NEOLIBERAL HURRICANE: 
WHO FRAMED NEW ORLEANS?

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Tropical Depression 12 formed over the Bahamas on August 23, 2005, triggering a sequence of events that would result in a most unnatural urban crisis. When Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Louisiana, some six days later, the city of New Orleans was bracing itself for what Mayor Ray Nagin had called the ‘storm most of us have long feared’. The Mayor had ordered the city’s first mandatory evacuation, but it was known that many of New Orleans’ poorest and sickest residents had been unable to evacuate. Although the eye of the storm narrowly missed the city itself, a series of catastrophic breaches of the levee system on August 29 inundated four-fifths of the urban area with several feet of toxic floodwater. If the level of preparedness for this long-anticipated disaster was lamentable, the management of the subsequent emergency was tragic. A lethally tardy and poorly coordinated response from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) compounded the problems faced by state and local agencies, whose limited organizational capacities were quickly overwhelmed. The abject failure of the evacuation effort was captured in searing media images of tens of thousands of displaced New Orleanians crowded, in unsanitary and dangerous conditions, into the city’s Convention Center and Superdome. Lacking adequate food, water, and medical supplies, these ‘refuges of last resort’ were not themselves fully evacuated until September 3 and 6, respectively. But yet more shocking, for many commentators, was that in the days after the storm, the city’s social order apparently ruptured: the police lost control of the streets, looting and violence ensued, all of which was broadcast, in occasionally hysterical form, by the global media. A social disaster, compounded by political indifference and governmental failure, added up to what the Economist would call ‘The shaming of America’:
Since Hurricane Katrina, the world’s view of America has changed. The disaster has exposed some shocking truths about the place: the bitterness of its sharp racial divide, the abandonment of the dispossessed, the weakness of the critical infrastructure. But the most astonishing and most shaming revelation has been of its government’s failure to bring succour to its people at their time of greatest need.

The scale of the human, environmental, and social catastrophe wrought by Katrina may, quite literally, never be known. The official death toll currently stands at over 1,800, with as many people still unaccounted for. One-and-a-half million people were displaced by the storm, one third of whom may never return to the Gulf Coast. Damage estimates, quickly politicized, range from $40 to $120 billion, while the bill for reconstruction effort could be as high as $250 billion. The ‘recovery’ of New Orleans, a city now slowly repopulating, is expected to take years.

Much of the commentary on Katrina and its aftermath has focused, quite understandably, on the Bush Administration’s manifest ineptitude and apparent indifference. But there is another story about post-Katrina New Orleans, less talked about, but no less important. It concerns the ‘management’ of the fiscal and policy fallout of the disaster by conservative and free-market think tanks, like the Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute, Cato, and the American Enterprise Institute. Here, the response has been considerably more sure-footed, and the consequences profound. As the Bush Administration floundered, both institutionally and politically, in the days following the flood, the conservative think tanks did not hesitate to wade in. The initial reactions of these ideological first-responders were occasionally off key, but before long they were acting in concert, ‘framing’ the disaster in a manner designed not only to contain its political and financial costs, but more than this, to enable a brazen extension of the neoliberal project.

While think tanks often take pride in their intrepid exploration of the ‘unthinkable’ reaches of policy, in the immediate aftermath of Katrina this extended into saying the unsayable. As mainstream politicians quickly learned that contemplating anything less than a complete reconstruction of New Orleans was practically unacceptable, think tank scholars pondered much more freely the possibly ‘doomed’ fate of New Orleans, the city’s long-standing cultural association with death, its possible loss ‘to the forces of nature’; indeed, the very ‘improbability’ of the place, which – like Venice – ‘was created in defiance of the forces of nature’. There was also some rather intemperate reaction to ‘distorted’ reporting on the Katrina tragedy in Europe.
and elsewhere, where the politically motivated were seen to be too ready ‘to blame President Bush for the actions of Mother Nature’, while being tragically unaware that ‘a Hobbesian world waits explosively, just below [the] skin – here in America, just as in any place’. The suggestion that Katrina’s might could have been related to global climate change was also rebuffed, as ‘disgusting exploitation’ by ‘environmental extremists’ like Sir David King, the British Government’s chief scientific adviser. And, just as predictably, there was a visceral reaction to the offer of aid from Cuba and Venezuela: the United States, Heritage sputtered, does not accept charity from ‘self-serving autocrats’.

But the role of conservative think tanks extends far beyond the cut and thrust of daily political exchange. On the longer horizon, their function is to help lend a measure of form and coherence to governmental policy responses, in light of the right’s programmatic agenda, and to cajole and guide the (often wayward) political class. They do this by working on the ‘inside’, with government officials and elected politicians, and on the ‘outside’, through the conventional media and, increasingly, the blogosphere. And while they may share, in broad terms, a common ideological orientation, there is also something of a division of labour amongst the think tanks. For example, the Manhattan Institute tends to favour ‘long-range’ interventions, seeking to shape the principles and premises of policy debates in fields like welfare and policing, while the Heritage Foundation is located within walking distance of Congress, for good reason – it is closely attuned to the challenges of short-term policy management. If the Manhattan Institute strives to ‘turn intellect into influence’, to borrow its tag line, Heritage endeavours to transform influence into action.

Working off a series of well-established scripts, the conservative think tanks were within days constructing a ‘principled response’ to Katrina, predicated upon fiscal restraint and ‘offsetting’ budget cuts in Washington, DC, but extending into what amounts to an audacious neoliberal reconstruction agenda for the Crescent City. This includes an enlarged role for private enterprise in market-led development, governmental outsourcing, and city governance; selective institutional roll-backs, focused on the social state; redoubled crime control, making the city safe for tourists and gentrifiers; and an interventionist program of ‘moral reconstruction’, aimed at those stranded in the storm’s wake. Yet if this is to be the fate of New Orleans, it was never a pre-ordained one. Katrina presented an urgent and challenging problem for the conservative think tanks, and they committed significant resources to the response. Recognizing the significance of the events on the Gulf, key players in the think tanks were back at their desks immediately after the storm,
even while Bush Administration officials completed their vacations. While the conservative think tanks may have been relatively successful in ‘reframing’ Katrina, and supplying a package of workable policy rationales and ruses to the Bush Administration, their strenuous efforts also reveal the politically constructed – if not jerrybuilt – nature of this ‘free-market’ response. The character and content of their response, my focus in this essay, also speaks to fissures and fault lines within the neocon/neoliberal project itself. But, for now, let’s see how the conservative intelligentsia told the story.11

UNTHINKING KATRINA

‘No American city has ever gone through what New Orleans must go through’, wrote Manhattan Institute analyst Nicole Gelinas in the midst of the deadly flooding, since notwithstanding the immediate crisis, no city had had to contend with ‘flight of its most affluent and capable citizens, followed by social breakdown among those left behind, after which must come the total reconstruction of economic and physical infrastructure by a devastated populace’. Herself one of the city’s former residents, and a graduate of Tulane University, Gelinas confessed in a New York Sun editorial that, ‘[t]he truth is that even on a normal day, New Orleans is a sad city’.

