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Monday, September 12th, 2005

## New Orleans Activist Points to Neglected Corpse as U.S. Military Passes Off Blame

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Democracy Now! reports from the streets of New Orleans. We speak with community organizer Malik Rahim who points out a dead body in his neighborhood that has been neglected since hurricane Katrina hit and we ask soldiers and police why it hasn't been picked up. [includes rush transcript]

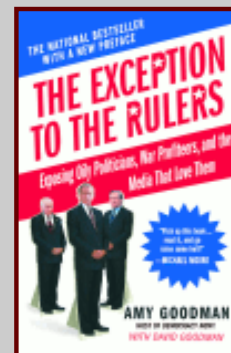
Democracy Now! broadcasts from Baton Rouge, Louisiana - a city that has been flooded with people pouring out of New Orleans and its surrounding area since before Hurricane Katrina hit. We have spent the weekend traveling around New Orleans, surveying the devastation, talking to scores of people.

The city remains under a curfew and there are police and military checkpoints everywhere. In the time we have been here, we have encountered law enforcement officers from nearly every possible agency under the sun. New Orleans has been transformed into a complete militarized zone. There are still areas of the city that have not been reached by rescue workers and there are a number of large makeshift morgues that have been set up. There is still no firm death toll. Last night, President Bush reportedly slept aboard the USS Iwo Jima and he is touring the area once again beginning here in Louisiana. In New Orleans itself there are people who are refusing the evacuation order and are calling on the government to restore their gas and electricity. But most areas remain like a ghost town.

We spoke with community organizer Malik Rahim in the Algiers neighborhood. He is one of those who has refused to leave.

- Malik Rahim**, a veteran of the Black Panther Party in New Orleans. For decades he has worked as an organizer of public housing tenants both there and in San Francisco. He recently ran for New Orleans City Council on the Green Party ticket.

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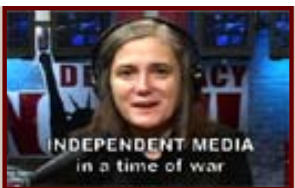
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. CNN

**AMY GOODMAN:**This is Malik Rahim.

**MALIK RAHIM:** You could basically smell it from right here. You know, and the police, they pass by. They look at it and they ain't going to do nothing, you know, to pick it up.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Malik then walked us down the driveway next to the health center and lifted up a sheet of corrugated metal with an X revealing the dead body underneath.

**MALIK RAHIM:** Now, his body been here for almost two weeks. Two weeks tomorrow. All right. That this man's body been laying here. And there's no reason for it. Look where we at? I mean, it's not flooded. There's no reason for them to be, left that body right here like this. You mean, just totally disrespect. You know? I mean two weeks. Every day, we ask them about coming and picking it up. They refuse to come and pick it up. You can see, it's literally decomposing right here. Right out in the sun. Every day we sit up and we ask them about it. Because I mean, this is -- close as you can get to tropical climate in America. And they won't do anything about it.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Malik, do you know who this person is?

**MALIK RAHIM:** No. But regardless of who it is, I wouldn't care if it's Saddam Hussein or Bin Laden. Nobody deserves to be left here, and the kids pass by here and they are seeing it. The elderly, this is what is frightening a lot of people into leaving. We don't know if he's a victim of vigilantes or what. That's all we know is that his body had been allowed to remain out here for over two weeks.

**AMY GOODMAN:**We are standing right outside the health clinic. It's doors are chained. The building is not seriously damaged. Have you reached people there? What authorities have you talked to to pick up this body?

**MALIK RAHIM:** We have talked to everyone from the army to the New Orleans Police, to the State Troopers, to -- I mean, we have talked to everybody who we can. I even talked to Oliver Thomas, who is the councilman at large, yesterday, about this body. He said he was surprised to see that this body is still there. But it's been two weeks. Two weeks that this man has been just laying here.

**AMY GOODMAN:** As Malik Raheem was speaking, as if on cue, every level of authority he mentioned drove by. There's a dead body right here. Is -- who are you

**Baltimore Sun:**  
**Hiroshima Cover-**  
**up**

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with?

**SOLDIER:** We're with 5015.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Which is?

**SOLDIER:** The cav.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Army?

**SOLDIER:** Regular army.

**AMY GOODMAN:** There's a dead body right here. Can you guys pick it up?

**SOLDIER:** You don't think we can pick it up, but we can call the local authorities to come pick it up.

**AMY GOODMAN:** This gentleman who lives in the neighborhood said that they have been trying to get -- here, let me ask these guys, too. Excuse me. Excuse me. Hi. There's a dead body right here. Can Louisiana State Troopers, can you pick it up?

