

Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans? George Bush, the Jazz Funeral, and the Politics of Memory

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It is only in his music, which Americans are able to admire because a protective sentimentality limits their understanding of it, that the Negro in America has been able to tell his story.

– James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*²

1. On September 15, 2005 George W. Bush addressed the nation from New Orleans in an attempt to quell the still rising tide of anger at his administration's response to Hurricane Katrina. The speech, which was notable in part for his recognition of the government's failures and his unusual acceptance of responsibility for mistakes made, ended with an upbeat vision of a revived Gulf Coast, and a metaphor that drew for inspiration upon local tradition. "In this place," declared the President, "there's a custom for the funerals of jazz musicians. The funeral procession parades slowly through the streets, followed by a band playing a mournful dirge as it moves to the cemetery. Once the casket has been laid in place, the band breaks into a joyful 'second line' – symbolizing the triumph of the spirit over death. Tonight the Gulf Coast is still coming through the dirge – yet we will live to see the second line."³ In so doing, Bush offered a model of memory and mourning that, this paper argues, stood in stark contrast to the model of memory and mourning that his administration adopted following the other great crisis of its tenure, the September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. Turning to the Greeks to identify and elucidate the distinction between the two models, the paper argues that while one seeks to exploit memory and mourning to perpetuate a particular kind of grief-wrath, the other seeks to negate, distance, and defuse such wrath in the interests of a democratic forgetting. The paper seeks first, to demonstrate the ways in which the Bush administration has sought to manage memory and mourning as a deliberate political strategy; and second, to identify potentially negative consequences of the approach.
2. In book 18 of the *Iliad*, Hephaestus draws two cities on the shield of Achilles: one in which the inhabitants are engaged in the peacetime activities of marriage and justice, the other in which its citizens confront a war outside their gates. In this, suggests Loraux, the "ideal figure of the *polis*

can be distinguished in outline: warlike outside its gates, civil and peaceful within."⁴ Indeed, much of Loraux's work in her book *The Divided City* is concerned to show how these two visions of the city are simply ideal types, with the truth about the city lying somewhere between. This juxtaposition of binary opposites was, of course, something of a Greek trope: evident as much in its ubiquity in their prose as in Thucydides' similar juxtaposition of two Athens – that of the funeral oration and that of the plague – in Book 2 of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*.⁵ Indeed, much of the dialectical potential of Greek texts appears to lie in the attempt to synthesize the perspectives offered by such juxtapositions. In order to establish the typology that will structure the remainder of the analysis I consider the ideal types of the city at war and the city at peace, tracing the connection between these visions and their respective approaches to memory and mourning.

3. Private grief was heavily regulated in Athens. Most obviously associated with women, there was a distinct fear that it would spill over into the public sphere where it could not be controlled. In *Mothers in Mourning* Loraux offers a detailed account of the regulation of women's role in the funeral ceremonies. She notes that the women who laid out and prepared the body were considered contaminated and kept apart even from those women who attended the graveside, and that the women who attended at the graveside left before the men lest the unbridled emotionalism of their laments were permitted to have the last word over the ceremony.⁶ Thus, *pénthos oikeíon* – the intimate mourning of the household – was subordinated to the public mourning of the procession, or *ekphorá*. "This is," she argues, "...the civic way of assigning limits to the loss of self, limits that for women are the familiar walls of the *oikos*. The reasoning is that the *oikeíon pénthos* must not contaminate the city, just as more generally, funeral rites should not intrude on the political institutions' operations."⁷ Somewhat ominously, Loraux concludes: "When this happens in spite of everything, it is a sure sign of problems for the city."⁸ The danger is, she suggests, that such emotionalism can all too easily become *álaston pénthos*, mourning without end.
4. The danger of this mourning without end is, writes Loraux, "the affinity that exists between grief and anger. The emotions of grief, which are the wellsprings of lament, spill over into emotions of anger, even rage."⁹ When mourning cannot end, when it becomes anger that can never be erased from the mind, she continues, "we see the ultimate justification for revenge, for the spirit of vendetta, for all the horrors of retaliation against earlier horrors."¹⁰ It is this that becomes the grief-wrath of *mênis*. It is, she says, repetitive and endless, all the more so because never to have an end is precisely its motivating force.¹¹ It is for this reason that the political seeks to regulate feminine excess, for such grief-wrath is the "worst enemy of politics" eroding all considerations of reciprocity, justice, and even self-interest in favor of its own singular perspective. Indeed, Loraux argues

that "anger as mourning makes the ills it cultivates 'grow' assiduously, and it is a bond that tightens itself until it resists all untying."¹² It might be thought, however, that such grief-wrath, although antithetical to politics, is conducive to warfare: its fury unleashed on the forces outside the city gate depicted on Achilles' shield. Nevertheless, just as the story of Achilles – whose grief-wrath over the death of Patroclus and the sleights against him – necessarily complicates any simple attempt to associate such mourning and emotionalism solely with women, it also shows us the dangers of this kind of unbalanced thinking for those who are driven by it. Indeed, describing Aeschylus's Clytemnestra as "*mênis* personified,"¹³ Loraux notes that it is the mode of mourning associated with tragedy. It is an association which suggests that – temporarily useful as it might be for inspiring warriors to acts of great bravery and violence – it is not a mode of mourning conducive to the long term health of the city. In this it appears to stand in direct contrast to the Greek notion of democratic forgetting.

