

Paddling One's Own Canoe While Reflecting on Katrina

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If ever there was a time in America when the fine art of "paddling one's own canoe" was needed it was during the trying times just after Hurricane Katrina. As the Biblical floodwaters rose in the City of New Orleans, the chant of "we need help" seemed to be the one common message heard from the rooftops, the mayor's office and the governor's office. During such perilous times one does not stop to chop logic, one must go about the business of saving lives. That time having come and gone, it is now time to "chop logic" about what has transpired.

During the early days of this republic, i.e., when States were sovereign and the Federal government was a limited government, most Americans held the view that they would not accept private charity and surely never accept governmental charity. Rather than depending upon others for one's well being, each man would prefer to "paddle his own canoe." Anyone not willing to do so was viewed as less than a complete man and one to be shunned by respectful society. This dogged determination to "fend for ones own self" was instrumental in establishing a society that was capable of overcoming savages, wilderness, isolation, foreign invaders and poverty itself to create the most free and prosperous nation on earth. This willingness to do for one's own folk and not depend upon someone else to pull your irons out of the fire was sorely missing in and around the flooded plains of New Orleans, September 2005. But should we have expected any different response from a people who for generations have been taught that government will take care of your needs? During the flood, pontificating talking heads from every major T. V. network overlooked this reality: Those who look to government for their well being are seldom capable of "paddling their own canoe."

During the first few days of the disaster every commentator, whether liberal or conservative, tearfully bemoaned the fact of "the poor choice those people made" by staying in New Orleans. Opting to stay eight feet below sea level while a category four hurricane is bearing down upon a city whose levees can only withstand a category three hurricane was not the first "poor choice" those people have made. For many of the people trapped in New Orleans their life has consisted of a long series of "poor choices." At age 13 they choose to get pregnant; they choose not to study and to drop out of school; they choose a life of drug abuse; they choose to wear clothes and speak in a manner that does not positively impress potential employers; and, they choose to vote for the very people who have made making these poor choices bearable and therefore inevitable. One must ask, "Why have they not learned by their mistakes?" The answer of course is nanny government. As all traditional conservatives know, when nanny government, i.e., the socialist state, is determined to "paddle their canoe for them," a people will always be a dependent people not an independent people.

As distressful as it was viewing the pitiful condition of the wards of the government, it was even more distressing and disgusting to hear so-called conservative leaders appealing for even more

government involvement in the disaster which big government had fostered. According to Newt Gingrich large parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama needs to be converted into Federal districts and the Federal government should "reconstruct" those States. Like fingernails scraping across a blackboard, those words set my ears ringing; but of course if I were born and raised in Pennsylvania, I might have a different view of "Federal reconstruction." Even discounting the poor choice of words by Mr. Gingrich, the eagerness of so many neo-conservatives to embrace big government as the solution for problems differs little from the liberal/socialist's view of governmental assistance.

If Katrina proves anything it should make it clear that government is not the entity that people should look to for their welfare. Government at every level failed to function properly during this disaster. Yet many things went very well. In sub-divisions, towns and rural areas across three states, people cleared roads, cooked meals, provided shelter and most importantly, armed themselves and protected their lives and property. While the unruly citizens of the welfare state in New Orleans looted, other citizens all around that area were "paddling their own canoe." Before the bureaucrats of government could cut through its barrier of red tape, local folk had already cut through 36 inch trees and open up highways and roads that would have stopped a tank. Before FEMA could get its act together, the Salvation Army, Red Cross and numerous church groups were on site providing relief. What works in America? Free people work in America and do so much better than government. Big government is and always has been the problem, not the answer (something to many "conservatives" forgot in the wake of Katrina).

Adding insult to injury, our conservative Republican president came to New Orleans looking and sounding more like Lyndon B. Johnson or Franklin D. Roosevelt and declared that the Federal government would rebuild New Orleans. So now we can expect something akin to FDR's social security boondoggle or LBJ's war on poverty fiasco combined with big government bureaucrats, rules and regulation as they reconstruct New Orleans. What more could a liberal Democrat have asked for from big government? Our conservative Republican has out done the liberals! With one last slap in the face for the people who were "paddling their own canoe," the President in an address at the National Cathedral declared that the lawlessness in New Orleans was a reaction to the legacy of "discrimination and injustice" those unfortunate looters had to endure. What kind of airhead wrote such a speech and better yet, what kind of airhead would give such a speech? The government of New Orleans has been under the control of the Black population for over twenty-five years. Jim Crow died with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, over 41 years ago. The current mayor of New Orleans, as well as many of his predecessors, is Black; the current governor of Louisiana is a liberal Democrat who was elected by over 80% of the voters in New Orleans. Even in the face of such evidence, our conservative Republican President asserts that "discrimination and injustice" is the root cause of lawlessness in New Orleans. Who is left to blame for the lawlessness if the looters are not responsible? Here we see our conservative Republican President once again sounding more like LBJ than the conservatives who elected him; the only people left to blame is the middle class folks who were busy "paddling their own canoe" during these tragic times. For traditional Southern conservatives Katrina once again proves that as for the National Republican Party is concerned, Southerners must still sit upon their "stool of eternal repentance."