New Orleans can’t take care of itself even when it is not 80 percent underwater; what is it going to do now, as waters continue to cripple it, and thousands of looters systematically destroy what Katrina left unscathed? …The city’s government has long suffered from incompetence and corruption…. On television this week, the mayor has shown no clear inclination to take charge and direct post-Katrina rescue and recovery efforts for his population, as Mayor Giuliani did in New York on and after 9/11… New Orleans teems with crime, and the NOPD can’t keep order on a good day… Socially, New Orleans is one of America’s last helpless cities.12

The underlying explanation for New Orleans’ ‘helplessness’ here is the city’s subjection to a hypertrophied form of the American urban condition, as it has been characterized by conservatives: the breakdown of social control triggers a middles-class exodus, leaving behind a welfare-dependent underclass whose proclivity to cultural dysfunction and economic disconnection then goes unchecked; a complicit and corrupt municipal administration is unable – by definition, since it is part of the problem – either to read the causes or manage the consequences. Having travelled further than most down this
spiral of self-fulfilling decline, Gelinas counselled, New Orleans may now lack the capacity even to save itself: ‘[s]ure, the feds must provide cash and resources for relief and recovery – but it’s up to New Orleans, not the feds, to dig deep within itself to rebuild its economic and social infrastructure’. Yet her sense was that this would take nothing less than ‘a miracle. New Orleans has experienced a steady brain drain and fiscal drain for decades, as affluent corporations and individuals have fled, leaving behind a large population of people dependent on the government’. In order to avert a still greater urban crisis the only hope, Gelinas felt at the time, lay with an injection of Giuliani-style leadership. New Orleans Mayor Nagin, visibly reeling in the face of his city’s destruction, would have to manage first himself, then the crisis: ‘[h]e must not waver, or a priceless city will be borne by the waters into Newark, 1967’.13

The following day, as media portrayals of the city’s descent into chaos began to focus on reports of violence and looting, Gelinas’ analysis turned yet more pessimistic. In what had become a ‘perfect storm of lawlessness’, the New Orleans ‘criminal class [had] taken over the stricken city’.

Katrina didn’t turn innocent citizens into desperate criminals. This week’s looters… are the same depraved individuals who have pushed New Orleans’ murder rate to several multiples above the national average in normal times…. Today may not be the best day to get into New Orleans’ intractable crime problem, but it’s necessary, since it explains how this week’s communications and policing vacuum so quickly created a perfect storm for the vicious lawlessness that has broken out…. On a normal day, those who make up New Orleans’ dangerous criminal class – yes, likely the same African-Americans we see looting now – terrorize their own communities…. Failure to put violent criminals behind bars in peacetime has led to chaos in disaster…. Now, no civil authorities can re-assert order in New Orleans. The city must be forcefully demilitarized, even as innocent victims literally starve.14

If American think tanks are often criticized for their tendency to rush to prefabricated policy prescriptions,15 a somewhat different dynamic seems to have been at work here. Perhaps reflecting the Manhattan Institute’s role as a supplier of basic ideational resources for neoconservative/neoliberal policy-makers – as opposed to the kind of quick-fire policy formation in which Heritage and its ilk specialize – Gelinas was (re)presenting her own form of causal interpretation. Recirculating staples of underclass analysis, she confi-
dently drew distinctions between the behaviour and motivations of the ‘core criminal class’ and the hapless group of benign dependants (‘impoverished women, children, and elderly folks’) who had trudged *en masse* to Superdome and Convention Center ‘expecting their government to take care of them’. These segments of the underclass were seen to be behaving rationally, if dysfunctionally, within a governmentally-engineered universe of perverse incentives. This was the Manhattan Institute’s standard diagnosis of New York City’s problems in the 1970s, along with the ‘broken-windows thesis’, which saw even minor untended lawlessness as intrinsically degenerative, spawning an hypertrophied culture of urban crime. While the ‘new urban right’ has developed responses to these entrenched problems – reform the poor with systemic welfare reform and zero-tolerance policing; bring back the middle classes with tax breaks and reformed schools – these are not, realistically speaking, short-term policies. Hence the undercurrent of weary fatalism in these initial dispatches from the Manhattan Institute. Reflecting this sentiment, Theodore Dalrymple expounded on the ‘thin line’ separating civilization from ‘barbarism and mob rule’, while David Brooks thought he detected not a ‘tipping’ but a ‘bursting point’, from which New Orleans had emerged as an ‘anti-9/11 [in which] nobody took control’.

The post-Katrina policy vacuum sucked in prefabricated conservative diagnoses of the American urban condition – the usual cocktail of race, crime, and dependency – but even professional opinion-shapers seemed initially at a loss how to construct much more than a rhetorical response. It was as if, in a period in which the governmental system itself temporarily lost traction, the most persistent critics of the misinterventionist state momentarily lost their bearings. And nowhere was the vacuum more profound than at the federal level, where the White House appeared paralyzed, successively, by indifference, incomprehension, and indecision. Returning from vacation in Texas, President Bush had taken an aerial detour over the flood zone to assess the damage for himself. Acknowledging that New Orleans’ recovery would be a ‘difficult road’, the President reaffirmed his confidence in the ill-fated Michael Brown, then head of FEMA, as the Administration’s point man in the stricken region, praised the ‘armies of compassion’ for their charitable responses, and appealed lamely for better coordination of the emerging relief program. While his Administration contemplated a ‘comprehensive relief effort’, Bush symbolically underlined the absence of federal control of the situation by standing in the Rose Garden and reading out the Red Cross emergency number, 1-800-HELPNOW. One of the Administration’s few decisive acts of the day was to open up the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, in order to relieve pressure on the nation’s gas prices.
Initially at least, the response of the Washington think tanks was almost as flat-footed. Even the Heritage Foundation, the most closely attuned to the daily rhythms of the political cycle, had its attention focused elsewhere at the beginning of the crisis. With harrowing images of corpses floating in New Orleans floodwaters dominating the national media, Heritage’s opening salvo in the post-Katrina policy debate was to warn of the perils of price controls, including a meditation on the ‘disaster’ of governmental intervention in the oil market during the 1970s.\(^{23}\) This rather discordant tone continued the next day, when Heritage researchers alternately pressed for both Arctic drilling and the deregulation of emission controls as means of easing post-Katrina gas prices; offered reassurances that, fortunately, the economy was in good shape – aided by the continuing ‘disintegration’ of the AFL-CIO and the ‘bravery’ of Congress for refusing to raise the minimum wage for a seventh straight year; and indulged in some uncharacteristically inconclusive hand-wringing about the scale of the catastrophe in the Gulf.\(^{24}\) Not until veteran fiscal hawk Ronald Utt joined the fray did a more rounded, apposite, and self-assured Heritage response begin to take shape. Having praised private and charitable responses to the disaster, Utt rhetorically asked if members of Congress would also be prepared to make a ‘sacrifice’ – recognizing this ‘higher purpose’ by renouncing ‘frivolous pork barrel spending’ in the recently enacted highway bill. Impishly, Utt proposed that the funds earmarked for the now-infamous ‘bridge to nowhere’ in Alaska could be reallocated to the Gulf Region, perhaps for a bridge reconstruction project gifted by ‘the People of Alaska’.\(^{25}\)

