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## Everyday Perseverance & Meaningful Toil: Mapping the (In)distinguishable Process of Recovery Post-hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, Louisiana

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EVERYDAY PERSEVERANCE & MEANINGFUL TOIL:  
MAPPING THE (IN)DISTINGUISHABLE PROCESS OF RECOVERY  
POST-HURRICANE KATRINA, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

by

Monique Hassman

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Anthropology

at

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August 2019

## ABSTRACT

### EVERYDAY PERSEVERANCE & MEANINGFUL TOIL: MAPPING THE (IN)DISTINGUISHABLE PROCESS OF RECOVERY POST-HURRICANE KATRINA, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

by

Monique Hassman

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019  
Under the Supervision of Professor William W. Wood

For nearly a century, anthropological scholarship on disaster has contributed to advancing emergency preparation and management, however examination focusing on survivors' return and responses in the *aftermath* of catastrophe, specifically the ways in which residents work to recover—if at all—remains far from comprehensive, especially in urban, post-industrial settings.

Following calamity, what remains? What is disturbed? What becomes reconstructed? Who repairs the tattered social fabric or restores the built environment? And how do these processes transpire? These questions summarize the research interests of this dissertation, which examines the place-making practices not of experts or administrators, but, rather, those enacted by (extra) ordinary community members of the Lower Ninth Ward post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans. Specifically, this investigation of place-making in the aftermath of disaster focuses on four main practices: residents-led tours, civic engagement, community establishments/businesses, and commemorative events. Although these practices and the places residents' make through these efforts entail ephemerality, I maintain that this toil is particularly meaningful in

distinguishing how survivors confront loss, disorientation, and trauma while simultaneously cultivating healing in their lives, livelihoods, and landscape. The findings of this project include that the multiple and fragmentary practices of residents promote a return to the everyday in Katrina's wake and these commingled ways of operating, reveal the adaptive and empowering response of collective autonomy.

People's sense of place is a well-studied theme by scholars from diverse disciplines, yet there is much to learn from analyzing this critical dimension of the human condition within a post-disaster context. In gathering data with both long-established ethnographic techniques (prolonged ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation) and innovative, geographic information systems (GIS), this research makes a distinct contribution to the anthropological knowledge and literature focused on sociocultural and spatiotemporal transformation following disasters. This cross-disciplinary approach serves as a novel means for anthropologists to holistically explore the intertwining dynamics involved when previously familiar aspects of life become significantly disrupted including, but are not limited to: environmental, linguistic, historic, political, spiritual, and symbolic. Consideration of these aspects of the lives of those living in the wake of disaster illuminates complexity of remaking home while legitimizing the desire to return to it – especially urgent matters in this era of global climate change.

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This work is dedicated to all affected by disaster—directly and implicitly  
(including those yet to be affected)—who remind us of our fragility and fortitude.

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## PREFACE

Growing up I had the opportunity to participate in a local, community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm. About an hour ride on my bicycle from town to this 20-acre river valley parcel, is where much of my appreciation for plants, people, and politics grew. At thirteen years of age, and by way of a substantially-reduced CSA membership rate that one could pay with modest babysitting and paper route earnings, I became the youngest “single adult member” of this community. Little did I know then how formative that experience would become for me over the years. I became familiar with the art of a collective where each season, the diversity of participants strengthened and complicated the organization and operation of the farm. This fostered my respect for the contingent nature of collaborative efforts and revealed to me the importance of conflict resolution strategies.

Participation in this community also influenced a range of my perspectives. For instance, cultivating knowledge about farming as a way of life brought to light how this idea differs from farming as a way to make a living, and why the difference between the two has relevance. Such perceptions developed at an early age when adult farm members discussed capitalism—particularly how it conflicted with so many aspects of the farm’s operation—as they taught me how to write checks to pay our utilities and taxes and balance the farm account. My thinking broadened conversations while conversing with farm members about alternative farming models, how we should determine farm membership fees, and if the surplus should be sold or donated to the local food pantry. My familiarity with the world around me expanded further as I became aware of how planetary influences guided what particular seeds we would sow during favorable periods, and through instruction on how to perceive an aura around a tree by lying patiently on

the grass. I also learned about conflict and consensus in decision making, from determining the annual seed orders to prioritizing tasks for the workday. Additionally, I learned about communal responsibility and personal accountability, which came to the forefront during tasks that are less pleasant (e.g., shoveling manure).

Biodynamics—a practice of agriculture rooted in spiritual science within the realm of anthroposophy—informed these moments and was the philosophy adhered to at this farm. Although I had grown up in a family of avid campers, as a “city person” farming was a novel undertaking for me. Combined with adolescence, this newness led to an openness and acceptance of biodynamics principles and practices. These ideas would likely be considered either alternative traditions, strange rituals, or curious systems of thought by many of those unfamiliar with biodynamics. The roots of biodynamics are “life” (bio) and “forces” (dynamics), and it is an ideology that embraces a holistic view of farms as living organisms that thrive as healthy, integrated systems when plants, animals, and human engagement are in balance and harmonized with celestial events. As such, a fundamental tenet of biodynamic agriculture is the growth of healthy soil including efforts to build a quality soil rich in nutrients, dense with microbiology/biodiversity, and ripe with fertility and involving a host of practices that take place at varying times of the day and season. These practices include: timely applications of medicinal preparations—dynamized herbal teas, liquid manures, and tinctures—on the soil and vegetation during specific planting phases; creating compost to return to the earth; growing cover crops; implementing crop rotations; and planning bed companion planting designs. On a homestead today, I continue to practice what I learned over the course of nearly three decades of participation at the biodynamic CSA farm.



Why am I sharing this account of my experiences with horticulture and what does it have to do with researching place-making in the aftermath of disaster? My reason for sharing my personal background and information about an alternative form of agriculture is to sketch some significant features and interests in my upbringing as well as to situate some of the knowledge and curiosity I bring to this dissertation. I have shared it to give some insight into where my attention in the field was drawn as well as toward those factors influencing my awareness of social and environmental issues. Likewise, it is a means of emphasizing my appreciation for interdisciplinary theory and my dispersed interests in cultural, spatial, public, and applied anthropology subfields, in addition to my interest in human and cultural geography, cartography, and critical GIS areas of study.

The cooperative, organized farm setting facilitated a deep appreciation for what humans are capable of creating through the perennial transformation of a piece of land. It provided opportunities to contemplate cycles of life and death and helped develop an understanding of the power of nature—which at times destroyed and at other times provided balance for a bountiful harvest. These aspects of cooperative farming gave rise to my enduring interest in human beings and their cultivation of cultures and societies—planting possibility and ploughing through tribulation.

At present, I live in an area celebrated as “the driftless” region of Wisconsin. Its name refers to the portion of land that escaped the last ice age glacial drift. Its karst topography consists of unique characteristics including deeply carved river valleys, caves, and sinkholes. Less than ten miles away from my home is one of the oldest river systems in the world (Driftless Wisconsin, Inc n.d.), the Kickapoo River, and the village of Soldier’s Grove. In 1979, after repeated flooding, this village situated along the river, embarked upon a radical plan to relocate

the business district to higher ground instead of pursuing recommendations of the Army Corp of Engineers to construct a proposed levee. Soldier's Grove, now also called Solar Town, was the first community to adopt a (passive) solar zoning ordinance stipulation for all new commercial and residential buildings—hence its nickname (Becker 1983)—in addition to being the first small scale community to relocate out of a flood plain (Wright n.d.). Since moving to this area, a little over a dozen years ago, I have become acquainted with not only the area's history of disastrous flooding but have also born witness to and experienced multiple major storms including back-to-back 500 year flood events in 2007 and 2008. Last summer intense storms produced unprecedented flooding that compromised three of Vernon County's 22 large flood control dams which lead to the devastation of farms, residences, business districts, and towns (Figure 1). While working as an intern at the Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD)—the public agency that manages flood control structures—I learned early in the morning hours that one of the breached dams was the one that we had been keeping nearly 60 goats and sheep on. The animals (our main workers in our pilot invasive species remediation program) were now in need of being saved. A coworker, the owner of the herd, and I met as quickly as possible and developed a game plan to rescue the animals from a piece of land they had retreated to during the night hours when the man-made lake behind the dam broke through. I vividly recall another coworker, the dam specialist, warning me: “That Jersey Valley dam is totally compromised. Be extremely careful and stay away from the edge, it's unstable and if it goes—it's a matter of life or death.”



Figure 1- Jersey Valley dam breach, August 2018

Photo credit: Daniel Theis

I encountered many residents from various submerged communities over the next few days that had their own similar, flood-related stories. Some residents I met described having lost everything they owned be it their residence, farm, equipment or herd. Others talked about how they barely escaped rising floodwaters. Still others debated if they would be able to rebuild, while almost everyone compared their current circumstance with memories of past devastation. Was the flooding that summer what would ultimately take the small rural valley off the map? For about a week, almost every major thoroughfare in the tri-county area had an impassable low area due to high floodwater. One day during the flooding my usual twenty-minute commute took two and a half hours because the newly replaced bridge I have to cross to get to work—which connects communities east and west of the Kickapoo river—was partially under water (Figure 2).



Figure 2- Kickapoo River flooding around Readstown, WI

Photo credit: Wisconsin The Beautiful

Local officials contacted the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and organizations set up shelters and relief stations in the flood's aftermath. Over time I donated provisions, volunteered for and attended benefits held to raise funds for those struggling to return, participated in meetings that informed the public about the magnitude of destruction from an environmental perspective, and talked with local residents during their town hall assemblies that were focused on the viability of their futures. Almost one year after experiencing major flooding in my own community, I recall it seeming almost surreal. Experiencing that flooding personally as a resident and as an intern-turned-emergency personnel tasked with inspecting and closing off unsafe dams and public lands, produced a range of emotions. So much of what I had been familiar with, in addition to the unquestionable sense of security I previously felt, became uncertain overnight. Today the devastation remains visible across the landscape and many people

are still contending with how to proceed in the aftermath of this flood. The disaster truly challenged the wellbeing of individuals and communities throughout the region.

When not working at the LWCD, I focused on writing this dissertation trained on the lives of residents totally disrupted by flooding almost 1,000 miles down the Mississippi River from where I live. My recent disaster-related experiences do not bring about any more accurate understanding of the experiences of the interlocutors I have worked with; nor do I share this experience as a means of implying any equivalence to what Hurricane Katrina survivors have experienced. Instead my intention is to demonstrate how my perspective and understanding of this research has expanded and become even more personal than I had at first anticipated.

This realization reminds me of the ways in which the themes anthropologists grapple with can become entangled with their own lives. The first example to come to mind is the way that Renato Rosaldo examines grief among the Ilongots of the Philippines following the loss of his wife (1993). The second example considers the critical reflections of Liisa H. Malkki on humanitarian workers setting out to do something “ethical and useful” to only be “left feeling equivocal, if not guilty . . . often for a long time” (2015, 75). Malkki examines her own guilt, “about progressing in my career on the backs of the refugees,” and after tenure, “not being able to face more writing about violence” (Ibid, 73).

Above all, I hope this personal narrative demonstrates that my familiarity and knowledge with this realm of research is ongoing and shifting. The same was true in “the field” where I conducted research and witnessed the enduring perseverance of those inhabiting a single New Orleans neighborhood, and observed their practices of meaningful toil.

## **CHAPTER 1:**

### **Introduction**

This dissertation is about the return of residents affected by a disaster that has radically altered their built environment and social fabric. I conducted this empirical research through a case study of New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward residents in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. To explore how these residents come back in the aftermath of a catastrophe, I employ place-making as an analytical concept to examine the symbiotic ways in which places influence people and people influence places. I focus on specific types of places created by residents: tours, civic engagement, community and commercial establishments, and a commemorative event.

There are two main reasons for discussing this collection of practices. My first intention is to show efforts initiated and orchestrated by the returned residents. Including how survivors return to their community in the wake of disaster contributes to the development of the existing body of literature that addresses the roles and impacts of governing officials, volunteers, charities, and nonprofit organizations in the supposed recovery process. Yet as will be revealed through this dissertation, residents' engagements with post-disaster circumstances and conditions provide important insight about what encourages or impedes their journey home.

The second reason for choosing this collection of practices is their transient nature. Although the residents' practices do not render permanent manifestations on the landscape, their toil has a great deal of significance because the practices cultivate meaningful transformation in their lives and livelihoods. I argue that both the post-disaster practices residents enact and the ephemeral places they make through their toil, reveal complexity around our understanding of recovery. If we define recovery as simply returning to what once was, what transpires when affected people are unable to achieve this minimum outcome? On one hand, this research grapples with that reality and in doing so challenges the assumption that recovery inevitably follows disaster. On the other hand, this study shows that the post-disaster return is interspersed with labor not often considered within the process of recovery. That often unaccounted for restorative work—be it related to the extreme disruption or any subsequent suffering—involves affected residents having to reclaim severed attachments to place, reaffirm identities, and reestablish social networks. Identifying such matters in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans requires mapping out the everyday perseverance and meaningful toil that would likely be otherwise indistinguishable.

### *Getting it Wrong*

*Some cities if you go to them, they say, well, we having a hard time with our education piece or some cities will say we are having a hard time with economic development, but we had a hard time with everything going on. We had a hard time with everything going on, and so it has been difficult.*

Lower Ninth Ward resident

In late October of 2010, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) invited five residents from the New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood to the campus. The invitation asked these residents to participate in a mid-semester review of work done by an undergraduate design

class. A month earlier this class had traveled to New Orleans for a field visit as part of their semester-long projects. I had been closely working with these individuals over the past year alongside a few faculty members from various disciplines. In order to make the most of the residents' three-day visit, we planned a range of activities around the architectural charrette. These included a community reception, meetings with university administrators from other area schools (to explore student service-learning opportunities in New Orleans), getting together with various local community agencies and organizations, and a farewell dinner.

One of the scheduled meetings was with Milwaukee's Walnut Way Conservation Corp. The intention of this gathering was to promote an exchange between the two predominantly working-class, African-American communities on their journeys to foster healthy, resilient neighborhoods. After brief tours of the Lindsey Heights community and the Walnut Way neighborhood center, a conversation ensued about how the transformation of the area came about. The narrative that was shared began with a focus on that region of the city, one where senior citizens who resided on those same blocks for many years remembered as a "good place to live." Employment was accessible and quality housing available. Churches, Black-owned businesses, parks, and reputable public schools made it a safe place to raise a family. In time though, the neighborhood would become one of the city's most impoverished communities due in part to racial redlining, loss of jobs, and heightened segregation. By fostering economic prosperity, environmental stewardship, civic engagement, and community health and wellness, this area has again more recently transformed into a thriving, innovative model for urban neighborhoods.

After listening to Walnut Way's heartening story of success, the Lower Ninth Ward residents expressed appreciation for the gathering. Then they attempted to explain in the most



gracious of ways, the different world they inhabit. As the visitors began to list assets and resources accessible in and around the Milwaukee neighborhood that contribute to the developing improvement of their community, it became disconcertingly clear how divergent their set of circumstances were and continue to be from those discussed by residents of Walnut Way. For instance, one resident tried to describe the implausibility of improving a failing neighborhood school when the situation involves the entire dismantling of a school district whereby 7,000 mostly union employees were fired and left without health benefits, many became homeless in the process. Their explanation of their truly extenuating circumstances continued. They explained that, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, residents have been without their homes while contending with insurance companies, banks, and fraudulent contractors. They asked what one can do when your place of employment permanently closes or requires rebuilding before you can get back to work? In addition to surviving without an income, the residents discussed how many of them have fractured social networks. Because residents were dispersed across the county after the hurricane there is extremely limited access to resources typically provided by families and friends facing the same predicaments. Additionally, materials needed to reconstruct the built environment have been unobtainable and expensive. When rebuilding and coping with calamity, there are also no facilities to go to for physical and mental health care. The Lower Ninth Ward residents further described not having homes, neighbors, communities of faith, businesses, schools, important paperwork, and basic infrastructure as a means of clarifying their difference from other marginalized communities. This culmination of their sustained tribulations was once explained to me by the co-founder and director of the Ninth Ward's Vietnamese Initiatives in Economic Training center as, "they're testing our commitment."

As the Lower Ninth Ward residents continued to poignantly convey the immeasurable losses and the insurmountable magnitude of complications in their supposed recovery from Hurricane Katrina, I became incredibly humbled and struck by the profundity of the conversation. In short, it required a much deeper understanding of the post-storm aftermath phenomenon than we realized before this well-intentioned meeting. The exchange would become just one of many teachable moments I would have during my research in the years that followed. It continues to be a significant reminder that simply comprehending the immensity of this catastrophe is a tremendous undertaking, a multifaceted endeavor for resident and researcher alike.

A hallmark of anthropology is studying how cultures and society change and such transition frequently emerges as a gradual process. Yet transformation also transpires from sudden unanticipated upheaval. Disasters are catalysts for this type of change. The devastation they bring tends to disrupt people's access to basic necessities and negatively impacts the previously familiar sociocultural and spatial aspects of life. Survivors are frequently left disoriented in what were once familiar spaces in their community, which results in the creation of new spaces. A slow and challenging recovery process often complicates their ability to return furthering the damage of a disaster's impact on people. Amidst a world increasingly affected by global climate change, deepening understanding of human dimensions of post-disaster space/place is particularly urgent, including those that occur in urban, post-industrial societies (and rural Wisconsin).

Examples of important questions asked in the aftermath of a disaster include: What remains? What is disturbed? And what becomes rebuilt? Who comes back or who is (not) involved in the return? How does the process of recovery transpire? Such questions implicate a

broad-range of entangled issues that afflicted residents may grapple with in their return home. Not surprisingly, these questions also fairly characterize the research questions driving this dissertation examining the place-making practices of New Orleans, Louisiana's Lower Ninth Ward residents post-Hurricane Katrina. My research was undertaken with the following two objectives: first I interrogated the practices used to re-make place that surface in the aftermath of disaster. In other words, when a disaster devastates seemingly everything previously regarded as stable and permanent, what emerges, resumes, or transforms as residents re-make their neighborhoods in the wake of disaster? My second objective was to investigate complexities within the process of returning from calamity by exploring the intertwining dynamics (linguistic, historical, political, sociocultural, spatial, and symbolic) and processes involved in that journey. Attending to these intricacies helped to identify conditions and contexts that in turn inform how places continually manifest and transform.

Despite the fact that people's sense of place as a critical dimension of the human experience is well studied, research focused particularly on survivors' engagement in their return within the recovery process is limited. This project addresses that omission by highlighting the efforts of residents, which I refer to as place-making practices, that include various engagements with the estranged environment. The first of these place-making practices I explored is resident-led neighborhood tours. While commercial tourism is a well-established industry in New Orleans, residents guiding visitors through their community presents an appropriated cultural activity, which some returned inhabitants have chosen to employ as a means of contesting what they perceive to be erroneous descriptions of their neighborhood. Residents have also made use of tours to (re)claim ownership and rights to place, and to (re)connect with the previously familiar.

The following chapters continue to examine additional endeavors that have emerged in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina primarily implemented by Lower Ninth Ward residents. Their work encompasses, among other things, qualities of self-reliance, collective action, and empowerment commonly associated with grassroots movements and do-it-yourself approaches. The specific place-makings mapped out in this dissertation are resident-organized civic engagements, resident-founded community and commercial establishments, and a resident-hosted commemoration event. Although such undertakings constitute a diverse inventory of post-disaster places that residents make, they share an ephemeral quality. The importance of emphasizing this trait is twofold. First, given that residents' enactments create temporary places, researchers may overlook these happenings while in the field. Second, despite these place-making performances being momentarily on the landscape, I have found such action cultivates meaningful change in the residents' lives and livelihoods. Being aware of this toil and recognizing its significance enables a distinguishable process of recovery to come into view. Discerning how such ephemeral places and the practices associated with them come into being provides insights about returning from catastrophe likely otherwise invisible to investigators.

This study makes a distinct contribution to anthropological knowledge and literature on sociocultural and spatial transformation in a neighborhood setting following calamity by complementing the traditional ethnographic approach of prolonged participant observation field research with innovative GIS methodologies. In this dissertation, I employ data gathered using these two methodologies combined with open-ended life history interviews, to analyze the ways in which adversity and agency influence residents' process of coming home. By representing data cartographically, I work to illustrate a sense of place informed by how Lower Ninth Ward residents remember the landscape and contemporary ways in which they create place through

their various forms of engagement with it. This use of a mixed methodology provides access to obscured aspects in a post-disaster context that ultimately expands our understanding of recovery.

### *Framing the Research*

August 29, 2019 will mark the 14th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina where record-breaking rainfall in a twenty-four-hour period inundated cities along the Gulf Coast. Soon after in the city of New Orleans, the pumping systems and multiple levee floodwalls failed, which resulted in a breaching storm water surge inundating 80% of the city. Although estimates are that approximately one million residents in the greater metropolitan area fled to all fifty states after calls for evacuation, one-quarter of the New Orleans population was incapable or unwilling to evacuate (Green, Bates and Smyth 2007). The social and political crises exposed by the storm—and that which this disaster has come to epitomize—disrupted complacency in the national consciousness concerning the deeply entrenched, systemic injustices experienced by marginalized populations in daily life. This intersection of disaster and subjugated peoples has become central in much of the Hurricane Katrina scholarship because the phenomena provided a rare chance to reflect critically upon notions of citizenship, democracy, and humanity.

The calamity at first baffled the world by exposing shocking truths about the city including, “the bitterness of its racial divide, the abandonment of the dispossessed, the weakness of critical infrastructure” and the particularly disparaging “revelation of the government’s failure to bring succor to its people at their time of greatest need” (Ruether 2006, 176). However, just as perplexing was that the deleterious circumstances which arose, or became exasperated in the wake of this storm, continue to persist over a decade later. From tens of thousands of evacuees

still scattered in exile across the country with no obvious way home (Peek and Weber 2012) to unresolved racialized situations within response and recovery (Lee 2006) and communities still struggling to return to some resemblance of normalcy, much remains to be examined.

This exploration of the aftermath of disaster is an interdisciplinary endeavor drawing upon some uncommon, constructive methodologies that transcend the anthropology of space, place, and catastrophe in the twenty-first century. The exploration builds up foundational studies of the ways in which cultures and societies change, yet challenges the boundaries of conventional assumptions and traditional research programs. This dissertation documents place-making practices in the New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward residential community as an effort to expand knowledge and scholarship about (re)making place in an urban locale, within a "developed" nation, in a post-calamity context.

The content of this dissertation will be of interest to researchers studying the sociocultural dimensions of place and disaster, and its findings will be beneficial for local, domestic, and international policy makers as well as community-based organizations involved with disaster preparation and long-term recovery relief. Moreover, this dissertation presents stories urgently narrated by and about Lower Ninth Ward residents that must be heard, and which speak to the (in)distinguishable process of returning after Hurricane Katrina. I make use of the term *(in)distinguishable* to address the ways that residents' meaningful toil in the wake of the storm has largely been overlooked. Such work has thus far received limited analysis, despite being extremely visible using the methodological lenses I have employed, which evidence the remarkable and distinct efforts of those in the process of returning from disaster in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward.

### *Contextualizing “The Storm”*

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina became the nation’s largest residential disaster and one of the deadliest in United States. history. Over one million people evacuated the New Orleans metropolitan region that came to be 80% flooded after multiple, substandard levees breached from surging storm water. The protective levees—a public service managed as an expense to be minimized rather than an essential investment to maximize security and enhance quality of life—resulted in approximately 134,000 flood-damaged housing units. Half of the households took in at least four feet of water, which in some areas remained stagnant for weeks, and hurricane winds caused extensive damage to public infrastructure from telephone to power lines, streetlights, and signs (Whelan 2006).

Due in part to the Iraq War, many of the U.S. military’s resources were committed elsewhere. As such they were unable to supplement state and local resources with National Guard reservists and active duty personnel as they had in the past (Hartman and Squires 2006). Hospital patients waited hours that turned into days before being airlifted out to other facilities, and Orleans Parish prisoners were left trapped in their cells to stay “where they belong” (Gusman 2011). Compounding the incomplete and car-dependent evacuation plan was the city’s failure to recruit bus drivers for the 275 public busses that had been lined up to transport the estimated 130,0000 residents who were either without vehicles or homebound, or residents of in-care facilities. FEMA’s obstruction of aid and assistance left thousands of other not evacuated residents stranded on rooftops, at the Superdome, the Convention Center, and along interstate highways and bridges for days without provisions of food, clean water, restroom facilities, shelter, or medical treatment. Other citizens attempting to escape the deluged city by crossing a bridge, from New Orleans to the West Bank, city of Gretna, were confronted by armed police

and were forced to turn back (Ibid). Shocking images and media coverage generated profound public mistrust and baffled the world. In the words of one survivor: “You want me to tell you the truth, my version of it? They tried to kill us. When you keep somebody on top of the interstate for five days, with no food and water, that’s killing people. And there ain’t not ands, ifs, or buts about it” (Alive in Truth: The New Orleans Disaster Oral History and Memory Project n.d.).

As hurricane floodwater receded in the following days and months, estimates of the impact began to materialize. While over one million people in the New Orleans metropolitan region evacuated (who were erroneously labeled as “refugees” by some journalists) the storm contributed to over 1,500 deaths during the immediate event. Of the major causes of fatality, 40% died drowning, 25% died from injury and trauma, and 11% were caused by health conditions such as strokes and heart attacks. Nearly half of the victims were over the age of seventy-four. Hurricane Katrina would come to be the most expensive disaster in history causing somewhere between 40-135 billion dollars in monetary losses (Kates, et al. 2006). Half a year after Katrina made landfall, the Lower Ninth Ward was still under curfew; and, the sustained period of silence by government officials left some neighborhoods without basic services including electricity, potable water, and sewers one year after the storm. As the state awaited the 4.2 billion dollars in allocated federal funds for the Road Home program to assist homeowners nearly one year after the storm, residents’ patience grew thin. They waited for FEMA trailers (some of which were constructed with formaldehyde-laden materials), financial assistance and coverage payouts to rebuild, and they watched their public school system, in effect, be dissolved, while battling post-traumatic stress with limited access to mental and physical health clinics (Wise 2005).



So where is New Orleans at almost the fifteen-year mark in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina?

Disasters are all-encompassing occurrences involving a chaotic nexus of the natural world, society, and technology that disturb every facet of life (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999). As a result, the unprecedented damage from Hurricane Katrina on a historically significant and culturally unique city like New Orleans drastically affected the city's terrain, built environment, and social geography. Life will never be the same for those who lost loved ones, material assets, and the one place in the world they called home (Jones-Deweever and Hartmann 2006) and which provided social, cultural, and physical grounding (Brown and Perkins 1992). Consequently, comprehending this catastrophe is a major undertaking, a multifaceted endeavor for resident and researcher alike. A sad irony of this storm is that one of the worst calamities in U.S. history happened in an area populated by some of the nation's most disadvantaged citizens (Ibid).

### *Seven is (Almost) Complete*

After Hurricane Katrina made landfall, it forced the largest population displacement in the United States since the Dust Bowl migrations of the 1930s (Falk, Hunt and Hunt 2006). I created a map to spatially illustrate one resident's experience in the post-Katrina diaspora up to her return home following the storm (Figure 3). She briefly narrates her route from location to location in the following interview excerpt.

*Well, started out in Dallas for thirty days. They put us out of the hotel because Oklahoma had their big game with Texas. So, everybody had to evacuate again out of the hotel. All the hotels just pre-booked. Reservations was made. So, that meant, that was another move again. Thirty days here, you're moving again trying to find someplace to live. So, I left there and went to Houston. Stayed there three weeks. From there, I left, I didn't care for Houston very much. I went to*

*Indiana and I stayed there for like, about a month and a half, maybe, with my youngest daughter. And I had to leave there because I couldn't deal with the snow, shoveling snow. And this is my husband's first experience shoveling snow, you know. But from there, we stopped in Missouri, thankfully. That's where my brother was. And he said, "Let's go home. If we've got to live under the bridge..." We were retired by then. It was in December when I came back, of 2005. When I came back to New Orleans, I lived in Metairie. That was my fifth move. Stayed in Metairie, trying to get a trailer. And I had to get an attorney to get a trailer. FEMA wouldn't give me a trailer. The Bywater area was my sixth move. When I did get a trailer, I didn't have a place to put the trailer. So, Disaster relief Center told me I could put my trailer behind their building So, I kept it there in the Bywater area. And my seventh move was here, on my land. That's when my life was complete. Seven times. And I really believe moves was complete.*

This resident felt “complete” once she was able to return to her own property, however in the years to come, she placed her newly constructed, post-Hurricane Katrina home—that she had worked tirelessly to have built—for sale because of the slow to non-existent recovery of her neighborhood. Despite her personal journey being complete, the same could not be said for her community. For many it became too much to endure. This resident’s journey in the post-Katrina diaspora represents just one instance among countless others of displacement, which has resulted in a great deal of time, resources, and frustration. Many residents still have yet to return.



Figure 3- Map of a Lower Ninth Ward resident's moves in the Hurricane Katrina diaspora

Although this dissertation largely focuses on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, I do not neglect experiences during the storm and in its immediate wake since such attention helps contextualize this disaster. For instance, the sharing of a resident's experience in the the post-storm diaspora helps to situate this research, which for me began four years into the wake of Katrina, by emphasizing where this study tries to pick up from and continue the Hurricane Katrina story. In examining Hurricane Katrina as a phenomenon, defining where to start and where to conclude has been difficult because doing so involves consideration of centuries-in-the-making factors that contribute to the contemporary unfolding of events and circumstances influencing the present. Other researchers have made similar points and the following quote nicely (and succinctly) summarizes them:

To understand it you have to understand the land, the river, the sun, the wind (air), and the sea; you have to understand geomorphology, meteorology, biology, economics, politics, and history. You have to understand how they have come together to form, with the peoples of America, Europe and Africa, the historical patterns of life in Louisiana and New Orleans, the bodies of the region. You have to understand what those bodies could do, what they could withstand, and how they intersected the event of the storm (Protevi 2009).

This passage powerfully indicates the numerous intricacies involved in any study associated with Hurricane Katrina. The following interview excerpt with a New Orleans resident who was discussing the post-Katrina city echoes a similar message:

*Unless you understand the history of New Orleans from the beginning, you won't get it anyway. You're not going to get why people do things unless you back up to 1732, somewhere in there, and start moving forward, to understand how the city was put together and the social demographics of things. And know that, you know, the janitor you see in the school sweeping the floor might have more power than anybody in the city council office, and know who they are, because of how things are done here.*

This resident hints at significant—though likely unnoticed (or underappreciated by scholars)—cultural and social aspects of New Orleans including local traditions, social networks, and ways

of life. In addition to heeding the counsel of such scholars and residents, my appreciation for the immensity of what I was getting involved with in this research was further impressed upon me in talking with an older Ninth Ward resident on a walk together one day. As we strolled along, she discussed her experiences with Hurricane Katrina and it came up that she was in the Ninth Ward for Hurricane Betsy as well. Betsy was a major storm that hit and flooded New Orleans back in August of 1965, and at the time it was reported to be one of the deadliest and costliest hurricanes in U.S. history (University of Rhode Island 2015). This resident repeatedly explained Betsy to me by saying, “It was different.” When I asked her how it was different, she replied, “Because we were thirty then, we’re sixty-plus now and we have doctor’s appointments. We’re older. We don’t have the energy and resources that we use to have back then. We’d go to work and then work on our homes when we came back after work.” Our conversation reinforced that I had to be particularly cognizant of generational experiences with Hurricane Katrina. My reflection upon a resident’s evacuation described above, in addition to commentary from other researchers about the multilayered histories intertwined with Hurricane Katrina, have impressed upon me that any study of this storm and its aftermath is a highly complex undertaking. Truthfully and perhaps appropriately, I find the idea of documenting the toil of survivors and the (in)distinguishable process of recovery that continues to transpire an overwhelming process, even while I am committed to accounting for the full complexity of the context from which residents of the Lower Ninth Ward have experienced the storm and its aftermath.

### *Contextualizing the Lower Ninth Ward*

Particular qualities tend to characterize the identity of places around the world. Relics of a former era, architectural style, landmarks and symbolic sites contribute to the “concrete

topographies” of place specificity (Strathern 1988). The identity of place is also a basic feature in experiencing place for it influences and is influenced by experiences (Relph 1976, 45).

Consequently, as places ‘gather’ material, demographic, discursive, iconic, and behavioral elements (Casey 1996, Nas 2011, Tuan 1974, 1974, 1977), the society and cultures of a particular location are often taken for granted (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Rodman 1992) and can be confined by “essentializing” features that generate topological stereotypes (Appadurai 1998). These issues of representation have resonance across the United States including the “racist south,” Florida’s moniker as “heaven’s waiting room,” and Silicon Valley’s exemplification of high technology. On the other hand, the peculiar qualities of a place may share commonalities with other locations. For example, take urban centers across the United States: while such places entail their own distinctiveness, they simultaneously tend to represent sites of diversity given that populations of varied sociocultural and class demographics often dwell together within them. However, within these concentrations of multiculturalism, particular racial and ethnic populations may disproportionately share histories of disinvestment, isolation, and marginalization due to the uprooting and displacement of communities of color. Supporting literature includes Massey and Denton’s work on segregation and poverty (1994); Setha Low’s study of gated communities and racial exclusion (2001); Mindy Fullilove’s research on urban renewal and displacement (2005); and Tim Wise’s work on the legacy of white privilege and supremacy in and beyond New Orleans (2005) .

Numerous cities across the United States have embroiled histories of colonialism. This is especially the case with New Orleans since it (and the surrounding region) shares a dual colonial legacy with Spain and France that has significantly influenced the milieu of the city. Yet, unlike many other places across the United States, evidence of colonialism persists prevalently there

today. For instance, when the New Orleans area entered the United States it did so with a clause preserving Napoleonic Code as civil law over the state of Louisiana. This code exists to this day. Local lexicon, including place names, also reflects the area's historical peculiarities. For example, the French designation of *parishes* is referred to as *counties* elsewhere in the country, and the term *faubourg* is used instead of *neighborhood*, to describe the subdivision of old plantations extending beyond the limits of the original city starting in 1788 (Campanella 2002). Other examples bearing evidence of French and Spanish colonial history include the city's layout, central squares (Congo, Jackson), churches, and architectural styles.

The city's close geographic proximity to the mouth of the Mississippi River has also provided access to a harbor and a major port that is still heavily used today. Pirates, including the infamous Jean Lafitte after whom the state's national historic park and preserve is named, and colonizers made early use of this location. It also became particularly instrumental to the establishment of slavery, since its positioning facilitated efficient transportation of countless enslaved humans from Africa and the Caribbean. The institution of slavery was distinctly experienced in the area that saw the weaving of African, European, and American Indian ancestry and customs which, in turn cultivated particularly unique cultural and sociolinguistic traditions referred to as *Creole*. Although answering who the Creole people are may be, "one of the most controversial and confusing matters in Louisianan history, one that strikes at the very soul of the place and its people" (Campanella 2002, 115), many visual and experiential elements of this culture continue in the city. Prominent displays expressed in the vernacular landscape include processions and parades, musical traditions, food and cookery, use of cultural artifacts such as handkerchiefs, umbrellas, cowries, and bottles, as well as Spirit Houses. Over centuries and through generations, these cultural foundations and traditions have correlated with the city's

history and continue to emerge presently as part of the living memory of the city's conflicted past (Annual Maafa Commemoration 2014, Waters 2014).

New Orleans has many vibrant communities that inhabit neighborhoods, some with disputed boundaries. Of the city's seventeen administrative divisions, the area designated as the Ninth Ward is the largest geographic and political jurisdiction. Many neighborhoods make up this region, including New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward (also locally referred to as the Lower Nine). Some residents and organizations further delineate the Holy Cross neighborhood from the Lower Ninth Ward, although others make no such distinction (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center 2002, Holy Cross Neighborhood Association 2011, J. F. Smith 2012).

