

**Mayor C. Ray Nagin**

**2009 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

**Wednesday, May 20, 2009**



## 2009 State of the City Address by Mayor C. Ray Nagin

### Welcome/Recognitions

Thank you, Mr. Wendell Pierce, for that wonderful introduction.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, Federal, State, and local officials, honored guests and friends.

First, I must recognize and thank my lovely wife, First Lady Seletha Nagin, and my children, Jeremy, Jarin and Tianna, my parents and all my family for their unwavering love and support.

To our partners in the State Legislature and on the City Council: I want to thank you for your hard work to ensure that this city continues to move forward during these tough economic times.

And tonight, I want to offer a special note of appreciation to my Executive Staff and all city employees. Please stand. Very few outside of City Hall really understand the difficult environment you excel in daily. I do, and I appreciate each one of you more than you know. When I first came into office, I learned that more than 40 percent of city workers earned wages at or below the poverty level. As Mayor, I am very proud that today **every** – I said **every** – city worker earns at or above the Southern regional average. And you deserve it!

I'd like to especially thank Dr. Ed Blakely and his team for their work in this unprecedented recovery. He and his team prioritized citizen-driven Recovery Plans into 17 Target Zones to create our initial implementation strategy. Dr. Blakely was one of the first to recognize that if we lost the VA Hospital then the future of New Orleans would not be as bright. We are now firmly positioned to have a world class 70-acre medical district anchored by two state-of-the-art research and teaching hospitals. This is a true economic game changer. Dr. Blakely, please stand. Thank you for a job well done. This will be his last formal public event as he will be returning to his family in Australia this June.

And to all those from around the country and world who have committed money, time and resources and to the many volunteers who cared enough to come and help rebuild this very special city: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

And finally, to the true spirit of New Orleans, its people. To all those living in this creative, resilient, beautiful city, those who refused to leave, the recent rebuilders, the newcomers, the migrant workers, and those still trying to get home. Stay focused on truth as we are still One New Orleans.

Now let me take a brief moment to remind each of you that Hurricane Season starts 11 days from now on June 1<sup>st</sup>. Although our hurricane protection system is the best it has ever been, the Corps of Engineers has not completed all of its work and we still have vulnerabilities in certain low lying areas in New Orleans East, the Lower Ninth Ward, and Algiers.

Each citizen must have a personal evacuation and recovery plan that accounts for your entire family. If you are one of our precious senior citizens who lacks transportation, if you have special medical needs, or if you simply cannot afford to evacuate yourself and your family, you should sign up now for our City Assisted Evacuation Plan by calling 311.

## **Opening**

“I need you. You need me. I need you to survive.” Naked truth for us all. First I want to thank two spiritual leaders, Pastor Fred Luter and Pastor David Crosby, and their choirs at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church and First Baptist Church. They provided inspirational singing tonight that reminds us that we need one another for our very own survival.

Franklin Avenue and First Baptist put these words into practice after Hurricane Katrina. Franklin Avenue Baptist Church was severely damaged and flooded. First Baptist Church invited the displaced congregation in and the two shared the same space for nearly two years until Franklin Avenue was able to move back home in 2007. One church is predominately white and the other predominately African American. They both found balance by putting love, compassion, and brotherhood into practice. They have provided an excellent living example for all of us. Let us bless them by giving them a round of applause.

I am once again honored to stand here as the 68<sup>th</sup> Mayor of New Orleans, one of the greatest cities in the world. It is truly a blessing to have this opportunity to make a difference in the city I love so much. This is an amazing place where wonderful, smart resilient people press on in spite of the many challenges that come our way.

Tonight I'm going to set the record straight and speak truth to you as I have many times before. If you have come here for doom and gloom, you are in the wrong place. Some facts will confront lies about our recovery and remind us how far we have come together. I will also acknowledge challenges and push us to come together even closer in order for this city to sustain itself long term.

Unfortunately, there is lots of misinformation out there that may cause you to wonder. I believe strongly in the spirit of truth. You see truth and lie cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Just like night and day, one comes and the other must leave.

This reminds me of a story I once heard where truth and lie went swimming one day in Lake Pontchartrain. They decided to go skinny dipping so they laid their clothes on the seawall steps. Truth was having a good time and when he turned his head and swam out a bit lie jumped out the water, put truth's clothes on, and took off running down Elysian Fields Avenue. When truth realized what was happening, he jumped out of the water and started chasing the lie. So in reality, what was happening was naked truth was running after a well dressed lie. When truth caught up to the well dressed lie, he undressed him, and exposed the lie for what it truly was. I will do some verbal undressing tonight.

