

For only **\$60** more
round trip!

AIR FRANCE

SFGate.com

SFGATE HOME • BUSINESS • SPORTS • ENTERTAINMENT • TRAVEL

JOBS • REAL

Search

SFGate News

Web by Google™

San Francisco Chronicle

OPEN FORUM

Emergency Preparedness Heeding Katrina's lessons

Diego Castaneda

Wednesday, November 9, 2005

As the pictures from Hurricane Katrina's devastation fade into the gallery of media blitzes past, and as the federal relief effort moves from its initial bumbling into a stalled phase marked by ineptitude and inaction, it's instructive to play a little hurricane trivia:

What island country was hit with five hurricanes of Category 2 or stronger during the years 1996-2002 and yet suffered the loss of only 16 people while its closest neighbors lost more than 600? (Hint: It's the same nation that recently lost no lives to the powerful Hurricane Wilma while only 90 miles north, Florida reported five people dead.) The answer is: Cuba.

But it isn't due to luck or financial resources that Fidel Castro's people have avoided large losses of life in the worst storms. In 2004, Oxfam International, a nongovernmental organization that helps developing nations recover from disaster, released a report about the Cuban model of Community-Based Disaster Management. Unlike the United States, where disaster relief means externally supporting disaster victims and throwing large amounts of resources in a one-size-fits-all method after disaster strikes, Cuba focuses on localized disaster-preparedness systems and tailored, specialized relief based on prior community organization. For instance, adequate shelters and supplies are available in every community. People know where these are before hand and know what to do. Everybody has a prearranged role. Also, nongovernmental people serve as leaders.

- [Printable Version](#)
- [Email This Article](#)

Opinion

- ▶ [Main Opinion Page](#)
- ▶ [Chronicle Sunday Insight](#)
- ▶ [Chronicle Campaigns](#)

SF Chronicle Submissions

- ▶ [Letters to the Editor](#)
- ▶ [Open Forum](#)
- ▶ [Sunday Insight](#)

For only **\$60**
more round trip

AIR FRANCE

ChronicleJobs TOP JOBS

PROTECH

is HIRING.....We offer Full

REAL

ESTATE AGENTS Biz Brokerage

RESTAURANT

CHEF: Culinary Grad preferred

RESTAURANT

Floor Manager & Experienced

RESTAURANT

Assistant General Mgr. Busy SF

RESTAURANT

Sous Chef, Line Cook. Exp

RETAIL

This system creates a citizenry that knows what to do and is confident that the government will provide the resources before and during a disaster. For Cubans, evacuation means leaving home before it becomes a boat. There are no people stranded on rooftops, fervently but helplessly watching a Chinook helicopter pass them by for the 10th time. According to Castro, quoted in the Oxfam report, "Victory means minimum loss of life."

We can gain valuable lessons from the Cuban method without becoming an authoritarian regime. To start, the U.S. government must admit the relationship between poverty and loss of life during a disaster. We must also confront that poverty is intrinsically linked to race. For example, vehicle ownership -- which meant the difference between evacuation from New Orleans and being left behind during Katrina -- is significantly associated with race in New Orleans. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported that, "more than 1 in 3 black households in New Orleans (35 percent) -- and nearly 3 in 5 poor black households (59 percent) -- lacked a vehicle, while only 15 percent of non-Hispanic whites were without a car."

Following the Cuban model of Community-Based Disaster Management, we should focus our resources on empirically tested social programs that enable the residents from the poorest communities to develop relationships with other residents, local employers and their own community-based organizations, so that a strong social framework exists for disaster preparedness.

We should support -- financially and politically -- groups that are already doing this work. In Alameda County, CARD (Collaborating Agencies Responding to Disasters) aims to train community-based organizations about disaster preparedness. Its goal is to create practical and economically viable solutions tailored to each group's needs, with the understanding that disaster preparedness inherently builds community and citizen infrastructure. Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, has also championed CARD's cause, most recently by hosting an expert panel to discuss these kinds of solutions.

The crisis in New Orleans has made us aware that we are only as strong as our weakest links. Disaster preparedness should not only be about future disasters, but should also help us to live well now, without undue fear of what's to come. In the words of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, "History is made by us, and as we make it, we are made and remade by it." Katrina can provide us with an opportunity to create a history free from the mistakes made in responding to this calamity.

Diego Castaneda is a graduate student in the School of Public Health at UC Berkeley.

Page B - 13

Ads by Google

[What's This?](#)

Free Ringtones

Ringtones at no cost Instant download on your cell phone
www.flycell.com

NOW HIRING
[H&M](#)

RETAIL

Variety of Mgmt positions avail
[Bloomingdale's](#)

RETAIL

CLERKS Galls, an ARAMARK Co., the

SALES

CAN YOU SELL THE PRESIDENT?
[IPA](#)

SALES

Pharma Exciting Part or Full-Time

SALES

CENTER MANAGER
 Quality baked

SALES

Earn \$400-\$600 per Weekend!
[Kitchen Works](#)

SECURITY

GUARDSMARK
 IMMEDIATE

SECURITY

CSS Great new site. S/O \$13

- [About Top Jobs](#)
- [View All Top Jobs](#)



We
 giving
 one n
 mile
 25 fl

 UNI
 It's tin

Unique Home Designs

Innovative prefab circular homes. Hurricane and tornado resistant!
www.DeltechHomes.com

Surplus Military Tents

Over 2,500 Tents In Stock US Mil. Surplus & Relief Goods
www.armytents.com



[Get up to 50% off home delivery of the Chronicle for 12 weeks!](#)

San Francisco Chronicle Sections

[©2006 San Francisco Chronicle](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site In](#)
