

# UC Berkeley

## UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

The Politics of Visibility: Urban Housing Struggles in Post-Katrina New Orleans

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1cp8p2xz>

### Author

Colom, Siri Joelle

### Publication Date

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

The Politics of Visibility: Urban Housing Struggles in Post-Katrina New Orleans

By

Siri Joelle Colom

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Michael Burawoy, Chair

Professor Laura Enríquez

Professor Ananya Roy

Fall 2014

## Abstract

This dissertation compares three housing and land struggles that emerged in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans. I analyze the politics that emerge around the closure of public housing, the razing of a neighborhood for a dual-hospital complex, and the attempt to repopulate the predominately Black, working-class Lower Ninth Ward. The dissertation broadly asks: what are the techniques of governance in an era of neoliberalism and how do local actors respond to the physical and political dispossession that comes with these techniques? Using ethnographic research, I uncover the spatial politics of poverty that developed around contested rebuilding and redevelopment policies in an increasingly privatized urban environment.

## Preliminary Pages

### Acknowledgements

This dissertation developed over many years with the support and guidance from family, friends, colleagues, teachers, mentors, and the community of New Orleans itself. Though it could never have been finished without the curiosity, assistance, and hours of reading and rereading, all the ideas are mine alone. Any issues and problems represent only the failings of the author and none of her excellent community of support.

My committee has been with me for much longer than the dissertation. Professor Laura Enríquez was my first advisor when I entered the program. She has guided much of my work, encouraged my thinking, supported my adventures, and gently suggested better paths when better ones were available. I was introduced to Professor Ananya Roy through her thrilling class on the city. I pursued her through graduate classes and talks, and have had the privilege to work with her on this project. She added depth in critical urban scholarship and always pushed me to challenge the center. My chair and guide, Professor Michael Burawoy was, and I believe is for many, the first person to make social theory come alive. He is a “bloody brilliant” (to borrow his own expression) teacher, a fierce advisor, and a rigorous thinker. He made me fight for my ideas and the dissertation is better for having engaged him.

Graduate student life is full of twists and turns and completing this dissertation would not have been possible without the camaraderie and support of my colleagues. To writing-teaching-research friends (in no particular order) Sarah Q., Gretchen, Jennifer R., Lynne, Dawn, Katie, Sylvia, Laura M., Damon, Nick, Laura N., Jen S., Leslie, Christyna, Fidan, Emily, Laleh, Gabe, Julia, Mike, Marcel, Elise and many others, you made the oft-times lonely act of writing social, you challenged my ideas, and pushed concepts and categories. This work is better because of your engagement. I also thank all the good folks in the department of sociology who provided support, jokes, and even some teasing. Undergraduate students Veronica Chew and Jessica Toyota worked on analyzing data from the media, and Jessica made the excellent maps.

The good people of New Orleans opened homes and shared experiences, showing great courage in the struggle to rebuild lives after such widespread pain and suffering. They are why I finished. There are many, many in the city who assisted me in the completion of this work. The list is long, and I know I will forget someone important. Tremendous thanks and a debt of gratitude to: Endesha, Mary, Sandra, Brad O, Brad V, Kathy, Mack, Evan, Jacques, Jordan, Lydia, Rachel, Janet, Mel, and Martha. The above gave their time and were people I learned a tremendous amount from. There were many others represented in interviews and fieldnotes, who helped shape the dissertation and I thank them all. There were also people that were part of my everyday life while living in the city who influenced my experience and understanding of the rhythms of New Orleans, but who do not make an ‘official’ appearance in these pages, their influence is certainly there.

Lastly, I would have never finished the dissertation without my core of friends and family. My colleagues in graduate school (and eventually professors in their own right) kept me sane, reminded me that I was all right, and encouraged me to follow my gut. My close friends

outside of the academy provided perspective. My parents, Diane and Bill, never doubted me, and they are the reason I never turned back. My brother Trevor, sister Evan and their families provided grounding and kinship. My *huge* extended family never let me forget where I really came from. And finally, I owe a tremendous debt to my dearest friend and companion Pegah, she has moved twice for me, supported me with every ounce of her, and has demonstrated to me that life with her will be full of laughter and joy. I thank them all for making me the person I am.

### **On Names**

Most names of interviewees and organizations have been changed to preserve confidentiality (I note only those names which have not been changed). Names of public officials speaking in their public capacity do remain, as do any resident speaking in a public forum. Many times, individuals had given permission to use their full names. But for continuity I have chosen to use pseudonyms for all but in official public spaces.

## Table of Contents

Prologue .....	1
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	5
Chapter 2 Hypervisibility of the Lower Ninth Ward .....	26
Chapter 3 The Destruction of Public Housing the Politics of Stigma. ....	47
Chapter 4 Subcontracting Democracy. ....	74
Chapter 5 Conclusion .....	114
Methodological Appendix: Making visible the invisible: From political ethnography to the Politics of Ethnography .....	118

# Prologue

## Out of the Frying Pan and Into the Fire

“I was never more hated than when I tried to be honest. Or when, even as just now I've tried to articulate exactly what I felt to be the truth. No one was satisfied.”

— Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

When I arrived in New Orleans in early 2010 to begin fieldwork on housing struggles in the post-Katrina landscape, it was in the shadow of another horrendous disaster. The week prior a tremendous earthquake hit Haiti destroying much of the infrastructure of the country as well as killing over 200,000 people on the island<sup>1</sup>. This number is still unbelievable to imagine. As I listened and read incessantly to the news on the earthquake in Haiti, I found myself with the similar emotional turmoil I had felt four and a half years prior in the weeks after Katrina. There is so little to do other than watch and listen. The distance appears insurmountable, yet the feelings that are called up are immediate and close.

Soon after, religious leader Pat Robertson offered his assessment of the earthquake's cause: connecting the disaster to Haiti's Vodun tradition, he mused that it had “made a pact with the devil...And the devil said, 'OK, it's a deal.' Ever since, they have been cursed by one thing after another” (Condon 2010).

More pointedly, he suggested this pact was made to overcome French colonialism and slavery. Robertson had offered similar commentary on his network in September of 2005 right after Hurricane Katrina. He claimed the hurricane and the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers were the outcome of legalized abortion in this country. He wasn't the only commentator to suggest that disasters are examples of a wrathful God speaking, particularly when they hit a vulnerable and predominately Black population. Representative Baker of Louisiana claimed that Katrina was God's way of ridding the city of the poor in public housing.

Global and national inequalities built up over centuries<sup>2</sup> left much of Port-au-Prince, a densely packed and poorly built city, with an extraordinarily high number of casualties. The total deforestation of Haiti (98% of the island is without trees) had removed the one natural barrier that might have kept the land protected from mudslides, hurricanes, and flooding. This

---

<sup>1</sup> According to O'Connor (2012) the number is still in dispute with some reports saying just over 150,000 to others suggesting over 400,000.

<sup>2</sup> As a telling example, the high interest loan Haiti took out to pay France in 1825 for Frances's loss of property in Haiti (both human and land) was not repaid until the 1940s.

was eerily reminiscent of the post-Katrina discussion on the destruction of the cypress swamps, which had removed the nature buffer to hurricanes. Unlike Katrina and other disasters of its kind, in Haiti, it appeared that wealth did not safeguard its residents on higher ground or in better-made structures: the presidential palace collapsed as did the prison. But, as in New Orleans, access to wealth would be the best indicator of the ability to recovery and rebuild.

But the opinions of religious and political leaders quoted above highlight a common inability to understand the social root causes and their continual unfolding, which in our environmentally degraded world, we must, if we have any hope to halt the dangerous relationship between inequality, environmental risk, and the lack of meaningful political participation. We must ask why Katrina's levees were continually under built, its cypress groves destroyed, and its canals enlarged for oil and gas, all the time destroying a delicate ecosystem. We must ask how Haiti's resources had been plundered by its elite (most especially the Duvaliers), its country punished by debt to wealthier countries which imposed high interest rates, and its forests decimated. We can call that God, but this god has an unusually human face with a profit motive.

### **New Orleans**

I came to New Orleans to follow the ongoing housing struggles of communities which sat at the margins of the social structure by virtue of the intersections of class and race. My research led me to hundreds of hours of public meetings, small strategy sessions, protests, informal and formal interviews with participants, a meeting with the mayor, press releases, opening ceremonies, memorials for those lost during Katrina as well as those lost due to the miscarriage of justice following the hurricane, courtroom proceedings, and delivery runs to community members. City councilors started to recognize me, local agitators offered me access to files and offices, people commiserated over drinks in bars, I volunteered rebuilding assistance to a number of organizations, I sat on the board of a sustainable building organization, and I walked streets with petitioners handing leaflets to residents. I wanted to know what the politics on the ground looked like after 5 years. I was interested in the claims they made, but more than that, I wanted to know how they made those claims and why they continued to fight when in many cases they had already lost. What were the tactics they used to shed light on the process and what were the deeper issues they struggled for?

This project grew out of a nascent desire to understand the possibilities for social change within the larger economic structure, what theorists have called 'neoliberalism', 'market fundamentalism', or 'disaster capitalism'. I was primarily motivated by questions that revolved around local politics and local control for marginalized communities that faced economic, social and political dispossession. What were the changes that occurred post-Katrina, both in response to the crisis caused by the disaster, as well as the changes that came about because of the opening that the disaster provided those most able to take advantage of the crisis? How did the forms of local participation, so widely touted after Katrina, look on the ground 5-10 years out?

Most published work on New Orleans after the storm rightly focused on the structures of dispossession that led to the social disaster and the dramatic outcomes of this disparity. But there is little writing that addressed the ways in which the process of political dispossession developed after the storm. Naomi Klein's influential book on disaster capitalism emphasized the power of neoliberal ideology to capitalize on disasters. According to Klein, our society is largely structured around the economy of disaster capitalism. In this view, capital can take advantage of the power vacuums created by disasters to make enormous profits, and it generates disasters in order to profit from them. Though a potent critique of our time, in this formulation disaster capitalism is such a powerful force that the possibility of change appears almost non-existent. This is a world with limited possibility and limited space for social movements, but a world that desperately needs communities to shout out and be heard.

Dispossession occurs throughout the world, particularly on the backs of the poorest and most marginalized. More recently, it has become a generalized phenomena reaching well into the middle class as it did during the housing crisis that began in 2008. But everywhere throughout the world we see public critiques. When Occupy first emerged in the aftermath of the crisis, it seemed to many to come from nowhere. Tents, symbolizing both mobility and dispossession at once, sprung up in every encampment and became its ubiquitous symbol. The tent reclaimed public space and called for a 'right to the city'. This reclaiming of public space with tents was not a new phenomena, for some time leading up to 2008, homeless encampments had sprung up in many urban public spaces, as well as at the margins of communities. They both challenged and were a result of local governments' implementation of draconian rules that delimited public space and who could or could not be in it. In 2007 New Orleans's local government also faced a serious confrontation when the homeless tent city, Homeless Pride, situated itself on the grounds in front of city hall asking to be seen.

New Orleans would become the watershed for a particular moment in contemplating who we are as a collective. It had us reflect as never before on inequality, race, and on the environment. But it told us even more about a particular political moment of our era.

Growing economic inequality has been matched with decreasing access to the political sphere. What is surprising is not that we live in a society that has at its pinnacle what even mainstream economists have called an oligarchy (Gilens and Page 2014), but that given the limited possibility for engaging in meaningful political action, apathy has not become a generalized phenomena. What we witness is rather that politics periodically boil over to revolt, anger, and protest. The assumption at the heart of many of those engaged in fights, from the radical to the libertarian, is that there is a possibility for change. One could claim that it is naiveté, that people believe that if they could convince one more person then a right would be restored, while the reality of institutional change is more about reproduction and stasis than about revolution. But, this would be an incorrect characterization of their motives. Many of the people I witnessed for the 18 months I lived in the city were more than well aware of the difficulties of change. They recognized that they might not win the battle. What became most intriguing to me as a social scientist is the ways in which these struggles transformed from a set

of clear demands around rights to and about housing, into larger claims of representation. These are local struggles with a local flavor that tell us much more about the enactment and practice of everyday politics. However, they can also serve to highlight the mechanisms of politics's more congealed form.

People often come together because something larger than the object of immediate concern motivates them. Housing dispossession connects the cases I researched, but a more profound connection concerns the political questions of legitimacy, belonging, and dignity, which are difficult to quantify. These socio-political questions go beyond politics as a form of power but rather as a process of being and becoming. The focus on the post-Katrina story has mostly consisted of overviews of either loss or renewal. This dissertation, one of the few in-depth ethnographic studies of post-Katrina life takes a different tact, by studying a political terrain marked by increasing limits to participation and resistance to that shrinking political space. These social practices revolve around the political tension of visibility and invisibility of people, place and process. They engage a deep dual meaning of politics because they are about power and they are about belonging.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

“What is not pictured is not real. Much of routinized misery is invisible; much that is made visible is not ordinary or routine.”

—Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (1997: xiii)

### **New Orleans, August 2005**

People sat by televisions watching the weather channel or they updated webpages for any change in the trajectory of Hurricane Katrina as it lumbered toward the Gulf Coast, an enormous ocean liner of a storm, its bow pointed at the coast of New Orleans. There was a strange sense for viewers of watching something unfold as closely as it did on TV and computer screens in our homes, yet having no direct ability to respond. For Americans, used to a culture of charity and assistance and accustomed to immediate gratification, waiting was difficult. News crews filming almost exclusively from the French Quarter, one of the highest points in the city, showed live clips of wind and rain whipping sideways through the streets. In the early morning of August 29, it appeared that the storm had spared the city. The winds were not as strong as they had been, the waters rose, but had yet to crest. In reality, the storm had spared the city. It was not the storm that caused the disaster, it was the poorly built and maintained infrastructure meant to protect the city, it was the racial organization of homes which left African American residents in the lowest lying land, and it was inequality rooted in the class system which made it most difficult for the poorest residents to return, that caused the disaster. By mid morning, the water had topped the levees in Plaquemines, St. Bernard Parish and New Orleans East. By 8am two breaches in the Industrial Canal flooded most of the Upper and Lower Ninth Ward, and the Lower Ninth Ward faced a wall of water that tore houses off their foundations. Throughout the next 24 hours, levee after levee gave way and within 48 hours 80% of the city was under water (Drye 2005).

In the following weeks, as images of streaming people escaping and trying to escape the flooding filled screens, outrage grew at the slow federal response to the flooding. A country increasingly tiring of President G.W. Bush, found the response the perfect example of all that was rotten at the top: a leader more interested in placing well-connected friends into key governmental positions irrespective of qualifications, an increasing reliance on private corporations for military and disaster response, and a leader seemingly more concerned with his ranch than the lives of those he supposedly governed. It was not only the sight of political ineptitude that shocked those viewing from afar, it was also the clear racial dimension of those left in the city. The black bodies of New Orleans' poorest filled the Convention Center and the Superdome, two pillars of New Orleans economy that represented the visibility of the

spectacles of sports and tourism, now were presented as spaces of ‘chaos’ and ‘anarchy’. The visibility of the spatial inequality opened up a dialogue in the weeks following the storm around race, space, and inequality which prefigured discussions that would, in part, emerge again after the economic crisis a few years later.

The floods receded and the extraordinary returned to the ordinary: the ongoing struggle with ossified political structures in the city, which left poorer, and predominantly African American residents at the political margins. As those residents located at the economic and social margins and expelled by the storm and flood, trickled back into the city soon discovered, rebuilding would not only require tools such as hammers and saws, but a new set of skills which I call the Politics of Visibility.

This dissertation examines the spatial politics of poverty in the post-Katrina urban landscape of New Orleans through a comparison of three housing struggles that emerged in the aftermath of the storm. I compare the politics that develop around the closure of public housing, the razing of a neighborhood for a dual-hospital complex, and the attempt to repopulate and reimagine the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood. The dissertation broadly asks: what are the urban spatial politics of poverty in an era of neoliberalism and how do local actors respond to this politico-spatial dispossession? In this introduction, I consider the ways in which the disaster was framed visibly through the media. As background, I give a brief history of the spatial-racial geography of the city. I also show how the ways of being ‘seen’ and visible to the state and market offered differential access to resources that allowed some the ability to return to the city and rebuild while others languished in FEMA trailers or far from their homes in the city. After considering visibility theoretically, I look at the ways in which the struggles moved beyond the immediate material needs of housing towards a politics of belonging. I introduce the three housing and land struggles and explore the tension between the techniques of power which served to make claimants and often the process invisible, and the tactics of grassroots struggle which challenged political invisibility and aimed to bring to light the process of urban politics in the city. These are all part of the politics of visibility.

## New Orleans an extra- or ordinary city

Is New Orleans an extraordinary city in ordinary times or an ordinary city in extraordinary times? Writers have tended to exoticize the city, noting that its unique racial-ethnic mix as well as history of being controlled by multiple colonial powers had contributed to a city that felt more Caribbean than North American. Being part of the South has also led to it being analyzed through a developmentalist lens. Its corruption and lack of industry was compared to regimes in the Global South, which allowed it to be dismissed as aberrant from the typical North American city (read “functioning” and “modern”). In these expressions, New Orleans is the extraordinary city.

But since Katrina, New Orleans's place on the map of world cities has become assured<sup>3</sup>, not merely because of its visibility in the traditional sense of increased media attention making it a "global city". New Orleans has become an ordinary city in extraordinary times. In what way are these times extraordinary? Extreme spatial inequality, increased privatization, climate change, a shrinking regulatory state are forces seen around the nation (and around the world), but which came together in New Orleans in the extraordinary visual form of destruction. Why then ordinary? Because these are trends we see throughout the urban cities of the world. New Orleans should not be read as aberrant, but rather as exemplary of the contemporary urban spatial order.

In the next section I will present the three overarching forces that have made New Orleans an exemplar of neoliberal urban space. First, because of the development of its natural and social geography it is a spatially divided city, which has made it a prime location for overdetermined "territorial stigmatization" (Wacquant 2007). I give a brief history of the city both to highlight territory but also as a background for the entire dissertation. Second, New Orleans is the exemplar 'crisis city' (Fox Gotham & Greenberg 2014) in which marketization of the government has become standardized. Finally, New Orleans embodies the process of "spatial fixing" of poverty and capital. These processes have sped up rapidly since the storm and led to the increasing spatial and political exclusion of poorer and working class residents from the city, a trend we see occurring in many cities throughout the world.

These characteristics are important for understanding the political economic forces at work in carving out New Orleans of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But, they only provide the backdrop for the focus of the dissertation. Up until now we have failed to fully theorize the mechanisms as well as the responses to these exclusionary practices of the neoliberal city. Our theory for response has left us between revolt and "post-political" apathy. But we require a more robust formulation for understanding both the techniques for how these mechanisms of disfranchisement are implemented and carried out on the ground as well as the responses they elicit. Thus, after exploring the background forces, I will turn to the focus of this dissertation: the interplay between the exclusionary techniques and the tactics of political response to the spatial exclusion of the poor since Katrina.

## **Social Geography and the History of New Orleans**

The social geography of New Orleans has been shaped by the confluence of the forces of nature, racial classification, and political economy. The power of the Mississippi River, which brought alluvial sands into the bay and created the swamplands surrounding the city, also made the city an ideal port for shipping to and from the interior of the country. From the time of its establishment by European settlers, the city has been at the intersection of cultures, a point of struggle between power-holders, and a port of call for any variety of trade. Environmental inequity and segregated space have developed hand in hand over the centuries (Colton 2005).

---

<sup>3</sup> Cities on and off the map is suggested from Jennifer Robinson's article "Off the Map" 2002

Swamps and water surround the city, and from the beginning of its settlement, it required an enormous amount of labor to lift the city from the swamps and keep the waters from the streets, labor which came in the form of African slaves who contributed key manual as well as technical labor to the developing colony. Early in its colonial past, New Orleans became a place where the slave economy received its chattel and from which it set the new property out to the various plantations that dotted the banks of the Mississippi. But, the division between black and white was more fluid in the French Colony than it was in its later ossified form (Hall 1992). Built on a more open French system, which allowed for a tripartite system of racial classification, rather than the dual system to which much of the rest of the South fell. The city was also a place where freed Blacks had more economic opportunities and could settle, own property, and work within the urban community.

Our classificatory division of race, embedded and developed in the economy of slavery, is also part of the city's history. Its natural and social landscape are interwoven tightly as a result of three centuries of development within this. The geography of race divides the high lands from the low. The whiter portions of the city are located on higher ground closer to the river, a reminder of the plantation past, when owner's homes sat along the banks of the river. The slave quarters were located down in the rich, low-lying soils which faced periodic flooding when the river swelled. As the city developed, the better lands and streets were always located along high ground, which wealthier residents were able to take advantage of.

Over the next century the city grew in size and in reputation. It was known as a place of vice and freedom. There was greater acceptability of social relationship of varying kinds across racial and ethnic lines, and New Orleans developed as a sort of cosmopolitan location for the unburdening of social restrictions around sex and race. Despite the liberty of vice that the city is often portrayed as harboring, its spatial history is more structure and division than fluidity and openness. Post-Civil War, *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the key Supreme Court ruling which allowed for legalization of "separate but equal" institutions originated in New Orleans. In the 1892 Creole Homer Plessy, in a orchestrated protest to the Louisiana law which created separate rail cars by racial classification, purchased a ticket for a whites only car.<sup>4</sup> The period following *Plessy*, as the Jim Crow regime was codified, was one of hardening racial lines throughout the South.

### *From the New Deal to Desegregation*

The years of the 1950s through the 1980s for most of the U.S. was one of a stratified movement out of the city by whites and a lack of mobility for blacks. This changed the landscape of cities across the U.S. including New Orleans, where some parishes (e.g. St. Bernard and Jefferson) boomed as working class whites fled the inner city. Though "white flight" was clearly an important process in many cities, Martha Mahoney (1990), in a piece on public housing in New Orleans, points out that, in actuality, the movement out of public housing by whites took place at a similar rate in the post-Civil Rights Act era (when public housing was officially desegregated) as it did before the act. What differed was that whites had the

---

<sup>4</sup> One of the ironies is that Plessy was such a light skinned Creole that he was not kicked off the train initially.

possibility of moving out and opportunities outside of public housing such that it “brought gradual racial transition in the projects as whites stopped moving in” because of the “greater white opportunity within the private market” (1283). Lack of opportunities for social and spatial movement also helped to create a number of middle class black communities in the city. New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward developed as two areas where the black working and middle class were able to purchase property. But, this also meant that race and class were even more tightly intertwined in the spatial geography.

By the early 2000s, New Orleans had three key industries: tourism, oil and gas, and the port. As the economy moved toward one based heavily on service it relied on cheap labor, which it found in the poorer black communities of the city. The oil and gas industries, and port had utilized more skilled labor, but the numbers of these jobs dwindled with the mechanization of certain tasks they entailed, while the service economy continued to develop. Cheap labor required cheap housing options. Public housing, far from housing the non-working, housed the elderly, women, and the working poor in the tourism industry.

The importance of understanding the social geography of the city is that it imprinted a spatially divided city with pockets of white wealth opposite those of black poverty in much more rigid lines than other cities.<sup>5</sup> Those spaces hit the hardest by Katrina (save Lakeshore) were almost universally black spaces, and they have recovered the slowest as well. The lack of recovery has compounded the spatial stigmatization of black neighborhoods.

Certainly particular neighborhoods have become marked by “territorial stigmatization,” a process which Wacquant sees as distinctly 21<sup>st</sup> century in the neoliberal cities of the world. These areas are marked not only by poverty, race or ethnicity, but by the attribution of complete social disorganization as seen from afar. This is very much the case with public housing in New Orleans, and to a lesser extent for the other two communities which seen as “blighted” areas. Wacquant is more interested in the relationship of territorial stigmatization to the habituses of residents, functionaries, and scholastic producers, than is this current work. But, the formulation is useful for recognizing the depth at which space and stigma operate as a legitimizing discourse for renewal through removal. We can also connect stigmatization to land value, bringing together Marxists and sociological analyses of the spaces of poverty. This is a particularly useful framework for understanding the process of redevelopment and rebuilding after Katrina.

### *Post-Katrina*

In the wake of Katrina observers worried about the possibility of a major demographic and spatial shift that could transform the city from a majority African American one to a majority white city. Morris considered the diaspora of Katrina, particularly the children, a second “Black Diaspora,” likening it to the great southern migration of the early to mid-twentieth century (Morris 2008). Fussell (2007) gofferred an historical account of the ways in

---

<sup>5</sup> There are still some areas of the city where the relationship of race to space is block by block , rather than neighborhood, which is much more common to residential segregation patters of southern cities as a whole.

which labor needs and race intersected during the last 200 years through post-Katrina. She noted that the exodus of black New Orleanians from the storm was followed by an influx of Latino workers, who filled positions in the construction field. She wrote, “The increased demand for low-skill, low-wage workers has not increased blacks’ representation in the city, as it had done in the recent past, since many displaced New Orleanians from that segment of the labor force lost their homes or apartments and cannot find affordable rental property” (855). In 2007 Arnold Hirsch wrote that the demographic shift would have significant political consequences in the city, particularly for Creoles who had held power over the last two decades. His warning would come true a few years later as the city council became majority white<sup>6</sup> and Mitch Landreiu became the first white mayor in decades.<sup>7</sup>

### Cities in Crisis

Recent work has looked at how social, natural, and economic disasters and crises make way for a radical reshaping of the political economic landscape in cities. Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg (2014) comparing the urban redevelopment efforts of New York after 9/11 and New Orleans after Katrina, write that these two paradigmatic cities are developing via the process of “crisis-driven urbanization”. Officials utilize market strategies for recovery, which has led to greater risk for the most vulnerable populations. These market frameworks, which include privatization of many social services as well as recovery strategies that aim to bolster business needs over communities, are justified under the “recovery” umbrella. Not only are more vulnerable populations most at risk, but there is a deepening of the social and natural risks and vulnerabilities.

Moves to privatize government in the name of efficiency had led directly to some of the problems in the immediate aftermath of Katrina. New Orleans witnessed the increasing role of private police forces in the patrolling of the city. Blackwater, just off its infamous tour in the Middle East, became one of a number of military corporations doing rebuilding business in New Orleans. Companies such as Halliburton capitalized on the “spoils” of disaster as they had on the spoils of war in Iraq. Naomi Klein’s book *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, captured the role of corporations in creating profitable moments after disaster (and indeed, creating disasters to profit). Others writing specifically on Katrina utilizing Klein’s formulation of disaster capitalism have noted the ways in which neoliberal strategies funneled money for recovery into multiple levels of corporations or non-profits (Arena 2012) rather than government agencies and the individuals who needed it (Lipsitz 2006, Gunewardena 2008). Gunewardena has called this process that of “marketiz[ing] the commons as the primary recovery strategy” (8). Based on an ideology that places privatization, liberalization, and ‘small government’ at the fore, with the market assumed to be the most efficacious, the government

---

<sup>6</sup> As of August 2014 the council is back to being majority black.

<sup>7</sup> Hirsch is particularly interested in the role the paternalistic relationship between Creoles of color and the powerful white elite played in the local political sphere prior to the storm.

subcontracts key functions of recovery and social welfare worth billions of dollars. Jamie Peck (2006) in a comparative piece on post-Katrina New Orleans and New York in the 1970s, has noted the ways in which in the aftermath of crisis think tanks quickly generated an ideational program based on regulating the poor while subsidizing the market to make the city become a place for the middle class, business and the market. This produced a particular discourse on urban crisis, which restricted the possibilities of full recovery in New Orleans, in fact, recovery was designed precisely to restrict its access to those entities with market value. These moves to privatize all areas of government meant that there would be almost no oversight for these organizations and companies.

Ideological belief that the best government is a small government has grown in the last few decades. But, like many ideological apparatuses, its power as a belief system has little connection to the on the ground reality. Small government, in this case, means only a government that does not regulate capitalism. In many other areas, government is expanding, but expanding principally its policing arm. This “market fundamentalism” (Somers 2008), which celebrates the removal of government from the market, has very in common with precisely those governments seen as the “best” examples of this *laissez-faire* policy, such as the United States and at various times South East Asia, or any well performing nation. In fact, far from being removed, these countries are deeply involved in the economy.

One of the hallmarks of “market fundamentalism” has been the slow but steady deregulation of much of the economy, but in particular, the banking and finance industry, leading to the increased ‘financialization’ of the market. Here is where the role of housing has come to play an increasingly important role in fixing the capital absorption problem (Harvey), that is the issue of how to increase the space for generating capital. In combination with banks, the manipulation of mortgages have become one of the clearest ways to fix the problem of where to generate profit. It is within the housing market where capital has found room for maneuvering.

### **An urban “Spatial fix”**

In mid-July 2014 the New Orleans local news featured two articles focused on housing. The first wrote of the impact on high-end rentals that new downtown developments are having. The article began, “It’s a good time to be in the apartment business” (Parker 2014). It celebrated how new developments have brought in capital from around the country, as well as from outside. Three days later an article from another local news station reported growing fears of the aggressive panhandling of the homeless under the mid-town expressway overpass located a few blocks from many of the new high-end apartments. Quoting one woman who works in downtown business, “Something has to be done about these hostile, aggressive panhandlers.” According to the article, the state and local officials were working together to “re-purpose and potentially fence[e]” the area (Capo 2014).

These two anecdotes from New Orleans aptly summarize the two key spatial trends in the neoliberal city. The first of these is that, capital finds that urban land can become the “spatial fix” for capitalist growth (Hackworth 2007). The second is the growing need to remove

poverty and the poor from the urban center, producing a spatial arrangement that remove poverty from our vision.

Urban property contributes to the production of space which helps capitalism survive in the long term (Lefebvre 1991). But given that land is a fixed asset, it necessitates that the space be continually remade or destroyed in order to convert it into a new value. In practice, this involves destroying low-profit structures for higher ones, such as the conversion of unused lofts into high-end condos, or in the case of New Orleans, developing high-end rental units along key business corridors by removing older or unproductive buildings along adjacent streets. David Harvey, borrowing a phrase from Schumpeter, has called this process that of “creative destruction” (see also Brenner and Theodor 2002). Capitalism must destroy value in order that it can create more value and expand capital. The destructive capacity of capitalism was for Marx an inherent part of its dialectic: that is, in order to overcome crises, capital must periodically destroy the forces of production. In urban space, these destructions take the form of rapid gentrification (turning over of land and property to higher income holders) or larger scale urban renewal projects. Spatial fixes have worked in the past as a way to shore up capitalism. They were very much part of the drive behind the massive suburbanization of the 1950s and 1960s, but suburbanization stopped functioning as capitalism transformed itself in the 1970s and therefore new forms of spatial fixes have arisen in the neoliberal city (Hackworth 2007).

A key player behind these two fixes, for capital and poverty, is the government. Far from the invisible hand of the market being the impetus, the government has played an integral role in creating a climate for capital’s growth, first in the suburbs and now in the inner city. The new spatial requirements of the inner cities have shifted local governments from concerned primarily with “managerial” functions of public goods and social welfare, to “entrepreneurial” in nature as they actively seek capital inputs for the urban infrastructure (Harvey 1989).

The other spatial trend is driven by the same needs of capital to increase the exchange value of land and property in order to keep capital liquid. This requires the expulsion of the poorest from the city. The removal of the poor, working class, or homeless, is seen as an expedient way to transform the space they occupy. Don Mitchell (2003) has referred to this process as the “annihilation of space by law,” particularly in reference to laws, which target the homeless (such as anti-sitting laws many cities have put into effect). Neil Smith (1996) has called the city with zero tolerance for the poor, “the revanchist city” indicating the militaristic-moralistic underpinnings of the move to clear the city of this population. This “spatial fix” is at times ideologically legitimized, but it is very much materially based in the need to generate capital accumulation in the city. In a commentary on the lack of evidence that mixed-income developments “fixes” the problem of poverty, James DeFilippis (2013) notes that we have always attempted “spatial fixes for *sociopolitical* economic problems” (70, italics added) but never for the stated purpose of addressing poverty. Further, he writes, “space as the solution is a problem” because the “the root causes of poverty within capitalism are the organization of labor markets...and the centrality of wage labor to household income and wealth” (70).

In New Orleans, the last decade since Katrina can be summarized as the political effort to increase capital by making poverty invisible: disappearing the poor. Said Pres Kabacoff, one of the key local developers in New Orleans, “This may sound dismaying or callous, but we were overwhelmed in poverty before the storm, [in] the storm we lost a lot of our poor. They found either an even better place to live, they didn’t have the finances to return, and so we don’t quite have the drag we had with the number of poor. So we have a great opportunity to de-concentrate the poor, which is I think the right thing to do” (quoted in Odabashian et al 2014). New Orleans has been able to harness massive quantities federal dollars in order to work on the two pronged “spatial fix” since the storm. And though success has often been seen as slow because it is viewed in terms of the numbers of those former residents who have been able to return, for capital, it has been a rousing success. Dispersal of the poor from the city-scape, a rapid increase in rents and gentrification, massive urban renewal projects, and increased federal funds, loans, and grants have mostly ended up supporting a very select group.

Scholars have noted the important role that cities play in the remaking of spatial arrangements (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Harvey 1989, Smith 1996), as well as the importance cities hold for challenges to these spatial orders (Lefebvre 1991, 2003). The rapid planetary urbanism requires that we rethink the place the urban has in relation to the shifting nature of the political, economic, natural, and social world around, as well as the response to these rapid changes. It is to the response to these changes that the dissertation will now turn.

Urban poverty is a visible phenomena in as much as it is treated and addressed as such. The struggle over the visibility of the poor has become one of the key political struggle of our era and it is directly tied to the needs of capital in urban space. The struggle over the production of space through a “spatial fix” of poverty drives a particular form of politics that I will call the politics of visibility. The dissertation takes off where others have laid down a strong foundation and asks what these politics look like.

## The Politics of Visibility

The Politics of visibility is the form in which spatial politics of poverty have taken in the neoliberal city. Urban space becomes one means by which residents can make claims of belonging. It is not merely about formal property rights and citizenship, but about access to these spaces which are called home. It is a politics of visibility because we are thinking about three-dimensional space and its connection to the city. It is also that access to this space is meaningful for the city (as a form of exchange value), which clashes with its meaning for residents (as a form of use-value).

I also consider visibility because it is in the tension around what is visible that the struggles exist. There is a politics to how people are ‘seen’ by the state. The state both sees (Scott 1998) *and* it systematically ignores or obscures. Residents respond to how they are seen by the state and they use their resources to be seen in particular ways. But, it is not visibility for visibility’s sake alone, people are struggling for real material ends. Political visibility is thus a

relationship, not merely something states 'do' but a terrain of struggle. These struggles are political because they target the state, rather than capital, who is the real beneficiary of the techniques. Residents must engage with local level politics in all forms (in terms of rights, control, coordination, clashing interests) as they work to be seen. The way in which people, places, and processes are made visible or invisible by the state is a political project. Finally, residents are deeply engaged with the question of belonging, that is of political life.

In the past the way the state negotiated between capital and civil society was through the judicious use of concessions to both. The neoliberal state is now an active agent in the market, rather than a regulator, as such, its most effective technique of rule has become invisibility of state functions and processes. The city, itself, has taken on many of the functions which state and federal governmental bodies had once done (particularly around the funding of social services). City government and leaders have found itself playing a more entrepreneurial role, setting aside its past managerial side (Harvey, 1989). This new city must transform (or destroy) its land from non-circulating to circulating capital in order to attract new capital into the city. The requirements for productive land mean that anything which devalues space is pushed to the outskirts. Poverty, the homeless, the degraded, all devalue the land they live on. Their visibility is a direct challenge to profit.

The politics of visibility are a politics contesting dispossession by the dispossessed, it is a politics at the margins. They are not primarily economic struggles, though there is an economic aspect in each struggle and that is what brought the dispossessed to engage with the state. But it is not what, ultimately kept these players engaged with the state. They organize around political dispossession and political disaffection. It is a politics that often occurs outside boardrooms and city hall, though what occurs (or does not) in those public places becomes important. It is a politics that utilizes performance, posters, marches, bulletins, street-by-street and door-to-door recruitment. It is a politics by other means, because formal channels have calcified. This does not suggest that formal means are not pursued, they are actively pursued, in particular the court system which, in each of the three cases, became a key point of struggle. But these too tended to be battles that could not be won. And, it was never based on the merit of the case. Often there was good legal precedent or evidence of wrongdoing. But the argument was made by political leaders and developers, more than one time, to push forward because though wrongdoing may have taken place, it was not considered worthwhile to arrest "development" for the city.

Dispossessions is the process of transferring wealth through erasure. When we think about visibility, we think of bringing something to light or the process of seeing. Visibility is both a metaphor as well as a sensory response. It is no surprise that in Louisiana (as well as many other states) the law, which makes any meeting over public business an open meeting, is called the "Sunshine law". In New Orleans, politics is about keeping as many people chained cave as possible. Actual decision-making was held behind closed doors. Public meetings only provided a performative area for the political process, as most decisions had been decided long before the so-called public meeting had been held.

### Visibility post-Katrina

Scholars of Katrina have noted the process of invisibility that became exemplary of the post-Katrina political atmosphere. Visibility/invisibility come up repeatedly throughout the literature on Katrina. Most of it focuses on how spatial and social exclusion of African Americans has compounded their invisibility. Somers (2008) writes that, in particular, exclusion from the labor markets has led to political exclusion. She writes, “the structural effects of racism and market fundamentalism have created a surplus population concentrated in the African -American community. Attributed with little of contractual value, they have become the socially and morally excluded—invisible, dispensable, and forgotten” (Somers 114). She highlights the ways in which the double discrimination they experience has led to an exclusion from the moral community of the nation-state. This is what Henry Giroux (2006) calls, “the new biopolitics of disposability... Excommunicated from the sphere of human concern, [the poor] have been rendered invisible, utterly disposable...” (175). Vincanne Adams (2013) addresses the inclusion or exclusion from “market-visibility” that determined people’s ability to recover, noting, “one of the main routes to dispossession among African Americans in the recovery period was that of the organization of recovery in ways that prioritized those who were already market-visible...for people who could not show the specific paperwork of title...there was little help” (39). This lead them to more reliant on the informal economy. To be “market” or “fiscally” visible meant you were deemed creditworthy and had some form of collateral (67). Adams also demonstrates how subcontractors, working for the government in the capacity of recovery, seemed bent on making people invisible (45). And Alicia Long suggests that some of the motivation for the closure of public housing in New Orleans after the storm was motivated by a desire to suppress their political visibility. She writes, “if nothing else, this engineered dispersal will certainly render [public housing residents] less visible and perhaps make them less troublesome” (2007: 801). If, as is noted by all these scholars, neoliberalism channeled through the storm has pushed people from sight, we must ask in what ways do they seek to become visible again.

Visibility implies the use of the sense of sight, and experience perceived most often through the eyes. But, visibility can be understood in its metaphorical sense, as a more expansive “seeing” and “understanding” through multiple senses. We make something visible by speaking about it and being heard. Something is visible to us when we experience it through touch, as the artist who has been blind since birth, creates visible objects and sculpture. What we imply by visibility is embodied empathy. Visibility is a social experience, a communication in space and in time. The politics of visibility are about this desire to be understood, heard, and incorporated. It is about the nature of democracy in that these are struggles that push for wider participation by citizens in the decisions their government makes.

Don Mitchell writes that struggles around issues of social justice rely on a “logic of representation,” which is the claimants ability to represent themselves and their interests to others and the state. This is based upon the notion of a right of representation, which “cannot be guaranteed...in the abstract—rather it is something always to struggle toward. In this struggle, the development...of a *space for representation*, a place in which groups and

individuals can make themselves *visible*, is crucial” (2003: 33). This is why, he claims, public space is so crucial. And, yet, so much analysis has focused on struggles over public space that we might be missing a greater understanding of the range of politics in this era.

How do we think about the ways in which visibility has informed the nature of our political struggles? In what ways do the tactics and the techniques of politics represent a new visibility of political language? We certainly know that recent upheavals throughout the world have brought to light the role of new forms of social media. So, in terms of the form of politics, there has been a shift. In the case of New Orleans, what is visible in these three cases is “the moment” the extraordinary of the hurricane’s landfall. But, much is “invisible” to outside eyes: the protracted nature of the struggles, the local nature of the struggles, and the particular nature of the space of these struggles.

## Housing

The hollowing out of the nation-state within neoliberalism has moved more of the governance responsibilities to cities and city-regions, what Swyngedouw has referred to as “glocalization” (cited in Hackworth 2007), and this has led to cities becoming more “entrepreneurial” in their governance (Harvey 1989). Public housing is one of the key provision of the Keynesian welfare state which has been under steady attack since the 1970s. Its ideological centrality has made it site of the struggle over the shape of the neoliberal state. But, the visibility of public housing was compounded by the invisibility of the federal government in all aspects of the private housing market.

