

Affirming Life

Sometimes surrender is wise. This is not one of those times.

New Orleans should be rebuilt, as before but stronger and better.

So should the World Trade Center towers.

Wise or not, surrender to evil is 'bad for the soul'. That is to say, it is harmful in many traceable and untraceable ways over and above the loss of the immediate thing being surrendered. The same is true of despair or resignation in the face of challenges from nature.

Correspondingly, defiance of evil, and of natural challenges, is good. It affirms life, and has unforeseeable benefits.

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No Question

This is one of those questions that is irrelevant. Not build New Orleans? C'mon.

The only questions are around how New Orleans can best be rebuilt. These are good and useful questions. How would you rebuild New Orleans better, safer, stronger? Now we are talking in the rhetoric of The Six Million Dollar Man.

I would rather not have New Orleans destroyed again by the next powerful hurricane. Even more, I see no reason for New Orleans to ever again be flooded with ten or more feet of water because of an unviable levee design. Biloxi and Gulfport will be rebuilt too, and above sea level as they are now.

by a reader on Tue, 09/13/2005 - 03:33 | [reply](#)

It's Not So Obvious

First of all, surrendering to evil (and thus encouraging more of it) is **very** different from not rebuilding something that was destroyed by nature. Sometimes, rebuilding it is just repeating a mistake.

I think it's politically inevitable that New Orleans will be rebuilt, but that doesn't mean rebuilding it is the right thing to do.

I have no objection to people who would like to rebuild New Orleans

contributing to such a project because they judge the benefits to exceed the costs, and they are willing to bear the costs (including the costs of protecting against repetition of this tragedy and private insurance against such events).

I have a strong objection to government subsidies that force unwilling people to contribute to this.

There are many people who perpetually rebuild their homes in unsafe areas because the government subsidizes their risky behavior.

That is theft. I don't think that **The World** should support such things.

Perhaps it's the case that the benefits of rebuilding New Orleans justify the costs. However, we'll never know unless those who want it done bear all of the costs of doing it.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 09/13/2005 - 06:05 | [reply](#)

Let the market decide?

Walter Block **makes the point** that the market rather than government should decide whether New Orleans should be rebuilt:

Private enterprise alone should determine if the Big Easy is worth saving or not. Problems of "transactions costs" will be far easier to overcome than challenges presented by an inept and economically irrational government. Possibly a Donald Trump type might try to buy up all the buildings at a fraction of their previous value, and save his new investment by levee building and water pumping. He wouldn't need to get 100% sales. A lesser amount, say, 90%, might do, and he would only make his initial purchases subject to reaching this level. That is, he might first purchase options to buy.

But I'm not sure this is relevant given the fact our society is organised so that government is very much involved in the infrastructure and it's not realistic to expect we can privatise a whole city at this point in time.

But I would guess it's probably efficient to rebuild in any case even from a purely economical standpoint. Because I think once the water is pumped out, we'll see most of the city is still there, so it would be quite a waste to write it all off. Repairing the city will surely cost less than building a completely new city elsewhere. And indeed, when you add to that the emotional component of not wanting to lose such a historic place, plus that it's good for the soul, the decision shouldn't be too hard.

Here in Holland in 1953 we had almost exactly the same thing happen. Also a flooding of a huge area, because a storm broke the dikes - something which had been predicted by experts for years but they didn't do anything about it. But it was all rebuilt and they made super strong dikes that are expected to break only about

once every 10000 years.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 00:32 | [reply](#)

Good for whose soul?

Are you claiming to know what is good for the souls of the 500,000+ former residents of New Orleans? Are the people who choose to leave and never return somehow moral cowards?

Perhaps they should be forced back to rebuild the city to fulfill your vision of what is good for them.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 13:18 | [reply](#)

Why are cities built?

New Orleans will be rebuilt. The Mississippi Delta is a fabulous place with many economic assets. As for real estate, Location, Location, Location. Below water tho is not Location, unless you are a shrimp or a clam.

New Orleans will be rebuilt. Rebuild it right, on the same premise that the original city was founded, above water.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 16:04 | [reply](#)

Re: Good for whose soul?

Perhaps they should be forced back to rebuild the city to fulfill your vision of what is good for them.

We disagree. Do you think we should be forced to agree, in order to fulfil your vision of what is good for us?

by **Editor** on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 16:23 | [reply](#)

Re: Let the market decide?

Isn't this a bit of a category error? If I were to write an article extolling the virtues of the Macintosh operating system over Windows, and urging people to switch to the former, would you reply that it would be better to let the market decide?

The point is, preferences are changeable. Preferences are causally prior to market forces. Preferences are a legitimate subject for debate and for creative thought. And there is no way of 'letting the market decide' what one's preferences should be.

by **David Deutsch** on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 02:46 | [reply](#)

Who Should Pay?

David,

It's perfectly legitimate for anyone to express their preferences. But, it's also the case that it's usually illegitimate to force others, who disagree, to pay for those preferences

There may well be great reasons why people should prefer to rebuild New Orleans. The best way to decide whether this is decided by reason and argument rather than force is to refrain from coercively forcing some to subsidize the expressed preferences of others, and to let those others express their preferences by choosing to pay for what they say is worth the costs.

The market doesn't determine what makes sense. But, it can help to determine whether there is actually sufficient economic demand for something to justify its costs.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 04:45 | [reply](#)

Macintoshes

To complete the analogy.

You may or may not be right about the superiority of the Macintosh's operating system.

But you would certainly be wrong to advocate the spending of taxpayer money to support the adoption of Macintoshes vs. PCs.

Likewise, I think you would be wrong to support taxpayer subsidized assumption of the costs of rebuilding New Orleans that people wouldn't voluntarily assume.

It's possible that rebuilding New Orleans is well worth it. But, separating people who make choices from the costs of those choices is to encourage mistakes. I think we should avoid the fatal conceit that we already know the right answer.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 04:55 | [reply](#)

Re: Let the market decide

David wrote:

Isn't this a bit of a category error? [...]

Yes, I agree with your point. There are really two separate questions involved:

1. Should these decisions be left to the government or the market?
2. What is the best decision?

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 12:45 | [reply](#)

Neither

This is not an either/or question. It is more a question of complex market forces and geography, also economics, also politics, greed and goodness, rational vision, also foolish dreams.

There is a market for swampland. There is a government which is not always by and for the people. All the King's Men is an excellent read right about now. Yet New Orleans shall be rebuilt and maybe well.

Perhaps the problem is more succinctly stated, who will pay and is the risk worth the risk of return?

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 21:30 | [reply](#)
