

After the storm: New Orleans in transition

By **DAMASO REYES**

Special to the AmNews

NEW ORLEANS, La. — “It’s going to be a toned down Mardi Gras, I’ll tell you that right now,” said Quentin Dumas, a 34-year-old bartender at The Courtyard, a bar and restaurant in New Orleans’ historic French Quarter. Having worked as a bartender for nearly five years he wasn’t used to the quiet that had descended on the Quarter in the six months since Hurricane Katrina hit the city and turned the lives of so many of its residents upside down. But like so many of his fellow citizens he came back and is doing his best to keep the spirit of his hometown alive as it struggles to rebuild.

Even in the French Quarter, home to many of the city’s tourist attractions, there are still windows filled with plywood instead

from the heart of the city trees still lie on rooftops and collapsed houses lie broken as though they had been made of matchsticks. A journey into the 9th ward or St. Bernard’s Parish or any other place that was too close to a levee or too far from high ground reveals a level of destruction usually reserved for war zones.

As tourists trickle into the city for what will be a low key Mardi Gras celebration, the city is still struggling with the pain caused by Katrina. Hundreds of thousands of city residents are still displaced and vital infrastructure from telecommunications to electricity has not been restored to broad swathes of the city. The tourists who have slowly begun to walk along Bourbon Street in search of beads will not see these parts of town; only the boarded-up windows of a few downtown high-

inspired this display was simple: “What do you think of the government’s response in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina?”

“Man, it’s the biggest joke in history,” he replied when the laughter abated. As he became more serious the wonderful smile which had beamed from his face

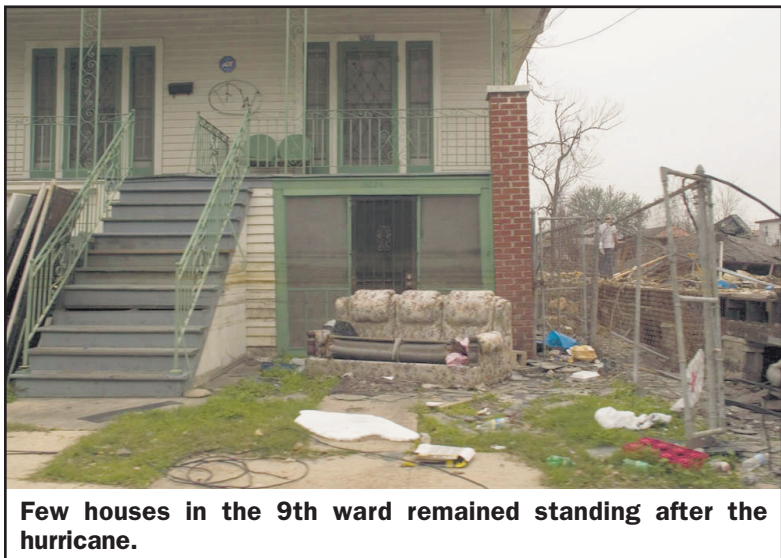
disappeared, leaving a scowl in its wake. “We have more money being spent in a foreign country than we do right here,” he added, visibly disgusted.

In multiple interviews with a wide cross-section of New Orleanians the one issue everyone seemed to agree on was the inade-

quacy of the government’s response.

While the haunting images of the aftermath of the hurricane have seared themselves into the minds of most Americans, what has not been reported, and indeed what can simply not be under-

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Few houses in the 9th ward remained standing after the hurricane.

of glass, darkened storefronts that once bustled, the occasional heap of storm-related rubble.

On a trip along Canal Street, one of downtown’s main thoroughfares, a visitor can find block long sections of sidewalk surrounded by yellow caution tape, an overturned palm tree in front of the remains of a Tulane University building which has still not been reclaimed, a giant twisted arrow encouraging passing cars to “Park Here.”

And this is the good part of town.

The further one travels from the central business district the more obvious the devastation becomes. Three blocks from downtown ruined cars still wait under overpasses to be towed away. Ten blocks away from Canal Street lights cease to work. A mile away

rises, which when seen after a few cocktails evoke the paintings of Piet Mondrian, will be visible to those who the city’s tourism board have convinced to return.

Everyone who lives here knows the truth: while the people are still friendly and the food still mouth-watering, New Orleans is far from the town it once was, and without immediate help from the city, state and federal government it is unlikely to be much more than a kind of Disneyland with alcohol.

THE BIGGEST JOKE

His laugh began high in his throat. After ten or fifteen seconds it progressed south into his diaphragm and finally became a full belly laugh which only ceased when Quentin was on the verge of tears. The question which



An abandoned truck waits to be towed six months after the storm. (Damaso Reyes photos)

8,913

NEW YORK CITY TEENS IN FOSTER CARE

EACH

1

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18,040 children/8,913 teens are the exact numbers of New York City children in foster care on March 31, 2005.

