

New Orleans, February, 2010

The annual meeting of the International Studies Association gave me the excuse to fly to New Orleans on the last day of Mardi Gras, which is also known as Fat Tuesday. After 11 days of Carnival (Balls, parades, and, feasting), the City and thousands of tourists celebrate the last day with huge parades and packed streets of partiers in the French Quarter. Community-based Krewes (clubs) toss colorful beads to revelers from their perches on floats, many pulled by semi-trucks, as you can see in this picture.



On the right is a woman's beads hurling through the air to a "lucky" person trying to catch the flying plastic necklaces.

This was the Rex parade with some 75 semi-trucks and trailers tying up downtown New Orleans all day. Each truck held 20 to 30 people continuously throwing beads. All this was just one out of at least a 100 such social parades!

Given that some parades climax with a fancy, expensive Ball, can you imagine the cost? I asked how people could afford it, and I was told that people spent all year long fund raising. I can imagine that businesses, both on top of and underneath the ground, are good for some of the



bill, as it brings in such piles of tourist dollars.

The weather was sunny and cold with high temperatures around 50 degrees. I arrived downtown about 3pm and had to walk about 10 blocks to the hotel with my suitcases because of the parades. About sunset I walked down to infamous Bourbon Street with my camera, and found these scenes:



In the French Quarter, beads and other little junk toys were being thrown from balconies while people on the street begged for the symbolic alms. The

woman above with black gloves had just, 2-seconds before the picture jerked the top of her dress down. Such tokens of sacrifice are sure to get more generous rewards. Women on the balconies are more likely to flash than on the street, so there is more going on than just the fun of throwing and collecting beads.



This couple dressed in white was from Holland, but their dress was authentic royalty from the period when Mardi Gras began. They even insisted in putting beads on me, so I went back to the hotel enriched, so to speak, by a half dozen 50 cent necklaces.

Below is the scene on Canal Street between the Quarter and the Riverside convention area.

Talk about toxic waste! The odor on Bourbon Street was almost nauseating. In places it looked like gallons of beer had been used to wash the streets.

Several groups were parading with Jesus and salvation signs, but few seemed to notice. One wonders what it will take to transform such party going to something more considerate of others.



I remarked to the locals how amazing the size of the Mardi Gras party seemed, and they said that it was nothing compared to the previous week's party to celebrate the [New Orleans Saints](#) winning their first Super Bowl some 10 days earlier. The joy of that win fed right into Mardi Gras, lifting the City's spirits just five years after Katrina devastated the city.

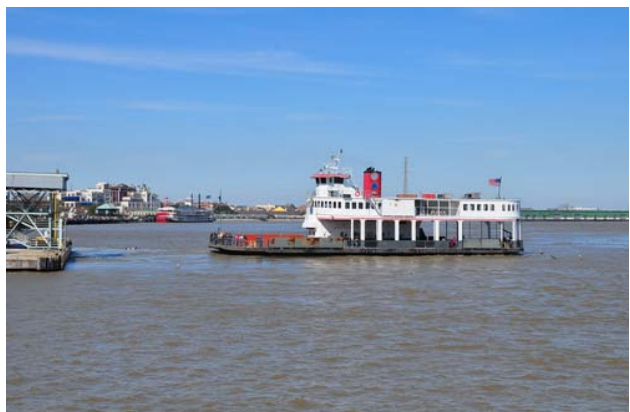
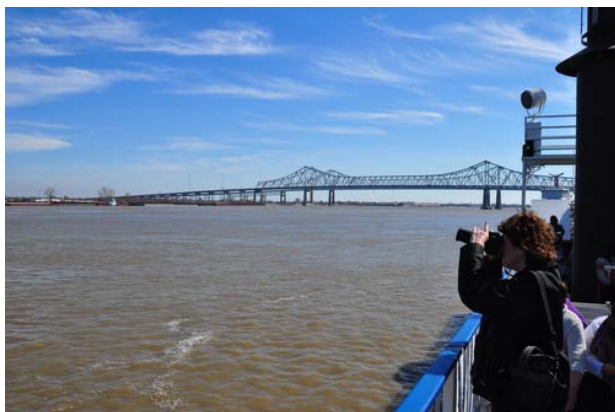
Mardi Gras ended at midnight that night. At midnight, the police on horseback lead the cleaning crews down the streets, sending people home, to the bars, or to another street. In heavily-Catholic New Orleans, many revelers will be in church the next day, [Ash Wednesday](#), to have ashes daubed on their foreheads as they, in theory, begin 40 days of prayer, penitence and self-denial leading up to [Easter](#).



