

evacuation order that exempted only inmates of the Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff's Office.<sup>5</sup>

Before leaving YSC, one 17-year-old boy reports the children were told "to take one sheet with them. We weren't allowed to take deodorant or mail or anything else."<sup>6</sup> A 15-year-old boy, also from YSC, was brought to OPP in a van with eight other boys, "all cuffed and shackled."<sup>7</sup> A 15-year-old girl says she was taken in a van with fifteen girls, two of them pregnant, to OPP from the YSC girls' ward.<sup>8</sup>

Once they arrived at OPP, many of the YSC youths were taken to Templeman V. The boys were taken to the second floor and crowded into cells designed to hold two people. Both an OPP staff member and a number of St. Bernard Parish prisoners report that juveniles were also held in Templeman III,<sup>9</sup> although it is unclear whether these were juveniles who were being held and tried as adults. One of the juveniles from St. Bernard Parish reports that he was first locked in a first-floor "open dorm with about 200 adult inmates."<sup>10</sup> In addition to being the only juveniles in the room, he recalls that he and the other juvenile from St. Bernard Parish were the only two white people in the room; he reports that he was threatened with violence until he was moved to a holding cell with his companion.<sup>11</sup>

There were approximately 16-20 girls who were transferred from YSC, and they were initially brought to a room where there was only a curtain separating them from the adult male inmates.<sup>12</sup> A 13-year-old girl states that at some point the girls were brought to a "20 person dorm" room on the second floor.<sup>13</sup>

## B. Last Meals

*"One boy found some dog snacks."*<sup>14</sup>

Like the adults held in OPP, the juveniles ate their last meals at different times. However, no juvenile interviewed reports eating after Monday, August 29. The children spent between three and five days without receiving food. Three of the boys said deputies at OPP had food during and after the storm. One 17-year-old reports that "[p]eople's nerves were very bad. Guards were leaving . . . [then] coming back with their own food and eating [it] in front of [us] without giving us any."<sup>15</sup> Days after Katrina, a 16-year-old boy said that once he and other boys were evacuated, they still did not receive food, though they could "see guards eating. . . . They had food with them on the rooftops. When [adult] prisoners tried to take the food, the guards threatened to shoot them."<sup>16</sup>

One 16-year-old boy reports that another youth found and ate "dog snacks" during his evacuation by boat from OPP because it had been so long since he last ate.<sup>17</sup> Another boy states: "When we got on the boat [to evacuate OPP], [guard] Mo took us (6-9 kids) to [the Broad Street Bridge]. There was food floating in the water and we tried to catch it and eat it. That's how hungry we were."<sup>18</sup> One youth states: "We went five days without eating. . . . Kids were passing out in their cells. The guards never explained anything to us."<sup>19</sup>

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## VI. JUVENILES AT OPP

To this day, it is still unclear how many children were detained in OPP at the time of the storm. According to the Sheriff's own statistics, over 300 children were transferred to OPP shortly before the storm from the city-run YSC alone.<sup>1</sup> The Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL) estimates that the number was closer to 150.<sup>2</sup> Neither figure includes juveniles at OPP who were being held and tried as adults.

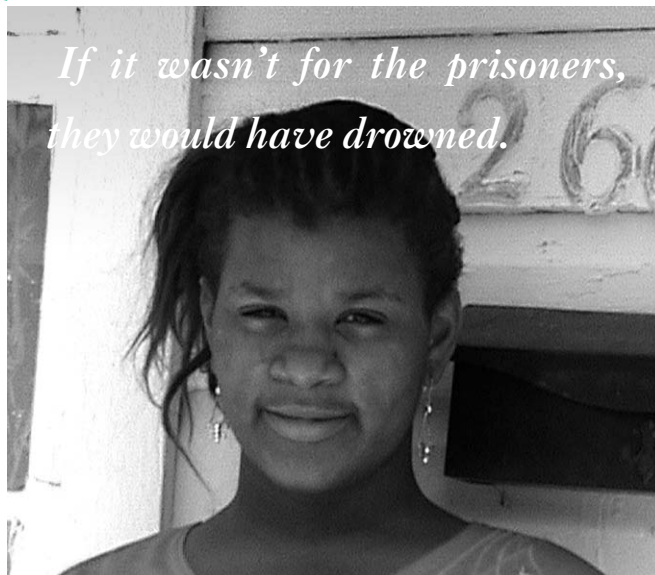
Following the storm, the JJPL interviewed dozens of the boys and girls who were trapped in OPP during and after Katrina. Their experiences, though no different in many ways from that of the adult prisoners at the jail, are particularly troubling in light of their age and vulnerability. For all of the prisoners in OPP during the storm, it is worth asking why they were not evacuated when the threat posed by Katrina became widely known, and DOC offered to assist. For the adult prisoners arrested on minor charges in the two days before the storm, it is also worth asking why those arrests were even made, and whether it would have been prudent for the city to release such prisoners in order to allow them to evacuate the city with their families.

These questions grow more pointed when one considers the fate of the juveniles who were at OPP, many of whom were being held on minor charges, and were separated from their loved ones and left to fear that they had been abandoned to die in the jail. What makes the juveniles' suffering all the more tragic is that in the five days before the storm, now-Chief Judge David Bell of the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court issued orders releasing those pre-trial juveniles who were held in Orleans Parish detention centers, and were not deemed threats to society.<sup>3</sup> Those release orders appear not to have been executed.<sup>4</sup>

### A. The Move to OPP

Some of the children who were at OPP throughout the storm were already being housed at the jail in CYC. Others were brought to the jail on Sunday, August 28, from the city-run YSC, and from the St. Bernard Detention Center. No official from either facility has explained why the juveniles were brought to OPP in the face of New Orleans's mandatory

## ASHLEY & RUBY ANNE GEORGE



### ASHLEY GEORGE

I was thirteen years old when the storm happened. I was in the Youth Study Center (“YSC”), but on Sunday, August 28 they moved me with other boys and girls from YSC to the prison. We were in the jailhouse across from the big boy jail. We were in a big dorm on the second floor with the adult women.

Across the hall from us there were adult men prisoners. Before the storm when we were still able to use the toilets, the men watched us. When the storm started, water broke through the gate and started rising. The day after the storm, water came into the place and I was in water up to my neck for a

couple of days. We got no food, no water. I felt like I was going to die.

The guards didn’t do anything to help us. We weren’t going to get out, but the adult prisoners escaped and got help for us. Military people told us that if we had stayed in there another day we would have drowned. Adults took a mattress and floated some girls out to the boat. I took another boat and went to the bridge, where I got chips and water. Sometimes we had to go to the bathroom on the bridge, and they put a box around us and made us go to the bathroom in front of the adults and

other boys. There were pregnant girls with us also, but they did not get any special attention.

We got on a bus that took us to Jetson. At Jetson they gave us food and water and we took showers. They also gave us teddy bears. I was there for about three or four days, before they brought me to some group home. I got to go with my grandmother about one month later<sup>20</sup>

### RUBY ANN GEORGE

Ashley is my granddaughter. After the storm I was going crazy. I kept calling and calling and

calling and calling. I thought they took them to Baton Rouge before the storm. They ain’t nothing but children. I kept calling all over, but I didn’t find out where she was for about a month. She was in Baton Rouge. They kept giving me different numbers to call and finally she called me on my son’s phone.

It’s horrible. Nobody should have gone through that—adults or children. They should have gotten them out of there. I was mad. They should have taken the children to Baton Rouge in the first place. If it wasn’t for the prisoners, they would have drowned.<sup>21</sup> ■

### C. Heat, Humidity and No Drinking Water:

*“I felt like I was about to die.”<sup>22</sup>*

With few exceptions, the boys report not receiving any drinking water after Monday, August 29. Many of them resorted to drinking the floodwater, which contained urine and feces from backed-up toilets.<sup>23</sup> One 16-year-old boy told JJPL, “[t]he water . . . looked like it had a lot of oil in it. It had rainbows in it and lots of trash.”<sup>24</sup> A 15-year-old boy saw a boy get “maced” by guards when he asked for drinking water while waiting to be evacuated from the Broad Street Overpass.<sup>25</sup> According to one youth: “One kid passed out from dehydration. . . . I started to get really dizzy, like the roadrunner when he gets knocked down, with the birds flying all around his head. I felt like I was about to die.”<sup>26</sup> A 16-year-old boy reports: “I had been locked up before, but not behind real bars. We couldn’t do anything. We had no sheets, no blankets, nothing. It got really hot, people started getting naked and cursing other people out because they were so hot.”<sup>27</sup> A 15-year-old girl similarly recalls that “[i]t was so hot at night we sometimes slept without clothes.”<sup>28</sup> She reports the girls at OPP received two gallons of drinking water per day to share among 15-20 of them. “We got a little every day.”<sup>29</sup>

### D. Flooding

*“I can’t seem to get that smell out of my skin.”<sup>30</sup>*

#### 1. Inside OPP

The children from CYC were held on the first floor of a building where the floodwaters rose to several feet. Boys climbed to the highest bunks in their locked cells to keep out of the rising waters.<sup>31</sup> Many of the juveniles were held in dormitories that did not have enough beds for all of them. Fights broke out when the water started to rise, and space grew more limited. Some of the juveniles report being injured during these fights and complain that they received no medical attention.<sup>32</sup> A few children who were held on the second floor started to panic when they looked outside and saw the water rising. One 16-year-old boy states:

*A few hours after the storm hit, the water started rising. That night the water started coming out of the toilet and the drains. It smelled like straight swamp water. I was crying and thinking about my people because right before the power went out we saw what was happening on the news and saw the Ninth Ward flooding. Kids were really upset because most of them were from the Lower Ninth.<sup>33</sup>*

Most of the children report that their toilets backed up, spilling human waste into the floodwaters and filling the facility with an unbearable stench. A 14-year-old boy describes it as smelling “dirty because of the toilets. You couldn’t use [them] and they smelled.”<sup>34</sup> Another youth says that the smell in his cell was so bad that he covered the toilet with a mattress, but that didn’t help to relieve the stench.<sup>35</sup> According to one 15-

year-old boy: “We had human feces floating around us in the water . . . we was forced to survive in for 3 days. I still have little sores on my skin. I can’t seem to get that smell out of my skin . . . . [M]aybe it’s all in my head but that smell will be with me, and be in my head for a very long time.”<sup>36</sup>

#### 2. Outside OPP *“Tall adults carried little ones.”<sup>37</sup>*

Depending on their age and size, children had to wade, swim or be carried through the toxic floodwaters during their evacuation from OPP. Some of them were taken by boat to the Broad Street Overpass. Others went to the fishponds outside OPP, where they waited with adult prisoners to be taken to the Jetson Center for Youth (JCY). Several children were shackled and handcuffed while trying to walk through floodwaters that came up to the chins of some of the tallest youth. A 15-year-old boy who is 6’2” said that the water was “up to my chin. . . . [The] tall adults carried little ones.”<sup>38</sup> Some juveniles report that only the smaller children were given life jackets. Several children recall being tied together with plastic cuffs, and then being pulled out by a rope and put on boats.<sup>39</sup> One 15-year-old boy states: “It was scary because I can’t swim and they were pulling us by our shirts and I went under the water a few times. I even swallowed a lot of water.”<sup>40</sup>

As for the girls, a 13-year-old states that adult inmates “took a mattress and floated [us] out. [We] were taken by the mattress to a boat.”<sup>41</sup> One 15-year-old girl says: “We walked through the water up to my mouth. I’m 5’7”. We carried [a] twelve year-old through the water. Guards watched ‘trustees’ [adult prisoners] help us into the boats.”<sup>42</sup>

### E. No Medical Care

A 16-year-old boy reports that children who got into fights were placed in separate cells, but they received no treatment for their injuries.<sup>43</sup> One youth was hit in the face with a phone, while another had his jaw broken. Other children were injured after being hit in the face or maced by guards.<sup>44</sup> Two pregnant juveniles received no medical attention,<sup>45</sup> although it is not known if they or their babies suffered any ill-effects as a result.

Many of the juveniles complain that they became covered in bumps and spots from the floodwaters. A 15-year-old boy says that his feet “turned all white, with mildew and sores on them. I was throwing up blood . . . . My feet are still messed up and still itching.”<sup>46</sup> Some of the juveniles also became ill as a result of going under the floodwaters, and others complain that they suffered bad sunburns due to being exposed to the late August sun and heat for long periods.<sup>47</sup>

### F. Youth Are Beaten by Guards

*“We can shoot to kill”<sup>48</sup>*

As conditions at OPP deteriorated, deputies and other security personnel used violence and threats of violence against children in an attempt to maintain order. Some children were injured as a result.<sup>49</sup> While in OPP, one youth was hit in the face multiple times by a guard. He says that guards threat-

ened other children “with guns raised to their heads.”<sup>50</sup>

The violence and threats by guards increased when the children arrived at the Broad Street Overpass. A 14-year-old boy states that once they arrived at the Overpass, children were threatened by armed, uniformed officers he believed were from the NOPD: “They had big guns. . . . They told us that the mayor said ‘We can shoot to kill.’ There was military there, too, but it was mostly NOPD. NOPD beat up an adult prisoner. They busted open his head. . . . You could see the meat.”<sup>51</sup> One 15-year-old girl and one 16-year-old boy both say that on the bus from the Broad Street Overpass to JCY, “one girl got beaten by a guard for fighting with another girl.”<sup>52</sup> The girl was removed and taken to a van. According to the boy, the guard used “closed fists.”<sup>53</sup>

Other youth witnessed adult inmates being beaten. One 17-year-old states:

*One man was maced and beat up really badly. His head was busted. . . . They let the dogs loose on that man. . . . The dogs were biting him all over. They told people they would kill them if they moved. . . . The worst thing I saw was the guards beating that man while everyone was just sitting there. . . . Those people need to go to jail or something.*<sup>54</sup>

There are also reports of youth being maced by guards. One boy writes: “When [we] were shackled it was ten youth shackled together. [Another boy] slipped out his handcuffs so they maced him and since we were all shackled together, the other kids basically got maced too.”<sup>55</sup> Another boy states: “Guards did not really care about us. [One] kid got maced requesting water. Some kids were too weak to act, or do anything for themselves.”<sup>56</sup>

## G. Arriving at JCY

Most of the children report that conditions improved substantially once they arrived at JCY, a facility operated by the Office of Youth Development (“OYD”). Juveniles were fed, allowed to bathe, given clean clothes, and some received medical attention. A 15-year-old boy reports that at JCY “we got food and water. We were treated very nicely.”<sup>57</sup> OYD staff report that upon hearing that the children were being transported to their facility, they immediately began preparing for their arrival by getting clothing and food ready, as well as setting up a place for all the children to sleep.

According to Dr. Heidi Sinclair, a pediatrician who examined children as they arrived at JCY, she encountered

*[o]ne 10 year-old with broken arm, one girl pregnant, one girl with child in foster care. . . . [Children] told stories of chest-high water and floating bodies. . . . A few kids passed out from heat exhaustion. . . . Six employees from YSC . . . were completely traumatized, vowing to never go back to New Orleans.*<sup>58</sup>

Dr. Sinclair recalls that they “kept boys in the infirmary with health problems, then put half in JCY and half in other places; some of the kids broke down crying when they were forced to be moved.”<sup>59</sup> OYD staff also worked tirelessly to help children locate and contact their family members. By way of contrast, “[t]he prison never notified the parents where they were going to take the kids,” according to Lynette Robinson, the mother of one 15-year-old boy who was in OPP during the storm.<sup>60</sup> She continues: “I didn’t know if he was alive or dead. I was afraid he was floating somewhere. He shouldn’t have been afraid he was going to die.”<sup>61</sup>

The entire experience had a profound effect on these children. One 15-year-old states, “it was a horrible experience and I would never want to go through that again and I know this will have a long-term effect on me until I am dead and gone.”<sup>62</sup> Another 15-year-old sums up the entire experience in this way: “We were treated like trash in New Orleans.”<sup>63</sup>

Before Katrina, Ahmad Nelson spent one-and-a-half years away from his daughter after being wrongfully accused of shooting a police officer. Charged with public drunkenness three days before the storm hit New Orleans, Mr. Nelson found himself back in OPP during the storm. Once guards abandoned him and other the others prisoners in Templeman III without food or water, Mr. Nelson found a way to bring himself to safety. Mr. Nelson’s experience inside OPP during and after Katrina began spreading on internet message boards shortly after the storm. He has not seen his daughter since the storm.

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