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New Orleans: Rebuilding With Confidence
New Orleans is like an eccentric old aunt. Her calm and pleasant veneer hides her unpredictable nature and her sometimes-ridiculous behavior. She is a combination of old-world gentility and outrageous decadence. Her cheerful demeanor is inviting. Her parlor is elegantly shabby, crowded with tasteful do-dads. Without warning, she suddenly jumps onto the table, rips off her blouse, throws her teacup through a nearby window and screams obscenities at her Chihuahua.
New Orleans prides itself as the “Most Interesting City in the United States” and the claim is justified. Famous for its Creole cuisine and fine restaurants, its Vieux Carre, night clubs and “Dixieland Jazz.” The city has a great deal to offer. Its sophistication “honky-tonk” and Southern Hospitality—all blended to make New Orleans a unique American City."
Introduction: Finding Inspiration

With the seemingly daunting task of finding a suitable, worthy, and challenging thesis topic, I at first went through them like Kleenex. A week of research, a new topic; repeated. Then amidst the chaos that was hurricane Katrina, the media did a poll—and asked people if they had ‘disaster fatigue’. I found this to be nearly humorous. The question essentially asks if what we have seen on TV is so much that we become numb to it—and we do not want to see or hear about it anymore. We just want it to go away. Our media attention spans
are extremely short, but that does not mean that we should just forget about it. The coverage of the south has now ceased for all intensive purposes. However, that does not mean that the problems have vanished.

My thesis project may not be the answer. Nevertheless, the mentalities it carries may be a small part of it. More than a physical project, it is a state of mind that must be used in order to restore faith in neighborhoods, cities, and entire governments. As a country, we have now realized that this is not just about physical destruction. It is about poverty, crime, hunger, drugs, racial discrimination; it is about health care, education, and general welfare of humanity.

Without being long-winded, I have accepted that I cannot know if what I will propose would be successful. However, through research, critical thinking, and careful planning, what is proposed is very unlikely to worsen the current condition of New Orleans and the Iberville Housing Project. (p.16) One of the egregious troubles with the Iberville complex is that it has isolated the poverty rather than encouraged a mixed-use, mixed-income development. These two elements are critical to what I am proposing, and essentially the largest non-physical difference between what was done over 70 years ago.

The project is not possible if we have no faith in the future. This may be a harsh reality, but I’ll end with what I began with: the problems exist—we can choose to ignore them and those who have to face them, or we can choose to try. No, I cannot guarantee success, but I think we can learn from mistakes and offer a higher quality of life to people who both need, and deserve it.
This presentation is a journey of discovery. I hope to treat you, readers, to a voyage through New Orleans before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. Before, relates to a fascinating place called Storyville, the present, to current day New Orleans (2005), while after relates to life at Historia—the name I have given to my development. Historia derives from its past site name Storyville, history meaning story, and speaks of its past, while informing its future.

You—the reader—has choices to make in your path through this presentation. You may read the sections as I intended them to be read, in sequential order. Or, you may choose to jump to page 10 to read the thesis simply as a story—one bourn of struggle, followed by a rebirth into life in Historia. The story, (which appears in this light text box throughout the presentation) follows one individual through the disastrous wake of Hurricane Katrina, adjusting to life without his wife, raising his daughter, and finally settling into Historia.

*all elements of narrative appearing in italics are actual first-hand excerpts from the hurricane survivors*
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*All photographs, diagrams, images, and text done by Josh Pabst unless otherwise denoted.
I was shaken. I thought it was my wife. Then I woke, I thought of my daughter.

Kara, my daughter, is only nine years old. She had been lying next to me. I wonder what was going through her mind when she felt the house shake.

When she saw my face, she began to cry.

Everyone thinks that it could never happen to them. I still don’t believe it happened to me. It’s been over two years now. And what I do remember was the moment Kara was born. I remember Monica—that was Kara’s mother—bearing down for the last push. I remember the head appearing. I was the first to see my daughter. Life these past couple of years has been bearable because of her. The moment your child is born is beyond surreal. You are immediately different. Your world is gone; it shrinks down to the dimensions—in this case anyway—seven pounds twelve ounces.
Hurricane Katrina

It is a bitter thing to view the photographs and videos of the refugees left behind in New Orleans, and to see that most of them were obviously poor and black. An anonymous e-mail from a rescue worker noted that those who did not evacuate were those who could not afford to evacuate: those who had no private car, no resources, and no people to turn to. Or you can choose to believe that a staggering number of people are just that stubborn. Katrina was not alone in her killing; her accomplice was terrible poverty.

In a bleak view, this project was born out of the immense struggle and hardships of others. Hurricane Katrina has quickly been placed at the top of a devastating heap of tragedies, disasters, and catastrophes that this country has endured. I am concerned that along with untold stories and lives, there will be many things that risk being lost when Hurricane Katrina wrapped her arms around the gulf shore—something much less tangible, but just as precious.

Having visited there myself several times, I think I can safely say that anyone who has stepped foot in the city knows that it is not just an American City, but a Caribbean one as well. It is a fascinating city with a mystique and air about it that makes me want to peel back the layers and discover more. Life is different here than anything that appears elsewhere in the United States. The city's architecture, the people, and the culture are all distinct to the place. The city has one of the richest cultures of any U.S. settlement, which was first Spanish, then French, and finally American. The city itself was a gumbo of sorts, many people, races, and ethnicities living side by side. Black, Italian, Irish, French, Cajun, Creole, Honduran, to name a few. You cannot just see the diversity, you can hear it; an anomaly in the way people talk; all the accents are enough to confuse even the people who live there.
New Orleans: rebuilding with confidence

Hurricane Katrina

The beautifully eclectic assemblage of people is what makes the place so rich in culture and gives the residents such a strong love for home. This assemblage is what is at the greatest risk of being lost as rebuilding occurs in New Orleans—if we are not careful we will change the colour of the place and it will lose all that once made it special. This assemblage of people drove my project. Even as waters were rising and hopes receding, many people wished to return to their homes and neighbors. It is in these neighborhoods like the French Quarter that every sort of person can be found: from the wealthiest magnate to the drifting street-musician. We need to again create an atmosphere that encourages and allows the entire culture and sub-culture to return.

