

# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Number 51

September 2015

## Katrina and the Least Among Us

A ten year retrospective - Part 2

by Fred Kammer, SJ

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### JSRI Welcomes

JSRI welcomes [Jeanie Donovan](#) as our new economic policy specialist. Jeanie is a Loyola Honors graduate and holds a masters degree in public health and a masters degree in public affairs from the University of Texas.

### JSRI Upcoming Events

#### October 18-20

Fr. Kammer will give two addresses on social analysis for the East Coast Jesuit Social Ministries Convocation in NJ.

#### October 23

Fr. Kammer will address Catholic Social Thought at University of Dallas Ministry Conference.

### Pope Francis U.S. Visit

#### September 24-25

Pope Francis will address the U.S. Congress and the United Nations. [Watch LIVE](#)

### JSRI Recent Activities

#### September 20-21

**Public Schools.** New Orleans public education “can claim the most dramatic before-and-after Katrina picture.”<sup>[1]</sup> In the 1950s and 60s, whites fled integration to private and parochial schools. Middle-class blacks followed. The pre-Katrina system was 94% African-American with 73% qualifying for free and subsidized lunches. Orleans Parish public schools ranked 67th out of 68 Louisiana districts in math and reading. 62% of students attended schools rated “failing.”<sup>[2]</sup> Corruption was widespread.

A state takeover beginning pre-Katrina and post-Katrina “reforms” created the new Recovery School District to oversee 57 charter schools; and left the old Orleans Parish School Board to oversee 14 charters and operate five traditional schools. (The state board of education directly authorized four additional charters, and there is one independent state school.) The state fired over 7,500 public school teachers and paraprofessionals; most were African-American.<sup>[3]</sup>

Preliminary results of this vast experiment show markedly better test scores and higher graduation rates and enrollment in postsecondary institutions.<sup>[4]</sup> Last year, New Orleans ranked 41st out of 69 districts.<sup>[5]</sup> Post-Katrina perceptions vary significantly: only 32% of blacks believe the mostly-charter system is better versus 44% of whites “even though precious few whites attend the public schools.”<sup>[6]</sup>

The state has revoked or not renewed ten charters in ten years; five charter school boards voluntarily closed their schools.<sup>[7]</sup> The greatest challenge now is how to train, certify, and keep quality teachers in schools relying significantly on young and inexperienced teachers from “alternative pathway programs such as Teach for America and TeachNOLA.”<sup>[8]</sup> Teacher racial composition has changed from 71% black pre-Katrina to 49% in 2014.<sup>[9]</sup>

attended the Jesuit Volunteer Corps board meeting in Baltimore, MD.

### September 17

Fr. Kammer and Dr. Mikulich were interviewed by Al Jazeera America for a television program addressing the Pope's visit to prisoners in Philadelphia.

### September 16

Fr. Kammer met with the Mission Committee of Christus Health in Dallas, TX.

### September 10-11

Fr. Kammer and Dr. Weishar travelled to Atlanta, GA for a meeting of the Advisory Board of the "Recovering the Human Face of Immigration" Project.

### September 2

Dr. Weishar helped facilitate a discussion on resources for immigrant children at the Unaccompanied Immigrant Children Service Providers Workshop organized by Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans and the Hispanic Apostolate.

### September 2

JSRI hosted a screening and discussion of [Big Charity](#).

### August 28

Dr. Weishar organized the [Katrina Immigrant Workers and Homeowners Press Conference and Rally](#). Fr. Kammer, SJ, and Ms. Baudouin spoke at the press conference, thanking immigrant workers for helping to rebuild New Orleans and calling for comprehensive immigration reform.

### August 24

Dr. Sue Weishar participated in a meeting of the Board of Directors of Seashore Mission in Biloxi, MS



**Photo Credit:** Loyola University New Orleans

**Health Care.** Before Katrina, 21% of city residents were uninsured, one of the highest rates in the U.S. Charity Hospital—part of a state system of free hospitals—was their place for birth, death, and ordinary health care. There LSU and Tulane trained doctors. Flooded on lower levels, "Big Charity" was shuttered after Katrina by state and LSU officials although National Guard, military, and hospital personnel had cleaned and restored the flooded levels within a few weeks after the waters receded.

State and federal officials battled for years over reopening the hospital or building a new one relying heavily on FEMA money. The new one—costing \$1.1 billion from FEMA and bonds—opened August 1st on a 34-acre site carved from local neighborhoods. Those traditionally cared for at Charity—75% African-American—suffered for ten years without its tertiary services and without 100 inpatient psychiatric beds for people often traumatized by storm and halting recovery. Many mental health sufferers ended up in Orleans Parish Prison.

Meanwhile, a loose federation of 70 community health centers opened, offering quality primary care with high patient satisfaction. These centers are funded by private insurance, expanded Affordable Care Act insurance, public and private grants, and post-Katrina appropriations. "Between 2013 and 2014, the percent of uninsured African Americans dropped from 25% to 16%, while the percent of uninsured Whites dropped from 14% to 11%." <sup>[10]</sup> Governor Jindal and legislators refuse to expand Medicaid, largely with federal ACA funds, to people with incomes below 138% of the poverty line—funding critical to the community primary care network.

**Latino newcomers.** Latino New Orleans pre-Katrina traced its origins largely to Central American and Caribbean countries—often tied to fruit, coffee, and hardwoods trade. <sup>[11]</sup> Latinos, comprising about one-quarter of the reconstruction labor force, tackled the dirty, dangerous, and disgusting work of Katrina remediation and recovery. The Latino population grew from 60,000 in 2000 to 103,000 in 2013. Many brought family to make this their "home," despite being victimized by thieves and unscrupulous employers, harassed by police and ICE,

and living in the shadows of undocumented immigration status. Schools, courts, health care, and the general population, without language and other resources, are challenged to respond. And, despite resilience as workers and families, long-term Latino viability depends on federal comprehensive immigration reform.

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**Published by the Jesuit Social Research Institute**

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