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Elbows Together, Hearts Apart: Institutional Reform, Economic Opportunity and Social Trust in Post-Katrina New Orleans

Michael A. Cowan[1]

> *A "social trap" is a situation where individuals, groups, or organizations are unable to cooperate owing to mutual distrust and lack of social capital, even where cooperation would benefit all.*[2]
>
> —Bo Rothstein

I. THE SOCIAL TRAP NAMED NEW ORLEANS

If you have a taste for the sheer dazzling differences of humanity, the music, food, dialects, arts, architecture, and worship of New Orleans spread a feast for the spirit every day. If you can stand to face the mixture of good and evil in America's soul, that is also in plain sight here daily. I write these words after a day that began with the chairman of our city council's criminal justice committee informing me that only one place in the world currently lives with more murders than New Orleans, and ended with the weekly rehearsal of Shades of Praise—the joyful interracial gospel choir that has become a living symbol of bridging the racial divide.[3] Such lows and highs make up the days of New Orleanians. On August 29, 2005, this wonderful, terrible city was plunged into chaos when Katrina's winds brought down the poorly built walls between us and the water all around us. This contemporary morality play was staged for the whole world: our shameful brokenness and lack of leadership on display for all to see and judge—harshly.[4]

Contrary to popular local and national opinion, the fundamental problem facing New Orleans is not poverty or geographic vulnerability[5]—nor is it racism.[6] Those are symptoms of a deeper social malady. The underlying social dynamic that has kept our city in steady decline for the past fifty years is a "social trap"—the inability of government, business, and civic leaders to negotiate with integrity across racial, religious, and class lines to bring into being a city that works better and more equitably for all groups. In New Orleans, groups divided by ethnicity and class are caught up together in a downward spiral of chronic conflict over where we should be going and how to get there. Both locals and outsiders typically misattribute our social dilemma to racism, the indifference of the wealthy, or pathology in poor black families; but in fact an enduring intergroup impasse over goals and action is the underlying social trap in which New Orleans is caught.[7] The three long years since Katrina drew an indelible line in New Orleans' history have done us the painful service of keeping a bright public spotlight on our social trap. And while the uniqueness of the Crescent City is legendary, and rightly so, what plagues our body politic is by no means our challenge alone: the incapacity of elected, business, and civic leaders to compromise and act across cultural and class lines for the common good is *the* American dilemma.[8]

A visible thread weaves its way through the fabric of complexity-bordering-on-chaos that is post-Katrina New Orleans: we see progress when enough members of different groups partially escape the inertia of our social trap by achieving a measure of consensus about what to do on concrete matters like criminal justice reform and then by acting on that agreement, and paralysis when they do not. I begin this article by retrieving an image of the world as it should be that was forged in the crucible of America's finest hour (thus far), an image with a powerful message for those caught in traps of mistrust. I describe the underlying conflicts in understanding problems, selecting goals, and choosing methods of change that continue to plague the recovery of New Orleans and limit her future. I

present three ways of thinking strategically about how to free a city from a social trap. And finally, I recount the most promising attempts that New Orleanians have ever made to move beyond our divisions to shared social action through the vehicle of an emerging network of diverse leaders and citizens who are basing our strategy for change on one of the three strategic models.

Out of and because of the devastation wrought by Katrina, New Orleans is on the threshold of becoming for the first time more than the sum of her extraordinary parts—a city where government serves all citizens efficiently, ethically, and fairly; where an economy affords opportunity to all who are willing to invest, work, and learn; and where intergroup trust transforms crippling divisions into powerful unity for the common good. The well being of the whole city including members of all her differing groups hangs in the balance. And a powerful lesson for America about diminishing the social killer named poverty and banishing the social fiction named "race" awaits the outcome.[9]

II. ELBOWS TOGETHER, HEARTS APART

In Nashville, two days after Christmas in 1962, with Jim Crow dying but not yet dead, Dr. Martin Luther King issued a prophetic challenge:

> [W]hen the desegregation process is one hundred percent complete, the human relations dilemma of our nation will still be monumental unless we launch now the parallel thrust of the *integration* process. . . . In the context of what our national community needs, desegregation alone is empty and shallow. We must always be aware that our ultimate goal is integration, and that desegregation is only a first step on the road to the good society. Integration is creative, and is therefore more profound and far-reaching than desegregation. Integration is the positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of [all] in the total range of human activities. Integration is genuine interpersonal, intergroup doing.

He then went on to declare his foreboding about an America desegregated but not integrated:

> We do not have to look very far to see the pernicious effects of a desegregated society that is not integrated. It leads to "physical proximity without spiritual affinity." It gives us a society where . . . elbows are together and hearts are apart. It gives us spatial togetherness and spiritual apartness.[10]

Where do New Orleanians find ourselves today? Exactly where Dr. King feared we might: racial segregation and discrimination have been illegal for the past half century, yet the human relations dilemma of our very diverse city is indeed monumental. In post-Katrina New Orleans, as elsewhere in America, our elbows may be legally together from nine to five, but with the notable and not insignificant exception of Saints games in the Superdome, our hearts remain largely apart.