The naked truth is we are well positioned for full recovery, have good momentum, and together we are headed to be an even better city tomorrow and 50 years from now. I pray a spirit of peace, love and unity descends on all of us and those who have eyes see clearly and those with ears hear fully.

Truthfully, we are all a battle tested and blessed people. We have gone through some very difficult and trying times. During these past seven years, we have all gone through unprecedented challenges that included the worst man made and natural disaster ever and three major financial crises, one near bankruptcy.

Together we have implemented major reforms to increase government efficiencies, dramatically improved technology, generated fairer real estate assessments, increased home ownership, reduced poverty, and upgraded public housing. Together we have begun to develop a state of the art medical district, we have enhanced Canal Street, and implemented highly successful citywide semi-automated garbage collections and Disney like services in the French Quarter and Downtown areas.

We still have some major challenges ahead, but we are well positioned with steady population growth, low unemployment, increased household income, and billions and billions of construction related activity. Citizens are empowered and doing great work.

We have built strong relationships with the White House, key members of Congress, and President Obama has tapped New Orleans as the U.S. blueprint for urban renewal, according to the Washington Times. By electing me, you have put me in position to be on the forefront of every major initiative of federal recovery dollars that has not only benefited our city but the region and the entire state. I thank almighty God and all of you for allowing me to be here at this time in history.

As a major sign of our resilience, we are here tonight at the newly renovated, state-of-the-art Mahalia Jackson Theatre for the Performing Arts. Isn't it beautiful? This facility was severely damaged after the storm, but look at it now.

As you know, we are a stone's throw from Congo Square in order to be reminded of the waterproof soul of New Orleans, its music, its culture, and its people.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Congo Square was a magical place where Africans, Indians, and others gathered on Sundays to market, sing, dance and create music. Our unique culture started here.

From this diverse, soulful place came our own Mardi Gras Indian tradition, which led to legends like Big Chief "Tootie" Montana, who lived not far from here in Treme.

Brass Bands also evolved here and we started second lining. The Dejan's Olympia Brass Band was formed in 1883 and is still going strong today as the Young Olympians.

Our cultural evolution continued as we are the birthplace of Jazz music, a national and international treasure. Our homegrown innovators like Buddy Bolden and Jelly Roll Morton created an art form that morphed into every style of music heard today.

Then there was the original Queen of Gospel music, Mahalia Jackson. She was a New Orleanian, an innovator. And this facility is named after her and the renovated grounds outside are named after another world famous New Orleans native, Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong.

Some of you may not know it, but on May 22, 1796, while George Washington was still president, the first documented opera performance in North America was staged right here in our city.

Music and culture run deep here and is in our DNA. The world knows us by it. It balances us. It heals us. It strengthens us. My good friend Ellis Marcellus often says, "Music and culture are so prevalent in New Orleans that it oozes up from the pavement."

Tonight I am announcing that the next phase of improvements to Armstrong Park will be the creation of a cultural sculpture garden that tells our story. This educational exhibition will not affect the park's integrity and will include seven larger-than-life bronze statues. Citizens and visitors will learn the truth about Congo Square with its original fountain restored. Unveilings will begin by year end and will feature the Big Chief, the first Opera, the origin of Jazz, Brass Bands, and the Gospel Queen. Since this is Armstrong Park, the "Satchmo" statue will be the primary display.

But our enhancements won't end there. We are also moving forward with the restoration of the Municipal Auditorium. A public-private partnership will develop a state-of-the-art, multi-use sound and movie facility for the creative media industry and other traditional uses. It will also serve as an incubator for the next generation digital media entrepreneurs. We plan to release a Request for Proposals shortly with construction beginning the first of next year.

From Congo Square to the creation of Jazz music, New Orleanians are always swinging and improvising. Somehow, no matter what we face, it all comes together, wonderful to watch, a bit messy at times, but when we finish, it is always a masterpiece.

### **Our Journey Together**

Now I want to discuss the state of our city. First I ask your indulgence as I take you on a very quick ride down memory lane. Think back seven years ago and remember our city was struggling. We missed the economic boom in the 90s. We were not effective on the critical issue of economic justice. Our population was declining. Our young, educated people were leaving and so were good paying jobs.

Seven years ago, you said the time was right for a business-oriented mayor to focus on change, the economy, and job creation.

