

POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS: A WELCOMING COMMUNITY
A CONFERENCE ON CAMPUS, SEPTEMBER, 2010

Jesuit Social Research Institute, College of Social Sciences
Loyola University New Orleans
Final Report, March 28, 2011

This report supplements our report of April 5, 2010, on the multi-week conference *People on the Move and the Common Good: Migration, Poverty, and Racism: Concerns for Our Future* (October 28 – November 17, 2009). With the permission of the Carnegie Corporation, we utilized the balance of the grant for the 2009 conference to conduct this one-day conference on September 11, 2010. The conference title, *Post-Katrina New Orleans: A Welcoming Community?* aptly described the conference and its purposes. As we stated in our proposal to extend the grant:

The Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI) at Loyola University New Orleans proposes to extend the work of its 2009 conference (*People on the Move and the Common Good*) by conducting a second conference examining more deeply the reception by the New Orleans civic community and its public and private institutions of the new immigrants who have come to rebuild this post-disaster city and the people whom Hurricanes Katrina and Rita displaced.

I. Activities and Accomplishments; Timeframe and Workplan

This one-day follow-up conference on the university campus brought together the academic community, researchers, policy-makers, community leaders, and social and health service providers to take a five-year perspective on the storm, its aftermath, the rebuilding, and their impact on people on the move—those coming to the city as part of its rebuilding and those displaced by the storm, tens of thousands of whom have yet to return.

This examination included a look at the demographics of in-and-out migration, the housing, social services, and health care infrastructures of the metropolitan area, and key social and cultural factors that have facilitated the welcome of some people and supported the exclusion of others. The conference did so in light of the ethical framework of the Institute's work, especially the dignity of the human person, the responsibility for the common good, and the special care due to the poor and vulnerable. We paid particular attention to the racial, social, and economic characteristics of population displacements.

The morning section of the conference focused on the pre-Katrina population and its return—or not—to New Orleans, as well as several aspects of reality in New Orleans that affected the ability or desire of people to return to the city. The afternoon segment of the conference focused on the migrants who came to New Orleans to help rebuild the community and its institutions and the factors that affected them and their desire to remain—or not—in the community. An overview of the program follows:

Welcome, Introduction to the Theme

Fred Kammer, S.J., J.D., Director, Jesuit Social Research Institute

Part One: Welcoming Home Our Own

Keynotes: *The picture after five years of welcoming back New Orleanians who are poor, elderly, and people of color.* **Presenters:** Dr. Allison Plyer of the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center and columnist Jarvis DeBerry of the *Times-Picayune*. Initial presentations were followed by wide-ranging discussion between the two presenters and the conference attendees.

WORKSHOPS: After a break, the participants were able to attend one of four workshops focusing on the conditions for welcoming people home:

EDUCATION – Lance Hill, Ph.D., Tulane University

HOUSING – Abby Johnson, Unity for the Homeless, and Liza Cowen, Greater New Orleans Foundation

HEALTH CARE – Karen DeSalvo, M.D., Tulane University Medical School

CHILDREN – Oscar Barbarin, Ph.D., Tulane University

A theological reflection preceded lunch by Sr. Jamie Phelps, O.P., Ph.D., director of the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University New Orleans.

Part Two: Welcoming Newcomers

Keynote: *An overview of immigrant workers coming to New Orleans and how we received them.*

Presenter: Martin Gutierrez, Director, Hispanic Apostolate, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans

WORKSHOPS: After Gutierrez's keynote, participants were able to participate in one of three workshops focusing on aspects of our welcoming the newcomers:

CRIMES AGAINST IMMIGRANTS, LAW ENFORCEMENT – Eva St. Martin, Catholic Charities, and Officer Janssen Valencia of the New Orleans Police Department

ANTI-IMMIGRANT LEGISLATION – Rob Tasman, J.D., Louisiana Catholic Conference

LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE: VIETNAMESE, HISPANICS, KATRINA, AND BP – Diem Nguyen, D.Pharm, and Shaula Lovera, M.P.H., on the work of the Hispanic and Vietnamese communities in the recovery of New Orleans East

A theological reflection on the afternoon's topics was again conducted by Sr. Jamie Phelps.

About fifty people participated in the day's activities, drawn primarily from the wider community, rather than the Loyola University community. They included: scholars from the local universities; researchers; the press; social service providers; advocates; representatives of faith communities; and the general public.