Dr. King dreamed, worked, and died for an America where members of all groups would engage in acts of "genuine interpersonal, inter-group doing." *Inter* means "between" or "among"; *doing* means "acting." So "genuine interpersonal, intergroup doing" means members of diverse groups not ignoring or shouting at each other and not just analyzing racism, classism or other *–isms*, but reasoning, compromising, and acting wisely and justly together on concrete matters of common interest, like safe streets and good public schools. Dr. King's vision of the America that should be is people acting together with integrity for the benefit of all, building a world where we judge others and are judged not by the color of our skin but by the content of our character, as revealed by our actions.[11] His cherished name for that American dream, which he discovered in the writings of the American philosopher Josiah Royce, was the "Beloved Community."[12]

The experience that Royce's biblically resonant phrase captured for Dr. King came from his lifelong membership and ordained service in the Bible-centered black church. In that milieu, his vision of the world as it should be was deeply shaped by the Jewish prophets. How often and how powerfully

did we hear him retrieve for us the troubling words of Amos: "Let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream"?[13] The vision of righteousness from the great Jewish tradition shaped Dr. King's moral compass and holds particular meaning for New Orleans and other divided communities right now. According to the biblical record, in times of trial, when gathering clouds of external threat filled the horizon of the chosen people with despair and there seemed no way out, God's spirit would come upon His people through anointed leaders.[14] Under their spirit-filled leadership, three things happened. First, the system of justice was restored to reliable and proper functioning for all. Second, mercy, understood not just as helping those in need but also providing for fuller participation of the marginalized—the widow, the orphan, the outsider—was undertaken as obligatory. Third, those who had renewed their commitment to the communal practice of justice, mercy had a renewed and powerful experience of God's presence among them.[15]

The same three Beloved Community challenges—creating just public institutions; opening economic opportunity to all who are willing to invest, work, and learn; and recognizing and learning to recognize each other as fellow creatures of the same God and fellow citizens of the same democracy—are the very ones facing New Orleans (and America) today. The genuine interpersonal, intergroup doing that we must undertake to address those challenges now is not a replay of the movement politics of the civil rights era, although it will likely require its movement moments. Nor is it simply an exercise in individuals pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps, although individual rights and responsibilities are at the heart of social change in a democracy.

Instead, the key to surmounting today's challenges is increasing the capacity of bridge-building leaders to convene government-business-civic partnerships that embrace the maximum degree of diversity possible without losing their capacity to act effectively on specific matters of common interest, like safe streets and good schools.[16] These partnerships

must create concrete plans for addressing specific issues based on demonstrated successes elsewhere and then mobilize a broad and deep constituency to see that they are implemented. Every plan of action will include specific ways of holding government officials, business and civic leaders, and ordinary citizens accountable for doing their respective parts. Every group that is willing to cooperate and compromise in this public work will contribute to and benefit from the genuine interpersonal, intergroup action required for success.

III. WITHOUT A SHARED VISION: LIFE IN THE BIG UNEASY

Why have New Orleanians, both before and after Katrina, been unable to create and implement plans for our future that will benefit all? In the ancient book of wisdom called *Proverbs* we read, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."[17] A people's vision cannot be separated from its own interests nor from those of the others with whom it shares a world. Political philosopher Hanna Arendt notes that "the language of the Romans, perhaps the most political people we have ever known, used the words "to live" and 'to be among men' (*inter hominess esse*) or to die and 'to cease to be among men' (*inter homines esse desinere*) as synonyms."[18] To be political is to have interests (the word is from the Latin *inter* plus *esse*), which means to share a world with others who have other, and differing, interests. Without an appreciation of how their interests are inevitably interrelated, diverse ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic groups living in the same place are stuck in the trap of paralyzing social mistrust—caught in divisions that limit, damage, and kill.

Good quality of life for all in New Orleans requires fair and feasible plans to fix the many things that are strained or broken here. The shared vision we lack is not a master plan or an agreement to some abstract principles, but rather a pragmatic commitment to the just and efficient rebuilding of a broken city, with the details to be negotiated in an ongoing series of compromises. Our failures of leadership, endless delays, and lost

opportunities post-Katrina have only confirmed what observant New Orleanians knew before the storm: Our elbows are together but our hearts are apart. We do not share a common vision, and we are slowly perishing as a result. Beneath the shallow surface of "Laissez Les Bons Temps Roulez" New Orleans, what is most evident to us and the world is our deep, demoralizing divisions. These chasms block trust in fellow citizens and investment in shared public life. They create incentives for those who can to secede from public involvement by making private arrangements for their health, education, and safety. That leaves those without the financial resources to fend for themselves in a city and state where waste, fraud, and abuse have long prevented all citizens, especially poor and working-class families, from receiving what they pay for and deserve from government. The result is a city where, in varying degrees, all live with declining opportunities in a climate of growing fear and distrust.

Like its prestorm incarnation, I find post-Katrina New Orleans divided in six ways. The first division is *strategic*: since the civil rights era, our predominantly black political officials and mainly white business leaders have failed to come to agreement on policies and strategies for the changes for the well being of all; at the same time, the leaders of our faith, nonprofit, neighborhood, and higher education institutions have been inwardly focused and too segregated from each other to push political and business leaders to come to such agreement. The second division is *socioeconomic*: the gap between rich and poor grows, while the middle class declines. The third division is *structural*: the city-wide efforts of elected, business, and civic leaders are not well aligned with the local efforts of neighborhood-based leaders. The fourth division is *intergenerational*: a new generation of government, business, and civic leaders attempting to find its voice in New Orleans is not being actively supported and mentored by senior leaders. The fifth division is *ethnocentric*: in our obsessive preoccupation with each other, black and white New Orleanians have consistently failed to acknowledge the presence and seek the participation of our Hispanic, Asian,

Arab, and other cultural communities at the table of public life, to both their and the whole city's detriment; in a similar vein, Christian faith communities have been loosely connected, if at all, to other denominations, let alone to their Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist counterparts. Our sixth division is *ideological*: leaders and citizens of New Orleans disagree profoundly about what to do about the continuing effects of racism and poverty.

