



GONE TO MISSISSIPPI

You have to come here... you just can't understand unless you see it... please come," Gayle Tart said to me. Kermit Moore, an organizer from the Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights, had referred me to Tart, an African-American attorney in Gulfport, for a perspective on Hurricane Katrina's impact in Mississippi.

Her urgency was persuasive. In late January, after I had traveled around the Gulf Coast region for a week, I met Tart in a private home in Gulfport. "Now we can talk," she said. "Until you saw what I saw, I couldn't talk to you. You had no way of understanding."

Tart was right.

Two things I could not understand from where I sat in Boston were the true extent of Katrina's geographic reach in

Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama—wiping out an entire region of the country—and the scale of human costs, compounded by government policies, local, state, and federal.

Even before the trip, I knew something wasn't right about the media's coverage of Mississippi. I heard entire towns were wiped out, but I didn't hear anything about African American communities, even though Mississippi has the highest concentration of African Americans in the United States. Even along the Gulf Coast, one of the whitest parts of the state, there are many heavily African-American areas. For instance, Gulfport, the second largest city in the state, is one-third African American; parts of the city are over 90% African American. But Katrina's impact on African-American communities on the Mississippi coast was virtually absent from the news.



BY BEN GREENBERG

On October 11, Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour announced the formation of his Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal. “The Coast and South Mississippi will decide their own destiny,” Barbour said, “but with strong support from the Commission, our Congressional delegation, state officials and many others.”

But whom, exactly, will government support? “It took some seven weeks after that commission was convened to even have a committee on housing, even though housing was the main thing the goddamn storm knocked out,” noted Derrick Evans, founder and director of Turkey Creek Community Initiatives, an innovative nonprofit community de-

The Grand Casino on its barge, tossed ashore by Katrina, Biloxi, Mississippi

velopment corporation in the historic African-American settlement, now part of Gulfport. “They quickly fast-tracked legislation to allow the casinos to be rebuilt on land so that the casino companies and operators wouldn’t abandon the Gulf Coast. An opportunity was missed to also require those folks, when they rebuild, to pay into an affordable housing trust fund, like the hotels do in Boston.”

To travel through the Gulf Coast region is to move through a twilight zone where thousands of people are in limbo, with no sense of their future. In contrast to the damage Katrina brought in New Orleans, the storm was largely color-blind in its immediate destruction of Mississippi. Like New Orleans, however, there are racial and economic dimensions to everything in the aftermath—from the availability of resources for relief and cleanup to reconstruction plans.

“On September 29, 2005, four weeks after the storm, after weeks of begging FEMA and a visit to Washington, D.C., to get congressional support, a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center finally arrived in East Biloxi,” said Ward 2 City Councilor Bill Stallworth, speaking before Congress last December. “That same week, the Red Cross set up an assistance center.”

“In emergency room triage, you attend to the person with their arm hanging off, not the one with the splinter,” Stallworth continued. “The Red Cross and FEMA seem to have a different mindset. The areas of Biloxi that were not as hard hit received a rapid response, while a good three and half weeks past the storm, we were still awaiting assistance.”

“We could see other areas with lights, and we didn’t have lights,” recalled an African-American accountant in Gulfport, Sam Arnold, who is currently a community organizer with International Relief and Development. “We were like two or three weeks in, and we could see the main highway [49], since our community is only two blocks off the highway. The businesses on 49 had lights, and we didn’t have lights. And you know, you really can’t function without electricity.”

The immediate housing crisis for storm survivors is translating into land grabs in low-income neighborhoods. Most widely at risk are African-American neighborhoods, many of them of historic significance, though not widely recognized as such.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

According to a National Hurricane Center report on Katrina, “in many locations, most of the buildings along the coast were completely destroyed, leaving few structures within which to identify still-water marks.” The center’s researchers estimate that the hurricane produced a storm surge as high as 27 feet in some locations.

It was dumbfounding to drive along the coast in Biloxi and find the Grand Casino on the north side of Highway 90. Before Katrina, the casino was on a barge, docked off



the beach, south of the highway. The storm surge lifted the casino barge out of the water, over the beach and over the highway. If you stand at the western end of the barge and look east, you can see the yellow and blue neon sign, a half mile down the road, where the barge originally sat. The same thing happened to two other casino barges—the President Casino in Biloxi, which landed on top of a Holiday Inn, and the Gulfport Grand Casino.