5. If the grief-wrath of *mênis* was potentially destructive of Athenian politics then, Loraux argues, forgetting made such politics possible. The harmonious *polis* depicted upon Achilles' shield is, she suggests, an "ideology for the divided city," one that "denies the very possibility of thinking about real divisions."¹⁴ Loraux argues that all Greek thought was concerned with averting *stasis*, or civil conflict.¹⁵ Indeed, she suggests that the city was founded upon a deliberate forgetting of such tensions, one achieved through a multiplicity of devices. When *stasis* did occur, she notes for example, it was "usually called in Greek, the events or the misfortunes,"¹⁶ and compared to a natural catastrophe that rains down on human society like a plague, making its origins external to the city: a sickness of the *polis*. The implication of such strategies, she notes, amounted "to denying that *stasis* is an ongoing condition of the city."¹⁷ Indeed, the Greeks continually sought to erase or to deny the political origin of such conflict.¹⁸ It is for this reason, she argues, that the city did not use the word "democracy." With its implications of a victory (*kratos*) of part of the city (*dêmos*) over the rest, it is a word that screams conflict. Indeed, Aristotle's preference for the word "polity" in his description of rule of the many with an aim towards the common good in *The Politics* is, she suggests, tied to this reluctance to accept *stasis* as a condition of politics.¹⁹ The most telling example of the importance of forgetting to politics comes, however, in the oath taken in 403 by the citizens of Athens following the restoration of democracy to the city.
6. The use of an oath as a weapon against discord was not unique to Athens, indeed, many peace treaties and pacts of civic reconciliation in the period relied upon the commitment to forget previous tensions in order to restore politics. In 403, however, the oath included a negative statement "I shall not recall the misfortunes." Its function was to ensure a ritualized forgetting as the basis of politics.²⁰ "Containing the hostility it annuls in being spoken," writes Loraux, "the oath

can and must renounce memory, because memory of misfortunes is memory of hate. Thus it reverses the implicit 'I shall never forget' that is the formula of vengeance."²¹ In this context, we can perhaps see more clearly the ways in which the grief-wrath of *ménis* – the memory that refuses to forget – was considered the enemy of politics. Indeed, Plutarch writes about the dangers of "unforgetting avengers" who pursue "the memories of some unforgotten foul deeds of earlier days."²² Such figures threaten the amnesia upon which such amnesty, and thus the end to *stasis*, was based. It is for this reason that the Greeks so closely regulated mourning and employed a number of other devices aimed at defusing such problematic remembering. Among them was whitewashing, a process that captured the way in which, for the Greeks, to erase meant to destroy by additional covering. The recoating of the surface of an official tablet with whitewash covered up the condemned lines and grievances, providing space upon which the new text could be written. Such political devices as whitewashing and oath taking stood in sharp contrast to other, non-political, means of forgetting available to the Greeks, such as potions and charms. The kind of forgetting engendered by potions – such as that used by Helen to ease the grief of Telemachus and Menelaus in the *Odyssey* – was considered a lesser form of amnesia, not least because the relief it produced was only temporary. In addition, however, the Greeks believed that such charms could be harmful to those upon whom they were practiced for "no approval, no consent is required from the one it befalls, who, momentarily subjected to this bracketing of misfortunes, is, perhaps, deprived of everything that made up his identity."²³ In this we see how the *manner* of such forgetting, not just the forgetting itself, affects the kind of politics that emerges from amnesia.

7. Having established the existence of these two types of memory and mourning in Greek thought and practice – that which seeks to exploit such memory in the interests of revenge, and that which seeks to forget in the interests of establishing the possibility of politics – the aim here is to use them as a framework for considering the Bush administration's response to the events of September 11, 2001, and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, specifically the manner in which it sought to use memory and mourning as tools to achieve its political ends. It is, however, perhaps necessary to say something about this turn to the Greeks for analytical purchase. For the philosopher and intellectual historian such use of the Greeks may seem ahistorical and problematic: the application of an Ancient model of memory and mourning to the politics of a post-Enlightenment republic. My aim here is not, however, to suggest an historical continuity, nor to identify some essential claim about the relationship between democracy, mourning, and vengeance. Despite the highly plausible claim that the funeral oration was central to the founding of both Athens and the modern American republic,²⁴ I am not arguing that this analysis reveals fundamental truths about memory,

mourning, and democratic politics. Rather I am suggesting that the models drawn from the Greeks provide a lens through which to view American politics, with the method being justified only by the possibility it provides for conceptualizing both the Bush administration's strategy of memory and mourning and the consequences of that strategy. In the words of Loraux: "it is...possible...that the far-off history of the Athenian democracy constitutes a valuable experimental terrain for helping us to think this present full of uncertainties."²⁵ Thinking this present suggests that the exploitation of the grief-wrath of *mênis* was not only a deliberate strategy of the administration; it is one whose negative effects were already being felt in the polity even before Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. As befits the complexity of the framework identified by Loraux, it also suggests that such *mênis* has been used as part of the Bush administration's strategy of forgetting in their post-Katrina policies. Neither approach, however, seems to bode well for the polity.

"We Will Never Forget the Lessons of September 11"

8. On September 14, 2001 President Bush visited the rescue workers at Ground Zero. Standing on a pile of still smoldering rubble – literally in some cases upon the graves of the fallen – Bush, his left arm draped around a New York City fire chief, spoke to the rescue workers through a bullhorn. Amidst cries of "Go get 'em, George," he observed "I want you all to know that America today – that America today is on bended knee in prayer for the people whose lives were lost here, for the workers who work here, for the families who mourn. This nation stands with the good people of New York City, and New Jersey and Connecticut, as we mourn the loss of thousands of our citizens." In response to a shouted cry of "I can't hear you," Bush seized the moment, moving swiftly from mourning to vengeance. "I can hear you" he declared to loud cheers and applause. "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." As the crowd of workers burst into applause and a chant of "U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!" Bush thanked the workers for their efforts, and called upon God to bless the nation, waving as he did so a small American flag.²⁶ His comments at Ground Zero were an echo of comments made earlier that day at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. where, of the lists of the dead, he had said: "We will read these names. We will linger over them, and learn their stories, and many Americans will weep." Just as on the pile, however, his comments quickly turned from mourning to vengeance. "Americans do not yet have the distance of history" he observed. "But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil. War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit

and murder. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing."²⁷ Indeed, Bush's observation that "the prayers of private suffering, whether in our homes or in this great cathedral, are known and heard, and understood," suggested the way in which the private grief of the household was to come to structure his response to the attacks.²⁸