The following passage about the city's historic and contemporary neighborhoods written by two geographers illustrates the latter: “[u]ntil its subdivision in the late 1800's, the area now known as Holy Cross (Lower Ninth Ward) consisted of plantations and a few large operations that had outgrown or could not function in downtown New Orleans” (Campanella and Campanella 1999, 170). Those involved with New Orleans City Planning Commission demonstrate awareness of such discrepancies stating in their Master Plan that they do, “not attempt to reorganize or redefine neighborhoods and accept[s] residents' self-identification of their neighborhood location” (City of New Orleans 2010, 5.2). In this dissertation, when employing the terms, *the Lower Ninth Ward*, *the Lower Nine* or *Lower Ninth*, I include the Holy Cross neighborhood unless specified otherwise. However, it should also be noted that my references do not include the Upper Ninth, a physically separate neighborhood whose unofficially recognized distinction from the Lower Ninth Ward emerged in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Despite the divergent terminology, most residents of the Lower Ninth concur that their community has been on the periphery for much of the city's history, despite an abundance of long-standing, esteemed cultural traditions and an enduring history of social turmoil and activism. In the words of one long-time resident, "Important community events were often neglected by the press, and the stories and photographs passed down amongst the families and neighborhood organizations rarely found their way into books, archives, or museums . . . the public record is sparse" (Breulin and Lewis 2009, 20). In addition to its historic marginalization, the topography of the Lower Ninth Ward is spatially isolated. Covering an area of approximately two square miles, its geographic boundaries consist of a man-made Inner Harbor Navigation Canal (Industrial Canal) on the western edge, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet to the north, the Mississippi River on the south, and the Louisiana National Guard barracks just east of the Orleans parish line. In terms of demographics, according to the U.S. Census Bureau 2000 report of pre-Katrina figures, the 98.3% African-American neighborhood made up just 2.8% (14,008) of the city's total population (484,674). The community was proportionately high in rates of elderly residents (14%) and held the highest homeownership rates (59%) in the city. Although nearly a quarter of the residents had attained some level of higher education (24.2%), 36.4% of the community was defined as living in poverty given that the average income of working residents (41.2%) was \$27,499 in 2000. These statistics and brief overview nominally indicate the historic, political, and sociocultural significance of the Lower Ninth Ward before Hurricane Katrina.



*Localizing Post-Katrina Efforts, My Engagement and Research Methods*

What follows next is a broad overview describing the post-Katrina engagement of the state of Wisconsin, the city of Milwaukee, and UWM. I also describe how I became involved and the backstory of the work that ultimately led me to conduct this research project. Next, I provide an outline of the specific methods employed in this study including traditional ethnographic methods and a more unconventional tool of anthropologists, GIS. Recognizing that any scholastic endeavor we undertake is engaged with and influenced by our own uniquely particular backgrounds, identities, perceptions, skills, and experiences, the final portion of this section works to further situate my personal and necessarily partial perspective and situated knowledge of what I have undertaken through a vignette and self-reflection (Haraway 1991, Perley 2009).

When Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast, I was a recent college graduate, and I had moved from the city of Milwaukee to start a human scale, biodynamic farm in a rural community on the other side of Wisconsin. I learned of the news of the storm while listening to a radio since my living arrangement was nearly off the grid. Phone calls to confirm the safety and wellbeing of friends living in New Orleans were made. During these conversations, I would come to learn about regions of the city that endured particularly disastrous impacts. My initial introduction to the Lower Nine came from these informal chats and then through media coverage. In the storm's aftermath, as the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood gained international recognition, I became personally and academically acquainted with it.

Like many other cities and universities, the doors of Milwaukee and UWM were opened to displaced evacuees with efforts mobilized to provide a variety of resources in the storm's immediate aftermath. The city of Milwaukee received and transported approximately 100

Hurricane Katrina evacuees and pets to the Tommy G. Thompson Youth Center at the Wisconsin State Park for temporary shelter (City of Milwaukee 2005). From organizing a clothing drive to sponsoring financial relief fundraisers, many UWM students, faculty, and staff assisted remotely with donations and with evacuated residents locally at the State Park. UWM, with the support of the UW-System Board of Regents, accepted and waved tuition for one semester for twenty evacuated students to attend the university.

Over time, UWM initiated other Hurricane Katrina related efforts to raise awareness and provide occasions for the student body and public to reflect upon this national catastrophe. One such event included guest lectures by Danny Glover and John A. Powell, both of whom placed human dimensions of this tragedy at the forefront of their presentations. Another example was the presentation of Hurricane Katrina-related films including Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* at the UW-Milwaukee Theater. The documentary *Trouble the Water* was shown followed by a panel discussion with two of the films' producers. These programs and forums facilitated moments for the student body and the public to grapple with deep racial and socioeconomic cleavages and entrenched conditions that contributed to pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans circumstances and which have plagued the nation more broadly since its "founding."

The city of Milwaukee is no exception to this pattern and holds many unfortunate similarities to New Orleans. These similarities include high rates of racialized segregation, poverty, incarceration, as well as health-related issues (including high rates of infant mortality, HIV, and diabetes). Research conducted by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, which analyzed the extent of racial disparity based on twenty-five socioeconomic indicators in the largest regions of the United States, found that both New Orleans and Milwaukee have high degrees of disparity, twelfth and twenty-first rankings respectively (J. A.

powell 2006). The two cities also have similar levels of severe poverty: the concentrated poverty rate of New Orleans is 37.7% and that of Milwaukee is 27%. These figures are even higher when one considers race since the concentrated rate of poverty for Black New Orleanians is 42.6 % and 39.3% for Black Milwaukeeans. The Kirwan Institute report observed additional resemblances between the cities in regard to discriminatory transportation spending, exclusionary zoning, and suburban sprawl supported policies, as well as critical infrastructure divestment in urban areas.

One of the most prominent UWM and Hurricane Katrina related endeavors has been the development and offering of courses that provide a thematic focus on New Orleans's recovery, called the "UWM in New Orleans Program." The endeavor began to materialize as part of a university taskforce, initially formed to coordinate immediate campus efforts, and tasked with identifying long-term commitments. In addition to such course offerings, involved faculty worked to foster inter- and multi-institutional collaborations and community-university partnerships.

In her role as the UWM Chancellor, Nancy Zimpher was inspired by the propensity of engagement with current issues embedded within the philosophical foundations of the Wisconsin Idea. The Wisconsin Idea is one of the "longest and deepest traditions surrounding the University of Wisconsin" that "signifies a general principle: that education should influence people's lives beyond the boundaries of the classroom" (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System 2019). The Wisconsin Idea then, dictated not whether the university should be engaged but rather attended to the relevance in *how* to be engaged (Brukardt, et al. 2004). Zimpher's undertaking to develop institutional change focused on a university and community working collaboratively together for the benefit of both was termed the "Milwaukee Idea." That concept

was rooted in the notion of together building, “a community and a university that are the heart of metropolitan Milwaukee” (Ibid, 11).

The philosophical orientation of the Milwaukee Idea, which was spawned 150 years after the Wisconsin Idea, embodies the spirit of Ernest Boyer’s “Scholarships Reconsidered,” which advances alternative perspectives to the traditional roles and agendas of scholars and researchers (1990). Boyer was a former U.S. Commissioner of Education, Chancellor of the State University of New York, and past president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Goldberg 1995). Through his pivotal report, Boyer offered a four-part solution to transform scholarship from mere research to a more holistic academic encompassment of civic and community engagement. In particular, it included faculty’s roles with the scholarship of discovery, scholarship of intention, scholarship of teaching, and scholarship of application. Much like Boyer’s report challenging the view of the “modern university”, Zimpher’s Milwaukee Idea invoked its own questioning of UWM’s role in academia as well as of its social responsibility to communities surrounding the campus. Since 2004, the Milwaukee Idea has placed student learning, scholarship, and discovery with public outreach at the core of UWM, however the degree to which it has been implemented in departments across the campus varies considerably.

Although the UWM in New Orleans Program may not have been spawned directly from the Milwaukee Idea, it embodied its conceptual vision through engagement and partnerships as well as the integration of “new forms of student learning environments, new technologies, and new roles for faculty and staff” (Bruckardt, et al. 2004, 28) and by encompassing values of inclusivity, diversity and openness (Ibid, 12). There are also parallels between these two initiatives in that they both worked to foster interdisciplinary relationships and promote shared foundations from which multiple branches of scholarship can learn from each other despite their

different schools of thought, methodologies, and agendas. In its five years of existence, from 2009-2013, the UWM in New Orleans Program increased students' exposure to applied research and civically-engaged pedagogy through service and experiential learning. It also gave rise to this dissertation.

### *Personalizing Involvements & Partnerships*

From 2009 until 2012, I held UWM project and teaching assistantships for New Orleans-based field school courses in a variety of disciplines (Anthropology, Architecture, Dance, Information Studies, and Social Work) and in partnership with various schools (Macalester College, University of Houston, Georgia Institute of Technology, and the Universidad de Puerto Rico). While most of the UWM in New Orleans courses were held during the winter recess periods, the architecture courses were offered during the fall semester and required an on-site in New Orleans portion of the class in the last few weeks of August, prior to the official start of the school year.

As an assistant for the UWM in New Orleans Program from 2009-2012, I handled an array of tasks. I helped form a variety of partnerships and assisted with the development of the program and course design. I also coordinated schedules for daily activities, interviews, tours, lectures, and cultural events (jazz shows, second line parades, farmers' markets, religious services, etc.) occurring around the city. My ethnographic engagement also involved undertaking and supporting "service" coursework in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood and elsewhere in New Orleans. Such "service learning" is a pedagogical approach that works to combine learning goals with community service in ways that enhance student growth and the common good (Bandy 2019). In my capacity as an instructor and teaching assistant, I assisted in identifying service-learning sites, and coordinated partnership placements for university students. I also took

part in the service activities I helped organize for students which led to working alongside an array of New Orleans-based community organizations and institutions (see Appendix B for a complete list). This engagement provided students as well as their instructors with opportunities to fulfill service in a variety of settings that included historically Black colleges and universities, elementary schools, urban gardens, cultural and art centers, a health clinic, and museums. It also enabled residents to co-teach thereby informing and directing the experiential learning itself. The act of “fulfilling service” as credit for university courses afforded opportunities to gain knowledge about gaps and strengths within the process of rebuilding in the Lower Ninth Ward as well as across the city. Sometimes the direction of our service involved dismantling projects and at other times the students, faculty, and I engaged in startup projects and programs.

For many in academia, Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, like other catastrophes, are paradoxically opportunistic. Amidst this national disaster were many “teachable moments” that provided inescapably apparent lessons on entrenched poverty, structural racism, institutional oppression, and a host of other injustices. While some academics have used such calamities as opportunities to embed applied approaches into their teaching and research, other scholars point out some of the contradictions inherent to such work, including in post-Katrina New Orleans:

[T]hese dominant forms of university-based engagements reinforce the tendency to organize civic action around the short-term goals of private voluntary associations and nonprofit organizations or around the pedagogical objectives of individual courses. What is missing is an ongoing dialogue that connects education with multidisciplinary strategies for addressing community needs and building on community assets. Perhaps this absence simply reflects the widespread laissez-faire attitude toward the public sphere that assumes it is nobody’s responsibility in particular and certainly not that of higher education (Kortiz and Sanchez 2009, 12).

The latter portion of this excerpt discussing post-Katrina New Orleans emphasizes the disconnect of localized efforts with larger contexts of engaged teaching, learning, discovery, and scholarship

and it deserves critical reflection (Brukardt, et al. 2004). Despite the need for serious contemplation and ample room for growth in community-university partnerships and academically oriented civic engagement, such debate is beyond the focus of this dissertation. Nonetheless, it is imperative to share this background to my participation in such work (and some of the debates about it) since it has indisputably influenced the relationships I established in the field and that subsequently informed my research.

My ethnographic engagements additionally included participation in various cultural events and activities that have taken place across the city and in the Lower Ninth Ward. Forms of participation included dancing in second line parades, tailgating Saints and Hornets (now Pelicans) games, bringing King Cake to gatherings after receiving the slice with a plastic baby in it, dashing down streets to follow Mardi Gras Indians on the nights of St. Joseph and Super Sundays, attending Satchmo SummerFest, and helping prepare for Têt, the Vietnamese New Year. I have shared meals with communing congregation members during fellowship meetings and found that live music on Sunday mornings contends with Saturday evening performances while attending religious services in Baptist, spiritual, and catholic churches. I have also partaken in and observed local meetings with residents, municipal employees, administrative representatives, local to national politicians, and community activists. During said public hearings topics of discussion have ranged from budget districts, transportation services, zoning regulations, and service amenities to issues with the Road Home Program. I have consumed more than my fair share of po'boy sandwiches and bread pudding (more than I would like to admit, albeit in the service of determining "who has the best"), learned how to pronounce crawfish "correctly" while eating it in boils and as *étouffée*, and enjoyed many a Monday hot plate of red beans and rice. I also admit to having purchased a few daiquiris from drive-thru

operations. Some of the most memorable moments have been the times I was invited into residents' homes to share in the meals they had prepared for themselves and their families. Mouthwatering menus of "everything in it" gumbo, pho, potato salad, greens, pecan pie, and 7UP cake that undermined my usually healthy and vegetarian diet.

Over the years, I have learned the schedules of house bands by "getting the rhythm" of their schedules and learning what nights they play and where. For example, the Treme Brass Band plays at the legendary Candlelight Lounge on Wednesdays. I have also committed late Saturday evenings to DJ Soul Sister sets upstairs at Mimi's in the Marigny and made myself available to see random touring punk bands play at the shady-looking Saturn Bar. I have also learned the hard way that Ellis Marsalis Quintet jazz shows at the celebrated Snug Harbor on Frenchman Street tend to sell out long in advance, despite being scheduled almost every Friday night.

My proclivity to eat out and see live music when I could illustrates on one hand my financial privilege that has afforded participation in these cultural activities. Yet on the other hand, given that I was subsisting on a student salary, I have also become savvy about shows and events with complimentary admissions and deep, off-the-beaten-path establishments that offered potentially questionable, yet economical fare.

Despite the modest scope of events and doings I experienced, I found the number of open or semi-public venues within the Lower Ninth Ward to be particularly limited. My access was restricted, if not totally inhibited, to frequenting grocery stores, retailers, restaurants, bakeries, bars, cafes, work sites, art galleries, video arcades, movie theaters, gyms, laundromats, playgrounds, community centers, and other establishments frequently associated with an urban neighborhood. While localized prospects for participant-observation in the Lower Ninth Ward



were extremely reduced given the realities of the post-disaster landscape, I spent many hours walking throughout the neighborhood and sitting on residents' porches. I would also work outside cutting the grass of residents, particularly of those for whom this task was physically difficult to carry out. These instances often materialized into fortuitous occasions for interaction in light of the obligatory social graces of the South. Friendly greetings often led to conversations; some only lasting a few minutes while others lasted the whole afternoon.

I began acquiring my collection of ethnographic materials in January of 2009, and continued doing so until the summer of 2014 (see Appendix C for a month-by-month timeline and duration of my travels to New Orleans as well as the times and locations I was out of the state or country with Lower Ninth Ward residents). Data collected throughout this period primarily focused on the process of return and recovery—common topics of discussion in many venues from official assemblies to unplanned encounters. My understanding of the Lower Ninth Ward post-Katrina was further informed by insights gained from casual conversations as well as formal interviews and spontaneous experiences that occurred during extended periods of time living in close proximity to the Lower Ninth Ward and throughout the city of New Orleans.

The availability of houses and rental units in the Lower Ninth Ward has been extremely limited post-Katrina for residents as well as visitors. Consequently, while working in the UWM in New Orleans Program, my residence was in the Foubert Marigny district, at a 140-year-old two-story Edwardian house and typical historic New Orleans “shotgun double” bed and breakfast that had just enough capacity for students, staff, and faculty. My other lodging accommodations included a “camelback shotgun” apartment in the Bywater neighborhood that bordered the Industrial Canal, a room in a traditional shotgun home at the Marginy, and a couch in a Mid-City double-shotgun house. Early interviews initially focused on stories of evacuation and different

points of return for each resident. The focus of later interviews concerned concepts of and relationships to the Lower Ninth Ward and its social and spatial transformations. Interviews conducted with residents ranged from one-time encounters to several successive meetings and led to approximately twenty hours of narration. The middle aged to senior citizen interviewees identified themselves as Black or African American and as working, retired, or on disability. Interviews took place in residents repaired and rebuilt homes, on their porches, and in their driveways. They also were conducted in more public spaces including a café and at nonprofit organization centers. The length of the interviews ranged from an hour to entire afternoons and evenings. If consent was given, interviews were taped, and portions of the recordings transcribed and coded. The majority of recorded oral narratives were collected from Lower Ninth Ward residents. Interviews were conducted in myriad locations, however most often in residents' homes and while traversing about their neighborhood (see Appendix D for a comprehensive list of interviews I conducted alone and while accompanying students in the UWM in New Orleans Program including date, location, and a brief demographic description of the interviewee).

I did not identify this group of interviewees as an attempt to provide data for statistical comparison. Instead, interviews were conducted as a means of providing insight into the multiple perspectives and practices of the process of place-making, especially as it relates to post-disaster circumstances. I also did not intend for this research methodology to be a comprehensive study of place-making in the United States, or even in the South. Rather it is intended to bring to light the invisible and tangible efforts and outcomes in the process of remaking place in a neighborhood community following disaster. The interviews document residents' activities, memories, and experiences in their own voices to not only enhance understandings of how place is in a continual process of making but also to view through the infamous R's of post-Katrina

discourse (rebuild, recovery, renovate, renew, and return) and other disaster contexts (Queeley 2011).

While away from the field, communication with residents continued on the phone, through letters, and via email. My awareness of the latest happenings was also kept up to date by joining several list-serves and e-newsletters (with politicians, media outlets, social institutions, civic divisions, and nonprofit organizations). Digital streaming of local radio station broadcasts (primarily WBOK, WWNO, and WWOZ) and online media resources (predominantly “The New Orleans Tribune” and NOLA.com) provided additional access to contemporaneous and developing news bulletins that I continued to discuss with residents, alongside the stories of return, in each passing year. In all, this work occurred over a five-year period and is informed by and reflects the historical development of disaster response during this period of time.

### *Geo-ethnography*

The use of maps and spatial concepts has a historical legacy in social sciences. Over more than two centuries, and increasingly in the past few decades, there has been explosive growth and availability of geographic information and geospatial technologies. Such data and tools are associated with GIS, a general term with many definitions. Perhaps one of the most basic descriptions of GIS is that it is a specialized computer database system or program designed for the collection, storage, manipulation, retrieval, analysis, and output of map-based or spatial information (Steinberg and Steinberg 2006). In the 1980s, William Huxhold led the city of Milwaukee’s efforts to establish one of the nation’s first GIS and over time, more and more industries and agencies have acquired GIS. Consequently, it has since become a massive global enterprise and multibillion-dollar business quickly gaining currency in political discussions on

spatial issues (Sieber 2000). Huxhold was my first GIS instructor and he refers to it as having two parts: 1) “there are as many definitions as there are disciplines involved in using” GIS (including, but not limited to urban planning, engineering, environmental science, geography, and anthropology); and 2) GIS “consists of a set of tools that professionals in these disciplines use to improve the way they work” and make their work “more meaningful” (Huxhold 1991, 25). In a classic text discussing social implications of GIS, especially concerning representation in the electronic age, John Pickles (1995) makes the case that not only defining GIS can be problematic, but even the very use of the term. This is due in part to competing definitions reflecting different interpretations of GIS’s central principle, while the term is also simultaneously used as an acronym for a single system as well as in the plural.

As with any technology, its development not to without critique. Early arguments attended to deconstructing the long rooted scientific and Cartesian epistemology associated with cartography and view of maps as an objective form of knowledge (Harley 1989). Although earlier researchers have proposed similar critiques, scholars including Eric Sheppard also began to explore GIS as a social technology, suggesting that:

there are important ways in which society affects the development of GIS at the same time that GIS affects the development of society, and...there are important research questions concerning these relationships that should be addressed by those with expertise in both social theory and GIS (1995).

This important consideration emphasized by Sheppard and others summarizes a position that really began to flourish after the momentous Friday Harbor workshop (Nyerges, Couclelis and McMaster 2011, 4) which contributed to a research agenda subsequently referred to as “GIS and Society.” GIS and Society explores the interconnected relationship between societies and GIS and emphasizes the implications and impacts of their inherent connection. Themes examined in this body of literature include the social construction of GIS (Harvey 2000, Sieber 2000),

semantic issues with GIS (Robbins and Maddock 2000, N. Schuurman 2005), the relationship of GIS and ethics (J. Crampton 1995, Onsrud 1995), GIS and privacy (J. Crampton 2003, Armstrong and Ruggles 2005), GIS and democracy (Rundstrom 1995, Sawicki and Craig 1996), GIS and feminist theory (Kwan 2002, Schuurman and Pratt 2002, McLafferty 2005), GIS and methods (Bell and Reed 2004, Matthews, Dewiler and Burton 2005, Skinner, Matthews and Burton 2005), as well as public participation GIS (PGIS, PPGIS) (Obermeyer 1998, Ghose 2001, Elwood and Leitner 2003, Elwood 2006, Sieber 2006). These numerous and wide-ranging topics attest to the fact that GIS is a socially-constructed tool, and as a result, its composition and use entails many intrinsic complexities that are necessary to consider, from power dynamics to the democratization of data and the participation/collaboration of non-researchers (e.g. various publics).

From such epistemological and theoretical positions recognizing GIS and maps as actively constructing knowledge and exercising power, further appreciated for them as an influential means to promote social change emerged (J. W. Crampton 2001, J. Crampton 2010). Such assessments and stances contributed to another body of literature that laid the foundation for what followed next in the early 2000s that is known as “Critical GIS”. *Critical* refers theories that include post-structural and post-modern approaches and persistent reflexivity. Matthew Wilson describes the realm of Critical GIS scholarship as follows:

[it] is particularly influenced by the work of participatory action researchers; the histories of cartography and geographic information technologies; and the inclusion of racial, local, everyday knowledges. It grew through feminist geography’s and feminist geographers’ insistence on the conditions of knowledge production and representation and the promotion of alternative methods and epistemologies. It inherits a focused attention to the social implications of geospatial technologies from the GIS and Society tradition while being cognizant of the technical debates and intricacies of GIScience (2017, 3).

Early Critical GIS literature focused on various forms of engagement, from producer to consumer, and reflection on these practices. Work that is more recent tends to concern volunteered geographic information (VGI), neogeography or Web 2.0, and critical technology studies.

In this dissertation, I include maps produced with geospatial technology, particularly the use of a desktop GIS to create visual illustrations that cartographically project some of the ethnographic data I collected (such as in Figure 3 earlier in this Chapter). GIS Society and Critical GIS have both inspired and informed the ethnographic methods I have employed as part of this study. In particular, these genres remind me that any engagement with “mapping is always a situated, political process, with a social context, purpose, and effects” meaning that the described data is only capable of showing a sliver of the rich nuances and complexities in which it was gathered (Dalton and Mason-Deese 2012, 441). These points also contribute to making me aware of the host of decisions I made about the data and its representation that have gone into the rendering of these two-dimensional images, which merely present snippets of information and knowledge at a very particular moment of time. I find the following to be an especially succinct description of such issues and my approach to working with GIS:

Mapping is not a one-time thing, and maps are not stable objects that reference, reflect, or correspond to an external reality. Mapping is a verb and bespeaks an on-going process of picturing, narrating, symbolizing, contesting, re-picturing, re-narrating, re-symbolizing, erasing, and re-inscribing a set of relations. On its most fundamental level, a map is a graphical representation of a set of relations. Maps are visual arguments and stories; they make claims and harbor ideals, hopes, desires, biases, prejudices, and violences. They are always relational, in dialogue or in contact with someone or something. They may or may not attempt to reference, reflect, or represent an “external reality” (however one defines that), but they are fundamentally propositions, suffused with world-views, structuring epistemologies, and ways of seeing (Presner, Shepard and Kawano 2014, 15).

Despite these complications, GIS and the maps generated with this instrument facilitate unique and useful ways to interpret and communicate ethnographic material, which is especially relevant given the general focus of this dissertation on less positivistic, qualitative work on sociospatial-related phenomenon.

More specifically, the mapping software I used was ArcMap, versions 9.3 to 10.5, developed by the Environmental Science Research Institute (ESRI). Given that the data manipulated using this software is unique and mostly qualitative, there were many stages involved in working with it. First, I had to enter the ethnographic data from fieldnotes and interviews into a database program. I used Microsoft Excel to consolidate and categorize the information that I then saved as file types that are operational with ArcGIS. Once uploaded to ArcGIS, I used an address tool to georeference the data, which in essence identifies locations to display the sociospatial information. Some addresses had to be rematched due to grammatical errors or incompatible address names. After the geocoding, shapefiles were created as were annotations to assist in working with labels. After that, I coded the data with symbols, colors, and fonts to organize, group, and convey the information. Additional edits were made to the placement of annotations. For further clarification, I also inserted text providing background information about data sources employed in the digitally created maps. In addition to the data I created, I had to collect supplementary data used to make my maps. These include background layers like hydrology, streets, and boundaries that I gathered from various sources such as the City of New Orleans data portal and sometimes, although more rarely, online GIS warehouses.

The terms *geoethnography* and *grounded visualization* refer to the methodology of coupling GIS technology with ethnographic data. It is a means for researchers to create and communicate their interpretations of data in multimodal ways, including the ability to evoke

senses of place and places as lived, embodied, and produced. In anthropology, although archaeologists have worked with GIS for some time—for instance, to spatially exhibit data collected—the work of cultural anthropologists with this tool has been particularly limited. Nonetheless, Kimberly Powell suggests that mapmaking is a multimodal method and lens for place-based ethnographic inquiry “to make visible residents’ sense of place and place-making” (2016, 402). Like Powell, I use mapping as a means to produce and communicate interpretations of data. Specifically, I use maps to provide a way to represent senses of place and lived experiences of the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood. I intend for the maps included throughout this dissertation to complement and enhance the discursive descriptions represented in vignettes, interview transcriptions, and my analyses.

Scholars refer to these cultural products by many names including *vernacular* or *counter* maps. Nancy Peluso (1995) introduced the latter term, “to describe mapping practices by indigenous people in Kalimantan, Indonesia as they made maps to contest Indonesian state land-use plans” (Dalton and Mason-Deese 2012, 442). Another term used to describe this kind of work is *thick mapping* which refers to, “the processes of collecting, aggregating, and visualizing ever more layers of geographic or place-specific data” (Presner, Shepard and Kawano 2014, 17).

The following passage describes this idea more precisely and in doing so connects these practices to Clifford Geertz’s (1973) approach to “thick” ethnographic description:

Thickness means extensibility and polyvocality: diachronic and synchronic, temporally layered, and polyvalent ways of authoring, knowing, and making meaning. Not unlike the notion of “thick description” made famous by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, thickness connotes a kind of cultural analysis trained on the political, economic, linguistic, social, and other stratificatory and contextual realities in which human beings act and create (Presner, Shepard and Kawano 2014, 17).



Although these alternative forms of mapping often entail some traditional cartographic principles such as the inclusion of orientation, scale, and legends on a map (Kuznar and Werner 2001), they feature additional components. Scholars describe *thick maps* as embodying temporal and historical dynamics through a multiplicity of layered narratives, sources, and even representational practices (Ibid). This includes, but is not limited to unconventional sights, sounds, smells, sketches, and even areas of emotion drawn from certain perceptions, often those of marginalized voices. This orientation informs my approach to vernacular mapping and has encouraged me to think beyond conventional methods to illustrate local knowledge and stories in this study.

#### *What Nonprofit Organization Do You Work With?*

As I stopped to wipe sweat from my brow while cutting grass at a Lower Ninth Ward residence on a sunny and humid August afternoon, I noticed a neighbor two houses down outside on the porch watching me. After we waved to each other, this senior citizen remarked that I was “doing a real nice job for a lady”. Her comment quickly made me aware that by engaging in heavy-duty yard work I was not complying with traditional gender roles associated with me as a woman. I reluctantly smiled and wondered how pervasive this stereotype was in this neighborhood or perhaps the Southern states. Admittedly, I had not spent much time up until that point exploring “The South.” As I continued to think about this, I also came to realize that despite sounds of lawn mowing and string trimmers running elsewhere within a few block radius of me, I had chosen possibly the most inappropriate time to work on the yard since it was the hottest part of the day. I remember uttering something like “classic move” to myself and then added this to the long list of cultural *faux pas* I so often seem to commit during my travels away from home.

Before returning to the lawn work, I paused for a mother and her two children dressed in school uniforms to pass along the sidewalk I had been attempting to clear of overgrown vegetation. After we exchanged greetings, I asked if the school year had already started. The woman replied “almost.” I returned to tackle the thick mat of the hardest grass I had ever encountered—a much different variety of turf from what I was accustomed to maintaining back home in Wisconsin. Working physically outside in the climate of the “Deep South” gave me a new appreciation for professionals in this line of work and much better understanding for all of the grass cutting business signs posted on telephone poles throughout the community. It also reminded me that my almost forty-year-old body was not in the kind of shape that it had been in decades prior.

A little while later, as the sun began to descend behind an old oak tree that supplied a bit of refreshing shade, I noticed another individual walking up the sidewalk. This time it was a middle-aged white man wearing shorts and a polo shirt and carrying a large video camera. Admittedly, given that I found the camcorder imposing (which contributes to my own hesitation to using such technology in fieldwork and my presumption of his association with local media), I tried to avoid eye contact. Yet my attempt to fend off the encounter was not successful. He approached me anyway with a “hello” and asked, “Are you working on your yard?” I told him that I was not. Due in part to my wariness of mainstream media and in hopes of ending the conversation quickly, I thought it best to share as little information as possible. He continued, “What non-profit organization are you working with?” I replied that I was neither working for nor associated with any specific group, yet the confidence expressed through his inquiry that surely, I must be associated with some agency, really caught my attention. It made me realize how representative my appearance was (as a young-ish, white, middle-class looking female in a

predominantly Black neighborhood and post-Katrina landscape) given that I shared many characteristics with the individuals leading volunteer groups, as well as non-governmental and charitable organizations that have inundated this area “to help.”

In response to his next question regarding what I was doing there if not working for a non-profit, I said helping a friend who lived in the house and whose health no longer allowed him to take care of it. My explanation seemed to satisfy his curiosity since he moved the conversation on to another topic: he wondered if I knew anything about the \$100 Lot Program. I confirmed my awareness of State Representative Wesley Bishop’s proposed bill that would allow the city to sell approximately 600 blighted properties for \$100 each, all within the Lower Ninth Ward, which residents had either sold to the state via the Road Home program or that were acquired by the city in some other way. “Well, we are trying to do a story about the lots going for \$100. You know, the city is trying to do something nine years later and two folks we interviewed already were really happy about this. We are going around the neighborhood and asking for comments about this. Would you like to share your opinion about it?”

Without hesitation, I declined. I explained that I felt it would be more appropriate to get responses from residents living in the neighborhood because they, not me as an outsider, would be impacted by such legislation. I then mentioned that if he continued to gather the opinions of people in this area he may come across some frustration among residents who had already purchased lots in the neighborhood through the previous Lot Next Door Program, however, those individuals had to pay full price for the properties rather than the proposed \$100. He said, “You have heard about that?” I said, “Yes, from at least one resident.” He then replied, “I hadn’t thought about that perspective. Do you think they would be interested in being interviewed?” I said if he had a business card to give me that I would pass it along to the individual I spoke with.

He pulled one out from his wallet for me, the front of it provided his contact information next to, “Louisiana’s News Leader 4WWLTV”. He handwrote the name and phone number of a newscaster on the back and ended our conversation with “well, thanks anyways”, then turned around, and headed toward a van parked about a block away.

Shortly afterward, Smitty, the resident whose yard I was working on, came outside to see what was going on. He, like many other residents, kept an eye on the neighborhood through the windows while inside his house. As I talked to Smitty in the yard about my exchange with the camera operator, we both noticed a middle-aged white woman taking photographs of Mr. Ronnie, Smitty’s next-door neighbor who often sat on his front porch or came and went on his bicycle from the barely renovated home. At some point over the years Smitty had introduced us and shared with me that Mr. Ronnie used to live next door but that he had been unable to come up with the resources needed to rebuild his home.

I mentioned that this was the first time I saw someone photographing Mr. Ronnie, and Smitty agreed. After the woman finished taking a few more shots of him with her camera while Mr. Ronnie sat on his front porch, under a handmade mailbox, they shared a few words and she left in a vehicle parked out on the street. Smitty called over to Mr. Ronnie and asked him if he was a model? Mr. Ronnie replied in a serious tone, “No, I’m not” and said she was writing a book. I then asked if he wanted to be in the book and his response was, “No, not really.”

Augusta Bolles (2013) explains that contextualization works to get at what the late John Gwaltney (1980) called, “telling the story straight” to correct history, stereotypes, and dominant paradigms that misalign and misrepresent Black people. Similarly, Anthony Oliver-Smith refers to repossession in the aftermath of a catastrophe to reclaim history and identity as work, “setting the record straight” (2005, 61). A commonality of these ideas about chronicling stories in a

particular way is that they emphasize the multiple ways that one can approach interpretation through the blending of theories, data, and people. The investigator, from initial design to data collection and analysis, inherently influences all facets of a research project.

As this vignette helps to illustrate, this study is thoroughly influenced by my background, experiences, and socially-constructed identity as an outsider in the post-Katrina Lower Ninth Ward. This includes but is not limited to my being (or being seen as) middle-aged, middle-class, non-married, non-disabled, without children, cis-gendered woman, white, privileged, Northern, American citizen, and an academic. While my intention is not to set any one particular narrative or perspective straight, this dissertation does come from a particular perspective, and from that perspective works to share fragments of contemporaneous realities, valuing subtle to substantial transformations which occur in the wake of a calamity. I endeavor to make known the efforts of survivors, the incomprehensible strength and courage of the human spirit, things that have yet to be comprehensively acknowledged, chronicled and appreciated in and beyond scholarship on the post-Katrina Lower Ninth Ward.

One of my dissertation committee members once asked me if I thought I was helping out and doing good with my post-Katrina participation and subsequent research, or if that is how the community viewed my work and me in the Lower Ninth Ward. I understand that such inquiries are an attempt to get at the racial, class, and a host of other power dynamics integrally involved in the work I have done, in order to address critical issues and questions that deserve reflection. This complicated and important dialogue brings up matters that I have taught in classrooms, have given much thought to personally, and have continued to struggle with since the start of my involvement with this particular research project, in addition to past studies with people of color, marginalized, disenfranchised, and oppressed communities, and as a cultural anthropologist.

Working to make an actual difference requires recognition of my privileged position, in addition to the realization that I have the ability to access and influence discourses, and a responsibility to take action within and outside of the academy. Such responsibility includes a lifetime of commitment and ongoing work.

### *Overview of Dissertation Chapters*

In assessing the slow to non-existent return of the Lower Ninth Ward, particularly in comparison to other regions of New Orleans, Harry Van Oudenallen explains that building plans need to consider effective use of human energy. Their assessment more specifically involves two interconnected maxims at work whereas, “the amount of energy people are willing to expend is proportional to the confidence they have in its success and the release of human energy diminishes in proportion to the perceived and real obstacles” (2010). I consider residents to be most aptly positioned for such evaluation and that they make the best decisions for themselves. In the words of one long-time Lower Nine homeowner, “My house floated away. But the land did not move. So, I felt like since the land didn’t go nowhere, I could come back here and rebuild”. This dissertation focuses on residents both determined to return and in the process of returning. The research documents fragments of their experiences and selected practices highlighted within a journey that continues at present. Woven together, these stories illustrate a pattern of social action that not only interacts with, but also influences transformation in residents’ lives, livelihoods, as well as landscape in the aftermath of disaster.

Margaret Mead’s frequently quoted caution comes to mind: “[n]ever doubt [to] that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” This idea articulates the essence of this dissertation’s overall narrative and

illustrates diverse forms of disaster aftermath place-making primarily enacted by Lower Ninth Ward residents post-Hurricane Katrina. I specifically examined resident-led neighborhood tours, the establishment of community offerings, civic-orientated engagement, and commemoration efforts. Focusing on these practices not only exhibits a range of ways in which ordinary people (re)make what was once familiar, but it also reveals the approaches and resources employed, and the how and why this social action transpires.

Before examining the ways in which place is made by residents in the Lower Ninth Ward post-Hurricane Katrina, Chapter 2 (In the Decade that Followed: Time, Literature, and Theory) provides an overview of related theories and relevant literature. Specifically considered are realms of work on the everyday, space and place, and disaster. The chapter also includes a review of some Hurricane Katrina literature that informed how I approached this research project and the field. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the various approaches and understandings of the term *place-making* as well as my own use of the concept in this dissertation.