Fatherhood confuses me. The first seven years were scary enough. The last two have been daunting. At the least, when Monica was alive, I had a second opinion on things. In all reality, I hardly had to give mine at all. I'm learning quickly though. Monica was a great mother. I miss her terribly, but then when I do, I feel guilty because my daughter lost even more; she lost her mother.

There are sudden rips. There are tears in your life, deep knife wounds that slash through your flesh. Your life is one thing, then it is shredded into another. It comes apart as though gutted at the belly. It seemed worse for a long time. The dull ache is a constant reminder, but my daughter makes life livable. She makes work workable.

I came too, and I jumped out of bed. I rushed to the window, then my worst fears materialized. At that moment I was angry at my wife. She hadn’t wanted to leave because my in-laws did not want to leave, would not leave. They’re in their 80s. They were staying with us. They were here when the storm hit. I looked through my window and I saw this black water starting to move across everything. A wall of water hit the back of these homes and they just exploded. All of a sudden,
New Orleans: rebuilding with confidence

Water was everywhere. I rushed back and grabbed my daughter, strapped her life-jacket on and told her not to let go of her mother. With my wife screaming at me I rushed down stairs to gather my in-laws. I looked frantically, but the water. There was so much water. I panicked; I grabbed the two cases of bottled water and headed back upstairs.

My wife and daughter hadn’t moved. Kara was crying. My wife just looked at me, eyes moist. I felt mine moisten. I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t think. I handed her the bottled water and rushed back downstairs. I shoved my way across the den; the water was so strong, it pouring in, already above my waist. I moved towards the living room, when I looked out the bay window and saw my Toyota go away down the street. The water was furious. I couldn’t stay down there any longer—not with my daughter and wife upstairs—alone. I could see natural gas bubbling up out of the water everywhere I looked. As far as you could see, there was nothing but black water.

Storyville: a place of dreams

The original Storyville was established on January 1, 1898 as a legally operated red-light district in New Orleans, this being the only legal red light district in the United States. The district was home to beautiful bordellos that were renowned for their grand architecture. The bordello’s festive atmosphere was created by seductive women and mood-altering music. Storyville is believed to be the birthplace of Jazz. The fun lasted until the fall of 1917, when the United States Department of the Navy shut it down. Later in the 1940s, the planning commission of New Orleans thought they would do a good thing for the city by constructing a low-income housing project on the site. To make way for this project the old district was completely demolished.
In Storyville, many young men got their first education in elegance from the costly marbles, bronzes, fine rugs, and genuine oil paintings of the brothels. In gaslight and later in the first electric lights they sat on fine furniture modeled for French kings, saw Tiffany glass, rare feathered fans, mother-of-pearl inlayed bedsteads, drapes of silk and velvet not seen at home. The madams imported furniture and art from Europe, India, China, and Japan, and while it was over-ripe and perhaps too rich in red and yellow, the heavy gold frames pictured beauty in landscape and flesh. It was a world that suggested fine living, and it gave many a young American on his way to success his first look at what life could hold if he went out to make his pile and gained some share of easy living when he built his own place. "The whorehouse has never been given enough credit for its great part in forming a taste for architecture and interior decoration in American life."
My wife was hysterical. I tried to calm her but it was as if she couldn’t hear me. I held my daughter, I shielded her eyes. I could see animals trying to survive. It was terrible.

My mind was racing, but I couldn’t grab a single thought. The water continued to rise. Within thirty minutes, it was only a few feet from our top step. I decided to move my family into the attic.

August 29, 2005, I curse the day. There are no words that can describe that day. From morning to dawn, it just never got better, in fact, it got worse. I realize now that I never expected it to. There were trees probably two to three hundred years old strewn about like toothpicks. It wasn’t the nicest neighborhood, but it was quaint. It was what my wife and I could afford when we got married. Now, our small home looked as though it was begging me to finish the job. It stood there, pardon the phrase, without a leg to stand on. The roads were impassable, cars stacked two high in places. The only evidence of some of the houses was an old stone hearth or grand stairway.

In the depths of the Great Depression, many families became homeless and many others were at risk of homelessness. Nationwide, there was great concern about this situation, which led to the passage of the United States Housing Act of 1937. Almost all Storyville structures were removed for the construction of the Iberville development. Ironically, the Iberville Project was originally intended for white service members. Iberville today consists of seventy-three two and three story dwelling units containing 858 apartments, and it is considered one of the smaller housing developments in New Orleans. These now 70-year-old structures are considerably, or even severely distressed.
The segregation of land uses is exacerbated by the fact that most American communities have been designed with only one transportation option in mind; the automobile. Limited transportation choices restrict the mobility of those who cannot afford a car, and of those who are too young or too old to drive. Consequently, this makes it difficult to find employment, even for those with the desire to do so.
The stages of grief: Supposedly, the first is denial. That was wrong. The first is just the opposite—total acceptance. You hear the bad news and you understand exactly what is being said to you. Your wife has passed. You understand exactly what is being presented. You understand that your loved one—your spouse, or parent, or child—will never come home, they are gone for good, that their life is over, and that you will never, ever, see them again. You understand that in a flash. Your legs buckle. Your heart gives out.

That was the first step—not just acceptance, not just understanding, but total truth. Human beings are not built to withstand that kind of hurt. That then, is when the denial begins. Denial floods in quickly, salving the wounds or at least covering them. But there is still that moment, mercifully quick, the real Stage One, when you stare into the abyss, and horrible as it is, understand everything.

You don’t know who to blame. But you want to blame someone, anyone, other than yourself. We talk politics.
The goal is to recognize the context, both physically as well as socially in order create a more urban and humane environment in Historia. In the wake of the Hurricane, the French Quarter was one of the first places to come back online; a testament to its resilience and function as a thriving atmosphere. In order to draw on what makes the area unique, I first analyzed the typical French Quarter block layout. Here you can see the character of the place, as well as the density and seemingly hodgepodge layout of its blocks.