I took office back then and learned we had only two days of cash in the bank and faced significant budget deficits. We worked quickly to right the ship. We immediately got our finances straightened out. Then we started weeding out corruption and took transparency to the next level. We stabilized our economy and restarted much needed neighborhood revitalization initiatives.

Within three years, the city experienced back to back record tourist years. Infrastructure investments topped \$3 billion. Retail spending was up. And instead of losing almost 10,000 jobs like the year before we started, three years later almost 8,000 jobs were added.

Our image improved around the country. Inc. Magazine named us the 18<sup>th</sup> best city in America to do business with, we were named one of the top 10 “comeback cities” in the South, and the City’s website ranked fourth best in the nation.

We worked hard to increase economic equity and fairness in contracting. Minority, female, and emerging local companies’ participation reached all time highs.

Finally, real estate values were increasing by as much as 10 to 20 percent annually. My rallying cry in speeches was and still is, “buy some dirt in New Orleans.”

We were making progress pre-Katrina on many fronts but had two significant challenges that still confront us today: public safety and race relations.

Now let us fast forward to today. First let me address the notion that our recovery is moving too slowly. I asked Dr. Blakely to conduct some research and compare us to other disasters. He found an average recovery lasts ten to fifteen years. For example, the post-war recovery of Tokyo, Japan lasted 25 years, rebuilding after the Los Angeles riots lasted 10 years, and New York’s recovery from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, is approaching eight years and counting. We should never be satisfied but we should also be proud of our work responding to the many challenges of what some describe as a once in a lifetime event, Hurricane Katrina and her aftermath.

### **State of the City**

So what is the current State of our City?

The current state of our city is that we are Recovering our Balance and we are poised for a major breakthrough or our “Atlanta moment”.

We are approaching our fourth year of recovery. Four years. The number four. This number keeps catching my attention. I noticed it a lot during the recent presidential election cycle. So I looked it up and found the number four metaphysically signifies balance, completion. The four corners of the earth. The four seasons. It takes four years to finish high school or college. Well, for some of us it takes a little longer.

The number four, balance. **The current state of our city is we are Recovering our Balance and we are poised for our “Atlanta or breakthrough moment”.**

And most of you see it. Construction, streets under repair, walking/bike paths, City Park revitalization, the re-opening of the Mahalia Jackson Theatre for the Performing Arts, Sanger Theatre public-private partnership, and live jazz music back on Bourbon Street. Progress is evident throughout the city.

Last August a Kaiser Foundation polls said 56 percent of you think New Orleans is moving in the right direction. And in another study, 7 out of 10 said you were hopeful about our future. A little over a month ago, UNO released their annual study which highlighted that overall satisfaction with the quality of life in New Orleans equals that of pre-Katrina attitudes.

So it seems that the steady diet of negativity that some push is not affecting the majority of our citizens. Most of us know that this city is recovering her balance.

We've already hosted another successful Sugar Bowl, Mardi Gras, French Quarter Festival, and Jazz Festival with numbers equal to or exceeding pre-Katrina. Our tax base continues to be strong. Job growth numbers are above national averages. Our city's unemployment rate is among the lowest in the country. Downtown office occupancies are at some of their highest levels. We have more fine dining restaurants open than pre-Katrina. Even the Saints have a waiting list for season tickets and the NBA Hornets have regular sellouts.

The nation has noticed our post Katrina accomplishments. Business Week ranks us as one of the best cities to ride out the national recession. Money Magazine says we are the sixth fastest growing real estate market in America. Outside Magazine told the world we are one of the 20 best towns in America to live in. And all three bond rating agencies now have us rated above investment grade.

With your help, my administration has positioned this city for another big push over the next year. Local economist and UNO Chancellor Tim Ryan predicts an economic boom in our city for the next 7-plus years.

### **Unprecedented Construction**

Some of you may remember that the great poet, Maya Angelou came to New Orleans recently to give a lecture, and the UNO Arena where she spoke was packed.

She made many very interesting points. She talked a lot about helping others and rainbows.

She reminded us that you have to first go through the storm, before you get to see the rainbow.

She also pointed out that most rainbows are best seen when storm clouds are still in the distance.

So picture this: half the sky is cloudy and half the sky is sunny.

And at that point, the rainbow appears brightest.

She encouraged each of us to be a rainbow in someone else's cloud and to look forward and focus on the sunny part of the sky. In other words, help others and stay positive.