The metaphor of the politically indefensible bridge to nowhere would become a staple for fiscal conservatives in the following days and weeks. Codifying a theme that reverberated across the conservative blogs and letters-to-the-editor pages, Heritage posted a set of ‘instructions for writing an op-ed’ on the members’ section of its web site, echoing the message that essential spending for Katrina recovery efforts should be clawed back from the ‘fiscally reckless’ highway bill.\(^{26}\) This line of attack was amply echoed by other free-market think tanks, most notably by Cato and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), themselves still smarting over the passage of the $244 billion highway bill in early August, 2005 – which infamously contained some 6,373 ‘earmarks’, a bloated package of congressional members’ local projects with a total value of nearly $25 billion.\(^{27}\) By now, the think tanks had recovered their footing, and were concertedly moving ahead of the public debate.

Less than two weeks after Katrina’s strike, by September 12, Heritage was ready to announce a full package of ‘principled solutions’ to the rebuilding
The federal government should provide support and assistance only in those situations that are beyond the capabilities of state and local governments and the private sector. State and local governments must retain their primary role as first responders to disasters.…..

Federal financial aid, when necessary, should be provided in a manner that promotes accountability, flexibility, and creativity. In general, tools such as tax credits and voucher programs, which allow individuals and families to direct funds, should be utilized to encourage private-sector innovation and sensitivity to individual needs and preferences.

Consistent with genuine health and safety needs, red tape should be reduced or eliminated to speed up private-sector investment and initiative in the rebuilding of facilities and the restoration of businesses. Regulations that are barriers to putting people back to work should be suspended or, at a minimum, streamlined.

Congress should reorder its spending priorities, not just add new money while other money is being wasted. Now is the time to shift resources to their most important uses and away from lower-priority uses… It is critical that America focus on building capabilities for responding to a catastrophic disaster, not on catering to the wish lists of cities, parishes or counties, states, and stakeholders.

Private entrepreneurial activity and vision, not bureaucratic government, must be the engine to rebuild. New approaches… such as enhanced choice in public school education should be the norm, not the exception…. The critical need now is to encourage investors and entrepreneurs to seek new opportunities within these cities. Bureaucrats cannot do that. The key is to encourage private-sector creativity – for example, by declaring New Orleans and other severely damaged areas ‘Opportunity Zones’ in which capital gains tax on investments is eliminated and regulations [are] eliminated or simplified.28

The comprehensive plan developed by Heritage deployed what would become a keyword in the subsequent reconstruction debate – offsets. Any new federal spending commitments, the Heritage team argued, must be ‘offset by reductions in other spending’, since under no circumstances must there be ‘mission creep’ into uncompensated spending, new programs, or worse still,
‘any entitlement expectations for disaster relief’. The Bush Administration was applauded for showing the ‘courage’ to suspend the Davis-Bacon Act, which requires that contractors working on federally funded construction projects should be paid the prevailing wage, on the grounds, ostensibly, that this would both hold down costs and stimulate job creation.\(^\text{29}\) And along with this came a potpourri of staple conservative demands – rolling back the Clean Air Act and restrictions on oil drilling; removing tariffs; accelerating tax cuts within the ‘Opportunity Zone’, including voucher schemes for healthcare, education, and job training; incentives for private providers and faith-based organizations across these and other policy fields; expansion and retasking of the National Guard; capping Medicaid entitlements; streamlining FEMA while rolling out a network of regional offices for homeland security, managed by political appointees; and the repeal of the Estate (or ‘death’) tax. Pressing a broad package of conservative proposals, the Vice President of Heritage editorialized in the \textit{Los Angeles Times} against ‘reflexively pouring money into the Gulf’ through Congressional displays of ‘checkbook compassion’.\(^\text{30}\)

On the other hand, ‘unexpected’ events, like hurricanes, must not, under any circumstances, disrupt the defining programmatic element of the conservative agenda: tax cuts. In an unsubtly entitled intervention, ‘New Orleans vs. New York?’ – just two weeks after the storm – the Manhattan Institute’s Steven Malanga pointed out that New Yorkers had ‘already done their share to lend aid’ to the victims of Katrina in the form of short-term charitable giving. His more serious concern was that a ‘post-Katrina mindset in Washington’ might lead to a postponement of the scheduled extension to dividend and capital-gains tax cuts, badly needed for Wall Street’s continued recovery.\(^\text{31}\) Never one to flinch in the face of potential controversy, Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform had struck while the Superdome tragedy was still unfolding, arguing that those politicians that were arguing for a delay in the rolling programme of tax cuts were ‘exploiting this tragedy’; instead, the long-awaited repeal of the Estate Tax should proceed immediately, on the grounds that it would stimulate economic growth.\(^\text{32}\) Norquist has been described as the ‘V.I. Lenin of the anti-tax movement’, pressing for deep tax cuts on principle, irrespective of the immediate political-economic climate – a measure of the long-term horizons of the conservative movement, where there is ‘no interest in politics on the margin or in managing the next recession or the one after that’.\(^\text{33}\)