9. In making such observations about the President's immediate response to September 11, of course, one inevitably appears to be engaging in what Jonathan Yardley called "the America sucks sweepstakes," participants in which "compete to find better, bitterer ways of describing the United States."²⁹ Even to suggest that there was something problematic about a President publicly lamenting the dead and vowing revenge in the days immediately after the worst terrorist attack on the nation in U.S. history is, perhaps, to appear to risk getting into bed with Ward Churchill, the *bête-noir* of conservative talk-shows who asserted that many of the World Trade Center victims were "little Eichmanns."³⁰ It is, nevertheless, clear that this understandable rhetoric of mourning and wrath was not a strategy confined to the immediate aftermath of the attack, but rather one that very quickly became policy. Indeed, what the President called "the lessons of 9/11, September 2001"³¹ became one of the most frequent tropes of his administration, used to justify a slew of policies and positions that were – at best – only tangentially connected to what Bush had labeled "the War on Terror." Most obviously there was the connection that was continually drawn between September 11, 2001 and the decision to invade Iraq. It is, perhaps, this connection that tells us most about Bush administration's strategy of memory and mourning.
10. As a number of memoirs by former administration members and Washington insiders have made clear, the Bush administration's desire to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein pre-dated the September 11 attacks.³² In this light, the Bush administration's use of the attacks to justify the increasingly amorphous "War on Terror" seems to be motivated less by the genuine grief-wrath or *mênis* of the administration, than by a deliberate strategy of inculcating such grief-wrath in the citizenry so as to generate support for the policies of the administration.³³ The President's willingness to invoke September 11 in connection with the invasion of Iraq – such as in his September 2003 televised address to the nation when he declared "Since America put out the fires of September the 11th, and mourned our dead, and went to war...We have carried the fight to the enemy"³⁴ – suggests that such *mênis* is less-genuinely felt that politically motivated. Loraux's observation that such grief-wrath kills politics can be seen in the way in which the administration has been able to shut down debate over the war, respond to criticism of its policies, and justify an expansion of executive power, often simply by invoking the events of September 11. Indeed, it is clear that *álaston pénthos* – the mourning

that cannot complete itself – has become a trope of popular culture: from the "We Will Never Forget" t-shirts and bumperstickers that proliferated after September 11, to the songs of "hot country," many of which invoke the memory of September 11 to chastise those who would question the country's actions in its aftermath.³⁵ In this, of course, *ménis* – the grief-wrath arising from an inability to forget – may also play its part in the administration's strategy of forgetting, one that may itself prove to be as damaging to the polity as its policy of hypertrophied remembrance. Evidence for this claim is to be found in both the impact of Hurricane Katrina upon the Gulf Coast, and in the strategy of memory and mourning adopted by the administration following the disaster, one that was concerned to induce democratic forgetting, in part, by evoking the grief-wrath of September 11.

Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?

11. George W. Bush's September 15 "jazz funeral" speech from Jackson Square in New Orleans was not his first speech on Hurricane Katrina, but it was the first one in which he seemed to acknowledge the significance of the devastation of the Gulf Coast region, and indeed, the immense human cost of the storm and its aftermath. Prior to the speech he had seemed so detached from the events that White House Counselor Dan Bartlett had compiled a DVD of Katrina-related news coverage for him to watch as he finally made his way to the region on Friday September 2, five days after the storm hit.³⁶ The public outcry over his apparent indifference was considerable. As *Newsweek* observed "How the President of the United States could have even less 'situational awareness,' ...than the average American about the worst natural disaster in a century – is one of the more perplexing and troubling chapters in a story that...ranks as a national disgrace."³⁷ The rapper Kanye West was far more direct. On the same day that the President cut short the longest presidential vacation in thirty-six years to visit the Gulf Coast, West appeared on an NBC telethon, breaking away from the scripted comments to lambaste the relief response, the media, himself, and finally the President. "George Bush doesn't care about black people"³⁸ he memorably declared, before NBC realized what was happening and took him off the air. West's anger was understandable.
12. Bush's first mention of Katrina had been a brief acknowledgement of the situation in a speech on the war in Iraq to military veterans in San Diego on Tuesday, August 30, the same day that he made a noontime appearance with country-singer Mark Willis – famous for his nostalgia song *19 Somethin'* – where the President was presented with a guitar and laughingly strummed a fake-chord. That many of the news networks chose to juxtapose this picture with the

scenes of devastation from the Gulf Coast where the victims were – in the memorable words of CNN's Wolf Blitzer "so poor, and...so black"³⁹ – did little to help the President's image. His next speech from the Rose Garden in Washington, D.C. on August 31 was little more than a verbal organizational flow-chart and a laundry-list of relief efforts. It was notable only for his observation that on his way back to Washington, D.C. from the West Coast he "had asked the pilot to fly over the Gulf Coast region so that he could see firsthand the scope and magnitude of the devastation,"⁴⁰ and for his concern with gas prices: comments which simply magnified his distance from the events. Even the President's arrival in the Gulf Coast did little suggest that he understood what had happened in the region. Arriving first in Alabama, he finally met with a hurricane victim, making a vow to visit the man again when his house – destroyed by the storm – had been rebuilt. That the victim was former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott – a man forced to step-down from his position as Majority Leader after praising Strom Thurmond's 1948 segregationist presidential run – further underlined the awkwardness of what one commentator called Bush's "racial etiquette."⁴¹ The President's later arrival in New Orleans did little to reassure a concerned public. Observing that he would not forget what he had seen in New Orleans, and that the situation would require the attention of the country for a long time, Bush's attention immediately wandered to his own *19 Somethin'* past. "I believe the town where I used to come from Houston, Texas to enjoy myself – occasionally too much – will be that very same town, that it will be a better place to come to. That's what I believe."⁴² Such was the President's tone-deafness, that even the normally deferential Fox News became critical of his performance, with reporter Shepard Smith briefly going off message to criticize the government's handling of the storm and its aftermath.⁴³

13. This then was the context in which Bush found himself on September 15, 2005. His apparent indifference to the suffering of the victims of the hurricane – particularly the predominantly African American survivors huddled in the Superdome and the New Orleans Convention Center who television news reports had shown suffering in the heat and violence of their temporary shelters – along with his prior refusal to address the NAACP at any time during his presidency, suggested that Kanye West was right about Bush and black people. His speech was thus an attempt to defuse some of this criticism and to cultivate a democratic forgetting that would return politics to its pre-Katrina state, a strategy that stood in stark contrast to his approach to memory and mourning in the wake of 9/11.
14. To suggest that Bush's September 15, 2005 speech from New Orleans was an exercise in forgetting requires, of course, that one account for those passages where the President uncharacteristically took responsibility for the poor handling of the crisis and even acknowledged longstanding social problems such as poverty and racial discrimination. "As we all saw on television," he observed,

"there's also some deep, persistent poverty in this region, as well. That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action." Similarly, the man who, in an April 13, 2004 televised press conference was stumped when asked to identify a mistake he had made as President, declared on September 15, 2005 that "Americans have every right to expect a more effective response in a time of emergency. When the federal government fails to meet such an obligation, I, as President, am responsible for the problem." Nevertheless, for every acknowledgement of error, Bush invoked at least one strategy of forgetting.

15. Most obviously there was the decidedly Greek suggestion that *nature* not *politics* was the cause of the problems in the Gulf Coast. Millions of lives were, the President observed, "changed in a day by a cruel and wasteful storm." Indeed, the President declared that: "In the aftermath, we have seen fellow citizens left stunned and uprooted, searching for loved ones, and grieving for the dead, and looking for a meaning in a tragedy that seems so blind and random." The storm was, he said, "an unprecedented crisis," even as he compared it to previous natural disasters including the Chicago fire, the San Francisco earthquake, and the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. As with the Greeks and *stasis*, such accounts of a "natural disaster" nevertheless ignored the many – very human – decisions and mistakes that had exacerbated the impact of the storm. These included the diversion of federal funds originally earmarked for strengthening the levees in New Orleans in the 1990s into widening the ship canal: a decision that actually increased the danger to those living in the most vulnerable areas of the city.⁴⁴ They also included the bureaucratic bungling and departmental infighting that had seriously hampered life-saving operations after Katrina: such as the group of 100 first responders diverted from New Orleans to Atlanta for sexual harassment training, or the doctor in New Orleans ordered, at gunpoint, to stop chest compressions on a dying woman because he was not registered with FEMA.⁴⁵ The suggestion that the storm was unprecedented obscured, furthermore, the previous history of storms in the region – the famous 1927 flood, and 1961's Hurricane Betsy which covered 80 percent of the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans in water – and indeed, the considerable warnings offered by a slew of books and articles including John McPhee's *The Control of Nature*, and pieces in the *Scientific American*, *Times-Picayune*, and *National Geographic*,⁴⁶ as well as the very specific warnings about potential levee breaches that Bush himself received two days before the storm.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Bush's claim that the tragedy was "blind and random" seeks to obscure, perhaps, the manner in which its effects were – due to politically not naturally produced policies – systematic and discriminatory. In New Orleans, *de facto* segregation and suburbanization made New Orleans poorer and blacker throughout the twentieth-century: 80 percent of New Orleans' minority households lived in the flooded areas where the

average income trailed those who lived outside the flooded area by \$17,000, and where the citizens has less access to private transportation, explaining in part, perhaps, the racial and economic disparities between those who did and did not escape prior to the flooding.

16. The "natural disaster" trope also served to mask the downgrading of the Federal Emergency Management Agency under the Bush administration. Before the now-notorious Michael Brown took office, FEMA was led by Joseph Allbaugh, Bush's former Chief of Staff in Texas and 2002 campaign manager, a man who described the agency as an "oversized entitlement program."⁴⁸ It was an attitude that bespoke little serious concern with the actual aims of the Agency. Indeed, at the time of Hurricane Katrina, five out of FEMA's top eight officials had come to the agency with virtually no experience in disaster management.⁴⁹ Brown himself, as *Time* magazine reported, appeared to have significantly padded his resume, his tenure and responsibilities at the International Arabian Horse Association being just one of the contested claims.⁵⁰ Even if, however, Brown had been a vastly experienced disaster manager, Michael Eric Dyson notes that by the time that Brown "arrived, FEMA had a greatly diminished status in an administration obsessed with fighting terror."⁵¹ In this we see, perhaps, how the strategy of remembrance employed by the Bush administration following September 11, 2001 played its part in exacerbating the impact of the storm and necessitated the administration's strategy of democratic forgetting, a strategy that was itself predicated upon invoking the grief-wrath of *mênis*.
17. On Thursday September 1, interviewed by Diane Sawyer on ABC's *Good Morning America*, the President was asked to compare the 9/11 devastation with that of the Gulf Coast. "Nine-eleven was a man-made attack," he offered, "this was a natural disaster."⁵² The competing explanations offered for the events of 9/11 and those of the Gulf Coast captured perfectly his administration's strategy of memory and mourning with regard to the two events: remembering of one, forgetting of the other. In practice, however, Bush used both strategies in his approach to Katrina, making the grief-wrath of *mênis* itself part of the democratic forgetting he sought to inculcate in the citizenry. Given that grief-wrath is a perspective that is necessarily antithetical to careful reflection upon its underpinning claims, it was no surprise that Bush invoked both the "War on Terror" and September 11, in his September 15 speech. "Our cities must have clear and up-to-date plans for responding to natural disasters, and disease outbreaks, or a terrorist attack" he declared, subtly shifting the focus of the speech from the specific – Hurricane Katrina – to the generalized fear that helped to cultivate grief-wrath since September, 2001. "In a time of terror threats and weapons of mass destruction," he continued, "the danger to our citizens reaches a much wider than a fault line or a flood plain." It was a claim that not only sought to invoke the all-consuming grief-wrath of *mênis*, it sought both to justify and hide its operations. If the

government had stumbled during Katrina, it suggested, it was because it was faced with a bigger problem. Thus, immediately prior to the President accepting responsibility for any failures of the federal government, he invoked the problem once again. "For years after the frightening experience of September 11th," he declared, "Americans have every right to expect a more effective response in a time of emergency." A speech which had begun with an attempt to demonstrate that, after so many missteps, the President was aware of, and concerned about, the scenes of devastation that had horrified America – one in which he had sought to convince the largely African American victims of the hurricane that "our whole nation cares about, and in the journey ahead you are not alone" – seemed, at this moment, to change its intended audience and focus. It became a speech about the War on Terror: a reassurance that the administration was capable of dealing with whatever lay ahead. Even, however, as it invoked the War on Terror and reminded the citizenry of the enemy outside the city gates, the speech sought to hide the already damaging and very tangible impact that the policy of *mênis* had upon the polity's capacity not only to think critically, but also upon the government's capacity to carry out one of its most basic functions: protecting its citizens from, and during, a disaster.⁵³

18. There has been much debate over the extent to which the war in Iraq – a war itself obviously justified by the administration's policy of mourning and memory – affected the response of both the federal and local governments during Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Much of the debate has focused upon the capabilities of the National Guard.⁵⁴ Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum, the Guard's top commander, told the Congressional Committee on Katrina that the Guard lacked two-thirds of the equipment necessary to respond to natural disasters and terrorist attacks because of the deployment of troops to Afghanistan and Iraq. Blum noted that the troops took the best equipment with them and left it there when they were replaced. He denied that this slowed the response to Katrina, but Lt. Colonel Peter Schneider, spokesperson for the Louisiana National Guard, disagreed.⁵⁵ Even if we bracket this question, it is clear that the downgrading of FEMA was but one way in which the Bush administration's cultivation of *mênis* undermined the Katrina response or exacerbated the impact of the storm. In February 2004, in a letter to the *New York Times*, Governor Blanco noted their report on the efforts to restore Iraqi wetlands, but observed: "Ironically...the Bush administration and the Republican-led Senate will not demand the same urgency of action to save coastal wetlands at home."⁵⁶ The importance of the wetlands to protecting the Gulf Coast from extreme weather patterns, and the federal government's neglect of them in the face of its overseas priorities is, perhaps, but one of the areas where the administration's policy of *mênis* and that of the forgetting implicit in their claims about the "naturalness" of the Katrina aftermath overlap and intersect. The need for

the policy of forgetting in the face of the anger generated by the focus on overseas priorities is evidenced by the ubiquity of claims such as New Orleans' Mayor Ray Nagin's angry observation that "we authorized \$8 billion to go to Iraq lickety-quick. After 9/11, we gave the President unprecedented powers lickety-quick to take care of other places."⁵⁷ It is precisely to defuse, or detract attention from, such anger that the policy of forgetting was implemented by the Bush administration. One key strategy in this policy was the call to futurity that provided a connecting thread for Bush's September 15 speech.

19. Standing at the podium on September 15, his sleeves rolled up to just below the elbow in the manner suggested to all the employees of FEMA by self-proclaimed "fashion-god" Michael Brown,⁵⁸ looking like he was ready for the hard work ahead, President Bush acknowledged the poverty in the Gulf Coast region and observed: "So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday, and let us rise above the legacy of inequality." Having made the acknowledgement of inequality, Bush immediately called for its forgetting. His focus on rebuilding – itself said to be supported by "a united country" – was part of this suggestion, as was his assertion that there was "a powerful American determination to clear the ruins and build better than before." Louisiana Republican Congressman Richard Baker seemed to capture the spirit of this move when he observed: "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."⁵⁹ Calling for building on the ruins of the previous city was not only an architectural palimpsest; it also suggested a further aspect of the Bush strategy. For the Greeks, democratic forgetting meant an erasure, a literal whitewash; here, perhaps, it was a metaphorical one. For although the President noted that such rebuilding should include "minority-owned businesses," there is serious concern about the future racial makeup of New Orleans. As Tulane historian Lawrence Powell observed, there is "the possibility that New Orleans will be demographically unrecognizable after its reconstitution: whiter, smaller, and less diverse...literally bereft of the African American roots that have seeded so much that is authentic in American popular culture."⁶⁰ Mayor Ray Nagin's call for a "chocolate city," aside, the scattering of the population of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast more generally threatens a population dispersion akin to that caused by the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927.⁶¹ Indeed, despite the President's mother's assertion that "many of the people in the area were, you know, underprivileged anyway, so – this is working out very well for them,"⁶² in the initial awarding of contracts for rebuilding, only 1.5 percent of the initial \$1.6 billion awarded in contracts by FEMA went to minority owned businesses, even though regular contracting rules require a minimum of five percent.⁶³ In such circumstances it is not hard, perhaps, to see the strategy of forgetting – focused on promises of futurity and rebuilding – offered to African Americans in particular as less the informed agreement amongst a nation determined to put its divisions aside, than as the kind of

potion or charm the Greeks used to gain temporary respite from their grief: the sort of relief which, Loraux argues, stripped its victims of their identity. Indeed, it is in the most obvious motif of futurity and forgetting employed by the President – the jazz funeral metaphor – that we see the complexity of his strategy of memory and mourning, and indeed, the true nature of the intended audience for the President's speech in New Orleans.

20. To Bush and his speechwriters, the invocation of the jazz funeral metaphor may have seemed wonderfully apt: containing within it an apparent vision of joy triumphing over grief, life over death, future over past. For many of those watching, furthermore, it no doubt appeared to be precisely that. To the largely African-American citizenry of New Orleans, however, displaced in many cases from their homes, their jobs, and their families, it probably appeared as little more than a minstrel show, an example of what James Snead called "exclusionary emulation," the "principle whereby the power and the trappings of black culture are imitated while at the same time their black originators are segregated away and kept at a distance".⁶⁴ For those familiar with the jazz funeral tradition, Bush's use of terminology could not have been more revealing. His suggestion that the "second line" was a piece of music, and indeed, what he claimed it symbolized, were both misplaced. Anthropologist Helen Regis writes:

The term *second line* is ambiguous, pointing to multiple dimensions of the same phenomenological reality. It refers to the dance steps, which performed by club members and their followers during parades. It also refers to the syncopated rhythm that is said to have originated on the streets of New Orleans. More importantly, *second line* means the followers, or joiners, who fall in behind the 'first line,' composed of the brass band and the social club, which typically sponsors the parade.⁶⁵

21. Regis's claims are supported by no-lesser an authority than Louis Armstrong who observed: "The second line is a bunch of guys who follow the parade. They're not the members of the Lodge or the club. Anybody can be a second liner, whether they are raggedy or dressed up. They seemed to have more fun than anybody."⁶⁶ Bush's confusion was, however, understandable, for the brass bands and jazz performers of New Orleans have long lead a bifurcated existence, splitting their time between the social clubs and local parades associated with the largely African American "back of town" communities, and those performances made for the largely white tourists and conventioners.⁶⁷ Jazz historian Mick Burns observes: "Both the funeral and the convention center jobs are part of a working brass band musician's routine, and both jobs paid about the same. In both cases, the bands played similar music. The crucial difference seems to me to be between the dignified ritual...in which the mourners were participants,

and the manufactured quality of the convention center parade, where the crowd were mystified onlookers." Indeed, Burns concludes that "the synergy between the band and the crowd is a more significant part of the brass band tradition than the style of music being played."⁶⁸

22. Bush's jazz funeral was, that is to say, the ersatz jazz funeral of largely white conventioners, not that of the families displaced by Katrina, many of whom made their living working in the tourist and convention hotels as maids, janitors, and busboys in what is referred to locally as the "servant industry." Noting the staged character of these parades, Regis compares them to the depiction of the jazz funeral in the 1973 James Bond movie *Live and Let Die*, and suggests that this has produced "a rather thin burlesque of the massive neighborhood-based events – produced for popular consumption...a cheerful (if not cheesy) minstrel show performed for outsiders."⁶⁹ For this reason, it might be argued that Bush's audience on September 15, 2005 was not the thousands of displaced African Americans mourning the loss of their homes and loved ones, but rather the largely-white television audience who had been shocked by the scenes of devastation on the evening news. Further evidence, perhaps, of this strategy of forgetting and its intended audience is to be found in Bush's assertion that: "In the life of this nation, we have often been reminded that nature is an awesome force, and that all life is fragile. We're the heirs of men and women who lived through those first terrible winters at Jamestown and Plymouth." It is, of course, clear *whose* ancestors survived at Jamestown and Plymouth. The ancestors of many of those Americans displaced by the storm no doubt also suffered through terrible first winters under very different conditions. As such, Bush's was a strategy of forgetting whose intended audience not the victims of the storm, but rather those who had to watch it on television, suggesting that Michael Eric Dyson was correct when he observed: "We are immediately confronted with another unsavory-truth: it is the exposure of the extremes not their existence that stumps our national sense of decency."⁷⁰ In their strategy of forgetting, the Bush administration sought to contain only the remembering of those unaffected by the storm, and, in so doing, inflicted greater insult and injury upon those very victims.
23. The cruel irony of Bush's appropriation of the jazz funeral tradition as part of his strategy of forgetting was, of course, that for residents of New Orleans, the jazz funeral itself, and the second line tradition, was a strategy of remembering: one far more complex than either of the approaches adopted by the Bush administration in response to Katrina or September 11. As the historian and filmmaker Jerry Brock points out, there were two significant periods in which brass bands exploded in popularity in New Orleans: after the Civil War, and following the Civil Rights movement. Both events gave, says Brock, the citizens of New Orleans "the impetus to have freedom in the music."⁷¹ Yet, the popular view – itself perpetuated by the conventioner parades – that the "second line is 'nothing but a party'...a harmless pastime or a

diversion for the poorest communities in a city that 'loves a parade,'⁷² is, says Helen Regis, one of the operations of black-face minstrelsy that hides the social and political significance of the parades. It is a phenomenon that is, she suggests, even more acute now that politicians regularly "cloak themselves in the seemingly unmistakable mantle of blackness by embracing the inner city tradition of the second line."⁷³ Regis details the cultural significance of these parades, highlighting their importance to the social ties of community; their role in neighborhood cohesion, revival, and social activism; and, most importantly for our purposes here, the manner in which they constitute and perpetuate a community of memory. Noting how the parades stop at specific locations and play particular tunes to honor the former residents of certain buildings or neighborhoods, Regis asserts that "the second line parades serve as important collective gestures of memory in the communities for which these individuals and networks were significant."⁷⁴ Elsewhere, she asserts that: "Like ancestors in the lineage-based societies, the memory of people and places defines communities in the contemporary New Orleans second-line."⁷⁵ Indeed, Regis further notes how the Mardi Gras parades with which the second-line parades are popularly confused, are associated with the white establishment in New Orleans, and that "the New Orleans second line season constitutes an alternative ritual calendar" which she compares to "an earlier generation of African American commemorative celebrations" such as that of celebrating Independence Day on July 5th.⁷⁶ Such associations suggest that the "back of town" jazz funeral is a more ambivalent tradition of memory and mourning than that invoked by the President on September 15, 2005.

24. In these circumstances then, Bush's invoking of the second line parade as a strategy of forgetting does damage to an institution that is associated with remembering: a further insult, perhaps, to those displaced by the storm. Much as with the Greek potions of temporary forgetting, it is a strategy that seems to rob its victims of their identities. For the President's mother's suggestion that many of the victims of the storm benefited from it economically is – as Patricia Williams has shown – not only mistaken in its failure to understand the complexity of the economic situation in the flooded areas which, despite its poverty, had a high percentage of home ownership, but also in its failure to recognize the damage inflicted upon people estranged from their communities in the wake of the storm.⁷⁷ The work of sociologist Kai Erickson on the February, 1972 flood that destroyed Buffalo Creek in West Virginia, suggests that in such circumstances the impact of the loss of communality is incalculable.⁷⁸ That this community of memory was constituted, in part, by a memory of the 1927 flood when the white business community needlessly blew the levees in the Lower-Ninth ward to protect the city, and then reneged on the promised compensation for those affected, suggests that there are even deeper strategies of forgetting at work in the history of

New Orleans. In this, perhaps, the President's speech was simply part of a much broader strategy of forgetting about race in America, one too broad to be fully explored here, although, as Loraux points out in her work on democracy and forgetting, it might "be fruitful to consider the ways in which modern representations of the political have retained this logic"⁷⁹

25. George W. Bush's speech from New Orleans on September 15 was then, it has been suggested, part of a broader strategy of memory and mourning employed by his administration to engineer support for its policies. The strategy is, on the one hand, bifurcated: memory of injustices done *to* the nation; forgetting of justices perpetuated *within* in. On the other hand, however, it has been argued that the strategy of remembering is, itself, employed as part of the forgetting: a way of distracting the many from the injustices perpetuated upon the few. Among the many ironies of Bush's use or misuse of the jazz funeral metaphor is that such funerals – when not appropriated for political or commercial gain – may offer an authentically complex mode of mourning more conducive to the health of the democratic polity than either of the strategies employed by his administration. Indeed, Helen Regis suggests that in recent years the jazz funeral – now infused with the beats of hip-hop – had taken on the role of celebrating and critiquing both the lives and life conditions of an urban youth cut down by crime, drugs, and joblessness.⁸⁰ The potentially positive connection between this mode of memory and mourning and the health of the democratic polity is, however, a topic for another paper. For now we might simply note that Baldwin's assertion that a "protective sentimentality" limits America's understanding of African American music – itself, perhaps, an echo of Du Bois's earlier claim that African American "sorrow songs" have "been persistently mistaken and misunderstood"⁸¹ – finds its target in the President's attempt to invoke the jazz funeral as metaphor in his New Orleans speech. That the rather linear modes of mourning employed by his administration stand in contrast to these sophisticated rituals is evidenced by Bush's rather straightforward assertion that the second line symbolizes the victory of the spirit over death. Again, in the words of James Baldwin:

White Americans seem to feel that happy songs are *happy* and sad songs are *sad* and that God help us, is exactly the way that most white Americans sing them – sounding in both cases, so helplessly, defenselessly fatuous that one dare not speculate on the temperature of the deep freeze from which issue their brave and sexless little voices.⁸²

NOTES

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² James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston, MA.: Beacon Press, 1984), 24.

³ George W. Bush, "President Discusses Hurricane Relief in Address to the Nation," 9/15/05. www.whitehouse.gov. (Accessed 4/4/06).

⁴ Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens* translated by Corinne Pache with Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2002), p. 32.

⁵ On Thucydides, see Simon Stow, "Pericles at Gettysburg and Ground Zero: Tragedy, Patriotism, and Public Mourning," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 101, No.2, May 2007: 195-208. For the juxtaposition of binary opposites in Greek life and prose, see James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes. The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

⁶ Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning* translated by Corinne Pache (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁴ Loraux, *The Divided City*, p. 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²² Plutarch, *Obsolescence of Oracles*, 418b-c. Quoted in Loraux, *The Divided*

City, p. 66.

²³ Loraux, *The Divided City*, 158.

²⁴ Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens. The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* translated by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

²⁵ Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City*, p. 245.

²⁶ George W. Bush, "President Bush Salutes Heroes in New York," www.whitehouse.gov. (Accessed 8/12/06).

²⁷ George W. Bush, "President's Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance," www.whitehouse.gov. (Accessed 8/12/06).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids," in Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 4.

³⁰ Michelle York, "Professor Quits a Post Over a 9/11 Remark," *New York Times*, 2/1/2005, B8.

³¹ George W. Bush, "Police Commissioner Kerik Discusses Police Force in Iraq" www.whitehouse.gov. (Accessed 6/30/06).

³² See, for example, Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: The Free Press, 2004); Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, The White House and the Education of Paul O'Neill* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004); Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); and Mark Danner, "The Secret Way to War," *New York Review of Books*, 06/09/05.

³³ This does not, of course, preclude genuine grief-wrath among individual members of the administration. On the eve of his 2006 State of the Union address, President Bush told White House aides that 9/11 was "tattooed" on his mind. Douglas Brinkley, *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (New York: William Morrow, 2006), p. 337.

³⁴ George W. Bush, "President Addresses the Nation," www.whitehouse.gov. (Accessed 6/30/06).

³⁵ Although there are many to choose from, my particular favorite is "Have You Forgotten?" sung by Darryl Worley, and written by Darryl Worley and Wynn Varble ©2003 EMI April Music Inc./Pittsburg Landing Songs (ASCAP). Although copyright restrictions prevent me from reproducing the lyrics, the rhetoric of *mênis* and revenge is clear. In response, for example, to the suggestion – made by unnamed experts – that the images of the attacks be removed from our television screens, the singer suggests that they be shown every day in order that we might not forget the attacks. The song is, furthermore, addressed to those who oppose the war in Iraq.

³⁶ Douglas Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*, p. 544.

³⁷ Evan Thomas, "Deadly Mistakes," *Newsweek*, 9/19/05.

³⁸ "A Concert for Hurricane Relief," NBC, 9/2/05.

³⁹ "The Situation Room," CNN, 9/01/2006.

⁴⁰ George W. Bush, "President Outlines Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts," www.whitehouse.gov. (Accessed 8/14/06).

⁴¹ Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 24.

⁴² George W. Bush, "President Remarks on Hurricane Recovery Efforts," www.whitehouse.gov. (Accessed 8/14/06).

⁴³ James Wolcott, "Flooding the Spin Zone" *Vanity Fair*, November 2005, 180.

⁴⁴ "The result," wrote Douglas Brinkley, "was the same as if a team of top flight engineers had been assigned to build an instrument for the quick and effective flooding of New Orleans." Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*, 219.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 441; Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*, 125.

⁴⁶ See Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*, 14-15.

⁴⁷ Luis Martinez, "Documents Show Katrina Warnings Ignored" ABC News, www.abcnews.go.com. (Accessed 8/14/06).

⁴⁸ Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*, 204.

⁴⁹ Richard Roeper, "Say That Again? Things Are Going Relatively Well," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 9/12/2005, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Daren Fonda and Rita Healy, "How Reliable is Brown's Resume?", *Time*, 9/12/2005.

⁵¹ Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*, p. 50. We should not, perhaps, forget the fine job that Brown did in Florida during Hurricanes Charley and Frances in the election year of 2004, where it might be noted, the incumbent President delivered relief checks personally.

⁵² *Good Morning America*, ABC, 9/01/2005.

⁵³ See Michael Ignatieff, "The Broken Contract," *New York Times Magazine*, 9/25/05, 15.

⁵⁴ Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco argued, for example, that relief efforts were hampered because too many of Louisiana's National Guard were serving in Iraq. Historian Douglas Brinkley dismissed the claim as a "specious, liberal, Democratic argument" (Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*, p.226).

⁵⁵ Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*, pp. 112-113.

⁵⁶ Kathleen Blanco, "Louisiana's Wetlands," *New York Times*, 2/28/04.

⁵⁷ Ray Nagin, quoted in Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*, p. 533.

⁵⁸ Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*, p. 537.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*, 154.

⁶⁰ Lawrence N. Powell, "New Orleans: An American Pompeii?" cited in Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*, xi.

⁶¹ For details, see John Barry, *Rising Tide. The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927*

and *How It Changed America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

⁶² "Barbara Bush Calls Evacuees Better Off," *New York Times*, 9/7/05.

⁶³ Angie C. Marek, "Minorities Miss Out on Contracts," *U.S. News & World Report*, 10/06/05. Additionally, it might be noted, that the President signed an executive order on September 8, 2005 suspending the Davis-Bacon Act of 1931, thereby allowing companies involved in the rebuilding to pay workers less than the prevailing wages. That he was forced to reinstate the act two months later nevertheless fails to negate the intent of the move.

⁶⁴ James Snead, quoted in Michael P. Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise. Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 25. That Bush's speech was delivered from Jackson Square, New Orleans, a place named after the President under whose administration blackface exploded in popularity is, perhaps, simply a fitting coincidence. Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 27.

⁶⁵ Helen A. Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line," *American Ethnologist*, 2001, pp. 752-777.

⁶⁶ Louis Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong, In His Own Words*, edited by Thomas Brothers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 27.

⁶⁷ Such as those, perhaps, at the 1988 Republican Convention.

⁶⁸ Mick Burns, *Keeping the Beat on the Street. The New Orleans Brass Band Renaissance* (Baton Rouge, LA.: Louisiana State University Press), p. 4.

⁶⁹ Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," p. 756.

⁷⁰ Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*, p. 2-3.

⁷¹ Quoted in Burns, *Keeping the Beat on the Street*, p. 102.

⁷² Helen A. Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals" *Cultural Anthropology*, 14(4), 1999, p. 475.

⁷³ Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes," p. 496.

⁷⁴ Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," p. 756.

⁷⁵ Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes," p. 478.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 493.

⁷⁷ Patricia Williams, "The View from Lott's Porch," *The Nation*, 9/26/05.

⁷⁸ Kai T. Erickson, *Everything in its Path. Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976).

⁷⁹ Loraux, *The Divided City*, 70.

⁸⁰ Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory."

⁸¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003), p.178.

⁸² James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. 42.

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