**LOUISIANA STATE TROOPER:** You need to talk to the public information officer, Ma'am.

**AMY GOODMAN:** It's been here two weeks. We have filmed it last week, and gentleman over here said he has been trying to get it picked up for two weeks. Louisiana State Troopers, the Police, the Army, no one has responded. We're looking right over at it right there.

**LOUISIANA STATE TROOPER:** You need to talk to the public information officer and contact him at the troop.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Your name is?

**LOUISIANA STATE TROOPER:** You need to talk to the public information officer.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Do you know about the body?

**LOUISIANA STATE TROOPER:** You need to talk to our public information officer.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Sir, do you know about the body over there.

**LOUISIANA STATE TROOPER:** Ma'am, you talk with the public information

Boulder"

officer.

· Newsweek Online:  
"Access of Evil"

**AMY GOODMAN:** Do you know what they should do to get this body removed moved?

· Los Angeles Times:  
"Left-wing radio's Amy Goodman takes her views on the road."

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** I have no idea. I can't tell you. I don't know. There's been several people over here looking at it.

· Tucson Weekly:  
"Names Amy Goodman  
"Best Radio Talk Show Host"

**AMY GOODMAN:**[planes flying overhead] That was homeland security that just went by. Sir, what -- what did you say?

· Arizona Daily Star:  
"Democracy Now!" host brings criticism of war coverage to Tucson stage"

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** There's been several people here looking at it, but you know like I said, I haven't seen anybody take it.

· Guerrilla News Network:  
"Guerrilla of the Week"

**AMY GOODMAN:** Several army guys?

· The Hindu:  
"The Other Side Of The News"

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** Army, state police over here looking at it. Seen ambulances looking at it. That's about it.

· Washington Post:  
"Peace Correspondent, DN! Host Amy Goodman making her voice heard on Iraq"

**AMY GOODMAN:** What's your name?

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** Sorry?

· Wall Street Journal:  
"Pacifica Radio Network Becomes Antiwar Voice"

**AMY GOODMAN:** What's your name?

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** Robert. Robert Gonzalez.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Robert gonzalez. You're with?

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** 15 cav.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Out of --

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** Ft. Hood, Texas.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Do you think the body should be picked up?

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** Yeah. Sometime. When they get around. There's probably a lot of bodies that they need to pick up.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Have you seen alot of bodies?

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** No I mean this all, I've seen is all, I've seen. I haven't seen a lot. These are the only two, but I'm sure there's problems in other areas, too.

They're probably having a hard time picking all of them up all at once.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Where would you bring it if you picked it up?

**ROBERT GONZALEZ:** I have no idea.

**NEW ORLEANS POLICE OFFICER:** Our sector is this area here.

**AMY GOODMAN:**This is right in your sector?

**NEW ORLEANS POLICE OFFICER:** Yes.

**AMY GOODMAN:**So that body is right in your sector?

**NEW ORLEANS POLICE OFFICER:** Yes.

**AMY GOODMAN:** So, what should happen then?

**NEW ORLEANS POLICE OFFICER:** Well, what I can do in my position is let -- notify my chain of command and leave it up to them to make those bigger decisions. It would be out of my hands. I'm just a lower level position.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Have you all contacted your higher-ups since this is your sector and this has been pointed out the last few weeks.

**NEW ORLEANS POLICE OFFICER:** We will notify our chain of command now. That's my lieutenant right there.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Lieutenant there's this dead body over there. Would the army take it out?

**NEW ORLEANS LIEUTENANT POLICE OFFICER:** No. That's not really in our jurisdiction. We can't do any police work. So, that's not for us to handle we can only report it and hope that the cops take care of it, but we can't do anything.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Have you reported it?

**NEW ORLEANS LIEUTENANT POLICE OFFICER:** Yep.

**AMY GOODMAN:**Why do you think the cops are not moving it?

**NEW ORLEANS LIEUTENANT POLICE OFFICER:** I have no idea, ma'am. No idea.

**JEREMY FOWLER:** Jeremy Fowler. With first cav.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Yes.

**JEREMY FOWLER:** You are?

**AMY GOODMAN:** I'm Amy Goodman. We're down from New York public radio and television. We're just wondering about this body that's been there since the hurricane. Who is going to pick it up?