While New Orleans has continued to sink ever deeper into the quicksand of these mutually reinforcing divisions for half a century, sister cities that not long ago were her minor rivals economically and socially—including Atlanta, Houston, and San Antonio—have moved, imperfectly but decisively, to embrace a multiracial political and economic paradigm.[19] The proof that a community's political institutions make possible and limit its economic vitality, as I will argue below, is in the pudding of the vibrant regional economies of those three areas, which produce steadily expanding opportunities for businesses and individuals, and a deeper tax base to support necessary public services.[20] That social and economic vibrancy stands in stark and sobering contrast to the steady regression of New Orleans from a national economic powerhouse to a tourist destination with wasteful, corrupt, and discriminatory political institutions and chronically unrealized regional economic potential. While New Orleanians prolong our "racial" fight over a shrinking pie, diverse urban communities whose leaders and citizens have fashioned a good-enough political consensus face the much preferable challenge of negotiating about what to do with a growing one. While the African American middle class of New Orleans continues to diminish because of lack of economic opportunity for well-educated young adults, Atlanta has become what Ambassador Andrew Young calls, only partly in jest, "African American heaven." The "Big Easy," caught in the regressive web of strategic, socioeconomic, structural, ethnocentric, and ideological divisions I have described above, continues to be left in the dust by the "City Too Busy to Hate" and many others.

HURRICANE KATRINA

IV. CLASHING IDEOLOGIES, POLITICAL PARALYSIS

Among the divisions outlined above, the ideological one—our endless, fruitless, divisive debate about race and poverty—is the most intense and polarizing, and also the most potent in feeding the others. Those working in good faith to change our city for the better while disagreeing fundamentally about race and poverty typically end up treating each other as enemies or trying to avoid each other, instead of seeking common ground from which to oppose those whose agenda is to restore the dysfunctional pre-Katrina balance of political and economic power so as to serve well-connected insiders, black and white. Because I see repeated polarizations on issues like affordable housing, public schools, and community–police relations stemming directly from unacknowledged differences in perspective on race and poverty, I want to try to shed some light on what is keeping us stuck by identifying six groups with conflicting views on what to do about race and poverty in New Orleans. I regularly encounter proponents of these views in polarizing confrontations or attempts at mutual avoidance in city council, planning, and school board meetings where the city's future is being contested, leaving those intent on restoring the *status quo ante* free to operate unopposed against the commonweal.

1. *White racists*, like Louisiana's own David Duke, hold to the ideology of white superiority.[21]

2. Black and other *ethnic bigots*, like Minister Louis Farrakhan, publicly profess hatred for the "white devils."[22]

3. *Antiracists* are convinced that institutional (or structural) racism—defined as the political, economic, and cultural power to limit the life chances of people based on skin color prejudice—is *the* underlying social problem. They are certain that any effort at social change that does not take undoing institutional racism as the starting point will make racism and poverty worse, no matter how well intentioned its participants may be.[23]

4. *Individualists* assume that people need to pick themselves up by their own bootstraps and take advantage of the opportunities available to

them. They believe that the antidiscrimination and voting rights laws passed in the 1960s leveled the playing field so that all who are willing can compete and win. They are convinced that people who insist on bringing up race are looking for advantages, commonly known as "playing the race card." For them, race-based social policies are racism in reverse.[24]

5. *Black nationalists* conclude that African Americans and other peoples of color must always fend for themselves and are foolish to expect any real help from whites. Their conviction, born of four hundred years of history in America, is that their survival is, and always has been, in their own hands. They have learned that power concedes nothing willingly.[25]

6. *Pragmatists* believe that the way forward is not talking about race and poverty but rather working together side-by-side across ethnic and class lines to heal our destructive history by doing things like making the public schools work for all children regardless of race or class; fighting the corrupting effects of government waste, fraud, and abuse; and ensuring that police treat members of all groups with professionalism and respect.[26]

These six positions are generalized categories or "ideal types."[27] While some people closely resemble one or the other, most blend them in various combinations, for example, pragmatic individualists or antiracist black nationalists.

White racism and black bigotry feed cancerous divisions in our social body and must be opposed by those who uphold the sacred dignity and inalienable rights of all human beings. The other four views each hold an important grain of truth. The antiracists are correct that the ongoing history of race in America has created systematic and cumulative disadvantages for African Americans and others that to this day cause suffering and limit opportunities based on the color of their skin.[28] The individualists are correct that people are endowed with certain inalienable rights, are responsible for their actions, and have opportunities available to them which they choose to take or ignore.[29] The black nationalists are correct that African Americans, like members of any cultural group, need to do the

"organic work" of building the economic and political institutions, which give them the power to decide and act in their interests.[30] The pragmatists are correct that at some point those who are serious about addressing racism and poverty have to get busy building diverse coalitions aimed at changing what race and poverty have done, like fixing district attorneys' offices, public schools, adult literacy programs, and mismanaged and corrupt city government.[31]

In my experience of communicating with people who see the world predominantly through the four filters that hold grains of truth in New Orleans and elsewhere over the past fifteen years, I have found that each of the four partially valid perspectives also leaves its proponents with a predictable blind spot. They limit their effectiveness as agents of change by leaving them unable to identify potential allies with shared interests with whom powerful coalitions could be built. *Antiracists* offer no credible strategy for reversing the effects of institutional racism through organizing strategies aimed at addressing our critical social issues, and they regularly alienate potential allies by insisting that *their* way is *the* way and that anyone who doesn't see it *that* way is naïve or racist. *Individualists* do not recognize that there is no such thing as a human being unaffected by society, and, more pointedly, that millions still are born, live, and die burdened with accumulated social and economic disadvantages tied to the color of their skin and other prejudices.[32] *Black nationalists* fail to identify and recruit potential allies from other ethnic groups who can and would collaborate with them for the well being of all, based on enlightened group interest. *Pragmatists* can be so impatient to get things done that they unnecessarily alienate potential partners who have understandable reasons for wanting the historic effects of racism or other "-isms" to be acknowledged by prospective partners before agreeing to collaborate.