II. Immediate and Possible Long-Term Impacts of the Activities; Relation to Goals; Definition of Success

As indicated in our proposal, the goal of the September conference was “*to take a deeper look at the character of a welcoming community and the progress made in rebuilding needed structures and services, as well as the need to develop new systems and structures for welcoming migrating peoples.*” In the morning the specific workshops looked at:

- public schools – there is now a greater percentage of charter schools in New Orleans than in any other U.S. city, part of a widespread educational experiment needing great oversight
- housing availability – rents in New Orleans have escalated sharply since Katrina and families with low and moderate incomes have difficulties finding accessible housing
- health care – a major experiment with community health centers appears to be very successful in the wake of a Charity Hospital-dominated health care system
- children services – in much disarray after the storm

In addition, the two morning keynotes provided the participants with a comprehensive look at the demographics (Dr. Plyer) of the city five years after Katrina—where many low-income African Americans and many families with children have been unable to return—and a reflection on the continuing role of racism in post-Katrina civic life in the metropolitan area (Mr. DeBerry).

In the afternoon, the three workshops provided the participants with opportunities to consider the important impact on the new migrants of: crimes against them and the role of the New Orleans Police in the crime situation; threatened anti-immigrant legislation in the Louisiana Legislature in the 2010 session and the role of the Catholic community and other advocates with respect to that threat; and efforts of the Hispanic and Vietnamese communities, primarily in New Orleans East, to use creative community organizing and economic development efforts in rebuilding.

All of the proceedings were conducted in the context of an ethical and religious reflection on the social realities of New Orleans as a welcoming community for people in need.

In terms of more specific outcomes indicated in the conference proposal:

- 1) Public education was accomplished by the combination of keynoters, workshops, data presentations, and ethical reflections. It also continued JSRI's efforts to connect the issues of people on the move with those of low income communities and people of color in New Orleans and in the Gulf South. Mr. DeBerry's subsequent column in *The Times-Picayune* (see attachment: “Slamming the door against the homeless”) also carried the

message of the conference and its underlying themes to the wider New Orleans community.

- 2) The conference did present an opportunity for scholars, advocates, service providers, faculty, and students to analyze and reflect on the intersecting issues of race, poverty, and migration.
- 3) The breakdown of specific focus areas—housing, schools, health care, and children’s services—allowed participants to better understand the complex array of factors and needs that contribute to residents returning—or not—to their communities. Workshop presenters also indicated areas where increased oversight and advocacy were needed.
- 4) The focus on crimes against immigrants, the role of law enforcement, the threat of anti-immigrant legislation, and opportunities for social and economic development also gave participants some indication of the many factors affecting a community’s welcome to new migrant workers.
- 5) Strengthened partnerships occurred in a variety of forms:
 - a. On campus, the conference was co-sponsored by the Center for the Study of New Orleans; and the involvement of Tulane and Xavier University faculty expanded the reach of JSRI beyond the Loyola campus.
 - b. JSRI staff were able to spend extensive time developing personal relationships with presenters to discuss common concerns and future collaboration, especially with immigrant advocates and service providers, which is very important to an Institute in its early development.
- 6) Research from the conference in the form of formal papers from Dr. Plyer and Mr. DeBerry has been made available on the Institute’s website. That research is also being published in the Spring 2011 edition of the *JustSouth Quarterly* which is now at the printer. A single print of the special section is attached.

In terms of “success,” unlike the previous year, we unfortunately did not utilize a written evaluation by the participants

In terms of other long-term impacts, our Institute again has been strengthened by improved relationships within the university and even more with the wider community of researchers and activists, better understanding by staff of the problems we focus on here, and knowledge gained about how to engage various publics on civic issues. For those who attended, long-term impacts can be hoped for in the heightened consciousness of the plight of people on the move and the dedication by some to working on the interrelated issues of race, poverty, and migration.

III. Measurement of Achievement of Goals and Impacts

Without the use of the formal evaluation instrument, it is more difficult to measure the impact of the second of the two conferences made possible by the Carnegie Corporation grant. Attendees

seemed genuinely interested in the keynote talks and the workshops and commented favorably to staff and others. Measuring the intangible impact is more difficult, even with an instrument.

In the period between conference one and conference two, however, the Loyola College of Business magazine, *Loyola Executive*, provided surprising input to our assessment. An article entitled “Student Voices from Portfolio,” (Spring 2010, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 21), reported the reactions of freshmen students in the College of Business who are required to attend some campus event and to comment on “what they took away from the event.” Of the seven student comments in the report, three were from JSRI events made possible by the Carnegie grant. Their remarks follow, providing hope for the kind of insight and personal change that JSRI values:

“Attending this event made me realize how much I take my freedoms and safety for granted. I now want to delve deeper into the social issues of these governments and societies to discover how we can help and get involved.”

--Attendee: Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Speaker Event

“Camilleri’s message was a very simple one that I believe encompasses the Jesuit ideals we strive to uphold: in every human is the presence of God and thus we must strive to gain equality for all people.”

--Attendee: Migration, Poverty, and Racism, Speaker Event

“This event brought out emotions in me that I never knew I had and made me want to do things to help I never thought I wanted to do before and for that, I am truly grateful.”