By mid-September, with President Bush about to give a major speech in New Orleans on the reconstruction effort, the drumbeat message on offset spending had intensified to the point that real pressure was being exerted on
the Republican leadership. Former House Leader Tom DeLay’s remark that ‘there is simply no fat left to cut in the federal budget’ had caused consternation amongst fiscal conservatives in the think tank community.\textsuperscript{34} Heritage and AEI got into something of an ‘offset’ race to identify the longest and most inflammatory list of ‘dispensable’ federal programmes. In addition to the fiscally conservative ‘gimmie’ of highway pork, the AEI proposed terminating the USAID program for malaria prevention and the National Endowments for the Arts and for the Humanities, while privatizing air traffic control, NASA, the US Postal Service, and Amtrak; meanwhile, Heritage took aim at just some of the ‘easy places to start cutting’, like Americorps, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, community development block grants, 130 programs serving the disabled, 90 early childhood development projects, 342 economic development initiatives, and farm subsidies – especially for celebrity ‘hobby farmers’ like David Rockefeller and Ted Turner.\textsuperscript{35}

But these were mere diversions relative to the main task to which the free-market think tanks were dedicated in the run-up to Bush’s New Orleans speech – to influence the principles, and if possible, the price-tag of what would clearly be a massive rebuilding effort. In this latter respect, there was a high degree of consonance in the positions of the free-market think tanks. Like Heritage, AEI was pressing for emergency assistance tied more to people than places, and based on short-term loans, vouchers, and temporary provisions. Yes, there should be a concerted effort to repair the damaged infrastructure, but ultimately ‘it’s important to let markets decide how fast New Orleans springs back’.\textsuperscript{36} An AEI colleague, James Glassman, likewise insisted that the ‘revival should be as spontaneous as possible’. But since New Orleans was never a city that ‘worked’ in the first place – ‘the world got a taste of that dysfunctionality… during the storm… [C]orruption, squalor and stupidity do not equal charm’ – a radically new approach would be called for:

The inevitable commission that will oversee the rebuilding must realize that the world’s best designers, developers and innovators will be drawn to the city only if they are relatively unrestricted. New Orleans could become a laboratory for ideas like tax-free commercial zones and school reform. This is the ultimate libertarian city and the last thing it needs is top-down planning…. I’m optimistic. New Orleans has a unique chance to make a fresh start and, in fact, become more like cities that do work (Chicago and Phoenix come to mind) while retaining its spirit of mystery, absurdity, beauty and decadence.\textsuperscript{37}
At least some of this conservative optimism was well founded. When President Bush addressed the nation from New Orleans’ Jackson Square two days later, he promised that an entrepreneurial city would rise from the floodwaters, assisted by a package of tax-breaks, short-term loans and guarantees for small businesses branded the ‘Gulf Opportunity Zone’ (GO Zone); there would be temporary jobs and short-term extensions to unemployment benefits, and evacuees would not ‘have to travel great distances or navigate bureaucracies to get the benefits that are there for them’; there would be an Urban Homesteading Act, to encourage home ownership, and Worker Recovery Accounts, to help individuals reenter the workforce; the federal government would join forces with the ‘armies of compassion – charities and houses of worship, and idealistic men and women’ in the rebuilding effort; the flood protection system would be rebuilt ‘stronger than it has ever been’; and there would be a ‘team of inspectors general reviewing all expenditures’ in order to ensure that the taxpayers’ money was being spent honestly.  

**DOING WHAT IT TAKES**

If the free-market think tanks were quietly satisfied with many aspects of the Administration’s proposals – indeed they were uncredited originators of several of them – there was considerable unease with what would become the headline-generating line from Bush’s speech – ‘we will do what it takes, we will stay as long as it takes’. Fearing an open-ended spending commitment, Cato reflexively warned of an impending ‘budget disaster’. For their part, Heritage scholars were somewhat more circumspect, working feverishly through less public channels, but also highlighting ‘dangers’ with aspects of the Administration’s plan. While welcoming the announcement of the GO Zone – practically a Heritage creation – they reiterated their demand for offsets (a word Bush did not use once in his speech), citing the apparent reluctance of Congress to make tough choices, and forecasting that ‘local officials [will] see this as an opportunity to put forward an extensive wish list’. Obliviously extending its own wish list, Heritage also called for Education Smart Cards, more support for charter schools, and – fearing a ‘cost explosion’ – a cap on emergency healthcare provisions, together with the appointment of an Emergency Regulatory Relief Board in order to minimize bureaucratic creep. AEI also identified a need for a ‘red tape tsar’, and would have preferred more emphasis on vouchers and private-sector financing: ‘[o]nce responsible intervention to restore order and infrastructure has occurred, individual desires and market forces should continue to shape the design of cities, not a federally financed return to the status quo ante’.
While at the same time presenting intricate plans for the re-regulation of housing, education, labour market, health, national security, and transport policy, the free-market think tanks are nevertheless perpetually fearful of a particular kind of governmental bloat – involving the proliferation of ‘paper plans’, the growth of command-and-control decision-making through ‘vast bureaucracies’, and ‘out-of-control’ spending. While the nightmare scenario of Senator Edward Kennedy’s New Deal-style Gulf Coast Regional Redevelopment Authority never represented a serious threat, it was one that the conservative think tanks liked to ventilate frequently, at least for effect. More serious, in just about every way, was the very real and imminent menace of ‘Big Government Conservatism’, Bush-style. As Heritage president Ed Feulner editorialized, just after the Administration’s plans for the Gulf region had been announced:

At some point, a hurricane is downgraded from a crisis to a problem…. But as lawmakers scramble to throw money at the problem, it’s worth remembering that no level of government has distinguished itself in the last several weeks…. [We] shouldn’t respond to government failures by making the government larger and still more unwieldy. The best way to rebuild New Orleans will be for the government to get out of the way. Congress and state governments can do this by eliminating or reducing regulations and allowing communities to decide for themselves how best to rebuild…. Let’s make sure that in responding to the temporary problems of Katrina, we don’t simply create the permanent problem of ever more – and ever more expensive – bureaucracy.