Leaders and ordinary citizens in post-Katrina New Orleans see each other through the lenses of these differing ideological perspectives, just as we did before the storm that upended our lives arrived. Like all human beings, we

come to the present moment with a set of assumptions about what is and should be happening based on our past experiences. Those assumptions make possible and limit how we can understand what is occurring right now and what the possibilities are. That understanding is our interpretation of the situation. It is not simply dictated by what appears outside us, nor by what is transpiring in our minds, but rather in the meeting between the world and our minds. Our interpretation of the situation makes possible and limits the action that we can take within it. Apart from dumb luck, no one's action in a situation can be any better than their interpretation of it.[33] My point is this: *the* underlying problem blocking recovery, prosperity and equity in New Orleans is the inability of antiracists, individualists, pragmatists, and black nationalists to reach compromises of integrity allowing them to act together against white racists, black (and other) bigots, and amoral opportunists of all colors, who have their own plans for the future of our city.

Absent the ability to deliberate and act together, good-faith efforts to address the enduring, intergenerational results of racism and poverty continue to degenerate into unrecognized, unnecessary, and fruitless ideological conflicts among antiracists, individualists, pragmatists, and black nationalists, punctuated by occasional provocative outbursts from white racists and black bigots. This failure to collaborate serves the interests only of unscrupulous opportunists of all colors. Repetitive, polarizing public fights in city council, planning, and school board meetings among those who see the same city through different filters keep New Orleanians from compromising and acting together fairly and wisely to undo gradually the damage of racism and poverty.[34] Before and after Katrina, New Orleanians have consistently demonstrated veto power, a capacity to polarize and organize *against* anything, typically along "racial" lines.[35] What is more difficult, and what we have thus far been unable to accomplish (with a few notable exceptions that I will present below) is organizing *for* the changes that will make New Orleans whole for the first

time. Three years after surviving as extreme a crisis as an American city has ever faced, we continue to struggle to make critical decisions locally, forcing us to default to state or federal government or the market. We can be relied upon to polarize and stop progress, but we find it very difficult to agree and act together on basic matters affecting us all—including strengthening the levees between us and the water surrounding us, repairing breaches of trust between citizens and police, providing quality education for all our children, and creating the quality of local government that would allow our regional economy to thrive.

V. Moving Beyond Ideological Divisions: Negotiation, Compromise, and Mutual Accountability

So what must we do to escape the inertia of our ideological divisions, to release ourselves from the trap of crippling social mistrust? We can start with the recognition that differing views need not be conflicting ones. Practical compromises on specific matters negotiated with integrity by those who differ lead to plans with strengths that advocates of any single view could not produce alone as well as buy in from the differing groups that forge them. A divided "we" becomes a diverse, united constituency capable of genuine interpersonal and intergroup doing not through "stakeholder" planning sessions led by consultants involving people with no real relationship; nor by creating artificial "vision statements"; nor by dwelling too much on the past; nor by avoiding different others; but rather by engaging in collective actions with a common purpose based on overlapping group interests. Our challenge, then, is to convene and sustain concrete conversations leading to compromises on specific plans for seeking the well being of the whole city across the lines of race, class, and religion on concrete matters like public safety, health, and education. Such compromises can only be fashioned by those who understand that their group's basic interests—safety, health, equity, prosperity, and peace—cannot be achieved unilaterally, but are always tied to the basic interests of

others. Whatever the particular issue at hand, our challenge is to replace our paralyzing ideological standoffs with pragmatic agreements on matters of common interest. We will only achieve successes on this road when proponents of the four approaches stop dismissing and demonizing those who hold the other views. Progressive leaders from all four groups do indeed have enemies—racists, bigots, and amoral opportunists using the devastation of Katrina for political and financial advantage—but we are not enemies. Rather, we are potential allies with unique assets to bring to the process of change who have not yet been able to make common cause by focusing on shared interests.

When proponents of all four valid but limited positions on race and poverty work at the discipline of listening to, learning from, and compromising with people of good faith who hold other views as they work together on issues of common concern, we will pick up the pace and extend the scope of the recovery of New Orleans; we will bridge ethnic and class divisions in the process. In addition to broadening and deepening the base of organized citizens available to push together for change, such an approach has the uncomfortable but liberating effect of making all of us more aware of the limitations of our own views. There is plenty of potential common ground in post-Katrina New Orleans, but we will not find our way to it unless we are willing to stop fueling fruitless, disrespectful controversies and start identifying and building on common, or at least compatible, perspectives and interests. In a city long caught in a social trap, shared vision will not be present and cannot be dialogued into existence at the beginning of a process of social change. Like social trust, shared vision can only emerge as a by-product of shared deliberation and action on matters of common concern.

