



## Questions for Public Discussion ...

Breach of Faith traces the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the lives of numerous survivors, and, by extension, on the lives of all of us who live in southeast Louisiana. It seeks to understand what went wrong and why. At the same time, it examines the efforts to rebuild and strengthen the region. Issues raised include responsibility for what happened – both at the personal and political level – as well as matters of race and class, economics and education.

Jed Horne

### Personal and Public Responsibilities

1. What are the national government's main responsibilities in cases of regional disasters?
2. What are the local and regional governments' main responsibilities in cases of regional disasters?
3. Compare the way the mayor of Kobe, Japan responded to the 1995 earthquake with the way New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin handled himself after Katrina. How were they different and how were they similar?
4. How did the media represent New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina?
5. Were news photographers among the wreckage merely exploiters of suffering or were they crucial witnesses to suffering and injustice?
6. What are the obligations of news reporters and photographers in times of disaster?
7. Who do you see as the heroes in the drama of Katrina's aftermath? Who are the villains? Or is it misleading to think in terms of heroes and villains?
8. Widespread looting occurred after Katrina. Was there any excuse for it?
9. Why did it take more than a week for the federal government and its agencies to respond to clear the Convention Center and bring the storm survivors?
10. Was Gov. Blanco right when she refused to yield to pressure from White House officials who wanted her to hand over control of the National Guard to federal authorities?
11. The evacuation was the largest in state history, possibly in the history of the nation, and yet thousands were trapped in a flooded city. Whose bears responsibility and what should be done to prevent it from happening again?
12. How much has "The Louisiana Way" been a factor in the federal government's response to hurricane recovery for New Orleans?
13. Who is ultimately to blame for the corruption, fraud, and waste that have plagued the recovery effort?
14. Was Katrina a natural disaster or a man-made disaster?
15. What are the main factors that contribute to the collapse of the social order that Horne chronicles? Was this collapse avoidable or inevitable?
16. Gov. Blanco accused the Bush administration of playing politics with the recovery effort, trying to make the Republican governor of Mississippi look good so as to make the Democrat governor of Louisiana look bad. Is there evidence that she was right?

### Race and Class

1. In ways does fear of those who belong to another race or social class govern the interactions among the people caught up in this storm and its aftermath?
2. To what extent did iconic photographs like that of Angela Perkins on her knees at the convention center (p. 114-115) reinforce racial and economic stereotypes?

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3. What does the evacuation of the various hospitals in New Orleans illustrate about race and class in the city, and maybe in American society at large?
4. It has been argued that Washington's slow response to Katrina was in some sense racial: the reaction to a majority black city by an administration that did not attract much support from African-Americans. How persuasive do you find that argument?

### **Economics**

1. Who were the main allies of business owners struggling to rebuild?
2. What were the main obstacles they faced?
3. How did insurance companies define the event that was Katrina? What other definitions does Horne ask readers to consider?
4. How does New Orleans matter to Louisiana's cultural economy?
5. Have you personally experienced a financial "ripple" effect or has your business been impacted by Louisiana's post-Katrina economy? What will rebuilding New Orleans mean to you financially?

### **Education**

1. What did Katrina expose to the rest of the country and bring home to New Orleans residents themselves about the New Orleans public schools?
2. Who or what is to blame for the poor quality of education offered by the pre-storm New Orleans public schools?
3. Was Louisiana right to take control of the New Orleans school system after Katrina?
4. How much should Louisianans worry about a permanent brain drain in the wake of Katrina?
5. What role should LSU and other institutions of higher education play in the relief, recovery and rebuilding of Louisiana and the Gulf South?

### **Lessons Learned**

1. Horne claims that the stories he tells "provide a lesson for America about itself" but what is that lesson?
2. Has Louisiana learned anything from Katrina? If so, what changes do you think we have to make?
3. Are the city's flood defenses any stronger than they were before Katrina? Why doesn't the city have a state-of-the-art flood defense comparable to what was built in the Netherlands after the terrible floods there in 1953?
4. Can New Orleans be made hurricane-proof?
5. President Bush's liaison to the Gulf Coast recovery area, Donald Powell, backs Gov. Blanco and other in using the crisis brought about by Katrina to force consolidation of the levee boards. What were their reasons? Was this a good idea?
6. The Army Corps has debated whether to bother fortifying levees in the southern parts of Plaquemines Parish, an area at great risk from storm surge and flooding. Is this fair or does common sense require recognizing that some areas are just too risky to bother with?

### **The Future of New Orleans**

1. What are the defining characteristics of a "great American city"? And what is New Orleans' claim to that title?
2. What place do you think New Orleans occupies in American culture?
3. Can New Orleans ever fully recover from Katrina?

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4. Is there a danger of New Orleans becoming a Disneyland for tourists instead of a real city? Or might this become a wasteland in which a few empty houses stand amid blocks of empty and crumbling buildings?
5. Should parts of New Orleans be written off and rebuilding forbidden because Katrina proved the flood risk is too great?
6. What changes would you welcome in post-Katrina New Orleans and Louisiana as they are rebuilt? What do you think New Orleans should look like in five years? Ten years?
7. If you were a business executive, would you invest in post-Katrina New Orleans?

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