Violetta Hall, originally from New Orleans, had lived in Long Beach, Miss., for the last six years. Her beachfront apartment at 101 Cheri Lane no longer exists. “When I got to the place, I was looking for the heavy things,” Ms. Hall said. “I was like, what happened to the ice box? Where’s the stove? Or the bathtub? Of course you’re gonna be thinking this big bathtub is gonna be there. But everything was gone.”

I met Hall in Pass Christian, at the A-1 RV Park & Campground, which is now a FEMA trailer park. Ms. Hall’s trailer is in an enclave of trailers that houses four generations of her family. Her mother’s trailer is next door; the trailer of her daughter, son-in-law, and grandson is nearby.

The national media have covered the near-total destruction of Bay St. Louis and Waveland. Driving along Beach Boulevard in the two towns, I saw a few people who had returned and were living in trailers on their plots of land, but practically everything was deserted. All that remained were the merest remnants of homes and the things that had been inside them.

In Waveland, we turned up Whispering Pines Drive and headed north for about a mile. Nothing stood as we headed inland, but here the wreckage was thicker at times. There were some hints of the original structures that had stood there. I saw a bathtub filled with a section of wall-tile and a phonograph record, broken up furniture, clothing, toys. A

few yards from a section of chimney stood a rusting green doctor’s office scale, not quite balanced out at 53 pounds.

In each place I visited along the western half of Mississippi’s Gulf Coast, the look of the destruction was a little different, but it was consistently total. And surprisingly, the destruction in the coastal areas of Pascagoula, at the eastern end of the state, is comparable. I remembered George W. Bush’s promise to rebuild another “fantastic house” for Trent Lott on the Pascagoula beachfront. I did not know that 95% of the city’s residential areas went underwater or that 65% of the city’s homes remain uninhabitable. Northrop Grumman Ship Systems’ facility in Pascagoula, which before Katrina employed 19,800 people, was all but obliterated.

Hurricane Katrina wiped out the entire Gulf Coast of Mississippi. The scale of the destruction is difficult to comprehend. All along the coast—mile after mile—just about anything that was there is now gone.

But this is only part of the story. According to the National Hurricane Center, the surge “penetrated at least six miles inland in many portions of coastal Mississippi and up to 12 miles inland along bays and rivers. The surge crossed Interstate 10 in many locations.” Interstate 10 runs east-west, four miles or more north of coastal Highway 90.

Gayle Tart’s brother Sam and his son John died in Pass Christian during the hurricane, on John’s second birthday. Tart explained that father and son had drowned inside their own home.

“Water never came down there [before Katrina]. That’s across the track. [With Katrina] that water came in and that water went out, and the velocity was unbelievable,” Tart said. “The first boundary was the beach and the next boundary was the highway. The day after the storm, you saw neither—no beach and no highway.”

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS

The railroad tracks, which run east-west, typically a third to a half mile in from the water, are a barrier to the elements that wrack the coastline; they are also a longtime racial and economic barrier. In the late 1800s, Mississippi's Gulf Coast became a popular resort area for Mississippi and Alabama plantation owners and for wealthy city-dwellers from New Orleans, many of whom built luxurious beachfront summer homes. Along with the hotels and entertainments of the resort economy, the late 19th- and early 20th-century Mississippi coast saw the growth of sawmills, the turpentine industry, boat yards, stores, and brickyards. Shipbuilding attracted military installations, with large new bases built in both Gulfport and Biloxi after World War II—Keesler Air Force Base and the Naval Construction Battalion Center, respectively. While the centers of economic power were south of the tracks, the workers who supported the economy were largely north of the tracks.

Though many of the Gulfport's African Americans live further north today, they started out closer to those tracks and the coast. "Prior to 1970 most of the black communities were located close to the water," Sam Edward Arnold recalled. "Transportation wasn't that great so they had to have close proximity to the places of employment. If you were interested in employment then you almost had to come to the coast, because the only other type of employment that was available most of the time was working in agriculture. One of the great sayings that we had was, 'They don't grow cotton on the coast.'"

In 1968 Arnold's family moved about four and a half miles north, to Forest Heights, one of the home ownership communities for low-income wage earners developed by the National Council of Negro Women in the mid-1960s, with

grant funding from HUD. Arnold was with his mother and his brother at the family home in Forest Heights when Katrina hit.