Because sightseeing is so omnipresent in the city of New Orleans, and even more so in the aftermath of the storm, Chapter 3 (“This is Not Normalcy Here”: Place-making Through Tourism) introduces the field site through various styles and modes of touring the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood post-Katrina. The ways in which the tour participants discuss, construct, codify, and represent the neighborhood as well as community are examined. This survey promotes sense of empowerment of place through multivocality (Rodman 1992). It also helps to situate much of the dissertation by providing background to the area’s history, in addition to contemporary portrayals of the storm’s impact on the natural, built, and sociocultural environment with accounts told by the residents as well as others. What materializes from

investigating the residents' tours and their spatial narratives (which stitch together for visitors the pieces of their lives through descriptions of pre/post storm experiences) is their multilayered knowledge and sense of place amid an altering social fabric and shifting surroundings.

In detailing what it takes to come back after disaster, Chapter 4 ("And They Think We're Back": Place-making through Everyday Engagements) expands this inventory of practices to include social action involved in responding to intricate struggles within residents' attempts to return home. A particular focus of this section concerns an episode in which residents traveled to Washington, D.C. to facilitate personal dialogues with political representatives, primarily about a myriad of issues with a government program created to assist the recovery of homeowners. While their trip illustrates how residents hold officials responsible for a host of failures in their return from disaster, it additionally shows how residents hold themselves accountable to one another in addressing the infringement of human rights by continuing their legacy of civic and political activism, what I refer to as *everyday engagement*. Consideration of place-making through everyday engagement occurring within a post-disaster context represents residents as active agents, subjects of their own history, and while considering power dynamics within residents' practices, this approach expands conventional boundaries of resistance studies.

The post-Katrina built landscape is still in need of considerable reconstruction and Chapter 5 ("Try and Be a Lead on It": Place-making through Community and Commercial Establishments) highlights residents' efforts in starting up their own community organizations and businesses. Of particular concern are the efforts of one resident who opened and operated a neighborhood health clinic. The story of her work offers a compelling portrayal of peoples' place-making that involves collaborative partnerships and attends to community healing and well-being. Due in part to the many challenges experienced in the aftermath of the storm,



residents identified numerous encounters with “oppositional forces” that gave rise to an obstacle-ridden return which challenged recovery in the wake of calamity, and speaks to the tactical responses of residents in the face of official strategies of recovery. While the story of a health clinic exemplifies a novel endeavor to improve upon the offerings available in the community, it is also representative of other residents’ innovative efforts of intervention amidst neighborhood uncertainty and instability.

Chapter 6 (“The Original Rooftop Riders”: Place-making Through Memorials and Commemoration) concerns cultural artifacts and traditions associated with bereavement and remembrance. Here I provide a review of various Hurricane Katrina memorials found across the city of New Orleans and outside of the parish. This examination of material culture reveals the diverse ways in which the storm and the lives lost in it are formally and vernacularly venerated. This chapter also presents two commemoration ceremonies, one held by officials and another organized by a Lower Ninth Ward resident as a means of demonstrating the different ways that Hurricane Katrina is reminisced about and symbolized in the past and well as at the time of my research. While I illustrate how the residents’ mourning is political and performative, I also reveal how this engagement changes over time and contributes to the healing and solidarity of their neighborhood.

The collection of place-making activities chronicled in this dissertation attest to some of the everyday and extraordinary work involved in negotiating former conditions and evolving circumstances. These stories of travesty and triumph culminate in the concluding chapter that summarizes the findings of this dissertation. I specifically revisit the transformative capacity of place-making to influence residents’ lives and livelihoods, in addition to the landscape in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This analysis of place-making lends itself to a significant mosaic of

meaningful toil that is rooted in collective autonomy and mutuality, and which has a great deal of relevance in and beyond the anthropology of disaster. As we enter the era of global climate change (and some argue societal collapse) it is something that may unfortunately be relevant to far too many.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **In the Decade that Followed: Literature, Theory, and Time**

I struggle to explain my senses on the morning of the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Back in August of 2015, I had arrived in New Orleans a few days prior to meet up with residents that had become family throughout the years of fieldwork. I felt a sense of obligation to be present at this time since commemorative events had become a sort of reunion for residents (former and present) and persons affiliated in the aftermath. I also felt terribly conflicted participating in the day's events alongside the teeming journalists, reporters, and various authority figures.

While driving over the Claiborne Bridge I immediately noticed a dramatic increase of activity taking place in the Lower Ninth Ward. As I took in the landscape, I noticed large-scale tents set up on various blocks and a significant security presence. There was also a concentrated number of vehicles in the neighborhood, and their need to travel slowly given the pothole-ridden streets created heavy traffic—an uncharacteristic scene. I felt a range of intense emotions. I felt great sorrow for what this community lost and for what all others along the Gulf Coast have endured because of Hurricane Katrina's wrath and aftermath. I was outraged at the lack of

progress that had been made in this neighborhood and other marginalized communities. I was also extremely concerned that the swath of outsiders visiting that one day, along with the greater public who was made aware of the spectacle through media outlets, would not hear or understand the countless stories of profound struggle and perseverance that I worked to document and comprehend myself.

Although some awareness was surely possible to gain through participation, grasping a holistic understanding of the storm and recovery from it was less likely. While such understanding is impossible for me and other researchers to achieve, it is something that I strive to work toward as do the others whose work is discussed in this dissertation. In this chapter I review three distinct, theoretical literatures relevant to this study: (1) the role of everyday practice in the production of place with an emphasis on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Keith Basso, and Michele de Certeau, (2) scholarship focused on the role of maps and mapmaking in the construction of place with a special emphasis on the work of scholars included in two important edited volumes by Low and Lawrence-Zungia (2003) and Roberts (2012), (3) the theorization of disaster, most importantly its aftermath, to reflect on the temporal dimensions of disaster research to date. In the final section I provide an overview of the literature about Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. I will use these three bodies of theory and scholars in what follows to develop my own processually oriented space-making framework heavily indebted to the work of Keith Basso. It informs my orientation to making sense of some of what I heard, saw, participated in, and (all too often) deeply felt in the Lower Nine post-hurricane Katrina. Indeed, something I continue to struggle with (theoretically and personally) is what I heard, saw, participated in and felt so viscerally that afternoon in 2015 while driving over the Claiborne Bridge.

### *Theorizing the Everyday*

Much scholarship of the everyday explores ordinary life by focusing on human action. People and their doings, intentional or otherwise, become a reference point to understand unfolding events and, more generally, social processes. This body of literature described as “practice theory,” informs an investigation of the ways in which social beings make and transform the world they live in. Often of particular interest are lifeworlds located outside formal institutions of modernity including sites of residence and neighborhoods. Practice theory emerged in the 1970s as a means of bridging previously discrete studies, which tended to be individually and processually oriented, or structurally oriented and collectivist. Practice theory operates in a dialectical relationship between social structure and human agency that works simultaneously back and forth in an interrelated way.

Pierre Bourdieu is a prominent social theorist of practice and his work concerns the dynamics of power in society. He stresses that there is an inherent relationship between knowledge and action in the world and that social actors are neither completely the result of external material conditions nor intentional, socially conscious subjects with independent mental representations. In other words, people navigate their social environments, and in the process have the potential to differently engage with social structures. Social structures are enduring aspects of society that may include political institutions and kinship systems as well as material conditions and local forms of norms and customs. Social structures are not conceived by Bourdieu as constituting independent variables in society, rather they are emergent from interactions. Bourdieu explores this interplay between agency and structure through his key concepts of habitus, capital, and social fields. Their combined effect provides a powerful

framework to investigate processes by which society and culture are produced, reproduced and altered, even if ever so slightly. In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu describes *habitus* as:

systems of durable, transposable dispositions... durable ways of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking... which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (1990, 53, 69-70).

*Habitus* expresses attitudes, ideologies, lifestyles, expectations, and values of members of a social group. It is simultaneously a product and producer of social worlds, a notion that encompasses both the embodied, performative aspect of social structures and a mechanism for transferring such “dispositions,” as Bourdieu says, through time and across generations. Put another way, social systems structure habitus and habitus structures social systems in a constant process and is subject to change given that innovative action can modify existing structures and generate new ones. *Habitus* functions as “an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted;” thus it informs our inclinations and how to go about that action (Bourdieu 1977, 95).

Social fields then constitute the social and institutional ground or context in which people develop their habitus. Bourdieu and Wacquant define a field as:

as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation...in the structure of the distribution of power (capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (1992, 39).

There are numerous types of social fields, such as a home, park, workplace office, and society, and each consists of relationships between people, in different positions, with varying types of resources. As a result, the ways in which social beings act within a particular field is contingent upon their positioning in a given field in addition to its wider context and environment.

An individual's position in a field is defined largely in terms of their accumulation of capital. Karl Marx is one of several predecessors who influenced Bourdieu's scholarship on capital and practice. In effectively calling forth "the working class" as a real actor in history, Marx put great emphasis on the production of class. In a similar manner, Bourdieu's attention to the force of singular social agents stresses the significance of individual agency, however he also illustrates that a person's character and inclinations are not without social influence. Concerning assets, Marx's idea of capital is solely economic. By comparison, Bourdieu considers capital to have additional forms, and these forms can be inherited, accumulated, and lost by individuals. Different forms of capital also shift in value dependent upon its use in particular social fields and positionality in a social field.

Along with economic capital, which Bourdieu regards as pertaining to stocks, shares, and investments that accrue value, social and cultural capital are additional forms he has theorized. Social capital is located in relationships, including informal, familial, and professional networks of mutual acquaintance that contribute to reputation and provide (perceived as well as actual) resources to achieve goals. Cultural capital refers to skills, capabilities, and knowledge. Bourdieu further characterizes cultural capital as: (1) embodied, for instance, preferred tastes and dress acquired over time through socialization, "often coded in muscular habits and reflexive responses," (2) institutional, such as degrees and awards recognized in the form of academic credentials, (3) objectified, consisting of material objects including clothing, furniture, and works of art (Upton 2006, 12). The value of economic, social, and cultural capital is context-dependent; their use and appreciation change in relation to particular milieus. Each type of capital can have symbolic qualities, which take form once they are recognized as legitimate.

Bourdieu's notion of practice is rooted in the term *praxis*. Although importantly associated with Marxism, praxis is a concept discussed by early philosophers to notable scholars including Antonio Gramsci, Hannah Arendt, and Paulo Freire. Thus, praxis has varying definitions comprising action orientated toward changing society and the repetition of acts to reproduce or subvert social structures. An even more straightforward conceptualization of praxis is revolutionary practice, or, in other words, practice to make change. Yet it is not just simply acts based on reflection, but action committed to human wellbeing. "Praxis might take a variety of forms, but (is) always strategically directed toward the liberation of working people, most broadly conceived," (Nonini 2016). In this dissertation, I tend to employ the word *practice*, however this theorization of praxis informs my general use of the term.

While Bourdieu's theoretical orientation has not gone without debate or critique, more frequently, anthropologists maintain its continued relevance and useful application not only within the discipline, but also for its interdisciplinary value (Schneider 2006). Critiques have also encouraged further theoretical developments. For instance, given Bourdieu's limited emphasis on feelings, researchers have proposed the use of the phrase "emotional capital" as a means to enhance understanding of how knowledge can exist beyond thoughts and ideas as subjective perceptions, emotions, and feelings, which can also acquire a collective dimension (Marinelli 2010). Henrietta Moore also develops Bourdieu's theory of practice as part of her research on how space takes on gendered meaning; thus, including space as a subject with multiple interpretations (1986). Disaster-orientated social scientists have additionally made use of the capital as a concept by exploring its roles in social networks (Elliot and Haney 2010), timing and outcomes of social interactions (Lovell 2011), influences in recovery through collective narratives (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2011), and in building resiliency (Aldrich



2012). In light of substantially-altered social structures and structures of the built environment in extremely disruptive periods (such as disasters), practice theory offers an insightful perspective from which to understand post-Hurricane Katrina social realities. Hence, Bourdieu's work in this area has a great deal of relevance to this research and informs the dissertation in a number of ways. Bourdieu gives us a way to understand how "we are inclined to respond to certain situations in certain ways" but also with appreciation "that our predispositions are constantly challenged and altered by variations in environment: bit by bit we modify our accustomed responses," (Upton 2006, 12). Such a theoretical orientation helps us to think about how people subjected to structural violence respond to adversity. Perhaps more importantly, Bourdieu's work shows that practice is not predictable nor a mechanical reaction, but rather it entails creative potential, provides a lens that lets us discern residents' practices as working to alter oppressive conditions and circumstances found in the aftermath of disaster, which supports the idea that, "[p]laces come into being through praxis, not just narratives" (Rodman 1992, 642). Practice theory considers people's diverse intentions, their interactions with one another, and the ways in which humans work to transform their worlds, including those tremendously battered by environmental and manufactured forces. While Marx considers praxis to bring about change through revolution, change for Bourdieu comes about progressively given the processual, iterative relationship between agency and structure. For residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, immense change transpired in both an immediate fashion and over time in the years that followed the storm. Yet they themselves have also been agents of change and this dissertation documents that through residents' purposeful action to remake themselves and their habitus, and in doing so reclaim their lives and lived environment.

Focusing on instances of everyday experiences supports the production of locality (Appadurai 1995) while simultaneously gaining insight into the cultural process of place-making across landscapes (Hirsch 1995). A realization that habitual behaviors involve internal processes also emphasizes the ways that social practices activate or engender spatial meaning. Edward Casey proposes that this is an intimate relationship of embodiment and emplacement. He argues that space is no more prior to place than the body is prior to culture since the body is itself an enactment and outcome of cultural practice by virtue of its considerable powers of incorporation, habituation, and expression (1996). While embodiment is vital to Bourdieu and Casey, Keith Basso also maintains that place informs and “animates” the body as much as the body does in relation to place and he calls this ‘interanimation’. He described this relationship as follows:

as places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process—inward toward facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternating both together—cannot be known in advance (1996, 55).

Basso’s concept of interanimation imparts the idea that the people concurrently shape landscapes as landscapes evoke memories, meanings, and values. As shown in Basso’s work with Western Apache at Cibacue, Arizona, such reflection expands our awareness of what place can mean to people. I consider this framing particularly relative to understand how a severely transformed landscape influences how people attempt to (re)inhabit it and how this effort is then manifested on the sociospatial terrain.

Michel de Certeau is another theorist of interest to this dissertation, albeit to a lesser extent than Bourdieu, and has contributed to the literature of everyday practice. Not unlike Bourdieu, de Certeau’s work situates social theory so as to analyze the dichotomized scheme of agency and structure. However, de Certeau attempts to do this by focusing not only on micro-

level practices within everyday living, but also on how particular practices do certain things. De Certeau does this most notably by investigating the ways in which “users” operate. In his seminal text, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau proposes that:

to make explicit the systems of operational combination which also compose a ‘culture,’ and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term ‘consumers’ (1984, xii-xii).

More specifically, he highlights different “ways of operating” between the “strong” and the “weak” through strategic and tactical practices; it is these two concepts which are of particular interest in this dissertation. Practices framed as strategies operate within the purview of “official” power and control, characterized as assuming a place defined as proper and isolated from an “environment” (xix). Conversely, tactics emphasize the creative maneuvering employed by common folk frequently with little official power. For them, everyday practices (conceived as tactics employed in social and culture fields) such as simply talking, reading, and moving about may constitute habits of resistance. In relation to this research, de Certeau’s two categories of practice are useful to consider when analyzing place-making as forms of resistance in the aftermath of a disaster since strategies imposed by city or urban planners (for example) often diverge with the ways that neighborhood residents of a community tactically interact with their implementation. These “multiform and fragmentary” practices of the everyday provide a means to not only appreciate, but to analyze how multiple practices commingle and inform a perspective that considers tactics not as a subset of strategy, but rather signifies adaptive responses to them (Goff 2014).

A significant implication of this literature includes the understanding of where practices occur. De Certeau makes distinctions between space and place and in doing so presents the idea of spatial practices. He describes this relationship as "a place (lieu) is the order (of whatever

kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence;” a place is thus "an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability" (117). In comparison, "space is composed of intersections of mobile elements; space is a practiced place” (Ibid). It follows from these distinctions that many elements of a place can seem concretely distinguishable and stable while in fact, their seeming stability is a consequence of patterns of practice. For example, place as particular geographic locations comprised of securely built structures that are consciously organized and ordered infer a way of understanding what a neighborhood is socially. Yet a neighborhood is simultaneously a space consisting of people and their practices broadly conceived. Although neighborhoods are designed as places for community, what occurs there at times may encourage this and at others impede communal activity. In this sense, "space is a practiced place" (Ibid) with considerable possibilities, and neighborhoods are a process created through the practices of people. In other words, neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward are a process of becoming in social practice.

How this relates to spatial practice is illustrated prominently throughout de Certeau’s discussion of people walking in the city. Streets “geometrically defined by urban planning,” consist of form (linear paths, curves) and material properties (pavement, gravel), are designed (and indeed anticipate) for pedestrians to traverse in particular ways. While their composition defines a suggestive quality for moving about the city, of particular interest is “the act itself of passing by” (Ibid, 91). Pedestrians may often follow the intended routes, while others may wander or engage in window shopping that do not follow planned pathways. They may also interact with the road by way of sidewalk chalk or skipping, and even ignore the plan by crisscrossing or turning off a sidewalk. De Certeau argues that the influence of “spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities,” however, the constructions of places do not determine

actions transpiring within them and activities of spatial practice embody the potential to learn from their use and interpretation (Ibid, 98). The work of Bourdieu and de Certeau helps to convey that the emergence, continuation, and transformation of place involves practices that are as habitual as they are purposeful.

James Scott is another social theorist of everyday practice whose work is of select interest to this dissertation. Scott's decades of studying a wide range of social activities, to the intentions of the subaltern as discussed in prominent writings, such as *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) contribute to his recognition as a leading scholar of resistance studies. His work tends to consider alternative forms of social organization that often oppose the dominant institutions of states and capital. In Scott's most recent book, *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play* he argues that the "basic respect for the agency of non-elites seems to have been betrayed not only by the states but also the practice of social science," (2012, xxiii). Scott explores this throughout the text by attending to various aspects of what he refers to as the *vernacular*, forms associated with the informal, everyday, and the independent, and which contrasts with "official" orders, related to the establishment, bureaucracy, and authoritarianism. Scott makes the case for applying an "anarchist squint" as a means to see weaknesses and paradoxes in official stories and approaches in a society, and in doing so, to highlight improvised action of the vernacular (xii). He affirms through this approach "certain insights will appear that are obscured from almost any other angle" including discernments of mutuality and cooperation without hierarchy or state rule, and maintains that "anarchist principles are active in the aspirations and political action of people who have never heard of anarchism or anarchist philosophy" (Ibid).

Before discussing the few ways in which Scott's work are relevant to this research, it is important to highlight a major difference between his work and this research. In particular, while Scott writes about communities that more often than not live outside of the state, I am not asserting that Lower Ninth Ward residents live outside the state. Rather, individuals of this community are citizens of the United States yet given the apathetic response of the American government to long-term recovery efforts post-Hurricane Katrina, residents have had to implement immediate responses and interventions in the aftermath commonly expected of the governing administration. In another regard, I recognize that the anarchist ideas considered by Scott, which may not be intended to topple, but rather oppose a government, may not be what Lower Nine residents are working toward or exposing in any way. Instead, the relevancy that I am asserting between my work and Scott's work simply concerns documenting aspects of anarchical ethos in the field that David Graeber describes as "autonomy, voluntary association, self-organization, mutual aid, [and] direct democracy" (2004, 2) and which is of limited discussion in much academic literature.

Other ways that Scott's work is of interest to this dissertation has to do with his focus on local knowledge and sensibility. This focus relates to my concentration on the practices of returned residents rather than those of outsiders to this community of many sorts, including governing authorities. Another aspect of Scott's work that relates to this study is his lamenting the loss of vernaculars. In light of my focus on and examining of post-disaster context, his discussions of changing land use patterns, local naming systems, and artisanal forms of production is of interest. Perhaps more than anything, Scott's work offers a way to describe the qualities of survivors' resourcefulness, and thus empowerment in an otherwise extremely disturbing and deeply regrettable episode in United States history.

Before concluding this discussion, a final theoretical notion deserves attention that, although it does not have specific connotations with philosophies of everyday practices, has definitive relevance to this research. This concept is “structural violence” as discussed by the renowned medical anthropologist Paul Farmer (2004). Despite its various definitions, Farmer refers to it as “violence exerted systematically—that is directly by everyone who belongs to a certain social order: hence the discomfort these ideas provoke in a moral economy still geared to pinning praise or blame on individuals” (307). He deploys the concept of structural violence as a means to understand modern social life and as a means to make apparent that which is “ethnographically invisible.” Farmer does this by taking an “historically deep and geographically broad analysis” to current events and happenings, from the AIDS epidemic, to studies of racism and poverty. He does so, as he writes, because without political economic considerations, “[w]e see the puddles, perhaps, but not the rainstorms, and certainly not the gathering thunderclouds” (309). These considerations inform my research, and help me to recognize that which is unseen, yet so embedded in the emergence of what it is I have documented.

Another important concern pertains to Farmer’s discussion of “the erasure and distortion of history” by “architects of structural violence” which he describes as “part of the process of desocialization necessary for the emergence of hegemonic accounts of what happened and why” (308). As a researcher, I become inherently involved in challenging such hegemonic accounts as I have worked to include in the Hurricane Katrina-related body of literature documentation of Lower Ninth Ward residents’ place-making efforts in the aftermath of this storm. An orientation develops to provide insight into how people experience what scholars have come to refer to as “double disasters” (Adams 2013) and “disaster capitalism” (N. Klein 2007). For a few years, I had the opportunity to teach a university course about multiculturalism in the United States.

Structural violence was a prominent theme explored throughout that class and I employed various readings to explain and provide examples of this concept to students. However, not until after viewing the documentary, *Trouble the Water* (Deal and Lessin 2008), one of many Hurricane Katrina-related documentaries, did the students really seem to grasp these issues. Perhaps the pivotal moment came during the film when an audio recording played a 9-1-1 operator go silent after explaining there was no one to help to a caller who described that they were “going to die.” The students also expressed great disbelief that the storm and its immediate (and continuing) aftermath was a chapter in recent American history, and even more so that they had little to no knowledge of it. Every semester, without fail, a student would ask why and how did we not know about this? On a related note, Michael Powers maintains that, “[h]istory has taught that the recovery from Hurricane Katrina will be largely a reflection of the values and commitment of those tasked with restoring the region” (2006). I consider this statement to be particularly telling for two reasons. First, this reveals profound neglect and disregard of governing agencies and political authorities. Second, it shows the incredible triumph of victims who survive by way of practices they enact that confront and negotiate such structural violence.

### *Theorizing Space/Place*

Space and place have long fascinated scholars across academic disciplines. Anthropology is no exception as it has been a topic of interest in early anthropological writings. This lineage includes Malinowski’s influential ethnography of the Trobriand inhabitants that begins with an imaginative narration of landscape, “imagine yourself... alone on a tropical beach” and whose research highlights the spatiality of transactions between villages (1922). Also included in the lineage is Evans-Pritchard’s work of the Nuer which reveals an interconnectedness between the



environment, social structures, time and space (1940). Anthropologists' long-standing attention to spatial dimensions of cultural beliefs in humans' experiences and practices (Lawrence and Low 1990) lend to a well-rehearsed study of space (Andrews 2012). Although the spatially bounded "people, place, and culture" paradigm that shaped much of the anthropological discipline into the twentieth century has since been deconstructed, a fully-formulated anthropological theory of "culture and space" does not yet exist, and often borrows from developments in geography, urban studies, and sociology (Kokot 2006, 10).

Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zungia have edited an important volume on the anthropology of space and place; their introduction provides a historical overview of the literature within this field (2003). Edward Hall is credited as the first to propose the concept of an anthropology of space, and his research in the field of proxemics investigates the influence of culture on spatial perceptions and behavior (1966, 1968). Low and Lawrence-Zungia also present in their book a conceptual framework for analyzing space and place. The book is organized into a variety of categories that make explicit the concepts related to place-making, including that it is: embodied, gendered, inscribed, contested, transnational, and tactical. The literatures that inform this dissertation (and the work of the authors included in their edited volume) construct space as an essential component of sociocultural theory. The conceptual framework developed in this body of scholarship presents crosscutting themes that I consider in this discussion, while it also encouraged my own "rethinking and reconceptualizing understandings of culture in spatialized ways" (2003, 1).

Les Roberts provides a more recent collection of work focused on the anthropology of space and place in *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practice, Performance* (2012). This edited volume of work includes a reevaluation of the place of maps and mapping in cultural studies and theory

while also emphasizing the “importance of practice and performativity in everyday productions of place and space” (11). While discussions of cartography and the inclusion of maps are minimal in Low and Lawrence-Zungia’s anthology, the authors in Roberts’ collection purposely explore the value of using maps as part of the fieldwork research process and the analysis of data in making sense of the geographies of human experience.

Roberts’ book is organized by themes I also regard as informative to this project. The first of these is “Place, Text, Topography” and chapters within this section primarily examine literary constructions of mapping. The chapters within the “Performance, Memory, Location” section explore mapping as both a method and product in the process of place remembrance while the last section “Practice, Apparatus, Cartographies” concerns the theme of performativity. Chapters in this final section focus on what maps can do rather than merely represent. This volume of work is particularly of interest in that it suggests innovative ethnographic methods that include engaging geospatial technology in discussing anthropological applications of cartography. This work also contributes to the development of an anthropology of cartography. Such geospatial technologies include, but are not limited to, navigational devices (global positioning units), cameras equipped with global positioning systems (GPS), online mapping applications and software programs (MapQuest, Google Earth, Bing Maps, Street View), and GIS, including the Environmental Science Research Institute’s (ESRI) Desktop ArcGIS, as well as open source versions like QGIS, GeoDa, and Grass GIS.

Academics within and outside of anthropology continue to contribute to the theorization of space and place as well as the everyday. This is especially the case for those in the fields of human geography and Critical GIS. Such areas of scholarship have persistently proposed the need and demonstrated the value of theorizing space from critical, postmodernist, and feminist

perspectives (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, Domosh and Seager 2001, Crampton and Krygier 2005, Kwan 2002, 2007). Gupta and Ferguson contend that such approaches add to our questioning of the traditional reliance of anthropology on a spatially-localized society while forcing reevaluation of some of the discipline's foundational concepts (1992). It gives rise to innovative anthropological inquiries into who makes spaces, how are spatial meanings established, what is at stake, and who contests them. It further engages reflection on positionality and dimensions of power, historical contexts, in addition to political and economic structures and processes. This probing moreover emphasizes the need to consider higher levels of self-consciousness in issues of space and place-making which include concepts within the growing spatial lexicon in social sciences that consider border, territory, and mobility (Watts 1992).

Research more specific to the body of literature on human dimensions of place illuminates that space and place are embedded in open, porous networks of social relations (D. Massey 1994) which embrace history and rootedness, as well as values and meanings. Dolores Hayden describes this perspective as the "power of place" (1995) and discusses how ordinary urban landscapes embody a capacity to nurture citizens' public memory (Ibid, 9) while reflecting the physical, biological and cultural character of everyday lives. Setha Low and Irvin Altman (1992) address the human dimensions of place through a notion of "attachment" whereby individuals develop similar ties to place via social, material and ideological dimensions akin to the psychological process of infants that establish and maintain their relationship to their parental figures. Consequently, research conducted on the loss or removal of a community from its space and place by disaster has been documented to be profoundly traumatic (Oliver-Smith 1996). Finally, human geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan considers how the sensing of place attachment is both a cultural creation and biological response, something he calls "topophilia" (1961, 1974). Research

by Basso additionally informs this realm of work by demonstrating how our respective cultures condition our senses of place. Basso develops this perspective in his rich ethnographic studies of place, place names, and what they mean specifically to the Western Apache in Arizona. I credit the efforts of Basso's research as being the most instrumental to sparking my interest on the subject of place-making.

### *Theorizing Disaster*

As all-encompassing occurrences, disasters constitute an intricate mosaic of realms (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999). Within each of these realms are dynamic factors that manifest traces of the force disasters make on landscape, community, and culture. Under extreme conditions, humans confront difficult existential questions and their adaptability is challenged. The multidimensionality of the expression of disaster and their entanglement with every aspect of life makes few research topics more daunting to anthropology (Fjord and Manderson 2009). Yet, the discipline's holistic study of humanity and traditional fieldwork among populations living in stressful and hazardous environments aptly positions the anthropological study of culture and catastrophe (Oliver-Smith 1999).

Anthropological investigation of disasters has been ongoing for almost a century. During this time, anthropologists have theorized disaster through ongoing consideration of the roles of history, political ecology, and social variables. This trajectory of work has in turn influenced the contexts, discourse, and paradigms informing disaster research. The ethnographic fieldwork undertaken as part of this scholarly work has also enhanced understandings in how disasters are deeply experienced through oral and written narratives. Anthropological scholarship of disaster contributes to be an important body of literature that moreover speaks to the value of culturally

appropriate and inclusive disaster planning, relief, and related policies. For instance, Fjord draws attention to the need to seriously consider the cultural expertise of those who negotiate social and built barriers in their geographies every day in all realms of disaster management (2010). Implementing this approach tends to promote universal design that benefit many rather than accommodating “special needs” which, in fact, are not *special* when everyone is suffering (2009).

Evolving concepts and roles of the anthropologist in the human dimensions of disaster have also emerged as being important over this period (Oliver-Smith 1996, 1999, S. M. Hoffman 2005). For instance, contemporary recognition of disaster as a process (Kroll-Smith and Couch 1991) developed from its earlier conceptualization as a singular event, something that has broadened comprehension of its systemic root causes (Bankoff 2001) while also arousing a deeper probing into conventional disaster analysis paradigms of risk, vulnerability, and resilience (Blaikie, Cannon and Wisner 1994).

Despite this constructive engagement and such contributions, anthropological inquiry has much yet to learn from the profundity of disaster. From the perspective of Christopher Dyer, a disaster studies researcher, the social and cultural responses of communities to disaster constitute just one important area for anthropological research (1999). There is a vast array of scholastic knowledge that continues to develop, from disaster remaining a contested concept with blurred boundaries, to fragmented interpretations of disaster’s diachronic relationships to human life, livelihood, and cultural legacy. Even so, there is a definitive facet of disasters: they are catalysts for social and cultural change. In the words of Anthony Oliver-Smith, “the issue of long-term social change has received significantly less attention than more immediate behavioral and organizational issues” (1996, 312). Such recognition is reinforced by Paul Doughty (2003, 319)

who makes the claims that “it is high time anthropologists turned serious attention to the examination of their [disasters] impacts on society and culture in both the short and long term.” The emphasis that these anthropologists make in their assertions for the pivotal role of temporality to be explored suggests an important direction for disaster research. Their insights concerning the theme of duration also highlight areas of responsible yet neglected anthropological examination of disaster.

While unintentional, the timing of this research came years after the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Long after the floodwaters receded, and journalists were no longer covering human-interest stories throughout the city I begin my work in the Lower Nine. Countless rebuilding plans had been proposed and discarded, and no-bid contracts had been allocated for post-Katrina clean up long before I arrived “on the scene.” Many of the dilapidated structures had already been torn down, and the contrasting, flourishing tropical vegetation, iconic of the South, draping from remnants of the built environment had also become part of the Lower Nine. Politicians had been reelected and indicted alongside corrupt contractors. Holidays, festivals, and seasons that fill the city’s calendar of events had repeatedly come and gone. Lives had perished, been birthed, and grown older. The swell of researchers from every discipline had retreated and since published an enormous and important catalog of Katrina-related literature, at the detrimental cost of “Katrina fatigue” on residents. This piecemeal description of the post-disaster terrain of the Lower Nine is where I found myself at the outset of my work beginning January 2009.

At the same time, extending the interval at which disaster research is conducted facilitates a number of important matters. This exploration can be a gateway for recognition of residual features from disaster that may otherwise be unobserved or disregarded. Consideration of this issue also holds promise of identifying emergent characteristics and qualities, and distinguishing

components that remain constant. Scale of change and scope of transformation prompted through the phenomenon of disaster reveal additional areas of potential insight. Such studies—which this dissertation strives to be—would innovatively contribute to the body of literature on disaster research and continue to enhance holism within the study of disaster, a hallmark of the anthropological discipline.

### *Hurricane Katrina Literature*

United States history records Hurricane Katrina as one of the most deadly and destructive storms. Along the Gulf Coast, it disproportionately affected Black Americans and devastated some of the most economically disadvantaged communities in the nation. The storm also rendered unprecedented damage to the unique city of New Orleans. The city's distinct factors contributing to its complex 300 year history are its unusual geography, conflicted history, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic traditions, culinary arts, and buildings and architecture influenced by, amongst others, early American Indian inhabitants, French and Spanish colonizers, enslaved Africans, and free people of color (Campanella 2007).

The collision of Hurricane Katrina with this confluence of factors drew strong interdisciplinary interest and as a result produced a substantial body of literature. Hurricane Katrina-related studies have answered questions concerning why residents chose not to evacuate New Orleans and documented the experiences of residents who remained amidst the storm (Klopfer 2015). Personal experiences of the storm and subsequent evacuation have also been documented and self-published by residents including one Lower Ninth Ward inhabitant (J. F. Smith 2012).

Much scholarship has explored the human tragedy of government mismanagement including daily chronological analysis beginning with the first week after the storm made landfall (Brinkley 2006); concentrated focus on wetland disappearance and levee failures (Heerden and Bryan 2006); a review of the contradictory forces (environmental, political, and social) unique to New Orleans (Colten 2005). Scholars have also focused on the intersection of Hurricane Katrina with a range of social variables. Their work has detailed pre- and post-Katrina demographics and statistics (Hartman and Squires 2006), with an emphasis on gender, race, and class disparities (Jones-Deweever and Hartmann 2006), intersectional vulnerability coupled with empowered responses (Ransby 2006), and with attention to local pre- and post-storm structural racism that also plagues urban areas nationally (powell, et al. 2006). Also included is an examination of representation through depictions of public imagery associated with low-income African-Americans, which contributes to America's cultural understanding of Black Americans and urban poverty (Young Jr. 2006); entrenched racism in American political life and the post-Katrina recovery (J. White 2006); and racial differences in perceptions of victims and concomitant reactions to governmental response (Huddy and Feldman 2006). Economic analysis has also accompanied racial studies to highlight impacts of white capitalism and neoliberal reforms in the aftermath of the storm (Leonardo 2010). Researchers have conducted linguistic analysis of socially-constructed categories (refugee/evacuee) (Masquelier 2006); studied symbolism in post-storm loss, and coping with disaster as a full-bodied experience and memory (Otte 2007); and examined the disproportionate effects and unequal distribution of recovery resources of Hurricane Katrina and the accompanying British Petroleum oil spill on the poor and people of color (B. Wright 2011). This work documents the destruction of human relationships and ruptured communities as "rootshock" (Fullilove 2005, Steiner, et al. 2006), and the



importance of social capital, particularly in the form of (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2011) relationships in the absence of individual resources (Weil 2011). Researchers' work shows Black clergy have played important roles in the response (Trader-Leigh 2008), and that their churches have been sites of empowerment in the recovery (DeVore 2007).

Another realm of Hurricane Katrina literature focuses on the localization of issues at a neighborhood level. This work shows, on one hand, that residents' community engagement is an asset within the recovery process, particularly when compared to projects implemented by outsiders (Queeley 2011) and, on another hand, that neighborhoods have had to demonstrate their "viability" in order to validate their return (Wendel 2009, Truitt 2012). Researchers have also detailed important features of neighborhoods: in the Ninth Ward, anthropologists have shown how second line parades act as a resource for reclaiming space post-Katrina (Breulin and Regis 2006). Also documented as prevalent in the Ninth Ward are disparities in policy (particularly related to housing recovery) which enforces stricter guidelines there than in other neighborhoods (Bates and Green 2009).