A very important benefit for our body politic of getting past the impasse of chronically clashing perspectives on race and poverty is that doing so requires that we grow out of our biracial ethnocentrism, our narrow obsession with black/white conflict, which is what most people in New

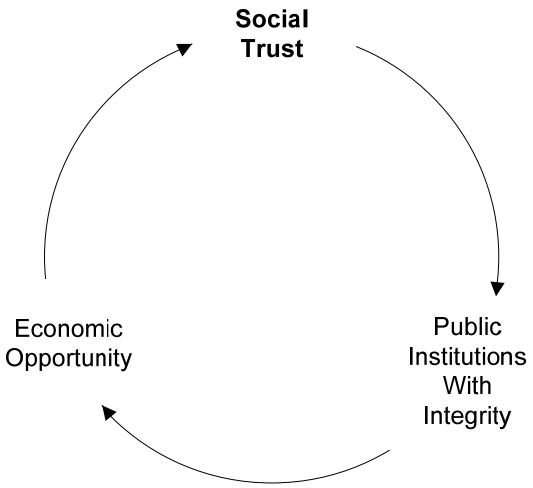
Orleans are thinking about when race and poverty come up. Members of the other cultural groups making up our city don't appreciate being treated like a distraction from someone else's fight, and rightly so.[36] As in ancient biblical communities in crisis, the livability of the whole city requires recognition of and participation by all the groups that comprise it.

So what strategic courses of action are available to elected, business, and civic leaders and those who follow them, who intend to bridge ethnic, religious, and class divisions by acting together to set a divided and devastated city on a path toward a decent life for all?

VI. Public Integrity, Economic Opportunity, and Social Trust

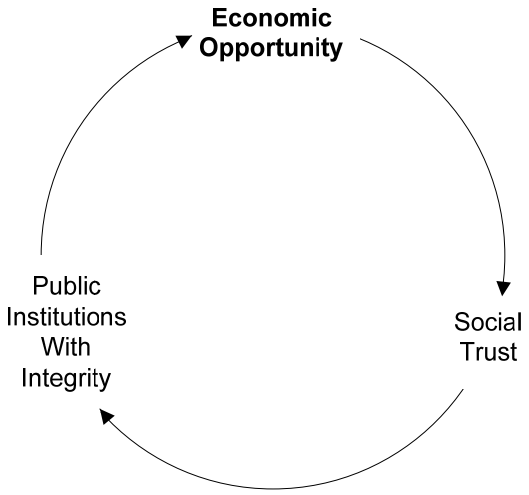
Comparative research on societies around the world demonstrates that when most citizens believe that public officials do their jobs fairly and efficiently and that economic opportunity is available to all who are willing to invest, work, and learn, they are also more likely to trust fellow citizens and cooperate for the common good.[37] Conversely, when most citizens believe that public officials routinely engage in or condone waste, fraud, and abuse, or that economic opportunity depends on insider connections, they will mistrust each other and refuse to cooperate even when doing so would benefit all. Social trust, economic inclusion, and good government are circularly related. When the circle moves negatively, public institutional integrity, economic opportunity, and social trust spiral downward together; when it moves positively, the three elements strengthen each other. While social scientists have made a compelling case that economic opportunity, honest and efficient public institutions, and social trust go together for better and for worse, they offer three contending recommendations about where to start if we intend to move the circular relationship among the three factors in the virtuous direction.

A. Starting with Trust



Those who start with social trust believe that if you want to build the public institutions necessary to support the creation of economic opportunity, you should bring together people that have been divided by encouraging the formation of groups based on shared interests, geographic proximity, social concerns, hobbies, etc. A civil society rich in "voluntary associations" provides the social glue that makes it possible for governmental and business institutions to function properly.[38] This approach to building social trust is direct: members of historically alienated groups must meet face-to-face in voluntary associations in order to create the social trust required for good government and economic growth.

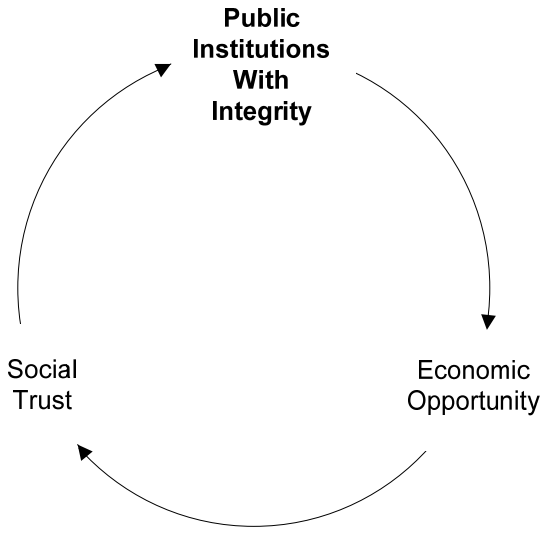
B. Starting with Economic Opportunity



Those emphasizing economic opportunity believe that markets left free to function will reward competence, create a growing pool of economic opportunities, and generate a stronger tax base to support necessary government services.[39] They are convinced that government attempts to create economic equality by forced redistribution schemes involving taxation of businesses and individuals or social policies like affirmative action that give advantages to members of some groups based on ethnicity or gender to make up for past discrimination interfere with and can destroy the market's job-creating power by distorting the dynamics of economic competition and chasing businesses into jurisdictions with transparent, consistent ground rules applied evenhandedly to all.[40] When local economies flourish, more households build assets, local governments have the resources to address public concerns, and social trust rises. But when business owners must "pay to play," that is, bribe local officials directly

with cash in envelopes, or indirectly with campaign contributions in order to get contracts or permits, or when public decisions are "steered" based on nepotism, ethnicity, or political affiliation, the economic base and the employment opportunities only it can generate, the tax revenues it produces, and social trust spiral downward together.[41] From this perspective, public institutions play a limited but crucial role in economic development: they establish and enforce transparent rules and norms for all, starting with property rights and equal treatment under the law, without which businesses and individuals will not invest in local communities and underlying inequalities cannot be addressed.