In the cases I will present here the common attribute is that these are struggles over and around housing. David Harvey has emphasized the unique role which housing and land have played within modern capitalism. In his work on Parisian urban renewal under Haussmann he notes that the key shift occurred as property moves from the petty bourgeoisie to a rentier class. Once housing becomes commodified, it leads to the rapid transformation of the Parisian skyline. And it is here that politics develops. Harvey “locates the essence of that politics in the contradiction between mobility and immobility: between capital in its mobile forms on the one hand and capital in its immobile, spatially fixed forms as factories, worker skills, social and physical infrastructures, etc., on the other”.<sup>8</sup> Mobility and immobility, this is an important tension within housing. It also emerges around the question of people. The poor, too often “immobile” are an impediment to the needs of mobile capital. The question becomes, what do the politics that confront this tension look like? What are the techniques of politics of the precariously housed, the ‘invisible’? If the key tool during late capitalism is dispossession, one of the techniques is making invisible the process of accumulation. How then do those involved in political struggles make visible their claims? The tension between invisibility and visibility is the focus of this present research.

---

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Cox 1998 *Spaces of Dependence*

The question of who has access to politics is best exemplified in the struggle over public housing. Here we see the tension around visibility in the way in which techniques used to exclude residents from the political process were contested by the residents themselves through tactics aimed at achieving inclusion. The challenges to political process are best seen in the struggle around the rebuilding of a new hospital complex and the razing of a neighborhood in Lower Mid City. In this case, the techniques of privatization and subcontracting out public processes were directly contested by former residents and allies as they worked to illuminate the inner and often hidden workings around the development. Finally, the question of who represents and to whom do they represent, is exemplified in the case of the Lower Ninth Ward, where NGOs, movie stars, green building interests, and political hopefuls all vie for speaking for the residents and often to a wider audience.

### **The Housing Question post-Katrina**

By 2007, as more people moved back to the city, as well as out of FEMA trailers, it became increasingly clear that the lack of affordable housing was reaching a critical point. Rents were rising every week: according to many reports there was a 40% increase in rents the few years after the storm in the city.<sup>9</sup> The city already had a large population of poorer residents who needed affordable housing before Katrina, and for them the squeeze became untenable. The black community in the city felt increasingly as though all efforts were being made to write them out of the future of the city. Their neighborhoods were not being rebuilt, the disproportionately black public housing residents had been shut out, and the emphasis on individual homeowners as the recipients of federal aid meant that renters struggled to return to the city. The influx of young white professions and non-profit workers meant more competition for fewer rental apartments.

It was also, ironically, homeowners in wealthier communities who received the greatest federal assistance. FEMA, HUD, and the state of Louisiana through the "Road Home" program, reimbursed repairs based not on how much the repairs would cost but on the value of the home, a value that was deeply racialized. Thus, if you lived in a poorer and predominately black community with a lower housing value, you received less than someone who lived in a higher income area, even if you had the exact same floor plan and the exact same damage. The effect meant that the poorer areas received the least help in rebuilding<sup>10</sup>.

The flood destroyed a large segment of housing. Sheila Crowley (2006) and others (Hartman and Squires 2006, have highlighted how decimated low-income housing was after the storm. The areas of the city on the lowest ground were the Black neighborhoods of the city (Lakeview excepting), but it was both working class and middle class black neighborhoods that lost housing. One of the largest areas hit was New Orleans East, a predominately black middle class neighborhood that is almost totally absent from the literature save with the focus on the

---

<sup>9</sup> this number was repeated often in news sources on New Orleans.

<sup>10</sup> A suit brought on by the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center claimed discrimination and was eventually settled for \$62 million, but not for six years after the storm (Thompson 2013)

small but vibrant Vietnamese community, in contrast the Lower Ninth Ward, so ubiquitous in the news, became the standard-bearer for the city and the storm.

Affordable housing shortage were not merely an effect of the storm. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “From 2001 to 2005, the number of unassisted low-income renter households whose housing costs exceed 50 percent of their income — a group the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) categorizes as having ‘severe housing cost burdens’ — increased by more than 1 million, or 20 percent” (HUD 2008). The entire country was faced with increasing rents and housing costs making it even more difficult for low-income residents to afford housing. Poor, black New Orleanians, faced the quadruple threat of a nationally tight housing market driving up rents and prices, the underlying problems that would eventually lead to the mortgage crisis of 2008, a storm and flood which destroyed a large percentage of affordable rental units, and a government at all levels that was determined to keep public housing closed. Mayor Nagin’s promise to bring back the ‘chocolate city’ sounded like hollow pandering to most.

This was a time when government subsidies for housing were most needed. In 2007 the Housing Authority of New Orleans’s (HANO) wait list for section 8 vouchers and public housing was over 17,000. Public housing alone had a wait list of close to 7,000. Yet, the local government pushed in part by the federal government, was planning to demolish over 4,500 units of public housing. And by some estimates the homeless population had tripled in New Orleans during the five years after the storm. Housing was at a crisis point.

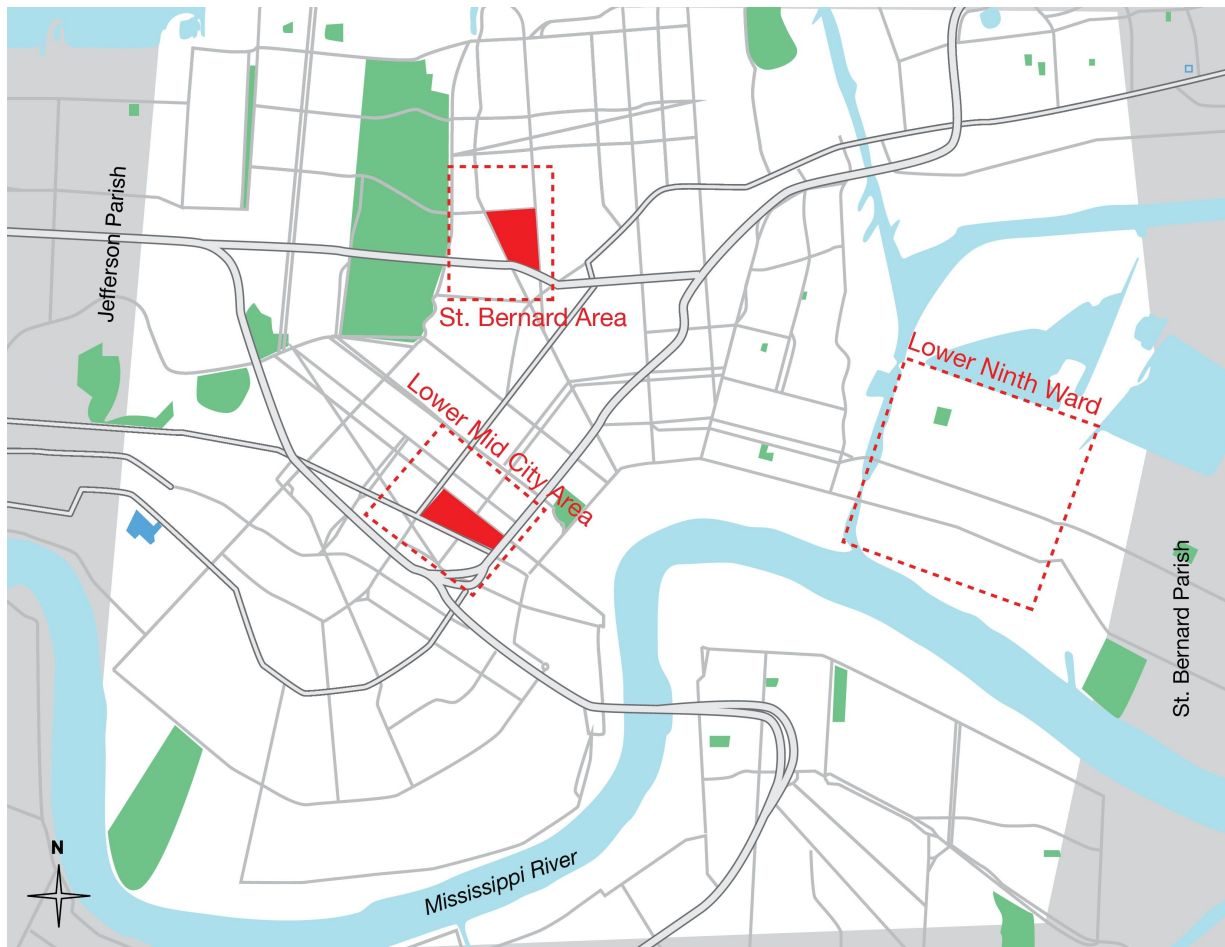
## The Cases

What was the nature of the local response to these larger shifts as they manifested in New Orleans? In the story that follows I will present three political struggles that emerged around housing dispossession. Each struggle represents a key dimension of how politics is contested and remade as it relates to the larger metaphor of visibility.

### Techniques & Tactics

Each of the following three empirical chapters is arranged as a struggle between the techniques and the tactics. As mentioned above, they all address key aspects of neoliberal politics: who belongs, how has the political process changed, and questions of representation. The techniques represent channels of power from above (often held by traditional institutions, but shifting in key ways), which worked to make people and processes invisible. Techniques imply the embeddedness of power, they represent forms of power. There are hints of Foucault in my use of “techniques,” as he suggests that the rather than individuals we should attend to the forms through which power is manifested. It removes the concept of power from individuals and organizations and focuses our critical lens on the channels, institutions, and importantly mechanisms of power. Tactics, on the other, hand are the responses to these techniques, they are the oftentimes guerrilla responses to governance. They are sometimes organized, and oftentimes not, but they are attempts at wresting control from above and

placing it below. De Certeau speaks of tactics as the way in which people reappropriate space from its intended use through creative means such as walking. I utilize tactics here as ways in which people reappropriate the means of politics.



### **Hypervisibility of Poverty and Race in the Lower Ninth Ward**

Soon after the storm, Lawrence Bobo (2006) noted that “If Katrina exposed America’s “dirty little secret” of persistent poverty and racial inequality, the data suggest that most Americans rather quickly got over any politically significant sense of discomfort or embarrassment” (3). The visibility of the intersection of poverty and race in New Orleans awoke great anger in a public viewing the storm on TVs and on the internet. Stamped in areas such as the Lower Ninth Ward, the intersection of race, poverty, and space, made for extraordinary media coverage. Great tension emerged between the outside and internal representations of the Lower Ninth Ward. In the beginning, the few residents who had moved back found the multiple NGOs in the community helpful in filtering money and unpaid labor to the city. As time went on, however, these “representations of need” became more and more problematic as residents lost control over the discourse.

Does the metaphor of light only imply openness, accessibility, and participation in the body politic? Not always. In the case of the Lower Ninth, the portrayal of the community post storm in the media, through non-profit building organizations, as well as planners served to portray a particular vision of the community. It was a powerful vision that drowned out most other local representations. The “hypervisibility” of both poverty and race in the Lower Ninth Ward contributed to a dialogue on the storm which served to express a particular idea of what New Orleans was (urban, Black, and needing the state). There was a way in which the hypervisibility served to aestheticize the neighborhood and poverty. As Ananya Roy has theorized, “The aestheticization of poverty is the establishment of an aesthetic and aestheticized (rather than political) relationship between viewer and viewed, between profession and city, between First and Third Worlds. It is an ideology of space” (Roy 2004: 302). In the case of the Lower Ninth Ward, both planners and volunteers served to produce this ideology of space. The aestheticization made the poor worthy in the eyes of their benefactors, which only served to justify the role of charity and non-profits in saving the community. The thousands of volunteers who came to the city contributed to what Vincanne Adams (2013) has referred to as the “affect economy,” serving to provide unpaid labor in order to restore the community. Local residents were seen as heroes for returning to the uninhabited locations of the city. While residents, in actuality, might only desire lights on their street and a working sewer system. The case of Lower Ninth Ward by looking at the way in which the hypervisibility of the neighborhood created certain conditions for local residents to contest (or not) the continuing marginality, it also made it difficult to justify to outsiders why, given the thousands of volunteers, it remained sparsely populated. Said one volunteer, “I don’t understand why they can’t just do this themselves, we’re here helping them, why can’t they help themselves?”<sup>11</sup> The tactics employed in response to the techniques of hypervisibility tended to push for self-reliance. Each church, each local neighborhood organization fought for self-determination as well as self-preservation, and at times their lack of coordination was seen by local politicians as a problem. Locals lived by the oft repeated motto: “better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission.” Responses to this outside representation of the community were fragmented and often contradictory. But more importantly, the over-representation of the Lower Ninth Ward served to obscure much of what happened in the rest of the city, that is, the hypervisibility of the Lower Ninth obscured some of the more radical mechanisms of dispossession taking place in the rest of the city.

### **Public Housing and the politics of stigma**

Public housing residents who fled the storm found that as the water receded they were not part of the master plan for rebuilding of the city. Barred from returning to their homes by the local housing authority, they faced a daunting task to return to the city. Compounding this was an atmosphere of hostility towards the poorest residents of the city coming from the local elite and legislators, who celebrated Katrina’s ability to ‘rid’ themselves of the poorest.

---

<sup>11</sup> fieldnotes, March 2008

In the weeks after the storm in 2005 media reports emerged that detailed the status of Katrina's "refugees" throughout the US. This nomenclature, which up until this point had been generally reserved to classify those who found themselves in liminal spaces outside their country of birth, called into the question the relationship of those fleeing the flooding to the nation state. This was not an academic quibble, but one that leapt around the existing communications channels till open for former residents. Members of the Black community<sup>12</sup> felt particularly incensed at the label, pointing out that its usage highlighted the liminal status of citizenship conferred on Blacks in the US. The debate called into question the relationship between the nation state and its citizens. Masquelier has written that the discomfort people felt in the use of the term had more to do with the Hurricane's destabilization of "an image of power, prosperity, and self-sufficiency that had been proudly projected onto national and international scenes as testimony to the vitality of the 'American dream'...Through the inequalities it exposed, the disaster severely undermined the notion of a self-sufficient and successful citizenry as well as the illusory comfort that this was a nation that took care of 'its own'" (2006: 736). But more importantly, she notes, the use of the term "refugee" was part of a racialized discourse that by "empha[cizing]... responsibility and accountability, surreptitiously excluded poor New Orleans residents from its public" (737). It expelled those escaping the flood from the nation, particularly those who were forced to utilize the large shelters—from the Superdome to the Astrodome—who were also predominantly poor and Black. And the terms raised the question of the role of government vis-a-vis the vulnerable.

In this second case, I look at the confrontation between former residents of public housing and the city, Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO), and developers after public housing remained shuttered after the storm. I focus mostly on the St. Bernard public housing development, which had an active group of former residents and allies protesting the closure on the grounds of human rights. Even after construction began on the new mixed income development, many continued to have active marches and sit-ins. They continued to agitate to insert their bodies into the public sphere in order ask: who is considered part of body politic? Faced with the dual prospect of fighting both for their homes as well as their dignity, they employed tactics which aimed to bring their presence into the public sphere, and include them in the body politic.

Emerging from the discussion on the role of the state are questions regarding what rights citizens have access to. In New Orleans, this revolved around the right to be housed as well as the "right to return" and this was most felt by those who lived in public housing. Debates emerged around how best to serve those in subsidized housing, and some felt they had no right to claim for more assistance. Others noted the most vulnerable and precariously housed should have immediate access to assistance.

## **Subcontracting Democracy in Lower Mid City**

---

<sup>12</sup> Al Sharpton had a stringent critique

Like scholars concerned with the growing privatization of social life and the abdication of the state after the storm, the case of the razing of a neighborhood for the rebuilding of a dual hospital addresses the ways in which the logic of the market have become so ubiquitous that the irony of destroying a neighborhood that was in the process of rebuilding for a hospital which already had a building never crossed the minds of the local elite. Compounding the irony is the fact that the placement of the hospital which required over 200 homes to be destroyed or moved was considered the greatest coup of the ‘recovery czar’. Such a celebration of the logic of the market led to multiple decisions that sidelined residents. The process of redevelopment became so convoluted with multiple plans, multiple agencies, multiple developers and stakeholders (never including the residents) that the process became a gordian knot of planning meetings. These techniques of obfuscation were countered by citizens attempts to constantly illuminate the process, garnering the frustration of the political powers who felt this was only a tactic to delay progress.

How has the organization of the political process shifted? The case of the hospital complex in Lower Mid City highlights the role of two new shifts within government. First, the increasing privatization of government functions has moved into handing the democratic process itself to large firms. In this case, international engineering firms ran most of the meetings that elicited public participation. I call this process, “subcontracting democracy.” Moving democratic functions away from the public spaces made it more difficult for those agitating against the planned hospital design and the tactics they employed utilized the street and the local media outlets as their main organs. Secondly, the process of creating a master plan for the area did not go through the regular channels nor did it involve the chosen firm who had conducted the plan for the rest of the city. Instead the organization in charge was a pseudo-governmental organization similar to a tax district, with no resident representation, nor any accountability. The hospital was deemed too important for the economic well-being of the city, to put it through regular political channels. From the very beginning, people trying to arrest the development knew it was an uphill battle, but they insisted they were there to hold their public officials accountable.

Below I include a chart of the general outline of the dissertation.

	<b>Politics of Visibility</b>	<b>Techniques of</b>	<b>Tactics of</b>	<b>Paradox of Visibility</b>
<b>Lower Ninth Ward</b>	struggle over the representation: who represents and what are those representations	Hypervisibility	Micro-resistance	obscures dispossession and expands domination

<b>Public Housing</b>	struggle over which bodies are part of the city: struggle to be seen	Exclusion	Inclusion	reproduces & deepens domination; state of exclusion
<b>Lower Mid-City/Charity Hospital</b>	struggle over the process of politics: what is hidden	Obfuscation	Illumination	small derailment of domination in the face of dispossession

### Contributions and Conclusions

If there is growing consensus around the contours of neoliberalism as a macro-economic process from above, there has been less work on in the U.S. on the ways local politics (actually existing politics) have shifted in response to the new organization of the economy, particularly in relation to most work since Katrina<sup>13</sup>. Work that did address government and politics, reaffirmed the retrenchment of the federal government from the realm of social welfare, the eroding of public goods as they are auctioned off to the private sphere, and the increasing role of non-profits and charity to deal with the detritus of the tattered social safety net. The only unique element was the spectacular nature of the event, which in an increasingly wired society meant that the long existing political economic trends were exposed in dramatic fashion. The numerous accounts and portrayals soon after focused on the failure of government at all levels (Johnson 2011). It was a particularly disastrous public relations period for the federal government under George W. Bush as the seeming indifference of the president combined with the incapacity of FEMA leaders to address the disaster, provided ample fodder for critics. Since the storm, many accounts focused heavily on the forms of neoliberal governance the storm exemplified: a lack of industry regulation and oversight by the state, a selling off of key public assets to private industry, a bureaucracy filled by nepotism without concern for skill, withering of state funds for upkeep, a bloated military apparatus, and an atrophied social security net. All of these descriptions are focused at the level of politics from above: organized, official politics of the state and the thousand threads connecting it to capital. This dissertation is concerned with a different aspect of politics: a politics from below as a relationship between the governed and governing. This is not the politics of the halls of government (though, indeed, part of the story takes place here), it is the street politics of people fighting for homes and land at the street level.

---

<sup>13</sup> This has not been the case with work from the Global South, which has dealt extensively with the politics from below.

Empirically, this study makes a number of advances. First, writing on New Orleans after the storm inevitably focused on the structures of dispossession that led to the social disaster, but there is little writing that addresses the political consequences since. Inevitably New Orleans has dropped off the radar as a newsworthy event, but sociologically, it is still profoundly important. It is important for us to begin to understand more about the contours of contestation around the state in these smaller more localized spaces, and not only focus on the extraordinary events, like the urban political uprisings that have been shaking the world since 2011.

Second, it focuses directly on the relationship between the form and the content of the struggles, rather than just the key players. Moving beyond traditional social movement literature which has tended to analyze tactics and discourses as a means to an end, this project puts these tactics within a larger political shift, showing how they exemplify a changing relationship between the governed and the government. I look to more recent work which asks key questions about neoliberal governance, as well as how media (in particular social media) is changing the nature of politics and social movements. But here too, I suggest media is less a means and more exemplary of a changing form of politics.

Third, by conceiving theoretically of ‘politics’ as a *relationship* between the governed and government (as opposed to something governments or civil society *does*), I bring this work into conversation with a rich emerging tradition of theory on urban space and politics from and about the global south. “What” this relationship looks like, “how” is it contested, and “who” are the representative figures, is what I am calling the “Politics of Visibility.” I suggest that the Politics of Visibility is the politics of our era.

This research is also one of the only ethnographic-based accounts since the storm. This kind of work requires an understanding of the city, local politics, the local actors beyond what can be gleaned in a visit or two. Ethnography is necessary to understand the ways in which techniques and tactics of what I am calling the “politics of visibility” are more than just methods of protest and rule. It tells us something important about the nature of the political and economic landscape. In a world where we fall back on easy dichotomies, the grey areas should be the focus of research. This captures the role of ethnography. The grey areas are the spaces where social life is most lively, problematic, confusing, and socially intriguing.<sup>14</sup> One issue with the majority of work<sup>15</sup> since Hurricane Katrina, is that it was written by researchers who spent little time in the city. It offered important critiques that contributed to the conversation on neoliberalism, but they were critiques from a distance and they often did not have the vantage point to capture the more complex moments of social life there. The researchers who conducted this work tended to interview the first line representatives in any given community, but rarely, if you will, the second line. In other words, certain voices were oversampled from

---

<sup>14</sup> what Anne Fadiman has called, “filling in the culture between the words”.

<sup>15</sup> Some notable exceptions being: Rachel Luft (2008), Frederick Weil (2010), and Jordan Flaherty (2010)—though the latter was written primarily for a non-academic audience—and D’Ann Penner (2009) and Vincanne Adams (2013) both who did extensive interview-based research and oral histories of residents and the process of recovery.

within a narrow range of actors in the city. Voices in one article reappear in another, and a similar story is repeated. Not because of apparent methodological rigor, but rather because of ease and distance. This project aims to reach the second line.

## Chapter 2

# Hypervisibility of the Lower Ninth Ward

Today, half of the Lower Ninth Ward has been taken over by fast growing plants and trees. Lawn mowers have no place here: some say the weeds have won. At many intersections in the neighborhood one feels they have been placed in the middle of an agricultural field, with growth, like stalks of corn or sugar cane, in every direction. A recent essay in the *New York Times Magazine* called “Jungleland” presented the community as overtaken by grass and used more as a dump for tires, trash, and the occasional body (Rich 2012). This image is contested by many locals, but their objections are not often heard. Rebuilding has been a slow process, one that began with the hopes that rebuilding the entire community as a sustainable one that could be done with the sweat equity of volunteers to the feeling of frustration over the large swaths of land where overgrown lots outnumber occupied homes.<sup>16</sup> The various levels of government often had too much on their hands to be able to address every community need and compounded this by handing over much of the building to non-profits and volunteers. Some, including well-known geographer Richard Campanella, have openly suggested that certain low-lying areas should not have been rebuilt. Even a resident of the Lower Ninth suggested that the only option for the neighborhood is to, “Burn the damn place down and start again<sup>17</sup>.” This is not a popular stance among most of the community as it is too reminiscent of past attempt at the erasure of the black community. But almost 10 years later there are more empty grass lots than homes.

When those of us not from New Orleans consider the images of Hurricane Katrina, our head is likely filled with the ubiquitous photos from above showing mile upon mile of houses under water. Or perhaps, it is lines of people in front of the convention center waiting to get on the few busses out of the city. It might also be the image of a barge, having broken through the industrial canal, sitting on top of houses in the Lower Ninth Ward. The storm was, as are most disasters in mass media drenched locations, primarily a visual one.

The visibility of the Lower Ninth Ward extends beyond traditional media. The neighborhood, almost unknown outside of New Orleans before the storm, became the focal point for research, plans, philanthropy, and the generation of ideas and theories on race and poverty. It became the representation and shorthand for the cause and effect of the storm. For those not from the neighborhood the picture presented was an aggregate one and a statistical

---

<sup>16</sup> As of August 2014 the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (GNOCDC) reports that addresses receiving mail in the Lower Ninth ward are at 45% of their pre-Katrina rate. The GNOCDC separates out the Holy Cross neighborhood from the rest of the Lower Ninth Ward something this author does not do. If separated out, Holy Cross is at 72% and the rest of the Lower Ninth is only at 34% (Mack and Plyer 20140).

<sup>17</sup> field notes, May 2012

picture, it presented a view from above witnessed from the seats of news helicopters. It was mediated through voices from outside of the community, such as volunteers who flooded to the city and to the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward in the years after the storm. One of the outcomes of the storm in New Orleans was a certain *becoming* of the area known as the Lower Ninth Ward. The Lower Ninth became the shorthand representation for all that had gone wrong and went wrong in the lead up to the storm. The highly visible natural disaster brought to light visible spatial inequality. Yet almost 10 years later, we still have a population there fighting to be seen and recognized politically.

Media visibility, however, did not lead to political visibility. Rather than struggling to be seen, the Lower Ninth Ward became a “hypervisible” community, one that was seen by all, over represented and over exposed.<sup>18</sup> Its visibility became a liability, with images and ideas generated from outside of the community by local state officials, planners, NGOs, and volunteers, which obscured the community member’s ideas of what the future of the neighborhood should be. It also obscured other parts of the city. The terrain of struggle for this community focused on the nature of the representation in relation to its future. While in other parts of the city, many struggled to be seen, in the Lower Ninth, they struggled against the ways in which they were been overrepresented. The visibility of the community became its own double-edged sword.

Becoming the Lower Ninth Ward, the household name that represented the metaphor of destruction, the blinding gaze of compassion and charity, and heroic figure of the architect and movie star, occurred not as a smooth ontological pathway, but emerged out of struggle. The struggle was not a particularly coherent one, against a particular and easy to identify object. It emerged as tensions around what the future of the neighborhood would be, who would be a part of that decision making process, and who was included in the image of the future. More specifically, tensions emerged around the production of ideas, images, expertise from outside of the community about the community itself. What I have called the hypervisibility of the community, was generated mostly by voices and instruments from outside of the neighborhood. Sometimes with altruistic motives, other times more self-serving ones. Either way, the result was a loss of control over the production of representation by the community. And, hypervisibility in the Lower Ninth Ward, like a spotlight on a stage illuminating one actor, helped to obscure dispossession throughout the rest of the city.

---

<sup>18</sup> “Hypervisibility” is often discussed within critical race studies. Patricia Hill Collins uses the word once, but evocatively, in *Black Feminist Thought* to talk about the way in which black female bodies have been over sexualized



### From Margin to the Center

Up until Katrina the neighborhood had remained a political backwater for the city, marked off from the rest by the Industrial Canal, it was more geographically connected to St. Bernard Parish than it was to Orleans Parish. It struggled for political recognition and infrastructure needs. Even today with the large numbers of volunteers still coming to the area, the community is often only seen from windows of cars on the two main through roads which connect St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes to metro New Orleans, and more recently from the window of tour buses. But, as historian Landphair (2007) noted, “Ironically, the Lower Ninth Ward—historically neglected, stigmatized, and peripheral to the city’s power structure—is now a household name across the nation, symbolizing the storm’s human disaster.” Examples abound, such as when, after the earthquake in Haiti struck, the *New York Times* published an article which compared the destruction on the island to that of the Lower Ninth Ward<sup>19</sup>. Municipal neglect in the Lower Ninth had an old history. The Lower Ninth was spatially distinct from the rest of the city, but construction of Industrial Canal between 1918-1923 solidified the separation. As Landphair writes “the area’s reputation as remote and irrelevant persisted from its founding through the opening years of the twenty-first century.” (837) However, the political indifference encouraged communal self-reliance of neighbors.<sup>20</sup> Even with limited numbers, a desire to return despite neglect led to a parcel-by-parcel rebuilding.

<sup>19</sup> Macfarquhar, Neil. 2010. “Haiti Is Again a Canvas for Approaches to Aid.” *The New York Times*, January 31. Retrieved December 16, 2014

<sup>20</sup> Landphair 1999 “In the late 1800s, the Ninth Ward’s isolation encouraged the growth of a self-sufficient communal culture among its residents. By 1890 over 17,000 people lived in the Ninth Ward”

The Lower Ninth Ward was the last area in the city to allow residents to return to their homes. It was the last area to lift a curfew. Nevertheless, stories abound of residents and small business owners who managed to pass the blockades and begin the rebuilding process. The local government, in disarray after the storm, had all but removed themselves from the community. The absent local government also meant that public services and safety were seriously deficient (from street lights to the sewer system). The common saying was “better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission” as locals boarded up vacant homes on their own, fixed neighborhood parks, rebuilt a school after being told they could not, and worked to bring neighbors back. Five, six, and seven years later the stories that were considered successes in the neighborhood were residents and businesses who worked despite the restrictions put in place. The muffler shop owner, passed the blockade to work 10-12 hours a day to open his shop, the residents who boarded up homes without permission, the community garden which took over a lot before local officials agreed to the permit.

In the aftermath of the storm, the attention the Lower Ninth received was welcomed. Past marginalities combined with the trauma suffered, the feeling of fear and absence when looking at driveways without homes, the difficulty returning and rebuilding needed to be voiced. Being able to share these stories with a wider audience was part of the process of recovery. Memories of those lost to the storm or to the difficulties of returning, memories of the space before the storm, were shared to anyone who came through. But, after time, as the community lost control over how it was represented the extensive visibility lost its appeal.

### Techniques Hypervisibility and Tactics of Micro-resistance

Outside voices came together to create a powerful hypervisible vision of the Lower Ninth Ward that overwhelmed the local representations. The dramatic increase of the representation of the community in traditional and new social media (writing, photography, news, etc.), moved images from the community to the outside. Connected to this dispersal of information was New Orleans’s position in the global north and the seeming contradiction the disaster presented in an industrialized country. This occurred not only via the increase of images moving out but with the influx of bodies moving in: volunteers, builders, planners, and non-profits, who became a second flood to hit the community. Many of these groups and individuals had differing views of what the needs of the community were, and they also constructed their own representations of the space, often an aesthetic one.

According to James Scott (1998) modern state power requires that space to be ordered, legible, uniform, and simplified. What does space need to be hyper-visible? It needs minute, narrow, and overwhelming production of images and ideas about the Lower Ninth Ward from outside of the community. In the Lower Ninth Ward, this production of knowledge revolved around three nodes. First, the Lower Ninth Ward became legible to the state and market actors. It moved from a place that had been ignored by the state as a “backwater” and where land had been passed down informally without official codification to a place that could become calculable to both the state as well as for the market. In fact, it had one of the highest rates of

homeownership in the city (GNOCDC census data cited in Landphair 2007) and a rate of Black homeownership closet to 10% higher than the average in the nation (Census data cited in Wagner and Edwards 2006) Second it became visible to experts, particularly urban planners and local officials, who came to the storm's tabula rasa. Finally, it became visible to a national and international audience motivated in great part through charity and compassion. All of these served to turn the gaze towards the Lower Ninth Ward, but like a spotlight, it focused on a pinpoint, the rest falling off into darkness. Hypervisibility helps to produces representations of a place and it produces knowledge by aiming a lens in a particular area.

The techniques I focus this chapter on emerged as sites for resistance and contestation amongst the community members as they struggled to maintain some power over the content of representation about their community. Often, these resistances were never fully developed, neither did they represent a coherent set of practices on the part of the community. Thus the local community's efforts towards some self-determination became fragmented and subsumed within the techniques that aligned closely the interests of rebuilding NGOs, planners, volunteers and tourists. The three forms of images generated from outside overwhelmed the local ones: the legibility needed by the state and market, particularly around the question of land and private property, aesthetic visions by urban planning and building which aestheticized the disaster, and finally a celebration of individualism and compassion from volunteers and charity.

In the Lower Ninth Ward, techniques of hypervisibility overwhelmed and fragmented the tactics that did arise. These small micro-resistences instead served to solidify the relationship of the neoliberal state to its citizens and did not add up to a coherent set of tactics that could challenge the direction of rebuilding in the city post-Katrina.

### **Making People Legible through Property**

"Brad Pitt's homes are nice but you have to be able to show that you were an owner"  
—C, fieldnotes, May 2011

Soon after the storm, tensions arose around property ownership and land in the Lower Ninth. Documenting land tenure had been haphazard there before the storm. Ownership of homes was recognized in the community. However, in many cases official paperwork had often not been updated for decades. Children and grandchildren took over homes and bills associated with them, but would not transfer the deed. This lack of legibility around property exploded soon after the storm as those 'unofficial' owners began to request funds and assistance for rebuilding. Not acknowledged as 'rightful' owners by FEMA or the local sate, residents fought for years to prove their legitimacy. The informality of property records meant many residents were never able to reclaim land or abandoned it out of frustration.

Prior to Katrina there were approximately 14,000 residents in the Lower Ninth Ward, as of 2014 there were just over 3000 (Marks and Plyer 2014). Before to the storm, 98% of the residents were African American, many residents had lived in the community their entire life.

Property was often passed down within families and sometimes remained in the name of a deceased mother, uncle, husband, or other relative. There was a long-standing looseness with which land and property was inherited within families and within the community. Deeds could be in the name of someone who had passed away 30 years prior. Many of the houses had remained in a family for multiple generations. A little talked about issue in much of the writing on post-Katrina but one that was a major concern for locals, was that many elderly were struggling to return. This was often connected to discrepancies of legal land tenure. Without legal tenure, residents could not receive federal or state assistance to fix badly damaged houses. In the Lower Ninth Ward, *every* home was badly damaged if not totally destroyed. If the head of the household was elderly, there often emerged dividing family concerns over the fate of the matriarch or patriarch. Sometimes children and grandchildren disagreed over what was the most appropriate place for the elder (in a home of a child or back in the Lower Ninth Ward). These were difficult decisions for families. Even today, services in the Lower Ninth are spotty. There was a lack of public services including lights on the streets and working sewer systems. Break-ins and theft are so common that residents have a wide range of mechanisms for preventing theft, including installing heavy metal safety doors, bars on windows, radios and lights left on when not at home, large dogs, and even hiring someone to stay in the house. In some of the more sparsely repopulated areas, closer to the canal breach, a house might be surrounded by empty and overgrown lots which residents complained provided cover for thieves. It was also difficult for residents to reach a hospital should something happen, and families of the elderly had to consider this.

Other times, families fought over the value of the property. One child might want to rebuild and another who lacked funds might not be able to or might not want to. Explained one lawyer: "Say a gentleman lives in parents house and he's 1 of 10 children with 8 still living, but he's the only one living there, the only one paying taxes, the only one interested in getting it back. He needs to get the signature of seven other siblings before Road Home will give him a check. How is he going to get all the signatures? One brother might want the money, and not sign unless he gets money. Well road home says you must use the money in 3 years towards the house, they want to see where the money goes. What is he going to do? You see the issue?" (C, May 2011). It was up to the residents to prove their ownership. This could mean hiring a lawyer, traveling from another state, and other difficulties which pressed hard against the resident's ability to return, and 'be made whole'. Importantly, "Katrina wiped out everything, including the documents in downtown," pointed out Alice, a pro-bono lawyer working in the Lower Ninth, which made locating original documents difficult to near impossible.

With the local records lost and the impossibility of navigating both the local and the federal bureaucracy, it was a minority of the neighborhood who could return quickly. The cost of rebuilding almost always exceeded the money that was offered through the various grant programs. In the Lower Ninth, due to the discriminatory way HUD and the Road Home program assessed properties based on market value not replacement value, residents in the Lower Ninth were often left \$100,000 short of funds. The exact same house in the Lower Ninth and in the

Garden District would receive drastically different amounts of money even though it required the same amount to repair. Ultimately this meant that if you were poor, or living in a poorer neighborhood, you would have to pay more out of pocket to repair your house than someone living in a wealthy district. And because of the history of race and space in the city, if one lived in a Black neighborhood the value of housing was assessed even lower.<sup>21</sup> Most working class families did not have the money to pay outright for repairs. By the time the court settled the class action law suit against HUD, it was more than 6 years after the storm and many residents had used the funds to live on, or had settled in their temporary homes away from the city.

Because residents could return only if they proved titled ownership to land, it legitimized the need to codify property in the wake of the storm. It also privileged land over any other form of registered ownership. For example, one woman in the neighborhood had been paying the property bills for her deceased husband for years. Everything was in her name, and she had been legally married. The title had not been moved to her name and she fought for four years without resolution in order to get money to repair her home. Property became the only form of proving connection to the community, but it was out of step with how the community had operated for years, neither did it recognize that the past negligence on behalf of the city was partly responsible for the informality that residents dealt with land and succession matters.

### *Land Trusts*

A Lower Ninth nonprofit, Ninth Ward Organization (NWO) suggested the road to recovery lay in two possibilities: community land trusts and a security district. In the case of the community land trust, NWO would hold the title for the land but the houses would be owned by residents. Community land trusts are economic organizations which uses community land ownership as a way of keeping land and housing affordable. The idea of the land trust had been raised before by a number of radical organizations right after the storm.<sup>22</sup> But NWO was looking for ways to secure its community foothold as well so had borrowed some ideas. The combination of an NGO that did not have community support along with a community without a culture of co-operative landholding meant the idea was met with almost total derision and even anger by locals. Many felt that the leader of NWO would profit from this endeavor, they noted that the board and NGO were filled with people connected to her. Numerous people pointed out that this organization had received a sizable grant from a national philanthropic<sup>23</sup> organization to get needed capital for starting land trusts, but that most of those funds were going to support the organization's employees. As one volunteer organizer said, "You can't see

---

<sup>21</sup> Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center argued successfully that the Road Home program was racially discriminatory against Black homeowners (<http://www.gnofairhousing.org/2011/12/07/the-road-home-a-timeline/>; accessed 2/14/14).

<sup>22</sup> By groups such as the People's Hurricane Relief Organization

<sup>23</sup> The Ford Foundation gave \$150,000 (<http://www.fordfoundation.org/issues/metropolitan-opportunity/promoting-metropolitan-land-use-innovation/grant-making>) Accessed: September 30, 2012.

the books. I thought 501c3s are supposed to reveal books?...People start with good intentions, but after a while the driving force is to further the organization”.<sup>24</sup>

A meeting took place in the Holy Cross neighborhood of the Lower Ninth Ward in early 2010 and a representative from this local community development organization came to speak about the land trust. The meeting was held in a church located in the heart of Holy Cross. It was one of the first buildings repaired after the storm and remained a symbol of hope for reconstruction. Whenever a resident returned to the neighborhood, they rang the church bell. At this meeting, the benches were full in the small wooden church. The representative explained that residents would be able to own the homes but the land would remain under the aegis of the non-profit. There was little interest and many critical questions about what it meant to not own the land. Suddenly, the president of the neighborhood organization said, “Do you know why we don’t like this idea? Because what you’re suggesting is sharecropping: you work the land but you don’t own it. It’s sharecropping!”<sup>25</sup> Holy Cross was in a much better position than the rest of the Lower Ninth Ward, given that it was on higher land, had more historic housing, and was also where white residents chose to live.

This story demonstrates the conflict that arose around property. One might assume that a land trust would be one way to offer security to residents. But much of the community was adamantly against the idea. Not because it represented any form of social-ownership, but because it indicated another way in which they would lose say over what happened to the land. The basic idea was that this non-profit would purchase land “abandoned” by former residents, then convert the space into a land trust. But all around residents who had returned saw open plots, reminders of those who could not come back. These blighted properties could be seized by the local government and offered to non-profits who promised to build, but who often left the land fallow. Slowly land was being redistributed from the former residents to multiple non-profits in the rebuilding business. In the meantime, there was a bottleneck preventing residents who were trying to return from accessing funds that would allow them to rebuild.

### *Security Districts*

Security was a never-ending concern for neighbors in the Lower Ninth. Whether it was fear of copper thievery, illegal dumping on vacant land, or hiding in overgrown weeds. It was a legitimate fear. Some residents who had once been surrounded by neighbors were now the only house in a square block. Some had stories of having thousands of dollars of copper piping and wiring removed from the house more than twice. Veronica, a community organizer for a organization developed by former ACORN members, went to every police meeting she could in an effort to get a substation in the community, “We want cameras!” she exclaimed at one stakeholder meeting<sup>26</sup>.

---

<sup>24</sup> fieldnotes 5/20/11

<sup>25</sup> Fieldnotes spring 2010

<sup>26</sup> Fieldnotes May 19, 2010

Sitting in a neighborhood meeting in the upper Lower 9th in April 2010 this same community development organization presented another plan for a “security district” for the community<sup>27</sup>. A security district arises from a special tax added to the real property taxes of a given residential area. It must be first passed by the neighborhood, which requires a ballot initiative to be added during primaries, and finally approved by the state legislature. In general the initiatives have begun in wealthy communities from powerful neighborhood associations. Security Districts were already in wealthy neighborhoods such as the Garden District<sup>28</sup> prior to the storm. Like gated communities that have their own patrol, the districts give funding for overtime patrols, cars, and other surveillance methods, usually at a cost of \$200-\$400 a year tacked onto property tax. Unlike gated communities, these are public streets that enter into a public-private agreement for security. Even residents who vote against the additional tax must join in if the majority of the residents approve the tax. Areas such as Mid City<sup>29</sup>, which cover a wide swath of land, passed the district tax while many were still away from the city<sup>30</sup>.