Hurricane Katrina literature also documents a long history of urban poverty, racial polarization, and government neglect. This has contributed to the vulnerability of the Lower Ninth Ward (Landphair 2007), and the city's extreme vulnerability resulting from decisions made over a 250-year history (Kates, et al. 2006). Researchers have recorded a strong sense of place in the Lower Ninth Ward (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009) that contributes to a long-term pattern of resistance in the neighborhood, and which has informed residents' responses to pre- and post-Katrina displacement (J. Jackson 2006). Academics have additionally documented how, for instance, New Orleans' Vietnamese-American community have come together in new, politically active ways in the wake of this storm (Leong, et al. 2007, Li, et al. 2008).

Another robust area of Hurricane Katrina literature concerns the intersection of this storm with political and economic forces. Such work has documented the maliciously incompetent relief efforts of the government (Lipsitz 1998, Ehrenfeucht and Nelson 2011); private firms as first responders (Shughart II 2006), five major top-down planning endeavors designed without residents' input (Ikeda and Gordon 2007); systematic divestment in the environment (Ruether 2006), the urban infrastructure (Lipsitz 2006), and social welfare programs (Scheper Hughes 2005); besides social inequalities in New Orleans and elsewhere in the United States (Pinder 2009) that remain factors at play in United States prosperity (Etheridge 2006). Researchers have also examined the subsequent emergence of privatization associated with disaster capitalism (N. Klein 2007) in various reform programs (Buras 2010), elimination of a public hospital (Lovell 2011), and the public education system (Quigley 2007).

Scholars have furthermore called attention to the national political implications caused by massive displacement of countless New Orleans residents who cannot return. This inability to return has contributed to a major loss of a previously strong voting bloc described as a "political juggernaut" that tended to vote democrat (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2011, J. White 2006). Other researchers have suggested that the limited number of electoral votes of Hurricane Katrina impacted states (Alabama-9, Louisiana-9, and Mississippi-6), and hampered the political interests of senators and congressional members since they would not likely profit from such efforts (Davis and Land 2007). Literature that addresses and shares personal experiences and political and economic issues such as the anthology, *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation* (James 2007) and *Floodlines* (Flaherty 2010) written in a firsthand account, truly humanizes matters of inequality and injustice. Likewise, Vicanne Adams's, *Markets of*

*Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina* (2013) also highlights changes brought about by privatization and market-driven governance.

Before moving on to the work of other scholars, I would like to briefly discuss the aforementioned text because many significant points that Adams's work raises inform and relate to this dissertation. To start, Adams's first sentences claim that her book is not about Hurricane Katrina, but rather about Americans who have managed to survive. She asserts that while she writes a story about New Orleans, it is a story familiar to other American communities that have suffered catastrophes and never recovered. I agree with this claim but have taken my argument in this dissertation in a different direction. On one hand, I, too, write about survivors. However, where Adams documents the ability of residents to survive a "second-order disaster" precipitated by the success of profit-driven solutions to a crisis (including the responses of grassroots, community, and faith-based groups that sprung up in the wake of these failures); I distinctively discuss particular practices enacted by the residents, primarily of the Lower Ninth Ward. These practices, which work to remake residents' lives, livelihoods, and landscape, are inevitably situated within the story Adams reveals in general about the restructuring of America's political economy, and more specifically about how the market forces involved in recovery, at a minimum, exacerbate existing inequalities and delay recovery.

I also agree with Adams's acknowledgment in the conclusion that her book "may not look or feel like it is about New Orleans at all" since it does not include extensive writing about "free people of color, the arrival of Afro-Caribbean spiritualism, or the birth of American jazz . . . no lengthy stories about tourism, Bourbon Street, Mardi Gras, Jazz Fest, or the French Quarter" (Ibid, 187). In a similar vein, while this dissertation does not go into detail about any one peculiarity that contributes to New Orleans exceptionalism, the research does consider how

various qualities and traditions characteristically affiliated with the cultures of this city influence the residents' post-disaster practices.

Adams's important reflection upon notions of "the routine" and "everyday" following a traumatic life disruption is a focus of her work with connections to my own study. She writes that people "seldom feel they can go back to normal." This perspective gives rise to residents getting angry and fighting against trauma while at other times adjusting and reconfiguring their lives (99). Although my research is in agreement with such sentiments as well as Adams's description of post-Hurricane Katrina circumstances that resemble a prolonged state of recovery more so than "being recovered," I document the ways in which residents make place amongst these conditions. Even if the places residents create are temporary, their practices cultivate spaces that in turn enable them to continue and cope—if not heal—from the ongoing traumas and disasters. Consequently, this research records how people reaffiliate and reconnect themselves to new locales upon returning to what is no longer possible.

As shown in this brief review of select Hurricane Katrina-related literature, the breadth of this work is comprehensive in many regards. Academics have paid considerable attention to the intersection of disaster with New Orleans' unique sociocultural, racial, and ethnic composition, its peculiar topography, and distinct social structures and institutions. Their research emphasizes the vulnerability that citizens previously overlooked or denied, and their studies have highlighted evidence of resiliency.

This body of work informs my dissertation and it is a tremendously important literature since it records a travesty in United States history that younger generations do not have access to as living memory. This scholarship is also a testament of a charged and ongoing matter that some would prefer to forget about and move on from. Moreover, much of this body of research uplifts

human dimensions of precarity, which is particularly imperative for those who see this phenomenon as exclusively opportunistic.

Despite this significance and scope of Hurricane Katrina literature, as publication dates reveal, much of this scholarship emerged in the immediate aftermath of the storm. This is particularly vital to consider given the enormity of impact scholars have documented; the implication is that it will take decades to repair, restore, and recover from, if “recovery” is even possible. A sampling of such concerns discussed in their Hurricane Katrina-related writing include: colonialization, imperialism, corruption, poverty, unjust federal policy discrimination, segregation, divestment, (post) capitalism, crumbling infrastructure, blight, deindustrialization, underemployment/unemployment, (environmental) racism, white supremacy, disenfranchisement, escalating crime and cost of living, urban renewal, and bureaucracy. In light of these myriad social ailments, studies focused on how people either confront these matters directly or navigate residual outcomes from them amidst returning from an immense disaster, are particularly limited. This underappreciated area of understanding is precisely the focus of this dissertation. Focused on the ways in which returned residents try to make change, this dissertation concentrates on what they are doing, years into the wake of Hurricane Katrina. It is meant to complement and build upon the foundations already established by scholars.

### *Place and its Making in Disaster*

Given that an individual’s spatial experiences have a very powerful resonance in the way places are understood (Connerton 1989, Relph 1976, Tuan 1961), places have become regarded by scholars as complex social constructions (S. Low 2000), integrated with multisensory, lived experiences (Tuan 1974, 1977, Basso 1996, Feld and Basso 1996, Hayden 1995). The

fundamental human activity of representing, sensing and maintaining place is a daily act, an irreducible part of the human experience (Tilley 1994, 18) that requires as well as produces contexts (Appadurai 1995). Edward Casey considers peoples' continuous exchange, dialogue, and interaction with their surroundings as making place more of an event (or process) than a thing. He uses the term *placelings* to describe this concatenated relationship, in part because human existence is never without emplaced experiences (1996). In turn, these experiences contribute to tacit knowledge of places and point to the process of place creation as *also* a process of knowledge production.

Grounded in the phenomenological tradition, place-making constitutes a realm whereby, "every so often, more or less spontaneously, alone or with others, with varying degrees of interest and enthusiasm, almost everyone does make places" (Basso, 5). As a result, place-making is not only about people's relationships to their places, but also about how people create relations amongst themselves in places, which can sometimes at moments be invisible and dramatic (Schneekloth and Shibley 1995). In order to understand and explain how dominant cultural forms are "imposed, invented, reworked, and transformed," Gupta and Ferguson maintain that the interrelations of culture, power, and place must specifically be taken into consideration in the analysis of place-making, in addition to matters of identity and resistance (1997, 5-7). These particular concerns highlight the importance of examining the meaning and utility of how "culture sits in places" (Escobar 2001) and attend to calls for putting "culture back in place" (Casey 1996). Employing place and its making as an analytical lens elicits anthropologists' early meaning of culture as "place tilled" (Ibid) while valuing contemporary scholarly regard for places as ever-transformatively emergent.

In this dissertation, place-making is a concept used to examine enactments of ordinary peoples' activities that transform their lives and livelihoods, as well as landscapes. Specifically, I employ the term *place-making* to reference purposeful practices, of the everyday and extraordinary, that involve visceral engagement with social and spatial realms. This particular framing of the term *place-making* differs from others' depictions of this concept which have become quite pervasive in and outside of academia. My intentional use of a hyphen between *place* and *making* is a marker to indicate this divergence, particularly from other approaches such as the placemaking of elites. *Elites* refers to "those with ready access to resources and power . . . who steer the interpretations and uses of a place to support their own financial interests" (Paulsen 2010, 600). This social group often works "toward these ends in tandem with place professionals including architects, planners, and engineers who design alterations to physical spaces and marketers and boosters who promote specific projects and places" including sites of intensive commercial activity and redevelopment projects like urban renewal and brownfield conversion (Ibid). In contrast, I focus on acts of making place that are more subtle and routine like how "individuals live, work, and interact in a given locale, shaping its uses and associations through everyday activity" (Paulsen 2010, 601). This distinction is especially imperative to emphasize and give consideration to scholars who note "that the powerful are more successful at articulating their versions of the past than are the powerless and that the constitutions of working people, racial and ethnic minorities, and women are often erased when places important to their histories are destroyed"(Ibid, 602).

Given that this research focuses on place-making occurring in the aftermath of disaster, temporal dimensions in which this work emerges are also important to consider. This exploration diverges from analysis of design and implementation typically associated with professional

placemakers (architects, landscape designers, city planners, etc.), and instead investigates the ways in which inhabitants cultivate, embody, interact, sense, and remember—in the case of the Lower Nine, places once familiar to them. Emphasis extends beyond a myopic focus on place, emphasizing instead the processes of its making and the people contributing to its composition and form through their practices—practices that develop, regress, and give stillness to space.

Approaching the aftermath of catastrophe through contemplation of residents' place-making facilitates greater depth of understanding cultural influences on urban space, society, and the human condition. Investigating the (re)making of place does not attempt not to move beyond the vulnerability and resilience paradigms prevalent in disaster research. Rather it posits place-making as a lens for developing awareness of the mutual entanglement of issues leading up to and following radical change. This enables a more holistic understanding of complexity to be acknowledged within the process of residents' return and recovery.

Focusing on residents' direct participation with the ongoing reconfiguration of place subjected to calamitous impact contributes to an area of geographically limited but widely important research. Interrogating post-disaster place-making bears witness to residents' perseverance and meaningful toil that manifests humanness in and belonging to place, emphasizing significance in even ephemeral efforts that yield healing qualities likely indistinguishable otherwise. Place-making is a dynamic form of cultural activity experientially constructing the past, traditions, and identities—an understanding of places as living and lived (Basso 1996). Contemporary scholarship on embodied place-making attends to the mutually constitutive relationship of body and material environment by emphasizing the identification and importance of human agency in physical construction and social production of place (Sen and Silverman 2014)



Examining how place is (re)made following disaster is a particularly complex endeavor. Thus, this research project required drawing upon multiple disciplines, topics, and theories to attend to the various themes of consequence and events that transpired during my research in the Lower Nine. As this review demonstrates, there is a great deal of understanding about how disasters can cause impacts and the ways in which particular social groups are detrimentally affected. Lesser known and understood is how those affected engage with changes brought about by catastrophe, and by what means they produce subsequent transformation in the aftermath.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **“This is Not Normalcy Here”:**

#### **Place-making through Tourism**

The occurrence of extreme weather events contributes to an urgent sense that humans are living in a particularly precarious time, perpetually subject to potential destruction and disaster (Furedi 2007). As Gray and Oliver describe, “The modern era is often cast as an age of catastrophe, of global conflicts, genocides, and ‘ethnic cleansings’, disasters of industrial and agrarian change and of technological hubris, and, increasingly, environmental cataclysms” (Gray and Oliver 2001, 1). Yet, given the frequency and force of nature-related, domestic catastrophes in 2017—which includes, but is not limited to, severe winter/hail storm events (Aon Benfield 2017); record-breaking numbers of tornados (Donegan 2017); incredibly destructive flooding, mudslides, hurricane (NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) 2017); and millions of destroyed acres by wildfires in multiple states (Achenbach 2017) —no matter how this phenomena is accessed, what follows these events are drastically altered areas and, inevitably, allure for the public to visit them.

In addition to its recognition as one of the fastest growing cities in the United States (Kotkin 2013) New Orleans, Louisiana is also a top travel destination (Travel + Leisure 2014). Tour options in and around the city provide visitors a range of themes to choose from including neighborhood regions (Garden District, French Quarter), ghosts, vampires, cemeteries, Voodoo,

plantations, and swamp tours. Following the unprecedented devastation from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, it took about three years for New Orleans' tourism industry to return to its previous numbers of visitors and level of their spending (New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation 2008, Robbie 2008) with thousands of visitors participating in one of the more recent tour offerings focused on post-Katrina New Orleans (Robb 2009). In 2006, Gray Line New Orleans Bus Tours began offering their "Hurricane Katrina: America's Worst Catastrophe" tour (Grey Line 2015) with a host of other companies following suit (Figure 4). These guided bus and charter van tours traverse the city, for two to three hours costing somewhere between \$24 to \$65. Some of these tours focus exclusively on the destruction and others more so on revitalization projects (Louisiana Tour Company 2016, Tours By Isabella 2016, Gators & Ghosts 2017). By design, tourism in this city has a long history (Gotham 2007, Gotham 2007) and constitutes one of its major remaining industries (J. White 2006). Although Hurricane Katrina occurred over a decade ago, Katrina-themed tours continue to be offered; and for some companies these tours are "the only tour[s] that sells" (P. Pezzullo 2009).



Figure 4- Tour bus advertisement

When visiting New Orleans some travelers include in their itinerary of activities visiting specific regions of the city outside of the highly-concentrated “tourist bubble” of the French Quarter (Judd 1999). Before the storm, the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood did not draw tourists. However, after becoming one of the most devastated areas of the city from levee-failure flooding, it has become a popular destination for visitors to view firsthand. Perhaps this is due in part to the neighborhood gaining global prominence amidst Hurricane Katrina media coverage. Years into the wake of this storm, visitors rent cabs for the excursion, while others “satisfy their curiosity” from their own vehicle. In the words of one such individual who wrote about this outing in an online Trip Advisor review:

*Me and my friend are just curios (sic) by nature, and with each place we visit we adventure out on our own without tour guides. On my recent trip to NOLA we jumped in the car to visit the Lower Ninth Ward. Armed with just few Katrina newspaper clippings and Google maps we found our way without incident. Now, almost 10 yrs post Katrina, there is still quite of bit work left to do to the area. Some areas are clearly new and a upgrade to what was there previously... however, some properties and areas remain untouched. It was very surreal driving besides the levies (sic) and you quickly realize why the area became distressed during the storm. Driving by the empty lots or lots with only the front porch steps remaining was very humbling. God bless that community and the families who returned (ritabell16 2015).*

The sentiments expressed in this passage characterize a prevailing account of many unfamiliar with the Lower Ninth Ward after their first visit. Most commonly observations describe the landscape scattered with remnants of the built environment (Figure 5) that seem to discharge an uneasy, lamenting atmosphere and which parallels Yael Navaro-Yashin’s portrayal of loss and regret “in the air” as well as zones of ruination and abandonment in post-war North Cyprus (2012, 27). While a cursory trip through the neighborhood facilitates some awareness into what the post-disaster landscape entails as noted by ritabell16, this sort of tour results in particularly limited understandings of past conditions and unfolding circumstances.



Figure 5- Overgrowth along a Lower Ninth Ward street

Local tour companies attempt to advance beyond “windshield survey tours” by providing excursions that fulfill visitors “desire for the dramatic” (Gotham 2007) while promising a rich and compelling experience. One tour, specifically focused on the Lower Ninth Ward, vows that it is “like nothing else ever offered in this city . . . close up and hands on with the people who were affected, the people who are rebuilding, and the people who are carrying on the rich, cultural traditions of that historic neighborhood” (Confederacy of Cruisers n.d.). The tour is said to “leave you uplifted at the spirit of the neighborhood and understanding of the people who are choosing to return to their lives after having it all buried under 10 feet of water” all the while affirming a “hopeful future of the area . . . to give you a well-rounded view.” Alternative tour operations, such as this one conducted via bicycle, tend to promote experiences embedded with a particular sort of ethics careful to provide genuinely accurate understandings of people and the area, implying that such experiences and spaces would not be accessible with a conventional tour company. This approach, emphasizing first-hand testimony and a shifting focus from event to

effects, characterizes recent trends in the tourism industry where companies attempt to provide tours that foster sensitivity in their delivery of perspectives, and uphold virtues of social and environmental justice (Clark 2006). For instance, Phaedra Pezzullo's illuminating research on toxic tourism documents efforts within the environmental justice movement that involve the offering of non-commercial trips to tourists interested in learning about poisonous chemical pollution and its damaging impacts on local communities and ecology. Pezzullo explores these advocacy tours as a tactic of resistance, which works to reduce the cultural and corporeal distance between hosts and guests (2007). Self-guided trips, as well as activist, traditional and niche tours, provide a range of ways to encounter and experience senses of place. Despite their differences, be it thematic focus, mode of transportation or form of participation, this assortment of outings demonstrates various ways to participate in the realm of disaster-related tourism.

Unlike Trip Advisor commenter ritabell16, my initial visit to the Lower Ninth Ward began with a tour by longtime resident Mrs. Valerie in January 2009. It was the first of many that I would take with her over the next several years, alone or in the company of family, friends, university students, faculty, and administrators while she was a Community Scholar in Residence for UWM, as well as after holding that position. As a determined and vocal community advocate in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Mrs. Valerie has met countless volunteers, students, church groups, conference attendees, academics, tourists, celebrities, athletes, and politicians, and has accommodated their requests for tours of her community in the aftermath of the storm. I quickly realized that Mrs. Valerie was not alone in her efforts to escort all kinds of visitors through her neighborhood and understood that she would surely establish with outsiders that the conditions were "not normalcy" as she put it. I learned of anthropologists who also wrote about traveling with residents as they explain recovery dynamics (Queeley 2011). Likewise, I became familiar

with numerous other returned Lower Ninth Ward residents who were fulfilling similar requests to provide tours of the neighborhood post-Katrina for a wide variety of individuals, groups, and organizations, including their visiting family members and friends. Throughout the past few years, I have joined different residents' tours of their community, participated in the classic ghost, haunted history, and cemetery tours, and experienced lesser known ones including the Hidden Histories' "1811 Slave Revolt" and the "African Life in the French Quarter" tours. I've even taken a French Quarter for Kids Tour, a tour of the Whitney Plantation, and an academic tour hosted during an annual American Anthropological Association conference. In this engagement, I acknowledge my simultaneous positions as tourist and ethnographer—similarly recognized by Edward Bruner, who "oscillated" between these subject positions while researching tourism and working with Maasai people (2001, 903).

As a means of beginning to address this dissertation's focus on mapping the (in)distinguishable process of recovery in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood post-Hurricane Katrina, what follows in this chapter is an exploration of tourism-related efforts undertaken by returned Lower Ninth residents in their community. Concentration on vernacular tours is the first place-making practice examined in this dissertation. In this chapter, I maintain that the particular place made by residents through this practice is a space to reestablish their identity, and shift experiences of marginalization to a focal point. Furthermore, in doing so with outsiders, such practices empower Lower Ninth Ward residents to correct and critique erroneous characterizations about members of the community and to provide a counter narrative for the neighborhood. My focus is on how residents employ tours resourcefully as a political statement.

I turn next to a brief review of relevant anthropology of tourism literature to position some theoretical grounding followed by a vignette describing what it is like going on a resident's

tour of their “Lower Nine.” The next section provides a discussion and analysis of the tour, with specific consideration of how residents’ tours have certain characteristics that distinguish them from conventional tours. In detailing these distinctions, particular attention is given to the concept of ethnocartography—a praxis referring to the mapping of land use and natural resources by indigenous communities from their own perspective. I use ethnocartography as a means of interpreting the ways in which Lower Ninth Ward residents present frequently-visited tour sites to outsiders. Such tours include history discussions (and unplanned talks about contemporary conditions) at each tour stop and while traveling from stop to stop with the residents. This contextualization enables visitors to understand how these places provide (or previously made available) unique, purposeful features in the neighborhood. The local knowledge and depiction of experiences shared at these stops during the tours communicate spatial narratives that not only entail shared qualities amongst community inhabitants that work to remake the Lower Ninth Ward habitus, but this work also differs depending upon resident’s subjectivity and improvisational delivery of material. The chapter concludes with consideration of the ways in which lives and livelihoods transform in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Given global climate change and the idea that people are “pulled” to frequent sites associated with calamity, attention to how residents present their community and discuss the recovery process post-disaster has much to offer in developing insight to place (dis)attachment and cultural authorship by attending to not only who is saying what, but why (Enarson 2000). This focus also enhances understandings of how marginalized groups create, restore, and reclaim space, particularly in the aftermath of its devastation (Carter 2014).



### *Approaches to the Host/Guest Encounter*

As tourism has grown to become one of the world's largest industries (Urry 1992, Tisdell 2000), the anthropological study of tourism, originating almost fifty years ago, has developed a distinct body of work. The topic of tourism which began as a rare remark in anthropological literature (G. Burns 2004) has since become recognized as a relevant and valuable field of study (P. Burns 1999). Some anthropologists argue that tourism is more telling about culture than simply a manifestation of it (Lacy and Douglass 2002) despite their struggles to define it (Stronza 2001). Principle themes in this growing literature include "host" and "guest" relations (V. L. Smith 1989, 1992), specifically with the focus on European and North American tourists or guests and "non-western" hosts (Nash and Smith 1991); tourism management and tourism as an engine of economic development (Jarfari 1989); impacts of tourism on local communities and environments (MacCannell 1976, Urry 1992); issues of authenticity (MacCannell 1973, E. Cohen 1979); and "the gaze" of the tourist (Urry 1992, 1992).

As the anthropology of tourism research continues to develop these central topics, the legitimacy of this subject of study has gained further acceptance. Initial hesitancy of some anthropologists to investigate tourism resulted in part from discomfort with its resemblance to their work as researchers in the field. Thus, its study was deemed by some to diminish the professional status of their work (Wallace 2005), while others argued anthropologists constitute just another particular type of tourist (Redfoot 1984). The practice of tourism itself has also garnered much critique from its reliance upon low-wage labor (J. White 2006) to recognition of this enterprise as a "cancer", a perspective resulting from the perceived power of tourism to "homogenize society" and "commodify culture" (Reid 2003). One tourism scholar who connects his critique of commodification in tourism to subsequent threats and issues of exploitation put is

thusly, “culture is packaged, priced, and sold like building lots, rights-of-way, fast food” (Greenwood 1989, 179). Still other scholars question the idea that exploitation is pervasive in tourism experiences and maintain that this as an overgeneralization (E. Cohen 1988, McKean 1989).

The fervent to more tempered perspectives on tourism research contribute to enhancing comprehension of this phenomenon. For instance, anthropologists have also come to problematize the enduring binaries of tourism itself as either good or bad (Nash and Smith 1991), as a nightmare/evil or as a godsend (Crick 1988, Ness 2003), or as pro- or anti-tourist (MacCannell 1976). Despite differing opinions about tourism and the shortcomings of its analysis, the topic of tourism has recognition as a “subject that brings unique, even vital, insight to the study of contemporary cultural phenomena” (Ness 2003, 22). Another favorable assessment for researching tourism concerns the subject’s ability to reveal how “cultural identities are formulated and modified, reified and negotiated, projected and conditioned” (Lacy and Douglass 2002, 7). Consequently, tourism research and analysis hold promising insights grounded in a “logical imperative” (Douglass and Lacy 2005). Employment of a more balanced approach to studies of this industry likewise facilitates a holistic appreciation of tourism’s impacts (Ness 2003). Anthropologists are no longer in a position to dismiss tourism either through intentional neglect or condemnation (Wallace 2005).

Through knowledge gained from initial oversights to past and present critiques of the subject itself, the body of anthropological tourism literature continues to grow as a fitting field for anthropological study (Graburn 1983) with interdisciplinary significance (Wergin and Neveling 2010). However, evolving forms of tours and traveling pose new theoretical challenges

for anthropological research (G. Burns 2004). The diversity of contemporary practices widening what classifies as “tourism” illustrates an issue for some researchers in the discipline.

Les Roberts and Hazel Andrews propose addressing this concern through reflection on what constitutes “doing tourism” through consideration of its negation—the “undoing” of the anthropology of tourism (2013). The aim of this perspective is in essence two-part: 1) facilitating constructive clarity as to what constitutes the anthropos within the “capacious” field of tourism through critical analysis of “embodied, existential, and experiential dynamics of place-making and mobility practices;” and 2) and the relationship of these practices to the category *tourist* (Ibid, 31). Examples that the authors’ highlight in their discussion include “placehacking,” which involves exploration of temporary, derelict, off-limits, or abandoned areas within built environments, and “urban exploration” that entails pursuing not contrived, but rather candid and venturesome experiences, often in hidden or off-limits places. Roberts and Andrews provoke evaluation of the nature of these practices, or rather, *what is it not* about them and their relations to those practices “more routinely engaged under the banner of tourism anthropology” (Ibid, 31).

Such consideration is of particular interest to this chapter’s focus on tours provided by Lower Ninth Ward residents, where I outline their closer resemblance to experiences found in realms of “counter/experimental” and other niche tours than with conventional tourism. Before delving into discussion of Lower Ninth Ward residents’ tours, there is one more recent branch of tourism research to consider—most commonly referred to as *dark tourism* (Biran, Poria and Oren 2011, Stone and Sharpley 2008). This realm of tourism research concerns “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering, or the seemingly macabre” (Biran, et al. 2014) with pioneering efforts to study this form of tourism beginning over two decades ago. Initial studies focused on “insatiable mass consumerism” and recovery of “traditional” products and markets

(Huan, Beaman and Shelby 2004), along with the restoration of traditional destinations, including the deliberate use of the sites of tragic events to rebrand and promote those destinations (Gotham 2007, Medway and Warnaby 2008), and the issue of “touristification” of sites of past tragedies (Tumarkin 2005).

As attention to the relationship between tourism and disaster continues to garner increasing consideration, researchers have been encouraged to explore the ways in which destinations acquire new attributes that emerge post-disaster (Biran, et al. 2014). Also requested of scholars is that they expand their focuses to include the progressive potential of tourism for personal and social transformation (Suzuki 2010). This breadth of scholarship is of particular interest because it relates to this chapter’s exploration of tours given by Lower Ninth Ward residents of their neighborhood—a neighborhood significantly affected by Hurricane Katrina and still in the process of recovery. Such consideration supports the notion that the host’s perspective should be heard and enhances the understanding of how individuals affected by disaster engage with tourism of their neighborhood while influencing their own recovery from the disaster as well (Stronza 2001, G. Burns 2004).

*“And this is my neighborhood... the Lower Nine”*

After visitors arrived by their chartered van or bus, it was customary to get out of the vehicle and meet Mrs. Valerie outside her home near Claiborne Avenue, a main thoroughfare only a few blocks away from the Industrial Canal—a manmade waterway connecting the Mississippi River with Lake Ponchartrain, bordering the Lower Ninth Ward to the west and close to the neighborhood welcome sign (Figure 6). After a brief exchange of greetings in the front yard or

inside the living room, she frequently welcomed visitors with an emphatic “and this is my neighborhood . . . the Lower Nine.”



Figure 6- Lower Ninth Ward welcome sign

Mrs. Valerie’s delivery seemed to be a way in which to prepare those on the tour for what was to come in the approximately two-to-three-hour long presentation/tour to follow. Sometimes inside her house and other times outside, depending on the group size, visitors were likely to learn first about Mrs. Valerie’s family and her upbringing (Figure 7). This background often included how they, like others in the neighborhood, came to live on this block after their displacement. Displacement came about as a consequence of *eminent domain*, from the town Fazendeville—a settlement established by free Africans, located on the site of the historic 1811 Battle of New Orleans, in an area now referred to as Chalmette in the Saint Bernard Parish. As part of this discussion, she often highlights that her father had the government relocate their home to the Lower Ninth rather than have it flattened with a bulldozer.



Figure 7- Mrs. Valerie leading a neighborhood tour  
Photo credit Shannon Dosemagen

Mrs. Valerie also shares that as an adult she lived next door to the home in which her parents lived and raised her in. Her sister lived on the other side of the neighborhood before the storm. Mrs. Valerie typically also includes talking about the years-long process of getting into her new home post-Katrina, which involved struggles with the Road Home program, altering building code regulations, and contractor fraud. If inside her home, perhaps a few of her photo albums or framed pictures might also be passed around the group to visually enhance the stories being told and show a few of the remaining possessions salvaged after the flooding.

Although there tended to be no specific itinerary, Battle Ground Baptist Church was likely a customary site for Mrs. Valerie to take people on her tour (Figure 8). The red brick structure housing this place of worship is particularly prominent against the tall, emerald shades of vegetation across the street, in the mostly remote area surrounding it. While standing with visitors outside of the building, throughout various phases of its reconstruction, Mrs. Valerie

typically talked about being a member of this over one-hundred-year-old church. She also discussed attending church with her brothers and cousins before the storm, but who now post-Katrina are no longer members since they reside outside of the neighborhood. Mrs. Valerie would also likely talk about her familial connection with this church back in Fazendeville, and afterward when it relocated from there to its present location on Flood Street in the Lower Nine.



Figure 8- Battleground Baptist Church being repaired post-Hurricane Katrina

The Industrial Canal was another likely destination of Mrs. Valerie’s tours (Figure 9). After walking up a grassy incline from the road to floodwall, Mrs. Valerie would explain that this levee was one of many that failed in the city following the landfall of not just Hurricane Katrina back in 2005, but also when she was a teenager during Hurricane Betsy in 1965. While there with tourists she draws attention to an area of the wall that is a different color concrete from the rest—the section said to be where a barge came through, and with it a decimating surge of floodwater over ten feet deep. If asked, Mrs. Valerie goes into detail about this levee’s initial

development to “repair,” and likely share during her discussion details about the class action lawsuit filed against the Army Corps of Engineers for its subpar construction and enforcement.



Figure 9- Visitors approaching the levee wall

The Bayou Bienvenue Wetland Triangle, obscured behind a metal wall, accessed by crossing train tracks and climbing a stairwell, is another common stop along residents’ tours (Figure 10). Once on top of the wooden platform, an elevated panoramic view of the neighborhood appears in one direction, and in the other a body of water becomes visible. A small number of tree stumps appear from the water slightly covered by algae. Mrs. Valerie’s description of the area includes how the area used to be a swamp once densely filled with cypress trees where residents regularly caught crawfish, fish, or turtles for a meal. In her response to the typical follow-up question “what happened?” she explains that this is a result of an introduction and increased concentration of saltwater from disappearing wetlands further down the coast from petroleum plants, and the construction of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, a 76-mile-long channel (completed in 1968) which provided a shorter navigation route to the Gulf of Mexico. In discussing the importance and fragility of this ecosystem that previously



absorbed storm surges, Mrs. Valerie may share information about her hazardous materials apprenticeship program at Xavier University that she began at age fifty—which also influences her husband’s description of her as “too environmental.” Before leaving the wetlands, referred to by its new name “Bienvenue” (or an older reference, “the swamp,” depending on the residents’ inclination) mention is often made of the fact that the new platform was constructed post-Katrina with the assistance of university faculty and students from Colorado and Wisconsin—perhaps a priority that should have come after residents’ houses were repaired.



Figure 10- Visitors heading toward and sightseeing at Bayou Bienvenue

Another regular spot included in tours is the House of Dance and Feathers, a cultural museum that celebrates the legacy and traditions of Mardi Gras Indians, Social Aid & Pleasure Clubs, and Skull & Bone Gangs, quietly tucked behind the home of curator and director Mr. Ronald Lewis on Tupelo Street (Figure 11). Visitors gain access to the museum by walking up the driveway of the spunky African-American elder, which turns into one of two ramps leading to its entrances. An American flag hangs on the outside wall of the tin-roofed building along with a small sign. It reads, “Come a stranger, leave a friend.” This sign is quite apt given Mr. Lewis’s approachable demeanor and generosity of time shared with neighbors and visitors spent discussing his extraordinary wealth of knowledge of local cultures, traditions, and politics.

Vibrant colors ornament memorabilia inside the compact room creating a densely-filled, visually-stimulating environment. Particulars of the surroundings emerge once the eyes have a moment to focus. Framed documents, photographs of people, and posters abound the walls next to elaborate patches of beadwork. Books and resource papers stacked on tabletops with embellished umbrellas decorating the ceilings and various artifacts fill display cases. After taking his seat at one end of the museum, attention diverts to Mr. Lewis's introduction and overview of the collections. In his presentation he tends to inform visitors about his efforts with Mardi Gras Indians and Social Aid & Pleasure Club, neighborhood's history, and Hurricane Katrina-related experiences. Visitors' questions direct Mr. Lewis's talks; during other post-Katrina times, he wants to discuss the latest current event or political. For those interested learning more from Mr. Lewis's wealth of knowledge after this stop, some purchase his published book which is available for sale at the museum, or they decide to visit with him as the local griot at the neighborhood farmers market.



Figure 11 - House of Dance and Feathers Museum

The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology is another typical stop (Figure 12). Depending on the time and day of the week, while driving by or stopping inside of the red-and-cream-colored brick building, Mrs. Valerie makes it known that this is the only operational school in the Lower Ninth Ward. She might discuss the post-storm dismantling of the New Orleans public school system or mention the struggle to reopen the school. During her story, she talks about the building being new before Hurricane Katrina;

however, in light of the school taking on some flooding, it needed cleaning up. Mrs. Valerie, alongside community residents, leaders, and volunteering college students were willing and able to assist with these first steps of restoration by removing trash and gutting the building. Not anticipated during this phase of reopening the school were threats of arrest from the National Guard as the volunteers attempted to gain access to the locked school. Mrs. Valerie speaks plainly about this fight, in addition to the countless other battles for municipal services, or with rebuilding assistance programs, revealing how and emphasizing that “they did not want us back” and “they did not want the Ninth Ward back.” Additionally, she may also talk about institutions that did not come back. One such case in point is Holy Cross School and the decision to reconstruct the facility outside of the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood (Figure 13).



Figure 12- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Science & Technology  
The only operational school in the Lower Ninth Ward post-Katrina until 2016.



Remains of the all-male, Catholic school (pre-k-12<sup>th</sup> grade) post-Katrina in the Lower Ninth Ward



Relocated (from the Lower Ninth Ward to the Gentilly neighborhood) and rebuilt

Photo Credit: Manuel Broussard

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/72222?id=67524>

Figure 13- Holy Cross School

Smitty is another Lower Ninth Ward resident who could frequently be found taking outsiders on tours of his neighborhood in the early post-Katrina period (Figure 14). He is an active member of the community and attends almost every meeting held in the neighborhood, albeit purposely late to avoid any religious invocation at its start. He has also come to appreciate the surge of visitors since so many of his neighbors have yet to return; he appreciates being in the company of others.



Figure 14- Smitty lecturing about Lower Ninth Ward background to visiting students

Given his agedness, which lent to his calling any residents in the neighborhood younger than he as “newcomers” (no matter if they had resided there for over fifty years), Smitty would likely mention that he went to Holy Cross. However, it had a different name at the time and the surrounding landscape was quite different, too. Smitty would share memories from his youth describing canals down the middle of some streets where there are now “neutral ground” medians, a time with no public transportation on *this* side of St. Claude, and undrained swampland where dense housing stood before the storm. As he chronicles that the Lower Ninth

Ward did not have basic services and municipal resources until the mid-twentieth century, Smitty also often characterized the neglect of city services in the area as chronic, a condition that he reminds visitors characterized them long before Hurricane Katrina. At the school both Smitty and Mrs. Valerie are apt to highlight the yet-to-be-rebuilt community center across the street and likely point out the years old, “temporary” mobile trailer in which the fire station is setup.