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Gold

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2002 at the Salt Lake City, Utah, Olympic Winter Games, organized by the scandal-plagued U.S. Winter Games Olympic Committee. The scandal (bribes, etc.) had nothing to do with any of the athletes. Flowers won her gold medal as the brakewoman for Jill Bakken, the driver in the two-woman bobsled race. And just as Shani Davis is the greatest 1000-meter speed skater in the world, so too is Vonn Flowers among the best brakewomen in the world. She finished sixth in the two-women bobsled race this year. She will attend driving school at Lake Placid, New York, next month. Her husband

Johnny said, "She's had enough of being in the backseat."

Shani Davis is the "First" African American to win an individual gold medal at the Olympic Winter Games. His victory grants him membership in the organization of African Americans who have achieved historic milestones in sports. The 23-year-old Davis, a native of Chicago, holds the world record in the 1000 meters. He didn't reach that record mark in his win, but his 1:08.89 was swift enough to overcome the challenge of his Team USA teammate, Joey Cheek, who sped to a 1:09.32 for a 1-2 United States sweep.

The answer to the expected question of whether his win will encourage a deluge of minorities to lace up skates was not one of hope. Rather, he rightly said, "If

this was a bigger sport and kids started skating, then it would make me happy."

The reality is this. Until there are as many skating rinks as basketball courts in the Harlems of this country, don't count on that happening. More than likely, you can count on your hands the number of Black and other minority youngsters who rushed to their TV's to watch the taped highlights of the speed skating events that came on late in the evening.

Shani's historic victory was diluted by his feud with teammate Chad Hedrick, who refused to shake his hand after the race. Hedrick, perhaps the world's No. 1 at 5000 meters, was out of his element in the 1,000. His anger was directed at Davis for not participating in the Team Pursuit race.

However, the Olympic Games have always, from the ancient games, been about the individual, not the team.

Joey Cheek, casting himself as a peacemaker, said he didn't understand Hedrick's resentment towards Davis. "Shani has never, ever participated in Team Pursuit. Everyone knows this."

But the truth of the matter goes back to a selfish Hedrick, who himself wanted Davis on the team because he thought his goal of winning five gold medals would have been enhanced had Davis raced with the team. Team USA finished out of the money in Team Pursuit. Davis, giving Hedrick more to think about, whipped him in the 1500-meter race, finishing second for a silver medal as Hedrick skated to a third place finish.

For this youngster Davis who has been pushed and nurtured by his mom, Cherie, and who bypassed the traditional sports that attract Black youngsters, his has been a journey that has not yet ended. There is the 2008 and 2012 Olympics yet to be conquered.

"My route was different," he said. "I didn't do basketball or football."

Other African Americans on Team USA include bobsledders Vonn Flowers, Randy Jones, Johnny Jones, Bill Schuffenhauer and Lonzo Smith. Also Aaron Parchem, the first Black male figure skater, who paired with Marcy Hinzman. But these Winter Olympic Games in Turin, Italy, will be etched in history as a memorable and historic moment for Shani Davis.

Adams

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Siegel said that the accusations against Adams, who is a founder and head of 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care, could have a "chilling effect" on all government employees who voiced their concern about issues where they worked. "We cannot allow any government entity to punish or possibly silence needed critics on the issues of public concern," he said, repeating comments he had given at an earlier news conference.

Central to the trial and charges against Adams is that he appeared on Marcia Kramer's news show on CBS-TV last fall

and stated that the city had delayed informing the public about a possible terrorist attack in order to distract from Mayor Bloomberg's failure to appear during a mayoral debate at the Apollo Theater. The tape was played in the courtroom and Adams is heard saying that he was the captain assigned to securing local subway stations in Manhattan.

"The announcement came on Thursday [Oct. 7]," he told Kramer. "The deployment took place on Friday, regardless of what's been stated."

That announcement came about an hour before the mayor was scheduled to appear at the Apollo, which Bloomberg had already said he wouldn't attend.

It was later revealed that the city had, in fact, delayed the announcement following orders from Washington, while investigations proceeded abroad.

Siegel hammered away at the charges, particularly the idea that Adams was representing the NYPD and not his organization. He said that each time Adams' face was on the screen, "it was clearly indicated that he was from 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care," he said, "and if he was there representing the NYPD why was it necessary for the program's producers to call Paul Browne, the police department's chief spokesman, for a response?"

The trial resumes Thursday, but there may not be a decision

until March 17, the date that Adams had set aside for his retirement from the force.

In an earlier statement to the press, Adams sounded pessimistic, fearing he would be harshly disciplined. A dismissal before his retirement could jeopardize his pension.

Adams has also indicated that he will be seeking a State Senate seat in Brooklyn.

A source close to the case told the *Amsterdam News* that the NYPD is seeking to demote the recently promoted captain.

"I informed the public that they waited for several days before giving notification of an alleged threat to the subway system. In their desire to get me, they will in fact force the

public to revisit that time around October 3 and ask questions. The mayor on the NYPD made the announcement just hours before a scheduled debate at the Apollo which was controversial because Bloomberg refused to attend." Adams concluded "In my fifteen years doing press conferences for the 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care, I have never said I was representing the Police Department. This is simply an attempt by a department infested with racism and bigotry to intimidate any government or city employee who will stand up for the public interest. But I refuse to be distracted from entering the senatorial race. My focus is clear."