The meeting was heated with some community members claiming NWO had falsely presented the sign-up sheet for the security district, which began, “Do you want more neighbors? Do you want more businesses? Then pledge your support for the Lower 9th security district.” A state senator in attendance felt it would be a bad idea for the Lower Nine given that its boundaries were “so large,” as well as the difficulties in assessing if the entire community supported the proposal.

The city and state has opted to privatize many of its services, much of this is driven by a strong ideology led by the current governor, who has made privatization of the health care system a number one goal<sup>31</sup>. On the other hand, as movements like those behind the popularity of security districts demonstrates, people are more willing to pay within the private market than to give the money to city hall, particularly, if it’s connected to home ownership. Now, in a city rocked almost monthly by some new corruption scandal, part of the reluctance is justified. Security for the entire city is less important than ones personal security, and so these measures typically pass by 60-70% and up.

Back in the Lower 9th, the state senator responded to the gathering, “the other issue is that you will be essentially letting the NOPD off the hook from doing the job they should be doing.”<sup>32</sup> There was still not a police substation in the district five years after the storm.<sup>33</sup> Along

---

<sup>27</sup> Fieldnotes April 8, 2010

<sup>28</sup> <http://gdsdpatrol.org>;

<sup>29</sup> <http://midcitysecuritydistrict.org>

<sup>30</sup> As a security management site announced in reference to the Port of Houston’s security district, it is essentially “creating its own free market security district that could be a model for the rest of the country” (Harwood 2007). A *Houston Chronicle* article touting the same plan quotes the then chief of staff of the Department of Homeland Security saying, “We’ve got to make sure this is a free-market solution” as opposed to a way to raise taxes (Hensel 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Starting in 2011 the state began the process of dismantling its psychiatric facilities. There has been protest from some over these closures, but the governor has remained unmoved.

<sup>32</sup> Fieldnotes April 8, 2010

<sup>33</sup> Though many members of the New Orleans Police Department work for the security district companies.

with no grocery stores, only one school, lack of street lights and repaired roads, the community struggled with getting basic services restored.<sup>34</sup> Some residents were concerned about the need for private patrols and whether this need represented the wishes of the neighborhood. Said a former resident of the Lower Ninth, who since Hurricane Betsy which struck the city in 1965, has lived across the industrial canal:

“the security district is a nightmare. You do not want this. They do have it in the East. But they have one association that represents it. Lower Ninth Ward’s got about 20 non-profits. How is one person going to stand up and say they represent everyone. How are you going to say that you represent 2000 people. When I come to a meeting, the majority of the people do not know what you are doing, and they are too busy getting back on their feet to come out here and hear this. [The non-profit pushing the security district] was misleading the people. On the petition it says, “don’t you want more policemen, don’t you want more businesses.” [They’re] not saying what it is going to cost. Once it gets on the ballot it’s too hard to say no.”<sup>35</sup>

What the residents of the lower ninth wanted was security, and more than just security of their homes. In struggling for physical, emotional, and social security, they also desired political security. But the options presented to them time and again were based on legitimization of property as the means to protect themselves from disaster and loss. The resident quoted above, highlights the fragmented nature of the community after the storm. This lead to constant struggles over which neighborhood organization or which non-profit would represent the community.

### *Contradictions*

A tension emerges as the neighborhood becomes hypervisible to the nation at large as well as to the state. The effort to make space, populations, and nature legible for the government and investment solidified the importance of property, such that it becomes the focus of legitimacy and legibility, as a technique for the state to “see” the community. It denies the legitimacy of passing down land and housing from family member to family member. The centrality of the property-owner also celebrates the frontier-like quality of social action, particularly around rebuilding. Even residents celebrate the “resiliency” and “pioneering” quality they demonstrate by moving back.<sup>36</sup> Yet, we cannot avoid the fact that much of the discourse of security and property aligns very neatly with a neoliberal ideology: self-sufficiency, the slow replacement of government welfare functions (as well as of residents) with non-profits and volunteers, the scoffing at land trusts, and even the suggestion that security be given over

---

<sup>34</sup> As of 2014, the situation is marginally better. There is a fire station under construction, as well as a second school.

<sup>35</sup> Fieldnotes April 8, 2010

<sup>36</sup> See one such example in Elliott 2013

to a private security contractor. Thus, the tactics employed by residents tended to deepen domination via hypervisibility.

### **Design and the Aesthetic Vision**

There were another set of outside actors besides the state whose “vision” of the Lower Ninth Ward contributed to its hypervisibility. As the storm washed thousands of homes away, talks began immediately for how the space might be rebuilt. Urban planners and architects were a subset of volunteers who inserted themselves into the rebuilding apparatus in the Lower Ninth. They offered plans for an aesthetic vision of the neighborhood, but many times without input from residents, who were strewn across the U.S. The outcome was an aestheticization of disaster.<sup>37</sup>

Paralleling the increasing need for state legibility, there was a growing desire to make the entire neighborhood, as well as the city, follow a guiding plan. Pushed from the business community and some local leaders, it was taken up by urban planners from around the nation. Within six months of the storm, the mayor unveiled the first of many master plans for the city designed by the Bring Back New Orleans Commission. In the case of the Lower Ninth, this plan called for a large swath of an area that included a number of communities (importantly parts of the Lower Ninth) to be converted into ‘green space’. The imposed outside vision of the community awoke fear and anger from the community members who were in the process of returning.

States often attempt to impose order from above, as the desire for plans will show. However, any decision around the built environment confronts the natural world it trespasses on. And the powerful Mississippi River Delta New Orleans sits on, is a constantly shifting force. Industry (oil, gas, shipping) and civil engineering have attempted to mold it, confining and transforming the land in ways that result in exponentially increased the effects of storms. In Scott’s words, “a whole world lying ‘outside the brackets’ return[s] to haunt this technical vision” (20).

We cannot consider planning and maps as socially neutral. Maps allow for distance and the veneer of objectivity, they have the power to reveal (Schulten), but they only consider one dimension. Analyzing plans for the transformation of medieval cities, James Scott notes that older cities privilege local knowledge, whereas the new imagined city needs to be legible to a larger audience, most importantly, the nation-state and capital. The dismissal of local knowledge, such as around deeds, in the Lower Ninth with the desire for a city-wide plan following the storm were an effort at legibility. But, legible for whom? In particular, for outside investors who, as City Councilwoman Jackie Clarkson pointed out on numerous occasions,<sup>38</sup> needed to know if property values were secure and stable enough to make a long-term

---

<sup>37</sup> Roy (Roy in, Roy and AlSayyad 2004) writes about the “aestheticization of poverty” as a romanticization of the poor. In this case, there is a romanticization of disaster zones and those pioneering residents who return against all odds

<sup>38</sup> Fieldnotes 2010 repeated at multiple Master Plan public meetings during February and March 23-31 2010

investment. For the Lower Ninth, the dispersal of residents meant a loss of local knowledge, it opened up space for the state purveyors of legibility to step in. But, as the reaction from the earliest city-wide plan highlights, local knowledge may have been dispersed, but it was not dead. These plans were a constant focus of resistance and struggle.

### *Bring Back New Orleans or the "Green Dot" Plan*

On September 30th, 2005, a month after Hurricane Katrina, Mayor Ray Nagin formed The Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB) commission. It was given the monumental task of creating a plan for the rebuilding of the city. Made up of businessmen, religious and cultural leaders, lawyers, an architect, and one elected representative (beside Nagin), it came together to address key questions of land use, economic development, infrastructure, education, health services, preserving culture, and efficient government. Formed on behalf of the mayor and made up mostly of unelected business leaders, it communicated little with local residents. Nevertheless, there were a few public meetings held in New Orleans and Texas (where many had fled the storm) to collect thoughts from residents of what they hoped New Orleans could become.

BNOB was designed to ensure those investing in the future of the city that their investment was safe. Its literature stated,

"Now is the time to form a united front. Together, we will rebuild New Orleans. Together, we will become stronger and smarter, bringing a diverse group of talent to the table to plan for our future. Together, we will take the lead on our tremendous rebuilding effort, with help from federal, state and other officials. Jazz needs you, Creole cooking needs you, and New Orleans needs you now more than ever."<sup>39</sup>

Up until here, one might assume this was a call to all displaced New Orleanians, but then it continues: "So check out some places to stay and pay New Orleans a visit."

On January 11, 2006 the Urban Land Institute (an organization specializing in land-use education and planning) presented the report commissioned by the BNOB. On the map the group had specified a series of neighborhood locations highlighted in green, which were to be reallocated as green spaces. This map showed various mostly low-lying, poor, black neighborhoods that had been hard hit turned into parks and recreational locations. A simplified map printed the following day in the *Times-Picayune* showed exaggerated green circles which shocked residents who saw that their neighborhoods (and perhaps house) lay under one of these soon-to-be infamous "green dots". Nagin insisted that decisions had to be made about where to put scarce resources and those neighborhoods hardest hit might have to be sacrificed. "'Shrinking the footprint,' as the concept came to be called, quickly became the single most controversial urban planning option on the table" (Campanella 2010).

---

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.bringneworleansback.org>; accessed May 15, 2014

The anger this plan generated within New Orleans and among displaced residents as well as some planners forced the mayor to drop the plan altogether as he entered the mayoral race that year. Along with New Orleans East, the Lower Ninth Ward, both predominantly black neighborhoods, were two of the areas most talked about in relation to shrinking. At a meeting celebrating Black History month at New Orleans Public Library, resident Mama Dee (a long-shot mayoral candidate herself) stood up and compared New Orleans to Chicago and said, “See all these green spaces? Mrs. Olery’s cow didn’t do nothing!”<sup>40</sup> Within the black community there was a strong contingent who were tremendously angry at the new plan and much of their ire focused on Nagin. Nagin had from the beginning championed a pro-business agenda in-line with the white elite in the city (Robertson 2008). With the growing anger Nagin pulled the plan. “Green dot” remained code for any shrinking of the city that targeted black neighborhoods. Whether Nagin listened to the voice of his constituency is up for debate. Some suggest his recapitulation was based on political calculation as he recognized he would not be able to win reelection without the black vote in the city (Osei 2008).

Many consider this the plan that launched the most active resurgence of civil society that New Orleans had seen in a very long time. Neighborhood groups developed overnight to protect their homes, and others that had been lying dormant were activated. And so began era of civic activism in New Orleans (Campanella 2010, Koritz and Sanchez 2009, Lukensmeyer 2007, and Weil 2010). Scholars point especially to the large planning process that produced the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP), as well as the burst of neighborhood associations post-Katrina, as markers of a rise in democratic citizenry. Referencing theorists from John Stuart Mill, to Tocqueville, to Habermas, they note that an activated citizenry is key to democracy and the possibility of a just society. These retellings of post-Katrina are contrasted with the plethora of work that emerged on the absolute chaos in the city in the wake of the storm and flood (Denzin 2006) or of the devastation of a particular subset of civil society (Hirsch 2006), the separateness based on race of certain parts of civil society (Dawson 2006), as well as the heroics of the everyday lives of those usually portrayed as victims (Penner et al 2009). Now, almost ten years later, we can have a more nuanced picture of the role these plans and the protests they awoke have played in the politics of rebuilding.

### *"Greening" the Lower Ninth*

“Go Green for Jesus”

—Church sign in Lower Ninth Ward, August 2010

Sustainability is the vision of the future within the planning and building communities. After the storm a string of non-profits, tapping into this drive, moved into the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward with the stated agenda of pursuing sustainability. Many of these noted that there was a direct connection between the effects of climate change, the overuse and dependence on oil and gas,

---

<sup>40</sup> field notes

and the attempt to constrict the natural flooding of the Mississippi that all lead to the severity of the storm and flood. While at first the reasons for rebuilding sustainability was the local community and efforts to bring residents home, interest soon shifted towards the built environment itself as architects and planners became involved. Residents soon took the back seat.

For example, Brad Pitt's organization Make It Right (MIR), landed in the city with pomp and circumstance befitting Hollywood, its reps announcing they would focus on rebuilding in the Lower Ninth. MIR gained attention and funding through its popular movie star sponsor, innovative design donated by some of the best architects in the world, and because it focused rebuilding efforts for residents in one of the worst hit neighborhoods of the Lower Ninth. It set a goal of 150 homes, which it has yet to reach.

As time passed, the New Orleans community became less enamored with Make It Right. In a high profile tiff between MIR and the magazine the *New Republic* (2013),<sup>41</sup> the organization was called out for its expensive bottom line for homes and the slowness with which buildings have been constructed. The *New Republic* compared MIR to another organization, Providence Community Housing, which is rebuilding the former Lafitte public housing development as well as numerous other houses around the neighborhood. PCH has completed many more homes at a far lower price point. The different building organizations jostle to prove they can do more with less. MIR many times is the straw man, as other rebuilding and volunteer-based organizations point out the incredibly slow building record of the organization. It has currently built 87 homes (as of February 2014),<sup>42</sup> which is a rate of 8.7 homes a year. But the focus on numbers ignores the deeper shift that has occurred.

It fails to highlight one of the subtle, yet key, roles that MIR (and other building organizations) have had in the community. First, they, as well as all the rebuilding organizations, particularly those celebrating their green building credentials, have tended to be far more interested in the outcome of sustainable building than of the community. This is a direct result of the increase of outside voices in presenting and representing the vision of the community. Second, they have swallowed up substantially more funding than have the actual homeowners. When people compare the amount of money that has gone into the Lower Ninth Ward, they rarely compare what percentage has gone to non-profits, the middlemen of disaster economics, versus to community members. Third, by taking over the building from the federal government and the state, they legitimate a withdrawal of the state. Fourth, they celebrate the role of the volunteer, while the resident remains a case of charity.

In the beginning, there was much community interest around green building, this was a result of a few key neighbors from Holy Cross who spoke openly of the need to rebuild their community in a sustainable manner. As much as the media attention has been on Brad Pitt's organization, the move for a sustainable community began more locally with one such leader,

---

<sup>41</sup> MIR response: <http://makeitright.org/new-orleans/our-response-to-the-new-republic/> accessed 2/14/14

<sup>42</sup> <http://makeitright.org/about/faq/>; accessed 2/14/14

Pam Dashiell,<sup>43</sup> who created the Center for Sustainable Education and Development (CSED) in the Lower Ninth within 4 months of the storm. She was a powerful force for the neighborhood often mending fractions, as well as making key alliances with outside organizations and individuals (including Pitt). As the opening quote shows, churches and local leaders were in favor of green building, as it promised the possibility of a more secure future that recognized the relationship to nature. Dashiell passed in 2009, though the CSED has continued being one of the key local-led organizations.

In the end, the focus on green building has done more for the green building industry and design firms than it has for the community. Following MIR, many other green building and preservation-focused organizations have made aesthetics their primary motive. In 2011 the *Times-Picayune's* architecture critic rated the new two-family designs MIR presented. He gave the lowest score to a home deemed too "traditional", though, as the critic noted, it was the most popular design with residents. Residents and their desires became secondary to aesthetics and design. The trope of the individual architect is a vision of the hero: male, visionary, rescuing the poor, and volunteering his time. Locals spoke derisively of the designs and sometimes the organization which they jokingly referred to as "Make It White." The aestheticization of design feeds directly into particular representations of race and poverty. Notably, MIR homes are a major draw for disaster tour buses in the Lower Ninth Ward.

Organizations such as MIR have struggled to locate former residents who can purchase the homes<sup>44</sup>. For MIR, this has led to an expansion of the area they hoped to focus on and for other organizations, such as the Preservation Resource Center, they have opened up to selling homes to anyone. On the one hand, community members want to see these homes filled because this means greater stability for the community as a whole. But, on the other, the racial and class demographics of the more historic sections of the Lower Ninth have changed since the storm as more younger whites find living in Holy Cross appealing.

### *Contradictions*

In the above example the technique of planning and design served to emphasize only one aspect of the "the disaster": its aesthetic possibilities. Recovering became exclusively a problem of the built environment. Social and political structures and the history of racial divide were lost to a minute focus on how the built environment could be reshaped to protect against a future storm. The problem was the levees, or it was that houses were built on low-lying land. Sometimes the problem was governmental neglect. But this only bolstered the importance of non-profits and the volunteers who came to replace governmental actors and public resources provisions. More importantly, this vision of the community required no people, in fact, people were, at times, in the way of sustainability, good planning, and elegant designs.

---

<sup>43</sup> I have used her real name and the name of the organization

<sup>44</sup> MIR locates original owners who can use FEMA/insurance funds to purchase the house at a drastic reduction in cost, given that much of the labor and supplies are supported by donations. In actuality, as mentioned before, many have had to use FEMA funds to live on since Katrina, and have little to no money left. Because of this, MIR has had a difficult time in filling homes.

### Visions of charity

A Lower Ninth resident on the eve of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary related this brief story: “A woman came up to me and said, ‘hey I took a photo of you four years ago!’ He replied, ‘Yah, you and 60,000 other folks<sup>45</sup>.’”

Residents had lost access to the presentation of their community as it was seen and viewed by outsiders. The vast amount of images generated by thousands of volunteers who came through and took photos, this was compounded by the fact that many of the volunteers were young and savvy with technology at a time that social media was taking off, they exponentially expanded the images of the neighborhood. As Susan Sontag (2011) noted in *On Photography*, “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power” (4). The hypervisibility of the neighborhood produced by volunteers (like tourists) further aestheticized the neighborhood but more than creating an aesthetic image of the community, they solidified a vision of moral individualism. In this final section, we move from visibility vis-a-vis the state, the visible designs of planners for the future of the city, and now to how volunteers and charity organizations view and visualize the community, particularly for the benefit of those on the outside.

We know when Katrina Was born, but when will she die?”

— L9W resident Valerie on the 5th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina<sup>46</sup>

Joe had become a node for visitors and volunteers in the Lower Ninth Ward through his community center he set up after the flood. One of the few visible community organizations after the storm, people often stopped in his community center when passing through to hear his opinion on rebuilding in the Lower Ninth. Up until the storm, Joe survived mostly working informally and underground. He once wielded a bat as the heavy for a loan shark. After the storm he found himself speaking for the community, receiving thousands of volunteers and donations, and with expectations to keep accurate books and show rebuilding progress. His repurposed industrial salvage hanger now called, “The Community,” vied for volunteers with Common Ground<sup>47</sup> which located in the upper ends of the Lower Ninth Ward. Some volunteers were effusive with praise on Joe’s work at The Community, while others noted he was disorganized, more heart than head, but nevertheless offered a place that outsiders could show up at and expect a warm welcome.

---

<sup>45</sup> fieldnotes, August 27, 2010

<sup>46</sup> Fieldnotes August 29, 2010

<sup>47</sup> Common Ground has had a varied and fascinating trajectory as an organization. It would be hard to be complete in the telling. It began with a radical agenda, at one point had been infiltrated by an FBI informer, but was now run by a former real estate agent with much more subdued hopes for the organization’s future.

To any volunteer group that passed through,<sup>48</sup> and there were many hundreds, Joe spoke about the need to “make the community whole” again. He called attention to the high number of elders in the community who had not returned, some dying while waiting to do so. He was getting “tired of seeing his community in the obituaries”. Most times, the number of unskilled volunteers surpassed the numbers of rakes, lawn mowers, and shovels that could be used. What were needed were skilled builders and they rarely came through. Joe would manage the unskilled, often shuffling them to complete a portion of a Sysifusian task: one group moving the donated library to the upstairs, then another group moving it back downstairs, then to a corridor, and then back upstairs. Common wisdom dictated that volunteers needed to feel “useful” and that they were “doing something important” for the community, even if the need was much greater than the skills they arrived with. If unskilled volunteers (often college students) were set up mowing grass (a thankless task that was very much needed to avoid homes being taken away) they complained. Working on a number of volunteer crews as part of my research, I witnessed this many times. This led to community members engaging in an “affective calculus<sup>49</sup>” based on what volunteers required and what the community needed. Locals, including Joe, believed that one reason to make volunteers feel important was so the word would get out that the Lower Ninth was still here and still rebuilding. This message became harder and harder to deliver and control as the years went on and rebuilding slowed.

### *Seeing Poverty & Race*

The repetition of particular images leaving the neighborhood produced gazes of compassion on the community and intensified ideas around race and poverty, as well as ideas about which people were the recipients of charity. The Lower Ninth Ward was predominately African American before the storm. Volunteers were predominately young, white and college aged. The organizations which sponsored the volunteers were mostly run by former volunteers who stayed around. Volunteers often did not deal directly with the residents, who may have been living in another part of town or another state while repairs were being made. Volunteers complained that they did not get to meet the people they were helping, needing a deposit in the “affect economy” (Adams 2013).

Not long after the flood media began to address the issue of poverty and race, a headline declared: “Katrina thrusts race and poverty onto national stage”(Sandalow 2005). Attention to the devastated Lower Ninth, which had suffered the worst physical destruction in

---

<sup>48</sup> There were, of course, many differences in volunteer groups, and also a difference temporally. Some of the first volunteers attached to Common Ground in its more radical stage, tended to be more critical volunteers working directly with residents and organizations to help protect local interests (as much as possible), however, as time went on, these groups tended to be less politically aware and became much more institutionalized in the disaster apparatus of the city.

<sup>49</sup> In work on New Orleans, Vincanne Adams (2013) has written about the “affect economy” that emerged in the care/volunteer market post-Katrina. Though the term “affective calculus” is not hers, I am playing with her earlier term.

the city, focused greatly on the effects of race, poverty and physical destruction, often making assumptions around the neighborhood's assumed deep poverty. The linkage between black spaces as space of poverty was repeated often in news<sup>50</sup>. The reality was quite different, and one statistic highlights this: prior to the storm, the Lower Ninth, at over 50%, had one of the highest rates of black homeownership in the entire country. The dependence upon a particular set of ideas around race and poverty, and their relationship, came to fill the representational space and left little space for the community to produce counter-representations. The way in which poverty, particularly as it intersects with race, as a seemingly visible social phenomena made the community more legible in the production of visible representations.

Because of its position, the Lower Ninth had the burden of representation thrust upon it. It was both the symbol of Katrina as well as the site of experiments in rebuilding from outside. The focus on the area as a poor and black neighborhood, also contributed to the framing of recovery to focus on charity, environmental fixes, and design. But as the reader will have noted already, none of these addresses the structural causes which did indeed leave poorer and predominately African American residents at a great structural disadvantage. The focus, as Brad Pitt said in a fundraiser, was on "righting a wrong,"<sup>51</sup> but that assumes that one need only provide a building fix supported by compassionate volunteers.

Some residents suggested that the work done by young white volunteers in predominately black neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth had the effect of breaking down persistent ideas around race. However, I noted many times volunteers grumbling about the work they were doing while a resident might be resting in the same house. One said, "why can't they just do it themselves." Volunteers openly expressed the desire that they do work for someone they could identify as needy, and saw their time as being more valuably spent if they could categorize them as such. Sammy, always the local critic, noted, "Remember, regardless of what you feel about it, the beggar is always at the mercy of the giver, as long as you the beggar you can never rise to the level of the giver. Cause the giver's going to always keep something for himself."<sup>52</sup> There was always the possibility that the interaction might open up discussions around race and class, and Sammy always made sure to raise the specter of race when he gave informal tours of the neighborhood. More often than not, though volunteers were never there long enough for a lesson in structural inequality.

### *Tourism*

"The pictures of the black urban poor that were beamed all over the world in the wake of Katrina did not fit most tourists' perception of this well-loved city, despite the parasitic relationship that exists between the worlds of conspicuous wealth and social deprivation in New Orleans" (Hartnell 2009: 733)

<sup>50</sup> As well as spaces of criminality, the ways in which the media selectively used "looting" only for black residents highlights this.

<sup>51</sup> [http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/12/brad\\_pitt\\_busy\\_making\\_it\\_right.html](http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/12/brad_pitt_busy_making_it_right.html); accessed September 30, 2014

<sup>52</sup> Fieldnotes, May 12, 2012

In “Katrina Tourism and a Tale of Two cities: Visualizing Race and Class in New Orleans” Anna Hartnell sees a shift in tourism since the storm that focuses not on the African-American community and its efforts to rebuild, particularly given the role race played in the outcome of the storm, but rather on the “natural” environment. By pushing aside the human cost of disaster Katrina, tourism “deemphasize[s] the role of race politics in the impact and aftermath of the hurricane and depoliticize[s] the environment in order to make it a ‘safe’ space for disaster tourists” (725). Lynell Thomas notes that tourism in New Orleans “reaffirms [its] position as an abiding site of racial exoticism in the national imagination” (2009: 749). While earlier pre-Katrina tours had actively avoided Black spaces of the city, the post-Katrina tours “consistently remap” these areas for tourists. While this could be seen as integrating a wider sense of history, she notes that the discourse tends to ignore race and class differences. Nowhere is this tension more obvious than in the bus tours of the Lower Ninth Ward.

Originally, these tours were welcomed by a fair number of community members,<sup>53</sup> much in the same way that green building, and unskilled volunteers were seen as a possible vehicle to get news out of the community about its rebuilding efforts. Tours would show the world what was going on. Often the buses were filled with visitors who would volunteer later during their visit or on a return visit. But, year after year, the busses came through and residents’ calculus shifted overtime. The tours rarely stopped, nor did they bring resources to the small businesses along the streets. If they did pause, it was often in front of Make It Right, where the organization had set up a convenient green parking meter-like terminal where visitors could swipe a credit card and donate to the organization. Residents living in the MIR homes murmured they felt like zoo animals on display for the tourists who sat behind the dark tinted glass of the buses.

### *Contradictions*

Tourism and charity ultimately reaffirm old hierarchies between the colonial other and the colonist. These images of the Lower Ninth Ward carry with them the racial package of colonialism and the embedded racial hierarchies of our country. They also serve to reaffirm the legitimacy of neoliberalism in that they solidify the importance of non-governmental organizations as the best source for social provisions, in this case for rebuilding. But, this, of course introduces a dual system. Those who can afford to rebuild using the market and those who cannot, the latter of whom must wait for the good graces of volunteers and charity.

## Paradox and Conclusion

### *Aestheticizing Disaster: Pink houses*

---

<sup>53</sup> There was certainly early protests against the tour buses, and signs painted on front stairs left behind that challenged people to leave the bus and actually see what happened.

The end of 2007 arrived and the Lower Ninth Ward was slowly rebuilding. In other parts of the city, some momentous decisions were being made. The City Council would soon pass a resolution that no improvements could be made on homes in the Lower Mid City in preparation for the eminent domain process that would remove these homes. In late December, City Council would once again revisit public housing and this time they would pass a resolution that allowed for the destruction of most of the public housing developments in the city. In front of City Hall a homeless encampment had gained national attention as a vehicle to protest the lack of interest from the local government towards the marginally housed. Brad Pitt, through his organization Make It Right, had a vision, which he hoped would bring recognition of the Lower Ninth Ward to the world. Calling it a Pink House Project, MIR built 100 structures and wrapped them in pink material. They were to make an visual statement that was both artistic as well as symbolic. According to Pitt, it was to be an art display that would represent the organization's righting a wrong. They would represent the houses his organization would be building. They also represented the way in which the space of the Lower Ninth had become an aestheticized space of recovery, a canvas for art particularly for those outside the community.



54

In the Lower Ninth Ward the paradox of hypervisibility is **two-fold**. On the one hand, the hyper-focus on this place called the Lower Ninth Ward pulls our eyes away from what is occurring in the rest of the city. While gazes looked towards the Lower Ninth, a rapidly privatizing public hospital system was taking over large swaths of a neighborhood and the entire public housing system (the key safety net for many low-income residents) was being dismantled. The other element of the paradox is that it also creates a particular myth of Lower

---

<sup>54</sup> staff photo for the Times Picayune by Matthew Hinton, December 1, 2007

Ninth, which is sold by NGOs (MIR and volunteer-based building orgs) and tourists. This myth has a frontier element of people returning, rebuilding, and reclaiming their land, but needing the charity of volunteers. It is a hyper-version of the way in which much of city was presented and celebrated. And though the residents are needed as figures of relief, they are curiously absent in many of the visions created from the outside.

The paradox of hypervisibility is that certain items remain, indeed are meant to remain, unseen. Reflecting back on Katrina, Clyde Woods writes that, "Despite mountains of communication and surveillance devices, America was still shocked by the revelations of impoverishment, racism, brutality, corruption, and official neglect in a place it thought it knew intimately." (2009: 428). We need to consider visibility beyond what is seen through the media, though this is an important aspect of how we 'see' an event. Visibility also implies giving coherence and illuminating so we can categorize and understand it.

Something else important emerges in the community out of these techniques of hypervisibility: the increasing commodification of the Lower Ninth Ward. Property defines one's ability to return; plans help to create a calculable space, and even voyeurism contribute to commodification. As for volunteers and tourists arriving to the city the Lower Ninth became a must-see site.

This chapter has suggested that one consequence (or the power of) the hypervisibility in the Lower Ninth Ward was that it obscured dispossession throughout the city. The Lower Ninth struggled to present a coherent front and struggled against on-going dispossession. But the tactics were of the triage, merely responding to the ways in which well connected and media savvy organizations took over the content of representation.

The response by residents ends up justifying a neoliberal governing regime based on the substitution of non-profits for the state, as well as the importance of property for being seen by the state. The irony is that to save the "community" residents must base their claims as individuals and property owners. They are caught in a double-bind in which their tactics help legitimate neoliberal governmentality.

## Chapter 3

# Destruction of Public Housing and the Politics of Stigma

“I always hear people who think that we were on the roof crying and waiting for the government. But from where I was, we were like, ‘I’m going to survive this. And we’re going to come back and put this neighborhood back together!’ It was self-determination.”

—Asante,

“We couldn’t get rid of public housing, but God did.”

—Congressman Richard Baker (R-LA) after Hurricane Katrina

Asante sat waiting outside The Center in a devastated and desolate part of New Orleans between the 610 Highway and Lake Ponchartrain. White paint peeled from the hot sun, window panes remained broken, Tyvek wrapping covered one side of the house, and in the rear the garage and former kitchen area had collapsed. The building lay beyond the I-610 expressway in a section of the city that had remained mostly vacant since the storm. Since then, the Center was always on the verge of being declared blighted by the city and possibly facing demolition. Periodic repairs were triaged by out-of-town volunteers or locals who owed Asante a favor or just liked him, so the threat never materialized. The upstairs, with two functioning rooms, had served as Asante’s bedroom and organizing office for the last 4 years. What remained of the bathroom leaned precariously down into the lower level, such that when you came through the entryway below, you feared the ceramic toilet and tub might come crashing down on your head. Prior to the storm The Center had been a community center for residents of St. Bernard Public Housing Development and their neighbors, now the few remaining neighbors helped stand guard on the street.

It is hot and humid, but Asante wears a black t-shirt, black shorts, and black flip-flops. He carries a maroon washcloth to wipe the sweat off his brow and his shaved head. Sometimes when I come by we sit in front of the Center in stadium chairs and talk about life, New Orleans, change, revolution, but more often we run errands. He doesn’t have a car, hasn’t since the storm, and so we drive around the city to pick up his weekly food, buy a bag of dog food, get an iced tea, or at times drop off some cash to one of the elders who had lived in the St. Bernard public housing development.

After the levees broke, water flooded the entire first floor of The Center up to the ceiling. The surrounding community, including the St. Bernard development, sat in 10 feet of water. Most of the houses in the neighborhood were one-story homes and flooded to the roofs. The Center and the St. Bernard apartments were some of the only two-story buildings in the area. Asante remained on the second floor of his building for a few days, waiting for the water to recede, but eventually he swam to the raised portion of the 610 highway. While there, looking down on the roofs of their homes, Asante and a number of community leaders from within St. Bernard decided they would come back and create a place to fight for their homes. They called it "Community Rising." He explained:

"Community Rising was created on interstate 610 about 5 days after the storm. The boats had finally come and moved people from the second floors in and around St. Bernard to the interstate. I was on the second floor of the Center. Once on the highway the residents could look back and down at the whole community under water. Public housing and the few two story buildings like mine were the only ones you could see. We started talking about how we were going to come back...We were determined to come back and do what we needed to do to build our neighborhood back up."

For days they sat on the highway in the heat and intense sun of early September. Sometimes Asante swam back from the highway to the Center for food and supplies. On the overpass, they planned for the future, hoping the water would recede and they could return. Finally, the busses and helicopters came to take them to dry ground, but they were treated less like survivors of a catastrophe and more like criminals.

"When they came, you had no choice. They didn't even tell you. There were no families sticking together. The National Guard was there with guns, and troopers with M16s. It was a forced migration."

Many of the residents, including Asante, ended up in the Houston Astrodome for another week. While waiting they made plans to come back, they spent their days in the stadium searching for neighbors and planning their return. Amidst the horror of the storm, they tapped the anger and fear they felt at the lack of respect they received as residents of the public housing.

We started [speaking] about coming back and reclaiming the neighborhood. We already had a feeling that we weren't going to be welcomed back...because, we didn't have any rights. Didn't have a right to stay, choose where we went, or even say I'm going with my family or friend. Made you understand that you were going to be treated like you had no rights. Some people took exception to them calling us 'refugees.' Reality was, we were refugees, that's exactly how they treated us...like refuse, garbage.

Asante's realization that the residents of St. Bernard had become the excess in the post-Katrina world infuses his sense of injustice and anger years later as he recounts the events above. In *Wasted Lives* Zygmunt Bauman posits that our era of modernity is an era of waste, redundancy, and garbage. The metaphors refers both to the material waste of production and

the excess lives left behind by a modern era that actually relies less and less on production. The feeling brought on as a result of the zeitgeist of waste is for Bauman one of ‘social homelessness’ (13). Though it is the case that people as waste, as surplus populations, have always been a part of modernity—the excess have been moved from rural areas to the city, from one country to another, and from one industry to another: other times, conquest and ‘cleansing’ become the method of removal and clean up—in late modernity, they have become the “‘collateral casualties’ of economic progress...[and] in the process some components are damaged beyond repair” (39). But Asante’s story offers something which Bauman is not effectively able to address, but which critical theorists of color have often demonstrated: the way in which certain racialized groups are overdetermined to become modernity’s ‘wasted lives.’<sup>55</sup>

Former residents of St. Bernard had become socially and physically homeless. They would not be welcomed back to the city. Nevertheless, they trickled back. What they came back to angered them, but did not surprise them. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, city officials decided to shutter the “big four” public housing developments in the city where most of the city’s public housing residents resided.

“we started getting these negative statements about the city. Like the guy in Baton Rouge: ‘we finally cleaned up public housing, we couldn’t do it, so God did it for us.’ Or Alfonso Jackson saying that New Orleans will never be primarily black again, because poor people don’t have any reason to go back because we didn’t own anything. You would read that New Orleans was not going to be the same city. Had this sense that if we didn’t go back soon, we wouldn’t have anything to go back to.”<sup>56</sup>

For Asante and others involved in the struggle to reopen public housing, they knew the relationship between race and waste would be the unspoken thread that wove through all their efforts to return to their homes, but the embeddedness and endurance of racial stigma in the political struggle would turn out to be deep and lasting and infused all the points of the struggle.

### **A Struggle Against Political Expulsion**

Taking a long look at the rebuilding of the city in the years since the storm this chapter suggests that ruptures caused by disasters (both natural and social) cleave along old divisions that are rarely remade (as some would like to believe) in the post-disaster landscape. Public housing has for some time been at the forefront of the spatial politics around poverty. The struggle around public housing begins and ends with a politically problematic group who were paradoxically both visible and invisible, an ambivalence of visibility that Patricia Hill Collins (1990) has unraveled in *Black Feminist Thought*. As public housing residents they had become

---

<sup>55</sup> Jared Sexton refers to this invisibility as “obscurity”

<sup>56</sup> Asante, interview notes 2010

the visible symbol of the excesses of the welfare state. They were publicly portrayed as a drain on society, unable and unwilling to work, made up of generations of welfare recipients who had been made 'dependent' on the state. Politically, they carried a very visible stigma, this intersected with race in powerful ways. In New Orleans, the effects of racial segregation had created public housing that was almost entirely black, which made the stigma of the residents that much more 'sticky' and visible. As they struggle to regain their homes, the heart of the claims made revolved around the political nature of this excluded group.

Public housing residents faced an unwelcoming political climate, yet an economic environment that depended on low-wage work that was subsidized in some form. This left many low-income residents in a liminal space. They were left out of the rebuilding, left out of the political process, and continually stigmatized because of their inability to afford housing on the private market. They became "diminished subjects" and from this position of exclusion residents and allies worked to challenge who belonged.

Some identities are less open for negotiation, they have become in Sara Ahmed's language "stuck" to particular figures, making it more difficult to be seen as equals in the political sphere. Rather, visibility works against them, especially the way in which the visibility of gender, race, class, and space come together in the figure of many of St. Bernard's former residents. And the visibility of those who agitated against the state and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) in response to the closure of the buildings was even greater. Powerful women in their community, they were also coded by political leaders and through the local media as examples of 'the problem'. Like Rep. Baker, many viewed the flooding of public housing as answering a political need to rid themselves of modernity's waste.

Zygmunt Bauman writes that insecurity and vulnerability have become a generalized phenomena, part of the process of the production of waste. Those who are most vulnerable to market forces are nominally 'protected' under a shrinking welfare state, while at the same time, their inability to effectively engage in the market criminalizes them (Bauman 2004, Wacquant 2001). This places those who receive any form of welfare, but in particular housing or food, in a difficult double bind: increased stigma comes with nominal state protection. And because the protection will almost never serve as a means for social mobility, it only increases the stigma associated with being a welfare recipient. Above and beyond, it must be emphasized that public housing situated in place, and so it is a stigma that does not merely stick to particular bodies but is also located in particular spaces, in this case the urban housing project.

The story that follows is one that ostensibly ends with many former residents still scattered around the country and with much of public housing in the process of being 'redeveloped' as mixed-income housing. Nevertheless, some writers have suggested that the very process of contestation effects how a community sees itself: its *self*-visibility. Post-colonial urban scholars use Gramsci to highlight the key role that the "continuous remaking of identities through contentious politics" has for both those in power and subaltern groups (Yiftachel 2009: 254). These writers have noted that contestations take place in particular spaces that both constrain and expand the possibilities of change. Authority is always contingent and ambiguous,

and power is not merely possessed. As the Housing *Authority* of New Orleans faced multiple challenges from residents, its authority was never absolute and as residents challenged decisions and rulings, they were also reworking their identities as residents.<sup>57</sup> So, we should consider the possibility, that though we might tend to see public housing residents domination as ‘complete’ given their inability to return back to their homes, we should also consider that the struggle may have shifted the political terrain in other ‘unseen’ ways.

### Struggle over Public Housing

The story of the closure of public housing in the city in the aftermath of the storm is one of the great ironies of the post-Katrina landscape. During the time when the need for housing was at its greatest, all levels of government worked assiduously to keep public housing units closed and prevent residents from returning. Residents of public housing faced incredible difficulties returning to New Orleans after the hurricane. First, HANO declared most of the units uninhabitable and refused to let residents return, even to gather belongings. The storm that kept thousands of residents from returning to the city precipitated a severe housing shortage, which dramatically increased housing costs. Outside of the structural difficulties of returning to a city without resources, the most difficult hurdle was the social stigma towards public housing residents. There was Representative Baker the notorious comment that God had managed to “clean up” public housing. Even progressive City Council President Oliver Thomas stated that the city didn’t “need soap opera watchers right now”.<sup>58</sup> Many pointed out that the public housing stock was some of the strongest in the city, and had withstood the flood far better than many other similarly situated houses. But it was never really the housing that was the issue: it was the people.

The city’s post-Katrina policy was a totally dismantling and closure of public housing, but the decline of public housing units had begun much earlier in the 1990s. Calling this the “neo-Burbon” policy, Clyde Woods notes that in the early 2000s New Orleans had 15,000 public housing units with over 50,000 residents living in public housing,<sup>59</sup> but by early 2005, before Katrina, there were only 5,100 (2009). HANO and the city hoped to demolish 4500 of those units.

In this same period after the flood, the homeless population had bloomed from about 5,000, prior to the storm, to around 12,000 afterwards. Some estimated it may have been as high as 17,000, but even at the low estimate, at least 4% of the population was homeless (Jervis 2007).<sup>60</sup> Most likely the number was well above 12,000 given that the homeless are traditionally underreported. During this same year there were two well-publicized homeless

---

<sup>57</sup> It is also important to note that for most of the last ten years (and leading up to Katrina) HANO was under federal receivership

<sup>58</sup> Cited in Flaherty (2010), originally from the editorial, “No Welcome Mat?” *Gambit Weekly*, February 28, 2006.

<sup>59</sup> With the population of New Orleans hovering in the mid 400,000s

<sup>60</sup> Most estimates of the population of New Orleans in the summer of 2007 was around 300,000 (down from 450,00 pre-Katrina) and this was based on 66% households receiving mail (Liu and Plyer 2007).

camps set up to protest the slow pace of responding to the housing needs of New Orleans's most marginalized. Homeless Pride developed into a large camp directly in front of City Hall, becoming a constant reminder to the local government of the dire challenges many residents faced after the storm.