The “steamboat houses”, a distinct pair of ornately decorated homes designed and built by a steamboat captain in the early twentieth century, is another possible site for Mrs. Valerie, Smitty, and other residents to take visitors (Figure 15). When Smitty takes people to this location, he uses the area as an opportunity to expound upon it as a delineated region of the Lower Ninth Ward, referred to as Holy Cross, which he and many others differentiate from the “Lower Nine” in several ways. Geographically, this section has more protection from flooding than other regions of the neighborhood because it is located on the highest ground of the Lower Ninth Ward. Socially, a white community resided in this area given that this is where early European slave-owning inhabitants lived until white flight occurred over half a century ago. Smitty continues by referencing critical moments of the past that contributed to their exodus, notably including the contested integration of local public schools. He also discusses the intense racial segregation in this neighborhood while growing up and explains that Black folk like him could not traverse beyond St. Claude Avenue, a border of Holy Cross, into the white neighborhood. He emphasizes the depth of this entrenched isolation through a story he tells about a senior citizen he tried to help in recent years by getting them post-Katrina aid at a particular site located in Holy Cross. Along the way, this individual said that they had not ever previously entered that area though they had lived in the Lower Ninth Ward their whole life. Due in part to his abundant stories of life experience and being a sage scholar of history, Smitty has

an endless supply of examples of racial bias and discrimination in the neighborhood, the Orleans Parish, the state of Louisiana, and the South to counter the uncertainty of any participants on the tour. His wisdom and assured delivery are particularly reminiscent of another tour guide I had the opportunity to meet and work with, Mr. Leon Waters, of Hidden History Tours. In a comparable manner to Smitty, Mr. Waters informs tourists of the emergence of New Orleans's decades-long lack of a sound economic infrastructure, and the ways in which the past contemporarily renders the city and surrounding communities at risk for raw exploitation from polluting industries, government incompetence, and obstruction.



Figure 15- Visitors walk up natural levee along the Mississippi River  
Historic landmark steamboat house in the background.

Lower Ninth Ward residents' tours continue to a variety of other spots dependent upon visitors expressed interests and available time. Sometimes other stops include visiting a community center that a visitor might have had heard about or a historic marker that might have caught the attention of someone. A popular destination that tour participants request to see, and which often comes as a final stop (perhaps due in part to its central location, easy accessibility, or more abstractly as an apropos theme on which to conclude the tour) is the Hurricane Katrina



Memorial on Claiborne Avenue (Figure 16). Reverence of this site feels incongruent given its location along a major thoroughfare with the ceaseless passing of traffic influencing the visit. On one end his donated installation includes a partially framed house with towering steel columns described as representing various floodwater depths from the storm. At the other side are three granite memorial stones with an inscription to victims and survivors on the larger marker in the middle. Most certainly while at this stop, Mrs. Valerie will express the need for names of victims to be included here or displayed elsewhere at another commemorative monument. It is a matter of extreme importance for victims of the storm to be recognized by name from not only the perspective of Mrs. Valerie or other guides, but also by countless others who have contacted them to include their own loved one's names after learning of their interest and work to have them memorialized somewhere, somehow.



Figure 16- Lower Ninth Ward Hurricane Katrina Memorial  
Blue bollards signify flood water depths, red framing suggests housing.

No matter which resident was presenting the tour, travel between visited stops was another essential feature. Sometime this involved the immersion, indeed the surrounding, of visitors in blight. Other times it was their captivation with an uncanny stillness amid an urban setting. It also included the tour participants' serendipitous meetings along the way with local residents and other random visitors to the neighborhood. Inevitably, these newly found acquaintances would share and swap stories and experiences. By and large, residents' spatial narratives shared along these tours, mixed an enthralling concoction of happenstance, stark candor, disorientation, and profound intimacy that contributed to making some tour experiences unexpected and unforgettable. While tour participants predictably offered gratitude at the conclusion of the tour, it seemed quite common that visitors wanted to express more appreciation and often did so through an embrace with their tour guide, or by providing some sort of monetary offering to them.

### *Mapping Experiences of Transport and Wayfaring*

Ethnocartography is a somewhat obscure term and named exercise for those both unfamiliar and familiar with mapping techniques. Nonetheless, its standard use customarily refers to a participatory practice of mapping natural resources and land use by indigenous, non-western communities from their perspective, combining geographic information with folklore and history (Stein 2002). Ethnocartography is applicable to this research since it has relevancy in how residents discuss various sites visited along their tours. In particular, with residents describing the sociocultural, economic, historic, or political significance of each location, important

resources are identified and this holds parallels to other communities recording crucial resources on the landscape, for instance mapping wildcraft medicinal herbs or sacred sites.

*Remapping* is a related term that defines the charting of rich, diverse knowledge (place names, oral history, and sacred areas) typically disregarded in conventional mapping initiatives (Wood and Krygier 2009). One exceptionally illustrative example of remapping is a yearlong collaborative work by Apache consultants and Keith Basso wherein they mapped almost forty-five square miles around the community at Cibecue, and recorded the Western Apache names for 296 locations with place-names (1996). In this particular case, the project challenges place-names as a singular notion, “nothing more than handy vehicle of reference” despite being quite indispensable as well as for showing that in communities such as Cibecue, “they are used and valued for other reasons as well” (Ibid, 44). Remapping relates to my redesign of a map for Smitty who had previously been using one in his tours that was created for other purposes, albeit tentatively since it was not tailored for the journeys he offered (Figure 17).

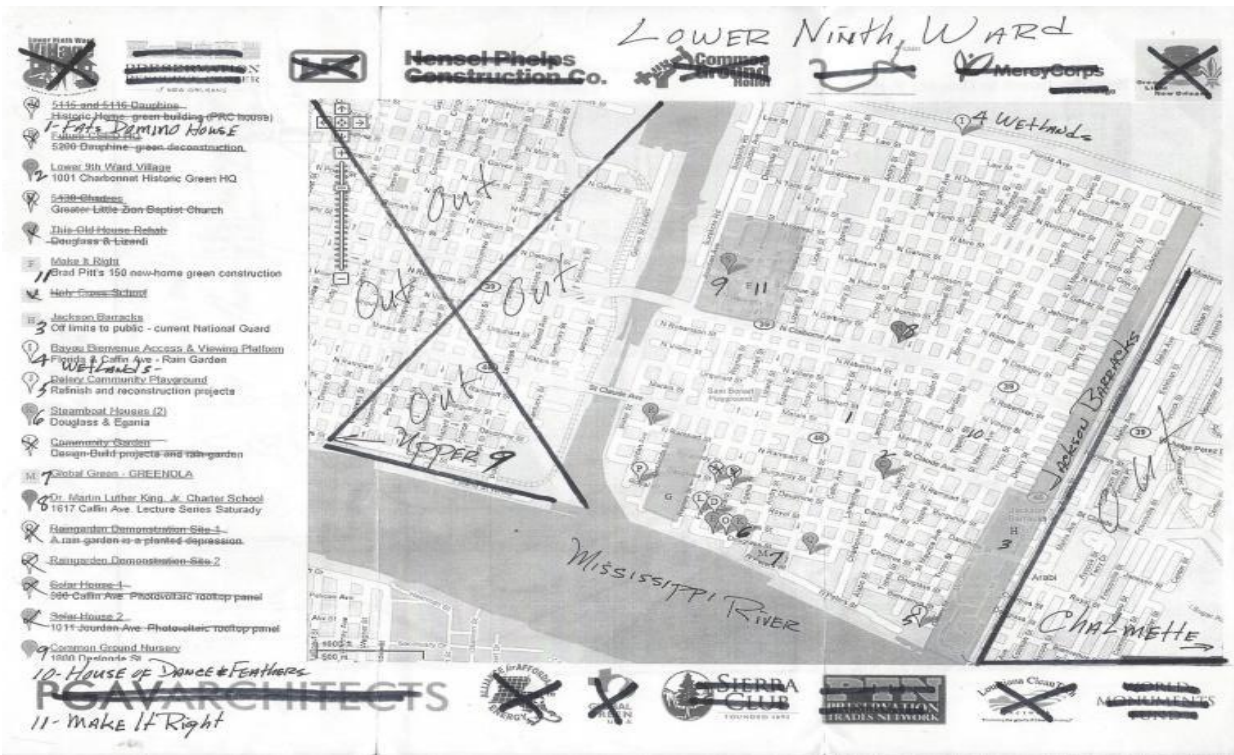


Figure 17- A Lower Ninth Ward resident’s tour-related map revisions

Given that the maps Smitty uses in his tours illuminate destinations of interest which would likely be visited along a tour, they fall within the category of tourism maps. Yet, because the maps also share with others a sense of the environment from a local perspective, which is further employed to navigate and narrate a complex, contested space to outsiders, the maps tell a very subjective story. They are also representative of cognitive maps. Cognitive maps (also called “conceptual” and “mental” maps) have long been used by human geographers and social anthropologists studying “how people describe places and remember what is where, their subjective sense of space and place” (S. Cohen 2012). Although Smitty appreciated having the custom-made map at his disposal to use with tours, he expressed that the best way for visitors to experience these sites was by being in place with them. Speaking to a group of university students interviewing him he said:

*I can show you, I can just walk you around the neighborhood so you can get some insight as to why I say some of these kind of things. Just sitting here talking, that's nice at the kind of intellectual level. But I'd like to see a couple of blocks around the neighborhood. Look at the houses. Then you get an understanding more of what I'm saying... I think if you're going to do an on-camera interview, you walk around the neighborhood, you talk to the person, got the background. Interact with the neighborhood, see the background, and then meet maybe some people in the neighborhood as we walk. We can do that. That can be done. That can be done. Pick out a day that's nice (Frazier 2010).*

Smitty's preference to have visitors experience his neighborhood and meet community members holds semblance to the concept of wayfaring. As defined by Tim Ingold in his book on the history of lines, wayfaring:

is the most fundamental mode by which living beings, both human and non-human, inhabit the earth, the inhabitant is rather one who participates from within the very process of the world's continual coming into being and who laying the trail of life, contributes to its weave and texture (2007, 81).

With residents' tours, such as those provided by Mrs. Valerie and Smitty, encompassing an overall experience of their neighborhood including its ever-changing dynamics, visitors are not only granted access to places, but also gain knowledge of the relevancy of the community members' past to more contemporary existences along the way. This process facilitates tours that hold more connection with wayfaring than transport—the latter describes rather a destination-orientated approach involving every move and serving the purpose of relocating persons to a particular orientation and final point (Ibid, 84). Taking into consideration that the essence of wayfaring concerns the journey of “getting there,” it has much resonance with residents' spatial narratives. Their spatial narratives detail aspects from pre- to post-Katrina spaces and movement between and through those spaces throughout the tour, something which also works to explain the traversed landscape, and develops the experience beyond visiting tour stops or destinations. Wayfaring also holds some semblance to the approach of undoing tourism as proposed by Roberts and Andrews in their discussion of conventional tours' reliance on an unswerving

itinerary, which attempts to prevent any possibility of uncertainty, chance, and serendipity in the journey.

In fact, these unstructured and fateful components are particularly constitutive of residents' tours rendering each one unique from the next. As a means of depicting this essence that is so distinctive to residents' tours and which exemplifies Ingold's sense of wayfaring, I have further modified the map initially revised for Smitty for this chapter. I did not alter the frequently-visited sites; however, I have converted some of the lines representing streets into text to convey commentary that often came up when in particular vicinities of the neighborhood, which I had written down while taking field notes during tours. I include dialog from residents that they tend to share during their tours while traveling between stops as a fundamental feature of the map to illustrate the importance of journeying in the overall tour experience (Figure 18). More specifically the comment, "There is way too much blight" attends to the overgrowth of vegetation in the neighborhood that is frequently talked about in residents' struggles to maintain what looks like deserted properties. Residents often discuss how this omnipresent aspect of the landscape contributes to an increase in crime (since it hides illicit activities), obscures disregarded objects, and adds to animal control issues. At the same time, visitors can hear residents' remarks about issues of blight at any time during their tour since no area of the neighborhood is completely without overgrown flora. Nonetheless, the location on the map where I have chosen to place this text is particularly desolate and does not have any common tour spots in the few block in its radius. It is a region that hardly seems to have any activity, and barely any evidence of physical structures remain. Although there is no customary stop in this part of the neighborhood, it is not uncommon for residents to take visitors to this region because of its stark absence of human-related goings-on and its towering, seemingly impenetrable,

vegetation. While residents would bring visitors to this region, given that tour groups more often than not were traveling by bus or van, it was not always conducive to traverse along these streets due to the particularly treacherous road conditions. Obstacles including deep potholes and large, sunken portions of pavement (often hidden by water flowing from what some New Orleanians refer to as “eternal springs” of broken water mains yet to be repaired, let alone turned off) hinder visitors’ ability to get out of the vehicle and walk around these extraordinarily isolated and uninhabited areas.

# RESIDENTS' TOUR & DESTINATIONS

Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, LA



Figure 18- Resident-informed tour map of Lower Ninth Ward  
Embedded with dialog from neighborhood residents.



Reflecting upon the collection of statements included in the map, a few observations about the collection deserve mention that I had not noticed before incorporating them into the map. Some of the residents' comments express memories of the past, including events such as the exodus of many white Lower Ninth Ward residents that relocated just across the parish boundary to St. Bernard Parish after racial integration of public schools. Memories shared by residents also include sites like pointing out that McCarthy Elementary School was once located where the Dr. Martin Luther King Charter School of Science and Technology stands, or to an area noted as a place to gather firewood and kindling for their mother's wood-burning kitchen stove. Another part of commentary articulated during the tours addresses critiques. For instance, mentioning uncertainty or asking questions about their ability to help frequently became the focus of discussions following remarks residents would make about the surge of nonprofits that came into the neighborhood in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Again, while a reference about nonprofits could come up at any time during tours given their dispersal throughout the neighborhood, I chose to position that comment in a more or less centralized location. On a related note, given the mixed opinions and complexity of feelings of Lower Ninth Ward residents about the post-storm arrival of nonprofit organizations, I placed some of these notations in the area surrounding the Make It Right tour stop. Other critiques are more site-specific such as the statements affiliated with and thusly placed along the allegedly fixed Industrial Canal levee wall or chatting about the Holy Cross School's controversial move to a more affluent region when passing by the dilapidated buildings that previously housed it. A final note about residents' commentary shared throughout tours and exhibited on the map is how they impart qualities about their communal identity. The mentioning of famous musicians, locally-renowned community scholars, and other personages to visitors uplifts prosperous

inhabitants of the neighborhood and in so doing refutes negative portrayals associated with this area of the city. And in describing a neighborhood museum that celebrates local traditions as “who we are and what we do” communicates a deep sense of appreciation and dignity. Another example that alludes to the character of residents and their neighborhood is a remark often made near the Hurricane Katrina Memorial—the belief that it should list the all the names of individuals who perished in the storm.

The dialog that transpires while on the moving through the Lower Ninth Ward is liable to change courses of conversation and sites visited. This variability in discourse and corporeal experience parallel wayfaring and despite this capriciousness quality in residents’ tours, their narratives frame places in particular ways that shares with tourists the inhabitants’ rich knowledge and vivid accounts, based upon memories and contemporary sentiments. Consequently, resident guided tours do not simply crisscross their neighborhood, but they contribute to its composition as do visitors moving through the region and its history. The approach provokes a variety of emotions creating a moving experience for visitors and empowering “place-ness” for residents.

At some point during my fieldwork, a neighborhood attraction map for the Ninth Ward caught my attention given the very limited, highlighted elements (Figure 19). The map is provided online by New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation, one of the two state-funded, tourism-marketing organizations (Lauria, Whelan and Young 1995), and ironically includes no attractions highlighted within the district. The only sites identified are the Chalmette Battlefield and the Malus Beaugard House, both located outside of the Ninth Ward and Orleans Parish (county) boundary (New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation 2015). Understanding that maps have long been recognized as a form of power, and acknowledging that, places represented

in official marketing communications initiatives may be a function of the interests and agendas of hegemonic groups/interests” (Warnaby 2012), the omission of places of interest in this “official” map of the Ninth Ward communicates a sense that the area is empty and thus, an insignificant space.



Figure 19- Official “Ninth Ward” map

Photo source: New Orleans Tourism Marketing Core. Reproduced with permission.

To the contrary, the residents’ Lower Ninth Ward map of tour sites specifies locations of significance visible in that void. This bears a strong resemblance to the tourism-related efforts of Dolores Hayden who creatively uses space to make evident women of color’s history and contributions in Los Angeles (1995). For other scholars like Brown and Perkins, they regard features, like those highlighted on the Lower Nine map, as places that anchor meaning in

peoples' lives (1992) and chronicling this on a tangible product conveys another sense of place—in this case a space with much value and relevance for residents. Cartographer and map historian Brian Harley describes this significance through the deconstruction of maps as a spatial language that illustrates “how cartography is implicated in the making of the world, not just representation” (Hubbard and Kitchin 2011). Consequently, in addition to making these sites known by visiting and speaking about them during tours, having these spaces represented on a map likewise resists disregard for and ignorance of the Lower Ninth Ward's community, neighborhood, and home (Cassidy 2012). As described by Les Roberts, “seeing one's local area ‘on the map’ is an acknowledgement of its rightful place in the wider image of the city could bolster community spirit or give political voice to groups contesting the local impacts of development and ‘regeneration’ schemes” (2012, 7).

While both official and vernacular maps (such as Smitty's map) provide unique senses of place, this becomes particularly apparent when considering how these two cultural artifacts divergently represent an area with one signifying inactivity and the other, in comparison, a place with plentiful spaces of significance that have association with various aspects of the lived experience of residents. The distinction conveyed in these maps expresses a sentiment felt by many Lower Ninth Ward residents that invokes deep frustration for an obliviousness or disregard for places of consequence. Such reflection is particularly telling and attends to reasoning for the critique that maps are too often missing and rarely used as tools of data gathering for ethnographers (Andrews 2012).

### *Unconventional Characteristics/Features of (Disaster) Tourism*

Although the sites on the map illustrate a static image of place, tour destinations and residents' spatial narratives about these sites shared during the tours are far from fixed, and this variability differentiates residents' tours from conventional offerings whose content tends to be about a single event and/or culture. Rather the content of their presentation diverges each time they offer tours because of the ever-evolving circumstances taking place in real time. There is also an affective potency to the sites visited in residents' tours, which heightens one's alertness to the disconcerting landscape and charged atmosphere. Nonetheless, Mrs. Valerie's relaxed demeanor makes it comfortable for tour participants to ask questions at each stop and while traveling between them. For instance, visitors might ask why does the Lower Ninth Ward not have "real" street signs yet? Or they might ask why there is a random piece of metal tubing in the middle of the road (Figure 20)? Inquiries into Mrs. Valerie's firsthand experiences of aspects about the community that no longer exist and the politics of its recovery, guide her unvarnished and evocative, spatial narrative of dependably frank and deeply informed responses. These aspects prompt improvisation that delivers each residents tour anew. Because of this spontaneity, unlike the programmed itinerary of commercial tours, those given by residents do not involve replication or pre-organized performances. The inevitability of chance encounters with residents, as well as strangers, met during residents' tours become features of the experience that challenge issues of "staged authenticity" (MacCannell 1973) and "pseudo-events" (Boorstin 1962) associated with conventional forms of tourism.



Figure 20- Random findings throughout the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood

Mrs. Valerie, Mr. Lewis, and other residents who cross the path of these tours inevitably share candid memories, vocalize strong critiques of accountability and assessment of resources, and raise difficult questions with visitors about (place) identity through discussions of spatial justice. For instance, residents might ask visitors where they think all the money given to help them out went? If visitors struggle to respond, residents are quick to encourage them to travel to specific neighborhoods of the city also hit hard by flooding, but no longer with visible traces of

Katrina, as their community overwhelming exhibits. Perhaps the most-cited example is St. Bernard, the next parish over and just a short drive away; there, visitors will see the newly constructed schools, businesses, hospital, and multiple fire stations. The residents' spatial narratives yield powerful, unparalleled stories that elaborate upon traditional place-making understandings to include transformations occurring beyond the landscape, which furthermore involve changes in the inhabitants' lives and livelihoods.

While residents are able to create their own itineraries, tailored to their own or others' interests (S. Cohen 2012, Speed 2012) not everyone is receptive to decisions about sites visited and content discussed along tours. For instance, when one Lower Ninth Ward resident was discussing the sites where he had planned to take some visitors who asked him to show them around, he was met with resistance from them since the only thing that they wanted to see was in his words, "Just the devastation—that leave behind the Lower Ninth Ward". Consequently, he chose not to give the tour. During an interview with a long-time Lower Nine resident, I asked where he would have taken folks had he been asked to provide a tour to visitors before the storm. His response was, "Ohhhh, I would have taken them on a great tour—through the neighborhood and meeting the people, meeting the people." I asked if he meant anyone in particular. His reply, "all the people" which paralleled another resident's comment that he would have, prior to Katrina, taken visitors on tour of the neighborhood by driving around and introducing them to residents.

The Lower Ninth Ward residents I met giving tours did not have backgrounds, professional training, or official certification as tour guides prior to Hurricane Katrina. Nor had tourists, volunteers, journalists, politicians, academics, and the like previously asked these residents to provide excursions through their community. Residents state that interest in

exploring the Lower Nine only ensued after the levees failed and severe flooding utterly devastated the area. Consequently, the returned residents who provide tours to the countless visitors post-Katrina are new to this role and work which they have taken upon themselves, despite being in the midst of their own return and rebuilding. It should also be noted that while the Lower Ninth Ward is now a recognizable region of the city's landscape to most outsiders, this community is not dependent upon the tourism industry. In fact, only a few months after the floodwaters in the Lower Ninth Ward receded, an ordinance was passed that prevented commercial tour busses from traversing about the neighborhood.

Another difference from conventional tour operations is that tours given by residents are not profit driven. Accordingly, their efforts do not include advertising or marketing. Visitors interested in touring the Lower Nine most often learned about residents providing this service through word of mouth. One individual "in the know" would supply a resident's contact information, usually just a name and phone number, to another individual interested in scheduling a tour, and this exchange would typically facilitate their request. Another variance relates to the minimal, if any, available tour-related souvenirs. I was only aware of one Lower Ninth Ward resident who felt that if "they could sell trinkets and mementos to tourists in the French Quarter," he could do the same when they visited his neighborhood. He, in fact, made coffee mugs and tee shirts with Hurricane Katrina-related images and slogans available for purchase (Figure 21).





Figure 21- Hurricane Katrina-related merchandise for sale

Given the inclusion of diverse voices heard along the tour, specifically of other Lower Ninth Ward residents either intentionally included or those included through serendipity, the rich concoction of history lessons, personal narratives, and dialog of unfolding happenings provide narratives intertwined with identity and place. Their spatial narratives do not overlook the importance of emphasizing the need to fix long-term ecological, economic, political, and social deficits that have caused undue impacts on marginalized residents of the city (Zhang 2016). Their accounts are *of* the community, not *about* the community (A. T. Jackson 2011) and as a result make public residents perspectives and experiences, which will not be lost or forgotten in the return to “normalcy” (Birch 2006) if that were even a place for them to return (Adams 2013). The intimate experiences of the city’s environment construct place-based knowledge which enacts active and conscious claims to agency, power, and a right to (return to) the city (Klopper 2015).

### *Transformation in Meaningful Toil*

What these tours share is some of the ways in which the built and social landscapes have transformed since Hurricane Katrina, including how residents perceive of and feel about the alterations. For instance, when visiting the section of the neighborhood where many Make It Right homes (Figure 22) have been constructed, residents will likely address their many differences from the previous housing stock (shotguns, camelbacks, creole cottages) that is also especially iconic of the city. Information and knowledge communicated along the tours also addressed inquires this research explores concerning what is lost or disappears, what/who returns and/or changes in the aftermath of this storm. While my attention primarily concerned these sociospatial-orientated matters in the (re)making of the devastated Lower Nine, my experiences of these tours, in combination with fieldwork and interviews, facilitated unanticipated insights about post-disaster recovery to come into focus. This recognition concerns two types of transformations: 1) the experience of “the Katrina phenomenon” created significant changes within the residents themselves; and 2) awareness among themselves that they are part of the change in their community. In other words, the residents’ practices embody transformation I had not sought to look at when beginning this research, yet I found that they thread continuity through their place-making practices.



Figure 22- Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation houses  
Photo credit: Shannon Dosemagen

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of this is explained by Mrs. Valerie reflecting upon her efforts post-Hurricane Katrina. One summer afternoon, while sitting on the couch in her living room, we talked about her work where she gives countless tours to visitors, and in this conversation, she began to mention a host of other recovery-related labors. Given the high number of examples she was rattling off, I asked to schedule a time when we could take a closer look at some of those efforts, perhaps by going through some of her keepsakes that illustrate post-Katrina work she has since been involved in, and because she mentioned she had “all kinds of that stuff.” Back at her house a few days later, this time in the spare bedroom, Mrs. Valerie began pulling out numerous large plastic storage containers and well-stuffed bags (Figure 23). In a reminiscent tone, I recall her asking, “Okay, where do you want to start? And I got a lot more in the other spare room closet.” At random, I chose a tote and together we began going through a range of items that included articles written for magazines, flyers, and for speaking at various

meetings, events, and venues. She had done spoken word for a university project on a storm-related music titled, “Terrorism 101,” took part in documentaries about Hurricane Katrina, made signs and tactically placed them in the neighborhood, such as “Not As Seen On TV” (Figure 24) and another one, “letting people know that the trailer was filled with formaldehyde and mold.”



Figure 23- Hurricane Katrina mementos



Figure 24- Sign posted in the Lower Ninth Ward

In this collection of Hurricane Katrina mementos she also held onto important newspaper articles (that named victims of the storm, highlighted the visits of prominent politicians, a mugshot of her jailed contractor), funeral programs, copies of important documents that escaped complete damage from the flooding, t-shirts, documentary DVDs, architecture renderings, recovery plans, and maps. She put her commitment this way:

*[Katrina] Changed my life, making me speak out. I never was a person to do what I'm doing now. Fight, speak out, I mean very, very active with organizations and politicians and just get to the point with. I would tell a politician—this was on my mind and don't bite my tongue, don't care. Take it or leave it. This is it. This is my freedom to speak and it's just me now. And this was never was me because I always was—I wouldn't stay quiet, but I wasn't the type of person to engage in a lot of this that I am doing now . . . This almost like giving birth to a newborn, what I am doing right now. It's like in a sense giving birth to the Lower Nine by getting out here trying to help these people. That is the only way I could describe that you know.*

Mrs. Valerie would also discuss this change with strangers. For instance, when we drove through her neighborhood one afternoon, we pulled over next to a house that was being torn down by a group of young and white, twenty-something volunteers working with National Relief Network. A woman who appeared to be one of their leaders walked up to the now rolled down window of our car. After asking a few questions about who the group was, Mrs. Valerie introduced herself by name and affiliation as a Lower Nine resident and then gave her gratitude for their labor. The next thing she said, following a deep breath, was “Katrina turned my life around.” She went on:

*Well I was affected [by Katrina] mentally, physically, just to start. I lost everything but my dignity. That I maintained, my dignity. But material things I lost. My dignity I didn't. And my sanity. That's something that Katrina couldn't take from me. And starting all over is like getting married for the first time, you know. You may as well say your vows again, you know. And I told my husband, I said, “Well, maybe we ought to just get married again. We need a housewarming. We need everything.”*

At the same time, Mrs. Valerie also has found a new sense of self-purpose in her work and describes this transformation as follows:

*And I don't know what happened. It's like I was searching, more or less, in my life, for my calling. And I found my calling. It took Katrina to bring it out of me, my calling. And I really never knew I had this fight inside of me. I knew my daddy was a strong fighter. A Southern man and a strong fighter. When he say something, that's it. Or he going to really press the issue. But it's almost like Katrina changed me and I was a totally different person from this disaster. When I look around, and the only thing I can see is God, my life's disrupted again. Because when we moved from Chalmette, I was a freshman in college. And then came [Hurricane] Betsy, you know. And that wash the books and clothes and most everything again. Nothing I was left with. And I just say well, I can't deal with this.*

*I enjoy doing what I do now. And being that I'm on disability and I don't work, I feel like this is a full time job, helping people and doing what I can for my community, to try to bring my community back, help make it safer, and keep it safe. And try, you know, to bring people together.*

*Like I said... I just got to be another person. I used to be a quiet person. It may not seem like it, but I used to be a very quiet person. Outgoing but, you know, on the quiet side. Never was like this before. But now, I'm just like another person.*

*[L]ike I said, Katrina turned me into something totally different. And I seen my need to help people, even though I couldn't help myself. All my fight for myself, I wasn't accomplishing. But every time someone come to me and say they need help in getting FEMA money, Road Home money, or they need a trailer, whatever they need, I could help them. But me, I was caught up in the bureaucracy for myself. But I was able to help other folk. So, I said well maybe this is my calling.*

When asked if her calling has changed much over the past few years, her response was, “My calling hasn’t changed much—the fight is still in me. I still have a little electrics in me . . . It is just that Katrina brought something else out of me that I wasn’t even aware of that I had in me.” Mrs. Valerie’s meaningful toil, including her role in tourism of her neighborhood post-Katrina, illustrates significant fragments of change transpiring in the community, across the landscape, and within herself. Despite their criticism about its limited appearance in research, Nash and Smith remind us that an influential component of the tourism phenomena is that tourists come from and return to their home communities (Nash and Smith 1991). Tourists’ sense of being and understanding of events and circumstances at tour site destinations becomes a relationship

informed away as well as at home (Torry 1979). Since beginning my work in New Orleans, I have also come to witness significant changes ensue in the lives of students and colleagues after spending time in New Orleans and with this specific neighborhood community.

Their transformations have included relocating to this urban metropolis, switching academic program majors to pursue changed fields of interest that came about during their time visiting this city, and initiating philanthropic endeavors back in Wisconsin that collaborate with Lower Ninth Ward residents and organizations to further initiatives. These emergent relationships of residents as tour guides and guests visiting their community—be they volunteers, church groups, conference attendees, students, academics, administrators, or politicians—constitute informal, yet direct, collective action that I call meaningful toil, which “adds to the inventory of “everyday forms of ... collaboration” (C. White 1986, 56). Through transmission of local place knowledge and experience from residents to tour attendees, many visitors depart from the tour changed by their participation. For example, Mrs. Valerie talks about this in the following story about taking Congresswoman Maxine Waters on a tour of her neighborhood, especially to more remote regions (Figure 25) and her reactions to this touring:

*I took her into the worst places to see, how bad the streets really were. I took her further back and let her see how deserted, how the houses looked, and how Katrina actually is . . . I took her, trust me, she could not believe it. The money that came. She said, the money, all the money down here, we sent down here. She couldn't believe it . . . They left here in shock . . . If someone from Washington come ride through here and not just ride through this little area down here where the Make It Right houses are, I mean ride through the Lower Ninth Ward and actually take a look at it—no we are not actually up and running . . . we are the forgotten land.*

Visitors like Congresswoman Waters are disturbed by what they learn on the tours and unsettled by their own ignorance of operations long thought restored that become sentiments reinforced by Mrs. Valerie's repetition of, “This is not normalcy here.”



Figure 25- Landscape of overgrowth and remoteness

### *Tours as Political & Empowering Action*

The residents' Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood tours emerge as an unexpected action amidst the multiplicity of projects that transpired while recovering from the storm. I consider the effort of providing these tours to be unexpected because, as returning residents contend with a slew of adversity and oppositional forces, they engage in this meaningful toil that demands a great deal of time and expertise. I also understood this work as a "critically constructive contribution" (Wallace 2005) to recovering from disaster, for the content residents discuss addresses a vast range of unfolding matters, deeply informed by politics and historical lessons woven together with personal, communal spatial narratives.

Visitors attention to residents' stories and experiences, along with their own participation in the neighborhood, exemplifies wayfaring in a few regards. On the one hand, tourists know that their short duration journeying through the neighborhood grants access to only a fragment of



understanding of all that is going on around them. On another, visitors quickly become acquainted with the reality that the accounts residents share continue to unfold given ever-evolving circumstances in the post-disaster aftermath. Both resemble wayfaring in that they are inherently without beginnings or endings. Another similarity concerns the newness residents provide in each of their tours since wayfaring, akin to ways of life, are not determined in advance, like routes to be followed, and, as a result, continually need to be worked out anew (2000, 242).

A fundamental concept in linguistic anthropology is that language is power and therefore the act of speaking as a cultural practice and resource must be acknowledged. In this case, the residents' tours frame micro-localized happenings in larger macro processes by sharing with visitors their knowledge about local inhabitants, institutions, offerings, and hardships which also correspond with explanations of former as well as present-day conditions witnessed at the time of the tour. Residents employ in their tour's language, their experience, and the space itself as a means to discuss the politics of representation, to establish authority in their understandings, and legitimize their power to make such claims. Consequently, resident-led tours bring about ways of being and understanding in the world which create a place for visitors to gain a more holistic understanding of the neighborhood. The residents' spatial narratives also relate to what some researchers propose to be particularly useful, "In order to comprehend the disruption fully, one must examine preexisting conditions that influence the experience of attachments as well as the post disruption conditions that influence how individuals can cope with their losses and begin rebuilding ties to places and people" (Brown and Perkins 1992).

Using de Certeau's classification, tours are a "tactic" for residents. Their movement through the neighborhood becomes place to share spatial narratives empowering their

marginalized voices and residents' stories forming a means for them to distance themselves from what they have become estranged from in the aftermath of the storm. From the perspective of Bourdieu, the residents' social and cultural capital be it their local knowledge, experience, or expertise, provide beneficial and productive resources they deploy as part of the tour's praxis. What this means is residents are not just showing different sites throughout their community to visitors, they are using tours and the spaces traversed during this journey to make explicit political statements about what is going on around them. In doing so, tours create a time and place to question social order and structures in the post-disaster context. At the same time, the residents as tour guides become meaningful community stewards. Applying an 'anarchist squint' to the tours makes visible the cooperation between Lower Ninth Ward residents and outsiders who come to visit and are willing to listen to those directly impacted, and still contending with issues in the aftermath of the disaster. Tours create a cognitive space for residents to share personal memories and subjective experiences. They also provide a place for them to discuss how they feel about what happened and about what once was in addition to talking about current matters. Furthermore, tours facilitate a platform for residents to express how they feel about their own and others' return and recovery from Hurricane Katrina. Tours provide creative ways for residents to reconnect to place by providing new experiences and connections, some that ultimately give rise to ensuing collaborative partnerships. They also become a powerful means by which residents can choose to articulate detachments from particular post-disaster contexts that they do not want associated with their community, neighborhood, and ultimately the Lower Ninth Ward.

These assets empower residents with authority to present the content of tours in ways they deem necessary and appropriate, something which contributes to the distinguishing qualities

of their tours as opposed to those that are conventional and commercial. Such touring practices further legitimize the residents' invested interests in confronting injurious perspectives as well as contingent and controversial conditions of pre/post-disaster life. Ill-informed views include the longstanding stigmatization of Black New Orleanians through various tropes such as: 1) they are an underclass, unwilling to work (J. White 2006), 2) they are helpless victims (powell, et al. 2006), 3) Black women in particular are to blame for unwillingness to work (Ransby 2006), 4) they are without the means or mindset to evacuate (Young Jr. 2006), 5) U.S. corporate media coverage of Hurricane Katrina isolates, criminalizes, and scapegoates African Americans (Hartman and Squires 2006, Muhammad 2006, Pinder 2009), 6) there is nominal expectation of the Ninth Ward recovering (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009), 7) the stereotypes of the Lower Ninth Ward as isolated and dangerous (Landphair 2007), and 8) they symbolize death and helplessness (Queeley 2011). In this light, tours emerge as a self-organized form of cultural stewardship where residents' stories become a collective act of defiance of dehumanizing scripts that frame them in what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as, "controlling images" (2000) that "the larger society propagates in order to subjugate a people" (Leonardo 2010). The politics of previous and present misrepresentation is but one fragment of residents' meaningful labor countering the "official" story (J. C. Scott 2012) of this phenomenon in United States history.

Such tours highlight residents' agency to act and show how affected persons become innovatively involved in the return of their neighborhood community. Simultaneously, their efforts contest official perspectives and dominant discourse of this moment in American history. Tours facilitate citizen participation and community engagement that facilitates oversight and accountability where the practices of ordinary citizens address issues and crises that the private sector and government create and/or cannot adequately handle. Framing their touring practices

thusly emphasizes residents' everyday efficacy (Kogl 2008) and highlights both community assets as well as features of community corrosion too often absent in disaster research (Furedi 2007) and representative of purposeful place-making through the practices of meaningful toil.

