

**QUOTES FROM THE CLUELESS**

*"We are going to move fast."*

—FEMA director Michael

"Brownie" Brown 8/28/05—the day before Katrina made landfall.

*"I have not heard of thousands of people in the convention center who don't have food or water."*

—Homeland Security honcho

Michael Chertoff on 9/1/05, three days after the first of what became 25,000 people sought shelter in the convention center.

*"We just learned of the convention center—we being the federal government—today."*

—Brownie 9/1/05

*"Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job."*

—George W to Brown 9/2/05

*"I don't think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees."*

—George W 9/1/05\*

*"We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."*

—GOP Rep. Richard Baker, 9/8/05

*"And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway so this—[chuckle]—this is working very well for them."*

—GW's momma, Barbara Bush, after viewing flood evacuees packed into Houston's Astrodome 9/5/05

*"What I'm hearing—which is sort of scary—is that they all want to stay in Texas."*

—Momma Bush again 9/5/05

*"Now tell me the truth boys, is this kind of fun?"*

—Tom DeLay to three young evacuees, at the jammed Astrodome 9/9/05

*"What didn't go right?"*

—George W, 9/6/05

*"I also want to encourage anybody who was affected by Hurricane Corina [sic] to make sure their children are in school."*

—Laura Bush 9/8/05

*"I'm going to go home and walk my dog and hug my wife, and maybe get a good Mexican meal and a stiff margarita and a full night's sleep."*

—Brownie after being relieved of his hurricane relief command

\*Among those who did just that are FEMA, the Army Corps of Engineers, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, the National Hurricane Center and *National Geographic*.

The **LOWDOWN**  
*High Tower*  
 Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer ■ Vol. 7 No. 10 ■ October 2005

The Battle of New Orleans II  
**It's time for people's housing, people's transit, and PEOPLE FIRST!**

By the fifth day—with New Orleans under 20 feet of toxic water, with federal help still nowhere to be seen, and with 100,000 or so poor people trapped in unbelievable misery and danger—some of the locals still were able to muster enough of the Big Easy's irreverent humor to crown their drowning city with an apt new name: "Lake George."

What happened in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi was not merely the abject failure of the Bushite presidency (both in preparedness and response), but also a deep moral failure, reflecting the

bankruptcy of their extremist ruling ideology. They have a blind hatred of the idea that government exists to serve the common good, instead insisting that people should be on their own.

In New Orleans, they were. To help pay for tax cuts for the rich, Bush had cut the money to shore up the levees...so people drowned. If you ever wondered what George W's "ownership society" would look like, there it was. Step right up if you want to own a casket.

What Bush & Company don't get is that the great majority of us Americans simply do not share such a callous ideology, and we are totally embarrassed that federal officials failed to be there for the people of the Gulf Coast from day one. Whatever else people think about government, ordinary folks (including the conservative-minded who are not partisan ideologues) expect govern-

ment to respond hard and fast in times of real need — and the aftermath of Katrina has to be the absolute definition of real need.

Yet Washington dawdled



Starbucks, the mega-global giant of the caffeine-slinging world, set out years ago to become the McDonald's of coffee shops...and has it ever succeeded! Starbucks is now as widely perceived as McDonald's to be a worldwide symbol of ubiquitous, corporate uniformity.

But let's not be negative. Instead, let's celebrate the indomitable spirit of America's grassroots, independent coffee houses... and the people who support them. I'm one of those people—wherever I go, I seek out the unique, lively, sassy, colorful, funky, and fun joints that are locally owned and representative of an actual place.

If you are interested in being Starbucks-free and finding local shops in your town or in your travels, there's a handy web site for you called the Delocator. It is the creation of three artists who had a caffeine-induced epiphany a couple of years ago while visiting New York City. Emerging from the subway in search of a genuine Big Apple coffee experience, they found themselves in Starbucks hell. The chain's cookie-cutter outlets were everywhere...but no local latte purveyors were left.