So, while most of the country is trying to ramp up with infrastructure projects because of the President's Economic Stimulus Plan, we have a three year head start with many construction projects that are already in final design. We are among the best positioned cities in America!

Katrina's Rainbow.

Ladies and gentleman, we have more than \$20 billion of construction projects that are either in final design or under construction.

Katrina's Rainbow.

At City Hall, we are managing \$1.4 billion in projects, including \$630 million in citywide street work.

The Sewerage and Water Board has \$3.4 billion in active projects.

The Corp of Engineers recently awarded another \$5 billion in construction projects on its way to spending \$14 billion in our area.

HUD has \$700 million under construction.

The public school system has announced \$800 million in new and renovated facilities.

Federal City has broken ground on \$200 million in projects on their way to spending \$750 million.

The new VA hospital site will be cleared by year end and with LSU \$2 billion in two new state of the art teaching hospitals will emerge.

Katrina's Rainbows.

Private sector investments in our city have now grown to \$4 billion and counting.

Katrina's Rainbow.

The signs of recovery are widespread and growing with powerful momentum.

### **Streets Recovering**

Now let's talk streets.

We are repaving and restoring streets throughout the city – Uptown, in Gentilly, New Orleans East, Algiers, the Lower Ninth Ward and everywhere in between. Slide Show.

Katrina's Rainbow.

Our initial focus is repairing the streets that carry 80 percent of our traffic. Slide show.

Katrina's Rainbow.

We are replacing substandard bridges and repairing more than 17,000 individual locations in streets and sidewalks. Slide Show.

Definitely Katrina's Rainbow.

We're also enhancing our nighttime environment by making it easier to see your surrounding clearly.



We are repairing and replacing streetlights throughout the entire city and upgrading to higher wattage energy efficient bulbs. We've completed these enhancements on Canal Street and in the Central Business District.

In 60 days we will start updating every streetlight in the French Quarter – with no negative effect on aesthetics.

And the enhanced streetscapes under construction that you asked for in the People Recovery Plan will help make things more beautiful, raise property values, and create a greater sense of safety among citizens.

### **Recovering our Neighborhoods and Housing**

Let's take a moment to talk about housing.

As you know, major challenges post-Katrina were affordable rentals, senior housing, and ensuring homeowners had enough money from Road Home and insurance to rebuild their damaged properties. Just as we are recovering our balance overall, our neighborhoods are getting stronger everyday.

Affordable rental has materialized with recent openings on Tulane Avenue, in New Orleans East, the Krauss development, and 200 Carondelet. We are also seeing signs that rents throughout the city are leveling off and in some cases showing modest declines.

The private sector and the city are working in concert to ensure affordable rental and senior housing is available for all. We have invested more than \$20 million of city funds since Hurricane Katrina that has been leverage to over \$200 million in developments.

This includes projects such as the Rising Sun Homes in the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward developed by Rev. W.H. Jenneford. His work is helping displaced seniors return home from Atlanta, Houston, Dallas and Birmingham. Rev. Jenneford, would you please stand? Thank you for your great committed work.

Let's touch on homeownership. A year ago, I announced that the City had launched a soft second mortgage program to provide forgivable loans of up to \$65,000. Tonight, I want to encourage more New Orleanians to take advantage of program. There has never been a better time to buy a new or rehabilitated home in our city.

We also know many Road Home and insurance checks were not enough to complete post-Katrina renovations. To address this challenge, we have reprogrammed \$20 million of federal CDBG funds to be used as soft second dollars specifically targeted for homeowners with rehabilitation gap needs. These forgivable loans are available for residents with a family of four earning up to \$72,000 annually. We are working to implement this program by late summer of this year.

But that's not all. Earlier this year, we also implemented a \$10 million home repair loan program to provide up to \$35,000 for low income senior citizens and people with disabilities. Last month, 6,000 people applied for a limited number of grants that were awarded through a public lottery.

I committed to you then that we would have another grant cycle to help more people. Tonight, I would like to announce that we are investing another \$10 million to launch phase II of this program. We will roll out this next phase within the next few months.

In addition, we have and will continue to partner with non-profits like Rebuilding Together that are leveraging other city funds five times in order to help more people. Our goal is to get another \$20 million in repairs going before year end.

It's time to talk about transforming and improving public housing.

We are making good progress here. Almost all of our public housing sites have been or are being upgraded. The new model is less density, larger apartments, and regular street grids. We are also converting many to mixed income communities with both rental and homeownership opportunities.