Highlighting tours given by Lower Ninth Ward residents of their own neighborhood attends to some of the concerns that researchers ask us to consider in studies of tourism. For instance, attention to these tours enables access to particular localities as “centered on native constructions” and on the process in which perceptions and experience of place contributes to their own making of place (Feld and Basso 1996). Such framing enables an understanding of the various and variable perspectives from which people know their landscape, including the lived worlds inhabited by those who resist (Ortner 1995). Given that much of the tourism efforts discussed in this chapter focus on tours led by a particularly active, local woman, her involvement in this labor begins to highlight women's creative leadership in disaster recovery that negotiates, challenges and resists her everyday conditions, as well as the everyday experience of the Lower Nine of others (Abu-Lughod 1990, Zhang 2016). Focusing beyond “the American left's fetish” with the binary of vulnerable/victimized and resilient populations (Markbreiter, Stafford and Shirley 2017) expands examination to consider gender in disasters, specifically of women's roles beyond preparers, rescuers, and caregivers (Enarson 2000) and grants awareness of the influential work of healthy, resourceful adults, with their unique personal qualities in recovery from disaster (Morrow 1999). Appreciation of this Black urban post-Katrina place-making practice, through examination of the actual practices of ordinary people working to transform the conditions of life in the places they live, opens a space to understanding the ways these places become, “sites of hope for a democratic politics that grants a measure of everyday efficacy to some of the least privileged citizens” (Kogl 2008, 3).

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **“And They Think We’re Back!”:**

#### **Place-making though Everyday Engagements**

As the days got closer to February 3, 2013, anticipation in New Orleans was brewing because the city was scheduled to host Super Bowl XLVII at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. Prior to working in New Orleans, I had never been interested in, nor paid attention to, the sport of American football. However, things changed a little during my time in the field in New Orleans as a consequence of the Saints successful 2009 season. In particular, I remember a distinct experience when the city’s beloved team won the NFC Championship game, and the “Who Dat Nation” of supporters danced in the streets, jumped on top of vehicles, exchanged hugs, and shed tears as car horns honked in every direction. I followed exuberant fans pouring out of the bar I had just been watching the game in and stood on the sidewalk. It was a peculiarly dramatic and positively chaotic scene. While I had embarked upon this specific sport-watching experience in the name of participant-observation, I amused myself by thinking: Is this what Emile Durkheim’s notion of “collective effervescence” feels like?

In the years that followed, since New Orleans all but shuts down during football games and I had somewhat warmed up to the idea of watching the action when in the city, I took these

occasions to hang out with residents in their homes, but like many others, went out to view games at neighborhood bars as well. It also became routine, when away from New Orleans at home in rural southwest Wisconsin, for some Lower Ninth Ward residents I had grown close with to use football games, particularly when the Green Bay Packers or Saints were playing, as a time to text or call me on the phone. These were opportunities for a quick check-in or teasing if the score merited such banter. It was an unspoken understanding that I would be available to chit chat and catch up during these football games since residents anticipated that of course, I would be around watching the game on television, just as they unquestionably would be doing.

This would be the case during the 2013 Super Bowl game, but the content of our exchange on the phone was unique. A few moments into what became a thirty-four-minute-long power outage during the game, my cell rang with a 504 area code number. After answering the phone, the first words spoken by this Lower Ninth Ward resident to me were, “and they think we’re back.” As I took a breath, she repeated, “and they think we’re back. Look at us. Huh! Eight years after Katrina, just look at us now . . .” At some point during our brief conversation, this resident informed me that Beyoncé, who gave the half-time show, “at least knew better” since she had brought her own electrical equipment to use during the performance. Before the call ended, this resident said in a conflicted tone, “now everyone will know the truth.” I understood the comment as relating to the ongoing reality of a severely limited, if not failed, post-Hurricane Katrina recovery endured by many residents of the marginalized neighborhoods of the city, no longer on the radar of the public or politicians. The point of the phone call was to reinforce precisely this point.

The power outage spontaneously defied the “official” account proclaimed by the mayor and others invested in the portrayal that “New Orleans is back.” The spectacle also validated

residents' claims concerning this misrepresentation, because numerous sections of the city, much more so in some than other neighborhoods, were far from returned to their pre-storm status.

Besides voicing dissent to authorities' assertions of a more or less complete recovery, I frequently observed residents participating in an array of purposeful social actions that confronted this contention—I call them forms of *everyday engagement*. Although anthropologists do not necessarily agree about what constitutes “engagement” (or what forms it should take in their scholarship), Setha Low and Sally Merry present a typology to cover the wide range of practices that fall within this category (2010). The forms of engagement they delineate include sharing and support; teaching and public education; social critique; collaboration; advocacy; and activism. While their discussion of these forms is presented in a reflective piece of literature examining how anthropologists *engage* engagement in their research, this inventory informs my approach to the term *everyday engagement* which I employ more specifically to reference the variety of civically-oriented ways in which individual and group activities mobilize, within and beyond their communities, in efforts to protect values, address issues of public concern, and work toward the betterment of their lives, those of their families, community, and society. This description encompasses civic and political activity, but also includes ongoing community-focused efforts invoking practices embedded with agency and advocacy.

This broad definition would appear to apply to the efforts of Lower Ninth Ward residents described in the previous chapter. While resident-led tours have connections with practices discussed in this chapter, a particular attribute contributes to their difference. This distinction has to do with, on the one hand, work discussed in the previous and next chapter that constitutes innovative practices since they are brand new forms of enactment. On the other hand, those

addressed in this chapter pertain to residents' participation in more familiar traditions. Another way to discern the divergence of the practices in the last and next chapter from those described here is that such practices tackle issues head on by immediately effective means, and they resemble what some would label as *direct action*. David Graeber makes this distinction calling action not directed at the state with a “defiant insistence in acting as if you are already free” to be indirect action (2009, 2011, 6). Following Graeber, I argue that this type of practice should be differentiated from residents' civically-engaged undertakings, which largely comprise direct, symbolic action seeking to influence authorities.

Given the blurred domains of direct and indirect action, my intention is not to determine how everyday engagements represent one form or another (direct or indirect). Rather, I concur with Gupta and Ferguson in their assessment that all place-making—besides being a fundamental, ongoing activity (Basso 1996)—is a politically contingent process, consisting of embodied practices that shape identities and enable resistances (1997). In this examination of everyday engagement, I reflect upon the relations between identity, place, and power by attending to the ways such anthropologists have insisted that we try to understand how residents attempt to change the world, not by seizing control, but by creating opportunities to exercise their personal and collective capabilities as a strategy to overcome precarious circumstances. Although the everyday engagement practices of residents discussed in this chapter are far from novel, their need to organize or partake in such action during the aftermath of a disaster is particularly unique.

When considering resistance or activism within disaster-related literature, researchers often focus on either how affected people respond to change brought about by the devastating event itself, or subsequent alterations that inevitably ensue in the wake of calamity. In my own



field research, I instead observed (and documented) that residents' frustrations with stagnancy and an inactive recovery plan were also a locus of resistance and activism. Despite the unresponsive governing bodies in charge of rebuilding plans and programs, New Orleans residents, overwhelmingly Black, have not passively accepted this state of affairs. As a result, I explore such responsiveness through everyday engagements primarily, but not solely organized and performed by Lower Ninth Ward residents and argue in this chapter that the residents' civic efforts make two distinct types of places. The first type of place is a collaboratively-organized street protest. The second type of place involves the journey of residents to Washington, D.C. Here I argue that residents make a place to hold politicians responsible for failures with various assistance programs, make representatives' answerable for their divestment and inability to handle recovery funding, as well as making them cognizant of their overall negligence. In the vignette describing the travel back from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans, I illustrate that residents make another place. This is a place that fosters a safe setting to address their own accountability with their return and obligation to one another to stay engaged with collective, civic action; it's also a sacred place for healing from continual disappointment and countless experiences of disparity. In spite of their variation, there is a thread of commonality amongst these places' residents made in that they created political spaces to toil with their inability to come back and recover—such efforts inevitably confront social violence. In relation to the work of Paul Farmer (2004), Nancy Scheper-Hughes's studies of everyday violence (1992) prompts awareness to racism, poverty, and a lack of opportunity, all of which can be subtle to overt forms of micro-level interactions. By exploring the residents' reactions to the silence and absenteeism of the official authorities in charge, structural and everyday violence in the aftermath of

Hurricane Katrina emerges, and in turn makes visible the value of the citizens and their right to return.

What follows in this chapter is an exploration of these everyday engagements as practices, primarily concentrated on public performances that demonstrate the residents' right to return, their self-accountability, and the responsibility of the state to be involved in the process of coming home after a disaster. Examination of everyday engagement highlights a continuation of social conditions related to negligence of the state and the cultural traditions of residents actively challenging that negligence. This approach aims to develop an understanding of one of my initial dissertation research questions: What remains, becomes distributed, or is lost in the return and recovery from disaster? I also explore how social action embodies mutuality and meaningful restorative qualities that contribute to healing ravaged lifeworlds after drastic disruption.

Before describing these practices, I first provide an orientation to my interest in them. What follows next is a brief review of the literature that discusses anthropological themes explored in disaster research and highlights practices associated with disaster-related everyday engagement. Afterward, I present a few significant instances in New Orleans' past whereby residents took action to resist oppression or work toward autonomy, before I transition into a review of more recent acts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. All the while I provide some historic and contemporary grounding. After referencing various examples of making a difference in everyday life, I present a variety of instances of everyday engagement encountered while in the field followed by an in-depth description of my participation with one such experience. Analysis of that episode concludes this chapter along with examination of associated issues and outcomes that continue the longstanding cultural tradition of everyday engagement, and how this

participation contributes to restorative qualities essential to recreating a sense of place and reaffirming one's own community in the aftermath of catastrophe.

### *Positioning & Rationale*

My awareness of the place-making I call *everyday engagement* in this chapter emerges in part from a general interest for community organization and activism that began in my youth.

Growing up, I became actively involved with an underground punk rock scene and took part in organizations such as Anti-Racist Action and Food Not Bombs. Out on my own, I lived in various housing cooperatives and stayed busy setting up shows for spoken word, traveling bands, and anti-authoritarian talks. I became involved with food activism, grassroots efforts for political prisoners, and peace and justice networks. Through organizing, traveling, 'conscious' music, alternative press and infoshops materials, the frequenting of autonomous zone spaces and other realms of non-mainstream participation, my interests in learning about nonconformity, alternative societies, uneven capitalist development, and the possibility of equitable social organization has flourished in me and continues at present. In sharing this background, I attempt to position myself and the interests and knowledge that heavily influenced my attraction and attention to the everyday engagements observed in fieldwork (Haraway 1991).

Another reason for my curiosity about disaster-related everyday engagement involves the perplexity I had in understanding why, as part of their return, residents were fighting to come back. Survivors endured the initial shock of the storm, tragic flooding, unnecessary suffering from abhorrent rescue efforts (regardless of countless promises by presidents and politicians supposedly committed to a full recovery), and now some needed to travel to the nation's capital and take it to the streets in hopes of having their voices heard, and to get something done about

their inability to return home from this particularly disgraceful phenomenon. On one hand, I did not get it—I could not make sense of it. On the other hand, having learned about suppressed chapters of United States history, and tremendously disturbing actions taking place today, through an education from progressive academics and artists alike, I could very well fathom this reality given the extreme systems of violence facilitated by the American sociocultural, political, and economic order.

Still further motivation to focus on everyday engagement relates to the nominal, albeit growing, attention to related themes in disaster recovery literature. Consequently, there remains much to learn from understanding how and why survivors—who long to return home rather than begin a life elsewhere—have to draw upon acts of everyday engagement to demonstrate claims to space or negotiate the politics of place. As a result, recognition of civically-engaged everyday practices present an opportunity to explore lesser-known, meaningful toil involved in the (re)making of place in the aftermath of catastrophe. Amid gross negligence and excessive bureaucracy that the affected have had to bear, which scholars have thoughtfully studied and documented in the wake of the storm, this exploration of post-disaster everyday engagement contributes to that scholarship by including the ways in which residents not only confront, but also contest obstacles encountered throughout their journey to return. By concentrating on the ways in which residents respond to subsequent conditions and changes in the supposed recovery, that involves various forms of erasure and violence, what becomes particularly salient is that many aspects of their survival depend upon these very same efforts.

### *Placing (De)Attachments of Home*

The concept of *attachment* is prominent in anthropological research and emphasizes the importance of place. *Place attachment* has been defined as, “a positive cognitive and affective bond that develops between individuals and their environment, involving an interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and belief, and behaviors and actions in reference to a place” (Low and Altman 1992, 5). Connecting to a locale articulates various aspects of place including economic ties through (home) ownership, inheritance, and length of residence; genealogical bonding through family or history; linkage to loss or destruction of land; narrative ties from storytelling and place naming; perceptions of neighborhood cohesion; and frequency of communal activities. Disasters can lead to a decline in place attachment because the destroyed site may no longer be able or appropriate to support certain activities (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009). Decline in place attachment may also be due in part to the loss of key services (schools, churches, businesses) that had a positive anchoring effect (E. Chamlee-Wright 2008).

Since the Dust Bowl migrations of the 1930s, Hurricane Katrina forced the largest displacement in the United States, and many New Orleanians, particularly the city’s Black residents, have been unable to return post-Katrina, resulting in the severance of important connections to their homes. Anthropologists remind us of a significance of the home to providing, “the single most universally significant exemplar of material culture that humans experience” (Lawrence-Zuniga and Pellow 2008, 4). Inhabitants of many societies aspire to have a piece of land or own one’s home given the security and autonomy it confers (J. C. Scott 2012). In addition to the dignity associated with owning a house, this attainment provides protection from inflation and is crucial to the production of wealth accumulation and investment. A purchased home (property or business) is also an asset that can be transferred across generations

which eliminates the significant burden of a family working to pay off a mortgage.

Consequently, while the location of one's residence is an important symbol and anchor for constituting individual and familial identity (S. Low 1988), residents need more than new housing, as they may have also lost the social, cultural, and physical grounding provided by their homes and communities.

In the United States, home ownership is foundational to the American dream of success, and its attainment tends to constitute one of the biggest investments that citizens will make during their lifetime (Hayden 2002). However, due in part to heavily-influenced, racist logic and the concomitant tendency toward racialized consequences, U.S. housing policies, banking and finance, tax codes and subsidies, and real estate practices include structural features of white privilege, thus limiting social mobility for some and contributing to a growing economic disparity between racial and ethnic groups (Lipsitz 1998). Regarding post-Katrina housing recovery in New Orleans, key issues proving to be problematic include undervalued properties, biased damage assessments of flood and structural damage, lack of access to grant-funding, unscrupulous contracts, and illegal demolitions (M. Davis 2007, Bates and Green 2009, Queeley 2011).

Although New Orleans is one of the most diverse cities in the United States, it has one of the highest rates of resident nativity of any major city in the country. According to the 2000 census, 83% of the New Orleans residents were born in Louisiana—in no other state is the proportion of people born and raised within its borders higher (Campanella 2006). More than anywhere else in the United States, New Orleans is a city where people live in one neighborhood their whole lives, and where generations live in the same community, referred to by some as an “unusual homegrown demography” (Falk, Hunt and Hunt 2006). Specifically, in the Lower

Ninth Ward, despite the concentrated poverty and historic marginalization, there is a particularly strong attachment to place. Many families in this neighborhood have been able to achieve homeownership that has eluded many other U.S. citizens. Prior to the storm, of the approximate 6,000 houses in this community, two thirds of the households owned their home, and 75% of the residents had lived at least five years at their current residences. Over 50% of residents had been in their homes for more than ten years, a statistic far above the national average (Elliot, Haney and Sams-Abiodun 2010). Post-Katrina, nearly 25% of the homes in the Lower Ninth Ward were slated to be demolished, a figure constituting the highest percentage of any New Orleans neighborhood (New Orleans City Council 2006).

In describing the Lower Ninth Ward's rich local history, Rachel Breulin and Helen Regis highlight small churches and the subaltern tradition of social clubs that offer residents social networks, institutions, and events. These scholars demonstrate that such community assets not only provide opportunities for public recognition and esteem, but also reflect a long-standing tradition of self-help, mutual aid, and resistance to structures of oppression (2006, 746). Ethnographic studies document residents in low-income communities cultivating social networks to help "make ends meet," and to cope with the everyday hardships of life in poor, urban environments (Elliot, Haney and Sams-Abiodun 2010). Consequently, working-class people tend to stay close to where they grew up since family members can provide economic assistance and be relied upon for social ties, and as a result, their social lives are deeply embedded in the locality (Keithly and Rombough 2007). Research has also shown that family remains the most common source of informal aid in the wake of drastic upheaval, and this support often comes without recipients having to request help. Disasters can damage, if not destroy, a society's ability to provide for the needs of its inhabitants (Oliver-Smith 1996), and as revealed in the wake of

Hurricane Katrina, members of a resident's closest network found themselves in similarly vulnerable and destitute circumstances (Litt 2008). The severity of this reality intensifies when we remember what George Lipsitz discussed at length regarding New Orleanians' multidimensional positionality which involved simultaneous associations with certain neighborhoods, employment, unofficial jobs/roles, as well as membership in community organizations and religious institutions (1998).

Many residents in the Lower Ninth Ward talked about their multigenerational living arrangements before the storm. Quite a few also spoke at length during interviews about having kin live near one another in the neighborhood. In the map below, I work to visually illustrate this closeness by displaying the approximate locations of homes grouped together by family affiliation (Figure 26). As one can see, some family members live next door to one another on the same block while another family may live close together in a particular region of the Lower Ninth Ward. I also embedded quotes from interview transcriptions into the map so that map-readers will hear the voices of the families describing which specific relatives lived in the neighborhood. The selection of quotes also imparts temporal relevance, in that two residents discussed who lived in the community before Hurricane Katrina, and another spoke to who moved away in the aftermath. While the map does not illustrate the duration that families lived in their respective dwellings, my intention is rather to show the spatial immediacy that infers relative closeness in social connections, including extended family members, availability of easily shared support and resources, and a sense of comfort and security in the neighborhood. One could imagine walking out of a home and being able to greet and talk in person with a parent or cousin whom one could see outside in the yard, sitting on a porch down the block, or



even driving along the street. For better or worse, this proximity also facilitates awareness of one another's "doings" and rhythm of activity, such as familiarity with work schedules.

# Neighborhood Spatial Distribution of Kin

Lower Ninth Ward, LA  
Prior to Hurricane Katrina (August 2005)



Figure 26- Neighborhood Spatial Distribution of Kin Map

Illustrating a few clusters of family members living in close proximity to one another.

Given that this socio-spatial organization of family life has continued throughout generations, this arrangement is a significant factor contributing to the importance of geography for Lower Nine residents. Such cultural practices also produced a psychological impact on the identity of residents (Keithly and Rombough 2007), and nurtured an interdependent and supportive environment—until the storm dispersed family members and caused deep “root shock” to arise. In her research on mid-twentieth century federal projects of urban renewal and the effects on African-American communities, medical doctor and scholar of urban policy and health, Mindy Fullilove describes root shock as “a traumatic stress reaction related to the destruction of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem” which can have ripple effects in decades that follow (2005, 10). Other scholars concerned with displacement, recognize removal from “one’s place” can mean removal from life itself since the disruption of individual and community identity, and stability can not only befuddle, but also silence a people (Basso 1988, Rodman 1992).

### *Hurdles & Homage with Heirship*

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, complications related to root shock ensued with housing inheritance related issues. After death, the passing down of one’s property to a family member who, if they were not already residing in the house, would come to occupy and thus “own” the home was a frequent local cultural tradition, which if already paid off, could provide mortgage free living. In the words of a Lower Nine resident, “these were homes that came from our ancestors.” Nevertheless, issues with insurance and the Road Home program occurred when succession had not been formally completed in probate court to attain a clean title (Whelan 2006, New Orleans Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau 2010). A resident I met briefly at

Bayou Bienvenue spoke to the importance of family and home connections, particularly in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. I listened to this senior who talked about being born and raised in the Lower Ninth Ward. When he brought up the Road Home program, he explained that he would not be moving away. He continued that some people took the money and left rather than rebuild the homes they had inherited from their parents, which he “just didn’t understand why you wouldn’t honor your parents by rebuilding it after the storm.” During an interview, I learned about another resident who had grown up in the Lower Ninth Ward, moved away during much of his adulthood, and then after retiring he moved back into his family home in the Lower Ninth Ward. Just a month after this resident finished renovation of his house, Hurricane Katrina totally destroyed it. He did rebuild it yet again, albeit this second time with the help of volunteers. Another resident seemed to reconnect with her family by way of a housing design. During an interview with this individual discussing how she decided the model home she chose, she answered with the following:

*This particular house, I said to myself, this kind of looks like me. And then again, on the other hand, it was a memory of my mother’s house and my house because my house before Katrina had this arch in the middle (pointing to an arch in the wall separating two rooms) – right there in my living room and in my dining room. My mother’s house had two arches like this. One on each side of the big one and something just drew me to this house and I just say, oh, this almost a duplicate of my mother’s house or mines - that opening.*

Another Lower Nine resident, who had lived with his mother, reminisced about her garden in the front yard. In an interview this individual discussed his efforts to it keep up: “After she passed away in 1998, I hired a gardener to maintain that yard from ‘98 up to Katrina, and now I had to rehire when I came back after I cleaned it up in 2005 and right now I am still trying to maintain that yard because of her.” Although these examples focus specifically on paying homage to one’s family or family member, reverence is a pervasive quality expressed in a variety of contexts. As

one resident conveyed in discussions about the importance of belonging to a social aid and pleasure club and funeral processions:

*We always like to honor the musicians and the people in the community, first of all, that came before us. To have people understand and know that the reason we are here in the first place, and do what we do and can, is because of those who came before us. It's the people whose shoulders you riding on . . . and this is a town that doesn't forget much.*

*We play those dirges for all of the loved ones that have passed away throughout the years, and all the ones that came before that, and the ones before that.*

The two quotes show acknowledgement of ancestors and point to the ways Lower Nine residents cherish important connections to personally-known individuals, as well as unfamiliar but recognized forebearers.

### *Reconstruction & Aesthetics*

Housing in the Ninth Ward constituted some of the most severely damaged from Hurricane Katrina (Pettersen, et al. 2006). As homeowners worked with insurance companies, banks, and government programs to have their homes rebuilt, actor Brad Pitt's philanthropic foundation, Make It Right, began constructing what was promised to be 150 homes in the most flood-devastated region of the Lower Ninth Ward. Eligible and interested residents could choose from approximately fifteen designs created by architects from around the world. The building materials, layout, and overall aesthetics of these structures starkly contrasted the previous housing stock, whose style traced back to West Africa and the Caribbean and whose design was particularly well-suited for a subtropical climate. However, the ensuing built environment that began to take form was no longer recognizable or suitable in local cultural terms. In fact, in time, the green home construction created, "one of the densest solar-powered neighborhoods in the country" (Reckdahl 2014). Anthony Oliver-Smith explains why these changes are important to

consider—in short, if a planned settlement does not take a form that people can appropriate as their own, add to and embellish, the community recovery will be impeded and the settlement will fail (2005).

When asking about their interpretation of these dwellings, Lower Ninth Ward residents tended to be colorful in their responses and at times coded. One such response was, “Only thing I can see is some strange looking homes.” In another reply, a resident framed the homes in terms of diversity, “Different looking houses—bringing *diversity* to the neighborhood. The neighborhood is changing. It’s changing our culture.” Although these structures received a great deal of criticism from residents, it was not uncommon for residents to include, even while discussing the many shortfalls of these houses, “If it wasn’t for Brad Pitt making it possible for some of these people that didn’t have enough money to rebuild, if it wasn’t for him setting up a foundation, when we look around—it wouldn’t be nobody but a few people on this-and-that street.” Upon each subsequent visit in the years that followed, residents would update me on the “recycled homes” that, despite being only a few years old, were already in need of repair. One resident described, “that roof over on the corner of Tennessee caved in—thankfully no one was home when it came down!” Since then, two Lower Ninth Ward residents have had to file a lawsuit against the actor’s nonprofit organization due to substandard houses “deteriorating at a rapid pace” (Lam 2018).

### *The Presence of Absence*

In addition to the formidable impact of the loss of one’s house, residents also lost other buildings of significance. For example, residents struggled with having their elementary and high schools removed from the landscape. I recall one resident asking, “How can I show my grandchildren the

schools I attended while coming up?” Additionally, officials questioning if these facilities should even be rebuilt also troubled residents. I learned about this kind of continued distress from Ninth Ward resident, Mr. Carl Gamon who established the Black rights organization, Louisiana State Committee Against Apartheid and has been a committed participant at Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) meetings working to implement African-studies programs in public schools.

For the past few decades Mr. Gamon has worked to replace the names of the city’s public schools that were named after white supremacists and slave owners with the names of African-American s/heroes. I illustrate the expanse of these efforts in the map below (Figure 27). I traveled with this resolute individual along the “Just Get on the Bus” journey to Washington, D.C. described below in a vignette, and had the opportunity to interview him two years later about his community endeavors, including the struggle to adopt “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology” as the name of the Lower Ninth Ward’s elementary school. This particular name change was one of almost thirty he accomplished in the district. Other renamed schools in the Lower Ninth Ward honored the following African-American heroes: 1) Joseph A. Harden, a political activist in New Orleans and a professor of anatomy and physiology who fought to have African-American history included in curriculum (Creolegen 2013); 2) Alfred Lawless, a reverend, a principal “at the first public school in New Orleans to provide modern instructional equipment and adult education classes to African Americans,” and an advocate for education (20th Year Reunion Committee 2014); and 3) Louis Armstrong, New Orleans native and famous trumpeter, composer, and vocalist. Mr. Galmon had also been successful at changing eight schools (Table 1) titled McDonough (with an associated number) that were named after John McDonough. Residents informed me McDonough was one of the

largest owners of enslaved people in the South, owning eighty-three humans at the time of his death in 1850 (Lightner and Ragan 2005).



# African-American S/Heroes Named Public Schools

Orleans Parish, LA

Prior to Hurricane Katrina (August 2005)

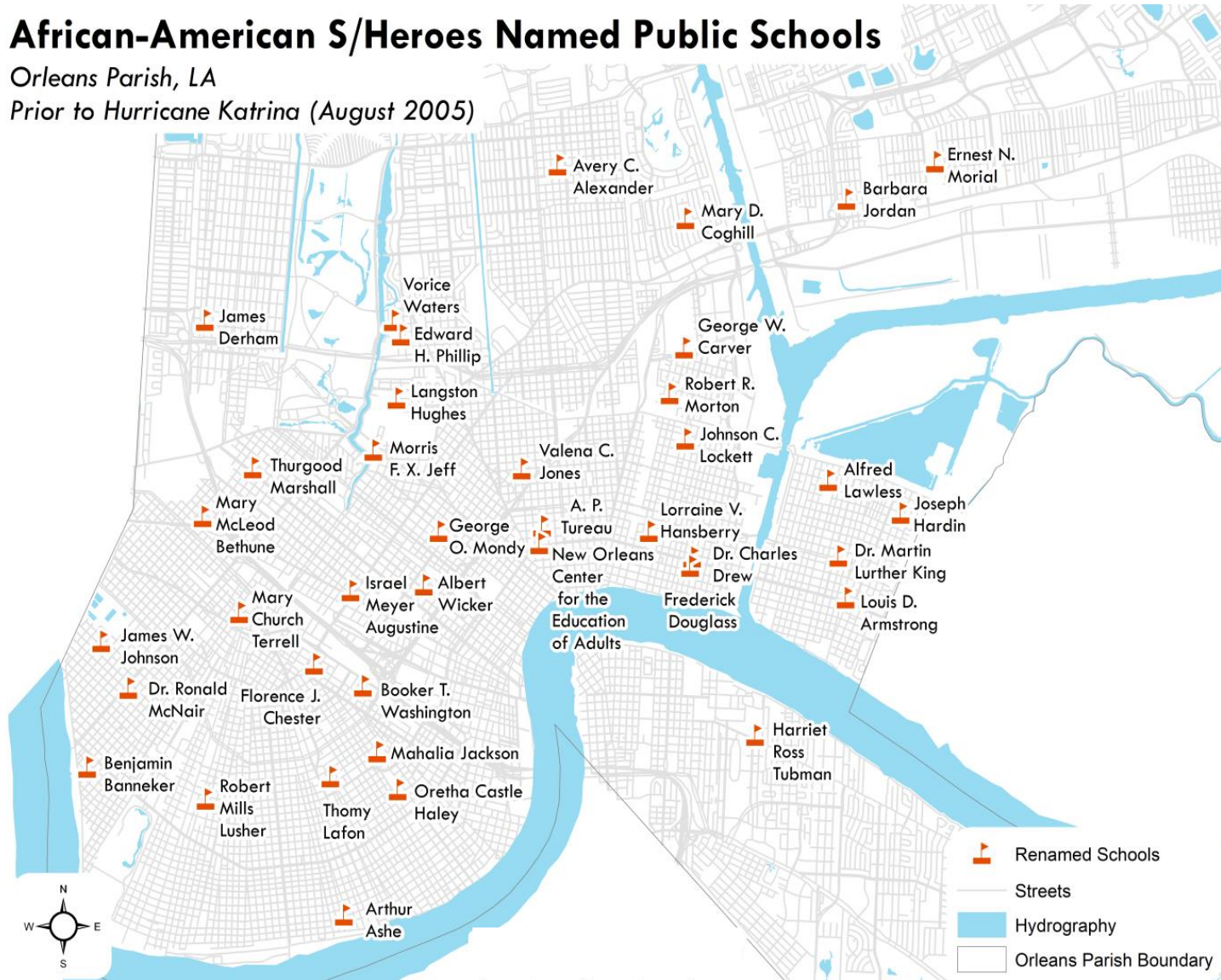


Figure 27- Map of Changed School Names

	<b>Original School Names</b>	<b>African-American S/Heroes Renamed Schools</b>	<b>Location</b>
1	Marie C. Couvent	A. P. Tureau	2021 Pauger Street
2		Albert Wicker	2011 Bienville Street
3		Alfred Lawless	5300 Law Street
4	Denneel Pre-Vocational	Arthur Ashe	3649 Laurel Street
5	McDonough No. 39	Avery C. Alexander	5800 St Roch Ave
6	McDonough No. 40	Barbara Jordan	4348 Reynes Street
7	McDonogh No. 25	Benjamin Banneker	421 Burdette Street
8		Booker T. Washington	1201 S Roman Street
9	Washington Elementary	Dr. Charles Drew	3819 St Claude Avenue
10	McCarthy	Dr. MLK	1617 Caffin Avenue
11	Lee	Dr. Ronald McNair	1607 South Carrollton Avenue
12		Edward H. Phillip	1200 Senate Street
13	Jefferson Davis	Ernest N. Morial	7701 Grant Street
14		Florence J. Chester	3929 Erato Street
15	Francis T. Nicholls	Frederick Douglass	3820 St Claude Avenue
16	Rogers	George O. Mondy	2327 St Philip Street
17		George W. Carver	3059 Higgins Blvd
18	Meyer	Harriet Ross Tubman	2832 General Meyer Avenue
19	Samuel J. Peters	Israel Meyer Augustine	425 S Broad Street
20		James Derham	5931 Milne Blvd
21		James W. Johnson	1800 Monroe Street
22		Johnson C. Lockett	3240 Law Street
23		Joseph Hardin	2401 Saint Maurice Avenue
24	Edward Douglass White Elementary	Langston Hughes	3519 Trafalger Street
25	Benjamin Morgan Palmer	Lorraine V. Hansberry	1339 Clouet Street
26	McDonough No. 19	Louis D. Armstrong	5909 St Claude Avenue
27	Alcee Fortier	Luscher	5624 Freret Street
28	McDonough No. 36	Mahalia Jackson	2405 Jackson Avenue
29	Roudolph T. Danneel	Mary Church Terrell	3411 Broadway Street
30		Mary D. Coghill	4617 Mirabeau Avenue
31	Judah Benjamin	Mary McLeod Bethune	4040 Eagle Street
32	McDonough No. 31	Morris F. X. Jeff	3368 Esplanade Avenue
33	McDonough No. 38	Myrtle R. Banks	1307 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd
34	McDonough No. 16	New Orleans Center for the Education of Adults	1815 St Claude Avenue
35	Gayaree Phillips	Oretha Castle Haley	2220 Oretha C Haley Blvd
36	W.C. C. Claiborne Elementary School	Parkview Fundamental Magnet	4617 Mirabeau Avenue
37		Robert R. Morton	3000 Abundance Street
38		Thomy Lafon	2601 Seventh Street
39	P.G.T Beauregard	Thurgood Marshall	4621 Canal Street
40		Valena C. Jones	1901 N Galvez Street
41	Phillips Elementary	Voice Waters	3800 Cadillac Street

Table I- Outline of changed New Orleans public school names

In the wake of substantial post-Katrina renovation to the New Orleans public school system, Mr. Gamon spoke about uncertainty of whether school names he had worked to change would in the aftermath of this storm be retained or replaced. One year later, I learned that the OPSB unanimously passed a new policy prohibiting the renaming of public schools (Dreilinger 2015). In the comment section of the newspaper article covering this ruling, one individual discussed their opinion about this with reference to their alma mater, Alfred Lawless, a high school in the Lower Ninth Ward, “Katrina washed away our building and officials were trying to take away our legacy. We signed a petition but was never acknowledged but we will persevere!!! We are one!!!”

### *Disaster-Related Engagements*

Anthropologists have long been intrigued with how people come to terms with events of catastrophic change, violence, loss, and resettlement, thus the social and cultural responses of communities to major challenges, particularly those represented by disaster constitutes an important area for anthropological research (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999). Anthropological investigations explore the roles key social variables have in responding to a disaster’s impacts, analyze the quality of interactions among affected and affiliated agents, and consider the types of post-disaster aid and effects of its distribution. Anthropologists also recognize that disasters produce fertile ground for political solidarity and activism, including survivors doing everything other than passively accepting their fate (Schmuck 2000) to the development of different agendas and new power relations (Oliver-Smith 1996).

Despite the absence of a comprehensive review of disaster-related activism, anthropology of disaster literature is not without discussions of everyday engagement in the aftermath of

calamity. Scholarship shows that in the wake of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico, emergent groups, including neighborhood and student organizations, began to mobilize and demand accountability from the political party in power (Robinson, et al. 1986). Research on the massive pesticide leak and chemical explosion in Bhopal, India also illustrates the rise in new forms of local activism and social consciousness in the aftermath of disaster (Laughlin 1996). Other studies illustrate that innovative forms of agency can become required to cope with the failed “translation” of community needs (Zhang 2016), and to “brokerage links” between the aid agencies and affected populations (Lewis and Mosse 2006). Responses to unstable and dissolute conditions brought about by drought, famine, or political turmoil have also evidenced evolving self-help tactics and long-term coping strategies (Van Arsdale 1989); and, as seen in the case of Brazilian samba schools, cultural practices of popular organizations can be powerful avenues for community organizing around disaster vulnerability (Blaikie, Cannon and Wisner 1994).

Scholars have also considered the ways in which public memorials of disaster invoke (re)action. In discussing a monument constructed by a minister for a train car carrying over 1,500 people that was swept off a track by flood water, Simpson and De Alwis describe a counter-memorial that also became erected at the site by a collective representing those who perished in the wreck. This alternative installation declares that the deaths of passengers not only transpired because of a tsunami, but also due in part to, “those in authority neglecting their responsibility.” It simultaneously expresses reverence and critique, which not only facilitated their ability to memorialize their dead, but also do so as they deemed appropriate while insisting on accountability (2008). Scholars have also documented the use of damaged possessions in art to interpret experiences, to connect with other survivors, and to be used as outlets for self-expression and critique against politicians or governmental organizations (Webb, Wachtendorf

and Eyre 2000). For instance, in response to the Red River Valley Flood, sociologist Elaine Enarson examined a project initiated by a quilting guild, and argues that their disaster quilts are oppositional texts constructed against the official flood story, as one of her interlocutors maintains, “If we don’t tell our stories, who will?” (2000). This question pertains directly to a point Kevin Rozario makes about disaster: who gets to tell the story goes a long way toward determining who is entitled to shape its reconstruction, as well as who benefits and who does not (2005). In another study focusing on debris from the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, Fuyubi Nakamura discusses how a memory search team developed a few weeks into the aftermath with the goal of rescuing and cleaning objects to reconnect them with their owners (2012). Nakamura contends that found materials, such as photographs, are capable of triggering memories, emotions, and the imagination, and although they may be fragmented, these remains survived the disaster, and just like the affected population, consequently embodied strength in the eyes of survivors. She also concludes that the found items remind us not to forget the disaster or the continuous efforts of many to recover and rebuild their lives.

