

COMMON SENSE

Katrina: Slow As Molasses

Submitted by [Digby](#) on August 25, 2007 - 1:04pm.

There was an interesting little factoid in Joshua Green's great [article](#) on Karl Rove in this month's Atlantic, that has everyone scratching their heads:

Hurricane Katrina clearly changed the public perception of Bush's presidency. Less examined is the role Rove played in the defining moment of the administration's response: when Air Force One flew over Louisiana and Bush gazed down from on high at the wreckage without ordering his plane down. Bush advisers Matthew Dowd and Dan Bartlett wanted the president on the ground immediately, one Bush official told me, but were overruled by Rove for reasons that are still unclear: "Karl did not want the plane to land in Louisiana." Rove's political acumen seemed to be deserting him altogether.

That picture of Bush looking down on the city from on high in his favorite little Air Force One costume was a terrible image. But there can be no doubt that what Rove was thinking about in those moments was not whether it would be good for the country or the people of New Orleans for the president to get on the ground immediately. He was thinking about how to turn the situation into a political advantage.

In the early days of Katrina, Bush was very strangely disengaged, even when he got back to Washington and saw the full scope of the damage. Again, it's impossible to know exactly what was going through their minds, but it was an odd performance even by Bush standards. It's hard to see how anyone could calculate that it was a good idea for the president to appear not to care about one of America's oldest and most beloved cities being destroyed while its stranded residents begged for food and water. And yet they seemed to be moving like thick, sticky molasses.

Within days it was [reported](#) in the NY Times that Karl Rove was in charge of the reconstruction effort in the gulf. Dan Froomkin in the Washington Post [observed](#):

Rove's leadership role suggests quite strikingly that any and all White House decisions and pronouncements regarding the recovery from the storm are being made with their political consequences as the primary consideration. More specifically: With an eye toward increasing the likelihood of Republican political victories in the future, pursuing long-cherished conservative goals, and bolstering Bush's image.

The first reconstruction plans to emerge bore out that assumption. Rove was reported to be working with a Heritage Foundation task force headed by former Reagan Attorney General Ed Meese. Much like their earlier [failed attempt at reconstruction in Iraq](#), this was seen as a perfect chance to create a free market Disneyland.

Heritage came up with a plan by September 12th, just two weeks after the hurricane came ashore, called "From Tragedy to Triumph: Principled Solutions for Rebuilding Lives and Communities." Their report confidently stated, "the key to successfully rebuilding the Gulf

User login

Username: *

Password: *

Remember me

- [Create new account](#)
- [Request new password](#)

Blogroll

[AFL-CIO Weblog](#)
[The Agonist](#)
[Alternative Hippopotamus](#)
[Alternet](#)
[AmericaBlog](#)
[Angry Bear](#)
[Beat The Press](#)
[Blue Climate](#)
[Bob Geiger](#)
[Booman Tribune](#)
[The Brad Blog](#)
[The Carpetbagger Report](#)
[Cliff Schecter](#)
[Climate 411](#)
[Commonweal Institute Blog](#)
[Compass](#)
[Critical Condition](#)

Coast is to 'encourage creative and rapid private investment through incentives and reduced regulation."

Paul Krugman [described](#) just what that meant in the NY Times:

"The Heritage Foundation, which has surely been helping Karl Rove develop the administration's recovery plan, has already published a manifesto on post-Katrina policy. It calls for waivers on environmental rules, the elimination of capital gains taxes and the private ownership of public school buildings in the disaster areas. And if any of the people killed by Katrina, most of them poor, had a net worth of more than \$1.5 million, Heritage wants to exempt their heirs from the estate tax,"

The Republican congress got in on the act as well. The WSJ [reported](#):

Congressional Republicans, backed by the White House, say they are using relief measures for the hurricane-ravaged Gulf coast to achieve a broad range of conservative economic and social policies, both in the storm zone and beyond.

[...]

"The desire to bring conservative, free-market ideas to the Gulf Coast is white hot," says Rep. Mike Pence, the Indiana Republican who leads the Republican Study Group, an influential caucus of conservative House members. "We want to turn the Gulf Coast into a magnet for free enterprise. The last thing we want is a federal city where New Orleans once was."