"All of a sudden the water begin to rise," Arnold said. "The velocity of the wind increased. And the strangest thing: even though the hurricane eventually came out of the south, the wind was actually blowing east to west, so we were able to open the front door, even at the height of the hurricane, and just watch. So we set there and watched it literally take our neighbor's house apart board by board."

Arnold's mother's home filled with four feet of water. Mrs. Arnold lost almost all of her life's possessions.

To the east, in Moss Point, six feet of water rushed into the house of James and Beulah Miller. James Miller, 61, is a retired crane operator at the Northrop Grumman shipyard in Pascagoula. Beulah Miller, 56, is a retired teacher—the first African American to teach in the Pascagoula schools. Moss Point is about five miles north of the obliterated beachfront of Pascagoula. Yet most of Moss Point—a city of 16,000 residents, over 70% African American—was covered by Katrina's uncanny, wind driven water.

Mrs. Miller described what they found when they came home after the storm. "Everything was wet. We didn't have anywhere to try to clean it and put it up. I started looking and searching for personal things of Momma's I wanted to keep. Bibles, you know. My momma and my daddy, both are deceased. Certain things of theirs I wanted to keep, but I had to let go, because it was all wet, mildewed, there's nothing I could do with it. I was just in shock."

"I started pulling everything out in the front yard," Mr. Miller added. "Later on I just had to carry it out on the road, so the collectors can get it. That's about it. It's just amazing how you worked all your life for something and overnight it just comes and it just goes. But what can you say, that's the work of the Lord, so I guess you just have to get up and pick your pieces up and go again."

HOUSING WOES

"Housing? Nobody was talking about housing before Katrina and nobody was talking about it after Katrina, until fairly recently," said Derrick Evans. "You know, housing is not a function of government in the state of Mississippi. It's a foreign concept."

Reliable figures on the number of Mississippians who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina and the number who still need housing are hard to come by. FEMA reports that just in the three coastal Mississippi counties most affected—Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson—the hurricane either destroyed (64,120) or caused major damage (35,340) to nearly 100,000 single-family homes, apartments, or mobile homes. In February, FEMA reported housing 95,700 people in trailers in the state; an internal FEMA doc-



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James and Beulah Miller, Moss Point, Mississippi



Ocean Springs, Mississippi

ument obtained by the *Biloxi Sun-Herald* indicated around 8,900 households were still awaiting a trailer.

“It’s so many more people that are needing trailers,” Sharon Hanshaw of East Biloxi said. “Why couldn’t there just be trailers all the way down? People are overly crowded in places. Five and six, seven and ten people in a one-bedroom place because at least they’re inside.” Hanshaw, 51, has lived in Biloxi most of her life. Before Katrina she was in a rental unit that adjoined her cosmetology business.

In terms of the race and socioeconomic profile of the Mississippians Katrina left homeless, the data that FEMA and others have made available appear in some respects discrepant with the reality on the ground. According to FEMA’s storm damage assessment maps, many areas dense with low-income African Americans did not flood. For example, FEMA’s maps show no flooding at all in Jackson County, which encompasses the eastern portion of the Mississippi Gulf Coast: the FEMA map shows only a portion of Jackson County and does not even include Moss Point, where James and Beulah Miller’s home was flooded with several feet of water. FEMA’s maps fail to show flooding in other heavily low-income, African-American neighborhoods where it unquestionably occurred.

Hanshaw, who was out of town when Katrina struck, returned to Biloxi five days later to discover that the entire front of her rented house and about half of the roof were gone. She and her three daughters tried to walk in and found themselves sinking in mud because the floor had fallen in. Although they could smell gas, they were overwhelmed by the

need to try to save at least a few possessions. “My daughter was pregnant at the time. I said, ‘Please, you get out.’ She said, ‘No, Ma, I gotta get some of your stuff.’”

In the end, Hanshaw and her daughters salvaged two pieces of luggage, an antique milk jug, and two antique tables. They hoped to return again, after the gas was shut off, to find more belongings, but the owner bulldozed the property without giving Hanshaw any notice. She lost all of her work equipment and all of the items she had been slowly accumulating to furnish the home that she had been making plans to buy.

Hanshaw waited five months to receive a trailer, though she had nowhere to live and had not received any other housing assistance.