Rituals of mourning support the bereaved by helping to integrate loss into their lives. While scholars recognize people must grieve for devastated communities, homes, social contexts, and culturally significant places and structures, they note that there are many styles, rites, and narratives of loss and grief that we have yet to appreciate and thoroughly study (Stein 2002). Human agency, another important and familiar topic in disaster research, could be further explored with an emphasis on community corrosion that is absent in these accounts (Furedi 2007). This review of selected studies illustrates that disasters can stimulate a range of reactions in their aftermath, yet it is possible to continue developing this insight as suggested by Betty Morrow assessed that that scant attention has been paid to the responses of those affected who

are healthy, resourceful adults (1999). This body of literature helps explain the significance of focusing on everyday engagement efforts in the return from catastrophe. That work informs this chapter, in addition to considerations about the distressed infrastructure and particularly limited resources in the neighborhood.

*BK/AK Everyday Engagement in New Orleans and the Lower Ninth Ward*

Maj Nygaard Christensen notes the tendency for highly optimistic discourses to emerge in media reports following extensive destruction from disasters given the “unique canvas for change” (2011). In the words of Richard Baker, a Louisiana Congressional representative from Baton Rouge, “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it but God did” (Harwood 2005). Landscapes of annihilation enable administrative authorities and planners to envision new beginnings and endorse unprecedented opportunities for development intervention. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, a wealthy developer and real estate mogul stated, “I think we have a clean sheet to start again. And with that clean sheet we have some very big opportunities” (Mutte 2015). Although such perceptions are evocative of geographer Edwin Relph’s notion of “placelessness” (1976) or Marc Augé’s “non-places,” Christensen draws upon James Scott’s notion of “state simplification” as a useful concept to understand how tools, for instance maps or censuses, conflate large, complex realities (1998, 77). Despite customary promotion of a new beginning post-Katrina, many public officials, urban planners, and journalists seemed resigned to a view that the Ninth Ward had little chance of recovery. A few days after the storm hit the Gulf Coast, U.S. Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, said that it did not make sense to him to rebuild New Orleans given that the city lies below sea level (The Associated Press 2005). Five

years later, areas like the Lower Ninth Ward still did not have working streetlights which made it hard to imagine that it can come back (Ehrenfeucht and Nelson 2011).

While “AK” (colloquial speech for “after-Katrina”) New Orleans was posited as a fresh start and for others as an opportunity to forget what once was “BK” (“before-Katrina”), my interest concerns affected residents who were not about to accept such sentiments. The following commentary is from an interview with a New Orleanian resident who is a particularly active community member and musician:

*(it) took a lot of willpower to come back to this city, when on national TV you got people saying, “They should just write that city off.” Even people in the Congress. “It’s not worth it to try to recover that city. Let it go.” They said that. You know, so people here were outraged because it’s crazy, the response that you get from the president on down, when you see what their viewpoint was then, you know, it was jaw dropping. But for people here, it was certainly all they had. And they knew that the people that they were listening to didn’t understand how much they valued their lifestyle, what it is.*

In order to make sense of how the residents I worked with felt about their journey home and one way in which they attempted to return, I draw upon the latest publication by James Scott. Often heralded as the unofficial founder of the “resistance studies” field, his scholarship began by exploring how subjugated people employed “weapons” of evasion and subterfuge to thwart control of the state in the early 1980s. More recently, such analysis is framed with what he calls the “anarchist squint” through an unorganized series of “fragments” involving a chaotic mix of experiences, episodes, and examples that illustrate anarchist principles of everyday resistance (2012). This work is of particular interest in this chapter on everyday engagement for a few reasons. It presents ways to see and understand mutuality and cooperation, without hierarchy, which are key qualities to many residents’ practices identified in this chapter. This approach helps to situate the significance of accumulating many acts to grow people’s confidence in their power to act and change things. It is also important because it highlights qualities within

vernacular and official orders of things that aid in identifying democratic citizenship in the civic sphere. Scott's work also reminds us about the tremendous desire humans have for autonomy as a "vastly underestimated social aspiration for much of the world's population" (Ibid, 85). Each of these points hold a great deal of relevance for understanding the practices of engagement of residents of the Lower Ninth Ward.

Academic scholars to local citizens celebrate everyday engagement as a deeply rooted tradition of Black residents throughout New Orleans and in particular the Lower Ninth Ward. The 1811 slave uprising, the largest rebellion in U.S. history; the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, the separate, but equal doctrine; and the McDonough Day boycotts, the annual commemoration of a slave owner; are all examples of their rich history of resistance (Martinas 2006) with powerful community organizations including benevolent societies, social aid and pleasure clubs, Black Mardi Gras Indians gangs (J. M. Jackson 2006), the Black Panthers (Arend 2010), and its offshoot the New Orleans Committee to Combat Fascism (Wendel 2009). The Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Council was another that a resident, nicknamed the Big Mayor of the Lower Nine, highlighted during an interview. "The neighborhood council was a political organization we founded in 1964. I think I am one of the few living original members of that organization." When I asked why this group started, he said, "We just needed something to pull together a lot of community people. Everybody came together and we had different people working on different [things]. Just like where the lady live on Forstall Street. She and her husband were head of the beautification committee." He continued talking about other efforts including people working on welfare and childcare. Other civic activities include voting and refusing to live with deficiencies in the physical infrastructure (improving pavement, street lighting, garbage pickup, sewage, water quality, and transportation) (Landphair 2007). Civil rights campaigns have also tackled



divestment, exclusionary zoning and policies, police harassment, tax-subsidized privatization, environmental injustices, lobbying against systemic segregation of public space/schools, and discrimination that has prevented Black people from freely acquiring assets that appreciate in value (Lipsitz 1998).

Post-Katrina New Orleans has been fertile ground for the continuation of service activities and socio-political action. Andrea Queeley documents the provision of basic city services made possible through citizen participation and community engagement along with discussion of residents' navigation of recovery programs through the use of their local networks and resources (2011). Frederick Weil also discusses civic participation and posits its rise, in addition to community organizations and institutions, as a new style of activism that comprises cooperative orientation and organizational autonomy (2011). In detailing mobilization efforts of Ninth Ward communities, scholars have focused in part on the large Vietnamese population. The work of such scholars has explored how this community responded when Hurricane Katrina initially hit the region (Li, et al. 2008), and how residents have organized rebuilding efforts in the aftermath, which has included fighting for city services and opposing the establishment of a nearby landfill (Leong, et al. 2007, Chiang 2009). As Vietnamese residents continued to work toward recovery throughout the years that followed the storm, they also found themselves contending with disproportionate impacts, given their connections to the seafood industry, from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

My field notes contain numerous observations of Lower Ninth Ward residents participating in various civically-oriented, everyday engagements. Some of my writing chronicles practices that have become embodied (Connerton 1989). For instance, a resident who could rattle off the local fifth district police station phone number, and another who had

memorized her council member's office phone number because they called them so often. I also found myself scribing quotes from residents talking about their social responsibility. For example, during my fieldwork, while sitting at the kitchen table listening to a local radio call-in program, I heard a caller make the following statement, "Let's make history today. History wasn't in the past, it is now—the present, we are the history and let's make it every day," and "If we need to march again, we need to think about that. I can't walk a block, but I will do what I can." Other times, I documented political commentary expressed in public art installations (Figure 28). I have also come to learn the nicknames for some of the residents I have worked with like Lil' Ms. Pelosi, as well as the Little and Big Mayor, given their leadership and committed participation in political and community-engaged activities. The Little Mayor of the Lower Ninth Ward said to me in reference to Mitch Landry, the acting mayor at the time, that, "he'll walk up and embrace us with that. He tells everyone that these are the mayors here of the Lower Ninth Ward. They do not want to fool with us because we are real powerful down here—well, we won't stop at no end to get something done. Or whatever got to get done". These characteristics reflect the spirit and tenacity of many Lower Ninth Ward residents who work to generate alternatives to the status quo.



Figure 28 - Political commentary in a Lower Ninth Ward yard

For some residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, this necessitated traditional street protests and while in the field, I participated in one such demonstration. I first heard about the protest during a well-attended A Community Voice (ACV) organized, neighborhood meeting, and learned more about it through an interview with ACV Vice President, Vanessa Gueringer, on a local radio station where she said, “If you want to know what’s going on, go to the Lower Ninth Ward. Little to no recovery.” Ms. Gueringer continued by identifying the Peter Sanchez Community Center, a fire station, and the Dr. Martin Luther King elementary school as only coming about because residents fought for them to be rebuilt in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In talking about the high number of blighted properties in the Lower Nine, she said that the city actually owned many of these unkempt lots and, in fact, had accumulated so many after the storm that they were unable to maintain them. During another interview a resident said that there was “something like 37,000 blighted properties in the city” although before the storm, “probably about 20,000 . . . it’s always been a problem.”

During that same radio show Ms. Gueringer also discussed the slow lack of recovery in the neighborhood which she labeled “ground zero” and added that millions of dollars came in to aid in the recovery of the Lower Nine, but had been spent elsewhere. As she understood and explained, there are still millions of dollars on the table, and folks need to reach out to Road Home and FEMA representatives. In the meantime, she said she would keep doing what she does: “committing her life to the community.”

Just after ten o’clock that Saturday morning, approximately 125 protesters began walking down the sidewalk along St. Claude Avenue. Some participants wore bright red ACV shirts and the remaining majority of white, college students donned matching grey tops printed with “Outreach TULANE – New Orleans 2014”. The march took about twenty minutes or so to

complete and at the final destination, protesters filed alongside a church parking lot (Figure 29). They faced the road and began to chant in front of a local television camera operator who had just arrived to the scene and began to tape. I asked two individuals who appeared to be leaders of the private university group how their participation in the protest came about. I was informed that they were taking part in a one-day, community service event in which students and staff volunteer at various service projects throughout city during their first week of classes. The students present at the event had signed up to participate in the protest.



Figure 29- ACV & Tulane University Students protest in the Lower Ninth Ward, August 2014.

As the main organizer of the protest, Ms. Gueringer took to the megaphone first and delivered a speech she had prepared. It ended with, “We must not allow the lives of our loved ones, that we lost in our community to have been lost in vain. We must, must, must continue to fight. Thank you.” The woman who spoke next said during her talk, “They used to sing a song ‘Ain’t Nobody Gonna Turn Me Around’ and then quoted further from this song. Ms. Gueringer next taught the song to the group of protestors and they briefly sang a few lines together. I remembered it also being sung in Washington D.C. Just then, a young boy who had been

standing next to me as I videotaped the protest, a grandson of one of the residents I had been working with in the community, turned to me and asked, “Are we on TV? Are we on the news?” I stopped filming and said to the youth of about ten years, “Yes, it will be.”

Speaking next was a nicely dressed, middle-aged Black man who introduced himself as a graduate of Tulane University. In his address, he quickly got to the point:

*All of the problems that you will hear today are structural problems. Some of you all – you’ll graduate from Tulane and go on and probably be elected officials, policy makers and decision makers. So, I want you all to remember this day. Not only this day but also the struggles – the constant struggles that you hear from the people who got up here and talked . . . Look around—again, all of these problems are structural problems. Government duty is to protect and empower its people. Once again, it is to protect and empower its people. And our government has not been doing it for us. It hasn’t been doing it for us and I ask every one of you to never forget. Never forget when you go to your communities in Boston, New York, LA—wherever you all come from—never forget the struggles that not only the people in New Orleans, but people around the world and throughout the United States are going through in poor, impoverished, urban communities. Poor, impoverished, urban communities.*

The gloomy clouds off in the distance moved above the area in which we stood and the first few sprinkles of rain prompted the protest to end quickly. As one ACV leader began singing, “We Shall Overcome,” the group of protesters opened their umbrellas and turned to head back in the direction from which they came.

As illustrated by this ethnographic vignette, problems of the past and present identified in speeches signal the scope of loss beyond material possessions to a host of sociocultural elements including livelihoods, social networks, and spatial markers. Participation in this protest facilitated the transmission of a tradition across racial groups and generations, and the use of media amplified the action by raising concerns to a broader audience. This practice and its collaborative organization provide an illustration of the way in which one resident describes the intentionality of such efforts:

*The whole purpose is to pass it along. The city is very much built off of oral traditions. And you know, rituals that have taken place. So, it's always going to be older generation of people, that is, showing someone two or three generations, or four generations, from them, what's going on in front of them and the importance of it. So, they're good at passing the torch . . . They constantly trying to show the rest of the world what the hell's going on . . . It only takes one generation for people to forget damn near everything.*

Through participant-observation, I have attended many meetings, alongside many Lower Ninth Ward residents. These have included blight statistic meetings put on by city workers and hosted by a neighborhood community association; an Orleans Parish District Attorney State of Criminal Justice meeting; a Select Committee on Hurricane Recovery New Orleans City Council Chamber meeting; nonprofit and neighborhood association organized assemblies; New Orleans Neighbors & Police Anti-Crime Council (NONPACC) meetings; and town hall gatherings with local and state representatives. Richard Campanella contends that calamities expose shortcomings of political leadership, if not startling abuses of power, since disasters put the legitimacy and authority of a government on trial (2006).

The course of fieldwork granted me access to explore this insight, which also contributed to my awareness of the strong preference for individuals affected by disaster to have face-to-face dialogue with persons associated with recovery efforts. For instance, in 2009 I wrote in my field notes about residents who wanted to communicate directly with the personnel in charge at a neighborhood meeting with two Regional Transit Authority representatives who were primarily in attendance to discuss a newly launched Lil' Easy van transportation service in the Lower Ninth Ward. After listening to their presentation, residents in the audience had a great deal to say about the city's limited transportation offerings:

*We need to talk to the people that make change. Your hands are tied - we need more services. You can't answer questions we are asking. Shouldn't someone else be here then? I've been coming to these meetings for almost 10 years now and it's always the same.*

In this example, residents turned out to participate in discussions, and their comments reveal attempts to address issues of concern, and in the process, to confront frustrating, if not futile, get-togethers. A more thorough illustration of residents working to hold political representatives responsible for adversities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina follows in the proceeding section. What comes into focus with this vignette is how residents create opportunities to meet in person with their legislators and policy makers, particularly those who have not made themselves available locally in the city or district they represent. I also came to quickly learn that residents expected that I exercise some sort of civic and social responsibility as well. One morning over coffee with the residents while getting settled in the field, the conversation turned to the last evening's news. This couple was not only surprised I had not heard the most recent happenings, given that the news is aired both at night and in the mornings (in other words providing multiple opportunities to catch up with the latest) they also seemed perplexed that I would live without a television. Although I was not against having one, I just had gotten by listening to the local radio station. I left their house later that morning with a spare television in hand that they insisted on lending me to stay informed and aware. From that point on, whenever possible, I made watching the local news a priority since current affairs, particularly things happening in the city, began many a conversation, and I sensed that my ability to participate in these discussions communicated connectedness and respect for the lives of residents living with these actualities. People did not have to keep me up to date on, as one person put it, "this stuff you can only catch locally," especially local politics, "because it moves rapidly here. At the speed of light."

In addition to consuming media, I have observed another related practice among many residents in the Lower Nine that further contributes to their awareness and influences engagement. When talking with a number of residents, it became apparent that they archive

collections of Hurricane Katrina related materials. Some I got to know were keeping binders, file cabinets, Tupperware containers, or just cardboard boxes filled with a compilation of newspaper clippings, magazine articles, event flyers, budgets, rebuilding plans, maps, letters, bills, and receipts. For example, see the community flyer in Figure 30 below held in the collection of a Lower Nine resident.

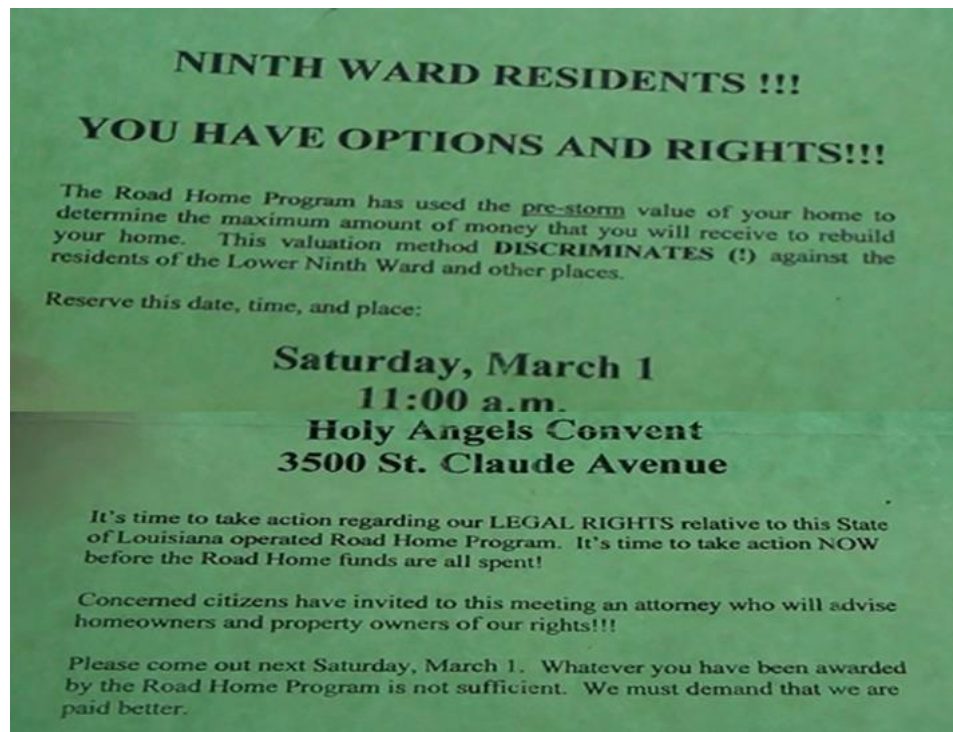


Figure 30- Archived Lower Ninth Ward resident's flyer to host a community meeting

I have also found some individuals use these disaster-related artifacts to help them communicate particular information. For instance, at a town hall meeting in the neighborhood with Councilman James Gray, I saw one resident raise a question about the cost of a local community center under construction. This resident's question came about because, in collecting newspaper articles about this facility, he noticed its funding allocation diminish over time. With the documentation in hand, the representative struggled to debate this claim. Others kept similar records about budgets promised for school reconstruction and for financing planning districts,



which became important pieces of data to support residents' assertions of inequitable spending, or for evidence of declining financial reserves allotted for particular recovery projects or areas in the city.

Experiences in fieldwork also lead me to reevaluate my reluctance to engage with mass media and commercial broadcasting. Perhaps this came about through Lower Ninth Ward residents affirming, "they get good coverage." One resident described this credibility as follows:

*One thing that can give the media here—they will get it done. You call the media, they gonna move on—they gonna get it done because they do not play with the media here. They do not like the publicity here. And that's one thing City Hall will work fast on—yes. You can call "6 on Your Side," you can call "I-Team Investigators" [local journalist investigative initiatives] here and they will act on it.*

More than once, I saw this individual and other Lower Nine residents make calls to local news agencies as well as government offices to address a range of issues going on in the neighborhood, from wildlife removal to getting trash in the road cleaned up. In spite of the stagnant post-Katrina recovery in the Lower Ninth Ward, it seemed that residents' everyday lives were kept busy with activities that helped them stay informed about the latest happenings, or that they were occupied with making others aware, if not accountable for. The next section expands upon this insight through a descriptive episode of post-Katrina engagement I had the opportunity to participate in during my fieldwork.

In the United States, traveling to Washington D.C., the nation's capital, to voice a grassroots organized message to the public and political figures is a rite of passage for many citizens. This vignette portrays such a campaign organized by Road Home Action Network Team (RHANT). They transported New Orleans residents to Washington D.C. with the hope of meeting with members of the Congressional Black Caucus and President Barack Obama. Their intention was to discuss concerns about the Road Home program, the single largest housing-

recovery program in United States history, which is run by private contractors who control and use tax payer monies to award rebuilding grants to homeowners. Residents' civic engagement practices of residents represented by this RHANT journey contribute to disaster aftermath findings around the issue of advocacy supporting the post-Katrina New Orleans research of Antoinette Jackson whose work highlights the insistence of Black residents on being heard in their journey to return (2011), and Barbara Ransby's documentation of Black women taking the initiative and acting boldly in the city's recovery (2006).

*"Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around"*

Just a few months after a Lower Ninth Ward resident shared with me an announcement she heard during a WBOK radio show about a local organization requesting that people join their "Just Get On The Bus" campaign which would take concerned citizens from New Orleans to Washington, D.C., I found my seat on the departing bus that Sunday afternoon under the overpass, across from CIRCLE Foods Store. This was early July 2013, eight years after Hurricane Katrina. The purpose of this endeavor as described in a promotional flyer by RHANT was to meet with President Obama and insist upon a full federal investigation of the Louisiana Road Home Program, which had been allocated billions of taxpayers' money, but that money was not being made available to many eligible residents. In addition to seeking this comprehensive investigation, another intention was to petition for a congressional hearing to be held in New Orleans. The point of contact for this initiative was longtime community activist, Mrs. Viola Washington, Chairperson of RHANT, Executive Director of Welfare Rights Organizations, and urban radio talk show host of REALITY CHECK.

Approximately 100 participants took part in this journey—some single people, married couples, siblings, representatives of organizations, parents with their children, and grandparents with grandchildren. Except for a few white people, the group was almost all middle-aged to older African Americans. Early into the journey participants introduced themselves to the group by giving their name and church membership association—only a select few others instead shared a political, community organization, or educational affiliation. After one major issue along the way (a tire blowout twenty miles from Georgia), we arrived safely in the nation’s capital early Monday evening. While participants knew that the big event had been scheduled for early Tuesday, specific information about the meeting was limited.

On Tuesday morning, with almost everyone dressed in the same yellow RHANT shirt provided to participants before leaving New Orleans, we learned that only approximately half of the group would be permitted into the meeting room. Couples traveling together, as well as groups, needed to decide who would be among the individuals or representatives in attendance. Other participants were to support from the outside along the street holding a banner and standing together around it. The younger of the coordinators continued delivering information including preferences for dealing with media and restating the purposes of the meeting. Right after one participant, a reverend, said a prayer for our group, participants on the bus broke out into song, singing “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” and we began to drive off to the meeting.

Just a few blocks from the White House, those going inside for the meeting headed toward the stone building with eagerness, determination, and a few walking canes. Was the gathering going to include representatives of the Congressional Black Caucus? Would President Barack Obama or members of his cabinet really be present and meet the residents? What

commitments would transpire from this pilgrimage? The moment was charged with such questions and uncertainty about how they might be answered, reluctant anticipation mingled with hopefulness for potential gains. After climbing a few flights of stairs, a young Black woman, wearing a blazer and pearls with a binder in hand, escorted the group to a room (Figure 31). Chairs lined all the walls and encircled one large table in the middle. It quickly became apparent as participants began to settle in that it was going to be a tight fit, for some it would be standing room only. The room soon began to warm up to an uncomfortable temperature, and some women began to fan themselves.



Figure 31- RHANT organization leader speaking with Congressman Richmond at a meeting in Washington, D.C.

The woman who first greeted us introduced herself as the Executive Assistant for Representative Cedric Richmond, Louisiana's 2<sup>nd</sup> congressional district, and mentioned he would be joining us shortly. While standing in front of the door next to an unfamiliar man in a business

suit, Ms. Lacy asked who was in the room, besides people from New Orleans. Responses included cities and parishes from across Louisiana and the states of Michigan, Mississippi, Georgia, and Wisconsin. The man standing next to Ms. Lacy introduced himself to the group as the Congressman's Legislative Director. He discussed his advocacy work while managing the housing portfolio and summarized his understanding of the participants' concerns. He moved the meeting along with the following:

*So, it's our job to just sit here and listen to you and convey all of your concerns to HUD and also the local officials that are going to be in charge of it . . . We're certainly hopeful that the state officials will do what is right, and we can certainly use the power of persuasion of this office to influence the decision making . . . So, my job, Bianca's job right now is to just sit here and listen to some of the things you have been going through and express those sentiments immediately to HUD—soon as we get out of here . . . Another thing that we are going to do for you all is ensure that you have a standing point of contact with, over at HUD so that your concerns can constantly be addressed with them. In a way, it doesn't let your message kind of slip through which, you know, has happened in the past . . . We work for you and that we are very glad to have you here today and receive you as our guests. This is exactly, you pay our salaries—you're the reason we come to work." He concluded with, "We are here to make sure your voices are heard. So.... tell me what I need to know.*

The young RHANT organizer, who had spoken on the bus earlier that day, gave each participant one minute to share their personal story or speak on the behalf of someone in their life. In the sweltering room, intense with emotion, about fifty individuals spoke in the two hours that followed. Their testimonies involved multiple residents' homes erroneously torn down, insufficient funds preventing reconstruction, years-long struggle with remediation, complications incurred from forgery, documents with varying disbursement figures, letters demanding reimbursement from payouts, individuals still displaced and homeless, false claims of uninsured status, cases of contractor fraud, and program ineligibility due to a too-high income level (\$31,000). One older man, representing his eleven siblings, discussed their issues as inheritors of a Lower Ninth Ward property from a parent that perished during the storm. Since the family

members did not inhabit the house at the time of Hurricane Katrina, their Road Home application was refused and despite having paid taxes on the house following the storm, it was unknowingly torn down by an unidentified entity. “We just have a piece of land there right now.”

### *Continuation of Adversity & Tradition*

As this episode reveals, apart from one state senator and his assistants, no other members of the Black Caucus, nor did the president, attend this meeting. The limited number of officials present meant that many individuals with influence or political sway did not hear firsthand about residents’ rebuilding narratives that described disheartening experiences following the clearance issued by authorities to return to New Orleans after Katrina floodwaters receded, and the last authorization was granted to the Lower Ninth Ward.

These representatives missed hearing their constituents talk about living in formaldehyde-laden FEMA trailers that caused long-term injury to their healthy lung function, and the resulting medical conditions requiring medication. Others were affected by the large shipments of drywall imported from China with excessively high levels of sulfur, who found themselves, while dealing with resultant ailments, having to tear down their newly constructed walls only to have to rebuild them with non-contaminated material. There were also stories about building regulation changes after residents had completed work. For instance, newly placed pilings that no longer met updated standards had to be repurchased and set again, in close vicinity to the others already lodged in the ground, since the cost of reusing and moving them exceeded the redo work. Still others discussed obtaining receipts for partial to completed work, necessary records to receive reimbursements from insurance or assistance programs, something that was difficult to do because contractors were sometimes incarcerated for fraud. Another matter that residents spoke

about concerned official letters they had received, and that were sent to more than 50,000 across the state, demanding repayment of their homeowners' Road Home funding because documentation showing how funds were expended was missing from the agency's records.

This vignette of residents traveling to Washington D.C., in conjunction with the older to contemporary examples of everyday engagement illuminates social action contending with an array of struggles that have yet to cease. Consequently, enacting everyday engagement in the aftermath forms a continuum of practices. Two related insights grow from this recognition. The first pertains to residents' everyday engagements contending with enduring struggles for human rights. With residents having to deal with issues of inequity, disenfranchisement, and injustices in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, post-storm circumstances continue a historical pattern poignantly familiar to African Americans and other marginalized groups in the United States-- that disasters perpetuate, if not exacerbate previously discriminatory social orders and conditions.

Yes to focus on scholarship that solely chronicles adverse states of affairs and perilous environments continues critiques raised by scholars like Clyde Woods (2002) and Nicolas Caverly (2018). In as much as disaster-recovery studies commonly concentrate on a dualistic assessment of place relative to its restoration to pre-disaster status or its improvement through implementation of a "better" design, the former does little to remediate past disparities, and the latter entails ambiguity in deciding what constitutes advancement for whom and to what end. These sorts of analyses suggest uneven rebuilding results as "preordained" and "petrified remains" (Ibid, 9-10), instead of attending to struggles in present endeavors that accentuate these conditions through projects continuously encountered, contested, and refashioned.

On a related manner, research and related advocacy work on language revitalization by Bernard Perley, advances a similar critique. Perley argues that metaphors of language “death” and “extinction” mis-frame the issue leading to interventions that exacerbate the problem. Instead of working to make recordings of “last speakers” (because documentation is only a partial solution), Perley suggests novel solutions, including new metaphors, to dynamically revitalize and reclaim “sleeping” languages (2012). This insight is relevant to residents’ everyday engagements in that their work tries to move beyond simply “returning home” to include “emergent vitalities,” in this case practices creating meaningful change, in their post-storm neighborhood and community (Ibid).

#### *Accountability in Collectivism & Healing*

These critical assessments inform my attentiveness to constructive aspects of residents’ everyday engagements that remain committed to questioning long-studied as well as recently-surfacing forces that fuel chronic displacement, everyday violence, and disaster capitalism. Naomi Klein is credited with coining the concept of “disaster capitalism,” which refers to the use of catastrophic events to advance unrestricted markets and generate profits for big businesses and major corporations (2007). Its implementation in turn paves the way for unequitable development, gentrification, chronic displacement, and a host of other extreme and detrimental conditions. Despite the utter devastation residents faced in their return from Hurricane Katrina, as researchers have contended elsewhere, residents of the Lower Ninth Ward do not resort to neglecting their community to regain their individual identities (Brown and Perkins 1992). I want to emphasize that this is also the case with regard to practices of everyday engagements. Anthony Oliver-Smith shares that “[p]eople can call upon many resources to reconstitute



community . . . Moreover, resources of an essentially cultural nature, by aiding in the reconstitution of community, help the individuals to heal as well” (2005, 56). He expands this view of recovery efforts by emphasizing an integral relationship to returning from calamity whereby “[c]ommunity constitution and individual recuperation become mutually supportive processes in which the survival of community restores meaning to individual lives battered by circumstance” (Ibid).

Applying this perspective to the Washington D.C. vignette reveals how individual residents came together to address the irresponsible and discriminatory operation of a recovery program meant to help, not hinder (Bates and Green 2009). Although their stories were subjective, when shared one after another, the discourse produced was powerful to not only the few administrative actors in the room, but also for the residents themselves to express and listen to collectively. The assembly of this group together with their bright yellow shirts enhanced their prominence (Figure 32). To assess the success of the meeting by solely evaluating how many official representatives were present, which was particularly disappointing to many of the participants, would take away from what the journey and meeting provided to the participants themselves. Perhaps even more important, and more visible when using an “anarchist squint,” it would discredit what happened when traveling back to New Orleans.



Figure 32- "Just Get On The Bus" participants in Washington D.C., July 2013

Although the bus ride back began as a quiet return, at some point a significant dialogue began to emerge. In the early morning hours of the next day, a pastor gave a prayer reflecting upon past struggles as well as current efforts, and further requested our safe journey home. One participant, so moved by the pastor's words, took to the microphone and from the front of the bus, characterized their feelings for the:

*blessed opportunity to give the famous speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I was so elated over that powerful prayer, 'til I just can't help, but do a good job on his "I Have a Dream" because I am already motivated, activated. This is the speech Dr. King give fifty years ago at the Lincoln Memorial.*

This senior citizen, who the prior day had shuffle-walked his way to the meeting, continued to recite, for the next fifteen minutes or so, the entire speech from memory. I later learned that he first memorized it as a young boy for school. The microphone was then handed to another enthused participant that sang the gospel song "It's Gonna Rain" acapella.

As we continued to travel across state lines in the many hours that followed, many other participants filled the air with passionate, impromptu talks. One speaker described the moment "as a first step, a first step of many others that have to be taken. As I say all of the time, I don't

have no dog in this race. I don't have no enemies to expunge and no friends to reward." Someone from the bus shouted out, "Alright!" She continued, "I am doing it from my heart because I feel like it was put on my heart to do this." This was met with a "God bless ya!" to which she responded, "And I need everybody to support it and help me make it happen because no one of us can do this by ourselves and we have to stay together."

These words continued to galvanize others to share of themselves on the bus ride back. One middle-aged man, traveling with his wife, also talked about the importance and meaning of what had occurred yesterday. He stressed political activity and calling politicians to task, be it for issues with Road Home, high rates of Black unemployment and incarceration, loyalty to Wall Street, or supporting private companies like Halliburton and Shaw who profited billions of dollars "off of our suffering." He too cited Dr. King, "a man cannot ride your back if you stand up straight," and then continued:

*We got to stand up. And we got to stand up and fight. And we got to let them know we didn't jump off of the turnip truck yesterday. That we do understand that we have rights, that the government we have was supposed to make us whole and they have not done that and we have got to continue to let them know that we must be made whole. And I would just like to point out that there are many other fights in New Orleans that we got to fight.*

Two such issues emphasized by him during the ride back home were the privatization of the public education system and police brutality, which he emphasized, was not only taking place in New Orleans and at the national level, but all over the world. He concluded with a brief description of local organizations that folks could get involved with back home.

Another older man spoke about his community-organizing work in New Orleans as a Black Panther and talked about how these efforts related to those of the ancestors during the time of slavery. He connected the current fight with Road Home to the eighteen-year struggle for his benefits as a veteran. He underscored, "Don't let this be the last time that we see one another . . .

we got to go back home and we got to—I'm going to the news reporter myself, I'm going to report to channel six—Arnold Roberson—and you gonna give me some air time on that TV . . .”

A woman whom I had been sitting across the aisle from gave the final talk during this spontaneous series of reflections, on the importance of the trip and its potential impacts:

*I am here as a concerned citizen . . . I am mad and you need to be mad. You need to be talking to everyone in your neighborhood. You need to be talking to people at your church. You need to be talking to people at the club because we are under war, we are under siege in that city.*

In associating the city's issues with politicians and their budgets and policies, she reminded everyone on the bus of the importance of voting as well as their responsibility to make informed decisions about candidates beyond name recognition. She concluded, “We have got to get off this bus today and start talking. We got to make phone calls. We got to tweet. We gotta get on Facebook.” With the remaining time together, she encouraged us to talk, ask questions, and get answers from some of the “powerful people on this bus”, which she also phrased as “some very important activists” to “get some understanding before we get to the parish line.”

Only those riding the bus that morning heard the provocative monologues of the residents. Despite the limited number of people in the audience on the bus, each message communicated, in addition to holding politicians responsible, that residents also hold themselves accountable to encourage and educate one another. The bus ride back proved empowering for ordinary folks to build solidarity and momentum in addressing local issues to systemic ailments. They reminded themselves of the tireless groundwork that had been paved before for them to be right here, at this moment, and their inspiring words restored faith to proceed, albeit with measured assurance.

The sense of accountability expressed on the bus ride back to New Orleans is not isolated to this experience. Notions of obligation are rooted within examples of everyday engagements previously discussed and can be discerned elsewhere in the neighborhood traditions. This place-

making represents fragments of contemporaneous realities experienced by New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, post-Hurricane Katrina residents, which are extracted from a much larger mosaic of practices occurring in the aftermath of this storm and continue today. Recognizing civically-engaged action within residents' efforts to return, demonstrates the importance and will of people to reconstruct—perhaps more aptly described as *mend*—their attachments to place. It also emphasizes that complete loss or removal of a community from its ground by disaster is profoundly traumatic (Oliver-Smith 1996).

Both vignettes in this chapter illustrate practices that create political places for residents to vocalize dissatisfaction and express dissent. Regarding the protest organized by a community group with Tulane college students, the use of streets provides an accessible public venue. It also gains the symbolism that accords with choosing to march in the Lower Ninth Ward, as compared to a higher traffic area of the city, since such action embodies ownership of the neighborhood. Regarding the bus campaign, and in light of residents not seeming to get what it was they were looking for in the Washington D.C. office, residents of the Lower Nine had to create this needed space themselves. On the bus ride back, the space they made resembled gathering around a fire to tell encouraging stories to one another as a means of keeping morale high, despite the feelings of disappointment. But participants were not sitting in a circle, nor were they outside in nature, under a starry sky. In place of the empowering and impromptu campfire to create a distinctly reverent place for discouraged residents, was simply a microphone at the front of the bus, the focused attention and support of those present, and their shared participation. It was as if the group had decided without saying so overtly that if they could not find resolution at their intended destination in Washington, D.C., they would create this space of solace and comfort themselves for themselves.

