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# THE RAGING PELICAN

JOURNAL OF GULF COAST RESISTANCE



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illustrations by ..... Ben Passmore, Tiara Falk, le petit gateau, & Ray Boudreaux  
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## Introduction

By: A. Pelican

*Welcome to Écoulement 2!*

We have expanded our focus, inviting in more voices to discuss a broader range of issues.

But what about the oil disaster?

Well, the local TV news in Mississippi only ever talks about Ken Feinberg, how he isn’t giving the right amount of money to the right people. Investigators from ProPublica have bravely exposed “spillionaire” outrages such as a New Orleans parking valet receiving a thousand-dollar BP settlement, and the Justice Department trumpets the conviction and incarceration of those who dared falsify paperwork to try and get BP dollars.

Meanwhile, we’re dying. At a recent public forum for those affected by the BP oil disaster, nobody was talking about payouts and settlements. No “spillionaires” were in evidence. All I saw was hardworking poor folks who were sick, in some cases life-threateningly, with symptoms that the doctors they had access to couldn’t or wouldn’t diagnose.

Beyond all the horseshit the mainstream media is running with-- beyond “exposes” about which Parish official got a new truck, or hard-luck folks going to prison for trying to scam a little something off the same corporations that have raped us to death for generations, beyond all the stories about Ken Feinberg that don’t mention BP’s name-- beyond and beneath that distracting noise lie the bodies of the dead and dying, the poisoned and ignored.

At that same public forum I met a formerly healthy young man who had just passed his Marine physical but, after immersion in the oil-and-dispersant soup, is now indefinitely confined to a wheelchair. These days he suffers frequent seizures, and I saw him have one. He was convulsing, foaming at the mouth, and the other people at the forum were crying and sobbing, crying aloud to Jesus for help.

That’s the real face of the BP oil disaster, one year in: a proud working-class Gulf Coast resident debilitated by undiagnosed medical problems, and a community with no recourse but tears and prayer.

## An Ultimatum from the “Boudin Taliban”

*On May 14, 2011, residents of Grand Isle, fisherfolk and their allies gathered to burn the BP logo and, in the absence of US Government aid, appeal to the British people to pressure BP to clean up the Gulf and address the health problems they’ve caused. These men and women call themselves “The Boudin Taliban.” The following is excerpted from remarks by Dean Blanchard of Dean Blanchard Seafood, who spoke at the event:*

BP got commercials all over television-- everybody in the United States who doesn’t live here thinks everything’s alright down here. BP has successfully bought off most of the US press. They’ve taken the news media out of the picture. They’ve successfully bought off all the politicians in Washington-- not all of them, but a lot of them-- and it’s hard to get any help, because BP knows where the bodies are buried. BP knows who they gave the money to, so the politicians are scared to help us



BP, you know, they buy people. Instead of British Petroleum, it oughta stand for Buys People, because all they ever did was lie to us from day one. They never told us the truth. Now they tricked the American public into thinking they did the right thing, which they never did.

I think BP’s gonna be responsible in the long run for killing more people than Bin Laden killed. We don’t know what the effects over the long term are gonna be on the people of Grand Isle, and the people all along the Gulf Coast.

You got people down here sick with diseases we never had before. There’s a sinus problem down here that all of a sudden everybody got, people that never had sinus problems before got it. They sprayed chemicals on us that weren’t allowed to be sprayed in their own country. The American government allowed them to do it because they all took pay-offs.

So if we can’t get help from the American Government, we ask the British people to ask the British government to force the company that uses the British name to do the right thing.

And as far as BP, if they don’t do the right thing, they need to go back to where they came from. We’re gonna burn the BP logo-- the BP logo in our opinion is stained with blood. We got blood stains all over.

We really don’t have nothing against the British people. To the British people, we’re not gonna burn your flag today, but we’re saying, do something, help us. Get to your government-- make the company that holds the British name do the right thing. Make them come down here and clean up the mess that they created and make the people whole. Just do what you promised.



We know for sure BP killed more walleyes than any company in the history of the world. We got dead fish washing up on the beaches, people who go in the water are catching sores, we got serious problems over here. So we’re gonna show BP what we think of them and burn their logo. And in 30 days if the British don’t do nothing right, we’re gonna come back and we’re gonna burn their flag next.



# Treating the Symptoms

By: Pauline M. Alvar

In the years after Hurricane Katrina, I saw New Orleanians suffer from lack of health care. The storm and subsequent flooding caused immediate illness, infections from the foul flood water and debris. As time passed, ever-present mold exacerbated respiratory conditions and mental health deteriorated in the face of immense stress. We are far from healed: a report in April 2011, well over five years out, shows hospitalization rates for heart attacks still above pre-Katrina levels. After years building social justice projects in New Orleans, the health care crisis I witnessed moved me to reexamine my priorities. I enrolled in general science classes at Delgado, the first step in the long path to becoming a health care provider.

When the eyes of the world turned again to the Gulf of Mexico last spring, I was in my first semester of Physician Assistant school in Mobile, AL. PA school is like a med-school boot camp - we soldier through seven semesters with very few breaks-- and I was still adjusting to long days in the cadaver lab. But with oil spewing in the Gulf just miles south, I couldn't keep my head in the books. I anticipated massive psychological fallout in communities still recovering from the hurricane, and I feared the uncertain health impacts from the spewing oil and perhaps worse, the dispersants.

Clean-up workers entering the Gulf without a shred of protective gear bore too close a resemblance to post-Katrina recovery workers, and for that matter, 9/11 responders and clean-up workers at "The Pile." Would these oil spill workers meet the same fate, lauded as heroes in the moment and disregarded as disposable when their health issues mounted?

In the fall of 2010, between cramming for tests, I started researching health impacts from BP's disaster. I also sought out providers caring for coastal residents and workers. I believed, naively, that a cadre of doctors in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana would step forward to connect the dots in the constellation of symptoms surfacing on the coast, and I envisioned sneaking away to volunteer with this outreach.

There seemed to be no organized effort. This was not exactly a surprise-- I did live through post-Katrina New Orleans-- but I had not fully understood the sway the oil industry holds over healthcare delivery in the region. Through my research, I stumbled on a group called ScienceCorps. They'd put out an excellent report outlining health issues connected to exposure to the array of chemicals now swamping the Gulf.

This report was sound science, and was exactly what federal government agencies such as the EPA and OSHA should have been distributing to protect the public, especially those to whom the chemicals were most dangerous-- pregnant women, children, those already living with chronic illnesses.

to provide information to the public about the very serious health effects the spill could have.

Though Gulf Coast providers would treat patients' symptoms, they were unwilling to draw any connection between the symptoms and the cause. In this atmosphere of evasion, one



Despite my leeriness of outsiders (especially "smart" Northerners who claim to have the answers for us backward folk down here in the South) I contacted the Boston-based non-profit, hoping they could lead me to Gulf Coast healthcare providers I was somehow missing. I had a lengthy conversation with ScienceCorps toxicologist Kathy Burns about her efforts, including her collaboration with nationally renowned Occupational & Environmental Medicine doctor Michael Harbut. They had also hit a brick wall with the Gulf Coast medical community. They found most doctors unwilling

doctor from coastal Alabama actually sought ScienceCorps out. "My patients are getting really sick," he said, and he felt sure it was linked to the oil and dispersants. He was eager to work with ScienceCorps, but after a few weeks he suddenly withdrew, saying he couldn't be involved in the project. No more detailed explanation was forthcoming, and thus no firm conclusions can be drawn as to why he quit, but Dr. Burns did share with me the chilling cautionary tale of Dr. Victor Alexander being framed for bank robbery, a story I would hear again and again and which is explored elsewhere in this newspaper.

Exposure to oil and dispersants does not constitute a contagion with one clear treatment. Individual cases will differ; variables such as amount and composition of exposure or a person's pre-exposure state of health play heavily into the specific manifestations of illness. Any body system can be impacted, and preexisting conditions such as cardiovascular, liver, kidney, neurological or respiratory disease will likely be exacerbated. As ScienceCorps points out in information designed for providers, the approach to treating these oil- and dispersant-exposed individuals is to treat their signs and symptoms. Thus, it is possible to treat patients sickened by the oil disaster without needing to link their sickness to the oil disaster.

ScienceCorps recommends general practitioners and others use an approach developed by Occupational Medicine doctors. In addition to a careful patient history and physical exam, ScienceCorps encourages a very detailed exposure history. They suggest a battery of blood tests and organ function tests directed at the patient's symptoms. In the end, the clinical presentation and lab results will point to the patient's treatment plan. Even without connecting illness to exposure history, a provider can treat the patient. This has been true in many acute cases of clean-up workers. A friend of mine, an ER nurse, works at one of the closest hospitals to the Louisiana coast, just across the Mississippi from New Orleans in Gretna, LA. She saw a number of respiratory cases she suspected were connected to the spill, often with the patients coming straight from the water. Their acute symptoms were treated and they were discharged back into the night, to shoulder the burdens of any chronic illness alone.

In February 2011, clinical training duties sent me for a day to the oil-devastated coastal fishing village of Bayou La Batre, AL. The patients I saw there had the usual array of illnesses seen in primary care; no one specifically complained of oil-related symptoms. I asked one of the providers about what she had seen post-disaster. She said, "Oh, we refer all of that to the health department." But from what I had read, the health department was not treating them either.

Disasters of this scale have impacts going far beyond direct exposure. One patient came in with fasting blood sugar at nearly triple acceptable levels. In addition, her blood pressure had spiked

despite taking her blood pressure medication. She was the wife of a now-unemployed fisherman, and since BP had ceased hiring locals to lay boom, there was no money coming into her household. With no health insurance and three kids to feed, she had at first divided in halves and then simply run out of her diabetes medication. It is impossible to quantify the ways the people of the coast are suffering. It is not just the oil and dispersants but the destruction of a way of life and livelihood that is killing the people of the Gulf Coast. Like that patient in Bayou la Batre, we often suffer as individuals in isolation the crimes that capitalism inflicts en masse.

As I write this, the Gulf Coast is observing the one year anniversary of the disaster. This is our chance to tell the country that we are still suffering. Health issues are a bullet point in the obligatory national media coverage, which vacillates between crisis ("People say they are still struggling to recover their health, mental health, and livelihoods") and optimism ("Hey, it wasn't as bad as we thought. Let me take a bite of this here shrimp po-boy.") What's notable is the absence of doctors' voices. The media quotes individuals, not groups like the Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN), the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, Boat People SOS and Guardians of the Gulf, all of whom are working to organize the thousands of people who are sick along the coast. Unless they are placed in context, individuals' stories of persistent neurological, respiratory, and gastrointestinal issues, while important to hear, only reinforce that these are "individual" problems.

There are signs of hope. Recently Dr. Michael Robichaux, an Ears, Nose, and Throat (ENT) specialist and former Louisiana state senator in Raceland La, connected with LEAN to share information about his patients. He is willing to treat people impacted by oil and dispersants; he does not hesitate to connect their symptoms to the spill, and he is speaking out on their behalf (to see the compelling testimony of Dr. Robichaux and his patients visit <http://www.leanweb.org>). People are traveling hundreds of miles to see him; why should this all fall to one private doctor? Why isn't the \$20 Billion BP fund, far from tapped out, being used to address coastal residents' health? Why can't the federal government and state governments coordinate this care? What about the state health departments? Why aren't

state governments advocating for their citizens? For the anniversary, Mississippi's Attorney General organized town hall meetings along the coast and was surprised that people wanted to talk health issues more than the frustrating BP claims process. His surprise encapsulates the government response in impacted Gulf states: "We'll have to look into that." His ignorance is outrageous. Where's the urgency? Do states have no duty to protect their citizens?

The federal government certainly did not protect us from this atrocity, and in fact has made itself complicit throughout. We see this in the behavior of the Coast Guard, the cozy relationship between the regulators and the regulated (remember the Minerals Management Service cocaine parties?), the slow reaction to the spill, the unwillingness to enforce regulation, and in the National Institute of Environmental Health Services' belated, cutesily-named "GuLF" study of cleanup workers. By waiting six months to start the data collection NIEHS has ensured the results will be flawed, something the study's designers have already admitted. The study was designed to be defective. Of the tens of millions of dollars being spent on the study, not one single cent will go to actual health care treatment. NIEHS' years of periodic phone surveys will alleviate no suffering; they will only provide bullshit data, "inconclusive" results BP can then cite to exonerate itself.