--Attendee: Katrina’s Internally Displaced People, Speaker Event

IV. Lack of Achievement

As we had done for our 2009 conference, we sent notice to professors well in advance of the 2010 conference in hopes they might incorporate it into course curricula or even offer additional credit for attendance. Yet, the attendance of students and professors was quite sparse. We used posters, flyers, video announcements, web-alerts, inclusion in various university calendars, free lunch, newspaper notice, and other means to promote participation.

V. Effective and Ineffective Strategies

Four days after the conference our staff and associates evaluated the conference proceedings using the thumbnail categories of “what worked” and “didn’t work” as follows:

What worked:

- The balance of presentations, ethical reflection, and expertise
- Certain workshops: specific content, unique points of view, expertise of presenter
- The use of the co-presenters in the morning keynote session and their complementary interaction, and the opportunity for participants to participate with the presenters in a lengthy “conversation” afterwards.

- The room arrangement utilizing round tables with chairs
- Having a full-day registration assistant who could remain available to welcome later arrivals while staff and associates were participating in the conference.

What did not work:

- Certain workshops: over-generalization, too long, presenter not sufficiently serious
- Insufficient participation by Loyola students and faculty
- Only about fifty participants, mostly from civic community
- Insufficient prior marketing of the conference; in future, need a specific marketing strategy for each target group.
- Excessive amount of food
- Needed a call to action to complement the closing reflection

VI. Changes in Major Factors or Conditions

As reported last year, the change of directors of the Institute in March 2009 meant that planning shifted in some ways, although the overall focus of the first-year conference (2009) continued in place. Additional meetings of staff were required to reach consensus on details and format of the various events of the conference. For the grant extension and second year conference (2010), we had one staff change—our migration specialist—but the conference went smoothly. Funding did not change.

VII. Programmatic and Administrative Problems

The major problems are indicated in number V, above, in terms of publicity and the attendance, although higher education conferences often are attended by small groups of interested persons. Our plans for the fall of 2011—a migration detention conference in conjunction with the University of Florida (October 13 – 14)—will shift location to our Law School, where clinical and other students have an existing interest and some experience to build on. It will also focus more on providing a forum for professionals, advocates, and academics to interact with one another and with civic leaders and to examine more deeply the economic, political, racial, and other characteristics of immigration detention and appropriate responses.

VIII. Communications Planning and Effects

Our communications and publicity planning were focused on promotional activities such as the following:

- 1) advance publicity on university platforms, e.g. calendar, website, by email, inclusion in our *JustSouth Quarterly* and *JustSouth E-Newsletter*, dissemination by university public relations offices to public media (electronic and four newspapers—general circulation, Catholic news, community papers, African-American newsweekly), and posters and flyers on various bulletin boards)

- 2) a formal conference flyer, included with this report
- 3) email alerts to faculty
- 4) individual letters of invitation with flyers were sent to twenty community groups

Subsequent to the various events, two of our three keynote presenters have produced written versions of their presentations that have been edited and are contained in a special section of our spring 2011 *JustSouth Quarterly*, which should be mailed out to 1000 readers this month. In addition, 300 copies of the section have been printed for our use in educational sessions for students and others who are still coming to New Orleans as part of post-Katrina volunteer recovery efforts. Finally, reports and photographs of the conference are on our webpage and in our *JustSouth Quarterly* and *E-News*, and the full papers from Dr. Plyer and Mr. DeBerry are on our website.

IX. Sustainability of the Work:

The Jesuit Social Research Institute primarily focuses on the issues that dominated the conference—migration, racism, and poverty. Now in our fourth year, our research, social analysis, publications, speaking, and advocacy activities all revolve around these three issues and their intersections, primarily in the Gulf South. Our *JustSouth Quarterly* and *JustSouth E-Newsletter* and our website at www.loyno.edu/jsri continue to be major vehicles for publishing our work and educating our publics. Staff will continue to work on these matters and to try to provide opportunities to engage the university community (faculty, staff, and students) and the religious and civic communities of this region in deeper understanding of these issues and in focused efforts to work towards the common good.

More specifically, as indicated above, a major focus in the coming months is on preparing a major conference in October on immigration detention in the region and specific efforts at research and advocacy to impact reform of conditions in detention facilities and U.S. policy.

The Carnegie Grant for these two years has provided a valuable platform for a relatively new institute to educate, network, experiment, and learn about three issues critical to the future of our region—migration, race, and poverty—and to further examine their interconnectedness. In the five-year retrospectives on Katrina this past year, for example, no other public observance so focused its attention as we did.

ATTACHMENTS:

- 1) Conference promotional flyer (small version)
- 2) Promotional postcard
- 3) Conference program handout
- 4) Conference Schedule
- 5) Dr. Plyer handout: “Facts for Features”
- 6) Conference financial report
- 7) September 17, 2010 DeBerry column from *The Times-Picayune*
- 8) Conference report from special section of spring, 2011, *JustSouth Quarterly* (see also <http://www.loyno.edu/jsri/forums/index.html>)