One question that few people have asked is "Why did local government fail?" One can understand the

failure of a big far away government but why did the local government prove to be such a failure? In a representative government the elected office holders are a reflection of the people that vote them into office. Since the enactment of the South only Voting Rights Act in 1965, there has been a constant lowering of the qualification to vote. Today in Dixie, the only thing one must prove in order to vote is that he is alive (in close elections even that rule does not apply). When people depend upon government for a check each month, who live in a society with 80% single parent homes, who cannot read or understand any basic function of government, when these people are allowed to elect the mayor of a city eight feet below sea level, guess what happens when strong intelligent leadership is needed? Unfortunately for New Orleans and the Nation, the back up for the mayor of New Orleans is the governor of Louisiana, Kathleen Blanco. Governor Blanco, a liberal Democrat, rode into office on the back of the same group of voters that elected the mayor of New Orleans. Is it any wonder she could not find the will power to order the National Guard to "shoot to kill" looters in New Orleans? Only after the world nightly saw the lawlessness in New Orleans did the governor find the courage to act, by that time it was much to late.

At some point in time this country must come to the realization that quality in the electors is just as important as quantity. If we are to safe guard those few freedoms that we now barely subsist upon, we must address the issue of voter qualification. If we as a nation fail to address the issue we are doomed to enter into that most unhappy and un-free state of mobocracy. Virtually all of the founding fathers of this nation unequivocally voiced their fear of mass democracy or as John Randolph of Roanoke referred to it the tyranny of "King numbers." What will be the fate of those who at present prefer to "paddle their own canoe" when the non-paddlers become the majority and elect all officer holders in this country? At that time the looters will be in firm control and liberty will be doomed.

Here are a few lessons learned from Katrina:

1. Don't depend on government to meet your needs, learn to paddle your own canoe. Imbued with a sense of self-reliance, free people are more likely to positively respond to a crisis than those who consistently suckle at the breast of nanny government. This is not to denigrate the positive influence that free government can have within the milieu of a liberty based society but in a liberty based society, everyone knows how to paddle their own canoe.
2. When faced with an emotional crisis, even the most "conservative" neo-conservative will sound more like a socialist, i.e., a liberal, than they will sound like a traditional conservative. Newt Gingrich offers a classic example of a neo-conservative selling out his "limited government" mantra for liberal big government ideas when faced with emotional images on T.V. Promoting the expenditure of billions of dollars of Federal funds, placing large parts of three States into Federal reconstruction districts and doing away the posse comitatus act, Gingrich sounds more like Hilary Clinton than a real conservative.
3. Anytime a race related issue causes neo-conservatives any embarrassment, they find Southerners useful as a scapegoat. After many days of looting and violence in New Orleans President Bush dutifully noted that the lawlessness was a legacy of "racial injustice." If the looters are not responsible for the lawlessness, who is responsible? The inference in Bush's remarks is that if it is not the looters' fault for

the violence down South then it must be the arch villain in America, Bubba and his cohorts. According to the manager of the New Orleans Wal-Mart, the only thing not looted in his downtown store was the Country Music CD's. You see, Bubba was busy "paddling his own canoe" and didn't have time to do any looting; yet, it is the South, the hard working, conservative voting South that is, by inference, held up to the world as the villain for race problems in America.

4. Until we place quality for voters on the same level as quantity of voters, we will continue to elect officials with the lowest common denominator of the voters. When the tax consumers out vote the taxpayers both the property and the liberty of the minority is held hostage by the tax-consuming majority. It shocking when one considers that more knowledge has to be demonstrated earning the privilege of driving a car, getting a hunting license or cutting someone's hair than it takes to qualify to vote. Why should someone who is a convicted felon be allowed to vote? Why should someone living on government subsidies be allowed to vote? Why should someone who files bankruptcy be allowed to vote? In all of these cases the individual has proven he is not responsible enough to manage his own affairs. Being unable to manage one's own affairs should not be a qualification for running the affairs of state.

From Louisiana my suggestion for all Americans is to keep paddling your own canoe but learn the lesson of Katrina.