

About a week ago, the Treme production was approached by active preservationists in New Orleans and informed that the classic shotgun houses that were photographed for the drama's first season were in danger of being torn down. The preservationists themselves explained that they valued these properties and wanted the opportunity to convince the mayor that these properties had historic merit, that financing could be achieved, and that the block could be rehabilitated.

At that point, the producers agreed to support their efforts by writing a letter expressing exactly that. We wrote an April 7 letter privately to Mayor Landrieu. We did not grandstand the issue. We made no public statements. We called no press conferences.

The producers assumed that as a result of this action, there were two possible outcomes:

1) The letter -- and the preservationists' stance -- would not find merit with the city for any number of reasons; either because priorities and policies require the demolition, or because any effort by the preservationists' to forward and fund a rehabilitation plan was unsuccessful.

Or:

2) The letter would find favor, in which case there would likely be some consensus among the mayor, the preservationists and the Central City community on such a basis. In such an event, the producers fully expected that we would be approached to contribute in both time and money to such a project.

Indeed, HBO and Treme -- as well as the individual producers of the drama -- have already raised or personally contributed close to a quarter of a million dollars to New Orleans non-profits including the New Orleans Musicians Clinic, the Roots of Music, Common Ground, Habitat For Humanity and Associated Black Charities, among others. We certainly expected that having spoken to the ideal of creating viable housing out of those shotguns, we might be obliged to make such a housing and preservation initiative a sponsored charity as well.

Since penning our *amicus curiae*, we waited patiently to hear back from both City Hall and the preservationists -- hoping the former might see possibilities in the properties and seek to engage our assistance and that the latter might be putting together financing and support to which we expected to contribute.

Instead, a third outcome -- one that I am hard-pressed to have foreseen -- has been achieved.

3) We heard back from no one. And on the day of the demolition, news coverage of this issue has implied that it was the Treme production alone - - and not the preservationists themselves -- who initiated a campaign against the proposed demolition, and who elected to make those

properties a priority. Moreover, the mayor himself -- having been only informed of our letter today, apparently -- has expressed disappointment at what he feels was last-minute grandstanding.

Lastly, many New Orleanians -- fed a very stilted scenario in the early news accounts -- have been amazingly quick to condemn a production that has aggressively committed to long-term support of a variety of local non-profit campaigns. And many have actually characterized our appeal as an attempt by some dilettante Hollywood-types to preserve some urban blight for purposes of filming and/or profit, and to do so without offering resources for the effort.

Remarkable, really.

Again, preservationists came to us about saving some properties that they feel have merit. We agreed and wrote on behalf of their effort, fully expecting that if city officials, preservationists and the community found common purpose in saving the houses on Derbigny Street -- houses that are in no way a sound stage and have no value to the production save for their appearance in a single still photograph -- that Treme would be contributing time and money to that effort to create some affordable housing units for months and years to come.

So, for joining with people in a fledgling effort to turn vacant houses into affordable housing and fully expecting that when the time came we would be required, as a production, to ante up, we have been handed our heads by all concerned.

No good deed. That's the saying, isn't it?