C. Starting with the Integrity of Public Institutions



Those whose starting point is the integrity of public institutions believe that assuring that those institutions are truly universal; serving all citizens

honestly (limiting corruption and cronyism), effectively (not wastefully), and fairly (without regard for ethnicity, wealth, or connections) is the most powerful way to create social trust in a community.[42] First a definition: "Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction."[43] They consist of formal and informal rules and mechanisms of enforcement. Institutions are the rules of the game and their enforcement; individuals and organizations are the players.

When public institutions play by the rules of efficiency by not wasting public resources, of honesty by eliminating corruption, and of fairness by treating all entitled to their services equally, they increase social trust indirectly by creating the ground rules necessary to give all their citizens value for their tax dollars and generate economic opportunity for more people.[44] Especially in circumstances where there have been significant ethnic, religious, or class conflicts and divisions, the likelihood that people in general will trust each other increases as members of all groups experience the elimination of waste, fraud, and corruption from public institutions like school boards and city halls. When those institutions function universally—effectively, honestly, and fairly for all—belief in "the system" fuels economic opportunity for all and breeds trust of other people in the community. When and insofar as public institutions fail to meet the standards of universality, legitimate government services and benefits are denied to citizens, economic opportunity is limited, and mistrust blocks and fractures relationships among people, reinforcing histories of division. A community's public institutions make possible and limit its economic vitality and opportunity, which in turn affects levels of trust among its various groups.

VII. BUILDING SOCIAL TRUST FROM ABOVE IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

As an active citizen leader in New Orleans since 1991, and one fully engaged in the effort to rebuild since Katrina, I am convinced that the future of our city hinges on whether our diverse leaders and citizenry will continue coming together to make public institutions—including but not limited to city government and the local criminal justice and public education systems—accountable for efficiency, ethics, and fairness. Without a framework of trustworthy public institutions, economic opportunity for all businesses and citizens will be severely limited, and without economic opportunity for all, we will never transcend our race and class divisions. The road to enhanced social trust is indirect. It runs through the reform of our public institutions necessary for equity of economic opportunity for all.

In the words of political scientist Bo Rothstein, "[s]ocial trust comes from above and is destroyed from above."[45] He adds,

> If it proves that I cannot trust the local police, judges, teachers, and doctors, then whom in society can I trust? The ethics of public officials become central here, not only with respect to how they do their jobs, but also to the signals they send to citizens about what kind of "game" is being played in the society. [46]

The behavior of mayors, city council members, district attorneys, police chiefs, judges, criminal sheriffs, sewer and water board members, and inspectors general is the most powerful source of the signals that businesses and individuals receive about the rules of the game in a community. The signals of these public leaders determine whether people feel that they can trust their government, members of other groups as well as their own, and even themselves.[47] Progress on economic inclusion and ethnic reconciliation can be realized most powerfully and quickly in New Orleans and elsewhere when leaders and members of different groups take the indirect route of reforming public institutions and then holding them accountable.

When public officials waste or steal taxpayers' money or favor particular individuals or groups with insider deals at the expense of others, the vicious spiral of bad government, inequality of economic opportunity and diminished social trust is reinforced. As noted above, New Orleans has been caught in that downward spiral for half a century. In the previous section, I argued that if we want to see greater economic opportunity for all businesses and citizens and build social trust among groups that have been divided, our most promising strategy for change is diverse citizen partnerships making public institutions operate efficiently, ethically, and fairly. I want to describe two well-advanced efforts by diverse networks of citizen leaders to do just that by initiating reform of two critical public institutions in post-Katrina New Orleans—city government and the police department.

Waste, corruption, and discrimination in local and state government have been and continue to be millstones around the neck of New Orleans. In January 2006, the Government Efficiency and Effectiveness Committee of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission recommended the establishment of an inspector general's office to combat all three.[48] An inspector general detects and prevents waste, fraud, and abuse in the expenditure of public funds. New Orleans needs an effective inspector general's office because most local citizens and business owners, as well as many state and national elected officials and private investors, rightly perceive our city government as poorly managed, wasteful, and contaminated by patronage, corruption and discrimination. Unless this perception is changed, local and national investors, both private and public, will continue to be reluctant to place their bets on the future of New Orleans. During the post-Katrina work of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, former Mayor Steven Goldsmith of Indianapolis emphatically warned members of the government reform committee that city government's basic role is to make businesses and individuals believe that it is in their interest to invest in the city's future.[49] The future of the city hinges on those investments. A powerful, effective

inspector general's office constitutes the best opportunity New Orleans has ever had to interrupt the waste, corruption, and discrimination that have always diminished economic opportunity for all and reinforced mistrust among groups.