Let me quickly update you on the "Big Four." HUD has informed us that construction has already begun at the Saint Bernard and C. J. Peete developments. At B.W. Cooper, site and prep work has begun and construction is expected to begin this summer. Lafitte has been cleared, financing is in its final stages, and construction will begin in the June/July timeframe.

With this transformation underway, only one traditional public housing development, Iberville, lacks a modernization plan. Resident leaders recently told me that it is unfair to invest in other developments and leave the Iberville in its current state.

Tonight, I am proud to announce that HUD/HANO has come on board and we are ready to move forward with the redevelopment of Iberville. Earlier today HANO announced the establishment of a resident advisory committee that will work directly with the project design team to develop a master plan for Iberville.

This will not be a total demolition. Our goal is a mixed income development with enlarged, modernized apartments, a normal street grid, enhanced street lighting and beautiful landscaping.

Another Katrina Rainbow.

## **Recovering Public Safety**

Let's talk frankly about one of our most difficult challenges – public safety. Seven years ago, the police department ranks were declining and murders were escalating. We implemented back-to-back pay raises, state-of-the-art equipment and performance based promotions, and installed new leadership. Violent crime trends improved and we finally reached 1,700 commissioned officers on the streets.

Immediately following Hurricane Katrina we lost nearly 500 officers and the entire criminal justice system was shut down. We brought in the National Guard and State Police for support and restored the criminal justice system.

I am pleased to report that we currently have 1,550 officers that include 31 National Guard members who recently became New Orleans Police Officers. They are with us tonight. Can you please stand? Thank you for becoming a permanent part of our family.

Let me be brutally honest: shortly I will show statistics that demonstrate a dramatic reduction in violent crime in our city. However, we all know that we have high profile violent crimes events that unnerve us. This weekend I attended the joint funeral of two senior citizens, a pastor and his wife killed in their home. There are also an alarming number of violent crimes being committed by teenagers. Just a week ago two young boys, barely teenagers, one 13 and the other 14, were unable to resolve a conflict and the tragic result left one dead.

The question people ask me all of the time is: What is really going on? With more police officers, state-of-the-art equipment, a new DA, court watchers, and Yes We Care rallies, why don't we feel safer?

I have thought about this a lot and offer this analysis. I recall right after Hurricane Katrina I had a conversation with a very wise man. He predicted that we would have more issues with young boys in the near future. His observation was that many boys witnessed their mothers and grandmothers suffering on roofs, at the Superdome, Convention Center, and in shelters. This man told me these young people believe no one really cared about them and once they became teenagers they would not care much about others.

So today, we are unnerved by these high profile violent events. My conclusion is we have three very combustible conditions colliding: post Katrina stress, the reestablishment of the drug culture, and too many of our youth wanting to become the next American Gangster instead of pursuing the American Dream.

So what can we do about it? First, we should continue what we started with the police, DA, courts, and other community related efforts. We should also put more focus, energy, and resources around youth, mental health, and drug rehabilitation.

For example, about a month ago I hosted meetings with key leaders of the criminal justice community, mental health experts, and key community organizations to work as

true partners on planning and applying for federal stimulus funding. Together, we identified these three areas of common focus. We are coordinating our grant applications and will jointly lobby in Washington, DC. We have also agreed to monthly follow up meetings to keep our partnership strong.

I would like to take this moment to once again urge Governor Bobby Jindal to not close the New Orleans Adolescent Hospital at this time. Give us at least one year to come up with a regional transition plan. Now is not the time for the city of New Orleans to have fewer mental health beds. Suicides have tripled since Katrina, attempted suicides are way up, and police arrests relative to mental health issues have also dramatically increased.

Now let's get back to the statistics I mentioned earlier. First I want to talk about the number of arrests made by the New Orleans Police Department. We all agree that we cannot arrest our way to a safe community. Some have made the argument that police make too many arrests and focus on non violent crimes.

Here is the truth. The arrest numbers are steadily decreasing. In 2004, there were 134,000 arrests. In 2007 there were 86,500. But in 2008, even as our population increased to 75 percent of pre-Katrina, arrests were down even more, to 84,000. Our police department is using smart policing strategies to help lower crime.

Another key crime fighting element is enhanced technology. As promised last year, all 242 crime cameras were repaired. These cameras are also working in coordination with 22 traffic safety cameras that have been installed at intersections. We also have 109 cameras in police cars and 350 hand-held cameras that record evidence on crime scenes. All 723 cameras work together to enhance public safety.