Deepwater Horizon joins a shamefully long history of the oil industry and corporate interests putting their profits above our lives and health, and doing so with the government's blessing. For too long in South Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, we have been limited to treating the symptoms of this dynamic. It's time we traced these symptoms back to their source. Just as it's possible to go on addressing piecemeal the problems caused by a drug addiction without ever engaging the addiction itself, we enable the petrochemical industry's ongoing abuse of the Gulf Coast when we limit ourselves to quietly, dutifully attempting to clean up after them. Their pipelines eat into our wetlands; their toxins eat into our organs. They are the cancer in Cancer Alley, and until they are excised, no healing will be possible. A world that prioritizes human health above profit is the only cure, and it is only through collective struggle we can create this world.

**"NOT JUST THE OIL AND DISPERSANTS, BUT THE DESTRUCTION OF A WAY OF LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD IS KILLING THE PEOPLE OF THE GULF COAST"**



# Solidarity with the Popular Revolution

By: John Clark

\*\*\*\*\* The following address was delivered Feb 5, 2011, at a New Orleans rally on the \*\*\*\*\*  
*International Day of Mobilization in Solidarity with the Egyptian and Tunisian Revolutions*

We have all been moved by the courageous actions of the Egyptian people in recent weeks. In response to their inspiring example, we might ask the following question: What effective steps can we take to support their struggle for liberation, and to support similar struggles throughout the world?

There is a very easy, and very bad, response to this question. Unfortunately, it is also the one that is most popular. This response is to express our great sympathy and admiration for their struggle, and then to go on acting as we have in the past. I propose that a more constructive response would be, first, to become better educated about what has made their struggle necessary, and, next, to begin to act in ways that that will make it, and similar struggles, more likely to succeed in the future.

If we look at the actions and statements of the U.S. regime over the past days, we see the strategies of a system that has long supported dictatorship and oppression and now finds itself in an embarrassing situation. Its heart and soul are on the side of dictatorship, but its words must now be on the side of the people. It finds itself in the unenviable position of trying desperately to manipulate a difficult situation so that the interests it defends will not be compromised by the catastrophe at hand — the catastrophe of democracy breaking out.

Let's look at some of the recent statements of our rulers.

Last week, Vice President Biden said, "I hope [that] President Mubarak ... is going to respond to some of the legitimate concerns that are being raised. Mubarak has been an ally of ours in a number of things and he's been very responsible ... relative to geopolitical interests in the region. ... I would not refer to him as a dictator." Thus, as late as just over a week ago, it was still acceptable to express friendship with the dictator and to hope that a few gradual reforms would appease the Egyptian people. The following day, the senator and former Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry could still call Mubarak "a friend to the United States and a friend personally." And on the heels of this, U.S. envoy Frank Wisner could still say, "I believe that President Mubarak's continued leadership is crucial — it's his chance to write his own legacy."

Soon after, however, in the face of growing mobilization by the Egyptian people, it became

clear that at least some degree of significant change was necessary, so that the emerging official goal would be the containment and direction of that change to whatever degree possible. President Obama had reached the point of advising Mubarak that there must be "an orderly transition," though a transition to precisely what was not at all clear. We were told only that "it must be meaningful, it must be peaceful, and it must begin now."

What Obama did not, of course, mention as he pronounced these pious sentiments, was that what U.S. regimes have supported for thirty years — up to just a few days ago, when such a policy became impossible — has been the precise opposite of what he now espouses verbally. These regimes have supported not peaceful change but rather the violent enforcement of a disastrous status quo. The many billions of dollars that the U.S. government has sent to Mubarak — which is now widely known to be \$1.5 billion per year — have been primarily in military aid to keep his violent, repressive regime in power. And contrary to any ideological illusions, intimidating a people into submission through force and the threat of force is not a "peaceful" process.

As of today, the Obama administration has reached the point of expressing its support for a gradual transition of some sort under the tutelage of the dictator's handpicked vice president, Gen. Omar

## "IT IS INTOLERABLE TO LIVE IN WORLD OF MATERIAL ABUNDANCE IN WHICH A BILLION PEOPLE NEVERTHELESS LIVE IN ABSOLUTE POVERTY"

Suleiman. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton explained regarding this necessary transition, "That takes some time. There are certain things that have to be done in order to prepare." She did not define "certain things." However, we can safely assume that these "things" include finding ways of assuring that a form of "democracy" emerges that has safeguards against the will of the people diverging too radically from the will of the dominant global powers.

Secretary Clinton refused to address the question of how the necessary preparations for "democracy" relate to the question of Israel and Palestine. However, her ally, Mr. Davutoglu of Turkey commented, "It is better not to talk about Israel-Palestine now. It is better to separate these

issues." It is, however, quite obviously impossible to separate these issues. Thus, the question posed is how to read this statement in support of the impossible. The obvious reading is the following. What is "better" is that the public and the press should not inquire into how the dominant forces are planning to engineer a solution to the crisis that is compatible with the goals of the U.S. and Israeli regimes and of various allied interests, whatever the views and aspirations of the Egyptian people may be.

There are many other intriguing statements by our rulers that might be analyzed — including Senator John McCain's comparison of the movements against authoritarian regimes in the region to a "virus" that is "spreading throughout the Middle East" — but I hope that the point has been made. All of this recent history must be understood in its larger context, which includes a long history of U.S. government support for dictatorships around the world. We might refer merely to such notable examples as Francisco Franco, Ferdinand Marcos, and Suharto — one of the greatest mass-murderers of the horrifyingly genocidal 20th century. This support continues, as dictatorial conditions persist among U.S. allies including Cameroon, Turkmenistan, Equatorial Guinea, Chad, Uzbekistan, Ethiopia, and Saudi Arabia (as recently documented by Joshua Holland for AlterNet).

The conclusion we must draw from this long and consistent record is that U.S. support for dictatorships is not a historical anomaly, but rather points to something systemic about the U.S. political and economic structures. If we sympathize with the liberation struggle of the Egyptian people and others around the world, it is incumbent on us to find out what that something is and to do something about it.

So what we can do? First, we might ask who we are. As I use the term here, "we" are those who believe that it is completely intolerable to live in a world of material abundance in which a billion people nevertheless live in absolute poverty. "We" are those who believe that it is intolerable to live in a world with abundant potential for

freedom, justice and peace, while that same world is fraught with oppression, exploitation, and aggression. "We" are those who believe that it is intolerable to live in a world capable of providing for all while living in harmony with nature, but which nevertheless continues on a path to global ecological catastrophe.

What we can do is to become educated and to act. It is important that we find dependable sources of information and that we avoid dependable sources of indoctrination. Look to the alternatives to the dominant corporate media. As we come to understand the dominant political system, we begin to see how it is designed precisely to

reproduce all those injustices and irrationalities that have been mentioned. More specifically, we begin to see how it is designed to support dictatorship and oppose struggles for liberation.

Our own ruling party is quite brilliant in that, unlike that of Egypt, it has two branches. One, called the Republicans, takes the initiative in developing the trajectory of the system. It experiments with how far the limits of that system can be pushed. When this development causes too much disorder and opposition, the other branch, called the Democrats, steps in, introduces measures to restabilize the system, diffuses dissent, and then, before long, turns power back over to Republicans.

Repeatedly, we hear well-intentioned people say, "I can't believe that Obama has done X." "I can't believe that Obama has escalated the war." "I can't believe that Obama supports dictators." Et cetera, ad infinitum. There is a solution to this perplexing condition. Grow up and believe it. President Obama does exactly what he has been hired to do.

Understanding presupposes that one can finally step outside the system of domination. It means that one has become conscious of the ways in which that system has colonized not only the whole world, but also our own minds. When one understands, one can then move on to action, and will indeed feel a powerful need to act.

So what does it mean to act? To act means to organize to create another world. A world in which people will laugh when told that the way to defend "democracy" is to support dictators. A world in which people will laugh when told that a regime that refuses the majority of its people the elemental right to return to their homeland is a "democratic" regime. It means that after laughing, we will find a way out of these tragic absurdities. It means that we will find the courage to stand in the way of the genocidal, ecocidal machine, that we will finally learn how to become a collective force that blocks its advance, and that ultimately, we will change the course of history.

Today, we might say that it means not only supporting the brave people of Egypt, but following their noble example and doing the same thing here ... and everywhere.



# Occupational Hazards: The bizarre case of Dr. Victor Alexander

By: Jules Bentley

## A CLIMATE OF FEAR

It's difficult to convey just how tight a grip big oil and other chemical industries have on the neck of the Pelican state. The scope of industry control over human life here is hard to believe-- so extreme it beggars belief, so far-fetched it defies the pessimism of the gloomiest cynic.

The nickname "Cancer Alley," coined to reflect the soaring cancer rates in communities near chemical and oil refineries, gives a hint, but it's only when you start tallying for yourself some of Louisiana's staggering history of unpunished industrial wrongdoing that you begin to get a sense of how far out the reality is-- how far it is beyond reason.

From then 'til now, the song remains the same: while factories profitably poison of the air, water, and inhabitants of Louisiana, anyone seeking to hold the petrochemical industry at all accountable or answerable gets branded "anti-business" and run off, discredited or worse. To contest the interests of industry is to be crushed.

Here and now, in the wake of BP's destruction of the Gulf of Mexico, it's been hard for those sickened by the oil and dispersants to find medical help. It's been hard to find doctors who will seek, let alone admit, any link between a sufferer's symptoms and the toxins we've been exposed to. A climate of fear within the local medical community means tests that might establish what's killing us go unordered, referrals to specialists are withheld, and patterns within communities are ignored or denied.

## THE WHISPERED NAME

There are many horror stories about doctors who defied the oil industry and suffered for it. Doctors have been subjected to punitive audits and investigations, been threatened, and been shot at. Among all these, though, there is one cautionary tale in particular that seems to reverberate down through the decades.

Talking to health professionals about the human consequences of industrial pollution along the Gulf Coast, one name surfaces over and over, even if it's only mentioned in whispers. It's the name of a man who fought big oil and paid with his career, his reputation, and his freedom. It's the name of someone whom prestige and prominence would have seemed to render untouchable, the name of a crusader brought low in spectacular fashion. It's a name still invoked warningly against any medico foolish enough to seek the truth in a place where only money matters.

The whispered name is that of Dr. Victor Alexander, a renowned toxicologist and a national star in the field of occupational medicine.

In 1982, this Harvard-educated researcher went from being a senior medical official at OSHA to being the Director of Occupational Medicine at Ochsner in Jeff Parish. In 1984, he founded his own ground-breaking environmental-toxin research & testing company in New Orleans' CBD, a company that made him over \$100k a year.

In May 1985, the FBI arrested Dr. Alexander and charged him with a \$2600 hold-up of a Canal St. bank.

## WHY OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE MATTERS

Occupational medicine, Dr. Alexander's specialty, is the crucial branch of medical practice that builds links between workplace hazards and the health problems of workers. If one in three employees who work with carcinogenic materials in a Norco refinery get thyroid cancer, or the rate of miscarriage among people living within 5 miles of the refinery is 20 times the national average, you might be surprised how difficult it is to connect these health effects to the refinery's carcinogens in a study that will convince government regulators. As we've seen in the wake of the BP disaster, the petrochemical industry itself likes to hire these occupational medicine experts. It buys doctors up wholesale, and they churn out proof of industrial harmlessness as fast as their paychecks can carry them.

For the few who don't accept industry money, establishing causality between the toxins and the toxified requires careful and thorough documentation. It requires sustained, long-term engagement with the affected people, all done in direct and unconcealable opposition to South Louisiana's biggest power brokers: industry itself, the government toadies industry has purchased, and local media who prefer to print government and industry statements as unchallenged fact.

Dr. Alexander was prominent in his field and earned a reputation as someone unafraid to oppose and expose big business. Throughout the early 1980s Dr. Alexander's name surfaces time and again within national media, as an expert witness on behalf of poisoned workers suing their unsafe employers, as an authority on brain cancer in petrochemical workers, and as a contributor of articles to scientific journals on the dangers of industrial carcinogens. He was most visible as a public-health specialist in South Louisiana newspapers, where he provided quotes about how pesticides end up in breakfast cereals or why employees of an Exxon plant had such astronomical miscarriage rates.