### **Race and Disrepair: Public housing in New Orleans**

From the beginning, public housing developments in New Orleans were segregated. By the 1940s there were six housing developments, two for whites and four for African Americans (Mahoney 1990). The white developments tended to be closer to the city center, while the black developments were often (particularly in the case of St. Bernard) located far outside the downtown area. The isolation of St. Bernard was so great that residents requested transfers at such a rate HANO stopped accepting them (Mahoney). In general, neighborhood patterns in the South are less spatially segregated than in the North. However, in New Orleans, the city began to resemble the northern pattern of entrenched neighborhood segregation. This was due in part to the effect of public housing developments. From the late 1940s through the 1970s public housing in New Orleans, and the U.S. at large, became predominantly African American due to a number of factors. First, the ability of whites to get FHA approved mortgages and move out of the city into the suburbs, shifted the white population spatially outward. Second, housing discrimination in both the private and public market continued to make black mobility more difficult. While some consider the role of real estate interests in fueling 'white flight' and limiting African American housing options<sup>61</sup>, Mahoney (1990) points out that the lack of job availability in the city along with the suburbanization of work, contributed to increased residential segregation. Whites continued to leave public housing units at the same rate they always had, but African Americans with limited access to the labor market quickly filled up those spaces, and this rate only intensified with the passage of the Civil Rights Act (Mahoney 1990). Public housing became seen as a place for the unworthy, nonworking, and black poor, which, along with the ghetto, helped to spatially fix ideologies of racial dominance (Wacquant 2001). Care for the buildings and active management disappeared, turning much of the housing into substandard housing. This was particularly evident in the case of New Orleans where the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) consistently rated the HANO as one of the worst run authorities in the nation (Reichl 1999).

By the 1990s public housing was deteriorated, stigmatized, and vilified as the epitome of the welfare state excesses. Public Housing funding was transformed during these years under the Clinton administration with the passage of "The Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998". This law implied, through legal and discursive framing, that 'responsibility' would be mandated to those on welfare through cutting what was understood as "dependence" on government funded safety nets. The key shift in housing legislation aimed to reduce poverty through spatial deconcentration of low-income public housing via the introduction of mixed

---

<sup>61</sup> This is dealt with in numerous sources. To name a few, see Freund (2007), Massey and Denton (1993), Mollenkopf (1983), Vale (2000).

income housing initiatives. Called, HOPE VI, the impetus behind the plans emerged out of the accepted belief that the failure of high-rise public housing was partially due to their modernist designs which concentrated poverty in mostly high-rise towers. The experience of such developments as Cabrini Green in Chicago and Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, which became so notorious for crime and neglect, seemed to confirm this. In contrast to tall, dense, modernist buildings, HOPE VI plans followed New Urbanist ideas of walkable streets and lower structures (Raskin 2012). Importantly, legislation included key provisions helping to create public-private partnerships. Early HOPE VI grants focused on remodeling existing buildings. But many housing authorities found that by accessing private equity and tax benefits it was actually less expensive to raze and reconstruct new housing than it was to rehabilitate older ones. This meant, at least in the realm of low-income housing, government was moving out of the business of building and management and into the business of financing. On the ground, it meant that local developers could become very wealthy by tapping into particular tax breaks and other incentives offered by the federal government.

The biggest source of problems in many of the most notorious public housing developments was not crime, but years of neglect. This is not to deny that public housing in many cities was not at a breaking point. With high rates of crime and violence in the communities, no one would deny they could be dangerous places to live. This was the case for the public housing stock in New Orleans, which though predominately brick structures made to last 100 years and built during the WPA, had over time, fallen into disrepair and needed significant upgrades. The reduction of funds for public housing occurred at the same era as public housing transitioned to majority black.<sup>62</sup> Residents complained that apartments had had no repairs for years. But reduced funding was not new nor was it localized in New Orleans. As highlighted above, lack of jobs and lack of mobility created a tinderbox within the low-income black community, which found itself concentrated in public housing in many cities. Many outside public housing equated the run down nature of the buildings directly to the residents. However, each year repairs in units became more difficult as the federal government reduced funding towards management. Over the last two decades as HUD began to shift its housing priorities, housing authorities all over the country have been faced with reduced federal budgets accompanied by higher costs, housing authorities are often forced to triage only the worst repairs in their existing stock. A recent report on New York City, the largest housing authority in the nation, showed a two-year waiting list for simple but necessary plumbing repairs in units (Buckley 2010). The units in New Orleans were no exception to these constraints. HANO was under even greater pressure given the high percentage of public housing developments in the city. Combined with the notorious mismanagement of the housing authority one can begin to visualize the run-down nature of the buildings, facilities, and apartments. Residents tried to push for reforms, but any shift that might indicate greater funding of public housing was not met with support.

---

<sup>62</sup> Mahoney (1990) writes that residents commented on the reduction of staff just as the developments became primarily black

### Redevelopment efforts in New Orleans

Efforts to redevelop public housing in the city had a long history. The push to move public housing from an entirely government funded program to one that supported the private market was part of a larger economic shift which had taken shape over the past few decades. The neoliberal turn emphasizes smaller government functions around welfare and regulation. Fundamental to this logic is a belief in a natural free market, which can only operate without interference from government. Large social welfare programs, such as public housing, were seen not only as drains on government, but as distorting the market, preventing its pure running. Public housing, in particular urban public housing, was one of the easier targets, given the racial composition of the housing and the tendency for this neoliberal economic logic to align closely with socially conservative ideologies, which saw white America under threat. The premier example of this discourse was the idea of the “welfare queen”: the urban black woman who depended on government subsidies and made her children dependent in turn.<sup>63</sup> The danger of the racialized and gendered discourse of the welfare queen is that public identities of this kind “endure over generations and impoverish the potential for empowered participation by citizens saddled with such identities” (Hancock, 4). In the struggle that developed around the closure of public housing, the image of the welfare queen became part of the political work done to delegitimize former residents.

In the past, when the possibility of redevelopment had been posited, residents proved to be intractable. Residents pushed-back at HANO, and as the political leadership feared the repeat of past standoffs,<sup>64</sup> such as the clash between the Black Panthers and police at the Desire housing project in New Orleans, they usually did not follow through. The storm allowed for a rapid closure without any police violence or a messy political fight. Katrina provided the legitimate reason to shut down the buildings. However, what they hoped would be a quick turnover, turned into a long protracted political battle that began with the St. Bernard housing project and continues with the Iberville project to this day.

Part of the untold story here is the slow building pace of the new developments as well as the continued resistance to them from former community members.<sup>65</sup> In the former St.

---

<sup>63</sup> It is probably worth noting that this term was first deployed by Regan when he was running for president, but it was based on a story that turned out to be false (Hancock).

<sup>64</sup> The public housing developments had been centers of political and cultural cohesion and activism, as much as they were areas of high crime and mortality; the former was not tolerated by the establishment, the latter, all but ignored. In the 1970s the Desire housing project was organized and politicized by members of the Black Panther Party. The Panthers offered the residents social services that were greatly needed, including free breakfast, education, and safety. Eventually, this led to a famous stand-off when the New Orleans Police Department arrived with 250 officers to evict the Panthers but the residents stood in the way, refusing to allow the police into the development. Leonard N. Moore notes in *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American Activism from World War II to Hurricane Katrina*, that tensions between the black Community and the New Orleans Police Department often erupted in protest.

<sup>65</sup> The pace is partly due to economic factors, but also due to the effects of former residents to keep the developments from being built.

Bernard area, the land around the new development lays mostly vacant. A number of former St. Bernard residents only live a few blocks away, as the new mixed income development, Columbia Parc, will only take a limited number of former residents. Instead, refusing to leave the physical community they had called home, they moved into the one private apartment building open in the area. The majority of the buildings in the surrounding community remain conspicuously uninhabited.

### Techniques of Exclusion

Within the Politics of Visibility—the terrain of struggle over how the state sees and how the governed respond to their political visibility—there emerged a tension between *techniques of exclusion* and *tactics of inclusion*. *Techniques of exclusion* are the forms in which political powers actively worked to neutralize and exclude public housing residents. The key techniques were the revival of ‘welfare queen’ discourse which served to alienate residents from building a broader coalition and the technique of dispersing the poor, which was often times pursued with the best intentions by a range of interests on the left and the right. In contrast to this, *tactics of inclusion* were focused on building coalitions particularly with younger white activists who moved to the city soon after the storm, and the tactic of occupation. Often operating under a human rights framework, many organizers worked to expand “rights” to include housing as a fundamental human right. While political leaders and many city residents worked to structurally and discursively relegate residents towards liminal status, former residents and allies pushed back forcing themselves to be heard and seen in ways that disrupted and challenged the state.

The politics of visibility in the struggle around public housing reflect the tension between the expulsion of a particular group of people from the political sphere (the poor and black), and the desire of those who are excluded to assert their place and become politically “visible”. The techniques of exclusion involved falling back on the identity of a stigmatized group and using that stigma as a way to justify their removal. It also utilized notions around poverty and how one can “fix” poverty through spatial means. That fixing rests on the dream that by removing a people the problem associated with it, poverty, will also vanish.

### Damaged Beyond Repair and the return of the Welfare Queen

One of the most oft repeated lines from agencies and groups responsible for overseeing the repair of public buildings is that the reason for demolition was due to the being “destroyed” and “beyond repair” because of the storm. This myth of destruction—repeated in every press release and in every media report.<sup>66</sup> While the level of destruction for many buildings was complete, the truth was more complicated. Many building sustained severe damage that required, in some cases, millions of dollars in repairs. However, if we compare the buildings that were repaired versus those that were demolished, we see it had more to do with political,

---

<sup>66</sup> Despite repeated reports by engineers and architects that the buildings were sound and worth repairing rather than replacing.

economic, and social forces, and little to do with the natural ones blamed for the “total destruction”. Often times, it was easier to access federal funds for a new building as opposed to rehabilitating the older one. Private financing, too, was easier to access if the building were rebuilt from the ground up. Other times, as in the case of public housing and Charity Hospital, the common sentiment was that the only way for a ‘fresh’ beginning were to destroy the buildings themselves. The meanings and history of the buildings threatened the new vision for the institutions. This last reason is the least tangible yet in many cases the most powerful, particularly in New Orleans.<sup>67</sup> This myth was repeated over and over again in official statements and in private conversations. Needless to say, in order to convince the public that buildings were too damaged to repair, required that no one be allowed back in the buildings. If the myth of destruction was to be believable, no one could have access to the buildings as people willing to clean and restore their old homes or workers willing to restore their hospital would clearly prove this myth false. In both cases, this is exactly what happened.

It is not merely that people wanted new buildings, there was palpable fear of the old structures themselves and the people they housed or assisted. It was a fear of the symbols and the stigma they held. Charity hospital would always be understood as providing “charity” which was against the “programmatic requirements” of the new hospital whose representatives hoped to attract new paying customers. The public housing ‘bricks’, as they were locally called, with their colloquial names of ‘magnolia’ and ‘calliope’ holding more sway decades after being renamed, would be hard to sell as mixed-income housing. Lofts and older manufacturing locations are more palatable locations to reinvent and certainly hold less stigma than public housing. It suggests that we need to consider the power of place that memories housed in physical structures hold in any analysis. The symbolic power they hold, particularly for those who used them, transcends the facts of the flood.

HANO’s website claims that much of the public housing stock was destroyed as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Its website states: “Much of HANO’s housing stock was destroyed in 2005 as a result of Hurricane Katrina” (HANO 2012). The evidence is that many of the buildings were far from destroyed. In fact, besides reports to the contrary (Ouroussoff 2007), it required only a brief walk in the area near most of the public housing. To see the areas surrounding these developments you witness street after street of houses that have been renovated, particularly around Lafitte, C.J. Peete, and B.W. Cooper—the last which sustained minimal damage from the storm—most of these houses were not nearly as well built as the public housing. B.W. Cooper has been occupied for the last 6 years, and is only now undergoing demolition. Granted these properties were not in good shape, but that had to do with years of neglect not the flood. As interviewees pointed out, no one seemed concerned *before* the storm about the level of disrepair. The area surrounding St. Bernard was harder hit. There are still many buildings

---

<sup>67</sup> In the next chapter on Charity Hospital and Lower Mid City, I will present a much more detailed analysis of the costs of restoration versus those of a new building. Charity is in some ways a more powerful case of the utilization of the myth. Not only was it able to be rebuilt, and many estimates showed a much lower price tag, but eventually the building was turned over for another use. Nevertheless, reports continued to speak about its being damaged beyond repair in the flood.

vacant, but standing. However, the devastation in this neighborhood has more to do with properties abandoned after the storm because of the inability or unwillingness (if rental property) of its owners to pay for renovations. Most damaging however, in 2006 the Loyola Law Clinic hired Juan Fernandez, an Associate Professor of architecture at MIT to do an independent assessment of the Lafitte projects. Looking a sample of 140 of the 850 apartments he concluded, “no structural or nonstructural damage was found that could reasonably warrant any cost-effective building demolition.”<sup>68</sup> This did not stop every public official from continuing to claim that the reason they were redeveloping the “Big Four” (C.J. Peete, St. Bernard, Lafitte, and B.W. Cooper) was because of damage sustained during Katrina. No one ever responded directly to the study, and, so as far as they were concerned it did not exist save in the minds of the activists.

Behind the assertion of flood destruction, it was clear that it was the *people* themselves who were damaged beyond repair. Residents had been called vermin in on-line comments,<sup>69</sup> they were seen as leaches on the system. HANO officials said openly that they wanted to “pass” over people who weren’t working. (Flaherty 2010: 186). In one case, a representative from suburban Metairie, next to New Orleans, proposed sterilizing male and female residents in public housing in order to “reduce the number of people that are going from generational welfare to generational welfare”<sup>70</sup> (187). The local daily, the *Times-Picayune*, fed the flames publishing article after article that openly suggested the problem with public housing was its residents.<sup>71</sup> The symbolic power of the “bricks” was as containers of less worthy and liminal people.

Some residents became lightning rods for the politics around welfare, poverty, gender and race. To organizers, Sharon Jasper was a key ally in a fight in which residents were hard to come by. She was glad to speak in front of the camera, often had preacher-like sound bites, and had the time and energy to show up to every protest. Most other former residents still lived outside the city, many feared reprisals from HANO if they were to become politically active. According to some, the ideal spokesperson for the importance of public housing would have be the single, working mother raising children, who along with the elderly and disabled made up a significant proportion of public housing residents. But many did not have the time nor capacity to come out and protest.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Cited in letter to Alfonso Jackson from the National Housing Law Project, from Aug 31, 2007

<sup>69</sup> One such example, full comment from NOLA.com posted by deaconblue01 on 12/21/07 at 2:48PM “Many of those poor excuses for humanity are the very vermin living in public housing. That's what people are protesting for? Get real.”

<sup>70</sup> The representative suggested men get vasectomies and women would get tubal ligations as a condition of receiving welfare.

<sup>71</sup> Particularly in the six months leading up to the City Council vote on public housing in 2007. I discuss one particular example in the following pages. Since then, it has relied on the fair and well-researched writing of Katy Reichdahl for its housing coverage.

<sup>72</sup> see Luft and Griffin (2008) for an good analysis of gender and housing in New Orleans after the storm.

To opponents of government assistance for housing, Sharon Jasper was a poster child; living for all but one of her years in some form of subsidized housing she represented all that was wrong with government-assisted social service programs. People did not hold back in comments in the local and national papers about the problems they saw with residents of public housing. And there was the “proof” in an article published the day prior to when the order for demolition was to go before the City Council. In the article, Sharon talks about difficulties with “slum-lords” and living on the edge, while she is provocatively photographed with a wide-angle lens to highlight her large screen TV and brightly colored flowers on the coffee table (Weaver 2007). This, the newspaper claimed, was not the picture of deprivation. It appeared to be a home of plenty! To make matters worse, the most widely shown media clip from the City council meeting, which received national media attention, was of Sharon yelling at a man sitting behind her in the council chambers, “Shut up white boy!” He had been badgering her and laughing at her, but the only clip played repeatedly involved her response. Several interviewees said the article represented months of biased coverage in the *Times-Picayune*, which made it very clear in news coverage and editorials where it stood on the question of demolition.

An organizer pointed out with some exasperation that there was little wiggle room for people who live close to the edge. Any day they miss work is money they cannot use to feed or clothe their family. There was frustration from organizers at the double bind that former residents were in which made them less likely to be visible on the front lines of protest.

“Nothing can really be done to fix it,” said one organizer, “the federal government is in charge of dealing with poor people, so there will never be a policy that addresses it adequately. It’s a two-tiered system [for low-income people]: anyone who can afford market rate does, but then has to face the vagaries of the market, and possibly homelessness, foreclosure, or doubling up. Or you are one of the few people who has a voucher and you hold onto that for your life because you see how unstable the market it, but then you spend your entire life being criticized for being a welfare queen.”<sup>73</sup>

### **Dispersing the Poor: Moving to opportunity?**

Along with the trope of the “welfare queen,” the other insidious cultural argument tossed around implied that the poor needed better middle-class role models. There was growing consensus from both liberal and conservative policy makers that public housing as it currently existed did not serve either the residents or the wider growth interests in the city. In the immediate aftermath of the flood, some policy makers and academics made the public call for “Moving to Opportunity” as a way to encourage rebuilding that moved the low-income residents from high-density areas of poverty to locations of mixed income (Briggs 2006). “Moving to Opportunity” is the programmatic phrase that HUD’s HOPE VI program has claimed, framing the removal of public housing as an opportunity rather than a loss. Detractors

---

<sup>73</sup> Interview notes, 10/17/10

however, view this particular idea of social-economic mixing as a mask for continuing inequality. As Nicholas Blomley (2004) writes “The problem with ‘social-mix’... is that it promises equality in the face of hierarchy” (99). In other words, the policy remains a one-way street: the upper displacing lower, not the other way around.

Critically, one can say that Moving to Opportunity is an up-to-date version of the “culture of poverty” theories from the 1960s and 1970s: that poorer people would be better off if surrounded by the non-poor: that the interaction (increased social capital) itself would benefit low-income families and help to alleviate poverty. Though there is ample evidence to support the existence of correlations between concentrated poverty and a range of social issues, the rhetoric around housing and poverty insists that the problem of public housing is the high concentration of poverty *itself*. This concentration of economic distress leads to a ‘cycle of poverty’ which can only be broken if residents are surrounded by more mixed-income neighbors. The solution of moving poorer residents to mixed income neighborhoods assumes that poverty itself is the problem *not* the outcome of numerous other social and economic issues, such as loss of jobs, growing inequality, disappearing safety nets, racism, and more. It also tends to extrapolate benefits of de facto mixed-income communities as opposed to intentionally organized ones (Levy et al 2011). There are a number of flaws with this thesis: first, it does not challenge the distribution of wealth, nor does it point out that high concentrations of wealth are just as problematic; and secondly, it assumes that those who are poor have the same opportunities of finding housing as anyone else (particularly when authorities encourage voucher use), whereas data from Chicago shows that when residents are moved out of public housing they end up in areas with the same density of poverty (Chaskin and Joseph 2012, Goetz 2003).

These discourses are notable for the way in which poverty is metaphorically understood as a plague, something that can spread, be caught, and destroy whole cities. Early slum clearance across the U.S., initiated by the original Housing Act of 1949, was a method to “stem ghetto expansion” (Bristol 1991), as though the ghetto were a sickness. Metaphors of poverty are as powerful as the symbols of the buildings. The rhetoric around poverty concentration gave a plausible reason and ideological backing to the forces already pushing for particular changes through the city. In New Orleans many real estate investors had been anxiously waiting since HOPE VI funds were made available in the 1990s to convert the massive public housing developments into mixed income communities. Converting the property to mixed income could enrich some key figures in the city, and it would most likely possibly reduce the number of low-income residents in the city. Framed as the need to keep “professionals,” reversing the “brain drain,” and the need to diversify the economy, they celebrated the few local neighborhoods that had been successfully gentrified. The problem, up until Katrina, had been the residents who, as long as they remained, were intransigent about leaving their communities. But in an economy that depended greatly on service industries, the need for low-income housing remained. As Democratic State Rep. Cedric Richmond said at the time questioning the logic of redevelopment, “it [was] audacious to blame residents’ misery on the concentration of poverty in New Orleans... It was always concentrated. Because you can’t get people to make beds and

clean hotels if you educate them well and they expect a decent pay” (Cass and Whoriskey 2006).

### **Developers paired with developments**

The redevelopment contract for C.J. Peete Public Housing Complex (Magnolia) went to developer McCormack Baron and Salazar (financed in part by Goldman Sachs)<sup>74</sup> and was renamed “Harmony Oaks,” Lafitte Public Housing Complex went to Providence Community Housing, a non-profit connected with Catholic non-profits, financed by Enterprise Community Investments, Inc. with some financing from Goldman Sachs. Unlike most HOPE VI projects nationally, which on average replaced only 1/3 of the former public housing units, the Lafitte redevelopment project aimed to replace all of the existing affordable units in some form. All projects had some aspect of work-force training, a charter school, and community services that were to be housed in the new complexes.

St. Bernard Public Housing Complex redevelopment bid went to Columbia Residential, founded by retired but active developer Tom Cousins from Atlanta who had completed what was then considered to be the most successful redevelopment of public housing. Cousins is also responsible for much of the cityscape in Atlanta built during the last four decades. The Atlanta East Lake redevelopment model focuses on centering the community around a charter school and work-force training, as well as connection to work and philanthropic activities around the nearby PGA golf course. The St. Bernard project was an ideal replication site for Columbia Residential as it was situated next door to City Park’s two golf courses. As part of the redevelopment, the Bayou District Foundation (BDF), the non-profit umbrella group responsible for the project and led by three of New Orleans major real-estate developers and financiers,<sup>75</sup> bid to redevelop City Park’s golf courses destroyed by the flooding after Katrina.

Columbia Parc on the Bayou is the newly minted and named mixed-income housing development of Columbia Residential. It has been built slowly in tracks of apartments that are composed of 1/3 public housing, 1/3 affordable rentals set at 60% AMI<sup>76</sup>, and a 1/3 market rate. Columbia Parc development will eventually have 1300 units, a small reduction of 100 from when it was St. Bernard, however, only 433 of the eventual 1300 will be for public housing residents.<sup>77</sup> Four of the old buildings from St. Bernard were rehabilitated and integrated into the plan of the development. Built by the WPA, they have been retained for historic purposes, but prove the possibility of rehabilitation. The Bayou District Foundation website states its explicit goal of “enabling children and families to escape the cycle of poverty”<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-firm/progress/harmonyoaks/index.html>

<sup>75</sup> Gary Solomon, Mike Rodrigue, Gerard W. Barousse Jr. from the Bayou District Foundation’s website: <http://www.bayoudistrictfoundation.org/PageDisplay.asp?p1=5484>; accessed 9/5/12

<sup>76</sup> According to 2014 Fannie Mae data, AMI is 58,800. 60% of that would be around \$35,280; accessed Nov 24, 2014 <https://www.fanniemae.com/s/components/amilookup/61d695d4-b7a7-4fe1-90c2-7dff2fd1ccd4?state=>

<sup>77</sup> Columbia Parc at the Bayou District Presentation to NCAHMA Conference April 8, 2010;

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.bayoudistrictfoundation.org/ourstory>; accessed 9/5/12

Even as protests waned around St. Bernard, they were reignited in 2011 over Iberville, the public housing development closest to the French Quarter that had been eyed by developers for years. HANO and HUD officials having learned a lesson, began conducting public meetings in the initial planning stage. By now, they had perfected the art of receiving input without real participation. Many residents noted the irony. At a meeting for another public housing redevelopment one woman sarcastically said, “You decide to redevelop our homes and then you ask us what color we want it!”<sup>79</sup> Some hoped the meetings would begin a new era of actual participation by residents however, as one observer noted,

“Despite their narrow purpose, some hoped the required meetings would shape a dialogue that exchanges information between the planners and community residents. That didn't happen in late 2006, as HANO prepared to demolish the Big Four and hosted the same sort of meeting in a packed John McDonogh Senior High School. Evacuees who drove for hours to attend the meeting were enraged to discover that the agency only wanted to record their questions but offered absolutely no answers” (Reckdahl 2012).

Instead these public meetings diffused the energy of the activity on the streets. Meetings turned into shouting matches, but then gave ‘proof’ to leaders and developers that they were dealing with unruly residents and their out-of-town instigators. They were able to narrow participation even further by creating a residents group to comment on the plan and to serve as the go-between for residents at Iberville and HANO and the developers. The group was given a stipend for their service.

### Tactics of Inclusion

Tactics of inclusion were part of the tools used to make people visible throughout the political process. Through these tactics, they inserted themselves and their bodies in the public sphere of streets and public meetings. In order to counter the exclusionary techniques used against them, protesters made both pragmatic as well as political decisions. Coalitions helped to make their case visible to a larger national audience and occupations were a spatial tactic of inserting themselves directly into the political wheels. Though the following discussion separates them into two broad categories, in reality, occupations depended on the coalitions, and sometimes the coalitions (particularly those from outside the state) needed the occupations. Broadly, these were the most effective forms of challenging the local political establishment as well as the Housing Authority of New Orleans, in its capacity as the agency in charge of the public housing developments. The effectiveness of tactics can be measured by the level of police surveillance that they ended up eliciting, which in the end proved to be effective in limiting the residents’ involvement.

---

<sup>79</sup> fieldnotes, Oct 18, 2010

## Coalition Building

Past struggles around housing had worked to create coalitions across class and racial barriers. In particular, local housing leaders had worked closely with key civil rights lawyers who had worked on issues of racial disparities in criminal justice and broadly around civil rights issues. At the same time, because of the attention the city was receiving after the storm, there was an influx of younger white activists into the city, who wished to dismantle what they saw as the old southern racist and capitalist hierarchies in the city. In an effort to mobilize and harness this energy, many tacticians from within and out began to meet regularly to discuss mobilization around housing issues. Great effort was made to make sure that residents were key participants in decisions and actions, but this did not stop the “outsider” status being used against them.

“Outsiders” was perhaps one of the most contentious subjects among people working on housing issues. Public officials claimed protests were led by outsiders: people who “didn’t live in public housing.” News reports from the local paper often called attention to the outsider status of actions. The *Times-Picayune* wrote of a protest at HANO offices in August 2007 that “the mostly out-of-town activists peacefully left the third floor of HANO’s Gentilly offices” (Filosa 2007). In local media there was racial coding of the insider/outsider dichotomy. Given how racially segregated housing was in the city and that public housing residents were nearly all black, it was clear that the strong contingent of young white people clamoring for reopening public housing were not from New Orleans public housing. Out-of-town was another way to say “white.”

National media also reported on this from a slightly different perspective. Reporting on an action, the *New York Times* quoted a housing official saying, “Ask how many of them have lived in public housing, have been to public housing other than to protest.” In the same article city councilwoman Stacey Head, a lightning rod for those protesting the closure, was quoted saying “I wish that all these people, particularly from out of town, would just leave us alone and let us improve our city” (Eaton 2007).

It was not only local and national media who made the outsider status a major issue. Other well-known organizers<sup>80</sup> in the city felt that post-Katrina public housing activism was misplaced, as it was not an indigenous movement. Within the movement people struggled with how to define the role of the young white activists who were coming to the city. But it was the growing recognition that stigma was playing an increasing role in the public sphere around public housing had led to tactical changes in the different protest actions which led for a larger role of younger out-of-town white activists as well as the threats made to housing residents that they would lose housing. There were a few key reasons, first, residents who relied upon subsidies and assistance could risk losing their housing voucher if arrested. Many were women with children and the possibility of insecurity for their whole families was too great a risk. Second, in certain actions, particularly one that took place in a wealthy white

---

<sup>80</sup> Leaders at the People’s Institute were vocal about their disapproval, but other local activists disagreed and pointed out there were many public housing residents involved.

neighborhood, young white organizers had greater access. Many times it was the residents group which met across from St. Bernard at Survivors Village who molded the actions. However, at times, the “face” of the actions, particularly after 2007, were people who did not live in public housing. Documentary filmmaker Luisa Dantas has footage<sup>81</sup> which shows a dramatic shift in the composition of protests from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day action in 2007 (when residents were threatened with losing housing) and those that took place in 2008 and later.

At times tensions arose around the type of visibility received and the form of tactics that certain actions utilized, especially those organized by outsiders who had limited connection to the residents. One particular example was when a group of anarchists created a series of provocative posters that got the attention of the FBI. Ellis explained the situation:

“That’s when you get these young hot heads....all they want to do is kick it over, no strategy, all they want to do is fight hard...it’s not clear what their purpose is. They didn’t organize it, they wouldn’t have. They don’t believe in collective action, they believe in action.

“They were involved in the posters that the FBI was investigating. One said, ‘rent has double since Katrina’ with a homeless guy, the other was ‘stop the demolition’ with an imprint of a bulldozer. There was a part that said for every unit demolished a condo will be destroyed. And there wasn’t any idea how these had been published, so there was some controversy within the leadership...The media establishment freaked out: ‘young terrorists coming to New Orleans to cause violence!’

“I was told ‘you have to burn these posters’...I was given a lighter and burned them in the backyard in a BBQ...

“There was some sense that a faction had generated that stuff, and it built a lot of mistrust. There were police cars staked out of people’s houses. So, people were worried. It was mostly NOPD...they was, I think a special task force to monitor activists. Every time Survivor’s Village had a meeting there was a HANO police car of undercover NOPD sitting on the neutral ground.”<sup>82</sup>

From the perspective of city leadership most of the younger white activists were all cut from the same cloth, whether they were working closely with residents or not. Though organizing had been a multi-racial effort in the city for some time, local leaders knew who were ‘theirs,’ the younger activists were seen as meddlers by local officials. In a city in which one measures one’s local authenticity and credibility in generations, outsiders are seen as interferers. In the meantime, as former residents found permanent housing, their numbers in actions continued to dwindle which shifted the proportion of residents to non-public housing residents involved in actions.

---

<sup>81</sup> Interview March 2007

<sup>82</sup> fieldnotes, Oct 17 2010; note, the NOPD would use HANO vehicles as indicated by this last sentence

*International Coalitions*

It is surprising now, given how little attention it received at the time, but in 2009 the United Nations sent a special rapporteur on housing to the city to focus on the effects of shutting public housing, increased homelessness, and the foreclosure crisis. This was organized by a national housing rights organization with the help of a local organization. The rapporteur's final report was damning towards HANO's demolition policy saying, "The current housing crisis in New Orleans reflects the disastrous impact of the demolition policy. In particular, the demolition of the 'Big Four' housing complexes (B.W. Copper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte and St. Bernard) has displaced approximately 20,000 individuals. Only one public housing complex still remains, Iberville, which is in need of better maintenance. Residents of Iberville fear demolition of their homes." (Rolnik 2010: 13).<sup>83</sup>

This was a moment when national attention might have been harnessed to great effect. However, frictions emerged around the national organization and the local organization (run by one person). Some felt that the national group were more interested in their own agenda and had little use for locals. The local individual who did work with the national group was seen by some as self-interested and had little of the charisma that some of the other residents had. The fact was, that by the time the UN rapporteur came on the scene much of the housing was in the process of being demolished.

In the end, the interference of the UN was seen as just that. The report was all but ignored by local leaders who brushed the outsiders away. Though others felt it justified what they had been saying all along about the problematic nature of demolition, it came too late to have any other than a symbolic effect.

The tension around the insider and outsider status of organizations for public housing had deep roots emerging out of old class and racial divides in the city, particularly within the Black community as a whole. There were old divisions in the city between the lighter skinned Creole "elite" with French surnames and Catholic upbringing, and the Black Protestant community, who tended to be darker in complexion and was overrepresented in public housing.<sup>84</sup> The Creole community was well connected to the white elite in the city and had been tapped by the establishment for top political positions. As one angry respondent in a meeting for the mayoral election said, "the black bourgeoisie in New Orleans have always betrayed the black working class, as long as they can go to the good schools."<sup>85</sup>

It was some of the same Black leaders who expressed deeply held ideas about the "problematic" nature of public housing residents. Former Creole mayor Sidney Barthelemy, one of the first African American mayors in New Orleans, was on the leadership team for HRI

---

<sup>83</sup> By 2014 even Iberville was demolished for a mixed-income housing development by local developer Pres Kabacoff.

<sup>84</sup> Of course, the history here is much more complicated than what was floated around by community members. There is also not a straightforward easy division between where race and religion line up.

<sup>85</sup> The use of "black bourgeoisie" implies a well-connected "creole" though it is not exclusive to that. New Orleans's "Future and its Next Mayor", public meeting, 2/25/10

Properties, a major re-developer of former public housing in the city, and pushed for redevelopment during his tenure as mayor. And Ray Nagin, former mayor, had publicly said he did not want the projects because they were crime ridden, and acquiesced quickly to the closure of public housing after the storm.

Writing on the power of the 'welfare queen' discourse, Ange-Marie Hancock suggests that not only do the "public identities" such as the welfare queen "impoverish the potential for empowered participation by citizens saddled with such identities" (5) but that these identities become hindrances in building coalitions locally and beyond because it creates divisions between "citizens who are and citizens who are not part of the target population of the legislation at issue," (7) in this case public housing. Residents found they could not respond effectively to the inherited stigma associated with public housing. It prevented them from making strong and broad coalitions and more importantly transferred the issue from being about affordable housing to being about the worthiness of the residents themselves.

## Occupation

Along with building coalitions, the tactic most used was that of occupation. Prefiguring the Occupy movement, but indebted to national and international movements to claim housing and land, the tactic of reclaiming the housing and the community became a key form of protest. But, it was within the occupations that we see the key role that the police played in limiting the capacity of the protesters to re-open public housing.

There were a number of key occupations of St. Bernard that took place over time. Each was met with force. On April 6<sup>th</sup> 2006, the anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, public housing residents and activists occupied a number of apartments in St. Bernard to prove they were livable. Local organizers gathered residents then living in Houston to participate in the protest (Arena 2011).

By the beginning of June in 2006, a little over nine months after the storm and just two months after the MLK occupation in St. Bernard, a group of public housing activists, including Asante, declared their intent to create a community that could be both a gathering place for former residents who had lost their community with the closure of St. Bernard, as well as a protest site to highlight the process of privatization of government services. They named the tent city Survivor's Village and it encapsulated the larger vision of a self-sustained community born out of the hopeful discussions on the I-610 expressway after the flood. The Center, where I first met Asante, was just one building of this larger vision, and it was also the only non-temporary structure. The press release from the day read:

"[Community Rising] will be constructed by residents of public housing and their supporters, across from the St. Bernard Housing Development, in the 3800 block of St. Bernard Ave. The [Community Rising] will contain a Tent City to demonstrate the need for affordable housing, a need that HUD and HANO have failed to address. The Village will contain a community center, which will serve as

a meeting and organizing location for residents of public housing and section 8, citizens of New Orleans, and community activists from all over the world.<sup>86</sup>

That tent city became Asante's home for the next four months, in protest of the closure of St. Bernard. The 22 tents on the neutral ground stretched six blocks and represented both protest and pragmatic housing for residents left out of the tight market. When an apartment building opened a few blocks away, a number of the tent city residents moved in, with the blessing of the community. Asante remained in his tent until a FEMA trailer arrived.

In mid June 2006 HUD announced plans to reopen 1000 units of public housing by the end of August. It is unclear how much HUD was responding to the pressure created by the tent city, but its officials were certainly aware of the activity through HANO which had housing officers watching over the encampment. In the same press release, HUD announced plans to utilize HANO funding, bonds, and Low Income Tax Credits to redevelop the "big four" housing developments of Lafitte, St. Bernard, C.J. Peete (Magnolia), and BW Cooper, which "endured moderate to severe damage".<sup>87</sup> Beginning the release with the 'good news' of more units, they buried the news of the demolitions towards the bottom of the release.

In response, one of the more strategic events planned was a march into the wealthy Garden District neighborhood.<sup>88</sup> It directly challenged discourse advocating the dispersal of the poor. Said one person involved in the event,

"There was this protest that Community Rising did, [in which] we marched down St. Charles with fliers that said, 'Make this community mixed income.' And then gave people eviction notices in mansions on St. Charles. It was like, 'Great! You really want mixed income? Ok, let's put mixed income here.' It was one of the smarter more strategic [activities], and they only had the young white kids like me hand them out. There were a lot of people there...It was multi-racial and there were a lot of residents."<sup>89</sup>

Many of the protests had been largely symbolic: challenging the authority of HANO or encouraging residents to reclaim their space. These had been significant, but their visibility was limited. However, the march into the wealthy Garden District caught leaders and the police off guard. Residents of the uptown neighborhood often met the protestors with gracious smiles until they read the pamphlet they were being given. The effect may not have been lasting, but the shift from focusing on housing to inequality was a key strategic move.

By June 27<sup>th</sup> the same group led by a local civil rights lawyer who stayed at the tent city when it first opened, submitted a class action lawsuit on behalf of former residents against Alfonso Jackson and HUD. The brief stated that:

---

<sup>86</sup> Press release Community Rising [name changed], June 2006

<sup>87</sup> HUD Press Release, June 14, 2006, "HUD outlines Aggressive plan to bring families back to New Orleans Public Housing."

<sup>88</sup> (image of FLYER here <http://neworleans.indymedia.org/news/2006/06/7855.php>); photo Nick Fuller Googins

<sup>89</sup> Jane, interview, Oct 14 2010

“By failing to reopen housing units that were undamaged by Hurricane Katrina, failing to repair other units, and declaring that most of the existing public housing stock in New Orleans would be demolished, HANO and HUD (Defendants) are violating their obligation to provide non-discriminatory access to safe, affordable housing for low- income families and breaching their contractual commitments and statutory obligations to public housing residents of New Orleans” (31).<sup>90</sup>

They hoped for time to fight the demolitions on legal grounds feeling that in New Orleans the degraded status of public housing residents would give them little local leverage and sympathy from the part of local leaders.

It was during these intense months of protest, as former residents prepared to fight demolition till the end, that the group was surveilled by two police officers from NOPD. The police officers’ identities, one burly man with a military flattop haircut, were quickly sussed out. This was a time when local police had been given tremendous latitude to work undercover with protest groups, and the public housing organization was no exception. But, for residents who depended on vouchers for housing security their presence was no idle threat.

On December 7, 2006, 15 months after the storm, HANO announced the final decision to demolish the four public housing developments locally referred to as “the Big Four”. According to news reports, “the meeting, the last of a series of required ‘consultation meetings’ with residents, appeared to be a formality.” (Cass and Whoriskey 2006). Though many had protested HANO’s decision, it was not unexpected, given HUD’s announcement earlier that summer. During the official public announcement, numerous news agencies reported HANO officials’ disinterested tone throughout the entire meeting. One resident finally cried out in frustration, “We are people. We are not animals” (ibid)

In January of 2007 on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day another occupation moved into St. Bernard. A large crowd of former residents met on the neutral ground near St. Bernard, they cleaned up apartments and readied them to be symbolically lived in. In direct contradiction to the claim they were uninhabitable, they threatened to destabilize HUD’s and HANO’s argument. Quickly, HUD and HANO sent injunctions to have the people removed (Hammer 2007). Lawyers working for the former residents claimed that people had a right to return to their homes. Even as renters, they held legal leases. They pointed out that the audit showed the units could be rehabilitated and that another engineering study supported the structural integrity of the buildings. HANO attempted to gag lawyer Bill Quigley asking him to refrain from, “prejudicial extrajudicial statements to the press and others.” They also threatened to bring him before the bar association if he continued to speak to the media.<sup>91</sup> Finally, in the early hours of the

---

<sup>90</sup> Anderson v. Jackson filed June 27, 2006

<sup>91</sup> letter cited in <http://katrinareader.org/police-arrest-public-housing-activists-new-orleans-federal-officials-try-silence-leading-attorney-lo>; accessed May 15, 2011

morning on January 31, 2007, while most of the media slept, a SWAT team removed the occupiers and arrested two non-residents.

Over the course of the next year there were many actions by residents and allies to protest the closure of public housing. These included multiple take-overs of the HANO offices. Along the way, there were also many moments of loss as well. Residents were threatened with loss of housing vouchers, the group lost the civil rights case against HANO and HUD, and a number of key leaders became too sick to continue, and one key housing activist and resident passed away.

### Silencing and Surveiling

We cannot address the politics of visibility without noting that surveillance is a technique deployed against particular populations. This technique is one of “in the final instance,” meaning, the larger political struggle between exclusion and inclusion was ultimately decided through the threat of force.

### City Council Upheaval

December 20, 2007 was the watershed moment for public housing. The vote to demolish was to come before City Council and the few months prior there were numerous actions around the city in protest of the possible demolition. Those pushing to reopen the developments were gathering in full force to protest the meeting and the assumed outcome. Up until that day people assumed the final vote would be 5-2 in favor of demolition. The final 7-0 came as a shock to most except a few who received warning of the impending vote late the night before.<sup>92</sup> Protestors arrived early, and found City Council chambers full of people with no connection to housing. But this prevented most from being allowed in. Without warning the doors were closed and no one else was allowed in. Standing outside, the numbers continued to grow and the police were called in to hold the line between the metal fence that separated the City Council chambers from the outside.