Many of the ideas under consideration have been pushed by the 40-member study group, which is circulating a list of "free-market solutions," including proposals to eliminate regulatory barriers to awarding federal funds to religious groups housing hurricane victims, waiving the estate tax for deaths in the storm-affected states; and making the entire region a "flat-tax free-enterprise zone."

They were all working together:

Members of the group met in a closed session Tuesday night at the conservative Heritage Foundation headquarters here to map strategy. Edwin Meese, the former Reagan administration attorney general, has been actively involved.

And [they didn't hide their intentions](#):

Conservative commentators see the measures as an opportunity to reverse federal entitlement programmes dating back to Franklin Roosevelt's that they argue ingrain poverty by encouraging dependency on the government. "The objection to these Bush proposals isn't fiscal, but philosophical," Rich Lowry, an editor on the National Review magazine, wrote. "They serve to undermine the principle of government dependency that underpins the contemporary welfare state, and to which liberals are utterly devoted."

Naturally, all this principled high-mindedness ended up making Republican contributors a whole lot of money, from the [very first moments](#) until [just recently](#).

But none of that is what Karl Rove was likely to have really been interested in. He was happy to promote free market ideology and ensure that important contributors were cut in on the action, but his holy grail was creating an enduring Republican majority. (And we know [he did not have a lot of scruples](#) when it came to doing it.)

Louisiana has been a swing state for some time, in which Democrats were dependent on the

[Crooks and Liars](#)
[Culture Kitchen](#)
[Daily Kos](#)
[The Democratic Daily](#)
[Democratic Underground](#)
[Democrats.com](#)
[DMIBlog](#)
[Eschaton](#)
[Eteraz.org](#)
[Facing South](#)
[The FairVote Blog](#)
[Faithful Progressive](#)
[Feministing](#)
[Firedoglake](#)
[The Geriatric Patient](#)
[GoozNews](#)
[Green Options](#)
[Gristmill](#)
[HealthBlawg](#)
[The Health Care Blog](#)
[Hill Heat](#)
[The Huffington Post](#)
[Hullabaloo](#)
[In These Times](#)
[The Intersection](#)
[It's Getting Hot In Here](#)
[Jack and Jill Politics](#)
[jspot](#)
[Latina Lista](#)
[Lean Left](#)
[Liberal Values](#)
[LiberalOasis](#)
[The Mahablog](#)
[MaxSpeak](#)
[Migra Matters](#)
[My Left Wing](#)
[MyDD](#)
[The Nation](#)
[The Oil Drum](#)
[Oliver Willis](#)
[Pam's House Blend](#)
[Pandagon](#)
[Political Cortex](#)
[Political Wire](#)
[PoliticsTV](#)
[Prometheus 6](#)
[Real Climate](#)
[Robert Reich](#)
[Seeing The Forest](#)

black majority in the state's largest city to win. It was not lost on Rove that all of those poor New Orleans African Americans --- and their children --- being dispersed throughout the nation could only be good for Republicans. As of now, only [about 66% have returned](#), not enough to keep the state swinging (in more ways than one.) It looks very likely that the state will have a Republican Governor and two Republican Senators in 2008. Experts in the area estimate that the congressional delegation advantage for Republicans will be five to one by 2012. There is little doubt that the Katrina diaspora finally turned the state blood red.

Kanye West famously blurted out "Bush doesn't care about black people" at a Katrina fundraiser and shocked everyone with his blunt assessment. But we could all see why he would think that. Bush had failed to even acknowledge the hurricane for days and refused to cut short his vacation. He told his disastrously incompetent FEMA head he was doing a "heckuva job" and seemed cavalier about the fact that people were expiring on the sidewalk in New Orleans. His strongest statements seemed to be against looting. Indeed, it appeared that he was quite content to let the catastrophe unfold in slow motion on the world's TV screens.

You can't blame West for thinking he didn't care. But it was likely far more cynical than that. Rove was busy counting votes that day he and the president flew over the city and he undoubtedly knew that an opportunity presented itself if New Orleans were destroyed. And he knew something else too: that if certain people heard tales of African Americans lawlessly marauding through the streets and saw hours of footage of poor black women with children it would successfully tweak the southern racist lizard brain to solidify those gains.