As head of Occupational Medicine at Ochsner, Alexander worked to make information on workplace deaths and injuries more readily available, conducted free seminars for the public on the links between workplace carcinogens and cancer, and advocated for better mandatory disclosure laws for employers who expose their workers to dangerous chemicals. He also authored numerous papers proving his findings with hard data. Between 1985 to 1990, however, there's a gap in Dr. Alexander's history of professional accomplishment, a gap accounted for by prison.

## THE HOMESTEAD HEISTS

710 Canal St., once a high-end menswear store where Huey Long bought his pajamas, now host to another Motwani-owned tourist junk shop, was in 1985 a branch of the Central Savings & Loan Association. That particular branch was robbed four times between May and July 1985, a strikingly eventful quarter given that there were only 56 total bank robberies among the state of Louisiana's 700 or so banks that year.

A lot was odd about the robbery Dr. Alexander was accused of committing. It wasn't just one of four robberies in a three-month period; it was one of two in two days. The robbery pinned on Alexander took place Tuesday, May 21st, less than 24 hours after another robbery at the same branch. The Monday robber, according to the FBI, was a Florida man who'd just flown into town and was staying at a local hotel, and who robbed the bank on his way to catch a flight out to Dallas.

Why would Dr. Alexander, a man with an absolutely clean criminal record, a man who made over \$100k a year, spend his lunch break robbing a bank? It's true his toxicology firm's offices at Canal Place One weren't far from the bank branch. There's also no doubt the robber shown in surveillance photos bore some physical resemblance to Dr. Alexander. Both were big, bearded brunette white dudes, although side-by-side photographs make clear differences in build, facial features, general girth and even finger length. Dr. Alexander's legal defense team was eager to bring up these differences via a host of photo identification experts, including former FBI criminal identification analysts, but they weren't permitted to call these experts during trial.

The robber had been given a dye pack which would have permanently stained his briefcase, clothing and skin, yet Dr. Alexander, arrested three days after the robbery on an anonymous tip, had no dye stains anywhere to be found. In fact, no physical evidence whatsoever was found linking Dr. Alexander to the crime. Based on such shoddy "proof"-- a grainy surveillance photo and the changing testimony of a couple eyewitnesses-- it's safe to say that if Dr.



Alexander had been a Dow refinery and the bank had been a small Louisiana town, he'd have gone free no problem.

Although he allegedly needed \$2600 badly enough to commit a broad daylight bank robbery, Dr. Alexander had no problem immediately posting a \$500,000 appeal bond while his lawyers took the case over to the Fifth Circuit on Camp St. The Fifth Circuit didn't like what they saw, and in April '85, Dr. Alexander's conviction was thrown out, due in part to the exclusion of the expert witnesses. According to the official finding of the Court of Appeals, "Review of the record reveals that the prosecution's case against Dr. Alexander mainly consisted of an in-depth recitation of his sloppy bookkeeping procedures and his habit of visiting night clubs featuring exotic dancers."

The feds weren't done with Alexander, however. They retried him, re-convicted him, again without the testimony of the defense photo experts, and his appeal of that conviction was turned down. He served out a 3-year sentence in federal prison, spending a good part of that time filing papers in a battle to retain his medical license.

## THE MESSAGE

Dr. Alexander went directly back to work after his release, co-writing a study demonstrating the increased probability in brain tumors for employees of nuclear plants. He has changed the name he publishes under and moved away from New Orleans, but he remains active on the national scene, publishing papers in the journal of Occupational Medicine and testifying before the EPA about regulation of airborne pollutants. Dr. Alexander wasn't defeated, but our region lost a crucial ally in its struggle against industrial death. What might Dr. Alexander have had to say in the wake of the BP disaster? What additional resources might he have been able to bring to bear if he hadn't been run out of South Louisiana?

Whatever one thinks of the fishy convictions Dr. Alexander was subjected to, there's no doubt that the a message was sent, loud enough to resonate across the years: Dr. Alexander's case and his fate are still discussed today. Michael R. Harbut, MD, MPH, a former chairman of the American College of Chest Physicians' Occupation and Environmental Medicine section, spoke of the

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For a version of this article featuring full citations, visit [ragingpelican.com](http://ragingpelican.com)

# Occupied Territory

By: Some anarchists from the Milneburg Hall occupation

In the still hours before dawn on September 1st, 2010, hidden from patrolling UNO police by a cover of darkness, we trudged in disjointed groups across the campus of the University of New Orleans. As our small band crouched behind the shrubbery lining the Milneburg Hall, a comrades emerged from overnight hideout in the building's computer lab to grant us free reign over our new dominion.

And so began the first phase of our plan of action.

Once inside the large, multi-story classroom building, we set about collecting large objects with which we could secure all four sets of ground-floor doors. Hauling tables and desks from nearby, and even from the second floor using the elevator, we employed a makeshift barricade in front of the doors. With a table laid sideways across the door jamb, the idea was to then tie the handle to the table, effectively rendering the door unusable from not only the inside, but more importantly from any outside tugging.

This, however, required some wrangling. If the cops could tug even an inch of leeway, they would be able-- in theory-- to cut the rope of the truck tie-downs and pull the door open. Now, we all know cops are not the sharpest tools in the shed, but we weren't taking any chances. In retrospect, considering none of us had ever before fortified a barricade, a dry-run would have probably proved a good idea. As the nighttime UNO police car made the rounds in the distance, we fought with the first door for more than 20 precious minutes, to no avail. We soon realized that the step-by-step instructions for locking down this particular kind of door in our manual, "Occupation: A DIY Guide", was essentially inaccurate, and we would need to pioneer a new method.

After many flustered minutes at a loss for how to proceed, we finally developed a technique. A couple of us wedged the table just beneath the doors' push bars, as Mouse and Apoc dutifully wrapped the truck tie-downs around and around the bar's frame, then clamped the tie-downs as tightly as possible around the table until it wouldn't budge. One push on the door, and it was clear we had successfully sealed off that entrance. With this initial lockdown complete, it didn't take long to repeat the process on the rest of the doors.

A light began to rise out of the dark sky as we barricaded the last of the doors. And timing was critical: only minutes after we were confident the building was ours, a janitor strolled up to begin his workday, a little before 6 am. To make our intentions clear and waylay any confusion, we

had taped handwritten signs to the glass doors reading, "THIS IS A STUDENT OCCUPATION IN PROTEST OF THE BUDGET CUTS." If not supportive, he at least showed no hostility toward us. After all, the janitors were being laid off due to these very budget cuts. Before he shuffled away, Morpheus asked, "If you could not tell the cops for another 30 minutes or so, that would be really helpful." Media press releases would be sent off within the hour, and we were counting on the arrival of students to offer support lest the cops break in prematurely and arrest us.

The UNO PD did grow privy to our operation soon enough, however. They first tried unlocking the doors, followed by more forceful tugging. When both failed (success!), they focused their efforts on wearing down the human element. "Open the door, man," a lone cop pleaded to Morpheus, whose face was partially covered by a bandana. "We need to talk about this."

"We can talk through the glass," Morpheus replied.

"You guys need to open this door, or they're gonna call the SWAT to break in. It's gon' be bad, man."

"Students have been doing actions like this all over California--"

"This is not California, man!" He was emphatic. "They gon' tear gas this building, send their dogs in, and arrest all y'all! This is a felony offense. It's gon' be bad, man. I'm beggin' you. This is your future, man." He even offered to come in alone and unarmed if we opened the door! Regrouping on the second floor minutes later, we weighed the possibility of the threats of the UNO

## "WE IMAGINED SEPTEMBER 1ST WOULD SPARK A CONFLICT THAT WOULD ROCK THE LSU ADMINISTRATION'S RANKS"

PD, while fiendishly texting comrades to offer ground support as soon as possible. Although well versed in the manipulative, fear-inducing tactics employed by the cops, the New Orleans police are particularly volatile, and we discussed the implications of the SWAT team being called.

Well, for the time being, the university building we held was our autonomous zone, and whatever consequences arose from our actions, we were all in it together. If only for a few hours, we were warriors, brave and free. Imminent arrest may have lay just ahead, but victory is in every step of

a process, even the attempt. So we celebrated--with ice cream sandwiches and soymilk from the teacher's lounge!

Two weeks earlier, in response to the severity of the budget cuts being steadily implemented since the Wall Street financial crisis of 2008, we decided the 2010 school year needed to be brought in with a bang. A call was put out to students and local activists for a walk out of all classes on the morning of September 1st to demand the UNO administration cease conceding to the needs of a capitalism in crisis at the expense of their students, faculty, and staff.

Two student organizers approached the members of the Save UNO Coalition, the primary organizing body on campus against the cuts, to entreat their support for the planned walk out. Save UNO was less than enthusiastic, however.

This group was comprised of the faculty who studied social struggle for a living. They paid lip service to the tactics of civil disobedience used during the Civil Rights movement, but what of this new student struggle, not yet analyzed or deemed worthy for the annals of academic Leftism? In the face of a university in shambles--with janitors being laid off, with their own jobs in jeopardy, with whole majors and departments going the way of the dinosaur-- the Save UNO "coalition" denounced our confrontational plan for a student strike as "ill-timed." They preferred a course of action not contingent upon consistent conflict, but rather, through less protest-oriented events in hopes of gaining support from the commuter-campus masses before any bigger demonstration could be staged. After shelving

the notion of supporting us and thirty minutes of meeting time spent discussing when their next meeting would be, someone unaffiliated with our group piped up, "So what are we meeting about?"

At this, members of Save UNO quickly decided on plans for a massive protest...in March, six whole months away! Better, we decided, to act now; even if it alienated a portion of the student body, we could at least connect with those ready to fight to reverse the spiral down which the university was headed as a result of capitalist injustice. Why wait?!



Despite being deflated by our purported allies refusing to lend support, we resolved to organize popular support ourselves in the two weeks leading up. Undeterred, we went ahead with our plans...

We also had a trick up our sleeve. Though busy enough preparing for the scheduled walk-out, we knew the element of surprise could capture the attention of both the students and administration like none other. Inspired by the budding student-occupation movement in New York and California, where students by the dozens seized buildings in protest of budget cuts, we too decided such a subversive measure was in order for UNO. An action that would shatter the passivity of symbolic protest, physically empowering the strikers: a takeover of Milneburg Hall!

A few of us would enter in the night, lock down the Social Sciences building, and cause an uproar on campus, thus gaining more support for the scheduled walk-out later that morning; then, once a critical mass had assembled outside, we would open a door to flood Milneburg Hall with students for an "open occupation," with us initial occupiers blending in with the surging mass. And then we'd throw a dance party!

But all didn't go according to plan...

"This building is under the occupation of its students! Who dat?!" yelled Trinity through the megaphone out the window of the third floor to a cluster of excited students below. We had decorated the chalk boards with slogans reading "Class Cuts? Class War!" and "Occupy

Everything!" as we ran wildly through the halls. Meanwhile, a fearless Dozer climbed out the window onto the ledge of the building's facade to, like the besieging of a castle, unfurl our three banners proclaiming our platform: "OCCUPY. STRIKE. RESIST."

"Don't do that, man," the cop from earlier advised, while Dozer tied the corner of first banner to the cement column. "Don't go around that, man," he continued, as Dozer slipped around the column to the next ledge, the crowd looking on from below. At this point, such pleading was a consolation for the cops who held absolutely no power over the unwieldy situation. But with more people arriving by the minute, and calls pouring in from reporters trying to confirm the building occupation, it was all the UNO PD could do to keep the media frenzy at bay, as they told them that reports of a student uprising were all false.

So far all was going according to plan. We were biding our time as the hour of the scheduled walk-out loomed closer and closer, and more assembled outside Milneburg. A few of our comrades outside were in the midst of riling up students in anticipation for what was to come. If we held one aspiration for our action it was enticing the student body to join in, escalating the fight, and leveraging our collective power. At 10am, we would relinquish a barricade and bring our occupation zone from a modest few up to more than a hundred! A full-blown open occupation to fracture the violent continuum of "business as usual" calmly overseeing UNO's deterioration.

But at approximately 9am, things went horribly awry.

"They're in!" yelled Tank, who had been on ground-floor watch. Unfortunately, we had missed a detail in our late-night reconnaissance: a partially open ground floor window on the side of the building. Next thing we knew, like the Sentinels breaching the hull of the Nebuchadnezzar, a squadron of cops flooded our rebel fortress through an interior door off to the side, drawing guns and even placing one of our number in handcuffs! As we frantically called to one another, the cops followed closely behind.