“Let the people in! Let the people in! There’s seats right there...and right there! What is wrong with you all!” Yelled a pastor who had made it into City Hall chambers on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Audience members slowly realized that no more people were going to be let in, and they decided to delay the meeting as long as possible. It was both a tactical as well as an emotional decision at the clarity of being left out of the political process. As emotions escalated, police inside the chambers began to use force to subdue some of the protestors. Suddenly, the police grabbed one man pushing him to the floor, and pandemonium broke out. The video recording

---

<sup>92</sup> Flaherty suggests the lopsided nature of the vote demonstrates that it was not about money and investment as the housing market in the city was never strong, but was more that the elite (white and black) did not want poor blacks back in the city as they were seen as “criminals and parasites” (Flaherty, 198). And certainly of the four developments closed, only Lafitte could be seen as ‘gentrifiable’ given its proximity to the French Quarter. Nevertheless, the racial divisions of the city are such that the Lafitte will remain predominately black and working class for sometime.

the meetings for live streaming suddenly turned off. Councilors seems surprised and didn't know what to do. The media jumped up close with video cameras to catch the melee. Those in the audience started screaming, and others tried to protect audience members who police subdued. One group were able to hold off a police who pressed a woman into her seat. A woman nearby got between them, yelling at the police, "stop, stop, stooooop!" Another group of police repeatedly tazered one man as he lay on the ground moaning. While in the background you can hear a quiet incredulous voice asking, "this is America?" Stunned that what was a public meeting had shut out most of those most affected by the decision and devolved into violence.

As one organizer who had been involved in shuttling residents to and from the various meetings around the city said, "I knew at that point it was over. The main point of December 20<sup>th</sup> was...it was so chaotic and there were so many new people, there was no cohesion, so all the local leadership was subordinated to chaos. The goal was to make [city council] look as bad as possible, even though they knew what was going to happen...It was intentional martyrdom, as many people would get arrested as possible. [But], there was no intention to subject them to the physical violence they endured, the tazering and pepper spraying."<sup>93</sup>

Meanwhile outside, hundreds of protestors waited in the rain, barred out by a locked gate and horse mounted police officers behind it. Sam, a well-known housing rights figure post-Katrina, stood outside "I've been hear since 8 o'clock this morning trying to get in. I'm a resident of public housing...they locked me out of my place and they locked me out of City Hall." (Dantas 2007) A number of people began to swing on the gate and the weak lock snapped. Police, fearing the crowd, reached through the gate, sprayed mace in the air and began arresting anyone near the gate. Those waiting, outraged at the police, yelled "this is a public meeting! Let us in!" and grabbed people who had fallen from the pain of the pepper spray. In the confusion, protestors, mixed with the media, who mixed with police as the police pulled the gate shut. In a bizarre video on the *Times-Picayune* website, there is an interview with Bill Quigley, a well-known lawyer representing public housing residents. He stands on one side of the gate, his interviewer sticking the microphone through the bars, stands on the other. Looking rather like a scene in a jail, Quigley repeats, "this is against the sunshine law, it is illegal." (Times-Picayune video 2007)

There was a tremendous amount of rage at the police from residents who wanted to get into the meeting, most had no idea that similar techniques were being used inside to contain dissent. One woman yelled, "You come MACEing these people out here and tazing these people out here cause they're standing for their rights. You goddamned right I'm pissed off, you're doing it to my people, my people!" (ibid). But the rage, which many felt was warranted, fit into the discourse of the out-of-control and irrational black woman which was part of the language used to describe public housing residents. Many others were incredulous that the residents claimed a "right of return". They felt it was their tax dollars supporting the lazy and

---

<sup>93</sup> Fieldnotes, Oct 17, 2010

indigent, never mind that data showed that many of public housing residents who were not disabled or elderly,<sup>94</sup> worked.

Mayor Ray Nagin gave a press conference later that day after the final decision in which he stated, “We stand here unified, the entire council, administration and everybody. This is a new day in New Orleans” (WDSU news 2007). Residents were infuriated that the two black City Council people had voted on behalf of demolition, in part because the residents had been the backbone of their constituency. But many residents had not been able to vote in the last election, given the difficulties of absentee voting following Katrina, making unclear what their political power and voice would look like in the future.

Many of those involved in the struggle up to that point were devastated. “It was depressing and I don’t think we ever recovered” said one person.<sup>95</sup> Another said, “No one knew what to do. Everyone was really depressed... The way they took down the buildings was by taking down a corner of the building and leave them open. You could look in and see full family rooms, you saw furniture and pictures on the wall. It was sitting like that for months.”<sup>96</sup>

A number of important activists had become seriously ill during in the process, including Asante, and as they left to recover there was a vacuum of leadership. Residents felt despondent and those in the city looked for alternative housing. In one meeting that February Asante, angry at the way the meeting was devolving, shouted, “you know there are no more residents anymore, only former residents.”<sup>97</sup> He suggested a need to change tactics and focus, something that was about the right of all people for housing. As one person said, “That meeting seemed like an important turning point, the two ways to express grief”

### **Policing the Poor: Memorial Day**

The group of housing activists coming from social justice groups, housing rights work, lawyers, and former residents gathered at the front of the Center over Memorial Day weekend in 2010<sup>98</sup>. The event was part of a weekend of activities to commemorate housing and land rights. Two large banners stretched across the group proclaiming, “Housing is a Human Right” and “Right to Return.” Other marchers held smaller spray painted posters reading, “Let the people in” and “Bring the People Home”. The banners had traveled all over the city, having been unfurled at countless other housing protests. They were also constantly remade as they were confiscated as quickly as created, particularly in 2007 in the lead up to the City Council decision on public housing.

---

<sup>94</sup> According to the Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, as of 2008, 64% of all public housing residents were either disabled or elderly.

<sup>95</sup> interview, Oct 17 2010

<sup>96</sup> interview, Oct 15 2010

<sup>97</sup> ibid

<sup>98</sup> The following section is from fieldnotes taken during the event, May 28, 2010

The group planned to walk around Columbia Parc—the new development replacing St. Bernard complex—and then into the leasing office to peacefully take over the waiting room. As the walk began, workers and residents watched quietly from the side of the street and balconies. Columbia Parc, had its own security officers who watched from a distance. The group marched through the center past newly built and painted two story homes, with balconies and faux columns, which were colorful compared to the monotone brick of the former St. Bernard complex, but not nearly as well built. There was something of an eerie silence in the development compared to the rest of the city, where life on the streets, neutral zones, and stoops made permeable the private life in homes and that of the street. Balconies are an important social space in the city, but that day most remained unused in Columbia Parc. There was talk that the terms of lease discouraged loud socializing or cooking BBQs on the balconies. But the silence was also a result of the destruction of an old community and its replacement with a fabricated one.

The group continued its march through the nearby streets chanting “Housing is a human right!”, past the quiet and partially finished development. Weaving through the streets, it passed out of the development and onto the city streets. Houses surrounding the development lay boarded up. Other patches of land were vacant, with the scar of a driveway or sidewalk the only indication that a house once existed there. The group reentered the development through the corner and headed up the main street towards the rental office. As the seventy-five marchers headed towards the door there was a panicked attempt from a woman in the office to bar the door with her body, but the push of the crowd moved everyone effortlessly beyond her. Employees looked bewildered as the group came in and took over the seating.

Tastefully modern couches in mute tones were situated throughout the waiting area. On the edges of the large room with 20-foot ceilings one could browse through sample rug colors, apartment layouts, and other options a prospective renter could opt for. It was decidedly un-New Orleans in its uniformity. The large room could have been in any city, any apartment building or hotel lobby: any sense of locality and place was erased save the superficial use of French names and the facades on the front of the buildings that imitated the French colonial porches in the French Quarter.

The marchers sat down on the floor, the couches, and stood around the edge of the room. They chanted, “no justice, no peace” while employees frantically got on the phones. Organizers spoke through a megaphone pointing out the multiple reasons former residents had been kept from returning home and the need fight the injustice. People milled around and waited to see who would make the next move, sometimes they chanted, other times they sat and chatted. A murmur of fear went through the crowd as the NOPD SWAT team arrived. They moved in past the protesters and directly to the video monitors in a small room visible from the main waiting area. The tension in the room grew, though lawyers said they could do nothing as people were only exercising their right to assemble and their right of free speech. All the various security teams —the SWAT team, HANO police, and plain-clothes cops—huddled around the monitors for sometime. At the same time as it appeared they had come to some

conclusion, the leaders of the protest shouted to move on outside and continue marching back to the Center.

A few days after the weekend events, police arrived at Sharon Jasper's door and told her she was being arrested for battery. When she asked for what, they told her for her involvement in the protest. An employee of Columbia Parc was filing charges that she pushed and injured her arm. Asante reflected on the event and the use of police a number of months later:

"If you're working for housing for the poor, for public housing, then the police take liberties against poor people and treat poor people in a manner different because they feel that these people don't have the same rights. If you're living in poor neighborhoods, which public housing was the symbol, you were poor you were probably less educated, probably black, probably a woman, or child of a poor black woman, probably politically the least probably to participate in normal political system. You were the perfect victim because no one cared about you. They would be more repressive and more brutal in that environment. It would make me see and feel how repressive and brutal police will be, with people they think no one cares about. The real indicator is a lack of material worth. You don't have anything, you don't count."<sup>99</sup>

Is violence invoked because of the threat to the sovereign status of the local authorities? What about public housing residents poses a threat? In much of the work on the ghetto, state violence is seen as containment. But, when state violence is meted out (directly or indirectly, through the uneven operation of the criminal justice system) it means there is a perceived threat. In almost every action around public housing, the police were a constant presence. Unlike the other cases under study here (Lower Ninth Ward and Lower Mid City-Charity), where there was little police involvement, public housing residents represented a highly surveilled and highly policed population.

In the end, the apparatus of force would be the final arbiter, brought in to silence or surveil former residents in a way that served to limit the effectiveness of the actions. Judith Butler (Butler and Spivak 2007) has commented that the state both "binds" as it "unbinds, releases, expels, and banishes," both are part of the exercise of state power and require the use of containment and force. For her, it is the exercise of dispossession, which defines modern state, just as it is the creation of wasted lives that defines modern capitalism for Bauman. What both lack in their analysis is attention to the actual politics, which brings about, shapes, legitimizes, and reinscribes a domination based on exclusion and dispossession. In the case of Public Housing, the tactics which pushed for inclusion in the political sphere were turned against them. The coalitions would bring claims of outsiders interfering, and the occupations brought about the use of force that often served to portrayed residents as needing 'control'.

---

<sup>99</sup> Interview Asante 10/6/10:

The double bind of stigma led to great frustration for those who struggled on behalf of the residents.

### Paradox & Conclusion

The politics of visibility in public housing revolved around the stigmatized status of its residents, which carried over onto the buildings themselves. The visibility of race and place came together to create a volatile political terrain for residents who were pushing to reopen the public housing developments after the storm. They refused to back down and publicly struggled against the closure. However, the claims based on their 'rights' placed them at the center of the claim and made residents the political focus of the struggles. Inevitably, the tactics reproduced and reaffirmed the domination. Sharon Jasper became a lightning rod affirming the public belief in the 'welfare queen' and yet she was one of the few residents who consistently showed up to events. The occupations inevitably brought out the police, which only served to confirm the 'prove' that this was a group needing police control. And even the effort to create coalitions at times created tensions within those advocating for public housing, around who was 'indigenous' to the movement. It also played into the political elites claim that no one who was actually a resident was involved in the protests, thereby justifying their dismissal. Yet, like most of the decisions made in the post-Katrina atmosphere, they were premised on keeping poor, black residents far from the nodes of power. But, with public housing residents there was the further impetus to keep them far from the city itself. The idea was that if one could banish the poor, one could banish poverty. Here, techniques of exclusion are bolstered by the police. But whose interest do they serve?

Who belongs in the nation state? These days with the furor over citizenship and immigration we often miss the ways in which formal citizens are pushed to the political margins. The debate that emerged right after the storm around the use of the word 'refugee' to describe Katrina's victims, highlights the ways in which formal citizenship may be problematic for certain groups. In particular, citizenship and private property are so tightly intertwined in the American political system that property owners as "worthy citizens" are the rule against which welfare recipients are measured (Hancock). This is made more evident when we consider how public housing residents were excluded in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As public housing residents attempted to return they discovered their homes shuttered and they were barred from entering. Thus began a long protracted battle to reinsert themselves back into the political process of rebuilding. This required that they make themselves politically visible. However, the stigma of public housing led to this visibility often becoming a hinderance rather than an asset. The struggle ended up re-inscribed their domination. As much as residents and allies tried, their responses were often twisted to highlight the very image they struggled against.

## Chapter 4: Subcontracting Democracy

"Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."

—Karl Marx, *18th Brumaire*

Walter is in his 80s and now lives in the suburban community of Metairie just outside of New Orleans. When I came to speak to him in 2012 he had already lost his house on South Tonti street in the Lower Mid City neighborhood for the new University Medical Center-Veterans Administration<sup>100</sup> hospital development. When asked how he fought the move for so long he said,

"They couldn't find anyone else to speak up. No one wanted to get involved. But I was losing what I loved, that's the only reason I can think of. I loved the neighborhood...You see, my house, my grandpa built when he was 19. The house is 125 years old. It had history. I was born in the front room. So I had a closeness to the house. When they took it, it was over...now I got a picture hanging on the wall, that's all that can bring me back."<sup>101</sup>

Walter<sup>102</sup> was one of the faces of the protests against the demolition of Lower Mid City. "Save Lower Mid City" parties had been organized on his (and the community's) behalf; and during the events multiple media outlets interviewed him. They sought to ask what kind of city do we live in that would force an 80 year-old man to sell the house he was born in? Walter seems to be in fairly good spirits, excited for the company and wanting to show all the photographs from the last century that decorate the wall of his daughter's suburban home. But, his voice lowers at times when asked about the move.

"It broke my heart when I had to leave New Orleans...I miss the people in the neighborhood, they're friendly, they come out and talk to you. It doesn't happen here...but I can't go back, they took my home. I shouldn't say it, but I don't care to go back in New Orleans. They can have my home, they can have everything...They should never took my home away from me. I would have

<sup>100</sup> The hospital board had changed the name to University Medical Center from Charity in anticipation of the new building and its new mandate. However, most folks still refer to the governing board as LSU.

<sup>101</sup> Interview May 2012

<sup>102</sup> Name has been changed

rode with them, I know they had to do something, but when they took my home it hurt.”

### **The Irony of Double Displacement**

This chapter tells the story of a struggle over the closure of the city’s only public hospital after Hurricane Katrina and the parallel story of the neighborhood leveled for the development of the new dual-hospital complex. The great irony is that many residents in the community, having suffered through the flood and ensuing displacement, rebuilt their homes only to find out two years later that they were to lose them once again. For the residents it was this double-displacement that broke their hearts. The chapter focuses on the tension between the governing “techniques of obfuscation”, a neoliberal order of governing that obscures the political process, and the grassroots “tactics of illumination” which aim to counter this trend. These are all part of the politics of visibility, a terrain of struggle over the definition and composition of political power.

The gates in front of the old Charity Hospital in downtown New Orleans have been locked shut since the storm. Charity was once considered one of the greatest public hospitals in the nation. But since the storm, it has stood vacant and solemnly quiet, all the while struggle over its future roiled citizens and politicians on the outside. There is no doubt that the storm provided the justification to close the popular hospital. However, like public housing, there is ample evidence that the hospital could have reopened to serve the devastated population immediately after the storm. Why it did not is a story for another time, and one that others have already told (see Ott 2012). Suffice it to say, the political will, which went up to the senior levels of Louisiana government, did not want the hospital reopened. Thus, though cleaned and prepared for service by the National Guard three weeks after the storm, the hospital remains shut years later.

In the chaotic month after the flooding of New Orleans, many expected that Charity Hospital would reopen at any moment and serve a battered, exhausted, and mentally frayed community. When it remained closed after the storm, in what appeared a politically motivated decision, it opened up a protracted struggle that continues to this day. People angered and motivated by the decision, followed each twist and turn, like the Mississippi River itself, never giving up and forever committed to the idea that serving the ‘public’ as a democratic ideal and at the heart of the mission of the hospital, did indeed exist. This story is of the struggle over its closure and over the new hospital complex development in Lower Mid City. Fighting the closure of Charity and the move into Lower Mid City was a group mostly made up of local preservationists, urban planners, a dedicated libertarian law student, a civil rights lawyer, former patients and medical workers who came together in an effort to thwart and stall the massive development. Connecting with local residents, they worked to highlight the numerous irregularities of process and law that had to take place in order for the hospital to move to the new site.

This story represents also the increasing encroachment of private industry into public institutions. As the largest public hospital in the state, Charity served New Orleans’s

poorer and working class population, and yet the decision to close it was ultimately made by those who would never need its services. Every turn in the process, from the hospitals' closure to its move to the Lower Mid City neighborhood, undermined public participation. The meetings themselves, which were designed to solicit the public's input, took place after most decisions had already been made. As one man said, "What you're doing to us is pissing on our heads and telling us it's rain."<sup>103</sup>

Before describing the political struggle it is necessary to give a brief history of Charity Hospital because it is part of what is obscured in the discursive narrative of local hospital leadership, local elected officials, and the business community. I follow this with some of the details of the decision to move Charity to Lower Mid City under a different name: University Medical Center. Lower Mid City, like all the cases, is an area of mostly the working poor, the neighborhood is located in a section of the city eyed for decades as a possible medical corridor.

### Steamrolling Charity and Lower Mid City

Charity Hospital<sup>104</sup> was one of the first teaching hospitals in the nation. Founded in the early-mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, it occupied six different buildings over the course of centuries. Under the leadership of populist governor Huey Long, Charity Hospital and the Charity system began its ascendance as a model of a functioning statewide public health system. It had always served the indigent of the city, but Long saw its mission as serving the state citizens in a wider sense. He first wrested governance control from the old regime, then he opened it as a teaching school. Up until his tenure as governor, medical students came solely from Tulane Medical School, which was expensive and out of reach for most Louisianans. Long pushed for (against the wishes of Tulane's well-connected leaders) and created a medical school at Louisiana State University (LSU), whose students would also train at New Orleans Charity Hospital. In the end, the expansion was a boon for both schools as their numbers of medical students drastically increased during the 1930s. But it was not until after Long's death that federal funds flowed in for the building of the 6<sup>th</sup> edifice, "Charity Hospital."<sup>105</sup>

A key part of Charity's history began post-WWII with the changing nature of the health care industry in the U.S. After Truman's failed attempt at a national health care system, the period of mounting health care costs and the ascendance of medical insurance as the predominant way hospitals received funds began. Places like Charity, whose finances depended on state funds over individualized consumption, would see a decline in individual's monies as they went to support newer private hospitals, which had increased in numbers since the Hill-Burton Act in 1946. Ott notes that beginning in 1965 both

---

<sup>103</sup> Fieldnotes, Oct 18, 2010

<sup>104</sup> The following medical and fiscal history is indebted to many long conversations with K. Brad Ott, as well as his excellent work on the causes of Charity Hospital's closure after the storm (2012); for a detailed look at the history of Charity before the storm see Salvaggio (1992).

<sup>105</sup> This was due to growing animosity between FDR and Long.

Medicare and Medicaid turned the federal government into the largest financier of health care,<sup>106</sup> and this tied the federal system to dramatic increase in expenditure within the private system who was the main beneficiary of these new monies. Charity, like most public hospitals, was overwhelmed with caring for the uninsured while receiving low reimbursements and funding for the small portion of Medicaid and Medicare patients they saw, and at the same time becoming more dependent on the pay-for-services system. Much like public housing, Charity suffered from a lack of general funds for upkeep and much needed repair, while it also became part of formula private hospitals used to make profit through tactics such as “patient dumping” and “patient skimming” (Ott, 34).

Beginning in the 1970s, responsibility for Charity was passed through a series of governing bodies in an attempt to streamline the state’s medical system. Study after study showed it to be a fiscal mess and most hospitals connected to the system were in need of some form of repair.<sup>107</sup> In the 1990s the system was handed over to the newly created Louisiana Health Care Authority (LHCA), which had been charged with creating a strategic plan for the system, and eventually ended up under the control of Louisiana State University.

### “Rebranding” Charity

Prior to the storm, Louisiana State University (LSU) sought to re-imagine the future of Charity as one that served a primarily paying and insured clientele rather than the

---

<sup>106</sup> “The adoption of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965 made the federal government the dominant force in U.S. health care finance. Almost immediately thereafter, Medicare outlays skyrocketed” Moran (2005) cited in Ott 2012

<sup>107</sup> Ott notes that an overlooked issue around Charity’s growing dilapidation was the convoluted usage of a 1981 federal law designed to protect hospitals that served a high percentage of the uninsured. The Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH and colloquially referred to as “dish”) was put in place to assist hospitals who served higher percentages of the poor who did not have access to Medicare or Medicaid. In general these represented large urban hospitals like Big Charity. This would allow these hospitals maintenance and operation funds. DSH funds were to be shared federal-state responsibilities, but wording was vague and loopholes abounded. By the mid 90s Louisiana was fourth in the nation in DSH funds received, having discovered a unique way to avoid the state share of 28%. There is a convoluted way in which this happened. The state tied payments to Medicaid, which then allowed them to avoid matching the federal DSH funds with their own. Simply put, it allowed the state to double dip from federal funds.

The great irony is that all the while it was receiving a bulk of the uninsured, the Charity system itself received little of the money. Ott and others liken Charity to an ATM machine for the state. The DSH funds instead of going to Charity went into the state coffers. This allowed the Department of Health and Hospitals to allocate the money where they chose, which was rarely for the Charity system. Instead much of the money went to private psychiatric hospitals (Adams (1995) and Wall (2002) cited in Ott (2012)) which were owned by, not surprisingly, the very politically connected. Under this new order, Charity continued to falter. When the federal government appeared ready to close the loophole that allowed states to profit off their uninsured, Governor Edwards proposed turning the Charity system into an HMO, which as Ott writes, “would become the latest twist in which Charity assets would be maximized – while promising little for Charity’s institutional longevity” (46). In typical fashion of Louisiana politics, they never sought the input of those who would pay for the bill (taxpayers) nor those who would receive the care. Decisions rarely involved in-depth studies except to support ex post facto decisions. And more often than not, if one followed the trail far enough there was inevitably a well-connected individual at the end.

indigent. The storm sped this process of closure and reimagining. This mission would require a new image, shedding the "charity" label for one, which indicated its modern, privatized vision. To do this, the board of supervisors noted, they would need a new building, for the memory of what Charity was and stood for would forever be housed in the large 1930s building that once dominated the skyline. The hospital had been at the city's heart and earned its affectionate nickname: Big Charity. People claimed that over 60% of the city had been born there. Certainly, 60% of the city regularly received health care at the hospital (Fox 2006).

The name "Charity", passed down since the hospital's founding by Capuchin monks in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to serve the non-military population, became intrinsically linked with the hospital when the Daughters of Charity's order took over the daily running of the hospital in 1833. Its meaning of "charity", as benevolence to the poor, was part of its mission from its founding. But this became more and more problematic with the expansion of the welfare state in the 1960s. Charity found itself serving primarily the uninsured poor in the city. "Charity" the hospital and the idea became linked to the increasingly politically contentious welfare system, particularly in a racialized form that tended to view poor black urban residents as the primary beneficiaries of a system seen to promote "parasitic" behaviors. During the 1990s, the first order of business for the Louisiana Health Care Authority (LHCA), which had taken over the operations of Charity, was to change the name of the hospital. It saw its mission as continuing to serve the poor as well as serving as a teaching hospital. But the name 'Charity' led to "misunderstanding":

"The 'Charity system' (fails to describe its) critical role played in medical education (and) suggests that the hospitals are part of the state welfare system ... (They) are not 'free' and are not available to our citizens through 'charity.' They represent a form of health insurance that is paid for by all Louisiana taxpayers."<sup>108</sup>

The problem was that the name itself was so ingrained in the memory of Louisianans that most residents did not favor a name change. It was also a badge of honor to have taught and learned at New Orleans Charity. Its name was recognized around the country, such that even doctors and medical students were against the change.<sup>109</sup> The leadership of the Charity system believed that as long as the name remained the hospital would be synonymous with serving the poor. This was a liability in a health industry that relied more and more on insured patients to foot the operations bill, and so they would need to rebrand the hospital to attract those consumers.

## Hospitals on the Move

---

<sup>108</sup> LHCA 1991 report, page 18 cited in Ott 2012

<sup>109</sup> Informal interviews with former Charity Hospital employees 2010, 2011

Five years after the storm, the area around the hospital district was a patchwork of partially functioning buildings, vacant land, shuttered offices, surface parking, and the desolate land created by a maze of highways, which intersected in the heart of the district. LSU had much diminished services in the University Hospital buildings, where an ER visit could last a day. Without a trauma center and no location for emergency psychiatric care, New Orleans—with one of the highest murder rates in the US and attempting to recover from a systematic trauma—was left unprotected. There was tremendous pressure from the community to open a new hospital, and most hoped it would be Charity. The city's Recovery Czar, Ed Blakely, had a different plan in mind, which he hoped would be the foundation to a revived New Orleans based on a reinvigorated medical district at the forefront of the biosciences. This vision would require land.

In late summer of 2007 residents of New Orleans woke to an article in the local paper announcing the decision to replace Big Charity and the closed Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals with a combined new Louisiana State University-VA hospital on a 70 acre parcel of land in Lower Mid City that was adjacent to the medical district (Walsh and Moller 2007). Blakely pushed the location as part of his idea that concentrating efforts on "nodes" of recovery throughout the city, including the newly minted biomedical corridor, would speed recovery in the city as a whole. News of the location emphasized the number of jobs to be created, the billions in investment for the city, the facelift on a notorious section of Tulane Avenue.

For some time reports suggested that the city intended to offer land to both the VA and LSU in order to build a combined hospital campus in the city. There had been multiple plans, which located the new campuses beyond Claiborne Avenue, but not crossing Galvez. There was legitimate fear that the VA, in particular, would move its hospital to another parish. So the city leadership felt a strong need to move quickly to appease the VA with land. At one meeting the VA even suggested not needing New Orleans (Blakely: 92). One former hospital campus in Mid City was offered, but it was deemed too far from the central hospital district (though only a mile away). Along with the Regional Planning Commission (RPC), city officials selected the site they thought would make an ideal new location: a piece of land located just outside the hospital district, in a newly formed larger biosciences district, which was a transitional neighborhood targeted for redevelopment for some time. It was also beyond Galvez Street, which had never been publicly mentioned. The problem was that over 200 homes and businesses were located in the area known as Lower Mid City. Little was said about the neighborhood that would be razed. With the decision-making happening outside of public forums, most were unaware that this neighborhood was on the chopping block, even the residents of that neighborhood.

The City Council found itself increasingly irrelevant and unable to have any say in the huge hospital project, though they ultimately were in favor of the move as they were

about every large development project. Said one resident of Mid City regarding the council's motives, "Say no to two billion investment? Hell no!"<sup>110</sup>

By November of 2007, the city, through Blakely and the Veteran's Administration<sup>111</sup> had signed an MOU for the site of their new hospital. It specifically stated that the VA would stop its "independent site selection process"<sup>112</sup>. But, almost eight months prior the city and the state had signed a Community Endeavor Agreement (CEA) which supported the move of the VA to the location above Galvez. The CEA also notes that LSU had already begun the process of acquiring land on the adjacent site.<sup>113</sup>

### **"We're saving this area because it's all blighted!"<sup>114</sup>**

Lower Mid City was one of the poorer communities in New Orleans, with over 56% of the community living below the poverty line<sup>115</sup>. It was also in something of a no-mans land, being located on the edge of numerous busy boulevards, the intersection of highways, a street known for its hourly hotel rates, and the enormous criminal justice complex which housed the sprawling and notorious Orleans Parish Prison. It had a high rate of rental units, and after the storm housed many temporary workers who had moved to the city to work rebuilding. Neighborhood cohesion was weak, though a number of organizations had formed to work with residents in the area.<sup>116</sup>

Since urban renewal's heyday in the 1950s, "blight" has become the rasion d'etre of massive federally funded removal projects. Though considered outmoded by many urban planners, large-scale federally backed projects continues to be a pillar of urban policy in the city in New Orleans and the large suburban hospital complex was no exception. This same neighborhood had been targeted for a large renewal project in the early 1950s to make way for a modern commercial zone called the "Miracle Mile". At that time, "slum" renewal removed 1200-1500 families from the neighborhood and many of the African American families ended up in St. Bernard housing projects.

'Blight' has often justified the removal of houses that are not being circulated within the normal mechanisms of the market. Where the market does not function to increase capital accumulation, the state steps in. But, connotation of being inhabited by less desirable people is embedded in the language of "blight" and "slums". As a resident wryly asked,

"Is it blight or is it that a population blights? We went to this dog and pony show for the district and they showed us a map of 'redevelopment'. And

---

<sup>110</sup> Interview, July 12, 2011

<sup>111</sup> the first offer was initially made to the Veteran's Administration separately from LSU-Charity, though the plan always included both parcels of land.

<sup>112</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between the City and VA 11/19/07.

<sup>113</sup> Community Endeavor Agreement, signed April 30, 2007 between the City and the State.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with community member on 7.12.11; regarding what LSU officials said of the Lower Mid City area.

<sup>115</sup> Census tract data, 2000

<sup>116</sup> Such as *Phoenix New Orleans*, noted in Seidman (2013)

what is redevelopment? Redevelopment does not occur in white middle class neighborhoods. It happens in inner city black neighborhoods. It's not the houses. It's the population."<sup>117</sup>

A telling piece of evidence comes from the official paperwork to HUD from the city which was signed by Ed Blakely in order to request \$75 million through a Community Block Development Grant to assist the VA in expropriating homes and businesses. The initial reason for the request of funds was "blight," which has been scratched out and replaced with "urgent need". This change followed a series of email communications (received under FOIA) which debated which term would be more appropriate, because neither "blight" nor "urgent need" justified using community funds to remove a community struggling to return.<sup>118</sup>

If you drive through the downtown area of New Orleans near the medical district today you will be struck by the amount of dead space consisting of low-use parking lots and vacant office buildings that litter the downtown area. Though much focus has been placed on vacant and blighted homes in the city, the rate of vacant commercial buildings and unused parking remains incredibly high.<sup>119</sup> The extraordinary amount of developable land contiguous to the hospitals shows that it was not a question of needing more land and space that led to the move, in fact many plans showed a much more compact urban design would that would have left intact most of Lower Mid City. Even the head of the Downtown Development District (DDD), who it would appear would want to fill up poorly used land and utilize vacant buildings within the district, was one of the main supporters of the move into Lower Mid-City. This meant taking the hospitals out of the DDD into Lower Mid City, but it also removed a large non-profit (non-taxable) entity from within the bounds of the DDD.

Why did it need to move to the Lower Mid City neighborhood? The community happened to be in the way of a project, long in the making, to revitalize both the Tulane corridor and supported a burgeoning medical industry seen as the best path for increasing high end service work. It was also a community that was easily sacrificed because it was seen as blighted and not contributing enough to the larger economic development vision of city and state leadership. The community, like those Charity hospital served, represented a population that the city wanted less of.

The project of redeveloping the hospitals were promised to bring in two billion federal dollars during the course of construction and would ostensibly lead to an increase in higher-wage workers and a renewed economy not solely based on tourism. Presentations spoke of the coming of a powerhouse teaching hospital that would vie with

---

<sup>117</sup> Interview 7/12/11

<sup>118</sup> photocopy of the original OCD/DRU Disaster Recovery Application (undated) document requesting the \$75 million and copies of the email exchanges about the previous document dated March 2, 2009

<sup>119</sup> There is little coverage of this in the press because of pressures from the business community which does not want the bad press to lower values of property in the city and make it a less appealing place to do business in.

Houston and Birmingham for those important, well-insured patients looking for a specialty hospital. As long as the old Charity remained, LSU officials feared they would not be able to shed the image of being a public hospital. As Dr. Larry Hollier, chancellor for the LSU Health Sciences Center said, the “UMC concept is to build a destination hospital.” While he pointed out the need to expand the economy beyond tourism, he inevitably used the language of tourism to describe the new purpose of the hospital, which will cater to patients from outside the state looking for a specialty hospital. In every meeting, officials took great pains to express that they would not be moving back into the old Charity building, as, they repeatedly stated, “It does not fit the programmatic requirements of the new hospital.” In front of the Louisiana Appropriations Committee they stated, “We are building the next great Academic Medical Center. We are not rebuilding Charity...Simply rebuilding what we had, even on a new site, would be a failure on our part to recognize the changing health care landscape...”<sup>120</sup>

### The Politics of Visibility: Seeing the Process

What I am referring to as the “politics of visibility” is a struggle over what is seen and what is hidden in the urban spatial politics of poverty. Each of the cases examined in this dissertation highlights a set of tactics grassroots struggles utilized in response to the techniques of governing. The politics of visibility are about bringing things into the open in a metaphorical sense. Now, this may seem straightforward, however, in most analyses, the “visual” is limited to our sense of sight: images and spatial orders. The present analysis is interested in the multiple qualities of visibility, in its metaphorical sense of “openness” as well as its sensory notion of what is “seen”.

In the current case of Lower Mid City and Charity Hospital, the politics of visibility were a contestation over what is obscured in the *political process*. The particular case at hand highlights a set of governing techniques of obfuscation. The total confusion that reigned after the storm at times could be harnessed to serve particular interests. Often the confusion was increased by the role of pseudo-governmental agencies with no accountability nor resident representatives, and the lack of ordered leadership that led to a kafka-esque maze of plans, governing bodies, or leaders were in charge at any given time.

The techniques are part of an ensemble of means governing that have developed out of the requirements of an era where public functions are siphoned off to private firms to keep governments “lean”,<sup>121</sup> regional governing bodies (such as the Regional Planning Commission, the Port of New Orleans, and others) have great amounts of federal and state dollars but no locally elected representation<sup>122</sup> (though they maintained important

---

<sup>120</sup> Fieldnotes, May 1, 2011

<sup>121</sup> The reality is rather far from the narrative.

<sup>122</sup> They may have elected officials on the boards (such as mayors), but they have not been elected for that position.

business connections), and civil society is seen to be opposed to the state rather than constitutive of it. In the case of Charity Hospital-Lower Mid City, the most effective techniques were the ways in which private and unelected forces worked to subvert public participation, using what I call “private participation.” In combination with this was the careful use of public spectacles, which included performative public meetings and press conferences.

The politics of visibility are not just composed of the techniques of governing but also of the tactics of engagement by the governed.<sup>123</sup> Countering these techniques of governing were the tactics of illumination, which sought at every moment to shed light and clarify the governing process. In the case of Charity Hospital and the neighborhood dispossessed for the home of the new hospital, Lower Mid City, the tactics of illumination utilized, first documentation of the process, second, public shaming of officials, and last reclaiming the streets through the act of walking and mapping. These “tactics of illumination” were efforts to be politically “seen” as well as to “make visible” the enactment of politics itself. A small group of dedicated people who originally focused their efforts on reopening Charity Hospital eventually moved some of their energies towards protecting Lower Mid City and the residents. The battle became a three-pronged affair. Some addressed it from a legal perspective, others walked the streets to inform residents of rights, happenings, and ways to be politically heard, and some focused on the historic nature of both Charity and the neighborhood.

This story has three temporal phases, first the struggle to reopen Charity hospital, second, to save the Lower Mid City from demolition, and finally, to challenge the scope and boundaries of the new biomedical district (called the BioDistrict). However, in the telling of this case of the politics of visibility, these phases are at times not presented temporally, but rather elements from each phase are used to highlight the tension between the techniques and tactics of visibility.

### Techniques of Obfuscation

In the following section I look at some of the key techniques (and the actors connected to them) involved in hiding the process. The first is the contested nature of participation in the city after the storm. Rather than opening up the process, more was hidden behind unelected officials, or out-of-the-way locations for less than public meetings. I look at the way in which one such organization, The BioDistrict, came to embody many of these contradictory practices and processes which residents were trying to access and illuminate. Participation is much more private than public. Working in tandem to this technique was the use of public spectacles. Spectacles served to obscure the larger struggle by highlighting one aspect (usually a celebratory one). I expand the notion of spectacle to include public meetings that, rather than actually soliciting the public's participation, were performative at best.

---

<sup>123</sup> see Chatterjee's discussion

The hospital development involved a labyrinthine set of processes, decisions, and power brokers. There was particular confusion around the process of expropriating the land for it. The state was authorized to acquire the land through the powers of eminent domain. However, it and the VA paid the city to do the actual purchasing of the property, as a way to remove liability. The VA was removed from the day to day operations of acquiring the land, as well as any of the local political battles that raged, all its administration wanted was a clean piece of property and they threatened to leave if things became too mired down in political and legal issues. But, the federal government was not totally hands-off, HUD was involved through backing the large loans needed to build LSU's new hospital, now called University Medical Center (UMC).<sup>124</sup> If this division of control is confusing, imagine how difficult it was for residents to understand which governmental bureaucracy (state and LSU, the city, RPC and Blakely, the federal government and the VA, FEMA, and HUD) was in charge of which piece of land, and who they should make complaints to, who was the ultimate authority that had control of their home.

A person closely connected to the attempts to reopen Charity Hospital spoke about the way in which this obscured chain of command was used to keep people from accessing Charity in order to see the condition it was in after the storm. "They kept it convoluted, and every time you'd ask for permission [for access from the state] they'd say, 'well, the state owns the building, but LSU has the keys and controls access to the building.'"<sup>125</sup>

### Private Participation and Plans

"Participation, however, has one meaning when it is seen from the standpoint of those who govern, i.e., as a category of governance. It will have a very different meaning when seen from the position of the governed, i.e., as a practice of democracy."

—Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*, 69

One of the key tensions in the political sphere in post-Katrina New Orleans emerged around the question of 'openness' and 'transparency' of the government. The local political machine, which had long operated behind closed doors, found itself under the scrutiny of its residents and a larger national public. After the storm there was strong pushback to increase citizen participation in all areas of rebuilding, which came from locals as well as from a large influx of volunteers and outside interests that moved to the city in the few years directly after the storm. Nowhere was this more apparent than in struggles around housing. However, larger political economic forces were pulling government and accountability farther apart. The neoliberal ethos pursued establishing greater and greater distance between the governing apparatus, now more and more private, and the governed.

<sup>124</sup> In 2012 the MCNO board had been denied backing and were pursuing other methods to insure the loans.

<sup>125</sup> Interview February 20, 2011

Henri Lefebvre (1991) writes about representations of spaces as places of domination. This has often been used in relation to planners and architects. However, meetings, too, are unique spaces of domination. Considering these spaces can help us expand how we conceptualize the ways in which power works in space to shore up legitimate power in the face of a challenges to that power.

Citizen participation is a form of what Nancy Fraser calls “weak publics,” where civil society is relegated to opinion-making but not decision-making (1990). In New Orleans, since the storm “public participation” has become part of the emerging discourse in the recovery landscape. It was an integral part of the master plan as prepared by Goody-Clancy and the part of the plan that convinced many residents that the plan would transform their relationship to the local government and bring about more accountability. The Master Plan, begun soon after Katrina, had been touted as a panacea for New Orleans: It would help the city rebuild, and rebuild intelligently. It would place citizens first and give them control over the process, and it would bring the best thinkers in the area of land reform to contribute towards the rebuilding. The problem was, that many citizens saw the Master Plan addressing larger issues than land reform. They saw it as reforming the governing process of the city. Part of this misunderstanding was due to the way the plan was advertised to the public, City Councilors (particularly a few connected to real estate) claimed that citizens would be first in deciding how their city would look. But most did not realize that the legal spatial changes it touted would best serve the real estate industry, which had longed for stable zoning laws in order to make better investments. The business community hoped this would transform the larger downtown businesses, which had had a difficult time attracting outside financing without the stability of property values. Business needs calculability, and that had been severely missing in the city’s land-use. Granted it would also eliminate one area of corruption: the assessor’s office, which had functioned as a patronage seat for years, and enriched a number of individuals. But as the master plan brought people from all over the city to ‘imagine’ a different future, some say it also channeled their energy into something which would not have the impact they hoped for, leaving them cynical of plans and public meetings.

Local neighborhood organizations led by homeowners demanded to be included in the planning-process, and they became a force celebrated by local and national leaders and the media.<sup>126</sup> Neighborhoods that had strong neighborhood associations (usually tied to race and class) often faired better at protecting their interests, particularly if they had outside assistance—such as Broadmore—or an active grassroots community organization—such as Mid City (Seidman 2013). The Lambert plan solicited opinions from many neighborhoods, and though eventually not utilized as the guiding master plan for the city, it did help to solidify and legitimate some of the post-Katrina neighborhood groups that had sprung up to offer social rebuilding aid (Williamson 2007).

---

<sup>126</sup> For an upbeat account, see Wooten 2012 or Weil 2010.

The flip side was that many leaders were wary of this activated public, and they felt, rather, that the "public" was unwieldy, made too many demands, and often derailed meetings. They regularly expressed frustration in meetings that they did not know what else people expected of them. Local leaders often employed figureheads to run meetings to avoid the discomfort of facing an unhappy and activated public, and were many times too conveniently absent during key debates. Though it appeared that public participation would make for more transparent government, even in planning, the back room channels of decision-making survived the storm and reemerged unaltered.

