in shaping the social relations of production. The core contradictions of spectacle can be analyzed in terms of the general contradictions inherent in the commodity form and the tendency of capital to destroy the conditions necessary for the reproduction of wage labor. The contradictions of spectacle are also immanent in the tendency for corporations and political institutions to use entertainment to celebrate prosperity and abundance while suppressing growing disparities in wealth because these threaten the legitimacy of the system. Thus, the discourse and practice of producing spectacle seeks to legitimate global capitalism by disregarding the consequences of capitalist institutions on those who own nothing and those who are unable to consume spectacles because they have little if no disposable income.

Classical and Contemporary Conceptions of the Spectacle

The concept of the spectacle is the latest heuristic device developed by scholars and critical theorists to explain the development of capitalism and the extension of commodity relations into non-commodified realms of society and culture. For Karl Marx ([1867] 1978), capitalism is system of social organization based on the private ownership of the means of production, profitable exchange, exploitable wage labor, and internecine competition that is intensely contradictory. The logic of profitable production and tendency for capitalists to debase the conditions of wage labor produces ripple effects through society in which different socio-physical spaces, geographical scales, and connections among different groups and interests are continuously rearranged and re-differentiated. Early work by Georg Lukacs ([1922] 1968) integrated insights from Georg Simmel and Max Weber to theorize the process of reification whereby capitalism transforms the products of human creativity into fetishized objects that have independent status over and beyond their simple use-value. As money becomes the universal equivalent of exchange and assessor of value, social

relationships and creations become valued for their instrumental exchange-value rather than their intrinsic use-value, a situation that represents and expresses the tendency toward the complete abstraction and quantification of social life under capitalism.

Later, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1972) lamented the growth of the culture industry whereby cultural objects, values and beliefs, and artistic creations become commodified and subject to the alienating character of the manufacturing process. Like other realms of capitalist society, the culture industry works through a relentless process of rationalization and commodification to annihilate use-value and mask the underlying relations of domination and subordination. In this process, alienation extends from the sphere of work to that of culture and manifests in the separation of the worker from the product of labor, from the process of production, from other workers, and from human-species being. In the 1950s and later, Henri Lefebvre's voluminous books, *The Critique of Everyday Life* ([1958] 1991) and *Everyday Life in the Modern World* ([1971] 1984) drew attention to spread of commodification beyond the realm of production to that of consumption in which the production and consumption of signs and images, rather than tangible material goods, becomes the dominant organizing principle of capitalist societies. For Lefebvre, Horkheimer and Adorno, and others, the multifaceted process of capitalist development unites and crystallizes a variety of social relations including market relations of production and exchange, and involves the conversion of human products and social relationships into saleable items that are produced for profit, and bought and sold on markets.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the work of French theorist Guy Debord and his colleagues in the Situationist International popularized the concept of the spectacle to refer a shift to an image-saturated society where advertising, entertainment, television and mass media, and other culture industries increasingly define and shape everyday experiences. Yet Debord did not relate the spectacle to specific images, sights, or manifestations. In his work, the spectacle is a totality that is the outcome and goal of the dominate mode of production. It is neither a set of geographic sites nor a collection of images but a "social relationship mediated by images" (Debord 1994, #4). Debord employed the metaphor of a motion picture to describe the transformation of society into a gigantic movie in which individuals are forced to passively observe the images that others have created for them. In the spectacle, individuals are rendered powerless and reconstituted as spectators who are unable to intervene in the production and control of the images that they consume. Influenced by Lukacs's notion of reification, Debord theorized the spectacle as a process of "objectification" or "thingification" of social relations and products that extends to the production and consumption of images. In turn, individuals view and experience the "image society" as an alien force, as an independent and objective reality that controls their lives through the machinations of media, entertainment, and commodified culture. For Debord (1994), modern capitalism is about the "manufacture of an ever-growing mass of image-objects" (#15) that induce "trancelike behavior" (#18) and produce estrangement (#37). Yet the spectacle is not an instance of "distortion" or "deception" of reality. The spectacle corresponds to the latest stage of development in the extension of commodification, rationalization, and alienation to all facets of society. According to Debord,

The spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm—a world view transformed into an objective force.

In addition to their critique of mass culture and the media, Debord and the Situationists assailed a variety of institutions and practices including urban planning, education and the political system, and work and employment as sites of spectacularization that mollify people through the ideology of entertainment and consumption, and thereby reinforce a condition of chronic passivity. Debord's critique of urban space and the built environment, for example, reflects arguments made by Lewis Mumford and Henri Lefebvre that the growth of sprawling metropolitan areas and space-transcending technology erode urban public life and support the development of market-based, indirect relationships. Unlike urban residence in the nineteenth century, the development of metropolitan life during the twentieth century is marked by a spatial and social separation of place of residence from place of employment, especially in the United States. As the activity of work becomes centralized within bureaucratic corporations and is torn from the community of residence, social bonds become relatively weak and nebulous. Changes in communication and information technologies combined with decentralizing trends compartmentalize community life so that direct relations decay and secondary relationships become dominant. These points echo other articles in *Fast Capitalism* by Poster (2005), Williams (2005), Babe (2006), and Goldman, Papson, and Kersey (2006), among others, who note that

most of the information people have about others comes not through direct experience or relationships but through the culture industries, especially the television, radio, and other print and electronic media. People are aware of others but not in genuine communication or discourse with them. Thus, as secondary groups replace primary groups, indirect social relations predominate and are managed by formal organizations and mediated communications, not by direct personal contacts.