Another new tool in our arsenal of high tech police equipment is tasers. These devices have automatic video recording when activated. We currently have 350 on the streets and an additional 500 have been ordered. They are proving to be an important equalizer, particularly for officers of modest stature. Since related injuries are down formerly reluctant officers are now requesting the devices – even though they cannot receive them until after being tasered themselves.

Let me close this section on public safety by sharing with you some facts about violent crime. We have already discussed high profile violent events so now its time to better understand the actual trends so we maintain our balance and perspective.

The data shows significant downward trends in the number of violent crimes committed in our city.

In fact, there has been a dramatic reduction in violent crime in New Orleans since 1994. That year, more than 12,000 violent crimes were committed. In 2008, that had decreased to 3,000. Slide show.

Let us stay focused on what is working and rally more on youth, mental health, and drug rehabilitation. Now is not the time for us to get frustrated and start blaming each other. Remember the song the choir sang, I need you, you need me, I need you to survive.

### **Economic Development**

I would like to briefly touch on economic development and job creation. As mentioned earlier, we have more than \$20 billion in construction that is driving an economic boom. Our tourism industry is holding its own during this national recession but must consolidate in order to compete in the future.

Last year I led a delegation to Panama and we are now implementing a plan to link the Port of New Orleans with a deep water facility near the Gulf. Speaker of the House Jim Tucker has done a great job of championing legislation that is moving as we speak.

Armstrong International Airport continues to grow domestically. Our focus now is international flights. We landed routes to Mexico and Honduras on AeroMexico. And we are aggressively pursuing direct flights to Cuba and are in active discussions with a major airline on becoming a hub for more direct flights to Central and South America.

In New Orleans East we have signed purchase and/or development agreements on the Plaza, Grand Theater, Methodist, and Lakeland Hospitals. New incentives, a TIF, will be implemented within the next 60 days to drive these developments to completion. We are also making great progress in Gentilly in the Pontchartrain Park community. We have site control of the nearby shopping center; we are ready to restore the Joe Bartholomy Golf Course and Wesley Barrow Stadium. And Wendell Pierce's development team is building more than 200 LEED certified homes.

Downtown development continues with the Saints, \$400 million of Superdome enhancements, Dominion towers/New Orleans Center remodeling, Hyatt Regency redesign, Sanger Theatre renovations, and Fairmont/Waldorf Astoria Hotel opening.

I am pleased to announce that the city has signed a firm letter of intent to purchase the Chevron Building. We intend to move City Hall into this newer, energy efficient building. This revives the vision that was announced by the Pritzker Company right after Hurricane Katrina that linked the Superdome and the New Orleans Centre to a new green space modeled after Chicago's Millennium Park.

Finally, we continue to enhance our city and the tourist experience by surrounding the French Quarter with new and updated assets. The Riverfront development will break ground by year end. We already talked about further enhancements to Armstrong Park. We will continue to upgrade Canal Street. And finally, we are moving forward with street car extensions on Convention Center Blvd and Loyola Avenue to the Union Passenger Terminal.

## **Race Relations**

Now I want to cover an area where we must improve or we may lose our balance forever. The question of the moment is: Do we have a racial divide in the city of New Orleans? Let's look at the facts. Pre Katrina we had the Razzoo's incident, a District Attorney discrimination lawsuit and judgment, and a mystery shoppers study that documented that 57 percent of black customers on Bourbon Street were charged higher prices than their white counterparts.

Now let's run down the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Before the flood waters were drained out of the city there were national media reports that it may be time to socially reengineer the city's population. Next we debated shrinking the city's footprint, which would have disproportionately affected certain citizens. Some questioned whether New Orleans should be rebuilt at all. Others said the recovery dollars should not be managed by democratically elected leaders. Some in dry areas resisted taking in citizens from flooded areas with cries of "not in my backyard". Finally, an election was forced with displaced citizens still disoriented and prohibited from an easy voting process. We fought each other, blamed each other, vilified certain leaders, targeted and defamed some, and have come to the point where trust in the city is at a very low level. Sorry, but this is the naked truth.

Some other key questions are: Five years from now, what will we say about ourselves? What will honest, objective historians write about all of us? Did we come together after facing the ultimate challenge? When local garbage contractors stepped up to make our city the cleanest it's ever been, did we support them or undermine them? Why did national TV host Cokie Roberts, daughter of our beloved Lindy Boggs, blast our local media for, and I quote "fanning racial tensions over trivial matters?" We can correct this if we are honest and committed to change.

A recent university poll as presented claimed "the racial divide is not that big a deal." However, if you turn to page 10 of this poll, you will find that 74% of all citizens said race relations is a major problem facing our city. Just look at some of the blogs and listen to certain talk radio shows. Several weeks ago, the New York Times quoted a so-called local expert as boldly saying every white person in the city hated me, an African American Mayor who represents the entire city. Why paint so many with the same brush? I know for a fact that all white people are not filled with such hate.

I know this road to recovery has not been easy. We have had more than our share of challenges, heartbreaks, obstacles, citizens giving up, leaders quitting, and we have had more hurricanes bear down on us. I have had my share of wins and a few loses. I have changed a lot and moved a lot of people's cheese.

I have made some tough, sometimes unpopular decisions. To lead effectively, you must sometimes tell people what they need to hear and not what they want to hear. Sometimes you have to go against the grain and upset powerful people. Sometimes you have to cuss a little to get people in power to help suffering citizens. Sometimes you have to stare greed in the face and say "No, everyone has a right to return to this city, especially if they own property." Sometimes you have to stand up to the double standards and do what you think is right for all people and not just a chosen few. And yes, sometimes you have to give a very scared part of our citizenry comfort by using a P-funk metaphor to let them

know regardless of what they are reading or hearing in the national news that they are welcome back to the city they love. You have to risk being misunderstood to get momentum going. Unfortunately some went from misunderstanding to frustration to misguided hate. We are better than that.

After all, our country saw our struggles with Hurricane Katrina and moved to a better place. In my humble opinion, Katrina exposed America's soft underbelly, issues of poverty, class, and race associated with most urban cities. Unfortunately we were the reality TV show that opened eyes everywhere.

When people around the country saw us struggle in a flooded city they were stirred to action.

They prayed for us. They gave money. They wrote letters to editors. They called their congressmen. And they took in strangers from New Orleans and got involved in easing our pain.

And they wanted to see real change. There were consequences in political leadership and some never recovered their balance.

The good news is America, as a country, recovered her balance and saw an opportunity to change for the better. As you know, we recently elected a new president. President Barack Obama. Yes, it really happened.

I mentioned earlier that I kept noticing the number four coming up during the presidential election. Remember I looked it up and the number four means balance, completion.

Prior to this election, our country was very much out of balance. Our economy was in decline. We were in a war under false pretenses. Our standing around the world had fallen to an all-time low.

Then this past November 4<sup>th</sup>, change came to America. We elected the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, President Barack Obama. Forty four years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Forty years after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. November 4<sup>th</sup> was America's breakthrough moment. A new day.

By the way, guess when President Obama's Birthday is, August the what? 4<sup>th</sup>. The number four, balance. A more perfect union.

And American are feeling good about this election. The most recent New York Times/CBS Poll found that 2/3 of Americans say that race relations in the U.S. are good.

But just as America has regained her balance, so must New Orleans.

One of the biggest challenges to our rebuilding together is that there is a whole lot of negative noise in our community. Not everyone, but a segment that is very skilled at getting their opinions and perspectives in the public domain. They dominate the news, the

blogs, and talk radio. They are the people on the fringes – the 10% on the far right and 10% on the far left. They most often are heard above the remaining 80%, the rest of us who don't subscribe to their very narrow ways of thinking. But the voices in the middle, the reasonable ones, get drowned out by the extreme distortionists.

It's time for New Orleanians in the middle to step forward forcefully. Most people who have moved back are not here just because of physical structures and the architecture of this city. They are back because of all of you, the citizens who give us balance. I need you. You need me. We are all part of one big family. We are all New Orleanians. We are French, African, Native American Indians, Italians, Germans, Spanish, and Greek. A New Orleanian may also be Canadian, Mexican, Vietnamese, Chinese, or any other ethnic class. We are all One New Orleans. We are many different spices all blended together that makes us special, creative, and a bit eccentric. We are Christians, Jews, Buddhist, or Muslim. We are unique, natural, and cool.

I once read in a very special book that "if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. So if a city is divided against itself, that city cannot stand or grow to its full potential. Let us challenge the negative people and turn the dialogue on loving all New Orleanians. I am aware of some differences that separate our respective ideas about life, social relations, economics, and how the affairs of our city must be conducted. We also differ sometimes on how to interpret the daily realities that negatively impact the lives of most New Orleanians. But you as citizens and I as Mayor share a common responsibility: to shoulder the burden of shaping our present and molding the destiny of this great city. Regardless of class, gender, race, sexual orientation, political affiliation, or Mardi Gras krewe, whatever New Orleanians do or refrain from doing right now will determine the future of our children and grandchildren.

