

Summary statement of Design Studio Project in New Orleans

Spring 06

First of all I want to thank Michael and the school for having me here today and making this much-needed event. It is the time that we need to understand what has happened and how to avoid it in the future. It is also the time for architects, designers to come forward to offer creative solutions, not just exterior decoration that we have been known for so many decades.

Let me start with this. This was not a natural disaster; it was a people made disaster from global warming to building in areas that were not protected. These disasters will continue around the world as the process of urbanization continues and discrimination against the poor and against different races continues. We must try to change basic issues that have cause this situation – not just rebuild or replace in people by putting them in harms way.

This is a call for action that this country has never seen before, a call to make right the conditions that so many people have lived under for so many decades.

More importantly, for me, the measure of a civilization or culture is not in the advances that have been made in technology, culture, education, health care, but more importantly how these advances can be shared by the largest part of the population. If the latest advances are only used by a few, then the civilization has failed, as it is the total population that must enjoy these new advancements.

What New Orleans has taught us with the “roof top of poverty” in this country is the clear understanding that a large proportion of our people do not share in the best that the country can provide. They are economically depressed and yes, racially discriminated.

Our country has the resources to provide the very best for all of our people, it is a matter of priorities and New Orleans should be at the top of this list. The budget for this is small compared to the costs of a war that is not helping this country or any other country.

We need to bring true democracy to the people that have been so badly affected not only from the hurricane but also from years of being neglected.

Now is the time to correct this situation and to make New Orleans a model for other parts of our population at every level including housing, health care, education, work opportunities and the ability to enjoy the very best of life.

Now is the time to not just “rebuild” but “newbuild” in a creative way to give the very best to the largest population.

The work of my studio for this term is directed towards this larger goal. It is entitled “Coming Together - Housing in New Orleans”.

The project for the semester is to design a demonstration project for a site near the French Quarter in New Orleans. The objectives of the project are the following:

- 1. To design more intense housing, community, educational and commercial facilities in 4 to 6 story buildings.**
- 2. To explore the “space between” buildings as a way of designing and shaping objects and provide places of “coming together”.**
- 3. To design at three scales - dwelling, cluster and overall.**
- 4. To design dwellings where the owners may be able to help build and gain a skill for employment as well as a connection with their housing**
- 5. To provide/design facilities that can help the residents to gain education and skills that can improve the quality of their lives.**

Since it is unclear how and where New Orleans will be rebuilt (it is not yet clear that all low areas should be rebuilt) the site chosen for this project is next to the French Quarter and was not flooded during the hurricane. Being in this location, we will look for clues from the dense part of the old city to design new housing without imitating the old. Special emphasis will be placed on designing around “three dimensional courtyards” for both community use and natural ventilation. Presently the site is a parking area and the parking will be kept but might be below the building and the housing could be higher than the existing land in case the area is flooded in the future. Total height of our

proposal is up to individual students but not to exceed 5 or 6 stories as determined by the Planning Commission.

We will be working with an NGO group called “The Urban Conservancy” that is trying to help rebuild New Orleans using local labor and providing jobs for residents as well as channeling the funds to New Orleans instead of large construction companies.

At the end of the studio we will invite community, city and NGO groups to our final review and organize the designs into a small publication to send to New Orleans.

It is the task of this studio to not only rebuild New Orleans but to build a new way of life that is better than was known before. It is the task of all in this room to contribute towards a new idea of the “architect”. Now is the time for us to come forward and show creative leadership.

Thank you.