Since Debord developed his thesis, scholars have pointed to several problems with the concept of spectacle that limit and obscure its explanatory power and empirical merit. First, scholars have noted that Debord did not have a clear conception of the relationship between social structure and human agency. In spite of Debord's astute and prescient observations, his conceptualization of spectacle is elusive while an image of individuals as cultural dupes pervades his ruminations. Second, Debord did not offer an explanation of capitalism that combined both macrostructural and microlevels of analysis. Debord's fierce condemnations of academic research militated against a nuanced analysis to clarify and adjudicate between deductive approaches that could highlight the role of global factors in constituting spectacles, and inductive perspectives that could shed light on the role of local influences and resistant forces. Third, as several scholars have noted, Debord harbored a naïve belief that the proletariat would eventually acquire a revolutionary class consciousness and become a "class-for-itself" to overthrow capitalism (Jay 1993:421; Best and Kellner 1997: 117; Jappe 1999:103-4; Gardiner 2000:125-6). This overemphasis on class failed to take into account other axes of domination and subordination such as gender and race. Fourth, Debord embraced a monolithic conception of the spectacle as a totalizing force of hegemony that disempowers the masses and short-circuits the capacity for collective resistance and progressive change (Best and Kellner 1997:119; Jappe 1999:117-24; Pinder 2000:361, 368). Indeed, while Debord and the Situationists were fond of saying that the world was ripe with resistance to the spectacle, they were quick to condemn any opposition as futile and illegitimate. Instances of revolt and contestation to the spectacle are inauthentic and worthless, forms of "spectacular opposition" that have already been co-opted and assimilated by the spectacle. Finally, Debord and the Situationists never explored the contradictions and crisis tendencies immanent to modern capitalism.

In the decades since Debord developed his perspective, other scholars have used the spectacle as a sensitizing concept to theorize and examine the diverse manifestations of the commodity-form. In addition, the concept of the spectacle reflects a longstanding Marxian concern with understanding the impact of communication and information technologies in eliminating the temporal and spatial barriers to the circulation of capital, the "annihilation of space through time," in Karl Marx's ([1857] 1973: 539) famous statement in the *Grundrisse*. As many articles in *Fast Capitalism* have pointed out, the technologically dynamic character of capitalism reflects efforts by capitalists to accumulate profits through the incorporation of more efficient labor-saving and labor-replacing technology into the workplace. Yet this process is shot through with rampant instability, fragmentation, and discontinuity that generate periodic conflicts and struggles over the use and control of technology in society. A related concern is the role that changes in communication and information technology play in altering people's conceptions of time, space, and experience; and the impact of technology in transforming relationships not only within places but between places, changing the relative status and power of those in different places. As Meyrowitz (1985) notes, changes in technology and media "have affected the information that people bring to places and the information that people have in places" (emphasis in original) (p. 115). What distinguishes the development of the visual and electronic media during the twentieth century is that they "lead to a total dissociation of physical places and social 'place.'" The social experience of electronic communications is spaceless to the extent that information flow and exchange between speaker and listener does not require proximity to the initiator or receiver of a message. What further distinguishes the electronic media is that the audience is totally abstracted from space and removed from any spatial identity (Goldman, Papsen, and Kersey 2006). Thus, while television addresses very large populations in a common information environment, the medium does not nurture the development of dense networks of social relationships that can form the bases for participatory democratic political movements.

In short, empirical and theoretical research on the spectacle reflects a broad critical effort to understand the development of modern capitalism and its exploitative and reifying manifestations. Below, I conceptualize and analyze Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath as a multi-dimensional spectacle and probe the diverse and conflicting ways in which human tragedies become constructed as spectacles. While I adopt a critical stance toward Debord's work, my goal is to update and extend Debord's theorizations. On the one hand, I analyze Katrina as a media spectacle in which the broadcast media provide a dramatic environment of temporally and spatially abstracted and disconnected images to reinforce and exacerbate a condition of ephemerality and discontinuity in the processing of information.

Today's mass audiences are involved in a one-way means of communication; information reaches people in spatially and socially dispersed, privatized settings and does little to link members of the audience to one another. On the other hand, I analyze Katrina as a class and race spectacle in which the enduring problems of poverty and segregation were illuminated by the hurricane and subsequent political commentary. Here I emphasize how media coverage of New Orleans reinforced an overwhelmingly negative and misleading view of the city and urban American generally. Finally, I analyze Katrina as a cultural spectacle in which the practices of entertainment and spectacle (e.g., disaster tourism and voluntourism) are being employed to attract people to New Orleans to aid in urban rebuilding.

