It's All About the Government

On January 4th, an article appeared in the Washington Post by Peter Whoriskey entitled “New Orleans Repeats Mistakes as It Rebuilds.” Among other inferences made pertaining to his headline, he seemed to make light of the fact that we do much depending on God down here by quoting two rebuilders as saying, “We’ll leave it in the good Lord’s hands,” and “I hope God is listening.” Then, on January 11th a dastardly insulting editorial was published in the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, called “The big stupid.” This paper brazenly bestowed New Orleanians with names such as “imbeciles,” and wrote that “If dim-witted evacuees are determined to rebuild in the worst possible areas, they should sign a waiver relinquishing any claim to future aid if their homes float down the river in the next 30 years.”

Do these writers have nothing better to do than to kick a downed dog? We are discouraged and hurt as we see that after all of these months, it is quite evident that a large part of this country still does not understand what occurred in New Orleans one year ago last August. Truly, if one did not go through this hellish nightmare of injustice, one does not have a clue. We must persistently put before the public that we were experiencing a little man-made holocaust down here; a deliberate destruction of a people and their way of life—half of a century being lied to that we were safe in our homes when we were actually living on faulty, government-built levees (paid for with our own tax dollars)—that could rupture at any moment.

Mr. Whoriskey quoted chairman of the federal Gulf Coast rebuilding office Donald E. Powell as saying, “Federal tax dollars should not be used to rebuild in places that repeatedly flood or are damaged due to Mother Nature…” My house was not damaged by Mother Nature, but by the negligent and criminal construction of our levees. Scientific fact, not this metaphoric attribution of “Mother Nature,” shows that we could have been flooded out and drowned long before Katrina. It irks us when we hear or read that New Orleans was devastated by “Katrina.” The name of the actual entity responsible was “Uncle Sam.” It irks us when the nation assumes that those who suffered did so because they lived in the fabled Lower Ninth Ward—a place in the city that actually resides on higher ground than where I lived in Lakeview. We were all lied to as one people, as one city; we were all treated, together, as if we did not deserve the truth about our system of homeland protection.

My husband and I lived in Lakeview, a neighborhood not unlike most of small-town America, for twenty-five years. We raised our children there and owned a shop for nearly as long. Because of the toxic torrents, everything in our homes, schools, libraries, and doctors’ offices, was disgusting and ruined. Our family-operated shoe store was submerged to the ceiling. We had a choice not to come
back here, as everyone did. But, this is HOME—as in, there is no place like HOME...HOME is where the heart is... HOME is where my love lies waiting silently for me... We have parents here to help out; are blessed with fifty-three years worth of friends who also returned; and have two long-time established businesses with loyal clients and customers. After being financially handicapped by the “Thing,” do we dare drop what we have been doing with our lives? Do we abandon our dear ones? Slash ourselves from our community? Surely, those in other countries who suffer crimes at the hand of their country often choose not to return to their homes that now look like graveyards, one may argue – but this is 2007, and this is supposed to be America.

It is imperative that Mr. Whoriskey, the editors of the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, and all in this nation who prefer to spend their time speculating about, demeaning, and dehumanizing New Orleans and its citizens, be constantly reminded that the bottom line is about the Government. The Federal Government denied our state the royalties from off-shore drilling which would help reduce the washing away of our wetlands, our natural buffer against tropical storms. It cheated us out of a quality levee system; murdered over two thousand people; destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes and livelihoods; and neglected to help us for days after, while our brothers and sisters were made to drown and float in the streets. We all remember the footage on the news channels that were reporting facts that the Government would then claim they had no clue about. And where are the billions of dollars appropriated by Congress? They are tied up in the Road Home Program, a flop of a government project full of flaws, just like our levees.

So will those who are really “repeating mistakes” please stand up? Please do not ever again write that they are the citizens of New Orleans. This disaster will go down in history not only as the nation’s most devastating, but also as a horrendous wrong, against this nation’s human beings, that will never be righted. All New Orleans citizens deserve to be living here in our beloved city safe and secure, and carrying on with our lives like the rest of you folks. You had better believe we look to God, in all His/Her formations—nature, prophets, angels, and saints—here in this melting pot of Afro-Euro-Caribbean cultures—this unique international port rich in the arts, and most famous of food—that we call HOME. It is in God’s divine presence that we can really trust.

Susan C. Levin
Metairie, LA

Jillian S. Levin
Formerly from New Orleans, now in New York, NY