Rather than just wail or rail, the three launched the Delocator, a web site that helps folks find locations in cities all across America where good independent coffee houses are. It's a simple site—enter a zip code and up pops a list of local shops within a five-mile radius. There's also a list of any Starbucks in the area, so you can avoid them.

The Delocator has had more than a million hits and has an ever-growing database of several thousand independent places to get a corporate-free cuppa' jo. You're invited to add your own favorite and make comments. Clicking onto [www.delocator.net](http://www.delocator.net) is a direct way for anyone to strike a blow against the corporate machine.

for days (George went on a mean-dering political trip out west, Cheney was out on Maryland's Eastern Shore buying a \$2.4 million vacation home, Condi Rice took off for some shoe shopping in New York City, and Bush's homeland emergency team was locked inside the Beltway doing a terrific impersonation of the Three Stooges). Americans were appalled, for the Bushites' indifference and ineptitude reflected on our sense of ourselves and our nation. "Is *this* America?" That was the question I heard being almost shouted out everywhere I went, asked in a combination of disbelief and outrage. We are a can-do, roll-up-our-sleeves people (as demonstrated amply by the gusher of grassroots charity and volunteerism that immediately followed the storm), and it was deeply offensive to our core values of fairness and justice that the Bushites were such clueless slugs.

### The third disaster

Katrina should be known as K<sup>3</sup>, for it brought three disasters. The first two—the storm itself and Bush's non-response—have been widely covered. But there's a third disaster that's still unfolding: the reconstruction of New Orleans and other ravaged areas.

Rushing to make up for their tardiness and incompetence, the White House and Congress are air-dropping massive sackloads of taxpayer cash on their political problem. The first delivery was \$62 billion (with \$50 billion going through those comical bunglers at FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency), and the best guesses are that the final toll will top \$200 billion. Two important questions about this bundle are not

being addressed by the politicos in charge: One, where's it coming from? Two, who's getting it?

**Funding the relief and reconstruction.** George is up to his usual fiscal hocus-pocus, delivering federal largesse without being honest or accepting political accountability for it. Just as with his \$210 billion tab (so far) for his Iraq attack, he is refusing to assess us taxpayers for the bill for his Katrina project. Instead, he's putting every dime of it on the federal credit card, passing the actual payout to our grandchildren, who'll have their taxes hiked to pay off the ever-ballooning debt. Of course, Bush will be long gone by then, so he and his GOP congress will pay no political price.

As usual, some of the right-wing congress critters are calling for more cuts in Head Start, job training, college grants, and other "social programs" to finance both the war and Katrina. But these cuts would hurt the very families fighting the war and the ones devastated by the storm. A better way has been suggested in numerous letters to the editor I've seen in papers all across the country: Cut corporate welfare and pork-barrel spending!

Take the recently passed highway bill, bloated by \$24 billion in boondoggle projects stuffed into it by lawmakers wanting political credit for bringing home the bacon. There are a record 6,371 of these projects in the bill—nearly all of which could easily be sacrificed to free up funds for the urgent needs on the Gulf Coast. For example:

- **Don Young**, the GOP chair of the House Transportation Committee, proudly said of the bill he passed, "I stuffed it like a turkey."

One reeking blob of stuffing was \$223 million to build the Gravina Island Bridge in his home state of Alaska. Dubbed the "bridge to nowhere," it will be the size of the Golden Gate Bridge, yet it will connect only the 50 people who live on Gravina Island with the 8,000 people who live in the mainland metropolis of Ketchikan. I'll bet most of these 8,050 beneficiaries would give up this pricey span to help the folks down south, especially since there's already a ferry running every 15 minutes between Gravina and Ketchikan.

- Don brought another bridge to Alaska, too, this one connecting Anchorage to Port Mackenzie (population 1) and Knik (population 22). In tribute to the chairman's porky prowess, this span is to be named "Don Young's Way." Alaska's former highway commissioner says that neither of Young's bridges make sense, "but a lot of people are going to make a lot of money building [them]."