New Orleans also faces the complex challenge of creating a just and efficient criminal justice system. For example, a recent intensive study of the New Orleans Police Department by national experts recommended strongly that the city recommit itself to a "community policing" approach.[50] This means that in neighborhoods throughout the city, police officers and community leaders would take the initiative to build the working relationships that will allow them to cooperate actively in preventing crime and apprehending and indicting criminals. Community policing is not simply an alternative patrolling technique to be applied unilaterally to neighborhoods by police officers; it is a change in the culture of policing and being policed that requires and creates the relationship of trust between citizens and police officers that allows them to solve problems together. Levels of trust between the police department and residents and leaders of some New Orleans neighborhoods are so low that many residents are unwilling to report criminal acts or testify against indicted parties because they feel they have been treated disrespectfully by police or they fear they will not be protected from thugs threatening to harm them if they do cooperate. In such a climate of pervasive distrust and fear, community policing has no chance of sustainable success. Around the nation, the most successful approach to the problem of antagonism and mistrust between citizens and police is an independent police monitor.[51] An independent monitor investigates, reports, and makes specific recommendations about improving how the police force treats citizens and visitors. New Orleans needs a police monitor now because lack of trust between citizens and police is among the most significant challenges we face in effectively addressing crime. The independent monitor can play a major role in

building the bridges of trust and cooperation in our neighborhoods that will make strong community policing possible and our streets safer for all.

Challenged by the recommendations on city government reform of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission in January 2006, city council members and the most diverse network of civic and business leaders that New Orleans has ever seen have aligned interests and worked together steadily for three years to authorize, fund, and implement the offices of inspector general and police monitor.[52] That work consisted of creating a diverse and informed constituency for both offices, actively supporting the city council members who introduced the necessary ordinances and budget proposals for both, encouraging the appointment of independent members of the ethics board charged with hiring the first inspector general, lobbying the state legislature for a law strengthening the inspector general's powers, introducing the founding inspector general to the city in an ongoing series of public meetings, and changing the city charter to protect the inspector general and independent police monitors from political interference by future mayors or city councils. *Who* did the sustained work to establish these two critical institutional reforms is as important as *what* we did. Without elected leaders, these reforms would not have happened; without business leaders, they would not have happened; without civic leaders, they would not have happened; without elected, business, and civic leaders representing the ethnic, religious, and economic diversity of New Orleans working together, these pivotal reforms would not have happened; and without our ongoing cooperative vigilance, they will not be sustained.

The most promising change in the social fabric of New Orleans resulting from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina is the emergence of expanding and deepening networks of diverse business and civic leaders working in active partnership with government officials to change specific things, including the establishment of the inspector general and independent police monitor. Those two are not our only reform success stories. Similar efforts by other action networks have also led to reform of regional levee boards,

property tax assessment, the district attorney's office, the courts, and the public defender's office. These partially overlapping networks are not operating from a master plan or guided by one group of government, business, or civic leaders. Instead, they focus on their respective interests but share a strategic and pragmatic commitment to getting important things done by seeking allies, including different perspectives and interests, compromising with integrity, implementing best practices from around the country and the world, and exercising the public discipline of holding each other as well as public officials accountable for keeping the promises we make to each other.

Diverse networks of civic collaboration leading significant, sustainable institutional changes on this scale are new to the historically divided city of New Orleans, and, in truth, unusual anywhere.[53] The underlying commitment that animates and orients the work of our reform networks is building a city together where public institutions do the business of all the people effectively, ethically, and fairly; economic opportunity grows for all who are willing to invest, work, and learn; and social trust replaces divisions, in a positive spiral benefiting all. Building that city together will be a struggle for years to come, but the effort is seriously underway, thanks in part to the radical disorganization and deep suffering wrought by Katrina. Building on these promising beginnings will require that we sustain and strengthen the kind of genuine interpersonal and intergroup doing by elected, business, and civic leaders that has already created an independent inspector general and police monitor. Lying immediately ahead of these new and vulnerable social-action networks is a minefield of potentially polarizing conflicts as they attempt to support the deep transformations of our public schools now underway, open the governance of the sewerage and water board and airport authority to public scrutiny, assure the provision of affordable health care and housing, and promote agreement on a legally binding master plan to govern future development in the city.

XI. GENUINE INTERPERSONAL AND INTERGROUP ACTION: THE ROUTE TO ONE NEW ORLEANS

In the three years since Katrina struck, those who live and work here have continually fielded a question from those who do not: How is your recovery going? My short answer is that the leaders and citizens of the city of New Orleans have been unable so far to achieve a working consensus about how to prioritize the rebuilding of our city and that failure has delayed and limited our recovery and added immeasurably to the disruption and suffering that all have endured, albeit not equally. With billions of dollars in public and private investment in the pipeline, we will eventually rebuild our physical structures and systems. New levees, schools, police and fire stations, hospitals, community health care clinics, shops, and stores will be forthcoming. As our "recovery" inches forward, vulnerable annually to another disastrous storm until Category 5 hurricane protection is in place (which itself depends on bridging our divisions), a key question remains for our government, business and civic leaders, and our citizenry, to answer: will the differing groups that make up the body politic of New Orleans act together so that our political and economic institutions are governed by rules of efficiency, integrity, and fairness, or will we allow them to continue to be riddled with waste, corruption, and discrimination? As daunting as the massive physical reconstruction we face is, the far more difficult challenge that confronts New Orleans is the same one that had badly strained the social fabric of our city before the storm: in sustained acts of genuine interpersonal, intergroup action we must refashion our public institutions to serve members of all groups efficiently, ethically, and fairly.