Similar concerns were generously amplified by the Wall Street Journal’s editorial page, which for some time has had a symbiotic relationship with the free-market think tanks. Under the headline ‘Hurricane Bush’ the Journal opined bombastically that, ‘[t]he people who couldn’t flee the storm were not ignored by “small government conservatism”, as if that still exists outside Hong Kong. The city’s poor have been smothered by decades of corrupt, paternal government – local, state and federal’, concluding that, ‘[i]t was certainly a collapse of government, but more accurately of bureaucracy and the welfare state’. A week earlier, the Journal’s deputy Washington editor, David Wessel, had gloomily proclaimed that, ‘[t]he era of small government is over. Sept. 11 challenged it. Katrina killed it’ – a statement that reverberated widely around the think-tank community. Illustrating the tight nexus between the financial press, the free-market think tanks, and fiscal conservatives in Wash-
ington, the Republican Study Committee (RSC)\(^47\) had been meeting at the Heritage Foundation to hatch their own version of the rebuilding plans, producing a ‘sea of conservative ideas’ that were subsequently published by the *Journal*. Parroting Heritage’s reconstruction blueprint, the RSC’s chair, Representative Mike Pence, declared that, ‘[w]e want to turn the Gulf Coast into a magnet for free enterprise. The last thing we want is a federal city where New Orleans once was. [We want] a flat-tax free-enterprise zone’.\(^48\)

One week later, the RSC launched ‘Operation Offset’ – proposing more than $71 billion in cuts from the 2006 federal budget in order to cover the costs of Gulf Coast reconstruction, while pressing for a much wider and deeper programme of ‘savings’ (totalling more than $500 billion) over the ensuing decade.\(^49\) Not surprisingly, Heritage warmly welcomed the package, much of which had been hatched in its own offices, while at the same time presenting the initiative as an outcome of ‘grassroots energy’.\(^50\) The *Wall Street Journal* also voiced its support, declaring the White House’s position on Katrina spending to be ‘irresponsible and even insidious’, having previously accused members of Congress of getting ‘in the way of this natural economic recovery by exploiting Katrina to spend like they’re back on Bourbon Street’.\(^51\) A parallel effort was also beginning to gain ground in the Senate, led by spending hawks John McCain and Tom Coburn, who called on the President to present his own package of offsets and rescissions.\(^52\) This initiative was conspicuously welcomed on the conservative/libertarian blog, *Porkbusters*, which was established on September 18, 2005 to fight the cause of offset spending cuts, post-Katrina.\(^53\)

During this time, the think tanks were stepping up their attacks on the spendthrift ways of the Republican leadership, mischievously praising House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi’s audacious pledge to return $70 million in ‘highway pork’ from her own district to assist the recovery effort, indeed taking the calculated taunting to the national press.\(^54\) Perhaps the mood in Washington was already beginning to shift, then, prior to the presentation of the Louisiana delegation’s $250 billion reconstruction package in early October – the ‘extensive wish list’ that Heritage had predicted on the day of Bush’s Jackson Square speech. The President immediately called a press conference to declare a subtle, but critical, shift in policy: ‘The heart of America is big enough to be generous and responsible at the same time... As the federal government meets its responsibilities, the people of the Gulf Coast must also recognize its limitations’. Bush emphasized that the recovery effort would be private-sector led, going on to promise to ‘work with members of Congress to identify offsets, to free up money for the reconstruction efforts’.\(^55\) The chair of the RSC, Representative Mike Pence, immediately
issued an obsequious press release, calling attention to the President’s newfound commitment to the principle of offsets.\textsuperscript{56} And the fiscally conservative think tanks dutifully reiterated the same line, also crediting the Administration’s far-sighted embrace of offset budgeting.

The PELICAN (Protecting Essential Louisiana Infrastructure, Citizens, and Nature) Plan was immediately besieged. Heritage characterized it as a ‘breathtaking display of parochial self-interest’, favourably citing the criticisms of RSC stalwart, Representative Jeff Flake, in the \textit{Wall Street Journal}, that ‘we risk setting... an unsustainable precedent that it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that the victims of natural disasters are made whole’\textsuperscript{57}. PELICAN was similarly dismissed by the AEI as ‘pork gumbo’, resident scholar Newt Gingrich stepping into the fray to portray the funding request as deficit-busting audacity from a cabal of local lawmakers historically prone to corruption:

While we all feel for Louisiana’s residents, there are limits to what American taxpayers can – and should – be asked to contribute on top of their already large tax bill. More worrisome, too much federal largesse can have negative consequences on behavior. What are the odds, for instance, of more responsible behavior by state and local officials when the federal government picks up all costs? And will private individuals and businesses make sound decisions – purchasing insurance to cover risks, for example – when Uncle Sam bails out poor choices?\textsuperscript{58}

Compassion fatigue, it seemed, was now extending beyond the tight network of fiscally conservative activists. But more importantly, a conservative position on New Orleans had now stabilized, with the aid of insistent incantation from the think tanks via briefings, blogs, editorials, and daily policy memos. The dominant motif, or policy ‘frame’, was now responsibility: fiscal responsibility in Washington; personal and local (government) responsibility in New Orleans. Conveniently, this new-found policy fix served both ideological ends (federal overreach is checked in favour of local bootstrapping) and partisan objectives (since both the state and local administrations in question were controlled by the Democrats).

As Heritage noted, the House Leadership was finally succumbing to a combination of orchestrated pressure and relentless reason, while acknowledging that it would take ‘political courage’ to respond to what they could now describe as the President’s call for a fiscally responsible offset package.\textsuperscript{59} Unless a line was drawn in the sand, federal spending would balloon to the
point that taxes would have to rise by 50 per cent – and then ‘France will look good by comparison’, Ed Feulner wryly observed. Reviewing national press coverage, Heritage also declared that the now-fabled ‘bridge to nowhere’ had become a potent emblem of fiscal irresponsibility, in fact a ‘national embarrassment’. To borrow a metaphor often used in think-tank circles, a tipping point had apparently been reached: the Washington version of ‘behaving responsibly’, it now seemed, was defined by sending less, not more, money to the Gulf Coast. The ‘rainbow in the aftermath of Katrina’, as Feulner put it, was that the ‘tipping point’ had arrived ‘[n]ow excessive spending is on everyone’s mind’.

More than this, the twin cases of Katrina spending and the Alaskan bridge provided an object lesson in the determination of legitimate federal responsibility and spending. The spontaneously choreographed challenge, to which all the free-market think tanks would rise, was to intensify the recurrent demand for offset spending, to brand all nonessential forms of spending as ‘pork’, and as the AEI put it, ‘to get the federal government out of the disaster-relief business [in order] to promote responsible behaviour on the part of individuals and businesses’. The provision of flood insurance, or for that matter no-strings-attached welfare payments, would only encourage what AEI’s Véronique de Rugy described as ‘dangerous’ and irresponsible behaviour, inducing ‘people to constantly make the same mistake’. The small print in the PELICAN Plan that suspended work requirements and welfare time limits in New Orleans had also irked the conservative intelligentsia, a Heritage analyst concluding that this meant that ‘welfare recipients would not be expected to play a constructive role in the recovery’. Meanwhile others at Heritage saw an opportunity to roll back federal labour policies, including Unemployment Insurance coverage in the affected area, fearing that the Administration’s proposed $5,000 Worker Recovery Accounts might reinforce an entitlement mindset, encouraging cooks, taxi drivers and bartenders to invest in training that they patently did not need.

REBUILDING NEW ORLEANS’ MORAL LEVEES

When Senator John Kerry observed, quite plausibly, that the Republicans’ plans for the Gulf Region would transform it ‘into a vast laboratory for right-wing ideological experiments… recycling all [the conservatives’] failed policies and shipping them to Louisiana’, Heritage immediately countered that the root cause of the problems facing the region were those Great Society programs in the fields of welfare, housing, education, and job training, which had in effect left the poor defenceless. Since it was the welfare state that placed the poor in the path of the storm, so the argument went, it would
be no less than perverse to pour money into programmes that destroy work ethics and encourage illegitimacy: ‘[t]he poor of New Orleans have been victims twice’, Cato’s Michael Tanner had pointed out in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, so ‘let’s not victimize them a third time’.67 The Hoover Institution’s Thomas Sowell likewise presented the main challenge as one of ‘rebuild[ing] New Orleans’ moral levees’.68 Less compassionately, George Neumayr, Executive Editor of The American Spectator and a recent media fellow at Hoover, railed against those New Orleans residents who he alleged had ‘no intention of leaving’, since the criminally inclined foresaw a ‘target-rich environment’, while the passive majority were ‘just waiting for their welfare checks at the beginning of September’, stayed put, and drowned. Had ‘chronically craven and indolent’ local officials had the wit to announce that the next round of welfare checks would be issued in Baton Rouge, Neumayr concluded, then no doubt ‘people would have somehow found a way to get out’.69

There had been more than a little unease, in free-market think tank circles, with the President’s Jackson-Square acknowledgement of ‘deep, persistent poverty [with] roots in a history of racial discrimination’, and with what he characterized as a ‘legacy of inequality’.70 The Bush Administration’s achievements in the area of welfare reform were also regarded as modest, if not tokenistic – more funding for a compassionate conservative programme of ‘marriage incentives’, but little else. The Heritage Foundation’s welfare guru Robert Rector, amongst others, thought that the time had now come to ‘experiment boldly’. Lecturing the dependent residents of New Orleans ‘how not to be poor’, Rector contended that the root cause of the city’s poverty was neither racial discrimination nor an absence of job opportunities, but the collapse of the nuclear family, coupled with low levels of parental work – both trends that have disproportionately affected the black community. The falling marriage rate was fuelling welfare dependency amongst blacks, while propagating the dysfunctional ‘culture of the underclass: drug abuse, promiscuity, and violence’; and the appropriate response should be ‘moral renewal’:

The post-Katrina debate [has focused] on jobs and construction, joined with occasional proposals about relocating dysfunctional families or voucherizing services. But it is families, not houses, that really need rebuilding. If the proposals continue to ignore the social causes of poverty, they will merely reproduce the original slums of New Orleans in fresh concrete. Twenty years from now, another hurricane will swamp the city and pundits will wonder again where all the poor folks have come from.71
Striking his trademark tone, Charles Murray, now W. H. Brady Scholar at AEI, informed the readers of the Wall Street Journal that the conventional repertoire of policy responses simply does not work for the underclass, whose defining characteristic is ‘behaving destructively’. The underclass, he cautioned, should not be confused with the responsible poor, who work and get married; rather, they are the ‘looters and thugs’ and ‘inert women’ for whom conventional policies simply fail:

We already know that the programs are mismatched with the characteristics of the underclass. Job training? Unemployment in the underclass is not caused by lack of jobs or of job skills, but by the inability to get up every morning and go to work. A homesteading act? The lack of home ownership is not caused by the inability to save money from meager earnings, but because the concept of thrift is alien. You name it, we’ve tried it. It doesn’t work with the underclass.72

It was this brand of argumentation, of course, that first made Murray’s name, more than a quarter century ago, at the Manhattan Institute. And it has been one that his followers have pursued with gusto. ‘For a while it looked like Hurricane Katrina would accomplish what the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] never could’, City Journal contributing editor Kay Hymowitz reflected, ‘reviving civil rights liberalism as a major force in American politics’.73 Newsweek’s post-Katrina cover story, ‘The Other America’ had vividly recalled Michael Harrington’s formative contribution to the War on Poverty, just as Senator Edward Kennedy’s Gulf reconstruction proposals explicitly begged comparisons with the achievements of the Tennessee Valley Authority.74 But, as Hymowitz blustered, this moment of retro-liberalism had ‘only lasted about five minutes’; now it was down to conservatives to respond to the real problem – the breakdown of the nuclear family, together with its racially and socially uneven consequences. Hymowitz’s colleague Nicole Gelinas likewise dismissed as ‘amorphous talk’ the President’s evocation of racism, poverty, and inequality in the aftermath of the hurricane. What New Orleans really needed, she contended, was improved levee protection, since ‘civil engineering actually works, unlike the social engineering that Bush has invited with his lament about urban Southern poverty’. With the physical infrastructure appropriately fixed, then it might be possible to deal with New Orleans’ ‘immutable civic shame, before and after Katrina’, the city’s ‘culture of murder’.75
After documenting in gruesome detail the city’s pre- and post-Katrina ‘murder rampage’ – together with images of black men caught in the commission of ostensibly illegal acts, in one case in the gunsights of a white police offer – Gelinas argued that the problem is a supply-side one, since ‘New Orleans’ legions of weak, female-headed, underclass black families supply generation after generation of … “lightly parented” young men to fuel the carnage’. In the short term, there will be no revival of New Orleans until public safety can be assured, she argued, which in turn calls for the importation of both Rockefeller-style drug laws and NYPD-style policing.