Perhaps at first glance there is not a great deal of beauty in the area: It is carved out of hot, flat swampland after all. Nevertheless, New Orleans has created its own type of beauty here that can be found in the good nature of the people and the built environment, and the heartbeat of jazz that found its birthplace here. It is a place of writers and musicians—of romance and painted landscapes—of mystery and intrigue.
I turned on the television—not to see the news—I knew what that would look like. I turned it on for the same reason most people do; to stop thinking. In many ways, I thought it would ease my mind. But every channel was filled with the same bull shit and I couldn’t escape it. The media inundated with “hero” images of the National Guard, the troops, and the police struggling to help the “victims” of the Hurricane. All I saw was more political-garbage. I felt as though George Bush and Mayor Nagin themselves were standing behind the camera directing the freak-show. None of what I saw in those hellish days came through the small worthless contraption sitting before me. I didn’t see any real heroes. I didn’t see any of the working class of New Orleans, no maintenance workers who used a fork lift to carry the sick and disabled. I didn’t see any engineers who rigged, nurtured, and kept generators running—no electricians improvising thick extension cords stretching over blocks to share the little electricity available. I flipped the stations looking for nurses who took over for mechanical ventilators and spent hour after hour manually forcing precious foul smelling air into the lungs of unconscious patients to keep them alive. I turned stations looking for something true,

Rebuilding Requirements: Historia takes shape

MENTAL CONDITIONING

We cannot build what we cannot imagine.

For the rebirth of a city to happen naturally and successfully, psyches must be conditioned to see disasters as instruments of progress. Certainly, we cannot build with any confidence or ambition without some faith in the future. We must analyze the society, which has the desire, and will to be resilient: We must get at the heart and soul of what makes a place—physically, culturally, economically, and socially. Construction and certainly reconstruction is always cultural, or at the very least should be. We reconstruct events in our minds, the stories we hear and tell about disasters, the way we see and imagine destruction—all have a decisive bearing on how we redevelop damaged buildings, neighborhoods, or entire cities.
Cities and Thrones and Powers
  Stand in Time’s eye,
Almost as long as flowers,
  Which daily die:
But, as new buds put forth
  To glad new men,
Out of the spent and unconsidered Earth,
  The Cities rise again.7

The location makes it ideal to draw on the areas that already have a strong urban fabric—which ultimately could readily connect Historia to the business/economic centers of the city via light-rail. Here you can see the close proximity of the site to Downtown New Orleans as well as the French Quarter (top left).
and the more I turned the angrier I became, and harder I pressed my finger into the remote, just looking for doormen who rescued folks stuck in elevators, or refinery workers breaking into boat yards to steal boats to rescue neighbors clinging to their roofs. I was looking for the food service workers who scoured the commercial kitchen improvising communal meals for hundreds of the stranded and hungry. Those are my heroes, the ones who also lost their homes, hadn’t heard from their families, but stayed, pressed on, and provided what was necessary. That was when I folded. Placed my head in my hands and began to cry.

Now Rita. The promised apocalypse! Well the two will send regrets, the sadist bitches. Katrina just tasted us, like a dog licking the full length of a bone. She probably spun away laughing, leaving all of us, even me, especially me, red-faced and furious. Then Rita—duped again. Surely there will be a big damn mess to clean up, but that’s just the physical part. What about the lives that need cleaned up. Things are not just things when they are destroyed. They are your things. Now all I want is a new dawn for my daughter, a cleansing, life-renewing dawn. Instead, we were forced to wait around, everyone in assigned seats, eyes averted and lied to, taking in inappropriate smiles as we sat with our thumbs up our butts waiting for Rita. Oh, hell.

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**Designing Density**

City governments typically spearhead the creation of public spaces, museums, libraries and art galleries, whilst cinemas, theatres, shops and restaurants are the result of entrepreneurial and local activity. Moreover, in order for a city/neighborhood to thrive, the natural relationships between private and public must be encouraged.

Encouraging the city means having pedestrian friendly streets and squares and commerce. In order for these spaces to function, we must plan for the density necessary. This enables shops, community facilities, and public transport to not just exist, but also thrive. A critical mass of people has to be established to make the community economically and environmentally viable. Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown coined the term “Elegant Density”, and what better place to showcase it than urban New Orleans and Historia. This elegant density has to be established to make possible a range of services and transport that would otherwise not be economically feasible; more importantly in a position to move toward self-sufficiency. It means, for example, that a local quality store can operate without any on site car parking. The store survives because of the...
numbers of people living within walking distance. This is further encouraged by the mixed-income development.

This can result in a decreased reliance on automobiles, which reduces congestion and air pollution and provides access to these goods and services for those who cannot drive. Mixed-use, more accessible, transit-oriented neighborhoods and communities with strong focal points have several advantages over their sprawled and single use counterparts. They require fewer infrastructures, and use that infrastructure more efficiently; which translates into lower costs for municipal services.

"A New Orleans must be a city dedicated to the genuine well-being of all her citizens. Poverty had been reduced in the 1990s; but pockets of terrible, entrenched, poverty were still far too common in that city prior to its deluge. Those pockets are the one thing that must not be restored; instead, the city must charge into rebuilding with an eye to reducing poverty drastically, by reducing the conditions that create it."
ZONING

Without mixed-income development, New Orleans will continue to have isolated tracts of poverty. A city’s residents share a common language of the city using the vocabulary of paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks. But cities are incredibly complex spaces; as a result, we tend to fill in the gaps with a broad brush. Depending on your position in the social structure, you might describe an area as, “those people live on that side of town.” Or, “I could never afford to live in an area like that.” Statements like these reflect people’s attitudes about racial segregation, crime, and income. Mixed-income development helps to eliminate some of those prejudices (conscious or unconscious). If these biases are not removed, they have severe consequences when large numbers of people share them. A few isolated assaults reported on the evening news may cause thousands of residents to define a safe, livable neighborhood as dangerous. If this label sticks, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy and the neighborhood declines.

We intimately know the street we live on (your face block) and the few blocks surrounding it (your defended neighborhood). Moving out of
these areas, you know the stores, groceries, schools, bars, and police and fire stations in your part of the city. Your area may even have a name like The French Quarter, Garden District, or Historia.

The private realm of Historia is where the most intimate interaction takes place; this is the center of my project. It is the home—apartment, condominium, or backyard—over which exclusive control is exercised. The social interaction of the face block and defended neighborhood may be no more than a few square blocks; nevertheless, this is where much of the daily life takes place. These are the streets, courtyards, and parks where children play. This is where you are a neighbor; the social place where you interact with the clerks at the market and pharmacy.

