

Political Leadership, Cultural Ethics and Recovery: Louisiana Post-Katrina

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Abstract The history of Louisiana colorful politics and corruption in government is legendary and, in Louisiana, something celebrated, or at least warmly embraced, as part of the cultural richness of the State. An oft-repeated phrase here is that Louisiana is no more corrupt than any place else, it's just that Louisianians are more proud of it. Such sentiments permeate the discussion of federal and private financial assistance to the State in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and serves as an explanation regarding the lack of effective leadership and misuse of funds thus far distributed. Yet beyond concern for the loss of dollars in themselves are the very real and tragic consequences for the citizens who were most affected by hurricane Katrina, who have received but a trickle of the flood of money that poured into the State following the event. For these people, who remain without adequate shelter, resources, educational opportunities, healthcare, and separated from their support networks, the recovery progress remains little changed over the last 4 years. An overview of the political and ethical culture of Louisiana and reflections on how that contributed to and exacerbated administrative failure in the wake of Katrina is presented here.

Keywords Ethical culture · Hurricane Katrina · Political culture · Crisis management

Why are people afraid of a better, New Orleans?

"I believe people are afraid to take risks. They were comfortable without having much and can't really see themselves living a better life."—Dudley C. Grady, Jr.

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“The only people afraid of a better New Orleans are those who’ve never known anywhere else and are afraid of change.”—Anitra Matlock

(Katrina Writing Project, 2006)

If one were to ask what three words first come to mind when thinking of Louisiana, whether posing the question to residents or others, the likely answer is food, music, and political corruption. A review of the articles written about the State evoke this triad again and again to the point where one could feel safe using them to encapsulate its cultural history. While certainly there are exceptions, it’s a fair characterization; all three are uniquely born from the heritage of the people who populated the State, all three are objects of significance rooted in a proud history, and all are as enduring aspects of life as any in Louisiana, as sure as crawfish season and hurricane warnings. While the popular culture celebrates personalities that live loud and out loud, people who boldly challenge the powers that be and who make themselves memorable by one-upping those of greater education or power to get a little something for oneself, the consequences of such an ethic have been accentuated by the lack of progress in rebuilding New Orleans.

Louisiana is far from alone at the top of the corruption rankings. Three studies reported in the *New York Times* (2008) list Louisiana as either the second, sixth, or tenth most corrupt state, depending upon how you measure it (survey of journalists, guilty per capita, or officials found guilty), although Louisiana is the only state to appear in the top ten of all three lists. What makes the State unique beyond making the top three, is that by and large Louisianians are genuinely proud of that heritage, a heritage that includes family, loyalty to the State and party, food, faith, and fun. It’s a heritage that is clung to all the more powerfully as the state embodies the us vs. them philosophy: it is usually last among all the desirable measures of health, human progress, education, and income, and at the top of lists of dysfunction (see Brown 2007). It has its own code of justice (Napoleonic), its own language (Creole, Cajun, French, English, and a propensity for idiosyncratic titles, such as parishes, elsewhere known as counties), a unique set of election and ethical transparency laws (one of the five states with the most lax disclosure laws (Gyan, Jr. 2007)), and was the last to accept federal mandates on age for alcohol consumption, among many distinguishing characteristics. While residents and many tourists find the culture rich and welcoming, a pleasant place to live and enjoy life, this same culture, in the face of catastrophe, renders it effectually incapable of professional and efficient recovery (Roig-Franzia 2005), both because of the ethical problems within the State but also because its reputation severely hinders or eliminates federal funding to the region.

While food and music offer no impediments to recovery or progress, the ethical culture of the State has been repeatedly cited as the reason it has received fewer federal recovery dollars, less investment, and slower re-development, the details of which have been thoroughly documented elsewhere. To many, the hurricane was a way to make money fast with little effort. Local, state, national, and international news forums are replete with stories of corruption following Katrina, and skepticism over whether requests for recovery funds should be either given without keen oversight or given at all. This is not to denigrate the selfless efforts of the many who risked life and property to save others after the storm, such as the Cajun Navy (Brinkley 2006), or who opened their homes and hearts to help victims of the

hurricane. A people who can withstand the heat, humidity, alligators, insects, hurricanes, and floods are a decidedly hearty group who take their independence very seriously. This same tolerance is afforded political storms as well, Senators' Vitter's prostitution scandal and Jefferson's alleged bribery indictments to wit. It's a thick culture passed from generation to generation with dignity and purpose. Such norms run deep and to change them would require a cultural revolution.

The variance between what had and is happening here from the models of effective emergency and crisis management is illustrative and fascinating, and ultimately pestilent. Pundits and analysts continue to chronicle the ineptitude of federal, state, and local administrations in addressing the failures of the Katrina response. What is perhaps more difficult to understand is the political and ethical culture that not only accepts but facilitates and protects an administration and politic that by most any measure is unprofessional and inept; why citizens don't demand fiscal, environmental, educational, and demonstrable competence is of extraordinary concern. Mississippi, who experienced many of the same ravages of Katrina, has revived at a much faster rate; given the horrific reports of Saxon (1927) which sound nearly indistinguishable from current day missives regarding New Orleans post-Katrina, Mississippi has clearly shown progress in hurricane mitigation. Given that Mississippi and Louisiana share very similar demographic, socioeconomic, and geographical characteristics, one could look to the differences in political leadership and ethical culture as the deciding variables in recovery.

Louisiana's ethical culture

The cultural elements and antecedents that define Louisiana have been fully explored elsewhere (Jurkiewicz 2007). It is an enduring culture, one little changed over generations as kinship groups, organizations, and political offices are highly protective of their traditions, are insular, and are fueled by patronage. Distinctive traditions and artifacts abound, from Mardi Gras celebrations and merchandise, to Easter crawfish boils and early autumn couchon de laits, and foods and cuisines globally renowned for their ingredients, spice blends, and cooking techniques. Applying the measures of culture anthropology, Louisiana possesses an unique and clearly defined culture that exerts a strong and dynamic influence on behavior and cognitions (Rosenthal and Masarech 2003), as well as ethical frameworks (Jurkiewicz 2007). In an earlier article (Jurkiewicz 2007), it was discussed how the scandals following Katrina made the citizenry of Louisiana long for the more familiar, salacious obloquies associated with characters such as Huey Long. The ethical milieu following Katrina echoes that of other current scandals, such as the SEC, Fannie Mae, ponzi schemes, and hedge funds that are too complex, too impenetrable to fathom. The public now longs for the good ol' times, as it were, when scandals were sexy and short and easy to comprehend (Stanley 2008). Given that strong cultures that encourage, celebrate, and reward pushing the limits to achieve personal gains exert a powerful influence on creating and sustaining unethical behavioral patterns (Treviño 1990), the ethical culture of Louisiana is no surprise. Now, 4 years after landfall, one finds the situation in Louisiana has only deepened, adding more layers of ethical malfeasance, mistrust, corruption, and

misuse of recovery funds as more violations are revealed and as progress offers new opportunities for wrong-doing. One of the few things that Katrina left unchanged in Southern Louisiana was its culture.

Corruption and unethical behavior has been revealed at all levels of society, and in all sectors. From individuals claiming damage who suffered none, to contractors taking the money without doing the work, insurance companies renege on promises real and imagined, hotels and fuel stations overcharging in times of dire need, politicians' inability to account for funds intended for direct relief, murders, looting goods not essential to immediate survival, and dramatic increases in rapes to white collar executives seeing opportunity for financial gain as top priority amidst the destruction. Charges of racism and socioeconomic bias permeate much of the discrepancies noted in recovery efforts, based upon a long history of ethnic conflict and extreme poverty (CNN 2005e; CNN 2005f). Adding fuel to this argument is the fact that the greatest cash outlay in impoverished neighborhoods is to incarcerate their citizens, about \$2,000,000 per neighborhood is some of the areas most damaged by Katrina (Kurgan 2009). To further examine these charges this author interviewed a handful of the most successful, top real estate developers in New Orleans who would speak only under promise of absolute confidentiality. While interviewed individually, their views and visions regarding the city in the wake of the hurricane speak as a remarkably similar voice. Below is a vignette of their verbatim comments, likely to engender strong reactions from readers, yet providing an unedited insight into the thinking behind some of the key individuals responsible for rebuilding the city (the only clarifications made by this author appear in parentheses). These developers' sentiments are echoed by many in the military, economic, and communications fields who want the city rebuilt in a completely different way, demographically, geographically, and politically, and who view the city as it was as unsustainable as evidenced in economic, environmental, political, and crime statistics (Scahill 2008). While the perspective as stated below may be controversial, it is nonetheless an important and valuable insight into the thinking of many professionals who believe the city's situation prior to Katrina was "out of equilibrium" (as quoted in Nossiter 2007, p. 20), and who are involved in the redevelopment of New Orleans.

The 9th ward (needs) to be totally wiped clean. Rehab the thousands of blighted houses in other areas of New Orleans for the residents that are returning that lived in that area. Government needs to expropriate, pay residents pre-Katrina values and then sell to developers. Developers should build new Orleans style raised houses/condos. Create great amenities, green spaces and parks.

The reality is that mixed income developments in New Orleans just don't work. Forcing the development to be mixed income is a recipe for failure. The possibility of upper income and moderate income families is more feasible and can be successful. The poorest of residents in New Orleans create the biggest challenge. The lack of education and parental guidance perpetuate the cycle of crime. Kids are having kids and have no means of supporting or educating the offspring. Therefore the cycle of poverty, crime and dependency on governmental assistance will never end. Part of the solution is to implement

a program that makes birth control a requirement to receive any government assistance. When a female welfare recipient shows up to pick up her check, the doctor installs a Norplant birth control device. This is repeated every time she comes in for a check. The result is a better quality of life for her as she has the opportunity and time to get a job or an education. When she secures a job either thru education or hard work, she no longer requires public assistance and is free to bear children. The volume and cycle of poverty, crime and dependency on public assistance is drastically reduced.

The mayor of New Orleans did a terrible injustice to the poorest evacuees for his own personal gain. In order to get reelected, the mayor campaigned and convinced thousands of poor uneducated evacuees to return to a city that had very little or no accommodations or assistance programs to support their return. Those evacuees were far better off in Houston and Atlanta where they had a much better chance to succeed and become productive citizens. Houston and Atlanta have far better systems in place that would have helped break the poverty, crime and dependency on public assistance cycle. Evacuees would have had a much better quality of life with a fresh start in a new location.

Since the return of the evacuees, the murder and crime rates have skyrocketed. Mr. Nagin calls this "diversity." Mr. Nagin consistently preached that we must have "diversity." The diversity that Mr. Nagin created is having a terrible impact on this great city. Since the crime rate is skyrocketing many of the upper end working class are leaving the city and or state. many hard working tax paying, productive members of our society are leaving because crime is out of control. Mr. Nagin had to call in the national guard because he lost control of the city, crime and murder were, and still are rampant. The thugs took over. And who brought the thugs back... Of course, it was Mr. Nagin himself.

When the dust settles and the billions and billions of federal and insurance dollars finally arrive in New Orleans, New Orleans will be a boom town. The economic impact will be like having over 100 super bowls, or like having Mardi Gras every week for a year. The giant influx of so much money in such a small city like New Orleans will be unprecedented. As that money turns over and over in the economic cycle, New Orleans will flourish. The demand for construction will bring people back to New Orleans. The opportunities that will open up due to such a large influx of money will also cause people to return to New Orleans. New Orleans will be the land of opportunity. Hopefully the lack of city and state leadership will not kill this golden opportunity.

The Iberville public housing project must be closed. It is the single most detrimental thing to the successful rebuilding of the city. Since it was placed on the national historic register, it probably cannot be demolished. Although it is insane that it was placed on the register at all. This site should be redeveloped into moderate to upper income apartments as they are situated in an excellent location, close to the French Quarter and the cbd (central business district).

The Lakeview area was totally devastated and stayed flooded for weeks. This area would also be better served if the government would make the tough

decision and expropriate all the devastated areas, pay the pre-Katrina values of the houses, and sell the cleared land to developers. An architectural review board could be appointed to insure a New Orleans style development was implemented and built. Elevated houses, multi family and green spaces and parks. A planned development. This area is centrally located and pre-Katrina was inhabited by a majority of older, retired people. This area could become one of New Orleans premier neighborhoods. If the tough decisions are not made regarding demolishing the abandoned houses, this potentially great neighborhood will take 20 years to come back.

Perhaps these developers' vision for physical redevelopment as an opportunity for social and cultural redevelopment will be realized, in full or part, but the fact is that recovery efforts have lagged in New Orleans, both compared to other national disasters and in particularly to Mississippi which also suffered catastrophic damage from hurricane Katrina. If one includes the major cities to which New Orleans residents were evacuate or fled, these other venues they have demonstrated effective assimilation and mediation programs (Moreno 2006). Not that any of these locales stand as models of perfection, but certainly if one looks at results in terms of recovery their success relative to New Orleans is undeniable. Explanations as to why this is the case run the gamut from economical, sociological, and political to historical and cultural. The focus here will be on reviewing evidence of slow or absent recovery initiatives and the role of ethics as a causal factor.

The federal government certainly engaged in ethically reproachable behavior, to which both Louisiana and Mississippi were subjected. Passive reaction at the White house (Hsu 2006a), combined with Rumsfeld's refusal to send troops to Katrina-ravaged areas for 5 days, and then only at the insistence of the president, despite Chertoff's pleadings (Draper 2009; Fiderer 2009) was an egregious political maneuver. Susan Collins' whitewashing of the congressional investigation of Katrina, wherein no key staffers were interviewed and communication records were not accessed, and the scapegoating of Michael Brown (Fiderer 2009) is another clear example. FEMA's financial mismanagement, giving hundreds of millions of dollars in non-competitive contracts to favored companies whose performance was neither monitored nor adequate and, in some cases, dangerous (the trailers and Blackwater's involvement, to wit) (Scahill 2008), including failure to accept assistance from rescue experts offered by the Interior Department (CNN 2006a); fraud in excess of hundreds of millions of dollars (Whoriskey 2006) by the agency; and FEMA workers arrested on charges of fraud and bribery (CNN 2006a). The Department of Homeland Security auditors identifying millions in waste and fraud with poor financial controls (Hsu and Witte 2006). Extensive modeling of Katrina-like hurricane impacts were intentionally ignored in planning for such eventualities (van Heerden and Bryan 2007; Hsu and Witte 2006), as were clear warnings the storm was approaching days before it hit land (Warrick 2006). These factors did not differ between the two states.

Political leadership at the State and local levels, however, did vary considerably. Whereas reports of Barbour's (Mississippi's Governor) solicitation and management of federal intervention, his extensive background in politics, his reputation for working on behalf of the citizens, his skill in cross-sector coalition building, and his ability to bring together disparate groups toward a particular goal has been widely

praised (New York Times 2009), Louisiana's Governor Blanco and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin have been just as widely criticized (Hsu and Witte 2006). While Blanco's administration has not been accused of ethical wrongdoing, her political acumen and experience has been publicly debated. Nagin has been vilified for demonstrated problems both ethically and politically, and therein lies a telling difference in comparing the effective restoration of Katrina-affected areas in both states. Nagin's ethical violations, both those documented and those yet to be litigated, as well as the citizen's evident disregard of his questionable political leadership suggests a probable cause for ethical failure at the local level as evidenced in the much slower rate of progress for New Orleans, even as compared to nearby Parishes sustaining massive damage from Katrina (Hsu and Witte 2006). Nagin is cited not only for his own ethical violations that have hindered redevelopment, but for the image he communicated to the nation and the world that effectively scared many potential recovery resources away, such as his interview with Oprah Winfrey on national television during which he cited armed gangs committing rapes and murders in New Orleans in an "almost animalistic state;" such statements were condemned by both Congressional investigators as well as the media as both untrue and heightening tensions and hyped media coverage in an area desperate for stabilization (Hsu and Witte 2006). This tendency to thrive upon sensationalism has been said to define much of his leadership style.

Ethical leadership

A centuries old phrase ascribed to the Chinese remains timely and true of all human nature: the fish rots from the head down. It is used to mean that an unethical leader leads to an organization of unethical followers and, conversely, that if an organization is unethical then the problem starts with the leader. The leader establishes the culture of an organization, government, or country through their actions even moreso than their words (Jurkiewicz 2000; 2002; 2006), and is accountable for the culture they create. Foucault (1984) asserted that normalized values as articulated by those in authority lead to dominant and unquestioned institutional practices that define acceptable behavior and restrict individual autonomy. He views it as an involuntary, often unconscious, submission to the power of institutional authority; a view expanded upon by Bourdieu (1990) to describe how individuals create and maintain commonplace practices and adopt expected roles even when these practices are oppressive, marginalizing, and are in contrast to one's previously held ethical beliefs. Kohlberg (1976; 1981; 1985) emphasized the point that leaders have a profound effect on the level of ethicality employed by their subordinates in deciding on which action is ethically right or wrong. Treviño (1990), as previously cited, asserts that cultures such as that found in Louisiana and most particularly New Orleans, that encourage, celebrate, and reward pushing the limits to achieve personal gains exerts a powerful influence on creating and sustaining unethical behavioral patterns. Ethical, or unethical behavior, is thus learned from those in positions of authority over us. In understanding one the key elements that has prevented the effective and efficient recovery in New Orleans let's review, first, just a few of the reports of unethical behavior in the wake of Katrina,

followed by charges of ethical violations against Mayor Nagin. To remind, the head of the fish can claim they have no knowledge of the rot occurring further down the body, but it is neither possible nor true as the head is the standard bearer. While both the State and Federal level administrations share the responsibility in part for either contributing to the cultural ethic in the New Orleans area, or failing to intervene to rectify ethical violations which is within the scope of their power. But as the Federal level can be said to affect Mississippi in the same way as Louisiana, and the State level can be said to affect other Louisiana parishes similarly, again the focus returns to local leadership.

Unethical behavior from citizens, businesses, and public employees has been well-documented. The numerous false claims for FEMA funds have been widely reported, although false claims for funds from the Red Cross have not been so broadly publicized (Salmon 2005). Insurance companies operating in the area have been and are being sued for alleged contract violations, unethical business practices, and fraud (CNN 2005g) while at the same time the legislature approves rate increases for these companies who support political campaigns. Additionally, police officers have reportedly stolen luxury vehicles during the chaos following Katrina landfall (Gyan 2006), have been captured on video looting (CNN 2005c); and recorded stealing luxury items from storm-ravaged boutiques and department stores (CNN 2005d). Another example are documented reports of unwarranted killings by Blackwater operatives in the days following Katrina about which local law enforcement was aware and did nothing, in addition to Blackwater personnel commandeering citizens property for their own use (Scahill 2008). One representative case of ethical malfeasance in the healthcare sector was a nursing home whose owners were charged with negligent homicide for abandoning elderly and infirm clients during the storm, 34 of whom drowned (CNN 2005a). An example of egregious political behavior are reports from the Louisiana National Guard that Representative William Jefferson requested two National Guard heavy trucks and a helicopter, along with military support personnel, to escort him to his family home in New Orleans while others were awaiting emergency rescues from their rooftops, a trip during which personnel waited over an hour while he allegedly retrieved documents and a computer relevant to sixteen criminal charges on which he has been indicted (Tapper 2005) while residents perished. These serve to illustrate the scope and seriousness of the many ethical violations that have contributed to the perceived culture of corruption in New Orleans, although the list is much lengthier than this entire publication. The focus now turns to the leader of the city.

New Orleans' Mayor Ray Nagin gained international renown for his role in Katrina, and the ethically-charged issues surrounding him and his administration are viewed by many as one of the roadblocks to recovery in New Orleans. He has been and continues to be widely criticized for lack of planning, actions during the hurricane (taking control of key top floors of a downtown hotel, evading calls for leadership and emergency decision-making), and making incendiary comments and initiatives during the recovery period that followed. His lack of definitive leadership in calling for an evacuation of New Orleans following the National Hurricane Center's 26 August 2005 prediction that Katrina would reach Category 4 status has been attributed to his concerns for the city's financial liability for closing hotels and other businesses (Russell 2005). Finally announcing the evacuation on 28 August,

less than 24 h before landfall, was a direct cause of increased hardship for the 90,000 citizens (mostly impoverished and infirm) left in the city as 80% of it went under water (Parry 2005). Looking to the federal government for relief Nagin stated in his own news conference that, I don't want to see anybody do anymore goddamn press conferences...until the resources are in this city...now get off your asses and let's do something, and let's fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country (Robinette 2005). Michael Chertoff, then Secretary of Homeland Security responded with, "the way the emergency operations act under the law is, the responsibility and the power, the authority, to order an evacuation rests with the state and local officials. The federal government comes in and supports those officials" (Nagourney and Kornblut 2005), which is illustrative of the battles that permeated various government levels and the coordination of relief efforts. Former FEMA Chief Michael Brown stated his biggest failure was "not recognizing...that Louisiana was dysfunctional" (CNN 2005b).

Nagin's conflicts with State and Federal officials, as well as special interest groups, have been widely reported and chronicled (see Horne 2006; Brinkley 2006). Nagin's declaration to seize firearms sparked immediate litigation by the National Rifle Association and the Second Amendment Foundation (NRA 2008a), with courts ruling on contempt of court violations and issuing a permanent injunction against Nagin (NRA 2008b). Deeply fearful and distrustful of outsiders, when former FDIC head Powell was originally appointed to oversee recovery efforts he was met with suspicion and administrative power struggles, as Nagin warned Powell he was not the "federal mayor of New Orleans" (Roig-Franzia 2005). Nagin complained he was only allowed to spend \$15 million of the \$27 billion budget although his initial investment of these funds into a casino district as a recovery tool were quickly abandoned, the money gone, and post-Katrina analyses outlining what is needed to rebuild New Orleans (Scott and Richardson 2005) continue to remain absent from Nagin's reported initiatives. Favoritism in appointments to recovery committees and political battles with the Governor as well as key business people continue to fuel the area's long-standing reputation for dysfunction and corruption (Roig-Franzia 2005). More conflicts of this nature were reported and continued into the initial stages of recovery, with Nagin stating at a town hall meeting in October, 2005, "I can see in your eyes, you want to know, 'How do I take advantage of this incredible opportunity? How do I make sure New Orleans is not overrun with Mexican workers,'" a comment widely criticized, most vocally by the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (Hispanic PR Wire, 2005) while others applauded, bolstering the representativeness of the developers' comments above. This was followed by Nagin's comment on the Tavis Smiley show (Stevens 2006), that he hopes New Orleans emerges as a "Chocolate City," referring to its future demographics, further inflaming ethnic tensions with claims that he knew the will of God (Sublette 2006), that the City "will be a majority African-American city. It's the way God wanted it to be" (CNN 2006), and disparaged "uptown" folks, his previously strong white, affluent base (Amrhein 2005), and that "God is mad at America. He sent us hurricane after hurricane....he is upset at black America...We're not taking care of ourselves" (Martel 2006)). The controversy surrounding his election with ethnic activists bussing in evacuees from other states to vote, giving Nagin a slim margin of victory in re-election, followed by his failed 100 Day Plan, a lawsuit by a contractor

alleging Nagin was given gifts in exchange for preferential treatment, and his widely-publicized view that record murders in New Orleans held positive consequences for New Orleans as it “keeps the New Orleans brand out there” (Bohrer 2007) has been cited as just a few of the examples given against funding recovery efforts under his administration, and the controversies surrounding him and his role as mayor continue into 2009. The Metropolitan Crime Commission has called upon the State Ethics Board to investigate Nagin’s alleged acceptance of vacation trips paid for by a company awarded contracts by the city (Advocate, 2009), the same company involved in a lawsuit of cost overruns to the city for a crime camera system (Bohrer 2009). The annual quality of life poll for New Orleans (Johnson, Jr. 2009) reported approval ratings for Nagin at 29%, the lowest since the poll began, with Nagin tied for third place in a listing of the biggest problems facing the city. More recent surveys by the University of New Orleans survey shows an even lower 24% approval rating (Bohrer 2009).

The cultural issues that affect progress in rebuilding and investment from federal agencies as well as other parties did not start with Nagin. It is exactly this cultural milieu that elected him, and allowed for his re-election. His leadership is not the causal factor in and of itself, it is both a symptom of the system and one that contributes to its perpetuation. He had the opportunity to lead change, to alter the culture to correct the problems that act like an economic and political stranglehold on effective progress in the region. The fault is that he did not do this. A website has been established (<http://www.nagins-last-day.com>) counting down the days to the end of his term in May 2010, which is viewed as a significant opportunity for advancing recovery efforts in New Orleans. Of course this success depends, in no small part, on the ethics and political leadership of the individual elected to replace him. Unless the citizens make the hard choices necessary to embrace cultural and political change, they will elect someone who will perpetuate the problems rather than create a culture of progress, ethicality, and accountability. Change doesn’t come easy down here in South Louisiana, a point in which most take great pride. Yet if change doesn’t occur, the resulting man-made disaster will have a far greater negative impact than the costs of the natural disaster. As long as the fear of change remains greater than the intolerance for economic, political, and moral degeneration, even the most sophisticated, well-conceived mitigation and recovery plans will not work. Clinging to an ethical culture that prevents progress while at the same time demanding that external forces overlook it and fix what is broken for us, the State continues to be a victim of its own design well before the next hurricane hits. As Foucault (1984) remarks, individuals must be proactive in understanding how organizational images, the media, religious beliefs, ideological narratives, heroes, culture, and parents influence the ways in which one’s ethic is constructed, and to question if that is truly what the individual freely believes constitutes that ethical ideal for him/herself. He concludes that otherwise one is but a puppet to the forces of authority. It is a precept that follows in the footsteps of William James’ (1906) call for individuals to find the impetus to act in unison, essentially as the moral equivalent of war. The young people quoted at the beginning of this discussion stated it clearly: residents are accustomed to how things have been run and fear change more than they desire improvements to their situation. As Horne (2006) states, New Orleans is teetering between revival and permanent decline, and over

60% of poll respondents lack confidence that government in the state can effectively address its problems (Brown 2007). How can a society instill social values that urge citizens to go see beyond personal fears and self-interest and seek unity against an identified offender, whether the offender is an individual or a system (see also Niebuhr 1934)? The question is an imperative for us all.

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