Renters are finding themselves vulnerable even if their homes were not destroyed. Since the hurricane, evictions have been commonplace. Gulfport attorney Tart has taken numerous cases. “You see a lot of landlords realizing that they can get more for their property,” she said. “They don’t want to fix the property. So they’re telling people, ‘I don’t have to do this—you can get out.’ The courts have

basically sided with the landowners, mostly because a lot of people couldn’t produce leases. And if you’re on a month-to-month lease, you get 30 days to get out. You just have to go, but go where?” (For a particularly egregious instance of an African-American community neglected by military relief efforts, then faced with mass evictions, see Derrick Evans’ account of the Redball housing project, page 24.)

“There are no apartments; there are no houses for rent,” lamented Rod Mimbs. “Even now, four months after the storm, they’re not to be found. Finding a home to buy is virtually impossible in the coastal counties of Mississippi, in the lower counties of Alabama.”

I spoke with Rod and Hazel Mimbs in a trailer park in Gautier, near Moss Point and Pascagoula. Rod Mimbs, 44, is white; he works in information technology support at Northrop Grumman Ship Systems. He is married to Hazel Mimbs, 47, who is African American; she works as an administrative assistant at Chevron in Pascagoula. The apartment they rented in D’Iberville was wrecked by the hurricane, and the building has been condemned.

“We currently live in a 26-foot camper,” Rod Mimbs continued, “which we purchased approximately two weeks after the storm because there was no housing available.” To other storm survivors I interviewed, this was an unusual move, since financing this kind of purchase was difficult in the early weeks after Katrina.

“There was no electronic communication with any of the major banks anywhere,” Mimbs explained. “All of the small banks here along the coastline were totally down. And it

took weeks. We got our loan in mid-October, over a month after the camper was actually purchased. We are very fortunate in that one of Hazel's sisters who lives in Florida was very, very kind and offered to go ahead and pay for the camper up front for us until the loan could come through, so we could have a place to live."

"We had nowhere to stay and FEMA was nowhere to be found," Mimbs added. "For the record, FEMA called us ninety plus days after the storm to see if we needed housing."

OBSTACLES TO REBUILDING

Those who have secured adequate temporary housing and are ready to begin rebuilding face plenty of obstacles. First is the sheer lack of resources, especially for those most in need. The Millers built their Moss Point home in 1978, across the street from the house where Mr. Miller was raised; they paid their mortgage off about four years ago. The water that filled their home destroyed all of their possessions. After an initial outlay of \$2,300 from FEMA and a subsequent check to cover the cost of a generator, FEMA told the Millers that they would have to pursue a Small Business Administration loan for the rest of the money to repair their home.

Though largely serving businesses, the SBA has provided

its Disaster Loan Program to individuals as well since its inception in 1953, when it absorbed the functions of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. SBA approves an average of about \$1 billion in low-interest disaster loans annually. According to the agency, as of late February it had approved 22,162 loans for a total of \$1.62 billion in Mississippi.

"We thought we would be eligible for the grant. They're saying our income is too high," Beulah Miller objected. "We're retired, fixed income. They're telling us now we're going to have to get an SBA loan. We're both sick. He's been having problems with his heart, emphysema. He's a diabetic. Now I've developed heart problems. That's going to be an added burden of debts. Our medicine bill runs about \$200 to \$300 a month."

The Millers did not have flood insurance for their home, so government assistance is the only resource available to them. "The SBA told us that we qualified for this loan," Mrs. Miller continued. "I told them I don't want a loan. I want a grant. I financially can't pay it back. And if I don't live long enough to pay it back, then you gonna take it away from my grandbaby, and that's who I want to leave my home to. She'll be left with nothing."

In December Congress passed \$5.3 billion in emergency supplemental Community Development Block Grants for

Carland Baker, Sr., on the site where his home once stood, Long Beach, Mississippi



relief and mitigation activities in Mississippi. Gov. Haley Barbour, who has complete discretion over these funds, has declared that the money will be used entirely as retroactive flood insurance for insured homeowners who did not have flood coverage because they lived outside of official flood zones.

“What the Congress has done with this package is not only unprecedented in its enormity, it is also unprecedented in the authority that it’s giving Mississippi, the leeway about how to spend money,” Barbour told the *Mississippi Press* editorial board on January 5. “I told the Legislature yesterday that we’re being trusted by Congress, that we are going to be good stewards of the taxpayers’ money.”

“As it now stands, only a few of my neighbors or community members will benefit at all from the housing relief package,” said Derrick Evans. “By definition, Community Development Block Grants are supposed to help the poor. Even so-called ‘entitlement cities’ like Gulfport should be wondering how anything will be left for them to use for their severe and worsening housing woes.”