Public meetings became valued show pieces of governing. Every organization had a public meeting and a public plan, sometimes the plans overlapped, and other times they contradicted each other. The numerous meetings and plans lead to a "planning fatigue" on the part of residents and what some referred to as the "plandemonium" of overlapping plans and meetings (Campanella 2010). Public meetings and plans were also a place for leadership to assert their authority over the post-Katrina landscape. As Williamson (2007) notes, each of the three competing master plans represented the interests of three distinct political figures who were tussling over political power and clout in the post-storm landscape. The Bring Back New Orleans Plan—otherwise known as "green dot"— was the brainchild of Mayor Nagin and a close group of elite supporters, including the wealthy and connected developer Joe Canizaro. The Lambert Plan was sponsored by the City Council, and finally, the Unified New Orleans Plan was pushed by the state through the Louisiana Recovery Authority.

The "plandemonium" continued and grew as the hospital development began to gain steam. More importantly, in response to federally mandated public hearings, there began to be a series of meetings to address a variety of aspects of the project. They began at the end of 2007 but this was months after the project was well under way. In August of 2007 the city sent a letter to the Secretary of the Veterans Administration offering a parcel of land adjacent to the initial one proposed for a joint site (see Figure 1—not completed yet).<sup>127</sup> On November 18, the city signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the VA, but it was not until November 29<sup>th</sup> that any public meetings were held on the joint project, and that meeting was only to discuss the LSU/Charity hospital parcel. Once the plans were in process, it was unclear which body of government had the final say and therefore which public meetings mattered. There were neighborhood meetings for the Veterans Hospital, city council meetings on street closures, LSU board meetings on the hospital, Greater New Orleans Biomedical Development District meetings on planning for a biomedical future, city-wide meetings on the Unified New Orleans Plan, neighborhood council meetings, and the list goes on.

And though the governing bodies and those who assumed the role of a governing body claimed that "participation was sought", it was only sought from a select group of interested partners, which included the business and university community, and local and

---

<sup>127</sup> MOU letter, November 18, 2007

state politicians. In one meeting at City Hall to discuss the possible “uses” of the Charity building, a woman challenged the facilitator for information on whom they had consulted with. A LSU board member rose and stepped into the fray, “We talked to the Downtown Development District, we talked to GNOBEDD,<sup>128</sup> the state, we talked to the city. It's a consensus driven process we're engaged in. We're soliciting input.”<sup>129</sup> The list is illuminating. There is not one voice of dissent nor is there an ordinary citizen. The list includes all parties who desired the Charity move and, in particular, the list places the business community at the forefront of decisions around a public hospital.

### *The Unelected*

Most decisions in the city, particularly around the hospital project, were made by unelected officials: Ed Blakely, the Regional Planning Commission, LSU and the VA, the BioDistrict (formerly GNOBEDD)<sup>130</sup>. These were pseudo-governmental offices that had tremendous power (some had elected officials sitting on boards, but none were elected for these particular positions). Numerous key informants on both sides of the issue spoke openly that Blakely, when not finding the City Council open to his proposals, had side stepped them and gone to the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) to seek out its support, in essence subverting the process. The RPC, by his own admission, was just the kind of organization Blakely liked: they had been studying the biomedical industry and the city’s “assets,” as a way to increase needed capital and patients with capital.<sup>131</sup> There were also deep ties between the RPC and the Downtown Development District (DDD)—another tax district set up by the state was involved and pushing for the move. There were many old family and business ties between members of the DDD, the RPC, and the BioDistrict to make a strong case for conflict of interest.<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> The BioDistrict was formerly called the Greater New Orleans Biosciences Economic Development District or GNOBEDD, pronounced “guh-no-bed”. It was an unwieldy name and was first changed unofficially, then in 2012 it was officially changed

<sup>129</sup> Fieldnotes, 10/18/10

<sup>130</sup> See footnote above.

<sup>131</sup> Blakely’s rather self-serving autobiographical book audaciously called, “My Storm: Managing the Recovery of New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina”. Blakely’s memory of this event seems surprisingly thin in his account. For one he fails to mention that the VA had already been offered a joint site with LSU on adjacent 37 acre land, and that the jump over Galvez street was an offer which very few were aware of or expected.

<sup>132</sup> One such partnership was between Caitlin Cain who along with the Regional Planning Commission, came up with the proposed new VA site across the Galvez line into another 37 acre parcel of land, and her husband Kurt Weigle who, as president of the Downtown Development District (DDD), had been one of the most vocal proponents of the move to Lower Mid City. It gets even more convoluted when one considers that Jim MacNamara, who was connected with the DDD and once on its board, was now president of the BioDistrict (formerly GNOBEDD) and also pushed heavily for the new hospitals. And to make matters even more layered, Kurt Weigle and Larry Hollier, the chancellor of LSU, were also officers on a board for the New Orleans Medical Complex, Inc, which is listed as a non-profit organization, and was in fact a parking garage located in the old hospital corridor. (The current president of the BioInnovation Center is also listed as a registered agent.) This is not to be confused with the New Orleans Regional Medical Complex, was set up by the Regional Planning Commission

It was difficult for residents to gain access to many of the boards, though a great deal of effort was made to have some local representation on the boards. At one BioDistrict board meeting someone asked the members if any of them lived in the BioDistrict. There was some hesitation from the dozen members present and those who had called in, and finally a voice on speaker-phone said, "I Do." It turns out, he did not exactly understand the perimeters of the district and in fact lived outside. At another BioDistrict meeting focused on putting together a Community Benefits Agreement, one board member suggested to the residents present that the BioDistrict could, in fact, serve as the community's representative given that it had connections with members of the city and the state governments, saying, "Now remember that this board is appointed by mayor and governor, so there is opportunity for representation here...they can be your advocate to talk to these medical boards..."<sup>133</sup> This suggestion highlights much of the language and demeanor the elites had towards the public at large. There was condescension tinged with infantilization, which suggested that the public's interest and relationship to the state was best seen to by an intermediary. This was not the only meeting where a similar suggestion was made. More importantly, there were no representatives from the neighborhood on the BioDistrict board and none of the sitting members were elected. As Maggie, a lawyer, pointed out at one neighborhood meeting: "I've heard you refer to the 1500 acre campus. But our homes are in your campus. You are not an elected body. You're not accountable to City Council, we can't vote you in and we can't vote you out." At another meeting a resident exclaimed, "I hear you saying that this board was developed before Katrina. But do you intend to include the community? I hear Xavier, LSU, Tulane...but we are not at the table...we're out of the equation." Later on another community member said, "You can't take advantage of the hurricane and our displacement anymore."<sup>134</sup>

The two main areas of contestation were financing (in particular, the misappropriation of federal funds, as well as questionable business connections in and around the hospital development) and political accountability. There was a growing unease at the way public meetings were handed over to private engineering and planning firms, whose only responsibility was to 'report' what had been said back to the agencies they have contracts with. There was increasing mediation of the public sphere with engineering firms who have stepped in to offer all sorts of services post-Katrina.<sup>135</sup> By the time it was in the hands of elected officials, they had little decision-making power.<sup>136</sup>

---

to be the non-profit that organized the bio-medical industry. If this appears confusing, it is nothing new in politics in New Orleans.

<sup>133</sup> Fieldnotes, 9/15/10

<sup>134</sup> Fieldnotes, GNOBEDD-BioDistrict meeting 1/15/11

<sup>135</sup> Many present themselves as local businesses creating new LLCs with names such as "Louisiana Solutions LLC" which is made up of two large engineering firms. They have become bureaucracy specialists, working with the federal government and its agencies often dealing with the paperwork around reimbursements.

<sup>136</sup> This was precisely what Blakely (and Nagin) had done by skirting city council and the legislature and utilizing the Regional Planning Commission.

*Louisiana Politics*

Louisiana politics have a long history of the subversion of the public. In order to gain and retain power, elites have tended to set up powerful bodies, commissions, boards, and organizations, in order to get their work done. In general, political power avoids the populace (save in its populist form of Longism or in the case of Dutch Morial's election). In the process of the fracturing of political power to unelected bodies, one organization has traditionally wielded enormous power in the state: Louisiana State University (LSU), had been one of the most powerful interests in the state. This meant that those who were against the closure of Charity and the move to Lower Mid City, were up against one of the most powerful non-governmental agencies<sup>137</sup>. At times it felt they were fighting a shadow. Said one, "The legislatures will tell you that there are four branches of government here, and the the fourth is LSU."

*The BioDistrict*

The new hospital location sits in the middle of a large 1500 acre area designated as the BioDistrict. Most residents had no idea what the BioDistrict was nor what it did and were generally surprised that they lived within its borders.

The BioDistrict<sup>138</sup> is bordered by Earhart Boulevard, Carrollton Avenue, Loyola Avenue, and Iberville Street, and it encompasses most of the Mid City community. Questions remain about why the boundaries were drawn as they were. In 2005 (pre-Katrina) the Louisiana legislature created the state chartered the BioDistrict as an economic development entity and gave the district special taxing powers. In addition the legislature allowed it to create its own master plan. This was very unusual at the time because the city was involved in setting up its own first master plan under the guidance of Goody Clancy that would become the rule of law, but planners were not given authority to discuss a master plan for the area--appearing as a large grey area in the middle of the city during all master plan hearings. Residents in the bio medical district area were out of the planning process. Though the BioDistrict does not have expropriation powers, many residents feared that LSU could expropriate on behalf of the BioDistrict and so these residents sought to limit this possibility with a revision of the original legislation.

The New Orleans BiScience brochure writes, "Within the Greater New Orleans Biosciences Economic Development District (GNOBEDD) is a cluster of 2.4 square miles of hospitals, research centers and biotech businesses..." From this description one would not guess that most of the land is residential or industrial with no connection to the biosciences. The paragraph continues,

"...this district is responsible for creating both the physical and business environments, and ensuring that the biotech science and healthcare sectors are well-promoted and well-supported pillars of the New Orleans economy. We do

---

<sup>137</sup> Like most state universities, they are nominally public organizations, as they are in part funded by the state. But they retain much autonomy and are shielded from the public's involvement.

<sup>138</sup> I will usually refer to the area as the BioDistrict unless the context requires its old name (GNOBEDD)

this through the construction of cornerstone facilities, good public policy, efficient technology transfer and capital formation.”

Residents recognized that the city desperately needed to expand its economic base beyond the tourist industry. However, they did not understand why 1500 acres were necessary for this agenda. The taking of Lower Mid City only served to fuel the fear that they, too, would lose their homes. The effectiveness of the fracturing and obscuring of the political process made it difficult for community members to be abreast of important changes and then even more difficult to protest what was going on.

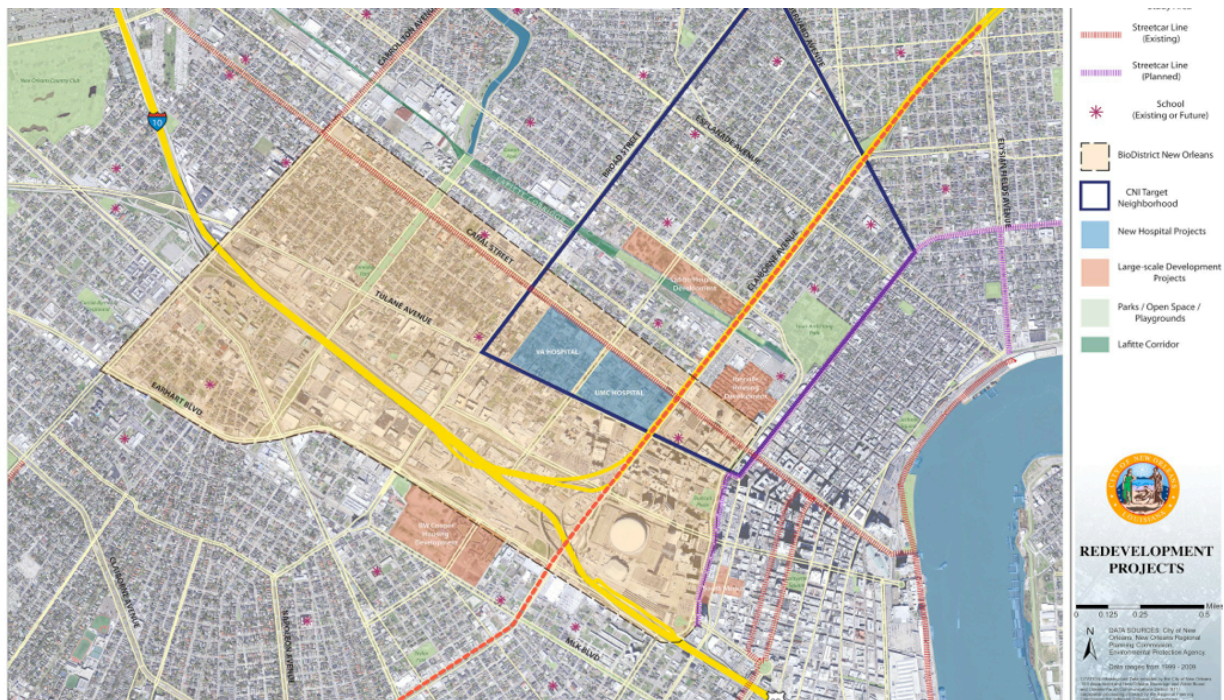


Figure 1. The various layers of planning maps which all intersect over the hospital development represented by the two darker shaded square areas in the center; map from the BioDistrict 2010

## Public Spectacles

The Janus nature of the techniques of obfuscation were such that they combined invisibility of the political process with a visibility of a few selected public events, which had the effect of making the actual political process even more hidden. Much in the same way the hypervisibility of the Lower Ninth Ward had, like a spot light, effectively made the area around that focal point more obscure. These showpieces served to legitimize the process for the media, who were more than willing to reproduce the claims made by LSU on the damage done to the hospital and the need to move.

Guy Debord's nation of the spectacle which has been so fruitful for media scholars and critics of pop culture references the way in which the overwhelming world of images inures us to the world around us, lulls us to sleep, and creates an imaginary world of images, as in Plato's cave, far from the material world. These spectacles were pointed showpieces designed to frame the conversation in a particular way. They also served to concentrate public attention in a particular place and space that made it more moldable. Residents often found that they arrived to offer "opinions" to a project that had been decided months before. These public meetings were often held to satisfy federal regulations which required meetings to judge the "environmental impact" a development would have on the community. Residents quickly realized this.

*The study of a photo*

## Progress Report: Breaking Ground

### University Medical Center Breaks Ground



Monday April 18th marked the groundbreaking ceremony for the new University Medical and a step towards a new economic opportunities for New Orleans. The University Medical Center and VA hospital, as well as other projected developments in the BioDistrict, will create or save approximately [5,500 permanent jobs](#) in the first five years of operations and create an environment for unprecedented outside investment in New Orleans. [Read more](#)

Figure 2 BioDistrict promotional week of April 19, 2011

What do we see in the photo above? A line of men, mostly white, in shades of grey suits, stand on grass as they smilingly shovel sand up and away for the camera. The title of the picture “Progress Report: Breaking Ground” suggests a double movement through both “progress” and “breaking ground”. This image came from the New Orleans’s BioDistrict promotional posting, which celebrated on April 19, 2011 official groundbreaking of the new dual hospital complex that would replace the old Charity and Veterans Administrations hospitals damaged after the flooding during Hurricane Katrina. If you are from New Orleans you may recognize the key political figures in the photo including Mayor Mitch Landrieu, Rep. Cedric Richmond, State senator Edwin Murray, City Councilor Arnie Felkow, head of Health and Hospitals for the state Bruce Greenstein (under investigation for improprieties around a government contract), Larry Holier, chancellor of Louisiana State University (the overseers of Charity), and a number of others. It is an image of the powerful. It is a strong image and the text that accompanies it tells us that progress in the form of new jobs and “outside investment” will come to the city with the new hospital.

What do we *not* see? We do not see the struggle around the closure of Charity Hospital. We do not see the struggle to spare the community that was eventually razed for this new development in the middle of the city. We also do not see the way in which the image above was constrained to present a particular version of “progress” in the post-Katrina landscape. Now what do we see?



Figure 3 Photo by the author taken April 19, 2011

The posed nature of the first image becomes clear. They are not on newly broken land, but on a parking lot fitted with fake grass and sandbox sand. These are not the only key figures, but a series of key figures who each took their turn holding shovels and digging dirt. Though this is a celebration of the new hospital, those there can not say when the building will commence, as at the time of the photo most of the land had yet to be cleared, many of the buildings wrapped up in legal fights. The shovels, meant to demonstrate the work about to start, are props. Those holding the shovels will never actually work on the site. This scene took place at the end of the ceremony. At the beginning, before the speeches, began a woman gathered medical students and doctors herding them towards the front saying, “We want as many people with [white] coats on up front...if y’all can move up there.” The leaders prayed for “financing” and claimed they were “reinventing health care” and “laying the foundation for a robust biomedical corridor.” This new hospital would be a “symbol of resilience.” One speaker directed his comments towards a group who had been protesting the entire process (many

were in attendance), from the closure of Charity to the slow dismantling of the new location. He emphatically claimed, “to those who want to rebuild Charity...know that Charity is obsolete...and they need to move past...for this is what 21<sup>st</sup> century medicine will look like.” It was a rather striking commentary to give during a celebration and demonstrated the strength this small group had had in derailing the closure of Charity, razing of Lower Mid City, and building of the now named “University Medical Center.”

John Kelly covering the event for the *Times-Picayune* noted this groundbreaking event took place almost sixty years to the day of another “revitalization” effort on Tulane Avenue (2011). That event of 60 years prior celebrated the newly minted “Miracle Mile,” an area that leaders hoped would become a commercial and industrial hub, but which would later use federal funds for “slum” clearance to displace 1200-1500 families. At the time a local pharmacist warned,

“Let any honest-hearted and fair-minded citizen visit this section and then ask this question: Aren’t there hundreds of thousands of square feet of area lying almost unused in the business and industrial districts? Why not use them first and then, when our city’s growth is such that all other space has been used up, then, and only then, the argument that our area is needed for the progress of our city will be sensible, logical, honest, and acceptable to us” (Eichhorn 2009).

To this day, much of the same Miracle Mile-Hospital corridor area remains more parking lot than commercial or medical center.

#### *Engineering & Insurance Firms as Democratic Fronts*

One of the noteworthy dynamics of public meetings on the hospital development and Lower Mid City was the particular format of the meetings. The orchestration of these meetings, often with the express purpose of “collecting comments” was contracted to large engineering and insurance firms. US Risk ran a series of public meetings in 2007 which were the first time any public input on the hospitals was solicited (notably months after the city had offered the land to the VA and LSU). Later, another engineering firm, AECOM, would run meetings on a sub-master plan for the BioDistrict while Jacobs Engineering ran meetings on Charity re-use. The outcome was that, first, no publicly elected official need be present, and second, all discussion was limited to the built environment. Like in the Lower Ninth Ward, the visible, built environment became the only topic of political conversation that one is able to address.

*Controlling the Content: “This ain’t a conversation!” “This is not dialogue.”<sup>139</sup>*

People engaged in the fight to reopen Charity and save Lower Mid City spoke about a key meeting in late November 2007. It was, as they saw it, the first time any public participation had been elicited on the proposed dual hospital development. U.S. Risk

---

<sup>139</sup> Two comments from transcript of first official public meeting 11/29/07

Management had been hired by the state to conduct research on the environmental impacts of the proposed hospital development project, particularly the state hospital side which would replace Charity Hospital.<sup>140</sup> They held a number of public meetings as part of the compliance for the environmental impact studies, mandated in any project that involves federal funds in historic areas. Of the first meeting in November, one leader of the neighborhood organization said, “it was the first time we saw who the political players were...including, folks from the BioDistrict, the Department of Health and Hospitals, and Louisiana State University.”<sup>141</sup> Many were incensed at the lack of resident involvement and what they saw as a brazen land grab pursued by the city on behalf of the state and private interests. The meeting, announced with little fanfare, failed to bring in most of the residents who were to be affected by the move.

If the solicitation of public participation is, as Nancy Fraser notes, a form of “weak publics,” the question is, how are these “weak publics” constituted and maintained? By parsing out this meeting, which was representative of most public meetings around the hospital in the three years the development was actively contested, we see a few key techniques of obfuscation which help to maintain the weak publics: first, the controlling of process’s format; and second, controlling the content of the process, in particular, with a narrow focus on “progress”. The slogan of “progress” allowed for leaders to claim that any rebuilding or demolition was necessary for recovery.

### *Public meetings as spectacles*

The moderator began the meeting explaining its process or format: the evening would be for comment and “collection” only. He emphasized, “with regard to...questions -- [we’re] not answering a bunch of questions tonight. We’re collecting information. We’re asking you, when you have questions, to put them down on the comment cards that we have out there for you...That is part of the process.”<sup>142</sup> He repeated numerous times that the only project on the table was the LSU hospital portion that would replace Charity Hospital, and that they were not going to answer any question on the VA. At one point, the representative from US Risk concluded a long discussion with “what is absolutely vital is community involvement, for the community to give us feedback, for the community to participate and tell us what some of their issues and concerns are because that drives how far we go.”<sup>143</sup> But there was a Kafka-esque style of bureaucratic speak in the way leaders

---

<sup>140</sup> While searching for records of this meeting, there appeared to be no recording nor access to a transcript (which is required by law). It took a Freedom of Information Act request in order to get the official transcript from U.S. Risk Management. Initially when I contacted them I received a polite reply that it should not be an issue at all just let them know what meeting and they would send it along. But I then received a phone call that I would have to file a formal request when I mentioned which transcripts I was seeking.

<sup>141</sup> Interview notes, August 2011

<sup>142</sup> Transcript of the meeting received from U.S. Risk Management via a Freedom of Information Act request by the author.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid*

“just sat up there”<sup>144</sup> and refused to answer questions, as was exhibited in this exchange with an angered resident:

“I want to ask,” he began, “are these questions going to be answered or can we ask questions or what is the process here?... We need to be clear about the process.” The moderator responded: “Sure. Yes. In the process tonight, unfortunately, we will not be answering questions. We'll be taking comments. Your questions are being compiled, evaluated, to be acted on as we go forward in the process.”<sup>145</sup>

Director of Facilities for the state, Jerry Jacobs, insisted that the Charity building was out of date:

“the fact that the design of Big Charity, the footprint of the hospital and the age of the hospital does not lend itself to the delivery of modern health care...We cannot deliver the highest quality health care for the next fifty or sixty years in a hospital with the design footprint of Charity Hospital...That is just a fact.”

Then, shifting the discussion to New Orleans’s overall recovery he said, “Should we rebuild New Orleans and develop or redevelop this hospital? I contend that the answer is yes.” And then in a final call he quoted Rudyard Kipling: “as new buds put forth to glad new men, out of the spent and unconsidered earth the cities rise again.” This was to be the theme of the entire night, a grand call to rebuild the destroyed city, and the importance of a world-class hospital, which incidentally could not be housed in the building of the old hospital. Following Jones, a string of officials connected to LSU, the city, state, and FEMA began making the case for a new hospital. Each official, in what seemed like a coordinated defensive move, disciplined the public into being what Blakely called at the meeting “constructive participants”<sup>146</sup>, meaning, following the format, asking questions but not expecting answers, and keeping protest out of the room.

A representative for U.S. Risk laid out four ‘alternatives’ at the meeting. First, she said, was doing nothing, which would be detrimental to the downtown area as well as health care. Second, to renovate Charity, which she said was problematic because it did not contain enough space for the needs of a new facility. Third option, to move Charity (the preferred option for the local leadership). The problems she laid out here were that Charity no longer served the population in the old site. In other words, there was no negative mentioned for this alternative, but rather the negative was in not choosing number this option. Fourth, to demolish Charity and rebuild in the existing footprint, which she said would be detrimental to a historic building. The utter lack of respect for the public listening to these alternatives should be clear. All alternatives had ‘negative’

<sup>144</sup> As one woman angrily told me 3 years after this meeting.

<sup>145</sup> Transcript of meeting 11/29/07, all remaining quotes are from the same transcript unless otherwise noted

<sup>146</sup> Blakey’s comments

impacts listed, but the third alternative (to move Charity, which had been the desire of politicians and business leaders for years) in stead emphasized the negative impacts for the clearly more publicly popular alternative of restoring Big Charity. Later on in the meeting someone pointed out, “it seems like, in the course of the presentation, the alternatives were already kind of marked off as we went and we were told that this isn't a good alternative.” The fourth alternative must have struck many in the audience as ironic, given that the negative “impact on historic preservation” was just going to be transferred to the historic community allotted for razing. Resident of the footprint Bobbi Rogers noted the irony in her comments,

“I find that is interesting in one of the alternatives was the comment about Charity and historic preservation issues with that. It was built in 1939. That is a serious issue, but that doesn't seem to be an issue when you're considering tearing down all these houses in this fifteen-block neighborhood that are -- were built before 1939.”

The political leaders had mastered the art of non-participatory-public-participation, which here amounted to ‘hearing’ the public’s comments but having no process for responding to their concerns. The narrowness with which they interpreted “participation” allowed them to see meetings as hurdles to jump over. And historically, the New Orleans political community saw the public as a rabble and a mob that needed to be contained and policed, but rarely listened to. The idea was to ‘cool’ them off rather than take their perspective seriously.

### *Use of the Media*

It was clear that one of the most powerful methods of solidifying the impact of the public spectacle was the judicious use of the media. LSU was known to have a powerful media director, who did more than share press releases with media outlets. Charles Zewe (the LSU spokesman) was also something of a gatekeeper, known to control who had access to what information even going as far as access to Charity hospital itself. Along with access, there was the way in which LSU carefully framed language concerning the hospital. The re-use of the phrase, “does not meet our programatic needs” showed up in almost every presentation. And particular care was made in describing Charity’s destruction in a pathological form, something that parallels with the use of the term “blight” to describe a neighborhood. After protests by former medical workers who disagreed with the closure of the hospital began to build, LSU sent out a press release which read, “While parts of Charity Hospital may look normal to the naked eye, just as a cancer patient may appear to a lay person, the damage is indeed extensive behind walls...”<sup>147</sup>

The *Times-Picayune* had a long and deep relationship with political leaders in the city. Mayor Landreiu, coming from connected political family was well presented in the local paper.

---

<sup>147</sup> LSU press release, June 8, 2006, “LSU HCSD Statement on Charity Hospital

Landreiu was known to control the timing of particular news items. After the demolition of Lower Mid City began and preservationists had managed to get the city to agree to move up to 100 of the historic houses from the footprint, which in and of itself was a major coup for the group trying to save Charity and Lower Mid City. While the small group was trying to get the word out about this “win” for preservation, they fought against the needs of the mayor to control the portrayal of the event. His press conference to celebrate the move, was four days after the houses had already started being moved. The house moving, one of the largest ever in the nation, and easily the world, was totally absent from local news, even though houses, with roofs missing, were rumbling across Canal street followed by police and a squadron of house movers on foot for a number of days<sup>148</sup>. Its absence was almost comical. When the local paper was called to ask where they were, they explained they had agreed to wait until the mayor’s press conference to cover the project.<sup>149</sup>

Thus, without direct access to the political process, those protesting the closure refused to be left out. Instead members of a diverse group of preservationists, hospital advocates, and local social justice advocates followed every meeting. On email, phone, and in person they announced any meeting to see who could attend. They recorded, questioned, and agitated unrelentingly. This group of advocates for both the reopening of Charity Hospital as well as the preservation of Lower Mid City was lucky to have a powerful civil rights lawyer from the city who had been behind many of the major civil rights cases against the police before and after Katrina, a law student who voraciously studied the legal apparatus around preservation, a student of hospital and legislative history in Louisiana who continually corrected councilpersons, legislatures, and other officials on when they failed to follow protocol and legal procedure as well as when they claimed ignorance about historical details, and a preservationist who was willing to sacrifice years of her life in the hopes of saving a building and a neighborhood.

## The Tactics of Illumination

Mid-City, “the middle of awesome” proclaims a t-shirt made to celebrate this scrappy, historic, hard fought, and largest of the New Orleans neighborhoods. Many of its residents celebrate its economic and racial diversity, which is unusual given the segregated nature of many of New Orleans neighborhoods. It is predominantly a working and middle class neighborhood, with pockets of greater wealth located closer to City Park, as well as poverty scattered throughout the neighborhood and particularly along the Tulane corridor. “Neighborhood”, here, is a loose term as the area encompasses a huge part of the city. The Mid City Neighborhood Organization (MCNO) is one of the most powerful neighborhood organizations in the city. In the months after Katrina, it served as a beacon for returning and rebuilding homeowners. MCNO organized members as they moved back

---

<sup>148</sup> Fieldnotes

<sup>149</sup> Interview with S 2/20/11

and helped to give shape to a diaspora. When it appeared the political leadership was looking to shape New Orleans differently, they spoke vocally about the importance of New Orleans culture. As one resident pointed out, “there was a huge plan to redevelop the entire city of New Orleans...and an inherent plan to shift the population...if you have a suburban concept of what a city should be, you don’t like New Orleans.”<sup>150</sup> The battle was ultimately a fight for diversity and the heart of the city against an economic vision that relied on homogeneity, security, and calculability. “Maybe being flattened out is part of the global process” the resident mused. Another leader in the neighborhood told residents, “If we do not start planning on how our neighborhood is going to be rebuilt after the storm, somebody else is going to do it.”<sup>151</sup>

Lower Mid City, the neighborhood slated to be razed for the hospitals, was a neighborhood without a strong sense of community and remained broken off from the larger Mid City region. There were numerous reasons the community was fragmented. For one, many residents were renters who had moved in after the storm and did not feel a sense of connection to the neighborhood. The second was, the ways in which the overlapping planning maps and confusing new jurisdictions (the BioDistrict being the prime example) left open the question of representation. This was highlighted by the fact that MCNO did not include the area of Lower Mid City in their bounds until much too late, so they had almost no grassroots representation. Finally, the neighborhood targeted for removal was physically divided on four sides by major streets that separated it off from the other parts of the city.

The political fight in Lower Mid City emerged around the closure of the hospital and the eventual destruction of a community. However, the tactics focused on a broader set of political concerns. In particular, the issue became one of exposing the political process. As each of the cases have highlighted, the struggle begins to focus on an expanding set of political concerns. While the Lower Ninth Ward was a struggle around the dual nature of representation, and public housing residents struggled around the political belonging of a stigmatized group, here in Lower Mid City, the struggle emerged to be one that challenged the closed and hidden nature of political processes in the city. The tactics of illumination consisted of documentation, the use of the street, and shaming, which emphasized bringing to the surface the hidden processes.

## Documentation

Documentation has often been analyzed as a technique of the state. As a way in which calculation, statistics, and bureaucratization have become everyday elements of governing, it is often understood as part and parcel of modern state-craft. Foucault saw documentation as one of the key elements of a disciplinary society, a technique in the micro-physics of power. Through the collection of information, particularly via

---

<sup>150</sup> Interview notes, 7/12/11

<sup>151</sup> Interview notes, 7/12/11

examination, the individual becomes the subject of disciplinary power. Documents connect the work of modern states to the work of the disciplines of science (census, statistics on life that become part of what states do). For Weber too, documents were a key element of a modern landscape. The “files” are a component of modern bureaucratic power, it is one element that exemplifies the rationalization of leadership. Foucault and Weber, however, differed in their focus on the importance of documents. For Foucault, documentation was about the act or practice of collecting information, it was both the data that served as a form of power-knowledge over the individual by homogenizing them in a systematic fashion, and it was also the act of surveillance that created subjects and objects of everyone caught in the web of a disciplinary society. For Weber, the documents (“the files”) represented a form of the rationalization of state power. The documents are an example of how power can be ordered and systematized. It was less important for Weber what effect the documents have on the subject. The files are the organization of power.

There has been less analysis on ways in which the documentation can be turned around by those who are normally the subjects of this technique. Recently there has been much interest in the role that social media, independent journalism, and other forms of reportage that occurs at the margins, may or may not affect social change and may be used to develop capacity and interest in particular struggles. But this is a different focus than on the documentation itself. In New Orleans the group protesting Charity’s closure and move, utilized a counter technique of documentation. That is, they had paperwork on every single step that took place, they recorded every meeting possible, they took photos of meetings, took photos of houses, residents, and buildings, they even collected samples of dirt from the work site. Amidst the planning fatigue many residents spoke about, this group worked to make sure no meeting was left unrecorded and unattended. At every meeting someone would stand up and ask for the evidence supporting the decision to move the hospital, whether they had followed protocol around every federal mandate on the environment and historic districts, whether they had done an appropriate study on the feasibility of a new larger hospital, and ultimately whether they had misrepresented the findings.

New Orleans is a city that lacks regulation and systemization compared to most other larger U.S. cities. This results in a hidden code of governing. On the one hand, the lack of official regulation on many aspects of the city, particularly its streets, has brought forth a diversity of expressions. This could be anything from the ubiquitous street celebrations within the black community called “second lines”,<sup>152</sup> that fill every street on most Sundays from late summer through late spring, to the design and decoration of homes throughout the city, to the use of the so-called “neutral grounds” in the middle of major streets. There is a level of spatial play that you do not see in most U.S. cities. But

---

<sup>152</sup> Though these have become more and more regulated over time, which supports the overall argument of a city moving towards capitalist legibility

the lack of regulation also has an underside. Because little is written down, much occurs “unofficially,” which has led to a style of governing that obscures most of the regular functioning of the city.<sup>153</sup> One could say, too little Weber with too much Foucault. It occludes relationships among power-brokers, and has sustained a brisk business in government corruption. Those who do deal with the city or the state recognize that the only way to make a case is to have your own information and your own documentation.

Susan, Maggie, and Linda<sup>154</sup> had followed the proceedings since the beginning. Maggie, a well-known civil rights lawyer, had boxes of news clippings, reports, transcribed interviews, letters, and legal briefings that she housed at her law offices. She spent countless hours coordinating an offensive to block the dual hospitals’ planned take-over the neighborhood. Her office, located only one block from the planned development, contributed to her already passionate feelings for the issue. Maggie was considered one of the most powerful voices on civil rights issues in the city. A tireless voice against the injustices of the police over two decades, she used what little spare time she had for organizing around the hospital. She came to many of the meetings, particularly the official public ones, and never failed to make a strong comment often pointing out the illegalities and irregularities of the move.

Linda had 15 boxes of files in a crowded room above her small, downtown, sandwich shop. She also had boxes in her house she had lost count of. Whenever I stopped by the shop, she would pull out piles of real estate records and state business listings. She was determined to show a link between the dodgy real-estate transactions by speculators, which had taken place in and around the hospital footprint. Many showed links between a few figures who had made numerous investment purchases of properties. Some had multiple LLC listings with different names (though all owned by the same person). Linda spent countless hours following the breadcrumbs. Though it would be difficult to make connections between these figures, some of whom were out-of-town real estate investors, and the local elite who made the decision, it was still clear that a number of people were making large sums of money from purchasing the soon-to-be expropriated land, as well as making housing investments around the new hospitals.

Susan, had thousands of documents on her computer and in another collection boxes at her home in Baton Rouge. When I met with her, she also had video of interviews with key medical practitioners who spoke about the actual state of Charity hospital right after the storm, as well as photos which documented the state the hospital had been in

---

<sup>153</sup> A humorous example of this occurred when I got a ticket for going down a one-way street. The street is two-way most of the week, but was turned into a one-way street on the weekend. A series of local police waited for the mostly out-of-town cars to give large tickets. While the officer looked at my license, I complained that the sign was not at all visible from where I parked. He said, noting my license address and state, “Oakland? Well, there this ticket would be a lot more expensive.” I responded a bit cheekily, “At least there I know what the laws are.” Luckily, he laughed and said, “well, you are free to contest it.” For many residents, however, getting off lightly, was not always possible.

<sup>154</sup> Again, all names but public officials or names on public record (in meetings) have been changed

after the storm, and then its mysterious internal dismantling a year later which coincided with an information gathering trip by key federal figures. These photos included images which showed pillows stuffed in sinks and the sinks left to run and vandalism of hospital wings (that had no relationship to storm damage). In, 2006 an inspection team approved by the legislature had been prevented from viewing above the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the 20-floor building.<sup>155</sup> The presumed destruction of the hospital during the storm was important for the case of rebuilding, and that story was repeated at every meeting and by every official.<sup>156</sup> Susan also collected every study conducted on or around Charity hospital, as well as its new location. She also requested that additional studies be done, most which were required by law, but which she insisted on. Often times state officials who pushed the development, openly lied about facts surrounding the old building. Susan kept a growing list of these, and had, at one point, produced a 95 page rebuttal which listed the public deceptions claimed by state leadership.

And then there was the mysterious Anna Lynn who sent letters to the various figures fighting against the development with key bits of information, documents, of records that might be of use to show some link that might possibly indict some of the key leaders. She had access to archival data, which gave her a unique standpoint on the hospital move. She pointed out that the desire to create a medical corridor was an effort that went back decades, and local leadership had always had their eye on the Mid-City neighborhoods, given their proximity to the downtown as well as the perceived level of blight. She had newspaper clippings from as far back as the 1950s in which the neighborhood under local leader James Comiskey rallied against a planned slum clearance, calling it, a “high-handed, communistic, seizure of our homes and businesses.”<sup>157</sup> In a clear parallel to the hospital case, the local residents then were fighting against a city government that did not want to say “no” to a huge pot of federal funding for slum clearance under the Housing Act.<sup>158</sup>

There were two difficulties with organizing around the hospital and Lower Mid City. First, many employees were not able to return to the city because without the hospital open, there were few jobs. Second, LSU put a gag order on any of its medical workers after the initial outrage by many who worked in Charity that it was not going to be reopened. Increasingly, people worked behind the scenes and off the record, filtering key information to those who could work in the open. Though the number of key representatives of the

---

<sup>155</sup> Rep. Lynch, who was at this meeting and asked sarcastically of the assembled, “is there a hunchback in the rafters?” sponsored Resolution 89, which authorized an independent group to assess Charity.

<sup>156</sup> As well as in academic literature on the post-Katrina rebuilding environment

<sup>157</sup> *Times Picayune*, April 24, 1953

<sup>158</sup> It is interesting to note, that at the time of this initial plan (first proposed in 1952) the proposal was to purchase the “slum” land and resell it for “re-use” by private commercial and light industrial use. If the city lost any money in the process of buying and selling, the federal government would recover 2/3s of the loss in the form of grants to the city. The possibility of a number of investors making a huge profit through buying land as though at a fire sale, does not seem to have figured into the arrangement (information on proposal from *Times Picayune*, October, 26, 1952).

struggle could be placed at around a dozen, they actually represented a much larger contingent of people who could not use their names for fear of reprisals and loss of their jobs. A similar process of reducing the voices who spoke occurred in the fight over public housing. There the implicit threat was loss of housing. It was successful in keeping many people in the shadows, but certainly not in stopping the protests. However, in a similar fashion to the activities around public housing, by reducing the people who could speak, it allowed for the delegitimizing argument to be made that there were only a couple of thorns-in-the-sides of progress.<sup>159</sup>

The documentation around this case, was clearly an critical tactic for those who were pushing for a different hospital plan for the city. But, other complimentary tactics were needed in order that the small group would have an effect.

### Street Tactics

After the monthly New City meeting, Dana came up and announced, “I’m walking the BioDistrict. The whole BioDistrict. You can follow me on a google map I created and you can join me too.” I was incredulous but not surprised that she would have found another seemingly impossible form of street politics to occupy her. I first met Dana a year before during her campaign to collect signatures to keep Charity Hospital open. As a dare from the new Mayor, who at a party said when she approached him about his stance on Charity hospital, “Get me 10,000 signatures and we can talk,” Dana had, in two months, collected over 10,000 signatures almost single handedly. She was tired of hearing city officials say they never heard from residents. She was tired of the lack of information residents had about the political process around the rebuilding of the hospital in Lower Mid City. And now she was tired of the secrecy with which 1500 acres of land called the BioDistrict operated. It had almost no neighborhood representation, yet physically included most of the Mid City neighborhood. She decided to go to each house herself and ask them if they knew what the BioDistrict was and how it affected them.

The three phases of the struggle (initially pushing to reopen Charity hospital, then attempting to save the Lower Mid City neighborhood, and finally challenging the boundaries of the BioDistrict) were very much wrapped up together, and as one was lost, forces moved onto the next. In all three, the streets were an active space of contestation.

---

<sup>159</sup> This meant that, as I became more engaged in this research, some of my key informants requested off-the-record comments. Anna Lynn, who had been sending anonymous emails with key legislative and other legal documents, insisted on meeting in a location where no one could overhear our conversation and would not allow any recording devices. At one point she warned, “be careful how close you get to this and the centers of power, you could be in danger” (Interview March 21, 2011). I never once felt the danger she feared. But, it is interesting to note that many felt they were treading on very thin ice when it came to their struggles around this case. There was a lot of money and reputation on the line for the hospital development. As some key figures have fallen to forced resignations or indictments since I was conducting fieldwork, it is clear that not everyone has come out richer.

For some, it was a space for mobilization and participatory democracy, for others the streets were a space to plan, control, and to be erased.

