

Katrina Revisited: "American Phoenix"

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cjs@tulane.edu

In 2005, just three months after Hurricane Katrina, history professor Randy Sparks and his Tulane colleague Bruce Raeburn joined a group of French scholars in Paris for one of the first conferences about Katrina's aftermath. Five years later, Sparks is bringing his French colleagues to Tulane to "take another look at the storm and its impact."



History professor Randy Sparks is hosting colleagues from a French research institution for a conference at Tulane on Hurricane Katrina's aftermath. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The result is a [conference](#) on Thursday and Friday (Oct. 21—22) with talks by scholars from Tulane and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) of Paris, a lecture by the author of an acclaimed book related to disaster response, and a jazz music concert. The conference will feature talks on political, cultural and geographical issues related to the storm.

"From American Sodom to American Phoenix: The Destruction and Rebirth of New Orleans" is free of charge and open to the public, although [pre-registration](#) is requested. The [schedule](#) has sessions each day in the Lavin-Bernick Center and

evening events in Freeman Auditorium at the Woldenberg Art Center.

“We thought the fifth anniversary was a really important point to assess how far we've come, which in many ways is absolutely remarkable,” says Sparks. Katrina's aftermath has important implications for how this country will deal with disaster in the future, he says.

The French connection with Sparks' department began in 2003 with Francois Weil, a visiting Mellon Foundation professor. After Katrina, Weil created two visiting professorships in France for Sparks and Raeburn, curator of the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane.

The conference also features author Rebecca Solnit, who will talk about her book, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* at 7 p.m. on Thursday.

Friday's 7 p.m. closing event, “Celebrating the Odyssey Project,” will recognize the French Ministry of Culture's post-Katrina program that brought New Orleans jazz musicians to France to perform. Four of those musicians — Evan Christopher (clarinet), Tom McDermott (piano), David Torkanowsky (keyboards) and Leah Chase (vocals) — will talk about their experiences and perform in concert.