Nancy arrived Friday night and Saturday we took a little cruise on the Creole Queen, one of the two big cruise boats. You can see the boat behind the Joker and me. The Joker has become the main symbol of Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

Below on the left, Nancy from the boat is taking a picture of the infamous bridge to Jefferson Parish, where, five years ago during Katrina, the whites, at gunpoint kept the poor blacks from entering. It is hard to imagine such chaos.

Meanwhile the ferry (below on the right) quietly travels from the French Quarter across the wide but rapidly flowing Mississippi River and returns about every 20 minutes. You can see a glimpse of the French Quarter behind the ferry in the photo.



The pseudo-paddle boat took us up river for what seemed like only 3 or 4 miles and stopped adjacent to the main park dedicated to the main battlefield of the Battle of New Orleans. This historical event was in January, 1815, the last battle of the War of 1812. The Americans were fighting off the British, who couldn't quite accept the fact that they

had been driven out of the United States once already. Here is a shot of the battleground now.



The cannons now are painted an ugly blue. However, between the cannons stands this majestic moss-laden Cyprus tree.

Saturday night we went to a real jazz club, Snug Harbor. The Herlin Riley quartet was performing. They were extremely professional and good entertainers. Even Nancy enjoyed them, although she might not ever admit it to you.

On our last day, we had a few extra hours before our flight left, so we rented a car and drove to City Park to see the New Orleans Botanical Gardens. Perhaps the most unique feature of the Gardens is a collection of about 10 New Orleans-style birdhouses, an example of which appears here. Few birds could be seen using the



houses, but the people liked them a lot. Each house has a different design if not architectural style. Bright colors symbolize the colorful local culture.

Even though most plants remained brown or dead from the winter cold, already a few flowers were blooming. This bright orange flower has a long, cone-shaped body. Let me know if you know what kind it is:



Nestled in the Botanical Gardens were a couple of the beautiful magnolia trees (on right). The blossoms up close are quite beautiful, as you can see in the picture below



The picture above was taken through the fence of the City Park's Sculpture Gardens. The Gardens were closed for repair as they had just received their Katrina rebuilding money from FEMA – five years after the hurricane and flooding.



A postscript on the International Studies Association (ISA)

Not having attended the ISA before, there were some big surprises. It was the first convention I've been to where the CIA had a booth and some sessions. In the booth they were trying to recruit instructors to include CIA material in their courses or to come to teach at the CIA University. I have never seen so many people that work for NGOs (Non-Governmental Agencies). Often they are referred to as "aid workers." Many sessions discussed issues of disaster aid management.

I went to a variety of sessions, including several on the state of the humanitarian institutions, as well as unusual topics like emotions in politics and rehabilitating women and girl child soldiers. I had not realized that "girl child soldiers" were so common.

The ISA has about 5,000 members, half of whom are academic instructors and half of whom are practitioners or researchers. The academics mostly teach international affairs or foreign policy courses. I was most impressed by how many non-Americans were in attendance and giving papers. I can't remember a single session that did not have at least one person from a foreign country. I would guess that at least a fourth of the attendees were from other countries, and not too surprisingly, most of them were from European countries.

On each of the four days there were 4 time slots, with about 70 concurrent sessions per time slot. That adds up to 1,500 sessions. With about 5 persons per session, that means there were 7,500 presentations. That is pretty remarkable, but quite a few people gave 2 or 3 presentations, to make up for people like me that did not give any presentation.

My major goal for attending the meetings was to collect ideas and resources for my website on compassionate societies. Many sessions were on topics for which I already had a lot of resource material, e.g., human rights, gender and race issues, and environmental studies. I found several sessions on international ethics to be quite stimulating and thought provoking. I learned about an important book, *Moral Boundaries*, on the political ethics of caring. Ironically the author has an office in the political science department at Minnesota, and I had never met her even though her office was just a few floors above mine.

The sessions I found most useful were on humanitarianism. Some were philosophical and others focused on practical topics such as the failings and inadequacies of the international aid nonprofit industry. I had not realized that at least 80% of aid work is done by 2 or 3 organizations. The Red Cross & Oxfam are the top two. Providing immediate disaster relief does not pose a big problem for them as they have planes, ships, and supplies already to go, but addressing ongoing famine relief and to help conflict ridden regions are problematic. I bought a bunch of books and met some interesting people, so the trip was useful in many ways.

One session consisted of several presentations about using humor in conflict resolution. It reminds me of last week's joke by Ann Coulter. She said that Moslems should be barred from air travel, and that they should use magic carpets instead. When asked, in question and answer time, what should one do without a magic carpet, she said "Use a camel instead." On the basis of that remark she was barred from speaking at the University of Ottawa. It goes to show how humor doesn't always work as humor.