

Opinion

Two colossal man-made disasters: Katrina and Alan

By Ben Tanosborn

Online Journal Guest Writer

September 10, 2005 (tanosborn.com)—Katrina will come to be less the full force super-hurricane that hit the coasts of the Gulf region . . . and more a super-calamity in human suffering aggravated by a gross lack in leadership. Rather than replacing Camille as the standard for Mother Nature's rage and punishment- as widely reported, Katrina installed itself as the yardstick by which to measure how politicians care, and serve the needs of a region . . . or a nation.

America is replete with career politicians born, or self-anointed, to lead . . . at all levels of government. What becomes obvious when a Katrina comes along is that for the many "born to lead," there is only a scant few "committed to serve." And just as heroic acts by the commonest of people take place during these disasters, the bumbling in leadership and lack of human compassion loom high before our eyes.

Congress, as it always does in these somber situations, will investigate . . . and perhaps find fault with the French and Spaniards for building communities along the Gulf; or, take on Jefferson for negotiating the Louisiana Purchase; or even debate why we might be so far behind the Dutch in dike engineering technology and the ability to build safe population centers at or below sea level.

And, as always, our inept, and/or uncaring, politicians will miss the message written in bold capital letters before them. And we, as voters, will also miss the message written for us . . . for we never learn, and keep on electing the same self-serving, incompetent bunch. Which brings me to a comment made by an Irish friend, a much respected management theorist in Europe, last November, shortly after our presidential election.

"If only for anecdotal reasons, we must agree that each village should be allowed to have its idiot," he told me. "What really confounds me," he went on to say, "is when he gets elected, then reelected, mayor." That says something about the villagers . . . and the villagers'R'us.

One of the saddest parts to Katrina's calamitous aftermath is the lack of dignity and honor in politicians, or their designees. In the past we have seen how in other parts of the world, even lesser catastrophes are often followed, without instigation, by the resignation of those in authority. Even in situations where neither incompetence nor negligence is present. But honor and dignity don't blend well with American politics.

Right on Katrina's trail, there is another hurricane taking shape. It has been breeding for two decades over the unnaturally warm economy, picking up momentum in the last four years, and poised to takeoff with gale force. A hurricane wide and deep enough to cover the far reaches of the nation in one direct hit: a horrific, magnitude five, economic hurricane that could redefine the standard of living for most Americans.

And just as Katrina has been measured against Camille; Alan will be measured against the "Great Depression" of seven decades ago. Using the "D" word is not intended as alarming or prophetic, and definitely not apocalyptic; but only as a realistic scenario of what awaits the US economy after a generation under Mr. Greenspan's baton.

Alan . . . can anyone think of a more befitting name? A name that will forever honor (dishonor, really) the man who has made a stew of economics and political scatology . . . feeding it to us in a bowl of optimism, while playing the saxophone and, like a snake charmer, making the economy dance to the rhythm of politicians . . . and the special interests they serve. Yes, Alan Greenspan, the naked emperor whom, to date, so many economists in the US still see fully clothed, and dare not challenge. And those who do tread warily, as if afraid to antagonize the politically-herded, lied to masses.

Perhaps America's Economist-Emeritus is hoping that this economic hurricane will not take place until after his retirement in January 2006. In fact, he is beginning of late to sound an amber alert . . . years after the fact. Here is a man who, for years when staring at an extremely obese individual, pauses; then, incredibly, in a professorial low-talker fashion, makes the solemn pronouncement that such person "might be overweight." Wow! A level of tauro-scatology [read: bullshit] that elevates him to the BS-stature of a Bill Clinton, a Rafael Palmeiro . . . or other influential, powerful people who feel they can color humility and honesty as they see fit . . . because, like L'Oreal users, they are important: "they are worth it."

In fairness to Mr. Greenspan, he did not compose or orchestrate this Opus that for many will turn out to be an economic funeral march. Predatory capitalism, self-serving politicians, and insatiable greed in people, co-orchestrated this state of the economy . . . all the Fed chairman did was to give his imprimatur to their whims with an ill-advised monetary policy. As a result, and because of what he did, or failed to do, during his tenure, Americans are ending up . . .

- Disregarding a priori huge foreign trade imbalances, unlimited foreign debt, and globalization . . . without any discussion at the "people" level of how this foreign dependence may impact everyone's future in the US, not just the privileged class.
- Welcoming overvaluation of assets, particularly real estate and corporate stocks, at inflated levels that promote "fictitious" wealth which in turn brings irrational economic behavior, such as acquisition of unnecessary debt and wasteful spending.
- Accepting grossly misleading government data on inflation, unemployment and other "filtered" indicators that portray the economy through politically-colored glasses.

Unlike Katrina, which for the most part will only prove catastrophic to the have-nots of a vast region along the Gulf Coast, Alan will play economic havoc with everyone but a few very wealthy Americans. It should prove to be an equal opportunity economic disaster.

Whether or not Katrina is the precursor to Alan remains to be seen; but at day's end, whether next month or next year, Katrina will prove to be a man-made disaster, and so will Alan.

© 2005 Ben Tanosborn

Ben Tanosborn, columnist, poet and writer, resides in Vancouver, Washington (USA), where he is principal of a business consulting firm. Contact him at ben@tanosborn.com.

Copyright © 1998–2005 Online Journal™. All rights reserved.