Kevin Lynch, in The Image of the City (1960) and What Time is This Place (1972) was one of the first to explore the process by which we develop mental maps of the city. Design cannot cause behavior, but it can offer the possibility of certain activities taking place. The physical environment of a housing development, for example, can encourage, discourage, or be neutral to its resident’s behaviors.11

Zoning in Historia follows existing patterns of two–four story buildings and avoids horizontal divisions within. This is necessary to maintain the notable, tight, and intimate streetscapes.
Not since the fires and earthquakes of earlier centuries has the US been given the opportunity to rebuild a major city. The debate as to whether climate-change additionally fueled Katrina’s intensity began hours after the storm struck, and will continue for years. Whether or not global warming played a role in this catastrophe, it is absolute that a new New Orleans must be rebuilt for much greater resilience in the face of a changing climate. To do otherwise, we would just assume not rebuild at all. The city was always one of the world’s most vulnerable; that is part of what makes rebuilding such an extraordinary opportunity for learning.

Currently the city of New Orleans exists, in part, to service the oil and gas production and distribution infrastructure that now lies in the tatters of the Gulf of Mexico. It is likely inevitable that this infrastructure will also be rebuilt—massive economic and security interests will see to that. But it would be nothing short of criminal to rebuild in New Orleans and not aspire to use renewable energies. The sun shines mercilessly there; solar panels need

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING A GREEN SHOWCASE
big markets to push their development curve up and prices down. Therefore, New Orleans and her sister cities like Biloxi and Mobile could provide a tremendous opportunity to act as the nation’s green showcase.

Sustainability economist Herman Daly always noted that using non-renewable resources is not wrong, so long as you are investing some portion of them adequately in the development of their renewable replacements. New Orleans, sitting next to 30% of the nation’s oil and gas production, could demonstrate this principle in an extraordinary visible, powerful, and dare I say beautiful way.

Historia, along with the rest of city, could become a living laboratory for solar roofs, mini hydro generators, fuel cells, and architectures that reduce the need for heating and cooling. We need only capture 1 percent of 1 percent of the sunlight to meet all of our energy needs as an entire planet!14 (3 percent of 1 percent by 2025) Solar panels and fuel cells will soon be able to do this in the not too distant future, thereby meeting all of our energy needs. The beauty is that these new industries could sometime replace the gas and oil revenues, and be partly financed by them, as well as by the general reconstruction funds that are already on their way.

Massive amounts of money are going to be mobilized for this reconstruction. It’s time now to stop thinking about whether we should or should not rebuild in New Orleans, and accept that parts will be rebuilt—if just to service oil production. And assuming this rebuilding occurs, the ideas I am proposing should be in forefront of the minds of those doing the rebuilding. Moreover, massive purchasing power creates massive buying power. This opportunity to push the nation’s markets forward in the development of 21st century technology cannot be overlooked. The money must be directed toward the greenest alternatives available, it must not be wasted.
Design Process: Discovery

Historia should speak in the same language as the host place (New Orleans), as well as the language of the past host place (Storyville), and finally from the current-day culture from which it has sprung or derived. All places have their own voice, personality, persona: Boston-ness, New York-ness, etc. This is a discoverable, though at times elusive, combination of relatively simple things that produce memories, images, sounds, and smells—feelings.\(^{15}\)

The music itself served as an inspiration to the architecture. I am of course not the first to draw parallels between the art of crafting music and crafting buildings. However, as with all the arts—there exists an achievable balance and composition to a project, albeit a building, sculpture, or a musical score. Through my research, and guidance from thesis advisor Olon Dotson, I found myself immersed in the history of jazz music and the all but forgotten Storyville.
The image above, a more literal, yet playful demonstration of fusing music with the built environment, illustrates an elevation intended not to be realistic, but rather an informative study about place-making; allowing music to influence design moves.

New Orleans cannot hope to revive as simply “a place to do business.” It must again become something special, something truly wonderful; it is a city that lives on tourism, and that means embracing creativity in all its forms, with a passionate ferocity.
Last semester’s launching point was an analysis of courtyards and the potential role that they may play in urban life. They create a tension between the public and the private creating intricate spaces. These spaces allow for immediate neighborly interactions, as well as a place that is considered owned by those adjacent to it.

Designing Home: Courtyards

Housing is considered primarily as the design of a place for eating, sleeping, loving, playing, socializing, and raising children. The environment that influences behavior involves more than merely physical dimensions and design properties. It is laden or encoded with symbolic dimension and messages, which we read and decode according to our role, expectations, motivation, and other factors. The built environment of Historia helps to facilitate (or inhibit) behavior simultaneously, via several modes of physical, social, and symbolic communication. For example, the gated courtyards

Two and a half years later.

I am not exactly the handy man. I like watching the fix-the-old-home shows on cable. I debated moving into such a home, but I’m not too good with my hands. Our apartment holds that appeal—you pay a monthly fee, you don’t worry about the roof or an addition or the landscaping or any of that. There are gardens, and patios, parks, and yes, a playground for children. Utilities are included and reasonable due to the solar panels on the roof. Kara and I opted for our apartment in Historia, mainly because we liked all the color and excitement (I liked the price tag). We both agreed that suburbia was a sub world of sameness and in the end, there was only so much conformity one could take. Why add insult to injury by making your physical abode conform too?

Our apartment overlooks the courtyard. I spend a good deal of my time in the kitchen, sometimes reading at the table or watching Kara do her homework. When she’s out playing in the courtyard, I do the dishes. She probably thinks I watch her too closely, and then I probably do, but I feel safe with her running around with the other neighborhood children, especially when I can keep my eye on them. I also know some of the
(shown at right) that lead to a dwelling entry will strongly suggest that you approach the door by this means; also, that it is a private dwelling. However, social norms or familiarity within the courtyard may determine that you cut across the garden or tap on a side window instead. The courtyard is an urban type dwelling, because it is introspective, its external walls can be shared with neighboring houses, and it can be built right up against the public domain. With these courtyards grouped together, Historia generates a dense urban fabric with a clear separation of public and private open spaces.

Similarly, the location of a bench in a landscaped area will suggest the possibility of sitting, but by no means dictate it; we might just as easily choose the grass because friends are there or a stone ledge because it’s convenient. That is to say that design communicates a different message to different people, but is not the same as saying that people have total free will in relation to design and that their behavior is no way affected by it. In our day-to-day life, we seek social-physical settings where we feel comfortable, where there is some predictability to how we and others will behave.
other parents are watching their own, and that too is comforting. She’s a good kid. Everybody seems to be drawn to the courtyard. Even the complaining husbands seem silent when they are watching their children play. There must be something built in, something intrinsically interesting about watching people. I am always surprised at the numbers who just sit on their balconies and enjoy the evenings, watching their neighbors go about the usual business.