Indeed, not a single dollar has been allocated in Mississippi to address Katrina’s major blow to affordable housing. “In Mississippi, HUD has estimated damage to public housing alone to be at least \$114 million,” reports the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. “This Mississippi figure ... suggests that the total amount needed for public housing is

at least \$250 million, and the total for all HUD-subsidized housing is at least \$450 million. The Administration did not include funds for restoration of the federally-assisted housing stock in its recent supplemental appropriations request.”

Even homeowners in designated flood zones, who were likely to have flood insurance, face uncertainties thanks to the arbitrary criteria for assessing damage that FEMA and municipalities are imposing. FEMA has recommended that homes that sustained more than 50% damage now be required to meet new code qualifications, often including raising the houses higher than they were before.

“The bulk of the homes only flooded, and with removing and replacing the sheet rock, the houses are more than livable,” Sam Edward Arnold explained about Forest Heights. “But the city is taking the position that if a house flooded it fell into the 51% category regardless of the physical damage, without an evaluation.” People may be forced out of their homes because they can’t afford to bring them up to the new code if they repair them.

Homeowners who want to rebuild are also faced with price gouging on materials. “I once checked on some shingles,” said James Miller. “One week the man told me it was \$1,800 for all the shingles. The next week I went back; it was \$2,300. Everything is jumping sky high. Dry wall ran \$10, \$11 a sheet. Now it costs about \$30 or \$40. That’s a sheet!”

“We’re dealing with trying to find property to purchase to build on,” said Hazel Mimbs. “That’s our only alternative right now. There are no homes to buy.”

“Any property north of I-10, unwritten rule, went up a minimum of 10% per acre after the storm,” added Rod Mimbs. “A lot of that went out of our price range.”

“We were looking at 2.2 acres for \$17,500, in the country,” Mrs. Mimbs continued. “But they have a covenant: you cannot put a mobile home, RV, any type of temporary housing on the property to live in while you build your home. We couldn’t put the RV there, so we went on trying to find something else. But people were hiking the prices up on their property, so we couldn’t purchase land and build a home, too. We went back to that property for \$17,500, and he had gone up 10%. We’re still looking.”

The Mimbses would not comment on what it’s like to try to buy property as a mixed couple in the deep South. However, a local who wished to remain anonymous contends there are unpublished properties, sold by “good ol’ boy” word of mouth. “You can find property in certain areas here that don’t want to sell to blacks. The prices are good, but they don’t want to sell to blacks.”



BEN GREENBERG

Storm damage in the interior of Brother Ike’s church, Pascagoula, Mississippi



BEN GREENBERG

Beach front home in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi

GRASSROOTS, FORESTS, AND TREES

While I think it is safe to say that the individual stories I heard in Mississippi are representative of the experiences of many, it is extremely difficult to assess the total situation. Information is yet to be gathered in numerous struggling communities—African American, Latino, Vietnamese, Croatian, low-income white, and more. It is similarly challenging to assess what assistance has been delivered and what is still needed—especially because so much of the relief to date has been provided by a diverse array of both faith-based and secular nongovernmental organizations.

In Gulfport, I got acquainted to varying degrees with African-American communities in Turkey Creek, Forest Heights (aka Old North Gulfport), Soria City, and The Quarters. Other African-American areas that I didn't get to learn much about were Magnolia Grove, Handsboro, and Mississippi City.

“You got, north of the tracks, Pass Christian. Long Beach has a little Black enclave,” Derrick Evans said, rattling off a list of other Gulf Coast areas with African-American communities. “Going over the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge—Ocean Springs has a little, historic, Black, unrecognized district. Even if you go over as far east as Pascagoula, you've got three: Moss Point, Creole Town, and the Krebs Avenue neighborhood.”

Evans continued, “Most of these communities are located in places extremely ripe for gentrification. Close enough to

the beach and close enough to traditional employments, but far enough back because of historical segregation patterns to still be there and, in the aftermath of Katrina, to be rather ideally sited for something else.”

Gulf Coast municipalities, underfunded even before the storm, now face tremendous losses in tax revenue and are under immense pressure to come up with viable plans for recovery. The new hyper-scarcity of resources places these already vulnerable communities even more at risk.

