



**WHAT BECOMES OF THE BROKENHEARTED?
BY JULIANNE MALVEAUX**

This past week, I was doing my Congressional Black Caucus thing, an act I've perfected over the 30 years since I attended my first Congressional Black Caucus legislative weekend as an intern in the Carter Administration's Council of Economic Advisors. Then, I walked around wide-eyed at the legislators, at the brain trusts, at the energy and the possibilities. Now, instead of sitting in the audience wide-eyed, I'm featured as a panelist and I am rolling with hardly any time to sit back and inhale black people. In my mind, I'm talking, rushing, late even when I am on time. It is easy to get so consumed by the swirl that we forget about that which is real. So praise God for Harold Toussaint, who describes himself as a displaced survivor of Hurricane Katrina. As I tried to rush out of a panel organized by Dr. Ron Daniels, the brother thrust a book in my hand and focused his eyes into mine. He was forceful, and importantly, he reminded me of our nation's unfinished business with Katrina survivors, our displaced brothers and sisters who are still carrying the legacy of our nation's racism and indifference in their lives.

Brother Toussaint handed me a book called *Overcoming Katrina*, which breaks the aftermath of the hurricane down in ways I had not ever imagined. I have been there, done that, I thought, in New Orleans, filming in the summer of 2006, walking through the lower 9th a year after the hurricane. This book reflects the reality yet another year after, with a publication date of 2008. Things are still not right in New Orleans! Not right!

Reading *Overcoming Katrina: African American Voices from the Crescent city and Beyond*, by Dan Penner and Keith Ferdinand is like experiencing a body blow. It hurts to read of the racism, of the differential treatment, of the people who waded past bodies, who were scattered from their families and friends, who will never be made whole. I keep juxtaposing these monologues with the promise that former President George W. Bush made to Mississippi Senator Trent Lott that this house would be rebuilt. And what about the homes of the voices in *Overcoming Katrina*, folks like Ad\don Cotton, Senta Easton, Le Ella Lee, Aline St. Julien and the other voices of the New Orleans displaced. *Overcoming Katrina* begs a question – what becomes of the brokenhearted?

Will the Katrina displaced ever be made whole? There is no telling what will happen as a result of the CBC Legislative weekend. Issues swirl and people grab at them, and this time around, with a new black president, there is guardedness in the air, folk who do not want to be but so critical because they want to give "Brother" Obama a chance. But the brother from another further has more on his plate than race and he isn't going to push race if we don't. Fools can stand in front of him with parodying bones in their noses and he would say it is a nasal adjustment. Black folk have to say enough!

One of the ways we do that is to connect the plight of New Orleans to issues of

climate change. The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies has convened a group of folk to talk about climate change, including the esteemed environmentalist Dr. Robert Bullock (Clark Atlanta University) and Dr. Beverly Wright (Dillard University). I am not sure why I am stomping in this high cotton as a fellow commissioner but I know that I learn from my brother and sister environmentalists. From Joint Center polling, African Americans are underrepresented in the climate debate but fully aware of issues related to climate change and environmental responsibility. African Americans are recyclers, self-reed energy savers, and energy efficient. We struggle with climates that are too hot, with poor environments, and with conditions that may reflect our environment. Minorities buy energy efficient light bulbs or appliances, organic feed or hybrid cars. We are aware of environmental issues, bit from the Joint Center surveys, they don't top our list.

Our awareness about climate change and our environmental footprint are as important as the ways we navigate civil rights issues. Our embrace of environmental issues helps us understand the slow repopulation of New Orleans. Our embrace of our environment reminds us that when people are displaced they lose heat, health, energy and heart. What becomes of the brokenhearted? Ask New Orleans displaced survivors.