All over New Orleans, namely the French Quarter, older houses have balconies and roof terraces, and Historia also provides these. Historia introduces further movement into the walls with projecting corners and staircases, sweeping curves, and angled lines. I did however; follow the pattern of existing two- and three-story houses, avoiding horizontal division within. This was primarily done in order to sustain the vitality that comes partly as a result of having tight intimate streets. Doors and Windows are not standard to the French Quarter—they are more modern, but still carry external folding shutters offering a truly unique feel to Historia. The houses are of a steel frame, entire blocks sharing structure to increase rigidity and decrease price.

The appeal of these simple houses is increased by the bold, unselfconscious use of varied color that is typical of New Orleans. Local tradition certainly has an unlimited color palette, creating variety and contrast, but I would not intend to pick out every individual color in that way. My thought is that to do so would be too contrived, while to wait and ask each family to choose colors before getting to know their houses and their surroundings would provide no sound base for a decision either. Instead, I take the view that everyone could later repaint their house as they wish.
The effect of the built environment is powerful. People can immediately sense when they enter a place whether it is well designed. Although well-designed communities and buildings may differ in style, scale, or location, they are durable, integrated into their natural setting, and efficient in serving their purposes. Grand architecture and sweeping avenues may look impressive, but are not enough by themselves. The challenge is to create an urban environment that feels human and generates a subtle sense of ownership and certainly usable public space. In other words, the goal is to ultimately create a vital aspect of urban function and vitality. Our cities and neighborhoods are to provide a meeting ground, a social hub, a place of life and entertainment, and the widest array of authentic cultural experiences as possible; for both tourists and locals alike.
New Orleans is known around the world for its music, food, and cultural life; but as in most US cities, artists and art organizations had not been brought into serious discussions about the future of the region. New Orleans cannot hope to revive as simply “a place to do business.” It must again become something special, something truly wonderful. That means embracing creativity in all its forms. It means envisioning the city as a whole as a work of art—Historia is part of that place—a city that is not attempting to restore the physical environment just as it was, but rather recapture the essences which made it special.

The sights and sounds of summer resonated from the courtyard and main streets. Kids squealed, my daughter included, and blew by on their bicycles. She’s growing so fast, but then so is the neighborhood. The Steins—who’d built up a chain of appliance stores that were swallowed up by a bigger chain—were taking a stroll hand in hand. A few of the young boys, not men, were playing what appeared to be a defunct game of touch football in front of the Levine’s apartment, though I didn’t know any of the participants. The barbecue, always the barbecue, smoke and smell took flight from the Kaufman’s balcony.

Kara and I took the elevator down. I usually take the stairs, it’s only two flights, but I just didn’t feel like it this time. Win—real name Windsor Lockwood—stood in the lobby. He was dressed this morning in Late American Prep, blue blazer, light khakis, white button-down Oxford shirt, loud tie, the kind with more colors than a gallery at a golf course. His blonde hair was parted, always, by the gods, his jaw jutting in that way of his, cheek bones high and pretty and porcelain, his eyes the blue of ice. I don’t know where he goes dressed like that, but I was on my way to the grocery. Since it’s just my
The arts are key in Historia. New Orleans’ music and cuisine, its festivals and gardens and galleries, and even its notoriously wild parties are the only thing that can hope to draw people back to place whose inundation is etched into the world’s consciousness. The picture I paint of Historia is a place embracing a new flood of creative people, who see the chance to rebuild a city as the creative opportunity of a lifetime. Whether they are businesspeople, architects, actors, sculptors, technologists—or some fascinating new combination. The new New Orleans absolutely must be truly new.

The connection to the visceral is established through the level of drama that the built environment induces; the balance between active and quiet, the variations of light and dark—painted, rhythmic, brilliance, color—saturated or faded, bright or subdued. This also allows a distinction between public and private that establishes a sense of place and subtle sense of ownership. The tension is drawn from the public, the people on the street who want to see the courtyards; when I was in New Orleans I wanted to get into any courtyards that I could, there was an intrigue/mystery to them; they have a draw. Contrast is an essential ingredient to courtyard aesthetics, beginning with the transition from noise, smell, and glare of the street to the cooler more shaded (covered entranceway from street to courtyard). A verdant cluster of light and shadow is framed by a dark tunnel and decorative iron gate. In the second transition, one emerges into the courtyard with its contrasts of light and shadow, made rich by patterns formed by leaves. The splash of water replaces the noise of the street and the quiet of the tunnel.

(above: the circles highlight the gate that stops the public domain of the restaurant from coming into the more private courtyard)
daughter and I, I’m sure we could gladly survive on a steady diet of delivered pizzas, but we still need the basics: milk, orange juice, a dozen eggs, sandwich meats, a couple boxes of cereal, loaf of break, box of pasta, Prego sauce. Stuff like that. I enjoy shopping; it’s a nice opportunity to check out the neighborhood. The walk is only two blocks, but I have come to enjoy the seemingly mundane. Something such as shopping seems so normal, but I always manage to run into someone I know or see something new.

So, we hit the King’s on St. Louis street. I hold no supermarket loyalties, but I like King’s. Some of my friends have favorites and would never dream of shopping elsewhere. Kara likes the A&P three blocks west because of the free food samples. My choice, when I’m on my own, is more haphazard, to put it plainly, no matter where you shop, Tropicana Orange Juice was Tropicana Orange Juice. In this case, the King’s was closest to the Coffee Grounds. Decision made.

The weather was brisk, cool for New Orleans. Autumn had shoved summer aside with a patented gust. The trees of course still had all their color, but the air had that cool fruity quality to it. The coolness is welcomed after our hot summers

“What is the city but people?”
-Coriolanus, Shakespeare, 1623

CATALYTIC ELEMENTS

The goal is to create quality by utilizing intensity and activity in Historia in which all senses are stimulated: While at the same time preserving a comfort level and encouraging users to explore and experiment with the built environment. This means providing spaces, not just places for opportunity, and catalytic elements designed to promote art, music, markets, dining, and people.