Day in and day out, Katrina or no Katrina, New Orleans is America’s most dangerous city…. But New Orleans’s long history of street carnage is not a topic for polite discussion in Katrina’s aftermath. Polls and pundits have a million solutions for the city, from building more affordable housing to ensuring better schools to creating an incubator for the nation’s ‘creative class’ to offering tax credits for resettlement. But none addresses the city’s most obvious, and intractable, problem, the one that has kept New Orleans from thriving for years…. Evacuees – and businesses – know that even Cat-5 levees can’t protect them from the day-to-day mortal fear of living in New Orleans…. Only when New Orleans can assure safety can it begin to make up some of the losses it has sustained over a generation of mismanagement. Only then can it build a real private economy and robust public institutions that will attract a thriving middle-class population.76

Pointedly drawing attention to Houston’s late-2005 crime spike, Gelinas subsequently argued that this is no longer only a problem for the Crescent City itself, since ‘Katrina’s floods dispersed throughout the unprepared South the uniquely vicious New Orleans underclass culture of drugs, guns, and violent death’.77

Writing in the AEI’s monthly magazine, The American Enterprise, Joel Kotkin moved to cement this solidifying conservative orthodoxy, detailing his vision of post-Katrina urban policy. Announcing that the storm had torn ‘the lid off a virtual Superdome of liberal illusions’, Kotkin launched a scathing attack on ‘rotten administration’ at the state and local level, and the ‘collapse of responsibility and discipline’ that in his mind was a function of New Orleans-style urban welfarism:
By becoming mass dispensers of welfare for the unskilled, playpens for the well-heeled and fashionable, easy marks for special interests, and bunglers at maintaining public safety and dispensing efficient services to residents and businesses, many cities have become useless to the middle class, and toxic for the disorganized poor. Today’s liberal urban leadership across America needs to see the New Orleans storm not as just a tragedy, but also as a dispeller of illusions, a revealer of awful truths, and a potential harbinger of things to come in their own backyards. Look beyond the tourist districts. Few contemporary cities are actually healthy in terms of job growth or middle-class amenities. Most are in the grips of moral and economic crisis. If we are lucky, the flood waters of Katrina will wash away some of the ’60s-era illusions that fed today’s dysfunction. Honest observers will recognize that this natural disaster, which hit the nation so hard, was set up by the man-made disaster of a counterproductive welfare state.  

Fundamentally, the agenda of the new urban right is about setting the ‘ground rules’ for appropriate behaviour in cities, largely modeled on middle-class norms; establishing the preconditions for economic growth, largely through the kinds of minimalist supply-side interventions metaphorically represented, in this case, by the cat-5 levee; and maintaining social order through ruthless application of the force of law, facilitated by zero-tolerance policing. This, clearly, is anything but a noninterventionist programme, but its interventions are profoundly selective. It represents a form of revanchist neoliberalism, practised at the urban scale. The neoliberal face of this programme caters explicitly to business, taxpayers, and the middle classes, for whom the restructured city must be made profitable, safe, and welcoming. Meanwhile, the programme’s revanchist face justifies a new round of socially invasive interventions on a criminalized, feckless, and morally bankrupt class of the urban poor, from whom preferred citizens must be shielded at all costs. This is a form of urban policy not so much for cities, or even in the interest of cities, as one that is applied to them – restoring bourgeois urbanism by way of a kind of post-welfare policy corrective.

Before Katrina dramatically raised the stakes, New Orleans was perceived by US conservatives as one of urban America’s lost causes, an outpost of disfigured welfare statism, rotting from the inside. As George Neumayr saw it:

New Orleans did not fall from without; it fell from within. The chaos after Hurricane Katrina did not cause a civilizational collapse;
it simply exposed and magnified one that had already occurred... A strange admixture of upper-class decadence and underclass pathology, New Orleans has long been a stew of disorder and dysfunction, convincing many New Orleans residents, years before Hurricane Katrina, to evacuate what they regarded as an increasingly unlivable city... The squalor and crime in the Superdome represented nothing more than the squalor and crime transferred from New Orleans’ legendarily hellish housing complexes [and the] countless images of stranded women, children, and elderly were explained far more by the absence of fathers than by the tardiness of FEMA.  

From this perspective, ‘the city’s fall was inevitable’, a predestined outcome of the orgy of welfare dependency, crime, family breakdown, and corruption that preceded the storm, conditions that rendered the city socially, economically, and morally defenseless – before both ‘nature and human nature ran amok’. The fall of New Orleans was for the conservative intelligentsia a governmental-assisted cultural implosion, merely brought on by the hurricane. When they looked at the devastation of New Orleans, what they saw was a ‘hurricane of entitlements’.  

WHO FRAMED NEW ORLEANS?  
If conservatives were initially placed on the defensive by Katrina – having manifestly failed to provide basic security and protection, having publicly demonstrated both ineptness and indifference – they responded, as Lakoff and Halpin have argued, by ‘filling the framing gap so quickly and so effectively that... they may be able to parlay this disaster into an even greater power grab than they made out of September 11’. The outpouring of conservative commentary, editorializing, and detailed policy advocacy, particularly from the think tanks, does indeed seem to have been decisive in substantially re-framing the issue of New Orleans’ fall and reconstruction. Their influence can be read in the changing posture of the Bush Administration, from defensiveness and disorientation in early September, 2005, through cautious and ultimately confident containment of the ‘Katrina problem’ by the year’s end. By the time of the 2006 State of the Union address, New Orleans barely rated a mention. No longer was the rhetoric about ‘doing what it takes’, by the new year Bush was snippily retorting at a press conference, ‘I want to remind the people in that part of the world, $85 billion is a lot’. Meanwhile, evidence of the Administration’s evasion and unfulfilled promises in the Gulf reconstruction programme continued to grow.
What began as a ‘decidedly unnatural disaster’, in Neil Smith’s words, has been ruthlessly transformed into a malformed reconstruction programme that blames, and morally reregulates, the most vulnerable victims, while setting in train ‘[w]holesale gentrification on a scale unseen in the United States’. This is about as far from a ‘people’s reconstruction’ as one could imagine – a programme of contracted-out urban structural adjustment, designed in Washington and New York. An urban catastrophe that disproportionately impacted the poor, the infirm, and the elderly perversely resulted in the paring of programmes designated for precisely these groups. According to the neoliberal script, it was not a lack of resources, private transportation, or out-of-town support systems that placed some of the most-needy New Orleans residents in the storm’s path; it was the long-run consequences of urban welfarism – and its racialized cast of supported characters, including the workless, the feckless, and the lawless, absentee fathers, inert mothers, and criminalized youths.

There is a tragic truth in the ways in which Katrina ‘laid bare’ the operating model of American neoliberalism, its inequities and limitations. But by the same token, the relentless political management of the hurricane’s protracted aftermath exposes the continuing grip of this project, manifest in what has been a forceful display of orchestrated ideological recoil. The only partly hidden hands of think tank protagonists were feverishly at work in fashioning this ‘free market’ response. These new cadres of organic intellectuals are more than mere ‘orators’: they also construct, organize, and give direction to state projects. As such, their strenuous and concerted actions in the wake of Katrina again reveal the essential truth that in as far as the neoliberal project demonstrates unity, this is very much a constructed unity. It is also a contradictory unity. Beneath the veneer of common purpose, there are sharp – and potentially fatal – differences in the means and ends of small-government fiscal conservatives and big-government social conservatives.

