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## **Blackhawks over Bourbon Street**

**by Glenn Jacobs**

Last summer it was announced that federal agents would soon join local authorities in policing New Orleans. In addition, National Guard troops will be staying in New Orleans until November, and Mayor Ray Nagin wants the Louisiana Air National Guard to conduct nightly patrols over the city. The thought of national police, military troops, and helicopters patrolling an American city is eerily reminiscent of a postmodern sci-fi thriller.

Unfortunately, for the people of New Orleans it is reality. For the rest of us, it is an example of the cycle that results in oppressive government.

Following Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans became a case study of how this cycle works: there is a crisis (often as a result of earlier government actions or policies); the government then responds and intervenes, usually causing more problems than it solves. When its interventions fail, the government demands even more power and money so that it can intervene even more forcefully, causing even more problems. The result is heavier tax burdens and more restrictions on individual liberty; in parts of New Orleans, the result has been a situation akin to martial law.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) response to Katrina was an abject failure. Not only did FEMA move slowly, but when it did finally lurch into action, it actually contributed to the misery by, among other things, preventing many private organizations from entering New Orleans to help the Katrina victims. Waste and fraud became the hallmarks of the federal response to Katrina. Politicians did what they do best: they appeared in front of television audiences and promised to fix New Orleans with money confiscated from the viewers. Of course, little of that money actually helped New Orleanians. Indeed, special interests, politically connected companies, and con artists must have felt they had won the lottery, which, in a way, they had.

New Orleans's current problems, however, predate Hurricane Katrina.

Violent crime in the city has increased by 107 percent in the first quarter of the year as compared with the same period last year. This increase has been caused mainly by turf battles between rival drug dealers. Therefore, while it is true that Hurricane Katrina compromised the

ability of the local police to combat crime, most of that crime is due to the war on drugs, itself a government program. Instead of discontinuing the destructive war on drugs, the government demands more money, more power, and more authority so it can prosecute this failed program even more aggressively.

It appears that much of the emphasis of the federal intervention involves “gun crime.” Based on the city’s highly controversial and unconstitutional seizure of firearms immediately following Katrina, this is an ominous development. The government itself acknowledges that parts of New Orleans are unsafe, but, by means of laws such as those requiring concealed-carry permits, it hinders the inhabitants’ ability to protect themselves.

Generally, the people who need this protection the most, i.e., the poor who live in high-crime areas, are the least likely to have a permit, making these otherwise law-abiding citizens criminals. While the feds claim that they are targeting known criminals, how many otherwise innocent people will end up in their dragnet? Instead of protecting people’s right to defend themselves, the government criminalizes their ability to do so and then cracks down on everyone, resulting in oppression for all.

After the federal government’s inept response to Hurricane Katrina, many lamented its inefficiency. This attitude reflects a basic misunderstanding of the nature of government. In addition to the federal government’s being a monstrous bureaucracy that inherently moves slowly, the one thing that separates government from other organizations is its ability to legally initiate force. While private individuals and organizations generally solve problems through peaceful interaction and cooperation, government forces its solutions on everyone. When its solutions fail, government simply applies more force. With military troops in their streets and combat aircraft overhead, when will the people of New Orleans, and for that matter, America, recognize that government solutions not only are inefficient, but almost always exacerbate the problem, and, in the end, often wind up being the problem?

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