These elements help to fabricate a rich and experiential place that inspires and engages the human spirit. In the past unfortunately, I feel that architects have, for the most part, been entranced by the static object (buildings in most cases). However, with this project, the aim is to design an experience—the architecture and the building are merely a result of people.

People warm to cities when they find the environment conducive to their personal aspirations. The unexpected too, can make a city a delight and pleasure to be in. It is said that a good city is a city that you don’t want to leave. How do we provide for the aspirations of an entire neighborhood? City dwelling is obviously
In order for a city or neighborhood to thrive, the natural relationships between private and public space must be encouraged. Considering this, the square becomes a catalyst to encourage those relationships. The square and its consequential commerce draw people to a “center,” which can then allow the neighborhood to grow organically out from its center—in much the same way as all cities grow. The square (above/left) in this case, is a space which the people take over, and the built environment shifts for them—buildings and roads are overtaken by people.

Design and architecture play an important role in facilitating or discouraging human interaction. Communities built with sidewalks, town squares, houses with front porches, parks, and other public meeting places encourage people to interact. Active street life is an excellent indicator of good urban or suburban design.

not for everyone; but there will always be a large population of those who desire the close network of neighbors and the busy atmosphere that only the urban environment can provide. While some are lured to town centers and main street projects by the promise of a more bohemian lifestyle of bistros and art galleries (which Historia undoubtedly offers), many others wish only to simplify their lives and experience a strong sense of community.  

above: sketch, a city gives way
the shop windows below our apartment have started up with the Halloween decorations. Floating heads adorning purple, black, and orange wigs; the hair salon always seems to permeate the sidewalk with that chemical, but clean smell. It makes me wonder if the women who work there smell like that all the time. It’s hard to say when you are in there if you smell them, or just the air. 

Warm evenings here are wonderful. The sun goes down and the retail scene comes alive. My daughter and I regularly take strolls down to the neighborhood center so see the retail scene come alive. The shop windows finally get their chance to glow without battling the daylight. The colors become richer and more brilliant. The scene changes—buildings blur and blend with the night sky. Forms seem to melt away and foreground and background become a black-on-black canvas unrelieved by texture. Kara likes when we catch the street lights just coming on; that flick of the switch when lights appear all over the dim canvas. Some are blinking others twinkling, outlining a cornice, a window frame or a shop doorway. The lights begin to define form, outline shapes and create the neighborhood’s patterns. Facades glow, windows gleam and the world is electric, vibrant and alive.

Great places become so by anonymous editing over time. Whether Paris or Chicago or Venice—they all took hundreds, even thousands of years to “become.” There have been long periods of trial and error, of tuning and refining, which have gone into their creation. The challenge for Historia to two-fold. The first is to speed this process, then two, encourage the process of further tuning and refining. Our most successful cities have evolved out of deep and continuous culture in which they were acted upon by individuals and groups. I believe that we can learn from all of our surrounding contexts’, past as well as present. There are cues such as mided-use and density which have been taken from the still existing French Quarter as well are there cues such as vibrance, scale, and energy taken from the once existing Storyville. We can also learn from the mistakes that have been made with the Iberville Housing Project.

The communal experience is a designable one. My goal is to design with inspiration and the hopes to inspire—even trigger—unity in parts to create a more cohesive neighborhood; all within an abbreviated time frame. Because the trial-and-error-over-time methodology cannot be used immediately, the context and culture implications must be taken and understood from the areas that are already strong (areas such as the French
The people here vary a great deal, in age, family structure, and even race, but all in all everyone seems to be respectful of one another. There is no doubt however, some interesting characters live here, but no one seems to mind—I think they all realize that interesting people make life richer.

Take Warren for example. I don’t even know his last name come to think of it. He is the Son of the American Revolution, thirty-second-degree Mason, defender of insurance companies and banks: apple-cheeked, baby-soft anti-Catholic, pro-God, who tips his hat to everyone, treating bag ladies as royalty, construction workers as peers, so that our simple lunchtime passing on the sidewalk turns into a parade, and he leaves his inferiors dazed and grateful and babbling about “breeding,” which, according to Warren, was something that the rest of the world should refrain from doing. He is however, the genius artist type, but that has seemed to render him socially awkward. He is as he says, “a writer and a furniture-musician.” I would argue he is a furniture builder first of all, and a writer secondly, read by almost no one. But his furniture pieces seem to sell fast on fair-weather weekends in the square. According to the New Orleans Times his art is “certain to survive the millennium.”

He writes about sex, he writes about God, and he fuses the two. His writing doesn’t...
The square creates a dialogue between its users at several levels. The plaza, open to the sky above is accessible by all and provides foot traffic to the many retail spaces within. This critical mass of people creates opportunities not otherwise possible within the neighborhood. Again, the retail serves as a catalytic element that helps to further support the arts, encouraging street musicians and street artists. Here, the dialogue begins between the artist who is providing entertainment and visual interest for the shoppers, or just those passing through. However, the street musician would not exist without the congregations of people and passer-by’s. The two work hand in hand to make the space successful. The musician or other type of artists thrives because of the density of people brought there for other various commercial services, but they in-turn make the experience more enjoyable for the common-user. The built environment provides the setting for these human relationships to occur; people, observers, and participants. The concept of the square is probably the single most important idea with which the urban designer works. Without an understanding of its importance to man’s perception of the environment, only damage can be inflicted upon the city. The center of Historia would also be the center of the first phase of development. From this nucleus, the rest of the neighborhood would grow outward from it; according to the principles set forth in the original. By growing outward, just like all cities, we eliminate the risk of going too large too quickly. In other words, the neighborhood is allowed to grow at the pace that it can support and maintain itself.

areas intact (post Katrina). The site is bigger than a building, yet smaller than a city. It is large enough to carry a significant weight in the “Rebuilding of New Orleans.” Historia is a district or neighborhood within itself—an area with enough urban substance to activate a full set of complex experiences. It is a place, a destination, which makes it identifiable. It has its own signature characteristics. It thus becomes separate from the French Quarter, it is a new architecture, a new idea, but it still tells a story. It allows new things to come to life, new generations of intermingling of races and incomes. Historia then becomes a place that informs, and then guides the future development of the greater New Orleans.
New Orleans: rebuilding with confidence

