



Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu

Inaugural Address

New Orleans

May 3, 2010

Prepared Remarks

I would like to begin my service to you with a prayer. Lord, thank you for waking us up this morning. Thank you for the gifts that you have so generously bestowed. Guide us by your wisdom, correct us with your justice, comfort us with your mercy, enlighten us with your understanding, make us patient in suffering, forgive us for our sins and help us to resist temptation in the future. Teach us to be generous, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not ask for reward except that of knowing that we are doing your will. Amen.

I would also like to thank all of the people who helped us survive, recover and rebuild.

To the first responders, to the millions of volunteers, the faith-based organizations, the American taxpayers, the cities that took in our evacuees, to the many nations of the world who came to our aid: the people of New Orleans thank you and offer our undying gratitude.

To Mayor Nagin and Seletha thank you for your service to our city during a most difficult time. To all the dignitaries gathered here today, to friends and family and to all the citizens of New Orleans, young and old alike, each an equal shareholder in this city and in the greatest nation on earth: We must begin by acknowledging the families of those who perished in the drilling tragedy.

You must know that you are in our thoughts and prayers. We stand with you, and the first responders and our neighbors on the front lines of this disaster.

As we begin a new day, we are ever mindful of a new challenge that looms off our shore. Sheets of oil coursing through the waters of the gulf threaten our coast, our waterways, and our lakes.

The spill threatens the wildlife of the wetlands and the fisheries that feed our nation. In fact, it threatens the economy and the very way of life of a people on the mend.

The extent of the damage remains unknown, but of this we can be sure. Every practical resource of the government and the private sector will be brought to bear to deal with this catastrophe.

We will demand nothing less. And I can assure you, I will do everything in my power to protect the interests of the people of New Orleans and hold the responsible parties accountable for the damage done.

Moving forward, we have a responsibility to not only shield and clean up our shoreline, but to restore our coast once and for all. Come hell or high water, and we've had plenty of both, New Orleans will survive. But our future is not just about survival. It's about redemption. The journey that we begin together today with one single step is already etched in the footprints of history laid down by those who have gone before us searching for a better tomorrow.

Whether they be the footprints of Bienville, Claiborne, Andrew Jackson, Jean Lafitte, P.B.S. Pinchback, Homer Plessy, Ruby Bridges, our mothers and fathers, those footprints of our

proud heritage set the course to our promising future. The pathways pursued and the choices made by those who have gone before us have made us who we are today.

In like manner the pathways we pursue and the choices we make will forever inform and affect those who will follow. Who are they that will follow? They will not be nameless nor faceless apparitions from far away places of which we know not. They will be our children - our own flesh and blood born from us and through us - to whom we owe the most solemn and sacred commitment of service and sacrifice so that they may inherit a city that is not ashamed of its sordid past, but worthy of its great promise. A great promise not yet fulfilled to create a city of peace where neighbors can live free from fear of assault at the hands of another.

Where more babies live past their first birthdays. Where our children sleep peacefully at night in their own warm beds rather than die on the cold hard streets of the city.

WE MUST - TRANSFORM THE CULTURE OF DEATH ON THE STREETS OF NEW ORLEANS TO A CELEBRATION OF LIFE AND FREEDOM JOY AND POSSIBILITY.

A great promise not yet fulfilled to create a city in which we secure for every child their right to be well taught and well learned so that they become self reliant, self sufficient and creative beings capable of giving back to the world more than the world gave to them.

A great promise not yet fulfilled to provide every citizen the opportunity to work with dignity, to earn a decent living, to provide for themselves and their families and have an equal opportunity to share in the American dream.

A promise not yet fulfilled to restore our coast, strengthen our levees, build sustainable communities back smartly so that this piece of earth that we are the stewards of will actually still be here for generations to come.

A great promise not yet fulfilled, where all of the people of New Orleans irrespective of race or religion creed or color, gender or sexual orientation share opportunity and responsibility, risk and reward, political power and economic prosperity.

We must come to the table of democracy as equals, share communion by seeking the common good, improve ourselves by aspiring to find higher common ground and be content to part from the table of democracy with only that which our hard work and good will earn us.

A great promise not yet fulfilled to have a government in which those holding positions of power and influence are committed to serving the people; not themselves And, which reestablishes the sacred covenant between citizens and public servants that embodies the principle of an honest day's work in exchange for an honest day's pay.

A great promise like a new born baby in the cradle not yet fulfilled not yet untethered from the nurturing breast of mother history not yet standing on its own, not yet free from the dangers of those lurking who wish to end its days prematurely to create a city where every

citizen will be judged not by how much is in their pocket but by how much is in their head and in their heart, not by what they destroy but what they create, not by who they divide but by who they unite.

This promise, New Orleans, will only see life when we learn to love our neighbors as we would have them love us.

Who is your neighbor? Your neighbor lives on Audubon Place on Clouet Street Wright Road Gentilly Boulevard Carrollton Avenue Algiers Point. Your neighbor lives in downtown, uptown, Pension town, Gert town in back of town. She works on the top floor of One Shell Square; he works in the basement of City Hall. Your neighbor looks just like you and nothing like you at all.