Even though the new urban right was ready with a prefabricated crisis narrative when Katrina struck, the subsequent performance of the free-market think tanks reveals not only the potency, but also some of the incipient limits, of this post-welfare doxa. The bourgeois urban vision of the Manhattan Institute, just like the truncated, small-government federalism of the Heritage Foundation, did not emerge through a simple process of historical succession, as a singular and ready-formed alternative to Keynesian-welfarist urbanism. Rather, it has been formed incrementally, albeit in the context of a radical and overarching vision, as a tendentially consonant hybrid of a range of conservative, libertarian, pro-business, anti-statist, neoliberal and ‘post-liberal’ ideological arguments, claims, propositions, and ‘second-hand ideas’. What
might be characterized in retrospect as a (formidable) neoliberal project, or even a hegemonic ‘market order’, was of course a socially constructed one, the product of several decades of ideological investment and intellectual entrepreneurship, all facilitated by a favourable political-economic climate.

While the speed and force with which neoliberal nostrums filled the post-Katrina void can be read as a sombre commentary on America’s contemporary realpolitik, and the circuits of power and persuasion that sustain it, at the same time, the tensions and differences that were exposed along the way represent manifestations of the problematically hybrid character of the market revolution. For example, the post-Katrina debate reveals that fiscal constraint is evidently easier to preach than to practice; that the morally interventionist impulses of compassionate conservatives routinely try the patience of libertarians, just as they alarm budget hawks; that wholesale contracting-out risks compromising fiscal accountability; that small-government conservatives find it increasingly difficult to trust big-government conservatives; and so on. In principle, the exhaustion of the neoliberal project might just as easily result, therefore, from internal ideological fractures – or for that matter from various forms of social, political, and fiscal overreach – as from ‘external’ contestation. For now, if the fast-policy relays between New York City, Washington, and New Orleans tell us anything, it is a story of continuing neoliberal hegemony, for all the project’s shaky foundations and flawed realization. Only for a relatively brief moment did the manifest urban tragedy of New Orleans – the like of which has never been seen before in the contemporary United States – disrupt business-as-usual neoliberalism. Within the space of a few months, if not weeks, it had become clear that the longer-run outcomes of Katrina would not be a reversal, or even a midcourse adjustment of the process of neoliberalization, but in fact an acceleration of its extant programs of social regression and market governance. When the long history of neoliberalism is eventually written, where will New Orleans be placed?

NOTES

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4 When Republican Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, candidly mused that the rebuilding of New Orleans might not ‘make sense’, he was forced, within


11 Methodological note: the attributed contributions of ‘neoliberal’ (i.e. [neo]conservative, libertarian, and/or free-market) think tank scholars represent the primary source in this paper. The Manhattan Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and Cato represent the focus of the analysis. In general, the most ‘public’ forms of output are utilized – e.g. a *City Journal* online posting or Heritage *Web Memo* subsequently published as a newspaper editorial will be credited as the latter, though in practically every case these can also be found, verbatim, on the think tanks’ voluminous web sites. The interpretation here has been aided by a programme of interviews with think tank scholars and activists, part of a larger project on think tanks that the author is conducting with Adam Tickell.


13 Ibid.
19 For a broader analysis of the new urban right, see Peck, ‘Liberating the City’.
22 ‘President Outlines Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts’, Office of the Press Secretary, White House, Washington, DC, 31 August 2005.
28 Edwin Meese, Stuart M. Butler and Kim R. Holmes, *From Tragedy to Triumph: Principled Solutions for Rebuilding Lives and Communities*, Special Report, No. 05,

29 Ronald D. Utt, ‘President’s Bold Action on Davis-Bacon will Aid the Relief Effort’, Web Memo, No. 836, Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, 2005. Davis-Bacon was restored two months later, following Congressional pressure, a decision widely bemoaned by the conservative think tanks (see Tim Kane and David B. Muhlhausen, ‘Should Federal Labor Policy be any Different after the 2005 Hurricane Season?’, Backgrounder, No. 1893, Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, 2005).


35 Riedl, ‘A “Victory” Over Wasteful Spending?’.


38 ‘President Discusses Hurricane Relief in Address to Nation’, Jackson Square, New Orleans, Office of the Press Secretary, White House, Washington, DC, 15 September 2005.


40 A few days earlier the House majority leader Tom DeLay had told reporters, ‘Bring me the offsets, I’ll be glad to do it. But nobody has been able to come up with any yet’ (quoted in Washington Post, 15 September 2005, p. A1).

41 Stuart M. Butler, James J. Carafano, Alison A. Fraser, Dan Lips, Robert E. Moffit and Ronald D. Utt, ‘How to Turn the President’s Gulf Coast Pledge into Reality’, Web Memo, No. 848, Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, 2005, p. 3.


The Republican Study Committee is dominated by fiscal conservatives on the right of the Republican Party, inheritors of the Contract with America project.


RSC [Republican Study Committee], *Operation Offset: RSC Budget Options* 2005, Washington, DC: Republican Study Committee, 2005.


The Senate’s self-styled Fiscal Watch Team called for a ‘package of offsets’ totalling $130 billion, including a 5% reduction in spending on all federal programmes except those which impact national security, a pay freeze for federal employees, a two-year delay in implementation of the Medicare prescription drug benefit; cuts in the recently passed highway bill. See http://www.coburn.senate.gov.

*Porkbusters* is at http://www.truthlaidbear.com/porkbusters, featuring advocacy
of the Pork Barrel Reduction Act (S.2265) and a Pork Hall of Fame (#1 being, not surprisingly, Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, of ‘bridge to nowhere’ fame). *Porkbusters* is an offshoot of *Instapundit*, sometimes known as a ‘warblog’, due to its hawkish stance on the Iraq war, and one of the most widely read blogs in the world.


55 ‘President Holds Press Conference’, Office of the Press Secretary, White House, Washington, DC, 4 October 2005. The President also made the case that post-Katrina realities called for an extension of the Patriot Act and increased oil-refining capacity (“The storms that hit our Gulf Coast also touched every American, with higher prices at the gas pump”).

56 RSC, *Pence Praises President’s Call for Budget Cuts*, Washington, DC: Republican Study Committee, 2005.


65 Kane and Muhlhausen, ‘Should Federal Labor Policy be any Different’.

66 Franc, ‘Legislative Lowdown – Week of September 26th’.
70 ‘President Discusses Hurricane Relief in Address to Nation’.
76 Ibid., pp. 16, 21, 24-25.
81 Ibid., p. 50.
82 Franc, ‘Hurricane of Entitlements’.
84 ‘Press Conference of the President’, White House, Office of the Press Secretary, White House, Washington, DC, 26 January 2006.