The City Experience

The consequential issues of architecture today are not issues of style, but rather performance in light of the human condition. We must be steadfast with our concepts for rebuilding the tattered Gulf Coast; namely New Orleans. In a bleak view: Humankind has been disengaged, if not torn from the whole by the effects of modern urban planning and design. Cities have been ruptured—urban wastelands surrounded by patches of suburban sprawl. At some point—cities became formulas. They became an equation for separating housing, from office, from retail and institutional space. Cities, neighborhoods, and buildings should let us use them how we want. A good building for example, will serve as a backdrop for the life people lead, instead of making them live as if they were executing a program written by a designer. They were created in a way which singular structures became unrelated to one another or to the entire context in which they were built. The once cohesive and experiential fabric of the older order was tarnished. The marketplace and business moved the industry towards a competitive attitude, which was in resistance to integration that insured that new buildings reinforced the very conditions

Much of what makes Historia a wonderfully exciting place to live is the vitality of the retail scene and the assemblage of people. Even just below our apartment, merchandise seems to gush out into the jammed and crammed street level shops, food stall and stands, and the kiosks that overwhelm the area with wonderful sights and aromas. The neighborhood perhaps is not for everyone, but Kara and I are fond of our new home. Historia targets those who share a love for people and the city-life: those who are aware these “retail sculptures” add humor and enthusiasm to a street bursting with life and excitement.

stick. But his furniture looks wonderful all set up in the square. Or maybe people buy from him because they feel sorry for him – based on looks alone. It’s curious that someone with so much charisma could be socially awkward; he manages to. Surely most people have never heard of this Warren, it’s not as if he’s famous, beyond perhaps the artsy-fartsy crowd, but he seems to do well. He sets up shop every nice-weathered Saturday in the square, bald head glistening in the sun, eyes myopic and watery gray. His hands are plum, the cuffs of his long sleeved shirts always too tight, makes you wonder how he does such beautiful details with his hands.

URBAN OFFERINGS
that had contributed to societal breakdowns. The built environment became a product, for sale, and in direct competition with its adjacent environs. Essentially the people were taken out of the formula—out of the equation. Dollars and cents became the clients while people became the market for which buildings competed.

The urban environment proposed for Historia, in both quality and lifestyle, provides attractive hotel chains and inns—especially for tourists wanting to visit the birthplace of jazz. Travelers who may already be harried by their busy schedules and frequent travel to unfamiliar places welcome the opportunity to walk from their hotel room to offices and lunch meetings during the day, and to restaurants, entertainment, gymnasiums, and public gathers spots in the evening, without having to climb into a car. A neighborhood like Historia also offers something rarely found in suburbia: a “room with a view,” overlooking the public spaces and street life of a community.
Kara wanted to have a friend over to play. I’ve been reluctant to have guests up to this point. I tell Kara it’s because we’re not done moving in yet, but she knows it’s because of her mother, Monica. But Kara insisted that she have Juliet over. Juliet is a sweet girl and her parents seem like great people, but I just wasn’t ready to have guests. It always sounds silly when you’re a child and your parents insist that a friend not come over because the house is a wreck; then you get old yourself—you get it.

“Kara, somebody’s here, it’s probably Juliet.” Kara ran to open the door. My heart melts with happiness when I see her excited. As soon as Juliet stepped in, our large yellow dog (that Kara twisted my arm to get) came bounding and barking.

“Get over here,” I hollered at it, “hush, hush, it’s just Julia,” as if the animal could understand me. Clearly, I was just talking to comfort Julia. “She won’t hurt you,” I said, “She’s just a pup.” Pet’s being a pup, I thought, would not make them any less likely to knock you down. I could see the hint of trepidation in Juliet’s eyes.

“I’m not scared,” says Juliet to my amusement, jumping back when the yellow dog’s nose roughly rubs her arm.

Juliet is the same age as my daughter, but...
It is important to note current trends. American households are growing older and more ethnically diverse. These demographic changes have important implications for real estate markets: for example, as compared to families with children, singles, couples with no children, and retirees are more likely to be attracted to smaller, lower-maintenance housing clustered within walking distance of employment, services, amenities, people, and activities. Recent years, across the country, have witnessed a resurgence in downtown housing markets that is being driven by young professionals, empty nesters, gain easier access to urban amenities, and others looking to escape traffic congestion.

These mentalities also inevitably will conserve open space and promote human-scale environments—making it easier to integrate affordable apartments and homes into neighborhoods instead of creating isolated tracts of subsidized housing for low-income families. By including and encouraging diversity of housing choices within close proximity, opportunities are created for low-income residents and elderly households that are increasingly living in multi-family dwellings.

Location efficiency is an important component of sustainable design that connects housing with commercial, recreational areas and other economic centers throughout the city. Zoning ordinances that allow for mixed-use development, such as having a store, apartment building, and a school on the same block can permit people easy access to a range of facilities and the ability to walk to obtain goods and services are critical for a sustainable life without an automobile—either by choice or by circumstance.
Recap: Providing what’s Necessary

If there is to be a new New Orleans, it must first and foremost be made completely safe from flooding in any conceivable worst case scenario. It is also likely that rebuilding should be limited to select zones of the city. If it cannot withstand a Category 5 hurricane churning straight up the mouth of the Mississippi, few will dare to live there.

The science of living more sustainably on the Mississippi Delta is actually quite well developed. The mechanisms that were causing erosion of wetlands and coastal islands are understood, and can be reversed. The task involves rethinking the management of the entire river system. It involves restoring wetlands by allowing the river to rebuild the intricate network of coastal islands that would buffer the region from storm surges. The obvious, is about learning to work with the natural features of Southeastern Louisiana, rather than continuously fighting a pitched battle against them, or attempting to bend them to the will of vested economic interests.

already seems to have the body of a woman. In addition, her voice is strong and insistent, with an older, rich production of sounds in the throat. She speaks well, not intimidated by my being older, with an accent that I can’t quite put my finger on.

“Come on in, you guys can play in the living room, I’ll go to the kitchen and fix some snacks.” I felt like that’s what Monica would have done.

