

Half New Orleans Poor Permanently Displaced: Failure or Success?

Bill Quigley

Government reports confirm that half of the working poor, elderly, and **disabled** who lived in New Orleans before Katrina have not returned. Because of critical shortages in low-cost housing, tens of thousands of poor and working people might not ever be able to return home. The areas that are fully recovering are more **affluent** and **predominantly white**.

The reduction in poor and low-wage workers in New Orleans is no surprise to social workers. Don Everard, director of social service agency Hope House, says New Orleans is a much **tougher** town for poor people than before Katrina. "Housing costs a lot more and there is much less of it," says Everard. "The job market is also very **unstable**. The rise in wages after Katrina has mostly fallen backwards and people are not getting enough hours of work on a regular basis."



	BEFORE KATRINA	AFTER KATRINA
Black population	67%	58%
Children enrolled in public school	66,372	32,149
Families on food stamps	46,551	22,768
People enrolled in medicaid	134,249	72,211
Trips on public transportation	3,000,000 per month	732,000 per month

This chart shows changes in New Orleans before and after Katrina.

Hope House sees four to five hundred needy people a month. "Most of the people we see are working people facing eviction, utility cutoffs, or they are already homeless," reports Everard. The New Orleans homeless population has already doubled from pre-Katrina numbers to approximately 12,000 people.

The rebuilding has gone as many planned. Right after Katrina, one wealthy businessman told the Wall Street Journal, "Those who want to see this city rebuilt want to see it done in a completely different way: demographically, geographically and politically." Those who want to see a "different" New Orleans probably see the **displacement** of low-income people as a success. However, if the test of a society is how it treats its weakest and most **vulnerable** members, the aftermath of Katrina earns all of us a failing grade.

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Discussion Questions:

1. Is there anything in this article that you found surprising?
2. Describe how New Orleans is “demographically” different since Katrina.
3. Hurricane Katrina was a “natural” disaster. But some of the damage from Katrina comes from “man-made” policies. What policies do you think would help the people of New Orleans?
4. Warmer oceans cause an increase in the number and intensity of hurricanes. What does the Katrina experience teach us about future episodes of severe weather in the United States? What should we do to prepare for them?



Vocabulary Activity:

Write the root of each word and the meaning of the root.

WORD	ROOT	MEANING OF THE ROOT
Demographically		
Geographically		
Politically		

Understanding Vocabulary in Context:

Look at the words in bold. If you are unfamiliar with these words, think about them in context and see if their meaning becomes clear. Work with others and write the meaning of the word in the space provided.

WORD	MEANING (BASED ON CONTEXT CLUES)
Disabled	
Affluent	
Predominantly	
Tougher	
Unstable	
Displacement	
Vulnerable	