Hurricane Katrina as Media Spectacle

The destruction and devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent media coverage and political discourse suggest several processes by which powerful actors and organizations construct and present tragic events as spectacles. First, as competitive corporations, television news companies are structurally constrained to minimize costs and maximize profits using strategies of labor exploitation, market segmentation, packaging, and adoption of sophisticated technologies. Market segmentation refers to the development of new forms of cultural fragmentation and commodity differentiation that split consumers, markets, and spaces of consumption into ever smaller segments, resulting in a shift away from mass markets and homogeneity to specialization and heterogeneity. Packaging is a strategy in which producers arrange and sequence a series of events to assign meaning to those events and impose coherence to the overall story. Early work by Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen (1982) located the rise and bureaucratization of early news reporting in the extension of the commodity form to art, news, and information. Richard Wrightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (1983) examined how the commodification process assimilated science, advertising, reading magazines, and motion pictures to the emerging "consumer culture" of early twentieth century America. Today, the strategies of market segmentation and packaging are major factors in the commodification and rationalization of information and news. Along with market segmentation and packaging comes greater differentiation and specialization of news which, in turn, feeds into competitive pressures for news to be attractive to mass audiences. As a result, news corporations treat people as consumers and they tailor their programming and coverage to various cultures of consumption that differentiate the population. Processes of commodification and rationalization have an elective affinity with processes of differentiation and specialization. In this context, people experience an increasing pervasiveness of the force of spectacle—fashion, hype, and glitz—in determining the appearance and desirability of certain kinds of news.

In recent years, researchers have turned their attention to examining how entertainment and news broadcasting are increasingly dominated by a few monopoly firms that seek to standardize and homogenize the production of information and news (for overviews, see Herman and Chomsky 1988; Kellner 1990; Schiller 1990; and Bagdikian 1997). The past decade's wave of media mergers between some corporate giants as Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, Viacom, AOL Time Warner, Sony, and Vivendi, among others, have produced a complex web of bureaucratically organized firms that now control the production of news and entertainment (Croteau and Hoynes 2001). These large firms have incorporated labor-saving and -replacing technologies, pooled diverse inputs through vertical integration, and consolidated access to markets. As media critics Norman Solomon and Jeff Cohen (1997) have observed, the total effect of these bureaucratic and technological transformations has been to increase the power of the dominant conservative and corporate organizations while stifling alternative voices and views of reality. As a result, democratic institutions and groups increasingly confront a media atmosphere that discourages social criticism and broad-based participation. Herman and Chomsky (1988) note that the economic desires to accumulate capital and control media and information markets shape the selection and framing of "news" for viewer consumption, and invariably distort the definition of what is news. In addition, Bagdikian (1997) and Kellner (1990; 2004) have discussed the threats to democracy and free speech and expression that have accompanied the monopolization of media during the 1980s and 1990s. As corporations have consolidated economic power through monopolization and mergers they have abdicated their traditional role of providing information necessary to inform and promote a democratic citizenry (Halberstram 1979; Parenti 1986; and McChesney 2000).

Today, digital communication, virtual reality, and the Internet have joined the arsenal of media technologies that large corporations use to produce spectacles for global consumption. New media technologies enable the

globalization of spectacles to the extent that these technologies facilitate instant worldwide availability. In his famous book, *Introduction to Modernity*, Henri Lefebvre ([1962] 1995:164) lamented the “vicious cycle” of repetition in the mass media where “any event could be slotted in with similar events and circulated worldwide as soon as it happens, reduced to an instant image (omnipresent) and catch phrase (repetitive) ... a massive pleonasm.” For Lefebvre, “the demand for sensational news becomes translated into repetition” and new techniques of image presentation tend to shrink the news to “the size of the socially instantaneous” (166). Such points resonate with Theodor Adorno’s ([1967] 1989) argument that cultural products and organizations tend to exhibit “incessantly repeated formulae” that suppress critical analysis and reflexivity. In Debord’s (1994) work, the production of repetition and instantaneity are connected to a process of unification and trivialisization. The mass production of images abstracts and dissipates the independence and quality of places and relations and achieves “as nearly as possible a perfect static monotony” (#165) and “quantitative triviality” (#62). In this process, all events, including disasters and other tragic occurrences, become what Boorstin (1962) calls “pseudo-events.” Quoting Debord (#157), “the pseudo-events that vie for attention in the spectacle’s dramatizations have not been lived by those who are thus informed about them.” Media narration and depictions of disasters “are quickly forgotten, thanks to the perception with which the spectacle’s pulsing machinery replaces one by the next.”

The above insights from Lefebvre, Debord, and Adorno help us to understand that repetition and instantaneity are not ends in themselves but reflect and express the ephemerality, chaos, fragmentation, and discontinuity that define contemporary capitalism. Several examples are noteworthy. First, the instant viewer access to media coverage of New Orleans, for example, provided an efficient and highly rationalized vehicle for subjecting people to commercial advertisements. In watching major news coverage, people were forced to view commercials as an essential component of their consumption of the disaster. Like other television shows and media, the presentation of Katrina directly addressed people as consumers and the logic was to persuade them to spend money on goods and services offered by the advertisers.

Second, in a media saturated world, news corporations and 24-hour weather channels increasingly subject viewers to a wide variety of non-stop disasters. At any given time, there is a disaster occurring somewhere in the world. Media constructions of reality inevitably present a proliferation of disasters in an effort to create new avenues for consuming goods and services. Reflecting Lefebvre and Debord, disasters never stop; there is always one ready to take the place of another. Time has no meaning either. To truly make all time available for consuming disasters, the disasters have to implode into the home, so that people are subjected to tragic events on a constant basis on a variety of television stations. The Weather Channel and CNN Headline news have served to eliminate time as barrier to disaster reception, consumption, and viewing. These channels are “on” around the clock, every day, at all hours.