- What would Ronald Reagan say about the \$2.3 million piece of pork for some "beautification enhancements" along California's Ronald Reagan Freeway? The Gipper once vetoed a highway bill because it contained 152 unnecessary add-ons like this, while the latest bill has nearly 6,400 larded into it.

- **Dennis Hastert**, the GOP speaker of the House, grabbed \$207 million to build a "Prairie Parkway" through a stretch of his Illinois district, even though the locals say it is unwanted, dubbing it the "Hastert Sprawlway." Wouldn't repairing the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway be a better use of this money?

## Do something!

**Information:** To find out how much pork your own elected officials brought home, go to [www.cagw.org](http://www.cagw.org). If you see projects that look like pork and would rather use the money targeted for your state's projects for Katrina victims, contact your elected U.S. officials at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) <http://www.senate.gov>

**Agitation:** Pump up the Democrats! Mail, fax, or email this issue of the *Lowdown* to your own Democratic members of the House and Senate or to the Democratic leaders, urging them to stand up and speak out for a democratic, grassroots approach to rebuilding the Gulf Coast:

**Harry Reid**, Senate Democratic Leader  
528 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
202-224-3542  
202-224-7327 fax  
[http://reid.senate.gov/email\\_form.cfm](http://reid.senate.gov/email_form.cfm)

**Nancy Pelosi**, House Democratic Leader  
2371 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515  
202-225-4965  
202-225-8259 fax  
[Sf.nancy@mail.house.gov](mailto:Sf.nancy@mail.house.gov)

**THE GREAT TEXTBOOK ROBBERY**

**Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation**

1. Publication title: *The Hightower Lowdown* 2. Publication number: 0018-463 3. Filing date 9/29/05 4. Issue frequency: monthly 5. No. of issues published annually: 2 6. Annual subscription price: \$15 7. Complete mailing address of publication: 375 South End Ave Apartment 14P, New York, NY 10280 9. Full names and mailing addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: Public Intelligence Inc., 375 South End Ave, Apt. 14P New York, NY 10280 Editor: Phillip Frazer c/o 375 South End Ave, Apt 14P New York NY 10280 Managing Editor: Phillip Frazer c/o 375 South End Ave, Apt. 14P New York NY 10280 10. Owner: Full name: Public Intelligence Inc. c/o John Ernst, 375 South End Ave, Apt 14P New York, NY 10280 Complete mailing address: 375 South End Ave, Apt 14P New York NY 10280 11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders owning or holding 1% or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: None 12. Tax status: The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during preceding 12 months. 13. Publication title: *The Hightower Lowdown* 14. Issue date for circulation data below: October

| 15. Extent and Nature Of Circulation  | Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months | No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date |
|---|--|---|
| a. Total Number of Copies (net press run)   | 106433   | 120500  |
| b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation  |  |   |
| (1) Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541                                    | 103223   | 117479  |
| (2) Paid In-County Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541  | 1311   | 1559  |
| (3) Sales through Dealers and carriers, Street vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution | 0  | 0   |
| (4) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS   | 268  | 541   |
| c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation [Sum of 15b(1), (2), (3), and (4)]                               | 104802   | 119579  |
| d. Free Distribution by Mail [Samples, complimentary & other free]  |  |   |
| (1) Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541   | 279  | 301   |
| (2) In County as Stated on Form 3541  | 47   | 51  |
| (3) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS   | 27   | 107   |
| e. Free Distribution Outside the USPS   | 345  | 175   |
| f. Total free Distribution (Sum of 15d and 15e)   | 698  | 634   |
| g. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15f)  | 105500   | 120213  |
| h. Copies not Distributed   | 933  | 287   |
| i. Total (sum of 15g and h)   | 106433   | 120500  |
| j. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (15c divided by 15g times 100)                                 | 99.34  | 99.47   |

17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner:  
I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete John Ernst, Business Manager

failed the people of New Orleans and elsewhere early on, Bush now is hugging every victim he can find, using images of their suffering to show that he's a "compassionate conservative" intent on spending whatever it takes to rebuild the Crescent City (a place, he notes with a wink, he used to go party).

Hold it right there, party boy! While you're spending billions in the name of "the people," the big bundles of money are going to the same Republican-crony corporations that always seem to be first in line...such as Halliburton.

George W might have been a no-show in the critical week after Katrina hit, but Joe Allbaugh was Joey-on-the-spot. A longtime Bush buddy, Joe has raised money for George, been his 2000 campaign manager, and served as Bush's first head of FEMA (where he displaced the agency's competent pros with White House political hacks). Now he's a lobbyist for Halliburton, and he was on the ground in New Orleans before FEMA knew there was a flood, assessing federal business opportunities for his clients.

Not that Halliburton really needs a liaison to the White House, since former CEO Dick Cheney is its direct pipeline to policy. The Veep continues to hold \$10 million worth of Halliburton stock options and draws more than \$178,000 a year in payments from the corporation. In turn, Halliburton is a reliable donor of hundreds of thousands of dollars to Bush and the GOP each election cycle.

Sure enough, Halliburton now has a \$500 million, five-year contract to repair military installations damaged by Katrina and was just granted another no-bid deal to restore levees in New Orleans.

In recent weeks, on campuses all across America, another wave of bright-eyed and bushy-tailed students have enrolled in universities. Ah, what an experience—the camaraderie of college spirit, the titillating possibilities of higher learning! Then these eager innocents go to buy their textbooks, and wham—the dispiriting reality of corporate greed whacks them upside the head.

Students, already beleaguered by skyrocketing tuition and fees, now face sticker shock when purchasing required texts. A congressional study finds that students today are averaging \$900 per semester for books. A watchdog group called CALPIRG has issued a report called "Ripoff 101," documenting that the giant publishers are raising prices of college texts at a rate three times higher than the prices of general books.

CALPIRG finds three main reasons for the inflated costs. One, the publishers issue new, higher-priced editions every three years or so, even though there's little substantive change in the material. Second, at least half of the books are now sold "bundled" with unnecessary CD-ROMs and flashy workbooks that drastically bloat the price even though two-thirds of college faculty say they "rarely" or "never" use these add-ons.

Third, publishers jack up the price simply because they can. Students are a captive market. Professors say, "Buy this book," and there's little choice but to pay the rip-off price. Also, like drug companies, publishers have been charging Americans more than they charge consumers overseas. On average, the exact same books cost 20% more here than in England, but in many cases, the overcharge is much greater. A calculus textbook, for example, sells for \$132 here, but only \$62 in Britain.

The good news is that students, some faculty, and a

—continued p. 4

Yet when Young was asked about cutting the highway pork to help shoulder the load of what is now being called the worst natural disaster in U.S. history, his office assailed the idea as "moronic." Contrast that selfish nastiness with the spirit of the good folks in Bozeman, Montana, who have now petitioned their own city council to return the \$4 million Bozeman is to get from the highway bill to build a parking garage. "We figure New Orleans needs the money right now a lot more than we need extra downtown parking space," one Montanan told the *Wall Street Journal*.

On another front, why saddle future generations with Katrina's costs when there's an obvious, readily available source of new tax revenues: windfall oil profits. Thanks to Bush's failed war strategy, thanks to his oil-soaked energy policy, and now thanks to the hurri-

cane, Big Oil is charging up to four bucks a gallon and wallowing in record profits. Shell has reported profits of \$37 billion in the last year, and ExxonMobil is expected to make \$10 billion in profit in just the last three months.

The oil giants have done nothing to earn these unprecedented profits, but they are lifting these sums straight out of our wallets. Yet far from recouping even a penny of our money through an excess-profits tax, the Bush-Cheney energy bill passed in July doles out at least \$4 billion in new subsidies! ExxonMobil is hauling in so much profit that its CEO says he doesn't know how to spend it all. Fine, let's take back the excess (as proposed in the "Gas Price Spikes Act," sponsored by Rep. Dennis Kucinich and 33 others in HR 2070) and put the money toward the public good, including rebuilding the Gulf area.

**Who's getting the money?** Having

**GET THE LOWDOWN!**

**YES!** I want to receive a full year of *The Hightower Lowdown*—12 issues in all—for an unbelievably ridiculous, low, low price.


- Send me one year of *The Hightower Lowdown* for just \$15. (Seniors & students—\$12.)
- Send me two years of the *Lowdown* for \$27. (Seniors & students—\$22.)

To give a gift of the *Lowdown*, enter the recipient's name and address below and include your name and address on a separate sheet.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_  
 ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this coupon with your payment to: ***The Hightower Lowdown*, P.O. Box 20596, New York, NY 10011**

10/05

**The  LOWDOWN**

**EDITORS:** Jim Hightower, Phillip Frazer  
**COPY WIZ:** Gwenda Blair **ARTISTE:** Matt Wuerker  
**DESKTOP:** Sahu Barron **CIRCULATION:** John Ernst  
**RESEARCH:** Laura Ehrlich **PUBLISHER:** Phillip Frazer

*The Hightower Lowdown* (ISSN 1524-4881) is published monthly by Public Intelligence Inc., 375 South End Ave #14P New York NY 10280. © 2005 in the United States. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY. Subscriptions: 1 year, \$15; 2 years, \$27. Add \$8/year for Mexico or Canada; add \$12/year for overseas airmail. Back issues \$2 postpaid. **Allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of first issue and for all subscription transactions.** POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: *The Hightower Lowdown*, P.O. Box 20596, New York, NY 10011. Moving? Missed an issue? Call our subscription folks toll-free at (866) 271-4900 or write [lowdown@pipeline.com](mailto:lowdown@pipeline.com). Send us fan mail or hate mail at: P.O. Box 20511, New York, NY 10009-9991 or [editors@hightowerlowdown.org](mailto:editors@hightowerlowdown.org). Printed with 100% union labor on 100% recycled paper.

few lawmakers are fighting the gouging. To learn what steps you can take, go to this web site: [www.maketextbooksaffordable.com](http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.com).

### WHAT ABOUT "UNINTELLIGENT DESIGN?"

"Intelligent design" is the latest buzzword of the right-wing, Bible-thumping cultists who keep pushing to "Christianize" our public schools. But I ask you: How intelligent is the design of our world, really?

The ID crowd flatly rejects the science of evolution as apostasy, asserting that life on this earth is way too wondrous to have simply evolved. They point to Genesis as proof that a mighty God schemed it all out and poof! miraculously created our world whole in only six days. Accordingly, they insist that intelligent design be taught in our schools and be given equal weight with evolution.

Well, why teach only two beliefs? I submit that our world is pretty chaotic, often reflecting neither intelligence nor progressive evolution. "Unintelligent Design" is my theory. For example, here in Texas, we can get six inches of rain in an hour, then go six weeks without a drop. First we're drowned, then we're parched. Who planned this? Or, take tornados—does God hate trailer-park people? Why not hit some of those rich, gated compounds every once in a while?

Also, I'd like to talk to whoever designed our bodies. For example, men have nipples—what's up with that?

Why are there ticks and mosquitoes? Dogs are good, but why must they drool and have bad breath? Why haven't we evolved beyond the madness of war? And here's a big one: Why would an intelligent designer produce Tom DeLay?

### Using Katrina

The heaviest looting after the flood was not in New Orleans streets, but up in the suites of far-away corporations and in the backrooms of Congress.

One of Bush's first acts once he finally got in gear was to sign an executive order arbitrarily suspending enforcement of the law requiring federal contractors to pay the "prevailing wage" in any given area. In New Orleans, the going wage for construction work is about \$9 an hour. In Alabama and Mississippi, it's about \$7. So now, Halliburton, Bechtel, and the other disaster profiteers flooding into the region can get billions in federal no-bid contracts (which guarantee them a nice profit), yet pay no more than the minimum wage to people who've lost everything and are desperate to get work restoring their cities. With the stroke of his pen, Mr. Compassion took two dollars an hour or so out of the future paychecks of the people he's going around hugging.

Much more looting is being plotted—the White House is already claiming that the Katrina spending bill will require Social Security privatization and cuts in benefits, Tom DeLay is preparing yet another energy bill filled with the entire wish list of oil lobbyists, and other ideologues are citing the hurricane as an excuse to privatize everything from local schools to the National Weather Service.

### A New Orleans New Deal

More than two weeks passed before Bush finally spoke to the nation about the storm, the suffering, and the bungled response. His televised address from the eerily deserted French Quarter was a

belated, Karl-Rovian flim-flam designed to reposition the fumbling president as a strong leader in a time of crisis. With sleeves rolled up, George focused his beady eyes on the camera and declared, "This great city WILL rise again. We will not just rebuild, we will build higher."

Higher? For New Orleans' community groups as well as its everyday characters (who, after all, are the ones who make this place the unique, enchanting, and "great" city that it is), George's rhetorical leap upward confirms their worst suspicions. The dread of the locals is that the chamber of commerce/developer elites, out-of-state corporate powers, and other disaster capitalists will seize the moment (and the money) to turn the Big Easy into the Big Ersatz—a Disneyfied, corporatized, upscale theme park. One group, Community Labor United, turned this dread into a defiant stand: "We will not stand idly by while this disaster is used as an opportunity to replace our homes with newly built mansions and condos in a gentrified New Orleans."

This is not paranoia. Newt Gingrich, the Heritage Foundation, and other loopy laissez-faire ideologues are lobbying hard to turn the city into a lab for their neocon economic theories. They would make New Orleans one big enterprise zone, eliminating wage protections permanently, privatizing public functions and resources, slashing corporate and wealth taxes, gutting environmental and safety regulations, etc.

Instead, why not call forth the grassroots genius and gumption of the people themselves—small businesses, workers, churches,

community groups, musicians, and other residents? Two thirds of the city's people are African-American, and 28% of the residents are poor. They shouldn't get hand-me-down development that'll push them to the margins of their own city. Rather, they and all locals should be enlisted in an exciting grassroots structure to oversee the flow of our tax dollars and to direct the reconstruction of their own city in *their* image.

Forget the trickle-down, plutocratic approach of the neocons. This is a Rooseveltian chance to empower ordinary people, re-establish a social contract based on fairness, develop people's skills and enterprise, extend real opportunity for upward mobility, create thousands of good jobs and good wages, build a sustainable infrastructure, make mass transit work, show the way on affordable housing and renewable energy, and...well, make your own list of possibilities.

Most importantly, this populist approach will tell the people in New Orleans and all across the country that they matter. It'd be like a national barn raising—as American as you can get.

And don't stop in the Crescent City. Move it across America, putting people to work nationally to rebuild our deteriorating public infrastructure...and our sense of common good.

OK, the Bushites aren't about to do this. But where are the Democrats? I know that they can't pass such a plan now—but can't they at least propose it? Rather than just carp at the Bushites on technicalities...let's offer a vision that would rally and excite people, drawing a bright line between us and them.

[www.hightowerlowdown.org](http://www.hightowerlowdown.org)

PERIODICALS CLASS  
Postage Paid at  
New York, NY

The Hightower Lowdown  
P.O. Box 20596  
New York, NY 10011

#### MOVING? MISSED AN ISSUE?

Please call or write us at:  
*The Hightower Lowdown*  
P.O. Box 20596  
New York, NY 10011  
[lowdown@pipeline.com](mailto:lowdown@pipeline.com)

**Subscribers' toll-free number: (866) 271-4900**

7:10 October 2005

#### ITS TIME FOR PEOPLE'S HOUSING, PEOPLE'S TRANSIT, & PEOPLE FIRST!

- 1 Quotes from the clueless
- 2 Corporate free coffee
- 3 The great textbook robbery
- 4 Unintelligent design