Many residents are beginning to act on their concerns. In Gulfport, African-American community leaders have formed a steering committee for community-based planning, modeled on the Dudley Square Neighborhood Initiative in Roxbury, Mass. Existing organizations like the North Gulfport Community Land Trust and Turkey Creek Community Initiatives that are focused on community self-determination and on ecological and historic preservation now provide some of the basis for post-Katrina organizing.

There is a strong spirit of self-sufficiency in many of these African-American communities that were, for a century or more, unincorporated enclaves with little or no relation to nearby, white-dominated municipalities. So many people survived the storm because individuals took matters into their own hands, performing heroic and ingenious rescues and organizing their neighbors for survival.

Now the same spirit is helping to insure community preservation, as in Forest Heights, where residents are ignoring



Rod and Hazel Mimbs with their dog, Bette, outside their trailer home, Gautier, Mississippi

the arbitrarily imposed revisions to the building code. Sam Edward Arnold estimates that 80% to 90% of the homeowners got building permits early on, before the city established its new building code. “The city is talking about rescinding that, but people, being who they are and acting in their own self-interest, are doing some things that I applaud even though they might have to fight later on,” Arnold explained. “They are going on with their building plans. They’re doing it without getting the city’s ok. They’ll deal with the consequences later.”

Biloxi City Councilor Bill Stallworth opened the East Biloxi Coordination and Relief Center with funding and technical assistance from Oxfam America. The center has been coordinating relief to the area; providing community members with basic resources like the use of phones and computers with Internet access; and organizing political action.

Everywhere I went, homeowners have had tremendous assistance in replacing roofs, mucking out homes, removing trees, replacing sheet rock—but not from the government. The greatest assistance has been from a large influx of volunteers from faith-based organizations and secular nongovernment organizations. In Gulfport, for example, the local Interfaith Disaster Task Force, originally formed in response to Hurricane George in 1998, coordinates the relief efforts of local and national groups—Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, United Methodist Committee on Relief, and Lutheran-Epis-

copal Disaster Relief. Of special note in Gulfport and elsewhere in the state has been the work of the North Carolina Baptist Men. As of February 6, according to its website the group has “had more than 55,896 volunteer days of volunteer service, provided over 818,472 meals, completed 4,064 recovery jobs, provided over 44,560 showers, washed more than 6,000 laundry loads and provided childcare for 560 children” in Mississippi. The North Carolina Baptist Men have set a goal of rebuilding 600 homes in Gulfport in the next two years. Meanwhile, government support continues to play only a small role in relief and recovery efforts.

In New Orleans, the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund has been building coalitions among local organizations and forming partnerships with individual and organizational supporters across the United States and around the globe. In Gulfport and in Biloxi there are similar coalitions and alliances among community groups; state and regional organizations, like the Mississippi Workers’ Center for Human Rights, the Mississippi Center for Justice, the state NAACP, and the state ACLU; national organizations, such as the Lawyers’ Committee On Civil Rights Under Law; and international organizations, like Oxfam and International Relief and Development.

Hurricane Katrina has exposed—and intensified by several orders of magnitude—the profound vulnerabilities of people of color and low-income people. Six months after Katrina hit, the need for resources—money, physical labor, and technical support that builds local capacity—has not diminished; it has only evolved. Many are still in need of basic relief; the extent of the time and money that will be required for a true and just recovery are still just beginning to be understood.

There are fewer people affected in the Gulf Coast of Mississippi than in Louisiana. Mississippi has 364,000 people in its most affected counties, while Louisiana has 1.5 million. Yet the affected geography in Mississippi is more vast than in Louisiana and comprises a larger number of cities and towns, each of which has its own set of circumstances and concerns. It is always the case that outsiders who want to support vulnerable communities need to listen carefully to what they say they need and what they say their issues are. For the Gulf Coast, that listening process has barely begun. ■

Ben Greenberg is a freelance journalist, Dollars & Sense collective member, and author of the blog Hungry Blues (<http://hungryblues.us>). He recently joined the staff of Physicians for Human Rights.

This article appeared in the March/April 2006 special issue of *Dollars & Sense* magazine on Hurricane Katrina and Gulf Coast reconstruction. *Dollars & Sense* explains the workings of the U.S. and international economies and provides left perspectives on current economic affairs. It is edited and produced by a collective of economists, journalists, and activists who are committed to social justice and economic democracy. To order copies of the special issue or to subscribe, visit www.dollarsandsense.org or call 617-447-2177.