Another example of repetition and instantaneity is the adoption and insertion of entertainment codes and performance into information production frameworks, transforming news into “infotainment” to appeal to the widest possible audience (Gabler 1998). While information suggests collections of facts and verifiable statements about past and present events, entertainment is amusement or diversion intended to hold the attention of an audience. Infotainment represents what social theorist Jean Baudrillard (1983) calls the “implosion” of reality where the boundaries between information and entertainment blur and become indistinguishable. The term implosion explains corporate attempts to eschew boundaries, collapse distinctions, and combine several different images or activities into one meaning.

In the media coverage of Katrina, for instance, viewers were repeatedly shown a sensational show of provocative facts and high drama contained in a narrative structure that emphasized instantaneity, shock, and apocalypse. Websites operated by religious fundamentalists, for example, interpreted the hurricane as an act of retribution by a vengeful God, dismissing the pain and suffering experienced by residents. As reported by Reuters, an al Qaeda group in Iraq hailed the hurricane deaths in “oppressor” America as the “wrath of God.”[3] For some Israeli rabbis, Katrina was divine punishment against President George W. Bush for having supported the Israeli Prime Minister’s decision to force Israeli settlers out of Gaza. According to one rabbi, “New Orleans was also flooded because of its residents’ lax moral standards and ‘lack of Torah study.’”[4] In a widely circulated story and image, the Columbia Christians for Life blamed the devastation of Hurricane Katrina on abortion in Louisiana, explaining that the hurricane attacked the region in the form of a giant, angry fetus.[5]

Douglas Kellner (1990; 2003) has suggested that the selection of information deemed newsworthy, episodic and dramatic presentations of information, and techniques of narrative storytelling are political strategies that reflect conscious decisions to reinforce the status quo. Even when venting criticism, major news organizations tend to be

restrained in their coverage of events for fear of projecting an image of bias or instability (Alterman 1999; 2003). News coverage of Katrina, for example, purported to be unbiased, objective, and unadulterated. Yet it is important to recognize that claims to “objectivity” and “impartiality” are ideological constructions that reflect power relations including organized efforts to obscure conflict, marginalize dissent, and legitimate dominant interpretations of reality. In the case of Katrina, news corporations and media outlets created a spectacular disaster that was insulated from the reality of life and experience on the streets of New Orleans. “News” and “information” presented the city in a media world that was hermetically sealed off from reality (from real locals and the real consequences of social inequalities) while producing and legitimating simulations of the real (racialized looting, violence, crime).

A Spectacle of Class and Race

Understanding the production of Katrina as spectacle directs our attention to the role of political discourse and media coverage in both perpetuating and expressing the racial and class conflicts that traverse and divide U.S. society. Traditionally, scholars have conceptualized race and class as categories that express social conditions, identities, and relations of inequality. I want to suggest that race and class can also be viewed as spectacles, power-laden media productions and performances that embrace strategies of ephemerality, discontinuity, and fragmentation in the delivery of information. In general, the way the major news media framed their coverage of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath reinforced an overwhelmingly negative view of New Orleans as a city of rampant crime, intense poverty, racial tension, and other pathologies. While identification of social problems is important, the drumbeat of negative publicity had its consequences. Government programs to address the problems of Katrina-induced displacement were covered as well-intentioned but misguided, plagued by mismanagement, inefficiency and corruption.

Little media attention was given to the long-term effects of government retrenchment and cutbacks in weakening the public infrastructure of disaster-prevention and disaster-relief policy. In February 2002, President Bush cut \$500 million from the Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency responsible for flood control in the nation. Overall, from 2001-2005, the amount of money spent on all Corps construction projects in New Orleans declined 44 percent, from \$147 million in 2001 to \$82 million in 2005. More recently, the U.S. House passed a \$300 million cut in the Army Corps civil works budget for 2006.[6] Cuts in the Corps budget to protect the nation from floods and other natural disasters parallel further reductions in federal assistance to local governments for disaster prevention and relief. After the September 11 disaster, the Department of Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) was folded into the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as part of a major government reorganization to prevent terrorist attacks. In a July 27, 2005 letter to Senators Susan Collins and Joseph Lieberman, the National Emergency Management Association complained about the “total lack of focus on natural hazards preparedness” and lamented that “FEMA’s longstanding mission of preparedness for all types of disasters has been forgotten at the DHS.” These complaints coincide with a six percent cut in funding for the Emergency Management Performance Grants, from \$180 million appropriated by Congress in 2005 to \$170 million in 2006. According to a Congressional Research Service report, President Bush proposed \$3.36 billion for state and local homeland-security assistance programs for fiscal year 2006, \$250 million less than these programs received from Congress in 2005. In Louisiana, funding for Homeland Security Department grant programs dropped 26 percent, to \$42.6 million in 2005.[7] The cumulative effect of reductions in monies for levee protection and disaster-prevention has been to decrease the financial and organization capacities of cities to respond to and prevent disasters.

Political commentary and media attention that focused on Katrina constructed poor people and racial minorities, especially African Americans, left in New Orleans as responsible for their own plight. Neither the state nor local government had a plan for evacuating the poor and disadvantaged. Thus, residents were forced to rely upon private automobiles to escape, a policy that had clear class and racial consequences. As Michael Brown, head of the Federal Emergency Management Administration, told the Cable News Network (CNN) on September 2, 2005,

Well, I think the death toll may go into the thousands. And unfortunately, that’s going to be attributable a lot to people who did not heed the evacuation warnings. And I don’t make judgments about why people choose not to evacuate. But, you know, there was a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans. And to find people still there is just heart wrenching to me because the mayor did everything he could to get them out of there. And so we’ve got to figure out some way to convince people that when evacuation warnings go out, it’s for their own good.

In defending the Bush Administration’s decision to support this state and local government policy, Michael Chertoff,

U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, remarked that “the critical thing was to get people out of [New Orleans] before the disaster. Some people chose not to obey that order. That was a mistake on their part.” This rhetoric, supported by the absence of clear and organized evacuation procedures condemned a large segment of New Orleans population to suffer the wrath of Katrina.

The disaster caused residents to become homeless, unemployed, and involuntary migrants, forced to relocate to areas outside the South to obtain housing, jobs, and education, among other resources. In addition to leaving hundreds of thousands of people without access to homes or jobs, the storm has separated people from their families, and has inflicted physical and mental distress that will probably last for years. In addition, the disaster has exposed to a global audience New Orleans’s chronic poverty, strained race relations, and intense inequalities. At the same time, the disaster has reopened long simmering national debates about democracy and social justice, the existence of poverty in a rich nation, and the role of the war in Iraq in siphoning domestic resources.

At the same time, the victim-blame ideology of the Bush Administration fueled anti-New Orleans sentiments expressed by evangelical Christian groups. One evangelical group, Repent America proclaimed that God “destroyed” New Orleans because of Southern Decadence, the annual gay festival that the city hosts over Labor Day weekend. “Southern Decadence has a history of filling the French Quarters section of the city with drunken homosexuals engaging in sex acts in the public streets and bars,” according to Repent America director Michael Marcavage. “This act of God destroyed a wicked city [and] we must not forget that the citizens of New Orleans tolerated and welcomed the wickedness in their city for so long,” Marcavage said.[8]

The above points draw our attention to the role of political elites and other organized interests in using spectacular imagery and drama to frame social conditions and legitimate partial, insular, and parochial views as authoritative descriptions of social reality. Yet it is important to note that spectacles cannot totally camouflage inequalities and unilaterally disempower people because they are embedded within the contradictions of modern capitalism. In the case of New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina has created new political fissures and incited debates over whether cities are now less safe from natural disasters, terrorist attacks, or major epidemics.[9] The passage of antiterrorism legislation and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security have created a situation where cities are forced to expend greater resources to deal with “security” issues. The example of Katrina shows, however, that cities are more insecure than ever. The mobilization of military power to fight wars in Afghanistan and Iraq drains domestic resources and while aggravating political tensions in the United States and around the world. Since March 2003, Congress has allocated on average, \$5-8 billion per month to fight wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Estimates from the National Priorities Project put the annual cost of the war in Iraq at \$70-80 billion, or a total of about \$380 billion.[10]

The spectacle of Katrina reveals that a large part of government action and policy is about the management of risk and security. While some policies seek to reduce the overall risk of certain areas and modes of life, other policies introduce new risks and insecurities. Like wealth and income, risks adhere to class and racial patterns: wealth and income accumulate at the top, insecurities and risks at the bottom of the social stratification system. To that extent, risks seem to reflect and reinforce class and racial inequalities. Racial subordination and poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks and insecurities, including residence in low lying areas and flood zones. By contrast, the wealthy can purchase safety and freedom from risks.

Risks and (in)securities are, to a large degree, produced by public policies. Specifically, military policies pertaining to the war in Iraq, the defunding of disaster-prevention and -relief policy, and tax policies to distribute wealth and income upward are producing a wide range of hazardous, evenly deadly, consequences for U.S. cities. Studies by the National Priorities Project, Citizens for Tax Justice, the Children’s Defense Fund, and the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) show that Bush Administration tax cuts are heavily weighed toward the very wealthy and benefit those making over one million dollars annually. Over the decade, from 2001 to 2010, the richest one-percent of Americans are targeted to receive tax cuts totaling almost half a trillion dollars. The \$477 billion in tax breaks the Bush Administration has slated for this elite group will average \$342,000 each over the decade. According to a study of taxes and Katrina-related costs by the CBPP, tax cuts enacted in 2001 cost more in 2005 (\$225 billion) than the estimated cost of the entire Katrina relief and reconstruction effort (\$150 billion). Tax breaks for the richest one percent added up to \$55 billion in 2005 alone and are projected to increase dramatically over the decade.[11]

It is worth noting that the use of spectacle as a reality-constructing and -framing device compounds urban problems, reinforces negative views of U.S. cities, and legitimates conservative views and policies. With few exceptions,

the dominant media sources and outlets present cities primarily as spectacularly and extraordinary sites of social and economic problems. The images from the nightly news, according to according to Peter Dreier (2005:193), “are an unrelenting story of social pathology—mounting crime, gangs, drug wars, racial tension, homelessness, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, inadequate schools, and slum housing.” News coverage of urban blacks is typically framed as bad news and urban neighborhoods are defined as “problem neighborhoods” rather than as neighborhoods with problems. Rarely do we see media presentations of the strengths and assets of urban neighborhoods. Everyday interactions among different racial and ethnic groups that are cooperative and goal oriented do not become “news” unless they involve tension and violence. The antithesis of spectacular media coverage are day-to-day mundane concerns such as making a living, health care, housing, public services, and schooling.