We have come too far now to let a few destroy what we have collectively built since our beloved city was nearly destroyed. Let's forgive each other and move on. I wish nothing but peace and good fortunes to everyone. I stand here tonight and say I forgive everyone who has done me any wrong, and I ask that you forgive me if I may have done you any wrong. If the 13- and 14-year-olds had done this, then they both would be playing together in the park today. No more tit for tat. After all, we are all humans and God is not through molding us yet. We must all come together and heal our city.

If we don't, we stand to lose the window that is open. We stand to miss our Atlanta or break through moment. We could gain total balance on the infrastructure side and be out of balance on the "people structure" side.

I refer to the Atlanta moment as that unique moment when a city can seize its opportunities or cast them aside. Every city that has seen positive growth has one.

In Birmingham, it was the moment that allowed that City to leave behind its history as a dying, steel producing community to develop a major medical and research district.

Charlotte's moment transformed it into the second largest banking center in the country.



Atlanta's moment came when Mayor Maynard Jackson demanded that African American workers and contractors receive their fair share of business at the soon-to-be-constructed Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport. He put the development on hold until everyone realized that economics trump race and Atlanta's motto soon became, "We're too busy to hate." Atlanta moved from being a city with widespread poverty to one where Fortune 500 companies were eager to locate. Small and minority businesses grew and a significant diverse middle class emerged.

It transformed Atlanta, making it a symbol of the New South and that airport is now the busiest in the world!

Let me be very clear: This is not about us becoming like Atlanta, Charlotte, or Birmingham. New Orleans will always retain its unique culture, spirit, and history.

But we must use this opportunity to become a better city, a place where businesses want to locate, where our children can succeed right here at home, where wealth is created for all. A city of opportunity. That's our true potential.

New Orleans, we can change things if we really want to. This is our moment to break through and create that once in a lifetime jazz masterpiece. Other cities found their balance and created their break through moment. Now it's our turn.

But first we must have honest dialogue that involves every segment of this community. But talk is not enough, as we must also develop a realistic plan for change that includes timelines and checkpoints so we can monitor our progress. I stand here tonight to fully support the initiative with America Speaks that Councilmember Cynthia Morrell is leading. This critical effort has to include sessions for the overall community, one for the business community, and one for the media. The culmination should be all three groups coming together to finalize the action plan.

### **Closing**

In closing, the table is set. We have infrastructure development to support a world class city. Our hurricane protection system is the best it's ever been and getting better everyday. Our neighborhoods are getting stronger. Our recovery strategy to focus resources in target areas is working, and the city's investment of limited recovery dollars is triggering redevelopment and private investment. Our streets are being repaired. Parks, playgrounds and schools are being rebuilt. Our tourism related assets are being enhanced. The Superdome is getting its final face lift and tummy tuck. This will be right on time for our recently awarded Super Bowl in 2013. Go Saints!

This is our moment New Orleans. We can do this! We must gain balance on the infrastructure side and the "people structure" side. We can come together to reduce crime and build a safer community. This is our moment to cross that Katrina rainbow. Instead of the city having two days of cash in the bank, we sit strong with \$30 million in our emergency fund balance to address any rainy day. This is our time to create a future where we can

respectfully share political and economic power. This is our moment to diversify our economy with a state-of-the-art biomedical district, and a renewed relationship with Cuba that will allow for cultural exchange, oil company expansions and unprecedented port opportunities. This is our moment to nurture our young people to better respect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is our destiny to build upon the reasonableness of the majority, the 80% of us. We deserve a city that works for everyone. A city of opportunity for all. This is our time. Let us not worry about who gets the credit.

There may be a worry out there that I may get too much credit for all they we have done together. Don't worry. That is irrelevant. I have been in the spotlight enough to last a lifetime. That is not really important to me as I live by something that my good friend Flo Schornstein shared with me some time ago.

She taught me a Chinese proverb that says, "When the best leader's work is done, the people say WE did it ourselves."

We're doing it, New Orleans! You are doing a great job. Keep up the good work. Now that's some naked truth. Amen.

Thank you for being here tonight.

Good night and may God continue to bless all of us.