**JEREMY FOWLER:** The -- we have notified the New Orleans police and they're in the process of getting a mortuary team down here. The problem is, as you probably know, most the mortuary teams are north of the river, doing evacuation ops. up there. It's been notified. The locals have been notified. We have got patrols currently in the area just keeping local security, and we are waiting for local law enforcement to take care of it.

**AMY GOODMAN:** We saw local law enforcement, Louisiana State Police, New Orleans police, all of them had no comment.

**JEREMY FOWLER:** I can just tell you what I have done. We're just here to help restore some stability to this area and help really get this community back on its feet. So -- that's really all I can tell you.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Where are you from?

**JEREMY FOWLER:** Ma'am, I'm from Rock Springs, Wyoming.

**AMY GOODMAN:** So, what's the exact unit? Are you U.S. Army, or National Guard--

**JEREMY FOWLER:** I'm actually the Company Commander of Charlie Company, first battalion fifth United States cavalry. We're stationed out of Ft. Hood, Texas. We were activated about a week ago to come down here and to help the great people of Louisiana.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And any chance either of you were in Iraq?

**JEREMY FOWLER:** We were. Actually, we both were. This is my Executive Officer.

**AMY GOODMAN:** What's your name?

**MATTHEW COHEN:** Matthew Cohen, Captain, U.S. Army.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Wyoming also.

**MATTHEW COHEN:** No, I'm from California.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Where?

**MATTHEW COHEN:** San Francisco.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Where were you in Iraq?

**MATTHEW COHEN:** We were in southern Baghdad.

**AMY GOODMAN:** When did you come out?

**MATTHEW COHEN:** We got back last March as a unit. basically the whole company came back in late March.

**AMY GOODMAN:** How does this compare?

**MATTHEW COHEN:** I'll tell you, Ma'am, this is great to be down here. It's great that we can kind of come out and actually help Americans.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Hi, Sir. You New Orleans Police?

**NEW ORLEANS POLICE OFFICER:** Yes, ma'am. I can't talk, though.

**AMY GOODMAN:** We're just -- there's a dead body over here and we're wonder if the police would pick it up.

**NEW ORLEANS POLICE OFFICER:** I have no comment on that, Ma'am. You have to call one of the press guys. Sorry. Thank you.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Malik, just a minute ago, as we were pulling up, there were two what were they, police cars --

**MALIK RAHIM:** Yes.

**AMY GOODMAN:** What were they?

**MALIK RAHIM:** They were police.

**AMY GOODMAN:** New Orleans Police.

**MALIK RAHIM:** New Orleans Police.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Have you talked to the New Orleans Police.

**MALIK RAHIM:** New Orleans Police is the worst of the lot. Some of them. I ain't going to say all of them but most of them. We get a more friendly response from the Army. And the National Guard. Than from the New Orleans Police. I have no real respect for them anymore. Because they allowed those white vigilantes to ride through with carte blanche. I mean, if a white person was taking something, he was taking food for his family. But if a black was taking something, he was looting. You know? And you see signs all around: "We kill looters. We shoot looters." Some of them was even bragging about it. We used to -- for the first week we had truckloads of whites riding around, white vigilantes riding around talking about they're protecting the neighborhood. New Orleans came so close to breaking into a race riot than I ever seen. You know, because even though they were shooting blacks in the Algiers part where I live, Algiers is surrounded by nothing but black communities. And guys were saying that if they hear of anybody else being shot, they are going to shoot any white that comes through their community. It took a lot for us to stop this. But we didn't have no consideration from the government. You know? And that kept on going because again, if whites -- I mean, we sit here and watch them. They ride around in their dump trucks, I mean, pickup trucks with shotguns and high powered rifles. And if a black just showed a knife, it was automatically jumped on. I mean, it was just totally two standards of justice. I mean, that's the part that really got me. You know, that -- because it shouldn't have been. I mean, we didn't, first of all, we didn't have to abandon the 120,000 people that we literally abandoned in the city. I mean, we literally abandoned the poor and told them, "Hey, you fend for yourself." Then when they fend for themselves, then they was arrested.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Malik Rahim speaking just next to the Arthur Monday Multi-service Center in the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans. Unlike many of his neighbors, Malik has chosen to stay in his community.

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