The tendency among news organizations to embrace spectacle—high drama, intense conflict, and shock-value—in the coverage of events suggests that social problems are formidable and intractable. This negative perspective has two consequences. First, it reinforces individualistic interpretations of urban poverty that focus on the so-called pathological behaviors and attitudes of the poor as the cause of social problems; and second, it “contributes to public cynicism about government in general and about society’s capacity to solve social problems” (194). More important, the tendency to embrace spectacle has an overall conservative impact to the extent that government efforts to remedy urban problems are presented as ineffectual at best and counterproductive at worst. As Dreier concludes, “the media give their audience of readers and viewers little reason for optimism that ordinary people working together effectively can make a difference, that solutions are within reach, and that public policies can make a significant difference. As a result, what the media report as the public’s apathy or indifference may simply reflect their resignation about the potential for changing the status quo” (199).

A Spectacle of Urban Rebuilding

Since the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, local elites have attempted to advertise New Orleans as a come-back city that is regaining its vibrancy, style, and confidence. Exemplary of this effort has been the development of “voluntourism” and “disaster tourism.” “Voluntourism” is a term that integrates voluntary service experiences with entertainment-based tourist activities to attract energetic volunteers from around the world to help with demolition and rebuilding. While the combination of volunteerism and tourism has a long history, tourism organizations are using voluntourism as a major strategy not only to attract volunteer labor to help in the rebuilding effort but also to re-image New Orleans as a resilient city. In addition, Katrina has inspired a new industry of “disaster tourism” that involves the circulation of people to flooded neighborhoods in a guided tour bus. Beginning in January 2006, Gray Line New Orleans Bus Tours began offering its “Hurricane Katrina: America’s Worst Catastrophe!” tour through devastated neighborhoods. The bus tour presents flooded neighborhoods as spectacular and entertaining sites to visit. New Orleans neighborhoods affected by Katrina are remade into consumable spectacles and viewers constituted as consumers who are constrained to pay the tour fee to view devastation. What is important is that the constitution of flooded neighborhoods as tourist sites intimates local culture as a spectacle to the extent that local history, residential life, and neighborhoods are (re)presented in such a way to emphasize the dramatic, spectacular, and the unusual. Disaster tourism is built upon the commodification of leisure and the construction of otherwise ordinary places as exotic attractions that can deliver extraordinary experiences.

The rise of disaster tourism in New Orleans reflects the spatialization of time whereby symbols, images, and motifs about the past are frozen in fragments of urban space and manufactured as saleable commodities. In the work of Lefebvre and Debord, the spatialization of time is expressed in the museumization of neighborhoods as sites of tourism consumption and historic preservation. Scholars have long noted that tourism and historic preservation suffice as mechanisms for consuming space, history, and otherness (Gottdiener 2001). Tourism practices and discourse aim to reinvent and fabricate the past (buildings, homes, architecture, and so on) to project a feeling of nostalgia and sentimentality for a place. The result is a packaged and glamorized history that is dead (frozen in time), safe, and immunized from contemporary conflicts. On a broader level, the commercialization of history and the past through historic preservation and tourism-oriented revitalization schemes systematically diverts attention from the present, from current polarizations and struggles in the city. Indeed, disaster tourism has an elective affinity with Lefebvre’s ([1958] 1991: 108) critique of the modern city as a proliferation of “displays of consuming ... consuming of signs and signs of consuming.” Spatialized time is reified time that is uprooted and abstracted from the conditions of life

and transformed into the commodity-form. Through tourism and historic preservation, people do not create time and history as reflexive and collective beings but are forced to confront a rationalized and managed time fabricated by bureaucratic organizations guided by the logic of capital accumulation and formal rationality. Such actions are the antithesis of social time and represent an extension of accelerating pace of the commodification process that is the *sine qua non* of fast capitalism.

We should not view spectacles as exercising a monolithic power that overwhelms people, annihilates agency, and incapacitates critical reflection and resistance. Consumers are not simply passive recipients of accepted meanings produced by tourism boosters, advertisers, and marketers. They are actively involved in the production of meaning and, indeed, produce meanings, some which are unintended by promoters. Indeed, spectacles are sites of struggle where powerful economic and political interests are often forced to defend what they would prefer to have taken for granted. In this conception, spectacles are “a horizon of meaning: a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the fore” (Lefebvre 1991:222, emphasis in original). To quote Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson (1992:388), who analyze the social construction of media images, spectacles “may have a preferred meaning and point of view which the reader is invited to accept. But many readers may decline the invitation, either entering into some negotiation.” Disaster tourism, for example, employs the discourse and practice of spectacle and commodification to reveal the reality of physical destruction and human suffering that hides behind dominant media depictions of the city. The goal is to generate international awareness of New Orleans’s problems, build public support to rebuild the city, and leverage capital to finance the rebuilding process. Bus tours use spectacle to showcase physical destruction to transmit information, provide background and context, and expose people to the devastation of urban and suburban neighborhoods. Some residents detest bus tours for funneling self-serving tourists into devastated neighborhoods to satisfy voyeuristic curiosities. Others view bus tours as localized forms of social critique that seek to expose government policy as unequal, undemocratic, and unjust. Thus, understanding the cultural construction of spectacles requires addressing a range of processes from encoding the practices of institutions involved in the representation of spectacles to individual and collective responses to these dominant representations.