The kitchen is bright, with big windows facing the court. Dishes and pots are piled everywhere to my dismay. Beyond the kitchen, down two broad steps, there is the more shaded living room, with large cushions already flung about the floor. The ceilings are spacious, and the walls must be thick, or the neighbors quiet, I most never hear them.
The environmental damage caused by the storm and the flooding is now incomprehensible. The rebuilding process offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to clean up the city, in every way imaginable; and certainly aim for the sky, literally, as it relates to using renewable energy resources. There is no reason not to cover the roof spaces of Historia with ever-bettering solar panels and beautiful green spaces for people to enjoy for decades to come. The rebuilding of New Orleans will have the purchasing power never seen before to get such amenities at never before seen low costs. The city is truly in a position to reemerge as one of the greatest in the country, yet there will still be debates as to whether New Orleans should be rebuilt at all. Pre-Katrina, there were hopes of making it one of the Top 10 by 2010 cities in the country. Are we to know give up on that dream? Or are we to show resilience in the face of adversity as we are asking her citizens to do? My hopes are that my opinion is clear.
New Orleans is gaining more and more life every time I turn around. It’s been over two years now since Katrina changed us all, but it now seems forgotten—people move on—we can’t dwell forever, and we shouldn’t. Outside today, the late afternoon sky is an optimistic, ladylike shade of gray. The low clouds have blown away and it makes me think of my life here.

Historia is new, it’s nice, it’s home. It suits my daughter and me and it allows us to keep our lives simple. Living here allows Kara to go to school where I’d like her to and I’ve found good, nearby work. We are fortunate to be here; I no longer take home or family for granted.

There is still poverty here of course, but I think we are all more conscious of it. It is unfortunate, despite what you hear, it is not easy to ignore the plight of the adult homeless. Today, it is too in-your-face. Walking through downtown, you may divert your eyes and keep walking and remind yourself that if you give in, if you tossed them a dollar or some quarters, they’d just buy booze or drugs or whatever rationale sails your boat, but what you did, the fact that you just hurried by a human being in need, still registers, still causes…

Codes and Guiding Principles: Overview

Historia’s physical presence, with regards to scale and density should allow to bring back that of the original Storyville, but not mandate it.

Historia, like the French Quarter should allow mixed-use development—up to the second floor (at discretion of private development.)

Neighborhood rebuilding should not be limited to a single developer—multiple developers and designers should be encouraged to create diverse and vital neighborhoods within abbreviated timeframes. Blocks designed by the same developer should not be adjacent to one another.

Due to the lack of expendable income in or coming into New Orleans, the private right-of-way should be extended into the public realm.

Developers should be encouraged to pursue Hope VI funding and social principles in order to encouraged mixed-income neighborhoods.

Principles such as Rent Ceilings based on household income should be implemented in order to encourage mixed-income neighborhoods.
Additional funding should be sought out from Hope VI to leverage local, state, federal, and corporate foundation resources.

Create long-term sustainability of service program through an Endowment program.

Historia should ferociously aspire to use renewable resources.

Historia should reduce heat-islands and help to control its storm water through the use of green-roofs—which should be accessible to the residents within the building and provide spaces/opportunities for gardening.

School choice should be a considered option; as it is already a system which is in place in current day New Orleans. This will help promote a return of families back into the community.

Each neighborhood (approx. 16-20 blocks) should include a full service employment, training and supportive services office staffed by local labor.

should include a multi-purpose classroom and training space for programs such as the GED, ESL, and Adult Literacy classes.

should include a full service Child Care Center which will also include infant and toddler care.

should include a gym, classroom, and training space for a comprehensive youth program—i.e. YMCA

should include a computer lab, which will function as a Distance Learning Center.
Conclusion: Dare to Dream

There may no longer be old bordellos or historic wrought iron balconies and gates, but there still exists that same vitality, character, and taste. There still exist tiled walkways lined with color, balconies and metal railings, sun-baked courtyards, gracious fountains, splendid archways and cobblestone courts. Historia is more than a simple streetscape—but rather an entire village that has been fabricated and then located in a tourist town as a living/shopping/dining destination. The streets are complex and complete with multi-story buildings with balconies and dripping foliage and flowers, a central square just right for fiestas and carnivals, markets, sculpture and more.

By utilizing a variety of roof lines and color and exterior design elements, there is a reduction in the appearance of large singular buildings—into a streetscape of smaller row-type houses that have the casual charm and elegance of the French Quarter neighborhoods. The structures may be considered contemporary with some of their balustrades, sweeping curves, patterns of fenestration, dramatic entrances, porticos, and everywhere bright green foliage, trees and flowering plants. The landscapes, both urban and natural, are all part of the grand scheme of the development. The two work together to create a constantly changing visual delight. Adding these highlights, bright colors, kinetic forms, sometimes startling shapes and exciting architecture to the already saturated surrounding neighborhoods is logical. The design combines form and function with fun and fancy.
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

more than physical
THE CHALLENGE
It seems that Nature itself is not widely seen as alive or sacred; and it seems easier for people to see themselves separate from the whole. Our failure to understand our creative role in harmonizing with nature needlessly causes an ongoing biological extinction of our life supports, our planet. It is thusly imperative that we view all humans as a single system, one large kin amidst an even larger family of Nature, which sustains us.

We need to make a shift towards the survival of everyone, rather than the survival of the fittest. If we can be courageous one more time than we are fearful, trust one more time than anxious, cooperate one more time than competitive, forgiving one more time than vindictive, loving one more time than hateful, we will move towards our next breakthrough in our evolution.
THANK YOU
While giving thanks may seem a silly thing to do in a short presentation such as this—thanks are due. First to my parents, Dennis and Carol, who have supported me both financially as well as mentally throughout my education—from preschool to date, enough thanks cannot be given. I would also like to thank my Uncle Ed who has encouraged me and taken genuine interest in my collegiate endeavors. There are many other friends and family whom have supported me and reminded me that there are countless things in this world more important than school or work.

There are many people in this world whom I will never get tired of speaking to, will never get tired of caring for, will never get tired of loving. My attention may be short, but heart and mind are vast. My greatest possessions are the memories we have created together. My favorite belongings are my relationships. Many of which are coming to what seems to be an end, while others are just beginning. I have learned a lot—I have come a long way, from diapers to diplomas. I have been taught by all those around me, and have taught myself. Life is not perfect. We are not perfect. We are human; connected, but separate from all other living things, we form thought and know what it is to cry. We know what it is to laugh. I am learning to celebrate our differences. I am still a student, but a teacher to many; as we all are. To all those in my life who share my passions, I miss you every moment you are not by my side. To the stranger sitting beside me, I know you too. I feel your pain, I rejoice in your pleasure. We are here together, and I look forward to our future.
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