Noble

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smelled bad. He brought a message that was very difficult for us to digest. He made us think twice about ourselves, that we were a people who didn't know who the heck we were.

I couldn't say which Civil Rights leader was the greatest; they all impacted me. It's like winning a war and then asking what was the most important part. Everything was important.

You don't win a war with just one tactic. So Martin [and Malcolm] were part of a number of tactics. There was also a wide assortment of warriors in the struggle, who didn't make the headlines.

I'd really like to know where I came from. I remember my father talking about lineage one night, explaining to some guests, that his father, a Jamaican, was a Maroon. During colonialism Blacks across the Caribbean ran away from their European captors into the hills. When the slavers went up after them, the

Blacks beat them back. After a while the slavers said "Stay up there, stay marooned up in the mountains," that's how their name came to be.

My father had never told me this lineage [directly] but it explained a lot of things to me like where he got his steel. I love my father; he was so strong. He could pick up Sonny Liston or Shaq O'Neal and throw either across the street. He was an automobile mechanic, a very imposing, proud man. He didn't want to work for anybody and that came

from the lineage of doing for self, which is a Garvey phrase.

They [the Maroons] were respected. Even now in Jamaica there is an area where the Maroons concentrated called Cockpit country. One of the towns in [the region] is called Me No Send, You No Come. That shows you, these were serious people. And if they didn't send for you, you'd better not go up there because it might not be a round trip!

I view myself as a doorway [to those before me]. I'm not

front and center. It's just like music. I was a musician and in music you learn to take a theme and use it in different ways to say something. A journalist also has that same process. You are exposed to different [themes] and you have to decide what kind of stew you are going to come up with.

"Like It Is," is not so much a political voice. We don't provide a platform for one particular philosophy. It lives up to its name, to tell the truth about what's going on.

Storm

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stood unless witnessed first hand, is the level of ruin, the sheer magnitude of destruction that still exists in much of the city. During a recent tour of the lower 9th ward, East New Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard's parishes, which were among the hardest hit parts of the city, fewer than two dozen houses seemed habitable, let alone occupied. Churches, far from being places of refuge, were not spared and lay in ruin, when they were even recognizable as houses of worship. For block after block all one could see was broken homes, buildings collapsed into the streets making them impassible. Even rich subdivisions, where the neighborhoods are surrounded by gates and the homes modeled after small castles, were decimated. The buildings by and large

still stood in places like Eastover, where the Black middle and upper class of New Orleans had moved, but brown lines four to six feet from what were once carefully manicured lawns marked where the water had settled.

Basketball courts, with hoops tilted at odd angles, and golf courses more closely resembled swamps than anything else. Abandoned cars, once the proud possessions of those who felt like they had "made it," sat forsaken in the driveways of these empty palaces.

After six months and tens of billions of dollars in federal disaster aid the only thing that seems to have changed is the water level, which has receded, leaving a layer of mud several inches thick on many streets.

Still the nature of what a visitor finds in the poorest and not coincidentally hardest hit parts of New Orleans is nearly impossible

to communicate. When the World Trade Center collapsed, ten square blocks laid in ruin. In New Orleans hundreds of square blocks still lay under rubble. It is as if all of Brooklyn or the entire South Side of Chicago ceased to

exist. That is what New Orleans is like six months after the storm hit. Even if the displaced wanted to come back there is very little to return to, and no indication that anyone in government is the least bit concerned, if actions truly

speak to their intentions.

"Katrina didn't spare nobody, rich or poor," said Ed Robinson, owner of a local security company. "Everything is so desolate," he added as he drove through what was left of the Big Easy.

Africa

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says needs to be dealt with.

The coastal city of Cape Town is recognized as being popular among foreigners. According to the Institute of Estate Agents of South Africa, the sale of homes to foreigners in Cape Town averaged between 6 percent and 7 percent of total sales between 1999 and 2004.

With the exception of prime sea-front areas in the Western Cape province (where Cape Town is located) and in the southeastern KwaZulu-Natal province, residential property sales to foreign

nationals account for less than 1 percent of total sales, notes the institute.

There is also uncertainty about how foreign ownership of land in South Africa affects the country.

"No economic analysis is yet available on the impact of foreign ownership on the property market and foreign direct investment (FDI) or investor confidence," says the panel's report, titled the "Progress Report on the Panel of Experts on the Development of Policy on the Regulation of Ownership of Land in South Africa by Foreigners (Non-Citizens)."

Land is an emotional issue in various parts of Southern Africa.

President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has seized land from more than 4,000 white farmers for redistribution to landless Blacks since 2000.

"I don't think South Africa will go Zimbabwe's way. Our land reform will be transparent and we'll stick to the constitution," Bonile Jack, a member of the panel, told IPS.

However, South Africa's constitution does allow Didiza to expropriate land if there is a deadlock in negotiations to acquire it for redistribution. In such cases, the government is allowed to pay farmers an amount deemed reasonable for their property.