[Tom Schaller explains:](#)

Louisiana is, at last, about to look a lot more like its Deep South neighbors politically. There has been something of an inverse relationship in recent presidential elections between the share of black voters and Republican performance. That is, the blacker the state, the bigger the Republican margins. Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina are all states with black populations close to or above a third, the highest percentage in the nation -- and not a Democratic senator, governor or, since 1992, Democratic electoral vote among them.

Along with Florida, Louisiana had been different, a state where multiracial coalitions propelled Clinton, Landrieu and Blanco to victories. In Louisiana, a black population of 32.5 percent made victory for Democrats possible. The post-Katrina question is whether the black population will remain large enough for Democrats to continue building such coalitions, especially if there is a backlash among white voters in the noncoastal portions of the state toward Blanco, controversial New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and state Democrats in general. Recent polls, however, are not promising, and they also show how resolutely racial party identification has become in the Deep South. The blacker the state, the more Republican the whites are.

Despite the "heckuva job" performance of the Bush administration during Katrina, the president's approval rating among whites in Louisiana -- 57 percent -- is tied for second best in the nation with Georgia and Idaho, trailing only Mississippi's 61 percent. The link between whiteness and Republicanism in the South is now so strong that it can even withstand a Category 5 hurricane. Now, without the tipping-point power of the Orleans Parish black electorate, Louisiana may well become the new Mississippi, which has two Republican senators and a Republican governor and hasn't given its electoral votes to a Democrat since Jimmy Carter.

Rove may have failed to create and enduring national majority, but he did a heckuva job in Louisiana, cementing another bloc into the solid Republican south.

Save & Share



[The Sentinel Effect](#)
[The Sideshow](#)
[SirotaBlog](#)
[Skeptical Brotha](#)
[Smirking Chimp](#)
[Stayin' Alive](#)
[Street Prophets](#)
[Suburban Guerilla](#)
[Sustainablog](#)
[Talking Points Memo](#)
[Tapped](#)
[Taylor Marsh](#)
[ThinkProgress](#)
[TPMCafe](#)
[Wampum](#)
[Washington Monthly's](#)
[Political Animal](#)
[Working Immigrants](#)
[Working Life](#)

SUBSCRIBE

Sign up for our free daily dispatch.
[Privacy Policy](#)





Issues & Projects:

- [Conservative Failure](#)
- [Digby's blog](#)
- [Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Comments

Has any corporation ever ripped up its vendor regulations?

Submitted by [jibal](#) on August 27, 2007 - 4:24pm.

Deregulation is an invitation to corruption, and corruption always accepts.

BTW, for all those moronic libertarians out there: that's why Ron Paul is not the solution. Deregulation is like not checking the qualifications of your building contractor or auto mechanic, or offering up your teenage daughter to any male who wants her.

- [Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Privitizing Deregulating Failure

Submitted by [dajson](#) on August 27, 2007 - 3:11pm.

I was saying at the beginning of the failed Iraq re-construction that Bush and his creepy crew were shoving deregulating, free-market, privatization plans down the throats of Iraqis that American voters have resisted since Reagan first started selling us the lesser government privatization LIE. Katrina came along as an opportunity for them to shove these same ideologically misguided ideas down the throats of Americans. Now in addition to Iraq, New Orleans's is now a case study in why these deregulating privatization scams don't work. I hope our nation wide reaction to this failed ideology dwarfs any gains Rove may have got in turning a blue state red. We are not red states and blue states, we are Americans, and politicians who don't get that need to loose their jobs. Viva the Progressive Revolution!

- [Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Katrina: Slow As Molasses

Submitted by [jwea](#) on August 27, 2007 - 12:41pm.

The much too often maligned Huey Long would spin in his grave at the give-away to the rich and elite.

When the men of the Reagan Revulsion (not revolution) think of the phrase "redistribution of the wealth", they thinking (and planning) to steal from the poor and give to the already very rich.

We need someone much like Huey Long to lead a genuine Progressive movement to reverse the past 26 years of Reagan Revulsion.

- [Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments