

Common Sense: The Published Results of *REBUILD LOUISIANA*

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CONTEXT

Datum

08.29.05
physical infrastructure breached

09.01.05
the call for help reaches a national audience

09.03.05
large non-profits move money and goods

09.05.05
the mission moves from recovery to rebuilding

Center stage

09.17.05
Gambling interests make a bid to control the new order

09.21.05
Development Interests make a bid to control the new order

09.23.05
Politicians unveil the future flows of monies

At the margins

Urban communities come together & organize.
Rural communities rebuild themselves.

Individuals design solutions.
Small organizations offer support as they can.

*"Information can be defined as a difference that makes a difference."*¹

–Mark Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity*

09.05 THE CALL

As Louisianans who for so long had dreaded, and subsequently witnessed, the worst possible scenario for our state, we hastily sent out a worldwide SOS via the Internet, soliciting ideas that would make a difference in the aftermath of Katrina and Rita. Unlike many disasters of the past, these catastrophes, and their aftermath were fully documented for the world to see. There was no lack of opinions, trivia, or images. But what was truly lacking was any sense of information, of anything that might affect a difference.

In the immediate aftermath of the Hurricanes, the School of Architecture and Design at UL Lafayette was forced to cancel the Regional ACSA conference that we had been planning.

Not only were we left without the conclusion to a long planned event but also we all were feeling restless and unable to contribute to the desperate needs that Southern Louisiana was facing.

Even as restoration and rebuilding efforts were being organized, we realized that one vital aspect was being lost in the rush to start 'doing something'. No one, it seemed, was intent on opening up the "question". Each provisional answer and organizational structure solved particular issues, but invariably caused even more problems.

Recognizing that many others were feeling as strongly, we made an International Call for Ideas, requesting contributions from schools of architecture, the profession and anyone who felt they had something to contribute. We purposefully made our Call broad, asking for everything from odes and poems to architectural strategies and reflections. The response was incredible. We have literally filled a book with the best of the over 200 submissions, called REBUILD LOUISIANA. This work is designed as a sourcebook to suggest alternatives, re-stimulate ideas and open new possibilities. In the long slow process of rebuilding this book is intended to keep the visions invigorated.

We received submissions from all over the United States and Europe, from Schools of Architecture, professionals and just concerned people. Many schools, including the University of Oregon and the University of Texas at Austin, ran special seminars to develop responses. Included among these are submissions from Hungary, France, Louisiana, Michigan, Texas, Oregon and Florida. As a counter point to these submissions the book is also woven around the personal reflections and the early, post-hurricane photo-documentation of Elmore Morgan Jr. Our efforts have truly become an international collaborative.

We ask for the opportunity to share with you the published work.

08.06 COMMON SENSE

"Some writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins.

Society is produced by our wants, and government by wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher. Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil.

That there are men in all countries who get their living by war, and by keeping up the quarrels of Nations, is as shocking as it is true; but when those who are concerned in the government of a country make it their study to sow discord, and cultivate prejudices among Nations, it becomes the more unpardonable.

I offer nothing but the simple facts, plain arguments and common sense".

—Thomas Paine, Common Sense ²

As our book was being edited and published, we came to consider Thomas Paine's Common Sense as being emblematic of what an informative and well-timed publication can do to accomplish a sudden and revolutionary turn. While not intending to equate our own publication to Paine's, our optimistic impulse to make a difference is equivalent.

Having just read Scott Liell's, 46 Pages: Thomas Paine, Common Sense and the Turning Point to Independence, we were energized by the prospect that our modest attempt could play a significant role in the decision-making process of rebuilding Louisiana. Simultaneously, we were also mindful that "[i]n monolithic institutional environments [...] it is very difficult for the imagination to do what it must do: create an outside, create distance, create possibility." ³

It is just such a monolithic environment that was in place in Philadelphia on July 1775 as described by Liell: 'What the Congress as a whole would not contemplate—what they did not dare to declare, demand, or threaten—was *independence*.'" ⁴ So how is it, asks Liell rhetorically, that one year later, the very same Congress would, in a relatively blink of an eye, reject moderation and adopt instead the revolutionary and audacious cry for independence?

The answer, of course, was the publication of a 46-page document: "On January 10, 1776, bookstalls in Philadelphia began to sell the first

printing of a new pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*. The small work publicly set forth for the first time a diverse pro-independence credo that until then had only been whispered privately. It also opened a compelling new line of argument that went beyond anything advocated by even the most ardent *independent*?"⁵

The reasons for the remarkable impact of Paine's writing are many, as noted by Liell, but the one he underscores—and the one that is most applicable to our argument—is that he was not just advocating for democracy in theory; Paine had, according to Samuel Adams, "awakened the public mind, and led the people loudly to call for a declaration of our national independence."⁶ Paine addressed his compelling argument primarily to the people: A call to common sense that resonated with the common people.

In retrospect, we see that our impulse was to act as Paine described society, by encouraging intercourse. This was in direct contrast to the problematic structures that were forming in the role of Paine's government by creating distinctions. Almost one year after the hurricanes, the strategies that encourage intercourse have proven to be the most effective. Sadly, the strategies that create distinction still control the majority of people's attention: funds, and support of government agencies. The ideas of 'common sense' and Paine's strategy of dissemination became our goals.

09.06 PRECEDENTS

What is different about the post-Katrina and Rita rebuilding effort? Why has so little been accomplished a year after Katrina? Why is there so little optimism among residents about the potential for change in the rebuilding of cities and regions? There can be many theories:

- Carelessness among governments and residents despite the warnings of experts
- The media's portrayal of the events
- Little coordination between a multitude of relief/rebuilding effort
- The war in Iraq has drained our nation of both resources and will
- No charismatic figure has emerged to lead the rebuilding effort
- No single plan backed by the majority of the stakeholders has emerged

- Racial and socio-economic politics have kept the most difficult questions unanswered.

What is required to rebuild New Orleans?

The problem is clearly much more complex than physically rebuilding New Orleans. The Civil Rights movement and Gandhi's non-violent movement and the movement for independence in America address needs for systematic change, and these major social and political revolutions may be the only precedents relevant if we want anything more than a band-aid.

06.06 ANALYSIS OF SUBMISSIONS

The competition catalog in its final form contains 210 pages with 102 submissions and 33 Elemore Morgan Jr. photos. Of the submissions, 91 included some graphics and 11 utilized text only. As to the submission's origins: approximately three-quarters were from university students and faculty and the remainder was from the general public both here and abroad.

The published submissions were selected by the editors in a blind-review process wherein each of the four editors had an equal number of votes. The editors culled the submissions with the intention of defining the best representational cross-section of submissions. Many graphically compelling entries as well as a handful of text essays, written odes, emails and letters made it into the final production.

The graphic submissions can be divided into two categories:

- poetic/political
- design strategies

Some of the most compelling submissions fall into the first category. There are 30 poetic/political submissions. These submissions offer a visual argument in support of cultural preservation issues, environmental protection issues, and racial equality issues, to name a few. They do not attempt to present a solution or even necessarily addressing a particular problem, but instead serve as provocations for further discussion - they raise the "question." Some of the submissions are obituaries of New Orleans and others love letters, some are nostalgic and others bitterly cynical.

The remaining graphic submissions (61) offer design strategies or solutions to addressing one of the many problems found in the wake of the hurricanes. These problems and issues can be divided into Causes and Effects.

Some of the Causes for the catastrophes cited were:

- lack of emergency preparedness
- racial segregation
- poverty
- ineffective or non-existent evacuations
- lack of communication
- unfortunate siting and geography of New Orleans
- lack of leadership
- ineffective flood controls
- erosion of the wetlands and barrier islands

Some of the Effects in the wake of the hurricanes addressed were:

- urban planning strategies
- relocation of urban areas
- utopian strategies
- cultural preservation
- new ways to build hurricane-resistant housing/ typologies

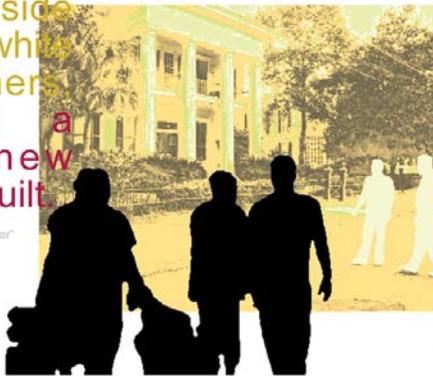
- environmental solutions to help prevent future flooding
- man-made flood and wind controls
- use of salvaged materials/ recycling
- suggestions for collaboration and communication
- hurricane preparedness kits
- work/rebuilding programs
- strategies for dealing with evacuees
- post-hurricane educational institutions
- memorial designs

06.05 FOUR SETS OF SUBMISSIONS

To illustrate some of the issues cited above, four sets of submissions will be explored in detail. Some of the most powerful submissions were sent almost as life-preservers immediately after the hurricanes from the University of Oregon. Randall Teal, his colleagues and students at the University of Oregon organized a multi-day charrette that our university participated in via conference calls. Out of this intensive design process came an out-pouring of compassionate and passionate submissions. In particular, the graphic Poetic/Political submissions seemed to be the strongest.

roughly 70,000
of new orleans
poorest
homeless
evacuees
could move
back into the
city alongside
returning white
homeowners
without a
single new
structure built.

[naomi klein] "purging the poor"



body is gone
spirit must fly
jim crow has passed
free your mind, let him die.

different to you
same to me
people are people
let my people be.

release your soul
do nothing less
with this embrace
we may coalesce.

ASHES



EXAMPLE ONE

Just as Ad-Busters harnesses the power of modern marketing, popular culture and advertising design to express poignant political issues, these Oregon submissions beautifully distill many of the Causes listed above. For example, in Randall Teal's first submission, he brings attention to the little know fact (outside of New Orleans) that adequate refugee housing already exists in the form of guesthouses and rentals in the wealthy neighborhoods of New Orleans.

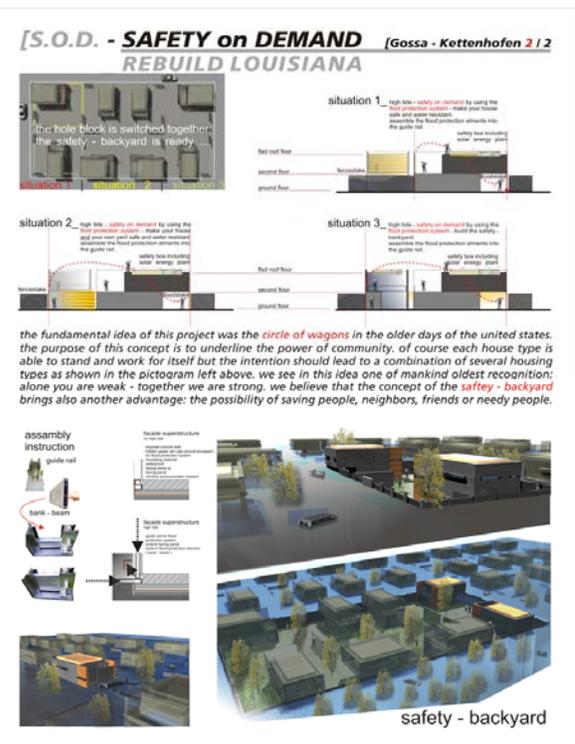
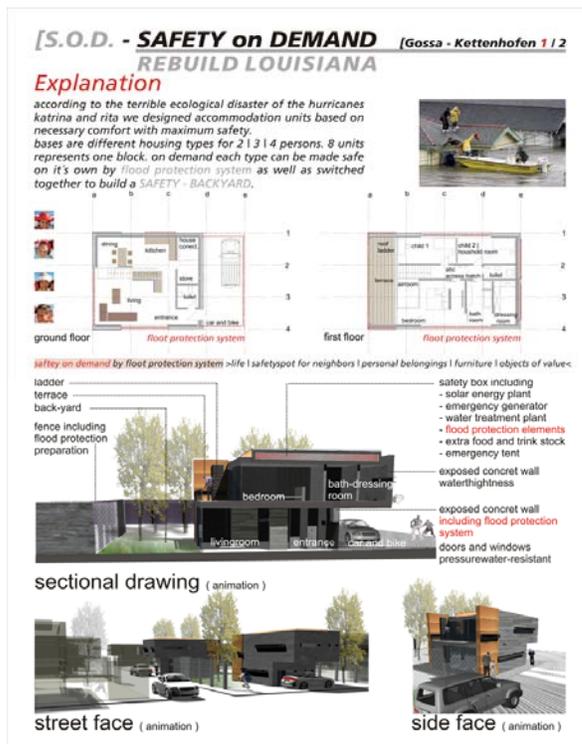
Racial discrimination and one of its effects, poverty are also the target of several of the Oregon submissions. Randall Teal's two other pieces, "I have a dream" and "ASHES", both utilize quotes from Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement to remind all that the catastrophe of Katrina runs much deeper than physical destruction.

Teal subverts a verse from the Confederate Battle Hymn of the Republic in "look away," by pleading for humanity to move beyond the prejudices of the past, the lack of post-hurricane leadership, unite and form "a krewe of all."

EXAMPLE TWO

Undoubtedly due to the unprecedented media coverage following Katrina and the compassion of other countries, many international submissions were received. In general, these submissions offer pragmatic, intelligent solutions to living in the aqueous environment of South Louisiana.

Bjoern Gossa and Oliver Kettenhofen of Germany elevate the discussion of urban living and community in the face of natural disasters such as Katrina and Rita. Their submission "S.O.D.- Safety on Demand," cleverly draws upon the American western notion of "circling the wagons" as a form of protection from rising flood waters. Not only is this idea of local neighborhood block floodwalls an intelligent, pragmatic solution but it also creates and instills a sense of community and collaboration. Hungarian architect, Kovesdi Krisztian, after apologizing for his poor English, admits in his email that "I can do nothing but I can give an idea. Only an IDEA." Acknowledging that trailer homes will be the reality for years for many displaced hurricane victims, Kovesdi proposes an innovative new typology for these modular homes. Here Kovesdi exhibits a disdain for complacency as well as a spirit of perseverance that we all can learn from.

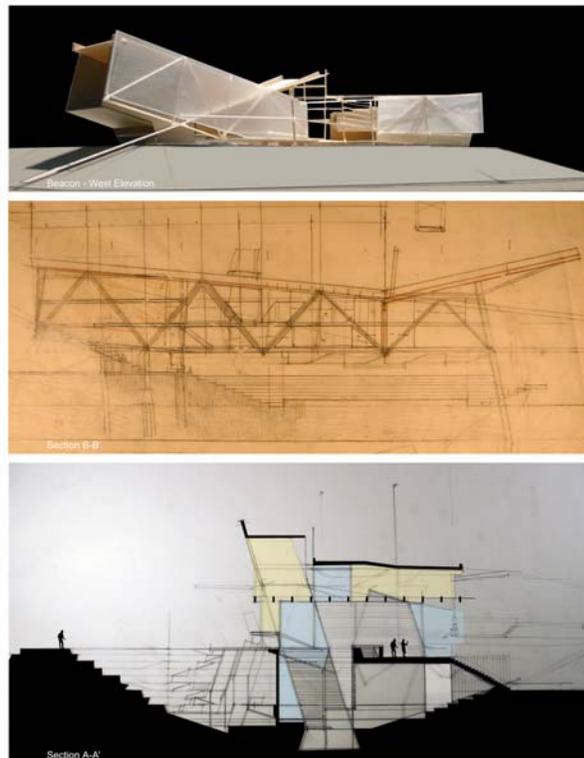
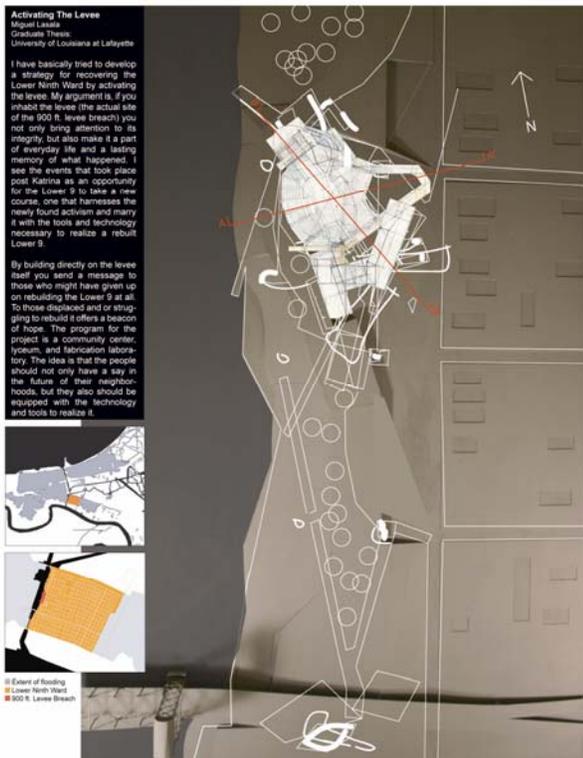


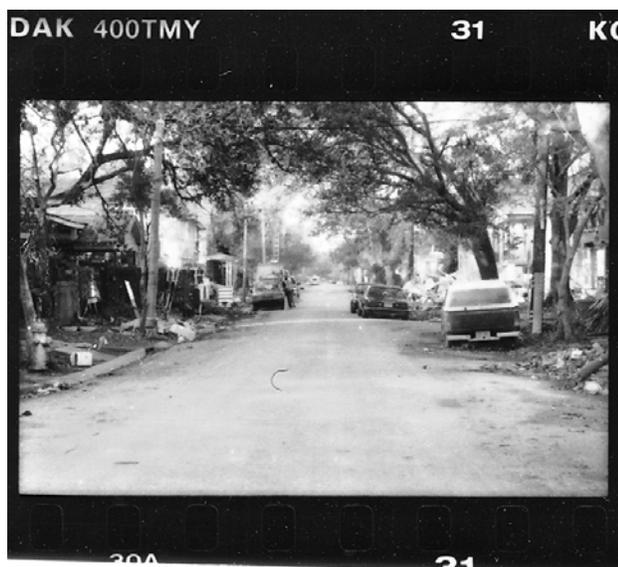
EXAMPLE THREE

Here at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, the effect of the hurricanes and their aftermath has been so profound that it has infiltrated all our classes and projects. Miguel Lasala chose to site his thesis in the epicenter of Katrina's physical and cultural devastation: the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. Not only is Mr. Lasala's community center and Katrina memorial located in the Ninth Ward but actually at the breach in the levee where the flood waters poured-in! As a first responder, the program for the community center calls for a forum or place of discussion, workshops for rebuilding and classrooms for education. It should be extremely uplifting for all of us to witness that the future of the architectural profession, our graduates, have the courage and poetry necessary to come to terms with the problems of our world, which this project exhibits.

09.05 PHOTOS OF ELEMORE MORGAN, JR.

We conclude by highlighting one photo of Elemore Morgan, Jr. Mr. Morgan is one of the pre-eminent landscape painters of the South. In Elemore's paintings one sees the color and beauty of the flat rice fields of South Louisiana. After the hurricanes, Elemore brought his highly adept powers of observation and storytelling to bear on the Rebuilding efforts by touring all the areas of devastation from Mississippi to Texas before many, including the media, had documented these areas. Elemore has photographed and written narratives about everything he has seen but most importantly, Elemore has established literal lines of communication between everyone from politicians to trailer park residents and from Schools of Architecture to Andres' Duany. Mr. Morgan has been an inspiration to us all and has no doubt "driven" us to publish and disseminate the findings of our campaign to REBUILD LOUISIANA. Thank you Elemore!





07.06 CONCLUSION

It is intended that by collecting and disseminating these ideas and strategies we can positively inform and direct the discussion about our region and ultimately affect it's re-imagining. We do not offer directives, but search for an open strategy that will expose relevant solutions. We present a schematic blueprint to rebuild for the people of New Orleans and all of southern Louisiana that is based as much on poetry as politics and as much on the heart of the matter as it is on the economies of the solution.

THE CONUNDRUM

01.01.06

Of the 357,617 residents who once (2004) lived in the flooded areas of New Orleans, only 51,700 have returned.

05.15.06

Rebuild Louisiana is published

06.01.06

Hurricane Season officially begins

06.06.06

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is substantially done with its repairs to levees and floodwalls damaged by Hurricane Katrina in the New Orleans area. *However, no new means of flood protection have been built or even begun.*

08.07.06

Ogden Museum in New Orleans agrees to an exhibition of *Rebuild Louisiana* submissions

06.04.06

The first tropical storm of the season hits Florida

TBA

Local, State & Federal authorities learn from bottom-up / grassroots organizations and actually coordinate their rebuilding efforts

TBA

Universities and in particular, architecture schools in the region become proactive developers in rebuilding

TBA

Building on hundreds of years of occupation, new social-cultural strategies and building technologies locally evolve to further negotiate human occupation in the region

Inevitable The next major hurricane strikes the region

ENDNOTES

¹ Taylor, Mark C., *The Moment of Complexity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 139.

² Paine, Thomas, *Common Sense* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1995)

³ White, Curtis, *The Middle Mind* (San Francisco: Harper, 2004), 14.

⁴ Liell, Scott, *46 Pages: Thomas Paine, Common Sense, and the Turning Point to American Independence* (Philadelphia, Running Press, 2004), 13.

⁵ Ibid, 15.

⁶ Ibid, 120.