Figure 2. The months since Katrina roared ashore have witnessed the commodification of urban disaster in the form of bus tours. Beginning in January 2006, Gray Line New Orleans Bus Tours began offering its “Hurricane Katrina: America’s Worst Catastrophe!” tour through devastated neighborhoods. The bus tour presents flooded neighborhoods as spectacular and entertaining sites to visit. Yet not all people are pleased or amused with these developments. The sign against the tree assails bus tours as profiteering exploiters of grief and sorrow, using distress and sadness to market neighborhoods as tourist destinations.

That said, much of the impetus for urban rebuilding and recovery in post-Katrina New Orleans involves planning for highly regulated, commodified, and privatized tourist spaces to maximize consumption. Indeed, in the coming

years, post-Katrina New Orleans may become an exemplary case for the implosion of tourism, spectacle, and other practices. Katrina did little damage to the extra-local networks, corporations, and chain firms that constitute the global tourism sector. While the hurricane temporarily disrupted flows of people and capital, tourism organizations and entertainment corporations are now working diligently to rebuild their casinos and tourism venues along the Gulf Coast. Since the disaster, Harrah's New Orleans Casino has launched plans to use its 450 room hotel near the convention center to create an entertainment district to link the French Quarter with the Ernst Morial Convention Center. The idea of developing areas near the French Quarter as places of profitable commercial and tourist opportunities is moving forward and overshadowing the idea of rebuilding flooded residential spaces, especially high poverty neighborhoods. Moreover, major developers such as Donald Trump and others have planned major condominium developments while Harrah's has joined with local tourism organizations and city leaders to redevelop the area from the French Quarter to the convention center into an urban entertainment destination anchored by new restaurants, a themed jazz club, upscale bars, and global retail firms. In 2006, the city of New Orleans hired a marketing firm to seek sponsors for future Mardi Gras celebrations and contract with television networks to broadcast carnival parades nationwide. In September 2006, The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved \$28.5 million to distribute to 17 tourism offices and organizations in Louisiana to promote their venues. State and local tourism officials have earmarked this money to finance a national tourism campaign similar to one used by New York City after the September 11, 2001 disaster. All these developments compliment the \$185 million that has been spent to repair and improve the Superdome stadium which reopened in September 2006.

Debates and conflicts over tourism and spectacle are likely to intensify as New Orleans rebuilds in the aftermath of Katrina. Hurricane Katrina has destabilized the tourism industry, displaced tens of thousands of people, and problematized meanings of local culture. Major debates are erupting over who will lead the rebuilding, how the city should be rebuilt, which neighborhoods should be revitalized, and who will be allowed to return to the city to reclaim their former homes and neighborhoods. On the one hand, the website of the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOMCVB) proudly proclaims that New Orleans is "open for business" and advertisements celebrate "The rebirth of New Orleans: Ahead of Schedule," "You'll Love the New New Orleans," "Welcome to America's most romantic, walkable, historic city, New Orleans." Yet city leaders and elites recognize that the ongoing competition for tourist dollars and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina complicate efforts to attract tourists and revitalize the city. Thus, New Orleans is currently being reimagined, a process that involves the deployment of spectacle to neutralize negative publicity and project globally a coherent and transparent image of urban rebirth and vitality. On the one hand, the latest use of spectacular imagery and discourse of resiliency express a larger process of semiotic warfare to counter the image of poverty and inequality that dominated national and global news coverage of New Orleans during September 2005. On the other hand, the production of spectacle is about communicating a sense of "community," "uniqueness," and place "distinctiveness" to unite disparate groups of residents and galvanize support for tourism rebuilding. In both cases, the production of spectacle is a fundamental feature of New Orleans's rebuilding efforts and reflects an integrated and organized network of economic development organizations devoted to the task of cultivating, projecting, and regulating spectacular images.

Conclusions

The above comments and examples provide a challenge to accounts that emphasize spectacle as an irresistible process of domination and subordination that furthers elite interests and strengthens the dominant ideology. In Debord's work the spectacle is a monolith that imprisons people in the nightmare of consumer society giving us no other perspective than that of the blind, duped, and alienated spectator. Yet I have tried to show that spectacles illustrate the conflictual, contested, and contradictory character of capitalist social relations. In the context of contemporary critical theory, the approach I have elaborated here and in other places suggests a reconceptualization of spectacle and its relationship to contemporary forms of socio-political conflict (see Gotham 2005; 2007; Gotham and Krier 2007). Today, as transnational corporations, state institutions, and local social movements struggle to influence the social organization and trajectory of capitalist development, spectacle has become a major socio-institutional battlefield in which the temporality and spatiality of global capitalism is being fought and forged. This situation is one of the major paradoxes of contemporary capitalism. As Kellner (2003; 2005) has pointed out, processes of capitalist development are causing spectacle to be intertwined ever more directly with media

culture, politics, education, and other social institutions. At the same time, spectacle appears to have become a major pillar of global capitalism through its central role as a motor of urban revitalization, tourism growth, and cultural differentiation.

In this article, I have attempted to outline some of the contours of the process by which different political and economic elites, organized interests, and other groups construct tragic events and disasters as spectacles. My goal has been to illuminate the political interests and processes behind the contemporary proliferation of spectacle by borrowing from Debord's critical theory while also probing the contradictions of spectacle. I want to suggest that the same logic of capital that has played itself out with regard to material objects and the production of images throughout prior historical stages of commodity production now also applies to the production of spectacle. Thus, there are trends toward an accelerated circulation of media spectacles, political spectacles, and other entertaining spectacles in order to offset the tendency toward a declining rate of profit and curb the ruinous crises and conflicts that infect fast capitalism. Yet much work remains to be done to come to grips both theoretically and politically with contemporary processes of spectacle production, consumption, representation, and contestation in all their complexity and multidimensionality. The rapidly expanding literature on the social production of spectacle, which I have only mentioned fleetingly here, contains powerful theoretical insights that scholars could mobilize to examine the diverse manifestations and conflictual processes of spectacle. One fruitful approach I have suggested is to view spectacles as both arenas and objects of sociopolitical contestation as a wide range of sociopolitical forces interact to reconfigure the social and spatial organization of capitalism. Throughout the twentieth century, the production and consumption of spectacle have always been a highly charged political process but the intensity, acceleration, and stakes have today dramatically increased in a global context of exploding struggles against exploitation, domination, and subordination.

Finally, the urban disinvestment, class and racial inequalities, and other disturbing risks displayed by Hurricane Katrina provide a unique opportunity to come to terms with the inequities of capitalism and to renew commitment to democracy and social justice. The tendency of spectacle is to celebrate capitalism's surface appearances of celebrity, sex appeal, pizzazz, glamour, and glitz while denying capitalism's negative consequences including poverty, homelessness, and other inequalities. The fleeting representations generated by spectacle express the social and psychological contradictions of a fast-paced economy where "all that is solid melts into air" and risk, volatility, and instability of a fluctuating market economy produce anxiety and chaos. In my view, the question of possible transcendence can only be decided politically, through everyday struggles to reconfigure the spectacular dynamics and market processes that intersect and are mutually constitutive on local, national, supra-national, and global levels. A critical theory of spectacles might have powerful implications not only for reconceptualizing the contradictions of contemporary capitalism, and also, perhaps, for the mobilization of opposition groups and interests oriented toward a more democratic and socially just society.

Endnotes

1. Originally published in France in 1967, *Society of the Spectacle* contains nine chapters organized into 221 theses composed in an aphoristic style. The book contains no page numbers and the citations to the text I use refer to the numbered theses. For many years, the book was only available in English published by Black and Red (Detroit, 1970). A new edition appeared in 1983 and a new translation in 1994. I refer to the 1994 translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith.

2. Ben Agger, editorial introduction to *Fast Capitalism* (<http://www.fastcapitalism.com/>, accessed January 12, 2007).

3. "Iraq's al Qaeda says Katrina is 'Wrath of God'-Web." Reuters Foundation. 4 September 2005. AlertNet ([http://](http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L04123147.htm)

www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L04123147.htm accessed October 28, 2005).

4. "Muslim and Jewish fundamentalists hail 'Katrina' as God's punishment of the US." 7 September 2005. AsiaNews.it. (<http://www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=4067>, accessed October 28, 2005).

5. Columbia Christians for Life. "Hurricane Katrina satellite image looks like 6-week fetus." (<http://www.christianlifeandliberty.net/news3.htm>, accessed October 28, 2005).

6. Proposed and actual cuts in the Army Corps of Engineers budget come from the Budget of the U.S. Government, FY 2006 and other years; U.S. House of

Representatives cut in Corps budget is based on Energy and Water appropriation report. See National Priorities Project. "Katrina and Iraq War Demonstrate Misguided Federal Priorities." September 2005 (<http://www.nationalpriorities.org>, accessed November 1, 2005).

7. Entous, Adam. September 17, 2005. "Early Warnings Raised Doubt on Bush Disaster Plans." *New York Times*.

8. Ortega, Fidel Ortega. August 31, 2005. "Gays 'Responsible' For New Orleans Devastation Group Claims." (<http://www.365Gay.com>, accessed January 10, 2006).

9. In early September 2005, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) organized a web forum with authors posting short essays that "extended beyond 'natural disaster,' 'engineering failures,' 'cronyism' or other categories of interpretation that do not directly examine the underlying issues—political, social and economic—laid bare by the events surrounding Katrina." Social Science Research Council's (SSRC) web forum, "Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences" (<http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org>). Other organizations including the National Low Income Housing Coalition (<http://www.nlihoc.org>), the Center

for American Progress (<http://www.americaprogress.org>), and Alternet.com., among others published critical commentary on the impact of Katrina that reached worldwide audiences (www.alternet.com). All websites accessed January 12, 2006.

10. For analyses by National Priorities Project, see (<http://www.nationalpriorities.org>, accessed January 12, 2006).

11. For analyses by National Priorities Project, see "Katrina and Iraq War Demonstrate Misguided Federal Priorities." September 2005 (www.nationalpriorities.org, accessed January 12, 2006). Studies by the Citizens for Tax Justice and the Children's Defense Fund are referenced in Citizens for Tax Justice. June 12, 2002. "Year-by-Year Analysis of Bush Tax Cut Shows Growing Tilt to the Very Rich." Data for this study are provided by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Tax Model, June 2002. For a recent study on the inequities of the Bush tax cuts, monies spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the cost of rebuilding the Gulf Coast, see the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) <http://www.cbpp.org/pubs/katrina.htm> (accessed November 20, 2005).

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