The UNO police chief suddenly broke in to order his goons to put their guns away and unlock the handcuffs. As we followed him downstairs, he said he wished to negotiate with us. We saw police lining the foyer, one of wooden folding tables split in half in their efforts to unlock the door, as spectators squinted into the glass. At this point we knew the jig was up and were positive we were getting a free ride to Orleans Parish Prison. Though suspicious, we agreed to "negotiate."

We were led into an auditorium, and Chief Harrington ordered the other cops from the room. After calling in the university provost, Joe King, what commenced was a half-hour meeting, videotaped by one of the occupiers (which can be viewed on YouTube under "UNO Occupier Speak to Provost Joe King"). The meeting was essentially useless, but one piece of information we learned was that not only was UNO PD bluffing on their threats to call upon the forces of the SWAT team, they were incredibly relieved to not have had to resort to such a measure, as it would have proved highly unfavorable to the image of the university. Thus, we held more leverage than we had first thought. When Chief





Harrington chided us (quite humorously, we might add) not to use bandanas in the future to conceal our faces because it is “an anarchy sign,” one of us retorted, “Well, we weren’t necessarily planning on getting arrested.” Although the day’s events were surreal enough, the chief’s next statement came as the greatest shock of all: Not only did he harbor no intentions to arrest us, but he wanted to help us with the scheduled walk-out!

Chief Harrington assured us he supported our efforts and even implored us: “Next time you plan to do something like this, please let me know ahead of time...”

“You would let us barricade the building?” someone off camera asks dubiously.

“Oh, sure, I don’t care,” he claims. If this wasn’t bizarre enough, Harrington then went so far as to offer to set up a sound system for us in the nearby amphitheater for the strike!

In a surprise turn of events, we walked from Milneburg Hall not in handcuffs but with fists raised, into the triumphant cheers of supporters! We took an hour to regroup ourselves before the walk-out commenced. Our still-born occupation may have been thwarted, but there was still hope for a strong strike. At 10 am 200 students skipped class to gather in the quad. In the distance hung a banner, dropped guerilla-style days earlier, reading “Become the crisis. Strike against the

budget cuts” off the side of the Liberal Arts building. Students who felt the urge took the megaphone to voice their opposition to the tuition hikes, class and graduate program cuts, the limited entrance scholarships and the laying off of faculty. Students pointed out that Louisiana is 48th in education in the nation, and how this further scourge on higher education will only exacerbate crime and poverty in New Orleans. How the state spends more on incarceration than it does on education. How those at the top of the pyramid still make their six-figure incomes while janitors, given only crumbs to begin with, are being laid off.

The unpermitted rally was obliged to move from the quad to the amphitheater in order to appease the police. As we migrated across the campus, the crowd decided that a quick detour through the administrative building was appropriate. Thus, students could tell the chancellor directly how they felt. A protest out in the quad is easy to ignore; inside his office... Not likely!

Without any leaders or formal organizing body, the students had taken it upon themselves to disrupt the university. As we approached the Admin building, a lone, bone-headed officer stood sentry at one of the glass doors and attempted to block the path. To no avail: the crowd simply opened the adjacent door and strode past! A sense of accomplishment possessed us as our chants reverberated through the halls. When the

kids up front began to gridlock the stairwell, a quick consensus was reached. “Up the stairs!” they yelled.

Wall to wall with banners and bodies, the crowd snaked its way through the hallways, cheered on by the excited secretaries. Then out came the goons to spoil our fun. “We’d like to speak with the chancellor,” one of us piped up to the clustered line of cops suddenly blocking the way. “He’s not in” is all the answer we received. Just then our “buddy” Harrington gave his dogs the order to “clear the building,” and a few cops unleashed their batons and began swatting at the large group. In their lashing buffoonery, a club made contact with a dispersing student’s calf.

The confused student who’d been struck turned around to face his assaulter—only to be pounced upon by multiple cops! Another student was attacked and pepper-sprayed for simply taking out his camera phone! Apparently, the cops wished no outside eyes to witness their brutality. But witness it they did: in the stairwell, as captured by WWL-TV, Harrington can be seen blustering down the stairs like a mall cop who’s suddenly found himself doing security detail in Tahrir Square. The police aggression culminated in Harrington dragging a student along with him in a headlock. A chorus of “Let him go!” resounded from the throng of students, as Harrington and his men fruitlessly fought to maintain order.

It doesn’t take much for a New Orleanian to decide the police have gotten out of line, and students were quick to discard the cops’ claims to authority, quickly “unarresting” their beleaguered classmate from Harrington’s clutches. Anarchy, it appeared, was upon us! As word spread that a comrade had been pepper-sprayed, the crowd enfolded the cops who were dragging the poor distraught soul in handcuffs away to a squad car. “I was attacked!” he screamed to the protestors and to the cameras. Only after his girlfriend insisted he be led away for medical treatment (and inevitably, jail) was the police car allowed passage. All in all, two were arrested by the end of the afternoon.

That night Chief Harrington was all over the news, laying it on real thick for the cameras before being carted away on a stretcher. Watching the news footage one begins to wonder whether the chief shouldn’t have pursued a more respectable career in soap opera: “He punched me in the ribs,” he says, dramatically panting and dabbing his forehead. “Then he pushed me down the stairs and...” (painful sigh) “...that’s when I twisted my ankle.” But reactionary press came as no surprise and made little difference to us. Even if spectators believed the pathologically dishonest New Orleans police and thought the students had initiated the violence that day, it succeeded in demonstrating students were willing to fight against the budget cuts-- and indeed, had already begun!

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 We imagined that September 1st would spark a conflict that would rock the LSU administration’s ranks like the revolutions crumbling the imperialist regimes of the Maghreb. And in some small way, perhaps it did. Just weeks after the protest, UNO’s Chancellor, Timothy Ryan, was fired, along with much of his bloated administration, presumably for their incompetence in handling the unrest on campus. Tim sympathizers rest assured; Mr. Ryan was virtually never on campus anyway (at least one thing the cops said that day was true:

## "AS WORD SPREAD THAT A COMRADE HAD BEEN PEPPER-SPRAYED, THE CROWD ENFOLDED THE COPS"

he really wasn’t in his office during the rally!); thus, his removal probably wasn’t too drastic a transition.

It soon became clear, however, that Tim’s firing signified not a reform of the university but a measure to tighten control over it. John Lombardi, LSU system president, promptly usurped the position of Chancellor. While Tim Ryan was a crook getting rich off his administrator’s salary, he was merely another dirty Louisiana politician. Lombardi, on the other hand, is a foreign invader, a truly reviled autocrat notorious for the continued condemnation of the public Charity Hospital and the destruction of hundreds of

homes in Lower Mid City to pave the way for LSU’s new, upper-end medical facility. In a news story, a UNO student confronts Lombardi on his newly conquered campus, asking if he would be willing to take a cut from his 600K salary. Lombardi, in his cream-colored suit, impudently sips his diet coke, then turns around and walks away without answering the question. Incidents of tudents calling Lombardi out like this during his infrequent visits to UNO campus have not been uncommon, and hundreds of wheat-pasted posters picturing Lombardi with the ironic caption, “Outside Agitator,” adorn UNO buildings.

Yet, despite the rumblings of revolt, the forces of repression and co-optation proved too strong for another uprising; the momentum ultimately dissipated. Now that the ball had begun rolling, the Save UNO coalition, in an effort to capture the movement, moved their tentatively planned protest in Baton Rouge from March up to November. So began the campaign of bake sales and efforts to bolster public image that drive the movement into the ground with boredom. Try as we might to organize with the Save UNO leftists, we were instead treated as a threat to their efforts. Rather than merely ignoring our actions as they did for the September 1st action, they swiftly sought to veto our every move, chiding us on how we would destroy their campaign if we planned another strike. Though our body of rebels had nearly tripled since the first week of school, we were demoralized by the “legitimate” organizing body actively obscuring us. At a large public meeting announcing plans for their rally in Baton Rouge, Save UNO feigned ignorance as numerous people inquired about what the organizers of September 1st were planning next. For another of their events, a “block party” put on to garner further support for the Baton Rouge protest, we were bluntly told that we were not allowed to come and hand out fliers.

The deplorable block party incident made clear that Save UNO wanted nothing more than for us to disappear and leave all the organizing to

them. The pitiful event itself, however, gave a clear indication of the efficacy of their tactics. There were practically more undercover cops snapping pictures than there were students, as local politically-conscious rapper Truth Universal and his crew serenaded an all-but-empty amphitheater.

But repression was not only coming from the left. In the fall-out of September 1st, as we scrambled to build support for the initial arrestees, three additional students were arrested at their homes three weeks later by the SWAT team! Abandoned by Save UNO and condemned as the initiators of violence by cowardly professors, public support

was scarce. Fortunately the radical scene outside of campus is mighty, and we managed to raise over \$500 for legal fees by throwing punk shows. As of this writing, all the arrested students have accepted decent plea deals, reducing their felonies to lighter misdemeanors. But taking these pleas was not at all ideal. Considering the damning footage of police aggression, their cases would have made for promising trials; yet because they possessed little public support, there was no hope for a political defense.

As for the rally in Baton Rouge, we couldn’t have been more opposed. It wasn’t only the contrived feeling of holding an event organized entirely by professors, cops and administrators that was the problem, though after the vivid events that transpired on September 1st this symbolic protest was indeed hard to stomach. We were opposed because we recognized this liberal tactic for what it was: by diverting our attention to higher authorities, they were removing the immediacy of the struggle on campus. Thus the issue became abstract once again, reinstating apathy. Much like the Sacramento protest pushed through by socialist groups at the end of the California university movement, Baton Rouge signified a forced climax to a struggle that still had much left to accomplish. In fact since the rally there hasn’t been a single challenge to the cuts that we can think of.

To conclude, we’ve decided to go ahead and humor that one cynical question impugning every social struggle: “Did it accomplish anything?” Our answer is, of course it did! It wasn’t the “rev,” sure. But does the painter simply pick up the brush and produce her masterpiece with one flourish of inspiration? Would we malign an orchestra for failing to perform a symphony after only the first rehearsal? Well, fomenting social struggle surpasses even these two monumental pursuits: for we must paint the canvas with sweat and blood; we must painstakingly arrange every instrument based on each musician’s talents to create a subversive form! We certainly wished to invoke the spirit of May ‘68-- nay, the spirit of Greece 08-- for occupations to spread throughout the University, for the students to take to the streets, shutting down business sectors and halting the orderly function of progress. We lament our humble actions did not segue into open revolt in solidarity with burdened workers, the people along the devastated coast, and other Louisianans marginalized by capitalism. But remember: it only takes a few initial sparks to ignite the fuse. And our recent adventures have provided us ample practice to hone our skills in this game of social war. Like we said before, victory is in the attempt too, and considering the upheavals looming ahead, we’re looking forward to many more victories...

# Where Y'ATS?

By: le petit gateau

*“Laws are spider webs through which the big flies pass and the little ones get caught”*

Originally when I was working on this article I passed my first draft through the hands of one of the Pelican staff and received a look of discomfort. The reason for this is in briefly mentioning the famous case of Liebeck vs. McDonalds (the hot coffee lawsuit), I had declared the case a “ridiculous lawsuit that is so goddam American”. What I did not know of this case is that Ms. Liebeck had received third degree burns on her inner thighs, perineum, buttocks, including genital and groin areas. It was more than a simple scalding that the media had portrayed. McDonalds tried to give her a measly \$800 dollars when she complained to their headquarters. So in the end, unable to cover the medical costs, she got a lawyer and won a case that shocked the nation.

My initially problematic opinion of the case can be attributed to the media coverage I received when I was younger, but also to my own experience. Ever since I was younger, suing seemed an American form of lotto where people try to win big by taking another party to court. I still remember when I was growing up a friend's family was being sued by another family whose son, Clint, had broken a leg on my friend's property. My friend's family had left a recently-dug hole unattended until the local nursery delivered a tree whose home was to be that very hole. In the end, my friend's family lost and was forced to pay a large sum to the complainants.

In a case such as this, I always thought the reasonable logic was that everyone is liable for the placement of their own feet. This boy Clint, who broke his leg, was known by us kids to always carry a slingshot from which he would fire crabapples at us while he ran around like a banshee all over the neighborhood in some self-proclaimed black-ops mission. It was hard to take sides with such a bully, but in the following essay, I've taken a closer look at bullies that would put Clint to shame, and they are not individuals at all, they are corporations.

Corporations are held accountable for defective products or practices by tort laws. Tort laws are important legislative measures. Simply put, tort laws are liability lawsuits, which can allow individuals to bring corporations to court for wrongdoing and hold them accountable to the law. Tort reform, or “tort deform” as one politician dubbed it, has been at the front burners of debate for many years now. From fast-food chains to the nation's pharmaceutical companies, corporations have spent millions of dollars towards weakening tort laws in order to escape liability lawsuits, one of their biggest fears.

For example, a new ruling passed this year has made it harder for foreign plaintiffs to hold corporations liable for their misdeeds. Residents of Niger Delta suing Royal Dutch Shell must now resubmit their lawsuit to not target Royal Dutch Shell at all. It was tort law which allowed Stella Liebeck to be awarded over two million

dollars from McDonalds on the grounds that her coffee was too hot and was the reason for her injuries (Liebeck vs McDonalds). Under tort law, there are many meritorious lawsuits that have been brought against corporations to challenge their power (see Doe v. Unical; Bowoto v Chevron; etc.).

On September 17, 2010, during the trial of Kiobel (one of the Ogoni Nine) vs. Royal Dutch Shell, the US 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Alien Tort Statute (ATS), the statute which allows foreigners to bring human rights violations to the United State's judiciary, can no longer be used in suits against corporations. Corporations were declared exempt from the statute on the grounds that it is intended only for suits brought against individuals, not abstract entities. The Alien Tort Statute has been in place for over two centuries, and prior to the September 17th ruling, the ATS had allowed foreigners such as

a group of Nigerian plaintiffs who sued Chevron and a group of Colombian plaintiffs who sued Drummond to file claims of human rights abuses against their corporate oppressors (although the corporations won in both of these cases). The September 17th ATS ruling appears to be in reaction to the June 8th, 2009 victory of the Saro-Wiwa Family against Royal Dutch Shell, a case which ended with Shell paying 15.5 million dollars to the victim's family in order to settle out of court.

The Saro-Wiwa Family vs. Royal Dutch Shell lawsuit began in 1996 when the Center for Constitutional Rights picked up the case brought against the corporation and the CEO of Shell Nigeria, Brian Anderson. The charges filed against Shell and Anderson detailed a series of human rights violations including murder, torture, false arrest and numerous assaults on the Ogoni way of life. Ken Saro-Wiwa was an activist, author and playwright who, thanks to the influence of Royal Dutch Shell in collaboration with General Sari Abacha's military dictatorship, was hanged in November 2005. Saro-Wiwa was one of the Ogoni Nine, which included Barinem Kiobel (refer to Kiobel vs. Royal Dutch Shell above). All of the Ogoni Nine were harsh critics of the oil extraction taking place on their ancestral lands, extraction which was ruining the population's way of life and environment. For 12 years, from 1996 until May 2009, Shell badgered the courts not to review the charges brought by the Saro-Wiwa family, but on the 26th of May, 2009, the voices of the Ogoni people were heard. In less than two weeks, the threatened beast of capitalism settled out of court, all while maintaining its denial of any wrongdoing.

This victory, while it may have thrown light on some of the downtrodden of late capitalism, has also carried a shadow: the exploited classes cannot be victors in the rigid caste system set up by the global economy. Just as corporations had begun to shake in their boots, the powers that maintain capital found a way to make sure it would never

happen again. Now, under the September 17th ATS ruling, others of the Ogoni Nine such as the Kiobel family must resubmit their lawsuits as not against corporations at all. They'll have to try and implicate a specific individual, limiting their cases and making them harder to prove.

The September 17th ATS ruling handed down by the 2nd Circuit Court was based on the fact that corporate liability is not a practice carried out by international law. This corporate amnesty practice was structured under the London Charter, which led the Nuremberg Tribunal after the close of the second world war. During these trials, corporations which assisted the SS and Nazis were excluded from the tribunal on the grounds that only individuals could be held accountable and not “abstract entities.” One example is the case of IG Farben, now Bayer, which used Jewish labor in Auschwitz to produce Zyklon B, the “pesticide” used in the gas chambers. Thirteen individuals were prosecuted during the trial, but the corporation itself was not held accountable.

As a side note, upon military victory most expansionist nations will excuse the war crimes of the defeated nation in order to hide the crimes of the victor. The Allied nations, for instance, did not prosecute the Axis nations for the castration and sterilization of targeted human populations because the United States was at the height of its own Eugenics movement. For more information, look into the Tribe of Ishmael and the Indiana Plan.

Back in the present day, the American public resides in a country where lobbying and special interests play into both lawmaking and policy. Lawsuits are becoming a one-sided affair in which people are having a harder time holding corporations and government agencies-- such as the NOPD-- accountable, while the U.S. government and corporations are bringing more frequent lawsuits against citizens, for example the suits brought against protesters and activists (Detroit, Oakland, G20, etc.) or farmers (by Monsanto and Cargill). These court cases can consume so much time and money that an average citizen is often forced to settle out of court whether or not there was any legitimate offense. Of course, if a defendant is found guilty, it is becoming more likely that his or her prison will be owned and maintained by a corporation, and that inmates will be used for profit, packing and processing for Starfucks, Victoria's Secret, Chevron, IBM, Texas Instruments, Microsoft, or many others.

## **“IF THE ATS DISMISSED CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY ABROAD, HOW LONG BEFORE SOMETHING SIMILAR IS DONE FOR DOMESTIC LAWSUITS?”**

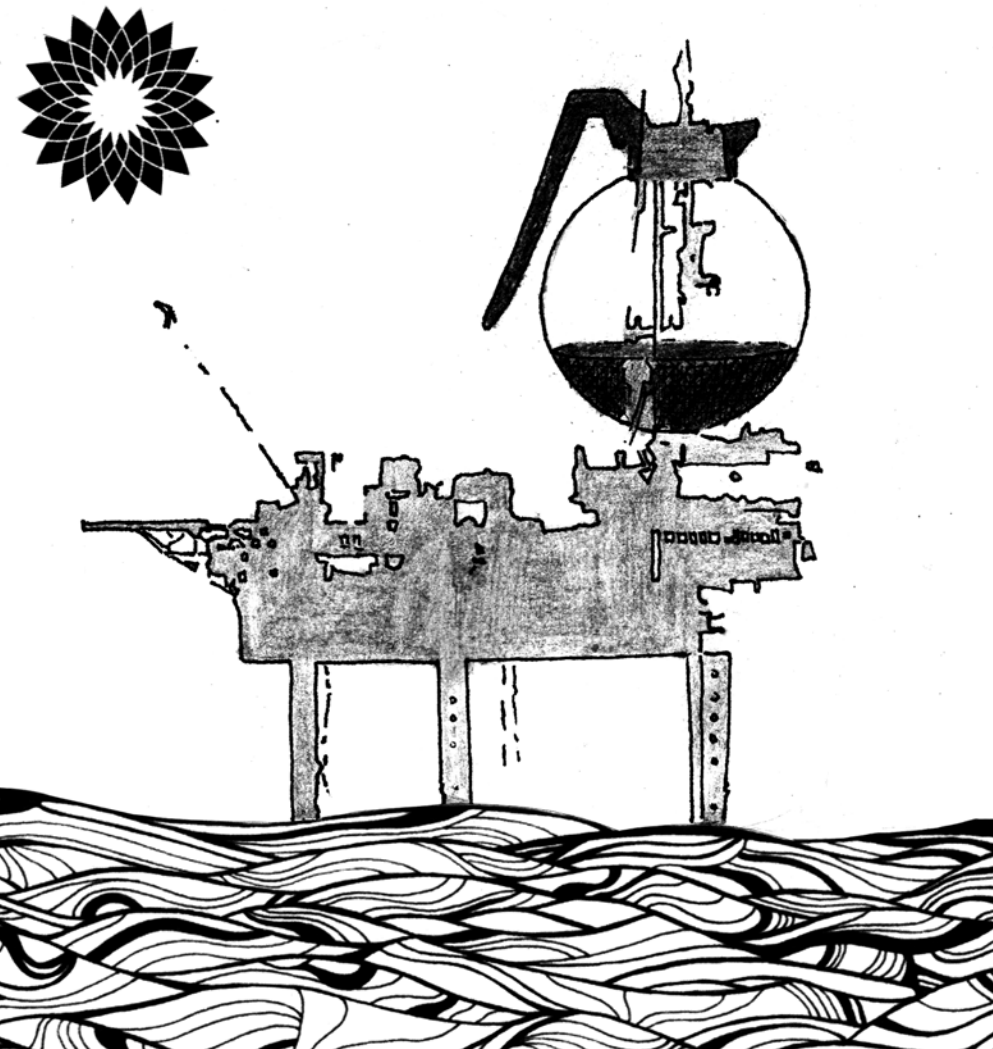
Not only are citizens at risk in their own homes due to foreclosures, but they are also at risk at their jobs where corporate liability seems miniscule. Additionally, the residents of the Gulf Coast are threatened by their own air, water, land, and food, due to corporate negligence and government acquiescence. If the ATS dismissed corporate accountability abroad, how long before something similar is done for domestic lawsuits? Will the next BP (big problem) receive corporate amnesty instead of being held culpable under liability tort laws? Is this what tort reform is pushing towards?

Recently, I was talking to a local on a fishing pier in Navarre, Florida, which still shows signs of the oil spill with a littering of tarballs. He was telling me about his good friend who fishes mullet for a living. The fisherman received a hundred thousand dollar settlement from BP for his losses. So, I asked him, “What has the damage been like? How's the fishing now?”

He said, “Well, it seems to be picking up, but there's a lot even the fisherman can't see.” He paused. “Probably gonna be long-term damage.”

I thought of people in the food service industry who have received, or are waiting for, payments from BP. “So, BP is giving short-term money for long-term damage?”

The Florida local laughed. “Yeah, they're smart.”





# A Radical New Orleans: Why Here? Why Now?

By: Veda Kaye

Building a movement requires shifting emotions, not just spreading facts. The facts are clear enough: our schools are no longer educating our children, our economy no longer provides good jobs for those who need them, our planet is being destroyed, our government serves corporations, not citizens, our criminal justice system is racist and corrupt, and the current adult population of America is the most drug addicted, medicated, depressed generation ever. It's easy for people to admit things are bad. It's difficult to get them to believe there's something meaningful they could do to accelerate change.

This is not to discount the many people who work hard everyday. Organizations that function as non-hierarchical, consensus based enterprises are springing up all around the country and filling essential needs within their communities. New Orleans is no different. The NOLA Free School Network, the Really Really Free Market, the New Orleans Restaurant Opportunities Center, Books 2 Prisoners, the Congress of Day Laborers, the Catholic Worker house and this newspaper are all examples. They give the people involved glimpses of what our community could be if people took radical ideals seriously.

At times, the intensity of organizing these projects can prevent discussion of larger goals. But what else would drive someone to sit in conversation about three sentences for four hours? It takes conviction that this counter-culture could grow. It takes belief that these rough sketches of a future community are making progress towards the society we dream about. And it takes a faith that such meager contributions can actually have an effect on all those terrifying, heart breaking facts.

But this faith is fragile. Without results and growth, these small scale projects won't last. It is not one thing that makes a movement grow or die. But dedication to expanding the reach of these programs is an essential aspect of survival. This points to a challenge for radical organizers. After all, it's relatively easy to recruit those who are already invested in radical values. It's difficult to build bridges with other communities that may share interests but have extremely different ideals. If a radical society is to flourish, it will need to put down roots. It will need to reach across class, race, culture to become infused with a community's way of life. New Orleans should be that place.

To start, New Orleanians have long been aware of how dysfunctional government can be. While the world watched in awe at the ridiculous behavior of the federal, state and city government post-Katrina, most natives weren't surprised. Citizens had put up with a crumbling infrastructure, rampant crime, corrupt politicians, corrupt police, and failing schools for years. Corrupt politics has such a long history people here are almost completely numb to it. Many citizens hold politicians to the same standards they would hold their own uncles. Nepotism is not seen as a negative-- of course politicians are going to hire their family, "that's what I would do." New Orleanians have trouble rousing the anger necessary to shun buffoons like Renee Gill Pratt. Luckily, radicals have enough anger to go around. We need to be shouting and demonstrating, and plan direct non-violent actions so that citizens can start to see the difference between justified anger and the vindictive rage that is played out in the streets.

New Orleans is also uniquely suited to radical economic projects. Unlike many American metropolitan areas, New Orleanians often reject corporate businesses. When I was in 6th grade, a Starbucks moved next door to our beloved Maple St. PJ's. All of my classmates and I boycotted it for years in favor of the local chain. New Orleanians are ingrained with a preference for what's local, what's traditional, what's human. It's the reason things like Mr. Okra and Haase's shoe store can exist while the rest of the country builds more Wal-Marts.

## "DESPITE THE UNPRECEDENTED CHANGES OF THE PAST FEW YEARS, MANY OF THE OLD PROBLEMS ARE NOT BEING SOLVED"

Even investors in New Orleans aren't always rational with their investments. There are countless rich patrons who throw money away to keep New Orleans institutions alive, the Prytania theatre being one example. They do this because they care so passionately about New Orleans' existence as a unique cultural wonder. If we can effectively draw the connection between corporate exploitation and New Orleans' eventual demise, perhaps we can galvanize upper-middle-class support for radical economic projects.

Plus, New Orleans culture values community, creativity, and celebration over ambition and monetary success. Our primary industry, tourism, would seem to allow those involved to enjoy New Orleans' many wonderful celebrations. But in actuality, employees end up missing a lot of them because they have to work for the tourists that come to enjoy the fun. The tourism industry relies on its workers having a positive view of the city. This adds to the pervasive denial among citizens of just how horribly the city is being governed. The structure of the tourism industry is exploitative and oppressive for all who are involved. Individuals have to balance the demands of their managers with the demands of their customers, forced to please both as their salaries are often caught in the middle. These New Orleanians believe in "live and let live" and stay in the city because they love it. But they aren't actually getting to taste the kind of freedom that New Orleans suggests because they are trapped within the tourism economy. We should push for organizing.

And now, for the first time in decades, waves of young people have moved to New Orleans from around the country. People interested in changing the school system are experimenting with charter schools. Urban farmers are attempting to bring fresh food to our citizens. Artists and creative types are creating new communities of graphic design and video making. A lot of money and time has been invested in strengthening New Orleans neighborhood organizations and networks. Buzzwords abound that New Orleans could be a "center of non-profit innovation" and "social entrepreneurship."

Yet, despite the unprecedented change in the past few years, many of the old problems are not being solved. Our environment is still being desecrated, our schools haven't improved significantly, our citizens are still murdering each other on a regular basis and our infrastructure is crumbling. As radicals, we know this is because these "innovative solutions" are the same hierarchical, ego-driven, false left solutions that prevent those who want to make positive changes in their communities from questioning the status quo. All of these innovators and young seekers who came to make their mark on the city need to be shown with urgency that non-radical solutions (i.e. solutions that don't address the root causes of our problems) are not just pointless, but harmful. If we can create



successful alternatives that are radical, we can show these caring individuals a way out of their dead-end strategies and with tact recruit their energy and connections to our cause.

Perhaps most importantly, the city of New Orleans is poised to become a front-line community as global warming wreaks its havoc. The wetlands of Louisiana are some of the fastest disappearing landmass in the world, with a football field of marsh being lost every 38 seconds. Every year since Katrina we have seen a rise in the likeliness of a storm like Katrina invading our Gulf once again. As the seas continue to get hotter, those chances only rise. The Army Corps of Engineers has shown for decades that they are incompetent, lazy and fundamentally incapable of protecting New Orleans and its wetlands from these threats, and yet they continue to be our first line of defense. The BP oil spill devastated our coastal fisheries and wildlife. It also showed that the claws of the oil industry are so deeply imbedded in our region's psyche it will take much more than letters to our congressmen to pry them out. And yet the non-profits in place to organize environmental change in our region advocate almost solely for lobbying. The issue is so urgent, so dire, it's hard to see how anything short of non-violent protest and direct action could be effective. We desperately need radical environmental organizers if we are going to survive.

Building movements takes emotions, not facts. The city of New Orleans is deeply and persistently loved by its citizens. The strength of New Orleanians' love for their city is as strong an emotion you'll find anywhere in this country. But love without action is empty. Many New Orleanians who claim to love their city sit on their hands as the city and region is falling apart at the seams. The radical community can show this love how to act in ways that approach root causes of problems and empower citizens to make changes in their communities. It is an incredible challenge to expand the reach of radical ideas and organizations. But it is one we must take on if we take our beliefs seriously. And there's no better place to do that than right here in New Orleans, Louisiana.

# Let Fury Have the Hour

By: Ruth Lysse

A black cloud from the south.

Oil reigns black tears.

An endless pool

Sinks heavy

Creeping illness

God is not knocking

If we lock arms

It seeps through

The weight the weight

Earth binds our wings

I was baptized in her waters

Now sinned by man's hands

Spoiled perfection

A poisoned garden

An explosion, then silence

We suckle at the beasts' tit

Black pearls in hand

I say a prayer

By the foot of the oyster bed

God is not knocking

But our mother is watching

You oppress the humble mans opinion

You ignore the bolts of lightening

So you will have your day of reckoning

By her hands we swear

On their knees in the oil

Drink our revenge!

Burning black tides!

Wash into your high rise office!

Bleed with your earth!

# A Land Called Louisiana

## Part I: From Self-Sufficiency to Enslavement in the Market

By: M.G. Houzeau

*This is the first article in a series on the historical interplay between the methods of exploitation introduced by Europeans in the Lower Mississippi Delta region and the resistance by indigenous communities to maintain their independence and an ethical relationship to the land and each other.*

*“Before the French came amongst us... we were men, content with what we had... We walked with boldness every road. But now... we go groping, afraid of meeting thorns, we walk like slaves, which we shall soon be, since the French already treat us as if we were such... Is not death preferable to slavery?” --Natchez elder at a War Council, 1730*

With oil creeping into bayous over this past year, settling in the shallow loess bottoms in the chill of winter, we might stop to reflect on what this nutrient-rich landscape in the lower Mississippi region has seen over the centuries. Before oil spills, before the erosion from pipeline canals, before industry, before Cajun refugees and before European colonial settlement, what did this region look like? What happened here?

Contrary to the Eurocentric explorer and historian’s “New World,” which retroactively constructs the land as virgin territory in a genocidally patriarchal whitewashing fantasy, indigenous communities have lived in the lower Mississippi region for twelve to fourteen thousand years, according to projectile points found in northwest Louisiana. The Indian communities here enjoyed complex and various cultural, spiritual, artistic, economic, agricultural, medicinal and warring traditions.

Indian villages were mostly built along the Mississippi River, nearly every ten to twenty miles where there was firm ground. The Natchez, the Tunica, the Taensas, the Houma, the Chitimacha, and the Washa were on or near the river while the Atakapa occupied the region to the west now known as Bayou Teche.

The tribes regularly traded goods, which compensated for the “unequal geographic distribution of essential resources such as shell, flint, salt and choice bow wood.”[1] Produced goods such as the superior baskets of Chitimacha artisans also found their way into a process of exchange between the tribes. Though glass beads and conch shells were also exchanged, the great mass of goods was desired for their utility.

In the lower Mississippi region, in what is bordered today as Louisiana and Mississippi, the standard of living in the 17th century was high. It was, in fact, higher than that of the Europeans who came to settle in the area in the 18th century. This can be attributed to good house-building techniques, capable doctors, competent agricultural practices, excellent weapons for

hunting and hooks for fishing, and a varied and bountiful food supply.

There was such an abundance of wild plant food-- fruits, greens, fungi and nuts-- that agriculture was actually resisted by tribes along the river until several centuries before the encounters with Europeans. The brackish bayous additionally provided crawfish, clams and oysters while the winter brought in migrating ducks, geese, passenger pigeons and birds of various stripes. The ready availability of protein, including the recent in-migration of large game like deer, bison and bears, provided for a balanced diet.

The Indians’ agriculture sites were often small, and conformed to the familiar triumvirate of beans, corn and squash that moved north from Mexico through to the eastern Indian tribes. Likewise the food preparation techniques and traditions were diverse and healthy as tribes always cooked raw meat, often cooked or fried food using bear’s oil, and constructed ovens for making bread from persimmons or corn. One tribe met by an early French colonist had forty-two methods of preparing corn, including sagamite, a thicker version of today’s grits.

As a sign of the Indians’ skill, intelligence and technology, modern anthropologists recognize that they “employed almost every method now commonly utilized in catching fish. Anglers took fish with hooks and lines, rabbit-vine hoop nets; cone-shaped traps made of wooden slats, trotlines, weirs, and spears used in shallow water.” From this testimony, one could see within it the possibility of reaching similar utilitarian technologies while staking out a different relationship to and respect for the land.

The Indian tribes near the end of the Mississippi-- the Natchez, the Tunica, the Taensas, the Houma, the Chitimacha, the Washa and Atakapa-- certainly were not passive receivers of European mercantile ingenuity. Starting in Natchez from 1705 and in New Orleans from 1718, Indian communities literally kept the French alive

in the lower Mississippi Valley over the first several decades of French settlement. The French depended on Indian communities’ knowledge of the land’s plants and animals, as well as their abilities to hunt, fish, farm and make herbal medicines.

Due to their customs of gift-giving and pre-existing exchange networks, and prior knowledge of British-Indian trading to the east, Indian communities in the Lower Mississippi Valley were socially predisposed to welcome the French traders. Indian tribes would trade food for linens or metal goods like knives, axes and hoes.

The transfer of infectious diseases such as small pox, the measles and the common cold during trading decimated Indian populations. Before 1700, the estimate of Indians among the various tribes in the region numbered 100,000. By the 1760s, their population dwindled to 32,000. [2]

The economic integration transformed Indian communities, often creating new standards of living and a dependence on goods from the French. This dependence often led one Indian tribe to side with the French in a battle against a rival tribe in exchange for a material payoff. Certain goods, such as muskets, were attained with the thinking that only by having them could Indian tribes resist full integration or, more realistically, domination. In a spin on “keeping up with the Joneses,” the Indians were forced to keep up with the French.

Some of the first enslaved Indians in the region were the outcome of an incident that started with British frontiersmen and allied Indian tribes upriver and to the east. When the British attacked the Tunicas in 1706, the Tunicas retreated south past present-day northwest Louisiana, pushing the Taensas and Houma tribes further south. The Houma moved near present-day Donaldsonville in Bayou Lafourche, while the Taensas found refuge in the Bayougoula tribe. The Taensas quickly turned on their hosts, killing many Bayougoula and capturing some Chitimacha

further downriver. The Chitimacha blamed these disruptions of Indian tribe networks on the French, and assassinated a priest who was out with an exploring party. Retribution was swift: the French drove many Chitimachas deep into Bayou Lafourche while dozens were enslaved.

However, Indians resisted the condition of slavery strongly by constantly deserting. Sometimes they would return to their original tribes and at other times they would join African runaways in the cypress swamps away from the river toward Lake Pontchartrain, in small groups called maroon communities. The French soon found enslaved Indians to be a greater risk than benefit because of the Indians’ knowledge of the land and potential to create resistance networks between Indian tribes and the people enslaved on plantations. These early plantations of tobacco and indigo were decidedly small-scale compared to the incarnations of cotton and sugar plantations to come later in the 18th century. Enslaved Africans and Indians were allowed a considerable amount of movement in the early French colony. Enslaved people could grow their own food and go to market in New Orleans to sell both their owners’ food and their own. Punishments for disobedience were as harsh as at later plantations, but coordinated dissent had greater possibilities. Maroon communities of runaway slaves were one such real possibility. They had their own small agricultural plots and means of making crafts, like weaving baskets, and often traded with or gave items to the enslaved to sell at market.

The demands of the European markets, however, and the behavior they engendered, increasingly affected wildlife and land in the region. In a sign of things to come, a 1705 French hunting party killed twenty-three bison, nearly a bison per person.

The most egregious manipulation of Indian custom by Europeans was that of the deerskin trade. Before the arrival of French settlers-- or British settlers to the east-- Indians consumed or used the entire deer, including its tongue, brain, heart and skeleton, which was made into hooks and other tools. The Choctaws, located east of the Mississippi, had a chief who

even “regulated” the hunting of deer. These checks on the wasting of animal life started to degrade with the influence of European hide traders in the 1720s. Between 1720 and 1780, an average of fifty thousand deerskins a year were traded from Indians to French traders in the lower Mississippi Valley. The hide trade incorporated the Indians into the world market economy and encouraged the depletion of game reserves, thus pulling them further from their agricultural traditions.



But not all destructive elements of the Indians’ world can be attributed to the arrival of European settlers, as hierarchy persisted in varying degrees in different Indian tribes. In warrior-centric tribes like the Natchez and the Chitimacha, hierarchies of decision-making and types of labor were

prevalent. The Chief and other higher ranks abstained from manual labor, instead organizing lesser chiefs and completing religious duties. In smaller clans, political power was more diffuse, but women were still almost universally excluded from powerful positions except as herbalists.

The warriors of Natchez, after eight years of watching land being granted outside the French’s Fort Rosalie for agricultural purposes, in 1730 revolted against this encroachment on their hunting grounds. The organized violent revolt was the final expression of more common small-scale raids of cattle taken from the new settlers.

An elder at a War Council in 1730 urged his warrior peers with a reminder of who the Natchez had been in the recent past. “Before the French came amongst us... we were men, content with what we had... We walked with boldness every road. But now... we go groping, afraid of meeting thorns, we walk like slaves, which we shall soon be, since the French already treat us as if we were such... Is not death preferable to slavery?”

The Natchez successfully surprised and massacred the French at Fort Rosalie, marching downriver with the aid of the newly liberated Africans from the fort and surrounding plantations. The French authorities in New Orleans countered quickly, hiring local Free People of Color, enslaved people and allied Indian tribes along with French soldiers and citizens to amass an overwhelming force with higher-quality weaponry. These forces killed the Natchez in large numbers, and many Natchez fled into the swamps to escape enslavement.

Throughout Louisiana colonial history, the French followed this pattern of extending privileges and benefits to enslaved people, free people of color and allied Indian tribes to destroy those folks courageous enough to resist the unambiguous exploitation of ancestral lands. Rather than “divide and conquer,” one could also call it “freedom or death.” Those who accepted the French benefits were no longer truly free, but instead dependent on French ways, French laws, and the new extractive relationship to the land.

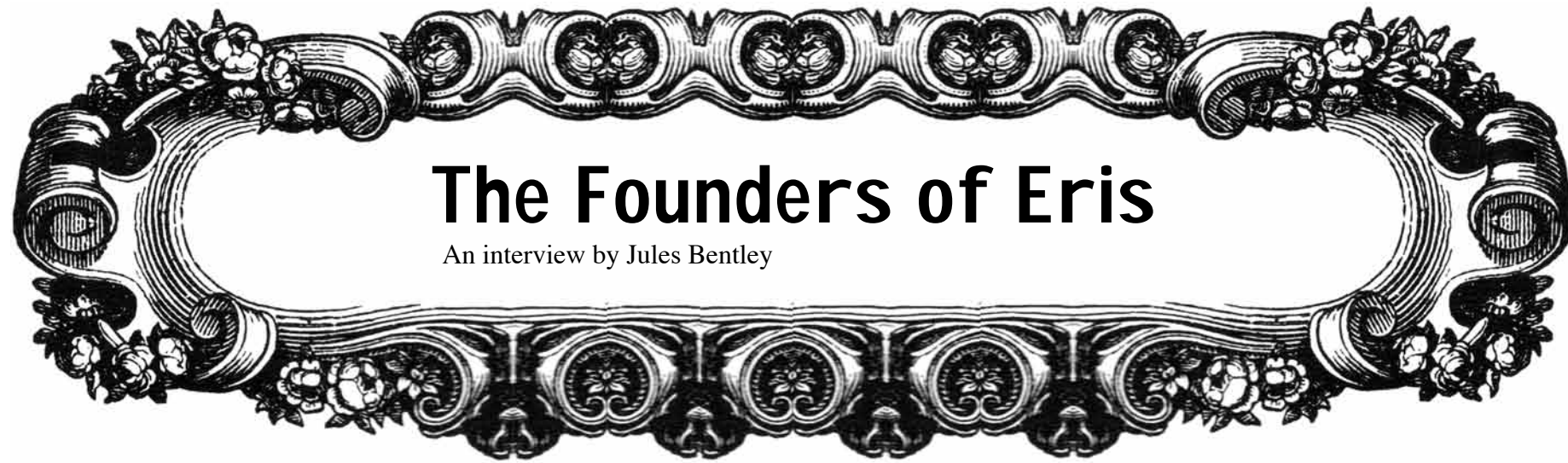
[1] Historic Indian Tribes of Louisiana, p.207

[2] The loss is not entirely contributable to disease because, as we shall see, there are also the aftereffects of armed resistance to consider.

### RESOURCES

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# The Founders of Eris

An interview by Jules Bentley

For many of its participants, the yearly Krewe of Eris parade is a highlight of New Orleans' Carnival season. This unpermitted, anarchic open-to-all foot parade, named after the Greek Goddess of Discord, is an explosion of beautiful costuming and craftsmanship that runs wild through downtown, clogging streets in boisterous celebration of unruly.

Eris is a magical experience, and like much of the best of Carnival, aspects of it are shrouded in mystery. Where does Eris come from? Does Eris really fight the cops? Should Eris be more explicitly political, or would that detract from the creativity and pleasure of the parade? Does Eris have a meaning beyond the fun and wonder that participation offers?

While it would be unforgivable to undercut the spontaneous joy and mysticism of Eris through overanalysis, there's no denying Eris functions at least in part as a populist reclamation of space. Not only that, it's an anarchic event derived from indigenously New Orleanian traditions, rather than an imposition of templated tactics from some other part of the world. Eris started here and is rooted here.

Eris is interesting both specifically, as Eris, and more generally, as an example of a tradition that was founded with an explicitly anti-authoritarian perspective and that has survived several changes of the guard, adapting and flourishing over years. In the week before what turned out to be an unusually eventful Eris 2011, I sat down with the parade's founders, who generously gave of their time to discuss Eris' origins, where it stands now, and what the future might hold.

## AN OPEN CALL

Eris first rolled in 2005, seven months before Katrina. It arose in part from its founders' participation in downtown's circus-born Krew du Poux, which has been around since the 1990s. "We felt we had outgrown Krew du Poux in some ways," said Ozone, one of Eris' originators.

Ms. Lateacha is one half of a couple that founded

and bottom-lined Eris for its first few years. "We wanted something slightly more serious than Krew du Poux," she said, "that drew more from the roots of Carnival, the old-line style. More traditional, more structured, with brass musicians and different themes each year."

Her partner, Lord Willin, agreed. "This town seemed big enough for another krewe with a different aesthetic and another style."

"I mostly wintered here," Lateacha said, "and I wanted to contribute and give something back to New Orleans instead of just taking and absorbing culture. I felt it was important to participate. A lot of people are just here a few years and leave, and don't give back or contribute to the city. It seemed to me a lot of people wanted to be more involved in Carnival, wanted to be part of it besides just making costumes for Mardi Gras day. Many people who came down here, even after living here for a while, still felt 'outside' Mardi Gras. They didn't grow up in families that participated in it. They weren't organically connected to it. They would just attend other people's events as bystanders, or sink big money into joining groups like Krewe de Vieux."

Almost all of New Orleans' most famous Carnival Krewes are closed to new members except via invitation, and are very expensive to participate in, with yearly dues running from thousands to tens of thousands of dollars. These dues are what underwrite most parades' floats, throws, permits, and parties. One of the ways Eris differs is that everyone and anyone is encouraged to participate, not just spectate, and participants create their own elaborate costumes and person-powered floats, sharing resources with one another. In many ways, it's a DIY parade. "We were amazed," Lateacha said, "that within the pantheon of all the big krewes with god names, Eris wasn't taken. It seemed appropriate and fortuitous."

With regards to Eris' germination, Ozone said, "At the time I'd been doing a lot of reading. I'd read [James Gill's] Lords of Misrule, which talks

about Mardi Gras as a day of leveling, a day of unrest when the social order was turned upside-down. This was before the big krewes and their giant floats, which those big krewes began doing partly as a way to distract people, to focus Mardi Gras on the celebrations of the wealthy and powerful, and to reintroduce a mystical awe towards the ruling class that was lost after the United States bought Louisiana."

Eris sought to bring back something rowdier, a parade that looked more deeply into the past and drew from older traditions. "It didn't exactly become that, though," Lord Willin said. "Even the first year, it was just an open call for creative chaos."

That, the founders agreed, was not a bad thing at all. Over the years Eris has grown in size and reputation; it's now the favorite parade of many locals. It's also inspired and taught a lot of people how to make their own costumes.

Eris' second year, the first Mardi Gras after the failure of the federal levees, was a turning point for Eris as it was for so much of our city's cultural life. "Our theme that year was Noveaux Limbeaux," Lateacha said, "to capture the mood of uncertainty that was pervading the city. Everything seemed up in the air. Some people were saying Mardi Gras shouldn't happen at all, and we were unsure how Eris would come off. But it was a couple hundred folks, and as it went on you could feel it taking on a hopeful spirit."

## DISCORDANT HARMONY

The Eris band is unmistakably central to the parade. An ad hoc assemblage of horn players and percussionists, the band has its own unique and distinctive sound, in particular the loopy, swerving rise-and-fall signature of its haunting motif, the "Eris theme" or "Eris song."

For anyone who's participated in Eris, that song is powerfully evocative. It resurfaces throughout the course of the parade, a layered, rhythmically lurching minor-key riff that sounds like the drunken unwinding of empire's clockwork. This motif and many of the tunes the Eris band plays

were written for Eris by a musician, bandleader and music instructor named JR, who in the weeks before each year's parade would gather anyone who wanted to participate and teach them how to play simple tunes on brass instruments.

Over the years, many of the casual musicians from Eris bands have continued to practice and learn their instruments year-round. Many of them are now full-time musicians themselves, writing new Eris music and teaching new band members how to play.

Just as with the band, duties related to many other aspects of Eris have been passed along, becoming less centralized. "We put in a lot of long hours bottom-lining Eris," Lord Willin said. "Back when it was just me and Lateacha making the decisions, deciding things was easy, but getting them done was more difficult because people would take on duties and then not show up."

"We worked hard to keep people informed about Eris," Lateacha said. "We'd always be reaching out to people who wanted to be involved, making sure they knew what was happening. But when it came to decision-making, it was just the two of us. When we chose the year's theme, for instance, we didn't include other people in that, so there was no-one to be left out. Then, when we quit being in charge and Eris became a group decision-making process, suddenly there were people who were in the group and people who felt left out."

## WHO ERIS IS vs. HOW ERIS IS

That was just one of the growing pains attending the decentralization of Eris' decision-making process. "For instance," Lord Willin said, "every year once the theme is decided, there's an official written proclamation. Back when Lateacha and I were doing all the work, there was a certain kind of flowery language and a specific artistic aesthetic we aimed for with those."

"I loved the formal style of the old Mardi Gras announcements," Lateacha said, "The krewes each commission these big watercolor paintings of all their floats on a scroll. It's beautiful, and I wanted us to be able to do that with almost no money."

Those proclamation posters, painstakingly block-printed and decorated, are in high demand. "People appreciated those announcements," Lord Willin said, "and wanted that to carry on. Eris itself has become a tradition, so now there's a drive to preserve its traditional aspects. Now the people who do the announcement every year feel pressure to keep it in that style and tradition, although personally I don't really give a shit if the language sounds the same as we sounded like."

"Absolutely," Lateacha said. "It would be fine with me if people wanted to do it differently."

The pressures around that single piece of Eris are symbolic of a larger, nebulous conversation

within the group about continuity and the nature of Eris. One unprecedented and highly controversial occurrence this year was the Eris planning meeting being announced on Facebook. "That sparked a lot of people's insecurities," Lord Willin said. "What if Eris becomes this online, anonymous thing? People wanted to keep it embodied, keep it on the ground, keep it face-to-face. Eris is participatory and decentralized and it's for everyone, but there are people who've put a lot of energy into it over the years and want to keep certain ideals of it central."

"And yet," Lateacha said, "Having the announcement on Facebook let a lot more people know when the meeting was. It resulted in the largest real-world Eris planning meeting to date."

## STRIFE IN THE STREETS

In the past, there have been confrontations between Eris and NOPD. There are those who feel Eris should push harder in that direction, but those aren't necessarily the same people participating in the parade or planning it. "I don't have a lot of truck with people wanting Eris to fuck shit up and overturn cop cars," Lateacha said. "We have a certain amount of freedom and I'd like to see less of people going to jail. For me Eris is constructive, not destructive. It's a way for people to make art and reclaim Mardi Gras. I'm not sure people understand how lucky we are to be able to have a parade and no permit in the first place."

After conflicts in the past, Eris is re-routed this year, avoiding Decatur in the French Quarter and Jackson Square, which had become a flashpoint for conflict with NOPD. "It's a very controlled space," Lateacha said of Jackson Square. "Last year the cops were arrayed there waiting for us. New Orleans police hold grudges, and these days they figure out ahead of time when we're happening. We used to have the advantage that they were all at Bacchus, but now they're ready. Even if we 'liberated' Jackson Square, it would only be for five minutes. That doesn't seem worth what it would cost. I think Eris reclaims enough space through movement, and keeping moving is a big part of Eris. By focusing on taking a single space, you sacrifice continuing feelings of liberation for a single moment of liberation. There are times when that's worth it, but as someone who believes in the longevity of Eris, I don't think this is one of them."

Ozone was more blunt. "I think it's strategically retarded to be seeking confrontation when everyone's dressed up in gigantic glow-in-the-dark baby doll costumes," he said. "You gotta choose your battles, and you don't want to get a lot of people hurt."

Lord Willin concurred. "People getting thrown into cop cars is incredibly destructive to the parade and the mood of it. I'm not sure that people who are participating in Eris are signing up for that. In some ways, Eris is definitely not quite living up to its revolutionary or insurrectionary in-

spirational beginnings, because it's now a tolerated part of Mardi Gras. But it is a high point in the lives of the participants, whatever that's worth, and I think that's worth a lot. I'd like to see the krewe be more active beyond just the yearly parade, even if that's just the Eris band coming out to support other community events."

Lateacha compared the possibility of an expanded Eris to the way traditional Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs operate, helping build community unity and sponsoring social or fundraising events throughout the year.

## SOWING SEEDS

Of course, no joy exists without sadness, and your relentlessly negative reporter demanded from each of his interlocutors a worst-case scenario. What were their deepest fears about Eris' future? Were they afraid of Eris dying out or being outlawed? No, in fact, their concerns were much more profound.

"We gave a random punk girl a ride down to New Orleans this year," Lateacha said, "and she was like, 'The only good things about Mardi Gras are Eris and the Panorama Brass Band.' I was so offended. I was upset to even have her in the car. Her, right there, that's my worst-case scenario: that rather than contributing positively to Mardi Gras, Eris just takes over and becomes Mardi Gras for some people."

"I would hate for it to become that," Ozone said.



"Some hipster thing, some navel-gazing event that's just about itself and people trying to feel cool. 'Oh look what me and my friends do.'"

"Another nightmare," Lord Willin said, "would be that people keep trying to do it after the inspiration is gone, that Eris wouldn't stop after it needs to stop. The vitality would be drained, and even though it had stopped being fun, or fulfilling, people would just go through the motions because they felt they should. I'd dread that, to see Eris shuffling through the streets like a zombie."

Watching the parade grow from year to year, that dark future is hard to imagine. "Eris in good hands," Lord Willin said. "A lot of hands."

"Yes it is," Lateacha said. "I just hope I can get one of the posters."

## Followup

By: Apaira Paraders

It would be weird not to somehow acknowledge what went down at Eris 2011... what follows is a brief postscript by other authors detailing important events that transpired during this year's parade.

On the night of March 6th, during this year's "Sunday Gras", the Krewe of Eris convened for yet another year of discordant celebration. The 2011 theme, Mutagenesis, made commentary on a year marred by corporate contamination and state collusion by celebrating the inventive life-forms who survive it each and every day. The open-ended call was answered by a cantankerous krewe of Kafkaesque creatures. Restless swamp spirits, the many-headed hydra of capitalist resistance and a pissed-off dolphin teamster were but some of the riled beings following the cacophonous dirge of the Eris band and flag corps. As in the past, hundreds of peaceful, joyful paraders took to the streets of the Marigny and French Quarter, but the parade's ending this year was very different.

Only blocks from the end of the parade route, police cruisers swarmed into the middle of the crowd and NOPD began indiscriminately tazing, pepper-spraying and baton-whipping the crowd. While extreme police violence is a New Orleans tradition, this attack was still very alarming. No warning was given, no regard shown for the small children present. Members of the brass band were targeted, many having their instruments smashed. Video footage would later surface showing cops macing and attacking anyone with cameras, and 12 people were taken to Orleans Parish Prison, some suffering serious injuries. Were it not for the hundreds of people thronged around this brutish offensive, certainly many more would have been beaten worse than they were... but if the officers of the 5th District were looking for an easy roundup to meet their Mardi Gras quota, they did not find it at Eris.

The assault on Eris is part of a larger trend in New Orleans. Attacks on free space, like the wanton inflation of rent in poor neighborhoods and the razing of hundreds of houses for a new upper-end hospital, stem from an effort to gentrify the city and homogenize its culture. We saw it again this Ash Wednesday when the NOPD broke their own laws in order to shut down the ARC, a warehouse space that has for years been home to Plan B Community Bicycle Shop and the Iron Rail Library and Bookstore, among a host of others. Indeed, this same tension lies fizzing wherever the cops lurk, flaring up every time the city's new-arrived new money finds some other aspect of New Orleans distasteful and sics the cops on it.

The Eris arrestees currently face exorbitant hospital bills and court fees. To show your solidarity, read more about the NOPD's attack on the parade, or find out when the next benefit show will be, check out [www.eris12.org](http://www.eris12.org)... and please, make an online donation. Thank you for all your support!

## Keeping Truth Alive: the Impact of Social Justice Organizing on the Glover Case

By: M.G. Houzeau

Late last year, three police officers (out of five) were convicted in connection with the murder of an innocent man, Henry Glover, and its cover-up days after Hurricane Katrina. The cover-up included burning a car near the levee in Algiers (across the river from the French Quarter) with Glover, possibly alive, inside.

David Warren, the freshman officer who shot Glover in the back, received a 25 year sentence in Federal Prison for manslaughter. Greg McRae, who burned Glover's body in a friend's car on the levee, received 17 years for destroying evidence and perjury in front of a Grand Jury. The jury from the 2010 trial determined the convictions and U.S. District Court Judge Lance Africk handed out the sentence lengths.

While the U.S. District Attorney Jim Letten, whose office prosecuted the police officers, characterized the sentences as "significant prison terms," the Glover family was not satisfied. Rebecca Glover, Henry's aunt, spoke outside the courthouse directly after the sentences were announced. "I was expecting David Warren to get life. And McRae to get more time than 17 years. 'Cause if I burn you I'm gonna get more than 17 years," Ms. Glover said indignantly. "It's a joke and I'm very very upset about it."

Glover's skull is still missing from the body recovered from the burned out car. William Tanner owned the burned out car, which he first used to seek medical help for Glover after he was shot. Tanner believes the skull was stolen intentionally to prevent evidence from being discovered about a point blank shot to Glover's head. Tanner was beaten by police that day before police drove off with his car. He thought Glover was still alive.

When a reporter asked Ms. Glover if she had closure, she responded, "I still want his skull. We still do not have his skull. We'll have a little closure [then]. We only buried part of a body."

While the newspapers, particularly the Times-Picayune, finally covered the trials and re-investigated the original incidents with the attention they deserve in 2010 and 2011, most social justice organizers remember when no one believed the family's side of the story. And the media never took them seriously enough to independently investigate the claims.

Safe Streets/Strong Communities, an organization formed after the hurricane to address brutality and other unaccountable behavior by the police, were visited in their office by friends or relatives of victims who shared their stories and sought support for justice. Many stories of brutality, including Henry Glover's case, were included as testimony in the little-remembered, but sweeping International Tribunal on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The four-day tribunal was hosted by the New Orleans Black-led organization

Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund on the Katrina Commemoration in 2007.

With the support of Safe Streets, the Madisons, who lost a family member in the Danziger Bridge murders, organized and pressured the New Orleans

District Attorney to file criminal charges against the police officers in local criminal court. Not surprisingly, Judge Raymond Bigelow found a way to dismiss the charges, finding prosecutorial misconduct during the Grand Jury process. Almost immediately, Jim Letten's U.S. District Attorney's office started their own much broader investigation, which included an FBI raid of the New Orleans Police Department to seize files.

A year later a team of FBI agents fully investigated that barbaric incident on the bridge connecting Gentilly and New Orleans East. Six police were indicted in the cover-up, four whom face charges for the murders of two unarmed African-American men. Their trial in Federal Court is still pending, but if convicted they could face life in prison or even the death penalty.

Unable to shake the image of this stranger shot and driven off by police, William Tanner approached Safe Streets for support and justice for the murder of Glover.

When Safe Streets heard from A.C. Thompson, a journalist with ProPublica and The Nation, they directed him to William Tanner. Thompson included the cover-up of Henry Glover's death in his long investigative article in late 2008 on white vigilantes who murdered African-Americans in Algiers in the weeks after

the hurricane. The report brought national attention and regained local momentum to seek justice for everyone murdered in that "time of crisis."

The lesson is clear: never stop documenting injustice and speaking truth to power, for its effects and impacts may influence people you least expected. The FBI seeking justice for a few black people in America? Proactively prosecuting nearly a dozen white police officers? Relentless organizing to expose the truth of the NOPD to the public made the FBI's investigation a safe choice.

Legal action, however, has its structural limitations. There's the "bad apple" theory, where only the most destructive individuals are picked out for indictment. Questions arise about transforming the culture of the NOPD but always blow over until the next murder at the hands of police. Where will the spark come from to address the root causes of unequal power accorded police in American society? Where will the courage come from to implement and fund alternatives that will make the need for police obsolete? Now that's the terrain for lifelong relentless organizing that we all must participate in if we are ever to find the beloved community.





# ODE TO DOCTORS

By: anne peasant

*Doctor is so wise! Privileged priesthood, set-apart sect of sacred scholars,  
Elite few approved to interpret the scriptures of sickness for us layfolks.*

We crawl upon the padded altar-table of the examination room, and the Doctor reads our futures in our entrails. Bring us the news from ourselves, Doctor! We tithe you our everything: please, hand us down a decree from the great god Medicine, that oracular mystery to which you alone are privy! We may feel sick, we may feel well, but only you and your sacred interpretive apparatus know the truth. Only your chickenbones and stereoptoscopes, your calipers and crowns and gleaming divinatory gewgaws can deem us "healthy" or dilapidated, maladed or malingering.

Oh give me a NOTE, Doctor! Scribe me a pardon, sell me a scrip, give me permission to escape the suffering for even a moment or two. Give me a referral, give me something my insurance will accept. Please! Give me more of what big Pharm paid you to hook me on. Please, Doctor, hitch up the hem of your immaculate priestly gown-- let me rub my coarse face on your shoe-gleam. What could a wretched commoner like myself possibly have to please a Doctor? What could entice from you a single additional moment of your priceless time? Can you even stand to look at me? I'm sorry for wasting your time. I'm sorry, Doctor, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I deserve your brusqueness, I who am so needy, so flawed, so sickened, infected and imperfect.

I would beg you, Doctor, beg you abjectly to hear my health complaints, but then, what truth can your learning and holy machinery not divine? For I am literally naked to you-- beyond naked, to you I am stripped of my skin. You see into my being, know every ventricle of my hidden heart, see the full shame of my unwell self. Tell me whether I'm lying, tell me whether I'm in pain, whether I'm doomed. Please, Doctor, tell me the state of me.

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Please consider donating some money via [eee.ragingpelican.com](http://eee.ragingpelican.com). Every penny you give will go directly to publishing costs and postage.

None of the Pelican's many talented contributors are paid... not a silver dime. In fact, we pay out of our own pockets to get the Pelican published, because we believe in providing a voice for the Gulf Coast that isn't compromised by big industry or the agendas of corrupt government.

We are blue-collar New Orleans and Gulf Coast residents, and we make sacrifices to get this paper out. If you can help financially, we can put out more issues more quickly.

### **Want your work in the Raging Pelican?**

Let's spread the word! We want your reports of resistance, or just your grievances that big media won't touch... from the big cities to the small towns, anywhere in the greater Gulf Coast. What are you seeing and hearing? What difficulties are you facing? Drop us a line.

We also would love your black-and-white art!! Please, send it along.

**EMAIL: [RAGINGPELICAN@GMAIL.COM](mailto:RAGINGPELICAN@GMAIL.COM) • WEBSITE: [RAGINGPELICAN.COM](http://RAGINGPELICAN.COM)**

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