For the small group contesting the monolithic urban renewal process and its claim to 'progress', 'revitalization' and 'renewal', the streets were one of the clearest routes for exposure. They accomplished this in numerous ways, particularly through the door-to-door flyering and canvassing that followed the various mapped areas being contested, and a relentless mapping and photographing of every removal within the hospital footprint. As we saw earlier in connection to the struggle over the process, leaders attempted to bypass the public in an effort to quicken the pace of renewal and recovery.

De Certeau (1984) writes that walking the city is a form of subverting disciplinary techniques. By moving through space people subvert the intended and imposed use and demonstrate the inability for a totalizing vision of the urban. Unlike the planners' view, which sees a totality, movement through urban space enables a reclaiming of the relational elements of social life. As De Certeau writes, this "process of *appropriation* of the topographical system...implies *relations* among differentiated positions" (italics in original, 98). Walking reinvigorates the importance of social relations for de Certeau, not the relationship of form that is often the key concern of designers. Walking is peripatetic; it cannot be planned. One may travel to the same store everyday, but the route will never be exactly the same, it cannot be. De Certeau saw appropriation through movement. By walking as a creative spatial act people undermined imposed uses; his users were the speech acts of the city. In Lower Mid City, the streets were political spaces for the dispensing of knowledge, they were spaces used to counter the logic of legibility. Those mobilizing around the hospital were not spontaneous actors in the same sense as de Certeau's "walkers", they were consciously organizing street by street.<sup>160</sup>

Kenneth and Darren met regularly in the area of Lower Mid City to hand out flyers, which had been printed with their own funds or a donation from a compatriot. It was often at midday, the streets were hot, there were few trees in the neighborhood, many houses were already vacant, and as the demolition of houses began, dust and debris rose around them. They chose their streets and walked back and forth, crossing by each other at intersections, and leaving a flyer ("not in the mailbox, it's illegal") at every house. In hot pink, green, or yellow, the flyers headlined with a call: "To Governor Bobby Jindal, Mayor Ray Nagin, and LSU officials...Stop your effort to demolish the Lower Mid City historic neighborhood."<sup>161</sup> Below the call, there often was a copy of a sympathetic article from the *Times-Picayune* detailing the development, as well as a list of any upcoming meetings. Sometimes another member joined from the small but effective Save Charity Committee, which had shifted much of its operation towards saving Lower Mid City from the wrecking

---

<sup>160</sup> Jane Jacobs (1961) writes about the streets being places for mobilization where people could raise political issues; but even that has the air of spontaneity, more like someone passing out pamphlets to passers by. In contrast, in Lower Mid City, the street grid was utilized as a form of organization itself: a block-by-block attack.

<sup>161</sup> Original flyer from February 2010

ball. Darren tended to run the Save Charity Committee meetings with an iron fist, not having much space or time for anyone who veered off his agenda. Off putting to many, he was nevertheless a dedicated canvasser. Any public meeting he attended was sure to get a strong and loud lecturing to. The Committee knew that bodies mattered in the politics of dispersal and dispossession. Walking the streets they hoped to gain a few more of these voices and bodies at the meetings.

People used the streets as access paths to the homes. And, in this way, the homes also became part of the tools of the struggle. They worked house-by-house. "Stick it on every house, even the ones that look vacant." Nothing took place via the mail or through the internet. This was, after all New Orleans, where most interactions of import took place on the street, in a church, or a bar, at a second line, or at a party.

Residents often saw these political walkers as a container for their concerns, "I've been trying to get through to the number of Jacobs Engineering and they just don't answer!" "I can't breath with all this dust flying around, my son's asthma has gotten worse." But, there was the fear that they would be expending valuable energy and anger on those who were sympathetic to their plight and then not coming to the meetings where it was most important to have varied voices, particularly from the neighborhood. Like almost every contestation over housing in the post-Katrina landscape, the city politicians often claimed that no neighbors had come even if meetings were rarely well-publicized, and they assumed that absence was as much as acquiescing to whatever development was on the table. The repetition of seeing the same key opponents at meetings was also a hazard. Because there were small groups protesting, often for people who have limited ability to be at the meetings, political leaders could use this as evidence that there was not wide spread support.

It was not only people directly involved in organizations trying to save the hospital, but also former residents who saw something wrong in the way their relatives who still lived in the community were shunted aside. This is captured best in a question to political leaders in the first public meeting on the joint hospital project:

"It's nice having this forum, but this is the first time I've seen [anything] where people have the potential of being heard. My family had lived in this neighborhood since the 1850s. I lived here when the interstate came through, when blight came, when the hospital came. You wanted feedback here? Once the news broke in September about both the LSU project and the VA project, I noted with interest in the paper that both projects were presented as done deals. It didn't sound as if anyone had any voice in the matter. So I returned to the neighborhood where I grew up. I spoke with people that I never knew. I went up Palmyra Street; I went up Cleveland; I went up the side streets; I went up Banks and I asked, just what is going on and have you been given any voice, and what I heard disturbed me, and that is why I'm here tonight. The people who have had the courage against all odds to come back, to invest their heart and soul and savings and

sweat equity in this neighborhood are not being given a voice. They are being told that eminent domain will take their property, they have nothing to say about it and that is the end of the matter. Well, that is unacceptable... When I visited a month ago, I found a real sense of community, a sense of diversity and a sense of hope, except that hope has been taken away by bureaucrats who do not want to hear the public, who don't want to hear anyone's voice except the developers', the State."<sup>162</sup>

This speaker shows that the rationality of plans are irrational to those who are affected by them. More importantly, she highlights the lack of public awareness and involvement in the process, and through her own "walking" the streets she discovered a public left out. She also highlights something about the community's vibrancy which many of the leaders failed to see in the run down neighborhood.

James started his blog "In the Footprint" documenting the Lower Mid City neighborhood, its houses, and businesses, as a way to expose what he saw as an incredible overstepping of individual rights through the state's use of expropriation. A libertarian-leaning law student at the time, he started to spend a couple of hours every day walking through the neighborhood taking pictures of houses and speaking to residents. In naming the "footprint" he also helped to give it political coherency as a site of destruction and contestation, which the local media had failed to do by all but ignoring the problems with the process as well as the devastation of not having removed many of the services Charity had offered. Emerging as one of the most vocal opponents to the development plan, he showed up to meetings, house razings, media events, and even sponsored a number of key press releases protesting the impending destruction of an historic school which had received millions of dollars in federal disaster relief aid for rebuilding. He worried that through this development "the city would loose its soul."<sup>163</sup>

Dana had a map of the entire Mid City neighborhood printed from Google maps in order to document her progress through the 1500 acres of the BioDistrict. Since the continued hospital closure and the beginning of demolition in the Lower Mid City neighborhood, Dana had decided to take her fight to the rest of the neighborhood in order to warn neighbors what might happen without proper oversight of BioDistrict. She started in one corner of the map and determined to walk every street and leave a flyer in every door and speak to anyone outside.

As she approached each house, she inform anyone out on the street that she was a concerned citizen trying to inform residents of the BioDistrict. She would then ask, "Do you know you live in the BioDistrict?" To which almost every single person said, "no." The few who did, had been informed through their connection to the Mid City Neighborhood Organization. She would then

---

<sup>162</sup> Transcript of US Risk meeting, 11/29/07

<sup>163</sup> Interview September 28, 2010

explain that it was a large area of the city designated by the State Legislature which was to encourage the biomedical industry in the city. It claimed no expropriation powers though many pointed out by aligning itself with any state institution it could easily gain the power of eminent domain.<sup>164</sup>

Sometimes she had company on her travels, but usually she went alone. Streets are active places in the city, and people sitting on the stoops of houses were often open to conversations.<sup>165</sup> If no one was around, she left a half-page flyer in their door that listed all the important addresses, websites, and locations of important meetings in the future. There was to have been a similar effort by the BioDistrict, itself, to inform everyone of its existence. Door hangers were placed throughout the area, but many people noted they were sparsely placed on doors, some suggest even fewer than 50% in one neighborhood contiguous to the new hospital development.<sup>166</sup> Given the lack of knowledge that Dana faced, we can assume that in many areas there was a close to complete lack of information provided.

I make no suggestion that this was willfully done by people involved with the BioDistrict. In fact, they were often more than willing to explain in public meetings and in neighborhood organizations who and what they were. I do suggest, however, that there is no incentive for openness. Residents, like their homes, were not seen as partners but rather as obstructions. When the board for the BioDistrict<sup>167</sup> was constructed in the state legislature it included: four members from the universities (LSU, Tulane, Xavier, and Delgado), four members appointed by the mayor, four members appointed by the governor, and one appointed by Louisiana Economic Development<sup>168</sup>. An obvious omission: residents. In an area of land that included upwards of 15,000 residents it was shocking that their interests failed to have even one board representation.<sup>169</sup> Because of the composition of interests on the board, there is often an effort, for efficiency's sake, to limit and restrict the flow of information. And because they were left out, they were usually rowdy when finally let into the room. Rather than recognizing the reason behind the passion, this anger was often used as an example of the irrationality of the public.

The streets came to resemble the purest form of democracy. And not just for those individuals mentioned above, but there had been numerous and incredibly well-attended second-line parades to protest the closure of Charity. Streets are not "the people" in the aggregate but the individual bodies and homes of the people. This spot became the

---

<sup>164</sup> Fieldnotes July 15, 2011

<sup>165</sup> They were not as open to being recorded in any manner, as one person seeing me snap a photo of Dana angrily asked that I not take one of her.

<sup>166</sup> Informal interviews with residents and James.

<sup>167</sup> At that time GNOBEDD

<sup>168</sup> LED is a chamber of commerce-like organization for the state of Louisiana.

<sup>169</sup> Finally, after much effort, in 2011 a resident member was added, though it was unclear whether her membership was binding or merely honorary.

embodiment of democratic process. These walkers reclaimed an important element of what makes a city vibrant and in doing so, they also challenged the power of erasure.

### **Tactic of Shaming**

“...Shame feels like an exposure—another sees what I have done that is bad and hence shameful—but it also involves an attempt to hide, a hiding that requires the subject turn away from the other...”

—Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p.103

This case demonstrates the way a small group attempted to re-embed morality into a process that was often rationalized through the language of “progress.” In the Charity Hospital fight, the tactic most used was that of public shaming in an effort to illuminate what individual actors were doing. Every effort was made to highlight how local business leaders and politicians’ monetary interest was privileged over the welfare of the citizens of the city. But to consider Charity as an emotional issue from only the side of those who wanted to keep it opened, would be missing another key element. Charity was also an emotional and memory ridden place for those who wanted it closed. And it was precisely their hope to run away from the implicit memory and all that ‘charity’ stood for that made the fight so contentious. As a resident said, “Whether they could have opened up Big Charity again, I don’t think they ever fully vetted that. It seems a much more emotional issue than an actual issue. LSU doesn’t want to be Charity. Charity is for poor black people.” Charity, unlike the VA hospital, was the lightning rod for simmering tensions around race and class because of the population it had served and the population that was most harmed by its continued closure.

Many argued publicly that the lack of services could be directly tied to deaths, and implied that it was the back-room decision to close Charity which had led to these deaths. There was a continuing effort to bring morality back into the discussion, particularly as it related to the care and welfare of the city and its most vulnerable citizens. This connection was often made in the case of mental health. With the closure of Charity hospital, the city lost most of its mental health hospital beds. The police department and jail served as interim mental health facilities, though without services. In a public meeting over the “re-use” of Charity hospital, Cecil Tebo, a crisis specialist for the New Orleans Police Department, pointed out that, while Charity had been closed the mental health situation in the city had gone from bad to horrendous. She challenged the Health and Human Service Committee:

“Wouldn’t it be great if in this conversation we looked at 'need'...we have a huge mental health crisis and it is a public safety concern....A woman I worked with just jumped off the Mississippi river bridge. These stories play out time and time again. Charity had provided a place to treat these

folks. They were known, they were managed, and we didn't have the crisis we're having today....A huge price has been paid.<sup>170</sup>

Shaming was used to remind other New Orleanians of their collective identity. One way was by highlighting the lack of local connections of the organizations hired to redevelop the hospital. Jacobs's Engineering firm and its representatives, hired to plan the reuse of Charity, were continually accused of being outsiders.

Aaron, the facilitator hired to run meetings, was openly asked where he came from. "Who are you?" Shouted a woman, "and where are you from?" In responding "Nebraska" you could feel the audience in city council chambers shake their heads as if to say, "Told you he wasn't from here." Later that evening another man, said in a voice etched with sarcasm, "thank you for not attempting to pronounce my name."<sup>171</sup>

This statement was a particular cultural variant based in the old formulation that who counted as a New Orleanian was someone who could trace their lineage back, ideally, to the French colonial period, and who had the singular French Creole pronunciation associated with the local patois. It was less a calling out foreignness, but instead a shaming of the individuals (board members, local presidents of development agencies, political proponents of the redevelopment project) who remained quietly in the shadow of these facilitators. The same woman who called out the "out-of-towner" fumed the entire meeting and shouted at the LSU board, which sat quietly on the podium, "Why are *they* here? I'll tell you why. This is all about LSU and their political muscle!"<sup>172</sup>

Developers, LSU board members, special tax district presidents, and other interested parties declared that this was about the need for development in the city. They saw themselves as having a longer and grander vision. With biomedical money coming to the city in the form of investment and from higher paying patients, they would be improving the economic outlook of the city. This was progress being held back by preservationists. Many times they found themselves between two competing needs, on the one hand that they be progressive and entrepreneurial in their selection of outsiders with the 'best' expertise as opposed to the New Orleanian with the most ties, all the while asserting their bone fide New Orleans pedigree.

It was not only the sporadic shouting in City Hall chambers where the tactic of shame emerged. It was used more visibly and pointedly through billboards and other advertising. The large and low billboard on the corner of Esplanade and St. Claude Avenues displayed an image of an imagined hospital inside the old Charity building, and stated that most of New Orleans wanted Charity reopened. Another near the super dome displayed, "Renew, Restore, Reopen Charity Hospital." Hung high over the highway near Baton Rouge

---

<sup>170</sup> Fieldnotes May 2011

<sup>171</sup> Fieldnotes September 30 2010

<sup>172</sup> Fieldnotes, September 30, 2010

a billboard spoke to commuters and lawmakers: "Want to save \$283 million? Reopen Charity Hospital." In an effort to shame lawmakers and highlight to locals the waste of resources building a new hospital, preservationists with the backing of many former Charity medical workers bought the billboards and kept them up for months. Pamphlets printed on the brightest neon paper and handed out to residents or left in doors in the footprint called the move "a land grab" a "shame".

In one march around city hall in protest of the closure of Charity, a local activist held a yellow poster board sign with brightly painted lettering: "Reverend Alexander would be Ashamed." Charity Hospital had been renamed Reverend Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital after the well-known Louisiana civil rights leader who had passed away in the late 1990s. Many connected the closure of the hospital with the closure of most of the institutions that served Black New Orleanians. The local Black talk radio repeatedly utilized shame as a form of political response, particularly directed towards whites. One host railed about, "white's inability to feel shame".<sup>173</sup> In meetings on the continuing disparities of the rebuilding process, local black leaders would often publicly shame leaders. Shame has a deep history in the Civil Rights movement as part of the key tactic of non-violence, and its continued discursive use highlighted the underlying racial implications of moving the hospital. Charity Hospital primarily served poor Blacks in the city, the new hospital would be aimed at a wealthier and, thus, whiter cliental. The neighborhood that would be removed for the new hospital was composed primarily of working class people of color (an influx of Brazilian and Central American immigrants working in rebuilding meant a shift in the rental property in the neighborhood).

How did the local leaders respond? The first response was through bureaucratise: "the Charity facility is one that does not meet the programmatic requirements for the LSU hospital moving forward".<sup>174</sup> This was the phrase they repeated at every public meeting. Legally, the board faced the perplexing issue of there being some evidence that the hospital was not kept shut because of damage but because of a political decision. There was also photographic evidence of sabotage to the interior of the building, which was used to back up the claim of its purported destruction. By insisting on it not fitting the 'programmatic need,' they no longer had to answer whether it had been destroyed, which for a long time was the reason given. It also allowed them to possibly sell it for 'reuse' as a hospital to some other private entity<sup>175</sup>.

The second response was to highlight the number of meetings they had held on the issue. One leader of a development organization exasperatedly said, "I've been to dozens of meetings on this. How many public meetings do you need?" This never assuaged residents, primarily because the meetings were invariably held ex-post facto, and were nothing but the fulfillment of broad EPA or FEMA directives. Thirdly, counter-shame was used, which usually took the form of saying that preservationists cared only about the

---

<sup>173</sup> fieldnotes, Dec 2010

<sup>174</sup> Fieldnotes, October 18, 2010

<sup>175</sup> Mayor Landrieu was fairly committed towards using the building for the new City Hall.

buildings and implicitly, not the people. Business leaders were apoplectic to show they did care about the city because they cared for its future development. Finally, the mayor's office, in particular, had tight control over the main newspaper outlet in the city, and made sure no news went out before press conferences or other announcements. This could backfire, as in the case of a press conference to celebrate the moving of historic homes from inside the footprint to their new lots throughout the city. On the press conference day, the local TV stations and newspaper arrived, only to see the mayor get into a verbal battle with one activist, and to have another hold up a sign behind the mayor's head that read: "Shameful!"<sup>176</sup>

Why is it that 'shame' even works, or is deployed as a tactic? Theoretically, there are a number of possibilities. One way might be to consider the ways in which society attempts to re-embed the economy back into society by gaining control over the economic mechanisms that are believed to be autonomous. Somers, in her analysis of Katrina, talks about how market fundamentalism's strategy is to "contractualize the relationship between the government and the people" (71) and through this lens we can understand the use of shame is a response meant to remind those who are the position of governing that this is a non-contractual relationship of citizenship. Sara Ahmed (2004: 101) in her work *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, notes that shame is a form of recognition which creates a sense of community. It is political in that it helps to form the political body. We can see then why so much of the discourse around shame for New Orleanians was built around reminding leaders who they were and to what community they belonged. Feminist legal scholar Martha Nussbaum has pointed to the role that 'shame' plays in the legal sphere, particularly its role in forming legal policies around punishment (2004). Shame and disgust have long been parts of social and moral life. It is these "primal emotions" that worries Nussbaum, however, for anthropologists, such as Clastres (1987) and Barclay (1982), shame is a key form of social control in societies that lack rigid hierarchies. For Clastres and Barclay, shame is a form of positive social control. For all three, shame is more than constraint, it is power. Shame is fundamentally social, and we can see that it imbues the political and economic field.

In this way shame becomes a key tactic of the politics of visibility: it is deployed as a means of community control over the political and economic process. It is both an emotional response as well as a strategic tactic used by those protesting both the closure of the public hospital and the destruction of a neighborhood.

## Conclusion and Paradox

New Orleans offers us a unique lens to understand the shape of the relationship between the governed and the government. Politics of visibility is a response to the shifting nature of the state in which more and more relies upon the what I call the

---

<sup>176</sup> Fieldnotes, September 10, 2010

“subcontractualization of democracy.” Even the most fundamental relationship between citizen and state is handed over to the market and hidden from view, and in the case of New Orleans increasingly into the hands of unelected boards and large engineering firms.<sup>177</sup> This is most evident in the case of closure of New Orleans’s Charity Hospital after Hurricane Katrina and its renaming (to the Medical Clinic of New Orleans) and move to Lower Mid City.

The problem with the siphoning off of public goods into the private realm is not an issue of efficacy (whether the government does something better or worse than the private sphere), the issue is more profound than that. And it shakes the foundation of democracy. What is occurring is that the necessary ties of participation and communication between the government and its citizens is being lost. They are lost behind the paperwork of companies that see the role of participation as a hindrance rather than an integral part of the relationship. These companies are no longer just taking over vital services from the government, they are in fact substituting and mediating the very ties between citizens and government. They are re-engineering democracy.

The multiplicity of meetings for every aspect of the new dual-hospital development project were daunting. There were neighborhood meetings for the Veterans Hospital, city council meetings on street closures, LSU board meetings on the hospital, Greater New Orleans Biomedical Development District meetings on planning for a biomedical future, city-wide meetings on the Unified New Orleans Plan, neighborhood council meetings, and the list goes on.

The case of the hospital development in Lower Mid City is perhaps the most dramatic case of redevelopment in the city, and ironically, the least covered. The neighborhood was slated for demolition two years after the Hurricane Katrina. In a form of double displacement, the mostly lower income, rentals and commercial buildings were to be razed to the ground to make way for two large suburban styled hospitals that had been housed in the medical district within the downtown area of the city. The mystery still remains as to why this move was allowed to take place, and most accounts lay the blame on a back room deal facilitated by Ed Blakey, the recovery czar, who had been tapped to lead the rebuilding efforts in the city. His biggest “success” was the solidification of the hospitals within the New Orleans metro area.<sup>178</sup> But this move came at the expense of a neighborhood that had just begun to recover district.

The group that was advocating for both the reopening of Charity Hospital, as well as the preservation of Lower Mid City, utilized critical tactics of documentation, reclaiming the streets, and shame to contest the enormous dispossession faced by people who no longer could rely on the hospital’s services, as well as those who lived in the former Lower Mid City neighborhood. Most importantly, though, they were making a statement about

---

<sup>177</sup> AECOM, Jacobs, Louisiana Solutions, (the combination of two large engineering firms Waggoner and CDM), who handle everything from requesting federal Community Development Block Grants to support large multi-million dollar projects, to running community meetings.

<sup>178</sup> See his rather bland discussion of this in his book *My Storm*

the process of democracy itself. All these tactics served to illuminate a decision-making process that was being pushed into the interstitial areas, pushed off the maps, and into private hands. Whether or not they are seen as having 'won' the battle to preserve public medical care for the city or to preserve a neighborhood, they were extraordinarily important in the larger struggle over the definition of what politics is.

## Chapter 5

# Conclusion

Katrina was one of the most watched media events in the past few decades in the U.S. It came at a time when the development of new social media had begun to find its footing. For a moment, the media attention opened up a dialogue around structural inequality and the lasting effects of living in a racially divided city. Practically every social science journal had a special edition on Katrina. But interest in the academic world was as fleeting as that of the media, and most studies were conducted from a national or international vantage point. At the same time, the city became a magnet for celebrities, volunteers, and funders looking to make a contribution. Over time, these celebrities, volunteers, and funders became the dominant voice of the city and rebuilding efforts. As a result, local political struggles receded from the national imagination.

There was always a broad consensus to rebuild New Orleans differently after the storm, but what that future city looked like depended on one's position. Two visions of the future city dominated most conversations about the recovery. The first addressed and remedied past racial and class divisions that had caused so much inequity among the storm's victims in the first place.

The second vision treated inequality differently. Championed by some political leaders and members of the real estate and tourism industry, this plan identified the problem as the presence of the poor, rather than the structural causes of poverty. Supporters aimed to rebuild a city free of poor and marginalized residents. In the end, this second vision triumphed, though not without contestation.

In the past, projects labeled as 'urban renewal' oftentimes shuffled a marginalized group from one site to other areas of the city. Post-Katrina New Orleans decisions (intended and not) proved hostile to poor and working class citizens, primarily African Americans. But rather than shuffling them from one area to another, the city as a whole became inhospitable to them. One of the most dramatic examples was the decision to close the four largest low-income public housing developments and replace them with mixed-income housing. Another example was the decision to shutter the only public hospital serving low-income residents. Finally, federal recovery dollars supported property owners over renters, and high-income property owners over those living in low-income communities. Recovery funds were distributed as unevenly as the original path of destruction.

I aimed to delve deeper than the story of structural inequalities and environmental degradation, but to consider what political forces were unleashed by the flood and how these struggles illuminate urban processes at large. I argue that it is in these local struggles that we can really see larger political issues play out. In post-Katrina New Orleans, we see trends

common to other cities: the privatization of public goods, shrinking political participation, the displacement of poor and working class residents, and the dismantling of regulation in the name of small government. In response to these changes, I argue that residents deploy what I call the tactics of "politics of visibility". By this I mean that residents mobilize their resources to make themselves visible to a state that otherwise ignores them – and in doing so, achieve particular political ends. Residents must engage with local politics in a variety of forms to really be seen by the state in politically effective ways. So, the dissertation addresses much more than the physical rebuilding of a city. In essence the dissertation addresses issues of political belonging and the consequences of exclusion in the modern city.

This dissertation is at the heart a musing on what the state, within neoliberal capitalism, is: where its borders lie and how it is contested. If we say that the state is made up of a territory, a people, and a set of institutional processes, then we have here three cases which each respond to one of those key elements. The Lower Ninth Ward struggles over the representation of a territory, public housing residents struggle over their integration within the body politic of worthy citizens, and the case of the hospitals asks what does democratic practice look like?

### *Urban Governance*

The new exigencies of urban governance have led to urban and regional areas taking on more of the role that the nation state once took. Finding themselves short of federal funds, urban areas struggle over scarce capital. With more and more strain being placed on local governments, they see increasing tax-base as the way out. But increasing the tax-base is at the expense of poorer residents who are viewed as drains on local economies. In the new urban economy of the last two decades, a great exodus has been occurring as these poorer residents find themselves unable to afford gentrifying neighborhoods and moving to communities outside the urban core. These communities, such as Ferguson, MO are now the new seats of a growing trend of suburban poverty. The racial organization of both urban and suburban space in the U.S. is thus shifting, however, the distribution of wealth remains the same. Disasters such as Katrina allow for the rapid increase of this process of expulsion of the poor from the urban areas.

### *Expulsion*

Expulsion is perhaps the defining act of the state. Judith Butler (2011), summarizing Arendt, argues that the nation-state structurally requires the "recurrent expulsion of national minorities"(30). Zigmunt Bauman, writes that modernity, in particular capitalist modernity, requires the creation of tremendous waste, not just of things but of bodies and people. Imogene Tyler (2013) writes that states require the creation of "abject subjects" (4). The state gains its legitimacy through consensus, and that consensus can only be maintained if there is an object of fear and stigmatization, which can be the container for the social uncertainty of neoliberal capitalism. More importantly, there are people on the ground struggling around political and spatial expulsion from urban areas.

Some of the most vexing questions remain about the nature of local politics in a global world where limits to the autonomy of local actors appears greatly restricted by the needs of governments (from local to transnational) and capital. The limiting of membership into civil society and the squeezing of civil society from political society may be two of the key markers of our post-industrial society. Politics is always messy, and in a world that requires more and more efficiency for capital's profit-making needs the messiness of politics is a hindrance. All around us we witness the ways in which capital bypasses civil society.

### *An Era of post-politics?*

As our opportunities for participation become narrowed and pushed to the margins by the politically and economically connected, how do people make their claims heard? Political theorists in the last decade (MacLeod 2011, Swyngedouw 2009, Ranciere 2004, Zizek 1999) have suggested we are in an era of post-politics, in which, because of the celebration of "consensus" over conflict—a true political space—civil society resorts to one of two actions as a result of neoliberal political-economic relationships: apathy or violence. They suggest that move from a political space that revels in its messiness to one that seeks conformity has shrunk the political capacity of citizens.

Perhaps as scholars have noted, the reason for the constriction on political options is the seeming ineffectiveness of mass protest. According to Lauren Berlant (2011), we are in a crisis of "state participation." Tyler writes "one effect of the neoliberal political consensus is that people's capacity to protest effectively against the state we are in has been eroded as the acceptable means for formal and democratic protest are practically non-existent" (7). Though not absent. In his work on revolutionary Iran, Asef Bayat (1997), sees a quiet protest in the various tactics which urban residents use to access provisions. Tyler (2013) quoting Papadopoulos et al. writes that, "'becoming imperceptible' is the most effective tool that marginal populations can employ to oppose prevailing forms of geopolitical power. Certainly, invisibility is an important strategy of evasion" (11). So, these two scholars see politics in the act of hiding and already our spectrum between apathy and violence has become more nuanced.

There are other forms of urban protest, which fall between apathy and revolt. Through an analysis of three housing struggles in the post-Katrina landscape of New Orleans, this study aimed to engage with this debate by providing grounding to this theoretical question. I showed that empirically we see neither apathy nor violence but a creative use of visual tactics both inside and outside of the formal channels. There is a complex back and forth between the state, with its bureaucratic exigencies and entrepreneurial vigor, and the response from below to make the process and people "visible".

### *Or an Era of Political Visibility?*

In just the last 4 months at the time of this writing, we have entered a "new" era of protest, brought on because of the continued expulsion of Black America from the body politic and its maintenance of exclusion through the police. The rolling urban protests of the last four months of 2014 raise many of the same questions that this dissertation addressed around a

politics of belonging. Are these protests, marches, and rebellions “revolt” or do they represent something else? What about the effort by many public figures to use their public bodies to express dismay and anger? These are part of the politics of visibility, a politics, which adeptly uses media and the subversion of media (think of Anonymous hacking police and political websites), the use of twitter as the most important news source as well as political platform, numerous marches, protests, and other forms of visible politics.

The debate has grown around visibility as disciplinary mechanism from above or from below. There is a growing debate around the efficacy of tactics such as police body cameras, which would nominally bring increased visibility but which others counter by noting that there have always been cameras covering acts of police violence—visibility of these violent acts was rather a question of what bodies were deemed worthy of coverage. In another tactic, sports players, ever in the limelight, have begun to take publically visible stands in arenas formerly seen as apolitical. We see an increase in the spaces of politics, bleeding into apolitical arenas, confronting those institutions—the police—whose job it is to maintain the politics of exclusion.

In the meantime, we need to consider that the struggles people engage in may not be ‘winnable,’ they may instead be practice for the collective work in the future and a reconfiguring of where politics take place. Politics are messy and we sometimes forget that messy is not necessarily bad. Being a part of any social group is messy. It cannot be judged on the same standards as capitalist efficiencies.

In a recently translated piece, Lefebvre (2014) wrote that “the right to the city implies nothing less than a revolutionary concept of citizenship” (205). The rapidly urbanizing geographies around the world have led to the city as the key space for reclaiming full participation. In what way can the city be that revolutionary space? David Harvey in *Spaces of Hope* writes that the within the claims made during neoliberal and global era there is a “recognition that for most people the terrain of sensuous experience and of affective social relations...is locally circumscribed by the sheer fact of the material embeddedness of the body and the person in the particular circumstances of a localized life” (2000:85). In other words, the importance of the locale continues to exist because they are spaces that we live and move in every day, and even if space and time are constantly being annihilated through the process of globalization and capital accumulation, there continues to exist a very real place in which we inhabit as physical beings. The visibility of politics comes down to the visibility of people, flesh and blood social creatures, who live in particular places. They are people who desire political belonging above all else and are willing to use their bodies and the space of the city to be seen.

# Methodological Appendix

## Making visible the invisible: From Political Ethnography to the Politics of Ethnography

### **The Disaster City**<sup>179</sup>

I first traveled to New Orleans after Katrina in October 2007. As part of preliminary fieldwork, I visited a group organizing around public housing (which was already shuttered but still had yet to go before the City Council for the final vote) and I stopped by a homeless protest camp which had burgeoned outside of City Hall. The camp had been there for some time and though first brushed away by the political leadership, could no longer be ignored as it grew directly outside the windows of City Hall. When I arrived at the camp, the cohesion of the leadership had recently imploded. A knife was drawn amid tense exchange as one local activist attempted to defuse tensions. Housing since Katrina had become the key issue for the residents and that is what I aimed to follow during my fieldwork.

I visited the city one more time to before finally retuning to begin my in-depth research in February 2010, where I remained until August 2011. I had worked out my three cases from afar prior to this lengthy period in the field: public housing, homelessness, and the Lower Ninth Ward, each focusing on a particular political-economic relationship to property. But I soon shifted my sights given the realities of the field.

The month I arrived the city was in the midst of a trifecta of celebrations. First, a new mayor had been elected. The unpopular Nagin was gone and in his place was Mitch Landrieu. He was the first white mayor in decades, actually, since his father, Moon Landrieu was mayor in the 1970s. His sister was a powerful southern senator, one of the few democrats still in power in the deep south. His pedigree was unmatched, and a majority of locals (particularly white) seemed to feel that he would bring in the resources, connections, and perhaps reduced corruption of his predecessor. There were also fears that Landrieu's election also represented the whitening of the city. Though residents of the city seemed generally relieved with his election, even if worried about the racial balance implications. Secondly, the New Orleans Saints, famed for loosing year after year yet followed passionately by locals, won the Super Bowl after 43 years. The night of the Bowl, people crowded into homes to watch as the Saints decisively beat the Indianapolis Colts. As the clock ticked down and the win was assured, people and cars with horns blaring flooded streets to head to the center of the city: the French

---

<sup>179</sup> I purposefully did not use "post-" in this title, because, as should be clear, the dissertation suggests the "disaster" is not over.

Quarter. The old streets were packed as though it was Mardi Gras day, full of locals who treated each other as long lost friends: “Isn’t this a great sign for the city?” “See, we will come back!” “You can beat us down but we’ll always fight back.” People read the win as a sign from the god of football that New Orleans was coming back after Katrina’s wrath. The third event, the yearly Mardi Gras season had already begun rolling. Needless to say, the city, during the first two weeks after my arrival was unlike anything I had ever seen.

Those who have spent any length of time in New Orleans will know, work mixes with the Mardi Gras season like water does with oil. I was encouraged to not schedule meetings or interviews during three-four week period, that it would mark me as an outsider. Many locals leave, fearing the crowds, others, just let life slow down as the weekly parades rolled by,. New Orleans is a visually stimulating place, and when you visit as a tourist particularly during Mardi Gras, the ostentatiousness of the parades, the total decadence can be over-stimulating. Much of people’s experience of the city is from this perspective. When Katrina hit, once again, the city was a visual spectacle, no longer of decadence but rather of destruction. One of the key struggles as a researcher was to move beyond the surface visibility of the place, people and the process.

I took the advice about pace throughout my 18 months of research, choosing to sit back and watch and listen before even asking for informal interviews. I attended every public meeting I saw that mentioned the city (posters in communities, announcements via email, newspapers, etc) in order to gain a picture of what concerns residents had, discover how the business of politics was done, and see who some of the key public figures were. I had planned to cover the spatial contestation around homelessness. But when I arrived, the city had recently done a “clean sweep” of the areas where the homeless had been camping under the expressway and access became increasingly difficult. At the same time as the political battle around homelessness had been pushed aside, another key issue was repeatedly raised at planning meetings throughout the city. A large hospital development, which residents claimed they had had no say in and that was going to raze a community. This case became my third case and as it did, I began to focus more on the process of urban politics through the public enactment of the rituals of meetings, as well as the grassroots political action many engaged in as they protested the loss of housing and what I eventually saw as the expulsion of the poor.

I followed these struggles through hundreds of hours of public meetings, dozens of small strategic planning gatherings, dusty boxes of collected materials in attics and offices, and hundreds of hours of conversations with people who were challenging the political process and the economic goals of the unelected powerbrokers, through walking the streets, protesting, and closely following local politicians. The struggles originally focused on housing as an expression of the post-disaster neoliberal atmosphere, but the longer I sat with the data the more it became clear that these were not struggles about housing but about the poor and their place in the neoliberal city. For those who fought the campaigns to remake the city, it was importantly about belonging, about their “right to the city”. The research moved from being focused on the material conditions of housing to being about the political ramifications of a wholesale removal of the poorest residents.

## The Ethnography of Politics

I first became interested in the ways in which people spoke to the state in their everyday lives and made visible their body politics while conducting fieldwork in Habana, Cuba, over a decade ago. My research then focused on the ways in which a working-class community, culturally rich in the Afro-Cuban religions, and outside of the typical tourist purview, navigated the tourist industry in order to make connections that could support it monetarily. I wondered, how do marginalized members of a not-very-tourist community gain positions and, thus, access to a limited market? The performances for tourists, though few and far between, were points of possible connection with valuable, albeit limited, foreign assets in the form of tourists. The performers could also hope to leverage their performance into a deeper connection with the local bureaucrat who organized and paid for these performances. These connections, because they were fleeting, became points of contention between members of this community and the local officials who were the filter through which tourists came to see this community.

What I found so interesting in this case was that the conflicts that emerged, particularly with the cultural workers, were much more about people's relationship to the state and a sense of political belonging in the community than past researchers had acknowledged. They were not just about people's need to access limited capital, they were also the way in which their self-worth as defined through the state and its officials, could be raised. Importantly, residents of the community contested how they were represented by local leaders. Who spoke for them?

One of the most important forms politics takes is through active and open critique of the state. No matter how discouraged people may be, "being political" is part of the everyday life. Even when people are actively avoiding politics (Eliasoph 1998), they are directly contributing to the constitution of the political space they occupy. Just because this discussion is more difficult with regard to Cuba, than say in the United States, does not mean that a place for critique had not been crafted. I became intrigued with the tactics people utilized to speak about the state in a place where protest, including most commentary and critique, was actively discouraged. People had subtle ways of speaking of Fidel Castro that were both critical and affectionate, as though speaking of someone they knew intimately. Sometimes they called him "the old man," other times they would grab an imaginary beard and pull it down as they expressed frustrations. Castro was the state as far as residents were concerned. Often this took place in people's living rooms over coffee or in the hot afternoon sitting in a chair in the shade. In Cuba, conversations focused on scheming bureaucrats, the inequalities brought about by the embargo, and the difficulties of making ends meet in a country where almost everyone had two jobs: the formal and the informal. And though the subject matter revolved around the difficulties of economic life, the conversations inevitably came back to deal with the political.

I was hearing the call to turn my sociological lens towards cities in my own backyard (Robinson 2002). When Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast and I realized that as much as the storm exposed deep inequalities, the recovery would point to a troubling question: where we are going now? The role of the federal government had been so contested and problematic in

the few weeks after the storm, that it became clear the relationship between the state (from local to national) would be a point of contestation in the years to come. How that intersected with the rebuilding efforts remained to be seen. In combination with criticism that pointed to the ineffectual government being a direct result of the new moment in our political economy, which included the eroding of state services in favor of private interests, New Orleans appeared the place to focus these questions about how and why people become political and the ways in which they do.

Work on the state is, in the last instance, work about power and domination and this study has been no exception. The study focused on three poor and working class communities that struggled to return to or retain their lives and livelihoods against a local elite which saw the future of New Orleans as a place without the “drag” of the poor on the city (as local developer Kabacoff so bluntly put it). The dual spatial fix, that converts underutilized property value and expels the poor, in the neoliberal city brought forth a political response to the exclusion of the poor.

### **What is a “political ethnography”?**

There has been growing interest in the study of politics from an ethnographic perspective. Much recent writing has come from within the field of political science, which has begun to take ethnographic methods more seriously (e.g. Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014; and Schatz 2009) but sociology is also beginning to consider what political ethnography means (Joseph, Mahler, and Auyero 2007; Baiocchi and Connor 2008). Part of this has to do with a certain provincialism that defines ethnography as addressing the “micro” and not the macro, therefore at working at the opposite scale of its object (the state). This tendency to see ethnography as micro-based has been disputed for some time (see Burawoy et al 1991, Burawoy et al 2000), so it is surprising that “political ethnographies” per se are still relatively rare. Baiocchi and Connor (2008: 140) write that if we define political ethnography as the “study of societal power (its distribution, reproduction, and transformation) and the structures, institutions, movements, and collective identities that both maintain and challenge it”, then there are three shapes these ethnographies can take: studies of “political actors and institutions”, “encounters with formal politics”, and the “lived experience of the political”. They divide these as a heuristic device, noting that often ethnographies are engaged in one or more of these areas.

In my study, actors became political because they were losing their homes or wanted to regain them: that is, in Baiocchi and Connor’s categorization, how actors become political. The study also addressed how institutions, people, and groups navigated and responded to local leaders, federal agencies, and other key governmental/political institutions. This was the political backdrop for these cases. But ultimately, the story is one of the lived experience of politics. For residents of New Orleans, the ultimate question is one of political belonging in an “exclusionary” society.

## The Politics of ethnography

“The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them.”

— Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky - Foucault Debate: On Human Nature* ((1971)2006: 171)

As the project was transformed and focus on the politics of poverty, it became evident that my position as researcher was becoming more fraught and dilemma filled. I was “thrown off balance by [my] presence in the world I study” (Burawoy 2009). At times, I was challenged to prove who I was and another time I was told that I should be careful about “pissing” off anyone too much out of fear for my own safety.

Many of the activities I engaged in were partisan in nature, and inherently so. At times, it became difficult for me to negotiate my identity as researcher and remind people that I was researching. Those who were on the front lines, wanted me to write an exposé, to follow their hunches and become part detective as I looked into the issue of speculation and ties between government and local business leaders. Many times, I found myself lost for hours digging around in archives, newspaper clippings, and public records trying to find the smoking gun only to remind myself that proof of corruption was not my focus. That is, I was interested in the mechanisms of disfranchisement, the techniques of domination, and illuminating them as a whole system. That there were speculators making money after the disaster was not surprising. But a desire to expose the often blatant exploitation of the disaster had me imagining I could derail the march of a particular form of progress in the city.

It is humbling to remind oneself of the limitations of “research.” At times, people were excited that I was in the process of writing about this given case, but less so when I explained it might be three years before I finished. It can be disheartening to think about the length of time needed to produce a particular type of work. And when one is embedded in activities around a given struggle one is constantly reminded that the completion of an intellectual product will come well after any meaningful local contribution can often be made.

### **A Subject-Centered Ethnography: Reconfiguring our “Rs”**

R’s have a hallowed place in our methodological discussions, from “reactivity” to “reliability” to “representativeness” and “rigor” these terms give us mnemonics that remind us that ethnography (particularly in sociology) is a *science*. Jack Katz (1983) wrote about the importance attending to the issues of reactivity, reliability, replicability, representativeness, especially when conducting ethnography. These goals, often left to quantitative analysis, can become a part of the standards of the qualitative researcher without the need to follow fixed-

design models. Sanchez-Jankowski (2002) also has a list of Rs to offer up: representation, responsibility, and reliability. How is data represented and how does the researcher know the 'data' observed is representative of the phenomena they wish to describe? What is the responsibility of the researcher for how the data will be presented? And what *can* they describe. The concerns are fundamentally about reliability and validity within ethnographic research, which comes from a desire to imitate positive and hard science. Both Katz and Sanchez-Jankowski offer responses to an age old disciplinary critique which views qualitative research as less rigorous. They offer important ways of considering the possibility of objectivity within ethnography.

Some scholars have suggested, though, that the illusive goal of "objectivity" for the social sciences is a vestige of enlightenment ideals (see Jackson 2008). It is based in a Cartesian world in which the possibility of discrete variables can exist outside of the researcher. It looks for causality and explanation based in the categories which have been set up through a scientific method. And it assumes a particular relationship between the researcher and knowledge. These implicit assumptions, conventions of the scientific universe, allow for systematic knowledge to be produced, but they can also obscure the subjects in our research. Defined as variables, data, and outcomes they become disembodied sets of points.

In a critique of Katz's four Rs, Burawoy (1998) notes that these "four tenants of positive sociology" are inherently problematic. And they are problematic not just for ethnographers, but also for the staple of objective science, survey research. In contrast to the principles of a positive science he advocates a reflexive science with the extended case method as its heart. His theory-centered ethnography is based on *extension* and *engagement* and makes space for ethnographic dialogue between the ground and macro-structures. And just like positive science has its context effects, the extended case method must be attuned to the power effects of domination, silencing, objectification, and normalization which can easily cloud the waters. The question remains, how, as researchers might we begin to address and consider these possible power effects in our work?

In the section that follows, I want to suggest a different way of thinking of research and, in particular, ethnography. I will advocate for subject-centered research over a variable-centered approach (a positivist approach) as a way to address the concerns of power raised in Burawoy's discussion of the extended case method. Subject-centered ethnography focuses on the researcher and those being researched as subjects, and recognizes that knowledge is built from relationships between people (including the researcher) and groups, and that these relationships are embedded in a political-institutional landscape that impacts the production of knowledge. By focusing on the tensions within the subjects of research, I hope to question relations of power by problematizing the production of knowledge. Not to be out of step, I too, will offer my own list of the Rs of subject-centered research, which will move up in scale from the researcher to larger set of institutions. These Rs are: reflexivity, relationship(s), and representation. And each moment also has a corresponding research dilemma. I will use examples from my research to explore these three moments.

Three concerns of subject-centered research	Associated Dilemma	Scale
Reflexivity	Existential	Researcher
Relationship(s)	Interpersonal	Group/Community
Representation	Political	Institutional

### *On dilemmas*

I was participating in a panel of graduate students conducting ethnographic research<sup>180</sup>. The undergraduate students asked us what were some of the difficulties in our work. As I listened to the difficulties that the other two students faced it occurred to me that each of us were dealing with a different dilemma. The first graduate student spoke about his ethnography in a start-up tech company, where what first started as a research assignment for a graduate course slowly turned into much deeper engagement with the start up and a full time job. He began to question his role as an insider and even whether he should remain a graduate student. The second researcher spoke about her work on the embodiment of class in a small winter resort community and how she had to face certain questions about her class position in relation to those with whom she was spending a lot of time around. The friendships she built felt fragile at times because there was always the question of “are you researching me right now” in any of the interactions. In my work in New Orleans, engaged in multiple housing struggles, I was often asked, “Whose side are you on?” It took a long time to gain the trust of some, whereas others were grateful someone was listening.

These capture the three dilemmas the researcher engaging in subject-centered ethnography faces: the existential, the interpersonal, and the political. The existential question raised by the grad student in the start up firm asks: “who am I?” The interpersonal question, raised by the relationships created in the ski-town for the second graduate student, asks: “What are the nature of the relationships I’ve created?” And the political question, illuminated by my own subjects asks: “Whose side am I on?” Depending on one’s research there may be varying combinations of these. Most researchers deal with all three at some point while they are in the field, but oftentimes one concern outweighs others, sometimes, one dilemma may greatly outweigh the others: the ethnographer who loses herself in a community faces an existential crisis more than a political crisis; those in the midst of social movements find they face a political dilemma; and the personal moves through most work, though I would suggest has a temporal nature to it. That is, as people begin removing themselves from the field, this dilemma strikes them more deeply.

These dilemmas are scalar and correspond to the importance of attending to reflexivity, relationships and representation. Like the nature of ethnography itself—particularly theoretically informed ethnography—we, the researchers, often vacillate between these different scales as we conduct our research. Below I sketch out the importance of the three subject-centered Rs and their corresponding dilemmas.

<sup>180</sup> With Ben Shestakovsky and Shelly Steward.

## Reflexivity, relationship, and representation in ethnographic research

Power is at the center of this dissertation, and it also remains a key concern methodologically. How can one research power and domination while making an effort to not reproduce power's effects? Using field examples from New Orleans, I explore some of these issues.

### Reflexivity

Reflexivity is "a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference" (Davies 1998: 4). Reflexivity in sociology has a fairly robust, if at times contentious, history, dealt with by a wide range of scholars ranging from Bourdieu and Wacquant's writings on reflexive sociology (1989 & 1992) to Burawoy's piece cited above on reflexive science, as well as feminist critiques of privileged positions within and outside of the academy (England 1994). All address the contentious conundrum that one's work and research may reproduce and even justify one's own privileged position.

For Bourdieu, reflexivity went beyond acknowledging one's class, race and gender position, to include a critique of the loci of the production of scientific knowledge and one's disposition ("the scholarly gaze") in relation to that. According to Bourdieu, "A genuinely reflexive sociology must avoid this 'ethnocentrism of the scientist' which consists in ignoring everything that the analyst injects in his perception of the object by virtue of the fact that he is placed outside of the object, that he observes it from afar and from above" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989:34). Burawoy's reflexive science acknowledges the intrinsic impossibility of objectivity and, instead, seeks to harness those ethnographic ambivalences as a form of intervention in the field itself. As he writes, "the reflexive perspective embraces participation as intervention precisely because it distorts and disturbs" (2009:44). These disturbances can create moments that illuminate hierarchies and domination in the field.

For Weber the researcher's responsibility was related to their authority. He advocated a removal of politics from the classroom and to focus on facts not questions of worth or value (146). This makes sense when thinking of politics writ large and problems that are created when those in political power at the level of the state have direct access to the classroom through a given mouthpiece over an given audience. But he never meant that the researcher could not have a position; only that one's position should not fog their ability to see the "inconvenient facts." The turn in sociology towards reflexivity was a way to methodologically address the impossibility of value-neutrality. But, it does nothing to decenter the epistemic centrality of the researcher as the producer/categorizer of knowledge.

Foucault proffers a reflexive moment as well, though it is less about placing oneself as a researcher in relation to a given structure, and more about the work that critique can do broadly to destabilize our discourses of knowledge. In particular, he would have us challenge our categories and theories as they relate to our practice (AME:262), and also ask what are the

"privileged objects" (AME: 266) of sociology? At times the post-structuralist critique has been poo-poo'd as not scientific enough or throwing out the baby (scientific project) with the bathwater (relations and reproduction of power within the academic system). However, Foucault, among others, raise methodological questions relating to how we create knowledge. As Jackson notes, "Researchers must now take account of the theory-dependence of observation: the way that our very experience of the world is inescapably mediated by the conceptual and linguistic apparatus that we bring to bear when producing knowledge of the world" (2008: 130).

### *The Existential dilemma: who am I?*

The existential dilemma is the deeply personal questioning that comes with research that challenges who we are and where we belong. These are the dilemmas researchers face as they begin to navigate themselves in the social space of the site they have chosen to conduct research on. The tensions can be particularly great when inserting oneself in a milieu very different from one's own, especially if one's social position places them in a privileged position. Much of the world around us is a precarious one: people facing the violence of hunger, the state, or relationships. Our position as academics automatically places us in a privileged location no matter where we come from. How do we attend and account for those differences in our work? Do those differences have any significant meaning for the conclusions we come to and how we come to them? The above authors would answer "yes" and for those of us who engage in reflective work, there is an existential burden that comes with it. A burden we should attend to. That tension is meaningful and not just indicative of our social position, but it is meaningful in our work itself. Similar to how Burawoy suggests that we can harness the ambivalence of objectivity, we can harness the ambivalence that comes with our social position and use it to further our analysis, particularly when our work addresses power.

Ambivalence about who we are also comes from our questioning our vocation itself. Like the graduate student who in the earlier story begins to wonder if he should not just remain in this new, well-paid work, where he's made connections and friends, sometimes our work can push us to question the academic profession itself. We should question our vocation and we should question what it means to be an academic. And though often we are told questioning signifies a lack of commitment, I would say quite the opposite, it is through questioning that our health as well as the health of our discipline remains.

### **Relationship(s)**

Our research is always about relationships. For some, that relationship is between variables, for others it is between people. In a subject-centered ethnography, our relationship to ourselves (again, as a subject) as well as those with whom we engage as subjects is most important, but we also have relationships to our discipline, and to other colleagues as well that influence our work. That we are answerable to both scientific audience as well as those being studied is the "double hermeneutic" of our work (Sayer 2000, cited in Davies).

What do we owe the people we study? Do we only owe them the act of making "visible the invisible... mak[ing] the private public"? (Burawoy 2007: 29) Methodology normally asks: what are the appropriate means to study the world and how do we know they are valid? But, it rarely asks what and who we owe for making our research possible? It still assumes the unit of analysis is the researcher: they are producing the knowledge (or at least greatly involved in its dissemination). The researcher still remains central, even in participatory action research. But we all implicitly know, though we may not theoretically address it, that what is produced beyond the knowledge are relationships. These are fed over time in the field and often continue long past the time the researcher has left.

Ethnography requires a focus on practice and processes in the everyday. It is not only about the meanings people give something, but about the relationship between the way in which they go about doing something and the meaning they associate with that action. It is inherently relational, and in multiple ways. First, as noted, one must attend to the relationship between meanings, structure, and practice. Secondly, and importantly, one does this through *relationships* with people, often people that one becomes quite close with. Ethnographers live in communities and they become part of them (whether cities, shop floors, fast food restaurants, a high school, or immigrant communities on the border). They too are part of a politics of belonging as they grapple with the sense of being and becoming, along with the needs of objectivity and distance.

*The Interpersonal Dilemma: What is the nature of the relationships I've created?*

How do we write about the people we are engaged with and remain honest to our sociological perspective, as well as respectful of our interpersonal connections. At times we make decisions, we cut certain items, we leave out certain details. Many times it is because they are not useful in the story we are sharing, but sometimes we have to leave things out (or we choose to leave things out) for other reasons. This becomes an issue of what is our responsibility and to whom?

One makes decisions about particular processes that are addressed. One topic I struggled with in my research in New Orleans is the role of authoritarian male leadership in some New Orleans organizations. This came up in a number of groups and I wondered whether I should address it and if I were to, how. One of my concerns was around some form of confidentiality. There would be no way to offer some critique without it being clear who I was writing about. I, also, was not using patriarchy in my analysis (though one may critique its absence). The dilemma becomes, in a struggle with preexisting power dynamics, one in which you have been often granted intimate connection and knowledge, is it your 'responsibility' as a researcher to report any form of domination because you 'observed' it? The very way I have set up this question indicates my perspective on it, that is, there is a level of arrogance that assumes that all that we observe is fodder for exposition, and that all that we observe is 'real' in some way. Yet, what I observed was, indeed, a form of domination. The choice to not include it was based on some sense of confidentiality, as well as my particular theoretical focus. I was also aware that an exposition of sorts might overshadow the critique I was offering of other

institutions. On the other hand, it might be that these are the “inconvenient facts” which Weber tells us we should not shy from. I still am unsure whether by not fully addressing it I may be reproducing and legitimating domination and it is a dilemma I have sat with for some time.

## Representation

Representation turns the question of authority, output, and action around to decenter the researcher. When in our research we are called on by our “subjects” to speak, are we speaking for them, for their categories, do we speak against the imbalances of power? Representation here is not representation as a measure of positive science (as Katz (2004) and Sanchez-Jankowski (2002) emphasize), but representation as a question of one’s position and ability to “speak for” those one is researching. Post-colonial literature has offered the most sustained critique on the politics of representation. The systems of representation, those in particular which have the most legitimacy within the academic world, can, in fact, ‘silence’ those who we are writing about, what Spivak (1988) calls, “double displacement”.

When doing research within the political realm, whether politics writ large or writ small, the dual nature of representation as theorized by Spivak is a key entrance point for theorizing the role and position of the researcher vis-a-vis those she is studying. Though Spivak’s work is about the possibilities of agency within a particular setting (and the question of the researcher is largely absent), it is a useful framework with which to think about questions of speaking for and on the behalf of others, particularly when involved in an on the ground struggle. In our research, when we are called on by our “subjects” to speak, are we speaking for them, for the categories we’ve created, do we speak against the imbalances of power?

In my work, one of the ways in which to move beyond the tension of objectifying the subject is by focusing on processes. I aim not to portray people sympathetically, because that embroils one in the question of one’s position to represent people. I am committed to expose processes (and in my particular case “techniques” of power) which people resist against. Nevertheless, I am constantly with people who I share space with, which is why the question of representation (in terms of speaking) must be addressed. Representation is inherently a question of politics and power, which leads into the final dilemma.

### *Political Dilemma: Whose side am I on?*

Whose side? For Howard Becker (1967) this question came back to a concern about where “values” lie in our research when we write about a “subordinate” group. Here Becker is making a similar suggestion as Foucault, albeit coming from a distinctly different theoretical tradition. Both suggest that our research, particularly that which takes domination as its focus, will inevitably be radical because it will illuminate and destabilize relations of power and the internal skeleton of legitimacy which helps to maintain and sustain those relations. “Whose side are you on?” was also a question I was asked directly while doing my research. Not from those in nominally “subordinate” positions, but rather from those in powerful positions who were uncomfortable with the ambivalence of my research status. How can I respond to this question? Perhaps, it isn’t the question we should be asking or answering. Certainly, responding

with “I am on the side of science” is ridiculous, as though science were in a fixed position. The question of whose side, asks for us to engage in a Manichaeic worldview, and what we should be exposing is how that view is itself constructed and what it obscures.

Politics is not partisan warfare but about “the development of the modern society and the political management of society” (Foucault 1994:128). This is what Foucault offers us: an analysis of the expansion of power as a phenomena, what it produces, and where it is located (everywhere). The irony in using Foucault is that his stated objective was not power but rather the history of us as “subjects”. Given that I am calling for a subject-centered ethnography the use of Foucault might be seen as problematic. But I think it is still useful. Foucault sought to analyze and uncover the “new economy of power relations” (128). What Foucault advocated was using the points of resistance as a way through which to “bring to light” these power relations. This is, methodologically speaking, the foundation of my politics of visibility. I am not only analyzing what I see as a material form of politics that is responding to the neoliberal state’s drive towards the exclusion of the poor, but the very nature of writing and research is a way in which I can engage in bringing to light the new economy of power relations.

Once our research is out in the world, however, we have little control over how it is used.<sup>181</sup> As much as I hope it might destabilize and challenge the legitimacy of the exclusionary politics of space, it may serve other means. Visibility is a multi-sided phenomena, as my research on the Lower Ninth Ward highlights. But perhaps it is possible that ethnography can offer more. Edward Schatz (2009) believes that “[e]thnography’s role is not so much to produce abstract knowledge as to provide new ways of seeing and thereby challenge existing, often hegemonic, categories of practice and analysis” (15). And in this way, these “new ways of seeing” are making visible underlying structures of domination which are ripe for exposure.

## Conclusion

The goal of social sciences is the “capacity and the will to deliberately take up a *stance* towards the world and to lend it a *meaning*”  
— Max Weber “Objectivität”<sup>182</sup>

Sociology in many respects remains a positivist endeavor. It assumes an output that is a culmination (through the logic of scientific study), assumes particular social laws (in the form of our theoretical constructs), and assumes a claim of falsifiability and validity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 4-10). Where it can differ is in its relationship to those (or with whom) it studies. Rather than taking a decidedly 'neutral' stance, it acknowledges its connection to the social world it studies. The point, however, is not to merely understand and interpret from the

<sup>181</sup> Burawoy (1998, 2007) explains how his work was used by the mine executives in a way he could have never expected.

<sup>182</sup> Max Weber, ‘Die “Objectivität” Sozialwissenschaftlicher und Sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis’, in Elizabeth Flitner (ed.), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Potsdam: Internet-Ausgabe, (<http://www.uni-potsdam.de/u/paed/Flitner/Flitner/Weber/>), 1999), pp. 154–5.; as cited in Jackson (2008).

perspective of those social spaces we study, but to expose the forms of inequality and domination that exist, and that is a decidedly political act. We should not run from the difficult dilemmas we face, but rather they should become part of the research process. The dilemmas are an intrinsic part of the dialectic nature of research. They get at the heart of the multiple scales that are involved when conducting ethnographic work. It is embodied work because of it.

## Reference List

2008. "Policy Basics: Introduction to Public Housing" (December 18, 2008) *Center for Budget and Policy Priorities*. <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2528>. Retrieved 1/4/13
- Adams, Vincanne. 2013. *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*. Durham and London: Duke University Press Books.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Anon. 2006. "LSU HCSD Statement on Charity Hospital" LSU Press Release. June 8.
- Anon. 2007. "Melee Breaks Out at New Orleans City Hall" WDSU News. Dec 20. Retrieved 8/8/12. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_OUake6ta0&feature=related](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_OUake6ta0&feature=related))
- Anon. 2007. "New Orleans City Hall Protest - December 20, 2007 - Video 3." Times-Picayune video. Retrieved August 13, 2014 ([http://blog.nola.com/updates/2007/12/protesters\\_speak\\_out\\_outside\\_c.html](http://blog.nola.com/updates/2007/12/protesters_speak_out_outside_c.html)).
- Arena, John. 2011. "Balck and White, Unite and Fight? Identity Politics and New Orleans's Post-Katrina Public Housing Movement" in Cedric Johnson, ed, *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Arena, John. 2012. *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Baiocchi, G., and B. T. Connor. 2008. "The Ethnos in the Polis: Political Ethnography as a Mode of Inquiry." *Sociology Compass* 2(1):139–55.
- Barclay, Harold B. 1982. *People Without Government*. London: Kahn & Averill with Cienfuegos Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2004. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Bayat, Asef. 1997. *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Becker, Howard S. 1967. "Whose Side Are We On?" *Social Problems* 14(3):239–47.
- Blakely, Edward J. 2011. *My Storm: Managing the Recovery of New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Blomley, Nicholas. 2004. *Unsettling the City: Urban Politics and the Politics of Property*. New York: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Loïc Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. 1st edition. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Brenner, Neil, and Nik Theodore. 2002. "Cities and the Geographies of 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism'." *Antipode* 34(3):349–79.
- Briggs, Xavier de Sousa. 2006. "After Katrina: Rebuilding places and Lives". *City and Community*. 5(2): 119-128.
- Bristol, Katharine G. 1991. "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth." *Journal of Architectural Education (1984-)* 44(3):163–71.

Colom

- Buckley, Cara. 2010. "Public Housing Repairs Can't Keep Pace With Need." *The New York Times*, October 24. Retrieved August 13, 2014 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/25/nyregion/25repairs.html>).
- Burawoy, Michael. 1991. "The extended Case Method" from Burawoy et al *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method" *Sociological Theory*. 16(1): 4-33
- Burawoy, Michael. 2009. *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries Four Decades Four Great Transformations and one Theoretical Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Campanella, Richard. 2010. "Delta Urbanism and New Orleans: After" *The Design Observer Group*. 4/1/10. (<http://places.designobserver.com/feature/delta-urbanism-and-new-orleans-after/12978/>) retrieved 8/10/12
- Capo, Bill. 2014. "Homeless Camp Concerns Grow over Aggressive Panhandling." *WWLTV wwltv.com*. Retrieved August 14, 2014 (<http://www.wwltv.com/news/local/Homeless-Camp-Concerns-Grow-About-Aggressive-Panhandling-266797941.html>).
- Cass, Julia, and Peter Whoriskey. 2006. "New Orleans to Raze Public Housing." *The Washington Post*, December 8. Retrieved August 13, 2014 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/07/AR2006120701482.html>).
- Certeau, Michel de. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chaskin, Robert and Mark Joseph. 2012 "Chicago's Public Housing Transformation: What Happened to the Residents?" Research Brief for Mixed-Income Development Study, University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration
- Chatterjee, Partha. 2004. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chomsky, Noam and Michel Foucault. 2006. *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature*. New York: New Press, The.
- Clastres, Pierre. 1987. *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*. New York: Zone Books.
- Colten, Craig E. 2005. *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Condon, Stephanie. 2010. "Pat Robertson Haiti Comments Spark Uproar." *CBSNews.com*. January 14, 2010. Retrieved August 11, 2014 (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/pat-robertson-haiti-comments-spark-uproar/>).
- Crowly, Sheila. 2006. "Reclaiming New Orleans' working-class communities" in *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*, Hartman, Chester W., and Gregory D. Squires, eds. New York: Routledge.
- Crowly, Sheila. 2006. "Where is Home? Housing for Low-Income People After the 2005 Hurricanes" in *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* eds Chester Harman and Gregory D. Squires. New York: Routledge.

Colom

- Dantas, Luisa, and Michael Boedigheimer. 2007. "New Orleans City Council Shuts Down Public Housing Debate." *Youtube.com*. Retrieved August 5, 2013 ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMBWAXfGsc4&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMBWAXfGsc4&feature=youtube_gdata_player)).
- Davies, Charlotte Aull. 2008. *Reflexive Ethnography: a Guide to Researching Selves Andothers*. 2nd ed. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Dawson, M. C. 2006. "AFTER the DELUGE: Publics and Publicity in Katrina's Wake." 1–11.
- Debord, Guy. 1995. *The Society of the Spectacle*. 1st paperback ed. New York: Zone Books.
- DeFilippis, James. 2004. *Unmaking Goliath: Community Control in the Face of Global Capital*. New York: Routledge.
- DeFilippis, James. 2013. "On Spatial Solutions to Social Problems" *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*. 15(2): 69-72
- Denzin, N. K. 2006. "Katrina and the Collapse of Civil Society in New Orleans." *Space and Culture* 9(1):95–99.
- Dikeç, Mustafa. 2001. "Justice and the Spatial Imagination." *Environment and Planning A* 33(10):1785–1805.
- Eaton, Leslie. 2007. "In New Orleans, Plan to Raze Low-Income Housing Draws Protest." *The New York Times*, December 14. Retrieved August 13, 2014 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/14/us/nationalspecial/14orleans.html>).
- Eichhorn, M.L. 2009. "Sacrificial Lands" *Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities*. Spring: 37-43.
- Eliasoph, Nina. 1998. *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Elliot, Debbie. 2013. "Post-Katrina New Orleans A Story of Modern Pioneering" Morning Edition, National Public Radio. August 29, 2013. Retrieved August 11, 2014 (<http://www.npr.org/2013/08/29/216506079/post-katrina-new-orleans-a-story-of-modern-pioneering>)
- England, Kim V. L. 1994. "Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research\*." *The Professional Geographer* 46(1):80–89.
- Filosa, Gwen. 2007. "Anger Hits Home for Housing Agency" *The Times-Picayune*. September 1. Retrieved 4/10/12 (<http://www.nola.com/timespic/stories/index.ssf?/base/news-7/1188626629165060.xml&coll=1>)
- Finger, Davida and Rachel E. Luft. 2011 "No Shelter: Disaster Politics in Louisiana and the Struggle for Human Rights" in Hertel, Shareen and Kathryn Libal, eds. *Human Rights United States Beyond Exceptionalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Flaherty, Jordan. 2010. *Floodlines: Community and Resistance from Katrina to the Jena Six*. Chicago, Ill: Haymarket Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1994 "Why Study Power: The Question of the Subject" in eds Paul Rabinow and Nokolas Rose *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 2nd Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books.

Colom

- Fox, Anne. 2006. "New Orleans Rally: Save Charity Hospital." *People's World* April 7, 2006; Reckdahl, Katy  
2003 Who's Caring? <http://www.bestofneworleans.com/gambit/whos-caring/Content?oid=1242025>; accessed 11/30/1
- Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* (25/26):56–80.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2000. "Rethinking Recognition." *New Left Review* (3):107–20.
- Freund, David M. P. 2007. *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fussell, Elizabeth. 2007. "Constructing New Orleans, Constructing Race: A Population History of New Orleans." *The Journal of American History* 94(3):846–55.
- Giroux, Henry A. 2006. "Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability." *College Literature* 33(3):171–96.
- Goetz, Edward Glenn. 2003. *Clearing the Way: Deconcentrating the Poor in Urban America*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Gotham, Kevin Fox, and Miriam Greenberg. 2014. *Crisis Cities: Disaster and Redevelopment in New York and New Orleans*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gunewardena, Nandini. 2008. "Human security versus neoliberal approaches to disaster recovery" in Nandini Gunewardena and Mark Schuller, eds. 2008. *Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Neoliberal Strategies in Disaster Reconstruction*. Lanham, Md: AltaMira Press.
- Hackworth, Jason. 2007. *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press
- Hall, Gwendolyn Midlo. 1992. *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Hammer, David. 2007. "Housing Agencies Sue to Remove Protesters - Group Is Occupying St. Bernard Complex." *Times-Picayune*, January 23. Retrieved August 13, 2014 ([http://www.nola.com/treme-hbo/index.ssf/2007/01/housing\\_agencies\\_sue\\_to\\_remove.html](http://www.nola.com/treme-hbo/index.ssf/2007/01/housing_agencies_sue_to_remove.html)).
- Hammersley, Martyn and Paul Atkinson. 1995. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. 2nd ed. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Hancock, Ange-Marie. 2004. *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen*. NYU Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge
- Hartnell, Anna. 2009. "Katrina Tourism and a Tale of Two Cities: Visualizing Race and Class in New Orleans." *American Quarterly* 61(3):723–47.
- Harvey, David. 1989. "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism." *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 71(1):3–17.
- Harvey, David. 2000. *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh University Press.

Colom

- Harwood, Matthew. 2007. "Port of Houston Security District could Be National Model" Security Management: Security's Web connection. 8/15/07. (<http://www.securitymanagement.com/news/port-houston-security-district-could-be-national-model>). Retrieved 4/21/10
- Hensel, Bill Jr. 2007. "Partnership created to upgrade port security" Houston Chronicle. August 15, 2007. (<http://www.chron.com/neighborhood/pasadena-news/article/Partnership-created-to-upgrade-port-security-1827215.php>). Retrieved 4/21/10.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Hirsch, A. R. 2007. "Fade to Black: Hurricane Katrina and the Disappearance of Creole New Orleans." *The Journal of American History* 94(3):752.
- Housing and Urban Development. 2006. "HUD outlines Aggressive plan to bring families back to New Orleans Public Housing" Press Release, June 14 HUD.
- Housing Authority of New Orleans. 2012. [http://www.hano.org/our\\_story.aspx](http://www.hano.org/our_story.aspx); accessed 11/21/14
- Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus. 2008. "Foregrounding Ontology: Dualism, Monism, and IR Theory." *Review of International Studies* 34(01):129–53.
- Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Vintage Books.
- Jervis, Rick. 2007. "66% are back in New Orleans, but basic services still lag" USA Today. 8/13/2007. retrieved 8.8.12 ([http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-08-12-neworleans\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-08-12-neworleans_N.htm))
- Joseph, Lauren, Matthew Mahler, and Javier Auyero, eds. 2007. *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography*. New York: Springer. Retrieved July 27, 2014 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-72594-9>).
- Katz, Jack. 2004. "On the Rhetoric and Politics of Ethnographic Methodology." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 595(1):280–308.
- Kelly, John. 2011. "1951, Tulane Avenue reborn as The Miracle Mile" The Times-Picayune. April 19. Retrieved 7/15/14. ([http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2011/04/tulane\\_avenue\\_reborn\\_as\\_the\\_mi.html](http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2011/04/tulane_avenue_reborn_as_the_mi.html))
- Klein, Naomi. 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. 1st ed. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt.
- Klinenberg, Eric. 2003. *Heat Wave: a Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Chicago, Ill. ; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Koritz, Amy, and George J. Sanchez, eds. 2009. *Civic Engagement in the Wake of Katrina*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Retrieved August 12, 2014.
- Krupa, Michelle. 2007 "Brad Pitt busy making it right in the Lower 9" *blog.nola.com, Times-Picayune*; 12/2/07 ([http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/12/brad\\_pitt\\_busy\\_making\\_it\\_right.html](http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/12/brad_pitt_busy_making_it_right.html)) retrieved 8/9/12

Colom

- Landphair, Juliette. 1999. "Sewerage, Sidewalks, and Schools: The New Orleans Ninth Ward and Public School Desegregation." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 40(1):35–62.
- Landphair, Juliette. 2007. "'The Forgotten People of New Orleans': Community, Vulnerability, and the Lower Ninth Ward." *The Journal of American History* 94(3):837–45.
- Lefebvre, Henri. (1991). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.) Oxford, UK: Blackwell. (Original work published 1974)
- Lefebvre, Henri. 2003. *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 2014. "Dissolving City, Planetary Metamorphosis." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32(2):203–5.
- Levy, Diane K., Zach McDade, and Kassie Dumlao Bertumen. 2010. "Effects from Living in Mixed-Income Communities for Low-Income Families: A Review of the Literature." *Urban Institute*. Retrieved August 13, 2014 (<http://www.urban.org/publications/412292.html>).
- Lewis, Peirce F. 2003. *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*. Center for American Places.
- Li, Tania Murray. 1996. "Images of Community: Discourse and Strategy in Property Relations." *Development and Change* 27(3):501–27.
- Lipsitz, George. 2006. "Learning from New Orleans: The Social Warrant of Hostile Privatism and Competitive Consumer Citizenship." *Cultural Anthropology* 21(3):451–68.
- Liu, Amy and Allison Plyer. 2007. "The New Orleans Index: Second Anniversary Special Edition" Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program and the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center.
- Long, Alecia P. 2007. "Poverty Is the New Prostitution: Race, Poverty, and Public Housing in Post-Katrina New Orleans." *The Journal of American History* 94(3):795–803.
- Luft, Rachel E. 2008. "Looking for Common Ground: Relief Work in Post-Katrina New Orleans as an American Parable of Race and Gender Violence." *NWSA Journal* 20(3):5–31.
- Luft, Rachel E. with Shana Griffin. 2008. "A Status Report on Housing in New Orleans After Katrina: An Intersectional Analysis." In *Katrina and the Women of New Orleans*, eds. Beth Willinger. New Orleans, LA: Tulane University Newcomb college Center for Research on Women.
- Lukensmeyer, Carolyn J. 2007. "Large-scale Citizen Engagement and the Rebuilding of New Orleans: A Case Study." *National Civic Review* 96(3):3–15.
- Macfarquhar, Neil. 2010. "Haiti Is Again a Canvas for Approaches to Aid." *The New York Times*, January 31. Retrieved December 16, 2014 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/31/world/americas/31reconstruct.html>).
- Mack, Vicki and Allison Plyer. 2014. "Neighborhood Growth Rates: Growth continues through 2014 in New Orleans neighborhoods" *The Data Center* New Orleans, LA.
- MacLeod, Gordon. 2011. "Urban Politics Reconsidered Growth Machine to Post-democratic City?" *Urban Studies* 48(12):2629–60.

Colom

- Mahoney, Martha. 1990. "Law and Racial Geography: Public Housing and the Economy in New Orleans." *Stanford Law Review* 42(5):1251–90.
- Masquelier, Adeline. 2006. "Why Katrina's Victims Aren't Refugees: Musings on a 'Dirty' Word." *American Anthropologist* 108(4):735–43.
- Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Mitchell, Don. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 2002. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mollenkopf, John H. 1983. *The Contested City*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Moore, Leonard N. 2010. *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American Activism from World War II to Hurricane Katrina*. LSU Press.
- Morris, Jerome E. 2008. "Out of New Orleans Race, Class, and Researching the Katrina Diaspora." *Urban Education* 43(4):463–87.
- Morris, Jerome E. 2008. "Out of New Orleans Race, Class, and Researching the Katrina Diaspora." *Urban Education* 43(4):463–87.
- Nussbaum, Martha Craven. 2004. *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- O'Connor, Maura R. n.d. "Two Years Later, Haitian Earthquake Death Toll in Dispute." *Columbia Journalism Review*. ([http://www.cjr.org/behind\\_the\\_news/one\\_year\\_later\\_haitian\\_earthqu.php](http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/one_year_later_haitian_earthqu.php)). Retrieved November 5, 2014
- Ott, Kenneth Brad. 2012. "The Closure of New Orleans' Charity Hospital After Hurricane Katrina: A Case of Disaster Capitalism." University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations. Paper 1472.
- Ouroussoff, Nicolai. 2006. "All Fall Down." In *The New York Times*, Section 4, Page 1. November 19
- Ouroussoff, Nicolai. 2007. "History Vs. Homogeneity in New Orleans Housing Fight." *The New York Times*, February 22. Retrieved November 21, 2014 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/22/arts/design/22hous.html>).
- Parker, Nancy. 2014. "Rental Demand in Metro Area Soars to New Heights." *www.fox8live.com*. Retrieved August 14, 2014 (<http://www.fox8live.com/story/26000452/rental-demand-in-metro-area-soars-to-new-heights>).
- Penner, D'Ann R., Keith C. Ferdinand, and Jimmy Carter. 2009. *Overcoming Katrina: African American Voices from the Crescent City and Beyond*. 1 edition. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Peter Odabashian, Andrew Kolker, Louis Alvarez, Paul Stekler. 2014. *Getting back to Abnormal, 2014*, documentary film
- Ranci re, Jacques. 2004. "Introducing Disagreement." *Angelaki* 9(3):3–9.

Colom

- Raskin, David. 2012 "Revisiting the HOPE VI Public Housing Program's Legacy" *Governing States and Localities*. May 2012. Retrieved 9/2/12. <http://www.governing.com/topics/health-human-services/housing/gov-revisiting-hope-public-housing-programs-legacy.html>
- Reckdahl, Katy. 2012. "Iberville public housing redevelopment discussion is short on answers" *The Times-Picayune*. May 31. Retrieved 8/8/13. ([http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/05/iberville\\_public\\_housing\\_redev\\_1.html](http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/05/iberville_public_housing_redev_1.html))
- Reichl, Alexander J. 1999. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Volume 21, Number 2, pages 169–187
- Rich, Nathaniel. 2012. "Jungleland: The Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans Gives New Meaning to 'Urban Growth'" *nytimes.com*. *New York Times*. March 21. Retrieved 8/7/12 ([http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/magazine/the-lower-ninth-ward-new-orleans.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/magazine/the-lower-ninth-ward-new-orleans.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)).
- Robertson, D. Osei. 2008. "Property and Security, Political Chamelions, and Dysfunctional Regime" in *Seeking Higher Ground*, eds Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Robinson, Jennifer. 2002. "Global and World Cities: a View from Off the Map." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26(3):531–54.
- Rolnik, Raquel. 2010. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context" United Nations Human Rights Council.
- Rose, Gillian. 1997. "Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics." *Progress in Human Geography* 21(3):305–20.
- Roy, Ananya; and Alsayyad, Nezar, eds. 2004. *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia*. Lanham (MD): Lexington Books.
- Salvaggio, John E. 1992. *New Orleans' Charity Hospital: A Story of Physicians, Politics, and Poverty*. LSU Press.
- Sanchez-Jankowski, Martin. 2002. "Representation, Responsibility, and Reliability in Participant-Observation" In *Qualitative Research in Action* ed Tim May, pp. 144-159. New York: Sage.
- Sandalow, Marc. 2005. "Katrina Thrusts Race and Poverty onto National Stage / Bush and Congress Under Pressure to Act." *SFGate*. Retrieved August 12, 2014 (<http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Katrina-thrusts-race-and-poverty-onto-national-2606416.php>).
- Sayer, A. 2000. *Realism and Social Science*. London: Sage.
- Schatz, Edward, ed. 2009. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to The study of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Seidman, Karl F. 2013. *Coming Home to New Orleans*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Sexton, Jared. 2007. "The Obscurity of Black Suffering." In *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation*. Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press.

Colom

- Smith, Neil. 1996. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Smith, Neil. 1996. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Somers, Margaret R. 2008. *Genealogies of Citizenship: Markets, Statelessness, and the Right to Have Rights*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Somers, Margaret R. 2008. *Genealogies of Citizenship: Markets, Statelessness, and the Right to Have Rights*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sontag, Susan. 2011. *On Photography*. Macmillan.
- Sorkin, Michael, and Anthony Fontenot. 2014. *New Orleans Under Reconstruction*. New York: Verso.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. "'Can the Subaltern Speak?'" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty and Judith Butler. 2011. *Who Sings the Nation-State?: Language, Politics, Belonging*. Reprint edition. London; New York: Seagull Books.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. 2009. "The Antinomies of the Postpolitical City: In Search of a Democratic Politics of Environmental Production." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33(3):601–20.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. 2011. "Interrogating Post-democratization: Reclaiming Egalitarian Political Spaces." *Political Geography* 30(7):370–80.
- Thomas, Lynnell L. 2009. "'Roots Run Deep Here': The Construction of Black New Orleans in Post-Katrina Tourism Narratives." *American Quarterly* 61(3):749–68.
- Thompson, Christie. 2013 "Disparate Impact and Fair Housing: Seven Cases You Should Know." *ProPublica*. Retrieved November 11, 2014 (<http://www.propublica.org/article/disparate-impact-and-fair-housing-seven-cases-you-should-know>).
- Tyler, Imogen. 2013. *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. New York: Zed Books.
- Vale, Lawrence J. 2000. *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 1989. "Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu." *Sociological Theory* 7(1):26–63.
- Wacquant, Loïc, Tom Slater, and Virgílio Borges Pereira. 2014. "Territorial Stigmatization in Action." *Environment and Planning A* 46(6):1270–80.
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2001. "Deadly Symbiosis When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh." *Punishment & Society* 3(1):95–133.
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2007. "Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality." *Thesis Eleven* 91(1):66–77.
- Wagner, Peter and Susan Edwards. 2006. "New Orleans by the Numbers" *Dollars & Sense*. March/April.

Colom

- Walsh, Bill and Jan Moler. 2007 "Feds Want Plans for Downtown Hospital Scaled Back." *NOLA.com*. June 21. Retrieved December 9, 2014 ([http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/06/feds\\_want\\_plans\\_for\\_downtown\\_h.html](http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/06/feds_want_plans_for_downtown_h.html)).
- Weaver, D. 2007. "Housing officials claim surplus" *nola.com Times Picayune*. Retrieved 5/20/13. [http://blog.nola.com/updates/2007/12/housing\\_officials\\_claim\\_surplu.html](http://blog.nola.com/updates/2007/12/housing_officials_claim_surplu.html)
- Weil, Frederick. 2010. "The Rise of Community Engagement After Katrina." In *The New Orleans Index at Five*. Washington: Brookings Institution and Greater New Orleans Community Data Center.
- Wilch, Rachel Meredith. 2007. "Shades of Gray: Race, Class and Coalition Building in the Fight to Save New Orleans' Public Housing" Master's Thesis, MIT
- Williamson, Abigail. 2007. *The Role of Citizen Participation in Legitimizing the Unified New Orleans Plan*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Willie Drye. 2005. "Hurricane Katrina: The Essential Time Line" National Geographic News September 14, [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/09/0914\\_050914\\_katrina\\_timeline.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/09/0914_050914_katrina_timeline.html) Retrieved November 6, 2014
- Woods, Clyde. 2009. "Katrina's World: Blues, Bourbon, and the Return to the Source." *American Quarterly* 61(3):427-53.
- Woods, Clyde. 2009. "Les Misérables of New Orleans: Trap Economics and the Asset Stripping Blues, Part 1." *American Quarterly* 61(3):769-96.
- Wooten, Tom. 2012. *We Shall Not Be Moved: Rebuilding Home in the Wake of Katrina*. Beacon Press
- Wright, B.H. 1990. "Blacks in New Orleans: The City That Care Forgot," in *In Search of The New South: The Black Urban Experience In the 1970s and 1980s*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press 1990.
- Yanow, Dvora, and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds. 2014. *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*. 2nd ed. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharp, Inc.
- Yiftachel, Oren. 2009. "Critical theory and 'gray space': Mobilization of the colonized" *City*,13:2, 246-263
- Zizek, Slavoj. 1999. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso