

Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006  
New Orleans, Louisiana

### VOTERS EVACUATE IN NEW ORLEANS WHO BENEFITS?

Here in the Crescent City, the lines would seem to have been drawn in the dirt. Many residents want a quick election to pass judgment on those who want to govern the city in the future. Others want to delay the election. And political motives are attributed to both sides. Who benefits by the changing election dates? You might be surprised.

Many editorials and political columnists are, with justification, urging the New Orleans city election take place as close to the normal timeframe as possible. The first primary was supposed to be held on February 4<sup>th</sup>, but the governor, with support from a state judge, has postponed this date. Efforts are being made to “possibly” push for an April 29<sup>th</sup> election date. Constitutional amendments will be considered statewide on this same date.

Many, including this writer, prefer that the election not be postponed. I have set out in some detail in past columns how all the talk about roadblocks could be surmounted. Polling locations can be consolidated, polling commissioners can be brought in from other areas, and new voting machines are being brought in for use in future elections anyway. So the cry for delay based on difficulties in carrying on the election just doesn't hold much water.

A number of articles have been written about how democrats benefit by delaying the election. In fact, there are conspiracy theories floating around that both the Governor and the Secretary of State have confected delays for the purpose of helping democratic candidates. The theory behind this argument is that republican leaning whites are returning to New Orleans, while many democrats, primarily African Americans, have no homes, and will be away from the city for a lengthy period of time. Therefore, the longer the election is delayed, the more likely these democratic voters will return.

Frankly, I don't buy this argument. It's my “gut feeling” that a significant number of these profiled “democratic” voters will never permanently return. They may vote absentee the first time around in a New Orleans city election. All one has to do is request a ballot by mail if they are located out of the city. And there is, of course, widespread interest in how this city will recover, and who will lead it. So I would suggest that if the elections were held in the near future, many democratic voters would request absentee ballots, and participate. But what about in the long run?

If you take the time to peruse newspapers throughout the country, you will find regular stories about evacuees who migrated from New Orleans. I read in a Charlotte, North Carolina newspaper recently about some 27 members of an African American family who came to the city where a sister and her husband had moved years earlier. It was the only temporary place they had to go. But as the months progressed, they made some

interesting discoveries.

First of all, they found Charlotte's schools much superior to New Orleans' schools. They found a cleaner and healthier city, and generally just a better quality of life. Why go back when you can live so much better in North Carolina, particularly when you are surrounded by your family?

Similar stories have been written in a number of newspapers throughout the country. A Ninth Ward resident had moved four children to San Diego, California. So she opened up her arms and urged other family members to join her there. The local community there made arrangements for housing for family members, jobs, arranged for local healthcare providers, and definitely improved their standard of living. "Why ever go back?" she said. "We enjoy it out here so much more."

Related stories have appeared in newspapers from Salt Lake City, Denver, Houston, and Little Rock, Arkansas. I'm sure there are many others.

You don't read those stories about former residents who are white. By and large, they are making plans to eventually return. There is a large contingent of evacuees in Baton Rouge. They are happy here for the time being, and may stay a year or so until their neighborhoods are fully recovered. Even if they could go back now, without their neighbors, there is a safety issue and not that much pressure on them to return. Maybe in a year or two, but for the time being they are well settled.

Several recent polls indicate that only about 25 percent of the New Orleans population has returned; and of that number, 75 percent are white. This is a far cry from the demographics of six months ago where 65 percent of the city was African American.

What this tells me is that the best shot democratic candidates are going to have is in the first city election that takes place, and it helps them if the election is held the sooner the better. As time goes on, the interest in absentee voting wanes by these out-of-state democrats. Republican whites who plan on coming back will do so in larger numbers in the future, making the likelihood that more of the elected officials in New Orleans will be both white and republican.

The same demographic argument might just also apply to the whole state of Louisiana. The warm up for the 2007 gubernatorial election will take place in a little over eight months, when a special election takes place to fill the vacancy for Secretary of State. You can bet that the fall results will be dissected by all potential statewide candidates. This will be the first sign of how big an upheaval will sweep the state in the years to come.

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**Several side notes to share.**

**1. I was in the New Orleans French Quarter last week, having dinner at newly**

**opened Arnaud's Restaurant. On leaving following dinner, I crossed Bourbon Street and noticed six Louisiana state troopers patrolling the area. Several said hello, and I stopped to visit. The told me that some 70 troopers were on duty in the city along with a large contingent of military personnel. When I asked why so many troopers, the answer was frank.**

**"They governor wants us here. People walking the streets seem to feel much safer when we're around. They don't feel that way about the city police." One indication about how far New Orleans has to go in trying to recover.**

**2. It looks like the New Orleans Hornets are on there way to permanently locating in Oklahoma City. And did you know that it's illegal to get a tattoo in Oklahoma? So I guess that team leaves for good, but the players will come back for regular visits to get new tattoos. Some consolation, huh?**

**And finally, a little balance in television. It's always the good cops vs the bad guys, and the cops never make a mistake. Unfortunately, in real life that do. ABC starts a new series call "Injustice" Friday night at 8:00. It's subtitled: "When the justice system turns on you." Nice to have some balance for a change. You can bet I'll be tuning in.**

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Expecting the world to treat you fairly  
because you are a good person  
is a little like expecting the bull not to attack you  
because you are a vegetarian.

Dennis Wholley

**Peace and Justice.**

**Jim Brown**

Jim Brown's weekly column appears each Thursday here at Politicsla.com, and in a number of newspapers throughout the State of Louisiana. You can read Jim's Blog, and take his weekly poll, plus ready his columns going back to the fall of 2002 by going to his own website at <http://www.jimbrownla.com>.

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