We will only come to know our neighbors when we tear down the walls that have separated us for so long, and begin to build the bridges that will bind us for eternity. Too many of us grew up next door to each other but live worlds apart. We need to build bridges that are well lit and well traveled between Rex and Zulu; the Lawn and Tennis club and Stern Tennis Center; Women of the Storm and the Katrina Warriors; Greater St. Stephens and Holy Name of Jesus Church; Ponchartrain Park and English Turn; Lower Ninth and Lakewood South. .

We all need to spend less time apart and more time together fighting the common enemies that threaten us all. We have paid a heavy price for our inability or unwillingness to come together.

So many of our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles have been part of a great exodus - searching for better lives elsewhere taking not only our history and our progeny but our future as well.

This mass exodus from this Deep South Mecca began as far back as Reconstruction not Katrina and continues through this moment. To all those who have gone away, it is time for you to come home.

TODAY, THIS DAY, WE MUST LAY DOWN THE OPPRESSIVE BURDEN AND DYSFUNCTION OF RACE AND LIFT UP, FOR THE WHOLE WORLD TO SEE, THE POWER, THE ELEGANCE AND THE RICHNESS OF DIVERSITY.

The richness of diversity is manifest so clearly in our culture - a beautiful mosaic that only we in New Orleans have been able to create. Our music, our food, our joy of life; our clear understanding of the simple fact that culture means jobs, livelihood and just sheer fun separates us from the rest of the world and makes us the soul of America.

This place we call home is pregnant with possibility and promise, yet frustrated with failure, filled with anxiety, crippled by the fear that we will never find our way out of the desert and into the Promised Land.

We have come to expect less of ourselves than we should lost faith in ourselves when we should not. No more. Hope springs eternal, but must be more than a distant dream. Hope alone doesn't build a city. People do. We must be the city where hope hits the streets.

Throughout history, the people of the world have suffered greatly at the hands of natural and man-made disasters. Either by earthquake, fire or flood, oil spill, great cities have been torn asunder and rebuilt.

From Lisbon to London, Tokyo to Tangshan, San Francisco to Chicago, great cities have transformed disasters into instruments of progress. But as the last five years have shown us, the historical narrative of disasters as catalysts of progress is being challenged on the shores of this nation and on our sacred soil. We now know that progress is not inevitable, nor certain.

It will not come on its own.

And it certainly will not come without a price. Every civilization that failed to learn the lessons of the past and failed to pay its dues properly owed has lost its place in history and will be swamped by times onward march. We cannot make that mistake. We will not turn away from our task and our time. We must change course. Change must come to this troubled yet beautiful, this impractical yet lovely, this gorgeous yet challenged place we call home.

But, change does not begin in the palace of the Pope, the halls of Congress, the rose petaled garden of the White House, or the marbled walls of a Wall Street boardroom. Change, real change, transformative change, enduring change comes from the streets. Change starts here. Change starts now. It is true that we have called this great Nation to do its part to rebuild our city.

We will hold them and everyone else to their responsibilities to protect, clean up and rebuild our coast. To rebuild our houses. To repair the damage done when the levees broke.

We have asked for help. We will accept it if it comes. But we must also know that our survival begins and ends with us. We know that we are first and last personally responsible for ourselves, our homes, our families. If we want others to help us we must help ourselves first.

We should have no fear.

There is nothing broken here that cannot be fixed. No problem here that cannot be solved. No offense between us that cannot be forgiven. No breach or divide that cannot be repaired. The hard truth is that the path will be long and arduous require sacrifice, patience, and endurance.

However, during our journey we will be sustained by the knowledge that what we build will be not for ourselves but for the ages. To do anything less to walk away to refuse to engage to deny the obvious to ignore the responsibility and yes miss the opportunity that lies before us

would be a sin for which we would never be able to atone. And, it all begins with one single step.

The first step is to declare that we are no longer recovering no longer rebuilding. Now we are creating. Let's stop thinking about rebuilding the city we were and start dreaming about the city we want to become. The world deserves a better New Orleans. People of New Orleans hear this - today is a new day, today is a new time.

Today New Orleans is a new place in heart in mind in body in soul in spirit. We will throw off the cloak of yesterday stand fast today and carry on our shoulders the yoke of tomorrow's challenge. We will face the future with courage with determination and with an unyielding commitment to lay down our self interests for the common good.

We will hear the voices that harken across the ages pay the dues we owe to history and dedicate ourselves to the proposition that failure is not our destiny and it will never be our legacy. We can win. You know we can do it. It's time for us to claim it own it and accept the awesome responsibility that history has laid at our doorstep. It all begins with one step. Get up off the ground New Orleans. Just one step. Rise off your knees New Orleans.

Just one step.

Be unbowed and unbroken New Orleans.

Take one step. Don't stop. One step. Don't turn back. One step. Keep going. One step. One team. One fight. One voice. One city. One single step.

May God bless the people of New Orleans. Let's get to work.