Like all Americans, the citizens of post-Katrina New Orleans must choose between continuing physical proximity without spiritual affinity—elbows together and hearts apart—or a mighty stream of genuine interpersonal and intergroup action for the common good. Just as all mighty streams begin somewhere, the healing of New Orleans starts with making our public institutions efficient, ethical, and fair. The diverse action

partnerships of elected, business, and civic leaders whose sustained, collective acts have given New Orleans an independent inspector general and police monitor, as well as other critical institutional reforms, have initiated what I believe history will one day judge to be the most important contributions ever made to our historic city. New Orleans is becoming a place where equal treatment and opportunity are available to all and where social trust gradually bridges race, class, and religious divisions. The new New Orleans will become a greater place to visit and a magnificent place to live. Where there is no shared vision, the people perish, but with elbows and hearts together in the service of the common good, they flourish.

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[1] The author is assistant to the president of Loyola University New Orleans; founding executive director of Common Good, a network of civil-society organizations seeking consensus on the rebuilding of New Orleans; and chair of the Human Relations Commission of the City of New Orleans. I want to thank Edward Chambers of the Industrial Areas Foundation for his mentoring and for energizing my social imagination about public life and leadership; Kevin Wildes, SJ, of Loyola University, Ben Johnson, Ludovico Feoli, and Richard Freeman of the Greater New Orleans Foundation, Byron Harrell of Baptist Community Ministries Foundation, and Gary Solomon of the New Orleans Business Council for their constant support of the post-Katrina experiment in social change called Common Good; Dr. John Lord Alderdice of Belfast for twenty-five years of transatlantic conversation and inspiration on the holy subject of peacemaking; Professor Clarence Stone of the University of Maryland for educating New Orleans leaders on the strengths and limitations of Atlanta's biracial governing regime; Ludovico Feoli of Tulane University and Bo Rothstein of Goteborg University, Sweden, for calling my attention to the relevance of the "new institutionalism" in political science to the rebuilding of New Orleans; William Julius Wilson of the Kennedy School of Government for pioneering analysis and personal encouragement on bridging the racial divide; Steven Goldsmith, Director of the Innovations in American Government program, also at the Kennedy School, and Maureen Griffin for three years of prompt responses to requests for information on national best practices in government reform; city council members Shelley Midura and James Carter, and inspectors general Christopher Mazzella of Miami-Dade County and Robert Cerasoli of New Orleans for pioneering work in the establishment of the first offices of inspector general and independent police monitor in New Orleans; Rick Heydinger, Beverly Stein, and the Public Strategies Group for wise counsel on reforming public institutions; and Jay Lapeyre, Ludovico Feoli, Dan Karnes, Richard Albares, John Comings, Fred Aigner, Jan Rieveschl, Michael Sartisky, Ben Johnson, Tom Fiutak, and Mike Gecan for critical readings of previous versions of this essay.

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communities in New Orleans. These sessions were convened expressly to hear from different ethnic groups and to "come together and thoughtfully look at those themes and make recommendations perhaps for policy, perhaps for certain problematic issues to promote more inclusion in the life of New Orleans." *Id.* at 5–6.

[37] ROTHSTEIN, *supra* note 2, at 106–17.

[38] ROBERT PUTNAM, ROBERT LEONARDI & RAFFAELLA Y. NANETTI, MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK: CIVIC TRADITIONS IN MODERN ITALY 181–85 (1994); ROBERT PUTNAM, BOWLING ALONE: THE COLLAPSE AND REVIVAL OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY 134–37 (2001).

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[41] Eric Uslaner, The Bulging Pocket and the Rule of Law 15–16 (Nov. 17–19, 2005) (paper presented at the conference, The Quality of Government: What It Is, How to Get It, Why It Matters) (on file with author) (available at http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/uslaner/uslanerbulgingpocketgoteborg.pdf); Bo Rothstein & Eric Auslaner, *All for All: Equality, Corruption, and Social Trust*, WORLD POLITICS, Oct. 2005, at 41, 47–48.

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[44] Id., at 27–35; ROTHSTEIN, *supra* note 2, at 108–09.

[45] ROTHSTEIN, *supra* note 2, at 199.

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[48] Report, Committee on Government Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, 20 Steps in the Right Direction (Jan. 19, 2006) (on file with author); *see also* Association of Inspectors General, http://www.inspectorsgeneral.org.

[49] *Id.*

[50] BROWN GROUP INTERNATIONAL, A STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE NEW ORLEANS POLICE DEPARTMENT 28–43 (2007).

[51] For an overview of a model police auditor system, see SAMUEL WALKER, THE NEW WORLD OF POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY 135–70 (2005).

[52] Gary Solomon chaired the Committee on Government Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission. Kevin Wildes, SJ, Janet Howard, and Una Anderson chaired subcommittees on ethics, taxing, and restructuring, respectively. C. Daniel Karnes was legal counsel and researcher. The author served as chief of staff and principal author of the committee's report. Steven Goldsmith and Maureen Griffin of the Kennedy School of Government gave technical assistance. Kenneth Ferdinand, Robert Montjoy, Bob Brown, Mark Drennan, Jackie Clarkson, Yvonne Mitchell-Grubb, and Jim Brandt were committee members.

[53] John Alderdice & Michael A. Cowan, *Metaphors for One Another: Racism in the United States and Sectarianism in Northern Ireland*, PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES, 2004, at 19, 31–36, *available at* http://shss.nova.edu/pcs/journalsPDF/V11N1.pdf. This article draws a parallel between racism in the United States and sectarianism in Northern

Ireland and argues for broad-based, cross-community organizing focused on matters of common concern as the preferred approach to dealing with both.