### *Roots Run Deep*

This review of selected civically-oriented, everyday engagements working to address an inept recovery and improve beyond-extreme substandard living conditions, which began long before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, is neither comprehensive nor is the work yet complete. Despite this meaningful labor, whose roots run deep in the lives of residents and those families they come from, nonetheless shows emergent efforts transpiring post-Katrina. Besides revealing failures of the state, such practices of residents hold officials accountable for post-disaster consequences while simultaneously legitimizing their right to return by reestablishing and reaffirming significant connections. The embodied place-making that results from civic engagement produces a sense of place, which scholars have shown to be a useful concept for explaining peoples' outlooks and dispositions (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009), in addition to playing an important part in structuring and transforming self-identification and collective identities (Low and Altman 1992, Rodman 1992, Sen and Silverman 2014).

Beyond signifying continuation of adversity and tradition, everyday engagement entails deeper social implications of a forceful capacity in which residents counter dominant narratives and challenge the erasure of history (Farmer 2004). Perhaps the reporting of Alabama State college students hanging a "Finish What Katrina Started" banner prior to a football game with the rival Louisiana State University team, a decade into the aftermath of this storm, is a reminder of the controversial discourse that emerged questioning the idea of recovery itself that was made by the public and politicians alike (Clayton 2015). As residents struggle to return amidst political corruption, an economy of disinvestment, and the erosion of human and ecological health—be it unintentional or by design—tragic consequences of what anthropologists have dubbed a "second order disaster" (Adams 2013), their place-making invokes meaningful

collective social action. Appreciating practices of concerted, organized behavior (Ortner 1984) and mutuality (J. C. Scott 2012) continues to open up to scrutiny a realm of practice that anthropologists have asked us to consider more fully. Doing so stimulates awareness to change in spatial ethnographies, which also uniquely fosters the opportunity for interdisciplinary examination of spatial justice (Wendel 2009, Soja 2010). Recognizing the meaningful toil of residents illuminates how a significant chronicle of continuing, everyday engagement materializes and cultivates a community's well-being (Ulysse 2013).

Identifying the everyday engagement practices of residents also challenges a number of assumptions typical of America's cultural understandings of African Americans and urban poverty. In one regard, these efforts of residents illustrate they do not lack motivation or capacity to work out solutions for themselves and their communal sufficiency refutes welfare queen stereotypes that some invoke (Reed 2006). This engagement also counters the notion that the demise of their neighborhood is unavoidable post-Katrina (M. Davis 2007). These stories counter dominant narratives of communities of color as dysfunctional, deviant, and in need of saving put forth by advocates of neoliberalism (Buras 2010). Residents' everyday engagement also provokes a reorientation to remembrances of Hurricane Katrina that emphasize monies not allocated or properly expended, mitigation plans not implemented, and promises that have failed to materialize. The demonization of disadvantaged African-American New Orleanians (J. White 2006) portrayed without any resources (Young Jr. 2006), and a city reduced to a vast slum inhabited by a criminal and helpless underclass (Davis and Land 2007), are tropes that residents themselves counter and undermine in their practices of everyday engagement. The same holds true of the Lower Ninth Ward being remembered as a symbol of death and helplessness (Queeley 2011). Combining the responsive social action of powerful organizing with critiques against

corruption, neglectful and inadequate assistance, blight and a crumbling infrastructure, offers a broader, more accurate appreciation of post-disaster experiences and hopeful insight into the dynamic human condition.

I would like to argue that de Certeau's term "tactics" be applied to the civically-oriented, everyday engagements residents employed to confront a non-existent recovery by using the symbolic space of a public street and an office in Washington, D.C. (as well as the bus ride home). The work of Bourdieu reminds us that residents' use of long-standing political practices, from protests to rallies, points to the agency of participants and the familiarity of a New Orleans habitus that they draw upon in a variety of situations (sometimes far from New Orleans) with the intention of altering inequitable social structures that are pervasive post-Hurricane Katrina. This is also highlighted through residents' praxis, be it their engagement with countless meetings, deliberate interactions with officials, or their calculated use of media, which are intended to work to hold politicians accountable. These practices also reframe responsibility as belonging to residents themselves as well as for the situations they find themselves in and, as a result, contribute to the remaking of their Lower Ninth Ward habitus.

From the perspective of Scott, applying the anarchist squint to civically-oriented, everyday engagements provide further insight into the ways such everyday practice builds mutuality including the fact that when residents join these forms of activism, a collective materializes. This is an important point for two reasons. First, the residents' efforts illuminate the officials' incapacity to create mutuality and a sense of camaraderie as they fail to deliver on promises of recovery, not discounting the basic ineffectiveness of their disaster-recovery related programs. The second reason why it is significant to recognize the mutuality created through such practices is that they strengthen individual residents' reconnections to home and a sense of



togetherness, that is to feelings of not being alone in their frustration with their experiences of coming back. Scott's anarchist-inspired lens also facilitates our ability to see that residents' activism authorizes them to hold officials accountable, as well as to recognize the responsibility they have to themselves and their community. Finally, in regard to the collaboration of residents with university students, cross-cultural relationships are fostered that cultivate senses of place and allow knowledge to flourish outside of the classroom in local communities.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **“Try and Be a Lead on It”:**

#### **Place-making through Community and Commercial Establishments**

As congregation members opened sanctuary doors to leave after the church service, the air-conditioned room quickly began to warm up with the outside midmorning heat. I waited in the red fabric covered pew to greet the pastor’s wife who was going around and welcoming each of the individuals that stood up during the service when the pastor asked visitors to share a little about themselves. When Mrs. Dorsey approached me, I said that I had had the opportunity of meeting her previously and began to describe the group of architecture students I was with the last time I attended Mount Nebo church several years ago. My mention of having been with university students from Puerto Rico jogged her memory of that moment. I continued to speak with her about some of my recollections of that earlier experience. Unlike the church service I had just attended that morning, which took place in a newly constructed brick building, the last one I had taken part in with this congregation was outside, underneath a green-and-white-striped tent. That one was over on Claiborne Avenue—the busy thoroughfare that passes from one end of the Lower Ninth Ward to the other, continuing into St. Bernard Parish (Figure 33).



Figure 33- Temporary site of Mount Nebo Church

I spoke with Mrs. Dorsey about helping set up the pews that had been stacked on top of one another under a tarp before the worship ceremony began. I also recalled that the microphone and organ on the makeshift plywood alter were powered by long extension cords connected to a generator, tucked away inside of a delivery truck that had been parked around the block to quiet its hum. I recollected that without walls, the sounds of song and sermon carried away in all directions. When Mrs. Dorsey spoke with our group of students after the service that morning five years prior, she shared with us that where we were, under the tent on Claiborne, was going to be the site for rebuilding Mount Nebo Baptist Church's new brick and mortar home. The previous landowner, who decided not to return to the Lower Ninth Ward after the storm, was donating the property to the church. This particular location and that gift of space held a great deal of significance to Mrs. Dorsey, as she explained, because it was the location where the body of her father had been found post-Katrina. Returning to my description of the morning I was catching up with Mrs. Dorsey again years later, I came to learn from her that those initial

rebuilding plans were no longer possible. Following a brief hesitation, she shared that the church we were at that day, and which I believe is still shared with another congregation, was now going to be their new home. I felt my heart sink. This was not the way I wanted her story of Mount Nebo to end. I wanted Mrs. Dorsey to have a new church rebuilt at the site where her father passed, given the fondness she seemed to express about this prospect, rather than housing the congregation at a location of little to no consequence.

Stressful events can have serious long-term consequences on a person's emotional wellbeing (Davis and Land 2007). Given the prevalence of Hurricane Katrina-related disaster trauma, the return to familiar spaces and accessibility of mental-health related services, including those provided by religious institutions, become critical resources for recovering from radical change. Scholars from diverse disciplines have long documented the importance of religion and church in the lives of African Americans. As Joyce Jackson emphasizes, Black churches have developed crucial cultural modes of coping with historical and contemporary trauma (2006). Churches in New Orleans played important roles in responding to Hurricane Katrina from evacuation to rescue, as well as mobilization of social networks years into the aftermath of the storm (Wendel 2009). In continuation of their enduring tradition, Black churches throughout the city have also been particularly active in community (re)building and empowerment post-Katrina (DeVore 2007). Yet, a report by Karyn Trader-Leigh describing the work of African-American, faith-based organizations and clergy in the aftermath of the storm reveals that only one church received reimbursement for the costs of assisting survivors (2008). Her research also draws attention to an overall disregard for Black clergy and their support of the spiritual and mental health of their congregation members, despite the ability of religiously-informed group solidarity "to prevent psychological fragmentation that leads to defeat and despair" (DeVore 2007, 769). If

one likens a disaster to a stone thrown in a pond with 360-degree radiating ripples resembling impacts into everyday experiences, as Joshua Breslau (2000) does, the potential service of local religious leaders to communities affected by disaster becomes an important, indispensable resource.

In my appreciation that such resources or assets are instrumental to the well-being of communities, in addition to the provisioning of disaster-related work undertaken by faith-based groups (Fisker-Nielsen 2012), I recognized that it was of utmost importance that Mount Nebo return to the Lower Nine. However, beyond securing a physical structure, I wanted the congregation's reemergence to be at the Claiborne site. Given the newly acquired meaning of that location post-Katrina, in remembrance of Mrs. Dorsey's father and of gifted land, I felt its return to this particular place would have provided, at the very least, some sort of restorative healing likely to be unavailable elsewhere.

### *Narrating Return*

Since my first visit to the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood four years after Hurricane Katrina, I have had the opportunity to listen to many residents' "post-K" stories of return. Many people, from strangers met along the way, to residents with whom I have since become close acquaintances, have opened up about what things were like before the storm juxtaposed with how things were presently "after Katrina." Hurricane Katrina has challenged the ability of many to see their life along a continuum (DeVore 2007) and as a result has given rise to residents' frequent referencing of "BK/AK" (as described above) categorization in conversations. Returned residents have also told disaster-related stories about specific sites. As described above with Mount Nebo but also as revealed through the use of names like "St. Walgreens," a name

residents use for a church set up post-Katrina in the building that previously housed the Lower Ninth Ward's pharmacy, and which chose not return in the aftermath of the storm. Referring to a pharmacy, one resident said, "That Walgreens, they should have put that back there and no way in the world it shouldn't be . . . That should have been back right there in the same location, St. Claude and Caffin Avenue . . . That was major."

These narratives of return have focused my attention to the role of temporality within the process of recovery from disaster. On one hand, this recognition came about through residents asking, "When will this end?" in discussing their seemingly endless struggles to return. I heard such stories, perhaps more aptly labeled as sagas, most often by simply conversing with Lower Ninth Ward residents whom I had come to know through repeated interaction in the neighborhood, during community engagements and via interviews conducted with them during each visit. It became customary when our paths crossed to take a seat at their kitchen table or out on the porch, where we would pick up from where we last left off to learn of their most recent experiences in how their life was becoming reestablished amid overwhelming instances of obstruction. Countless rebuilding plans, excessive material costs, contractor fraud, changing regulations, inaccessible permits are just a few of the impediments that residents encountered. On another hand, my consideration of the role of time in recovering from calamity came about from identifying a pattern in residents' attempts to (re)construct various facets of their neighborhood whereby a confluence of obstacles, including limited experience and financial resources, contributed to an ephemeral quality in their ability to return. Given the instability of new and reinstated establishments, including their short-term duration, these findings challenge the assumption that recovery inevitably follows disaster. Alternatively, this insight reveals that

through the emergence of these efforts, significant changes manifest within the lives and livelihoods of residents undertaking these ephemeral post-disaster, place-making projects.

Greater awareness of the role of temporality in the aftermath of disaster broadly contributes to anthropological understanding of how humans creatively adapt to ambiguous circumstances and a radically altered setting. Specifically, this recognition demonstrates the ways in which individuals affected by catastrophe influence cultivation of change in their own lives and livelihoods through their responses in the aftermath. Expanding focus to action taken by survivors in the return to their devastated neighborhood, beyond official or organizational response and involvement in the supposed recovery phase, holds key insights for anthropological research (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999), and fosters deeper knowledge of how people engage with disaster, not just about what disasters do to them (Stein and Frink 2010).

This chapter is an exploration of Lower Ninth Ward residents endeavoring to open post-Katrina community and commercial establishments. “Try and be a lead on it,” the title of this chapter, is a signifier describing the efforts of returned residents who, amidst their own returns and recovery, have simultaneously embarked upon entrepreneurial endeavors by founding initiatives in their neighborhood. Although entrepreneurial ventures tend to be associated with commercial operations, and the label “entrepreneur” insinuates businessperson, given that the work of residents constructing features of the built environment comprise various types of establishments, I employ “entrepreneurialism” to broadly describe practices discussed in this chapter that are quite diverse and not necessarily businesses. From early French origins, *entreprendre* referenced the action of undertaking an enterprise and before coming to imply “go-getter” in the twentieth century, the use of the term “entrepreneur” in the 1800s indicated “a person who undertakes any kind of activity” (Merriam-Webster 2018). More recently, the

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines enterprise as follows: “1. a project or undertaking that is especially difficult complicated or risky; 2. Readiness to engage in daring or difficult action; 3. Systematic purposeful activity” (Merriam-Webster 2018).

These more inclusive definitions inform my use of the term “entrepreneurialism” (and “entrepreneurial”) that I apply to describe some Lower Ninth Ward residents’ post-Katrina endeavors. In this chapter, I argue that while this work constructs essential features of the built environment, these residents’ efforts moreover make places that provide an important array of amenities and services that they offer for their community. This is an important point to emphasize since this kind of work (and giving to their own community), as undertaken by residents, significantly differs from charitable handouts, which often form relationships of dependency rather than autonomy. Relatedly, Erica Bornstein has made this point in her humanitarianism research asserting that, “[g]iving challenges people to think relationally about their place in the work” and is an activity that produces meaning for people (2012, 179). In the main vignette that follows, I document post-disaster entrepreneurial efforts initiated and enacted by Lower Ninth Ward residents that while primarily involving working with the local populace and have impacted those living outside of their neighborhood as well. Consequently, residents’ entrepreneurial efforts engage reclamation of previous social support systems while creating new ones. Additionally, their work disrupts the inert recovery process, and in doing so transforms aspects of the social organization of their community. It is also imperative to draw attention to these efforts, considering that so much of the Hurricane Katrina literature is focused on the humanitarianism efforts of volunteers and nonprofit organizations.

Appreciating that place-making and “people making” is not given as a natural fact, but rather an active process to be explained (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), included in what follows are



lengthy excerpts from an interview with one resident revealing her particular effort to establish a community health care center in the neighborhood after returning from her Hurricane Katrina displacement. The emergence and disappearance of this space evidences a great deal of adversity, however, choosing to limit the narrative to discussion of the difficulties she faced would prove neglectful of her accomplishments and the transformation that has also transpired through her meaningful labor. This chapter also highlights fragments of other residents' actions to (re)open facilities and (re)offer services as a means of demonstrating important, albeit ephemeral, endeavors implemented by residents which have a tendency to be omitted in media, neglected in disaster recovery plans, and overshadowed by other prominent themes that dominate the anthropology of disaster research (A. T. Jackson 2011). Before delving into portions of Ms. Craft-Kearney's interview, the backstory of perceptions and memories of the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood through the voices of several community residents is presented. Tending to such reflections enables deeper appreciation for the story Ms. Craft-Kearney tells as well as for the next section that briefly explores the contours of previous sense of place research.

### *Perceptions of Place (Lower Ninth Ward)*

As the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina making landfall on the gulf coast states approached, National Public Radio aired a segment about the status of recovery. "Now, much of New Orleans is back—more than half of the city's neighborhoods have recovered some 90 percent of their pre-storm population. That's not the case for the Lower Ninth" (Allen 2015). Residents' testimonies that describe this neighborhood customarily underscore a chaotic and troubling concoction of "stressors" relevant for understanding the slow to non-existent pace of recovery pointed out by journalists temporarily on the scene. The following is a difficult shortlist

to feature in a news story, let alone a dissertation: excessive bureaucratic procedures, debated property values, questionable damage assessments, limited insurance disbursements, predatory contractors and fraud, substandard construction, defective and overpriced building materials, fluctuating elevation regulations, mismanagement of rebuilding assistance programs, militarization of police, inaccessible permits, contentious zoning, dramatically increased property taxes and doubling of water and sewage bills without infrastructure improvements, and massive public health concerns from unsafe demolition and debris removal to feelings of betrayal due to abandonment and malicious incompetence leading to lack of trust with governing agencies, companies, and non-governmental organizations. Nonetheless, stagnation results from these impediments to recovery as discussed from the perspective of a Lower Nine resident:

*I still feel like we look like Katrina down here . . . I mean it's too much of a reminder of Katrina when you walk outside and you look around. You can't get over it... How can you? How can you when you look around? You're looking at Katrina. It's like a ghost town in a sense*

A year later, she shared:

*I don't see kids walking up the street like they normally do before Katrina . . . and I don't see grocery stores or I don't see corner store. I don't even see my neighbors, they vanish. And what else? Nothing more than stray dogs . . . I don't see a community around me. I only see like some blight, Make It Right homes around me, maybe like four homes around me. That's it. I just see 8 years ago . . . I guess, reality has set in and I feel like somebody been in shock and you came out of shock and I'm lost and there is just nothing here, nothing around me, I mean, I weigh it out every year. They are going up on property taxes and the energy and the water—and I am paying for raggedy streets, water leaks, and no lighting system, no library. Everything on your tax bill, not even a police substation down here. They don't even have that, so I mean—what am I paying all these taxes, for what? Why am I paying high insurance and no fire station? Why am I doing all this here? What am I doing here? There is nothing here. I thought within my head, in about five or six years, I would see more than I see now, but it is eight years and I am seeing nothing. Nothing is moving, nothing is happening. All I ever see is ground breaking, we do ground breaking for everything, that is all we ever do. The last time they said they was going to do groundbreaking for the senior citizen center, I said, “we did that.” How many times we gonna do groundbreaking? So, I went to a meeting and I said, “you know what, mind if I*

*say something?" They say yes. I said, "Don't tell me nothing about no groundbreaking. I am sick of groundbreaking. I can take a shovel and groundbreak my yard you know; I want to see some buildings, some pilings." It's nothing here for me.*

These excerpts convey severe disappointment with the absence of a returned community and familiar spaces. To gain some insight into the depths of this frustration since I did not know the Lower Ninth Ward before the storm, I asked residents about their memories of what kinds of establishments this neighborhood used to have. I also inquired as to where things were previously located using a blank neighborhood map to record replies. A compilation of their responses is displayed on the map, "Everything I Need Is In the Lower Ninth Ward" (Figure 34). The title refers to a resident's quote about the area's rich abundance of offerings pre-Katrina. It is a powerful sentiment in that the phrase strongly contrasts with other commentary I heard when doing fieldwork, expressed exclusively by outsiders of this neighborhood that "nothing was here in this area before the storm, except crime and poverty."

# “Everything I Need Is In The Lower Nine”

## Collective Memoryscape



Figure 34- Map of residents remembered pre-Katrina neighborhood offerings

Some residents initially hesitated with this request informing me of its difficulty through statements like, “You see pre-Katrina, we had little grocery stores—so many you could shake a stick at.” Other residents seemed to find the invitation a bit cathartic given their smiles and contented demeanor when recalling the many different options of groceries and services available to them *and* in close proximity. It seemed that when Lower Ninth Ward residents shared these memories, they delighted in the fact that they did not have to leave their community for much of anything, and this contributed to a real sense of pride with the convenience and self-reliance of the neighborhood.

When naming sites on the map, residents’ stories would often accompany these memories. For instance, when one long-time resident, mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, talked about where he collected firewood as a boy, he further elaborated on that point by then discussing his mother’s cooking which led to him speaking about her packing his school lunches, and then the walk he took to get to his grade school, which was now “MLK”. Two added examples further illustrate this pattern:

*Now, Mr. Howard’s (barbershop), he was only Black-owned business on St. Claude Avenue.*

*You go on Jordon Avenue and Dourgenois. And there was a guy named Mr. Preston and you go there and get the best bbq you ever want to eat back in them days. When they made you a fish sandwich, it was a fresh fish sandwich. He had a big ole boat—he used to catch his own fish. When he come back and you order a fish sandwich, he take a fish, clean it, split it, fry it—put it on one slice of bread. Put a glob of potato salad on top of that. Man, we had good eating in them days*

Regarding the first quote above about Mr. Howard’s barbershop, the comment highlights two particularly important points. One pertains to the empowerment of the enterprise being Black-owned. Second, its location on St. Claude is likely pointed out because this particular street, as mentioned above, marks a boundary of the Holy Cross section of the neighborhood, and has been

identified by some Lower Nine residents as a border impressed upon their memory from growing up in this community. It was a boundary not to be crossed unless you were white. Additional memories of residents elicited other stories that speak to racial dynamics as in the following passages about voting and a local grocery store.

*See I remember the days when we didn't have [but] one place to vote down here and that was well, Urquhart and St. Maurice. There was grocery store there, there was a white guy owned the store and he had a garage in the back and that is where the voting machines used to be. You had to go there to vote. You had to go stand in a line and it looked like 90 blocks long but you only had one voting place at that time.*

*The thing about our voting power now is that—we got a lot of youngsters that don't realize how hard it took to get us to vote. They don't appreciate the value of it. Because they didn't have to fight for it and the thing about it is—while it is I was a senior at Dillard with a white professor named Dr. Fury who taught us civics class. And Dr. Fury would get up on the board and demonstrate all of the procedures that they used to register you to vote. So we was already trained what we was supposed to be able to do. And the process was—well, you go down there and fill out the papers at one time and they would ask your interpretation of the constitution or they would ask you, today is like the eighteenth of 2014, they would ask you how old you were that particular day so I would have to take 4 - 17-36 and subtract it to get up there. I'm x number of years old with so many months and so many days. A range of test affiliated with the process . . . Yes, you didn't just go and sign up. Now a days you could be walking down the street and someone could be walking with a clip board and ask you are you registered to vote and most of the time I lie and say no I am not. And then I tell them that I can't read and all kinds of crazy stuff but now you registered automatically. They fill out a piece of paper. I imagine they require an ID but you don't have to go down and take no test like you used to have to do.*

At other times, residents connected memories with more recent happenings as illustrated in the next interview excerpt referencing Whitney's Junk Yard that had been previously located close to the bayou. A discussion about post-Katrina cleanup efforts elicited the following chilling memory.

*I was there when they came and they was taking the trash out and people that were back there at that time said that there was a lady and some children and they got to the bodies—two kids wrapped in the death prayer. Had to take two body bags and put them in. And then they came back the next day and there's*

*another body right there in the same area. You see, right after the storm, they didn't have no cadaver dogs. And right there on Tennessee and Claiborne they came in with a big ole crane and they was pulling up all that trash and put it in that truck and haul it away. That is why when they talk about getting all of the names of people that died back there—I don't think that they are ever going to get that. They will never know how many bodies they throwed away. That is the way it was being done back in the day.*

In another instance concerning a Head Start daycare, located close to the center of the neighborhood before the storm, one resident talked about its post-Katrina future in the neighborhood as compared to elsewhere in the city:

*They are making it difficult for putting things up. They are making it difficult to put up anything. Let me tell you something. They get mad when I tell them about being the stepchildren, north of Claiborne Street, and they know how I feel about that. Everything is going on, on the south side . . . My contention is—you build a Head Start program everywhere, but in the Lower Ninth Ward . . . You go on Lafitte Avenue and Galvez Street—there is a piece of a project, that is a Head Start facility, they don't have a sign outside, but I know it is a Head Start, like I said because of the meetings. That is uptown. They got a beautiful one out there they built one in the east. Off the lakefront and they built them all over the river, but we ain't got one downtown. They was supposed to try to build one and they know how I felt about the south side of Claiborne Street and they said "Could they build it on the Edison property? Would that be alright with you?" and I said yeah—where the school was, but we had—if you remember, we had the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Council. We had one on Lizardi Street and North Roman Street pre-Katrina—it's a building—sits on the corner. There was a Head Start there pre-Katrina.*

The “Everything I Need is in the Lower Nine” map highlights important insights about the neighborhood, revealed by engaging with and then representing graphically the collective memoryscape of residents. First, spatially identifying locations mentioned in this compilation of recollections reveals an abundance of resources offered throughout the Lower Ninth Ward before the storm. This is particularly important because residents’ memories preserve knowledge of the neighborhood establishments, predominantly Black-owned enterprises that provided their community a range of offerings and services, and I could not locate any such information elsewhere using local channels, such as the business records in city hall. Another important point

is the number of establishments named after individuals. Ms. Edna Mae, Willie Hughes, Johnson, Blair, Guy, and Lilian. They are just a few examples of businesses that employed first or full names in designating their establishments and in doing so imparted dignity for not only the business owner, but also a sense of community in which residents knew each other and knew who operated the establishments they frequented. Personalizing institutions with local place-names is an empowering practice that embodies ownership and confers feelings of familiarity and closeness. It also demonstrates diversity in the roles and professions of African Americans, which simultaneously contests negative tropes and homogenous notions associated with Black individuals perpetuated in so much of American culture. This practice of naming places after known individuals also points to a previous discussion of place-name importance—the naming of public schools after admirable members of the African-American community.

### *Sensing Place*

Anthropology and human geography scholarship attest to sense of place being a crucial dimension for humans in their self-identification and collective identities (Tuan 1977, Low and Altman 1992, Hayden 1995, Feld and Basso 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Sen and Silverman 2014). Sense of place is a concept that acknowledges depth and complexity in the ways that people construct meaningful relationships with their surroundings (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003). These insights hold special importance within a context of disaster since impacts from such phenomenon threaten qualities contributing to this relationship (Brown and Perkins 1992, Fullilove 2005). Post-Katrina New Orleans is no exception, and sense of place in the aftermath of the storm has been a common research theme for scholars (Falk, Hunt and Hunt 2006, Morgan, Morgan and Barrett 2006, Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009). Their work builds upon



previous literature examining the restoration of this bond post-disaster, and highlights that residents are typically disinterested in waiting for elaborate rebuilding plans. Given that affected residents often have a memory in mind of the areas they inhabited prior to its devastation, studies have found that they have a preference to begin reconstruction as soon as possible and in ways that are in keeping with their memory of the place (Selkregg, Crittenden and Williams 1970, Haas, Kates and Bowden 1977, Oliver-Smith and Goldman 1988).

Despite these lessons learned about residents' post-disaster preferences, officials proposed five major city plans for New Orleans post-Katrina. These designs and the subsequent deliberations about them led to an extended period of inaction between the disaster event itself and the time when recovery efforts could begin. FEMA, teams of architects, local notables commissioned by city staff, and outside experts primarily developed these rebuilding plans ranging in scale from neighborhood-level to larger "recovery district" areas (Figure 35). The following passage describes what they are and the rationale for their use in the recovery process:

The Recovery Plan for the City of New Orleans was instituted by the City Council in response to specific needs in the 49 flooded neighborhoods Post-Katrina. These neighborhoods were organized into the 13 Planning Districts as identified by the City Planning Commission of the City of New Orleans. Overarching Goals and Objectives were established by the City Council: "Work with neighborhoods to assist them in developing revitalization plans that are thoughtful, can be implemented, and formed into a citywide recovery and improvement plan for submission to the State of Louisiana and the federal government." Planning District 8... includes 2 geographically specific neighborhoods: Lower Ninth and Holy Cross (Skull & Lee, Inc. 2006, 3).



Figure 35- One of the City of New Orleans rebuilding districts  
Map Credit: City of New Orleans

Although early drafts were of a top-down nature, citizen-based input and participation influenced later versions. This is likely due in part to the officially suggested changes within each plan stirring up controversies that residents questioned, including the shrinking of the city's urban footprint. Such decisions lent to inequitable concentrations of redevelopment, and infrastructure spending based on misinformation about post-storm population density (Ikeda and Gordon 2007, M. Davis 2007).

Another critique, specifically of residents in the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East (both of which are located within the Ninth Ward jurisdiction) concerned the plotting of

green dots on a map in one of the earlier city recovery plans. The green dots infamously represented areas of the city proposed to be green space. Despite that fact that the greening of spaces is said to support the healing of communities from crisis (Tidball, et al. 2010) many residents of these areas were perplexed, if not outright offended by the recommendation to develop parks or wetlands in regions of their neighborhoods where homes previously existed before being destroyed by floodwaters (Weil 2011). In discussing the recommended green dots in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood, one resident said, “The really didn’t want us back. North of Claiborne Street. That was supposed to be a green space.” Another resident linked this recommendation with the inability to return and it generated a strong reaction from her because, in part, she still owned the property and remnants of her house. She expressed her thoughts as follows: “And they want this land for green space. You couldn’t come back. You couldn’t rebuild. So, this gave me that drive. I had two steps left.” Other Lower Ninth Ward residents would also come to appropriate this phrase in describing the neighborhood as the following quote of another resident illustrates, “People see it as open space, as green space, ‘cause that’s what it look like. It’s missing homes, people that lived down there, churches—it is just not the same.” Green dot recommendations on maps symbolized space “outside the New Orleans worth saving” (Truitt 2012, 324) and exasperated residents as evidenced by the following passage:

*When you look at why people are sicker, why people are mentally, they are maybe less stable than what they were pre-Katrina, all of these things play on them – and then you know you have the climate—and it is still to me, somewhat prevalent, because I don’t know if you are aware that we had to fight to come back. We had certain commissions, I can’t remember all of the them . . . Bring New Orleans Back and this one and that one came up. And it was like how do we rebuild after this tragedy and these folks were telling us that we had to prove we could be sustainable to come back to rebuild our homes? Now, I had never heard of that. Now, there are mudslides in California, tornadoes in the Midwest—and they have ice storms, blizzards that destroy people’s properties and people’s homes. I have never heard them say if you rebuild we want to make sure that you are sustainable. What does that come from This was the committee—the Bring New*

*Orleans Back because they wanted to do green space certain areas—New Orleans east, Lower Ninth Ward, Gentilly—predominantly African-American areas—okay.*

To date, many residents of the Lower Ninth Ward are still waiting to experience recovery and few have been able to muster up the substantial resources necessary to reestablish the community and business establishments, as referenced in the map, previously available to them.

The subsequent sections of this chapter present notable exceptions through illustration of some residents' efforts to (re)build. Their efforts to remake place are acutely opportune for the return of these resources—especially those of an essentially cultural nature and aid in the reconstitution of community, in addition to helping individuals heal (Oliver-Smith 1992). Consequently, plans to rebuild the physical infrastructure would be incomplete without a commitment to rehabilitate the social fabric and communal networks (Oliver-Smith 2005, Campanella 2006). Residents of the Lower Nine are keenly aware of this and have been working toward it for some time.

*“Try and be a lead on it”*

The efforts of Lower Ninth Ward resident Ms. Craft-Kearny to open a healthcare clinic in the neighborhood nicely illustrates both the obstacles residents face when they take on such projects as well as their determination to see that such projects come to fruition (Figure 36). Her pride in place and determination to improve access to healthcare services post-Katrina are highlighted in the following lengthy passage.

*Oh, it was a cheerful a very open place. When you walk in on the outside, we had a ramp that made it wheelchair accessible. Then you came on to a porch, then you walked into a waiting room and in the waiting room, we had large windows We didn't want curtains there. We just wanted the light to flood in. We had some beautiful glass artwork that some volunteers had made and it was in there and everyone would remark about it and it was really pretty and, of course, we had the*

*little area where the receptionist would greet you. Then you walked in and we had a total of five treatment rooms.*



Figure 36- The Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic

Ms. Craft-Kearney shares clinic background and services with visitors.

*We had a whole new group of people that were uninsured because they had lost their jobs . . . People [came] from all over actually. When people found out that it was free, they came from all over. So, we had people not only from New Orleans, we had people from St. Bernard . . . We helped volunteers and we had a lot of those folks coming in from out-of-town working come see us as well . . . We have had people that came in that have told us that we saved their life.*

*I had worked at Charity Hospital for 19.5 years and I worked in an area called—it was a surgical area, trauma surgery were patients were brought. As a supervisor I had to cover more than one area . . . After the storm, I lost my job. It was very heartbreaking thing that happened when, you know, that you've put in 19.5 years at an institution. You came in on good days, bad days, hurricanes, whatever and then and I'm thinking well I know I have all these years of service. I've always had excellent evaluations. I would be able to come back and get my job, right? But no. That was not the case, and, you know, what happened is when we were gone—our state legislators just kicked us in the butts . . . That was painful, but you move on.*

*I was in the Lower Ninth Ward during Katrina . . . once we left the Lower Ninth Ward we were taken by helicopter to the airport. From the airport, we were told by the National Guard we could not go and meet our family members who were waiting. I had family members that were really just waiting on the fringes of the city to receive us, but we could not go because they would not allow us to go to them. So what they did was they flew us to Albuquerque, New Mexico . . . Thank god, it was a warm reception, much better than the folks were in Houston. We were very well taken care of while we were there. The people asked us if we wanted to stay. Now part of my family decided to stay—I didn't—I did not stay.*

*I had to come back . . . I needed to get back. I needed to see first of all if I had a job. You know, that kind of thing . . . I was back and forth to New Orleans to see what was going on. I would come to these meeting that they would have about what's going to happen to New Orleans, okay. I was also attending meetings with Common Ground Relief and that's where I meet with . . . Michelle Lin, she was one of his coordinators and organizers. Michelle took over and we were planning and they would talk and we would talk to the residents and we would say what we need. So, what we basically came up with a plan where we said we needed certain things in the community for it to come back. We needed schools, we needed our health care back, we needed churches, you know, we needed grocery stores so everything. We needed different things, we needed small businesses to come back. So, what we decided to do was everybody try take a little piece and try and be a lead on it. So, I was not actually trying to lead the piece on health care because, you know, as I had said, I was trying to get my job back, but Michelle said, "Well, Alice why don't you help us with the healthcare piece and I said, "you know what Michelle, I have never worked in outpatient as a clinic." I said, "I have always worked inpatient" and so I said, "I wouldn't know even where to start . . ." "Oh, we'll help you. Blah, blah, blah, blah." I said, "Well, okay, Michelle."*

As described in this opening interview excerpt with Ms. Craft-Kearny, residents' responses to post-disaster conditions have often arisen out of self-organized efforts in which they produce their own plans for their own projects. A prominent site for nurturing their post-Katrina projects has been community meetings, and attendance at these "meetings on top of meetings" has

become a routine practice for many Lower Ninth Ward residents (Figure 37). The passage above also demonstrates how Ms. Craft-Kearny employed her professional background in yet-to-be-realized recovery efforts. Later, I would come to realize that other residents similarly employed their academic training and specialized skills in their place-making post-Katrina. One resident I interviewed shared the following story:

*If there is an environmental problem, I step in because I am Louisiana Licensed Hazmat. I have all my licenses right now: hazmat, asbestos, lead, and with the clean up after Katrina I was really disturbed because they was abating some of these houses, full of asbestos. It was going into the air, killing people—the lead and asbestos because you really supposed to take and cover that, when you're abating buildings like that and I do know the correct way of doing it. My husband calls me too environmental, too overprotective with health and all. But maybe I am, but my concern is health, and its people's lives, including my own.*

Alongside residents' backgrounds innovatively influencing the activity in their neighborhood, these efforts contribute to a “mutually supportive processes in which the survival of community restores meaning to individual lives battered by circumstance” (Oliver-Smith 2005, 56). In other words, the work of residents to provide community and commercial establishments not only services the neighborhood with needed offerings, but also provides residents with a sense of purpose, which can be particularly beneficial when experiencing hardships in the wake of extremely extensive devastation.



Figure 37- Community meetings held in the Ninth Ward

### *Disaster Capitalism & Double Disasters*

As she described in the passage above, Ms. Craft-Kearny became one of approximately 100,000 individuals who lost their jobs in the aftermath of the storm (Kromm and Sturgis 2007).

Although employment in New Orleans had been sluggish for approximately twenty years before Hurricane Katrina (Whelan 2006), with the closure of Charity, the second-oldest, continuously operated public hospital in the United States and flagship of public health in Louisiana, thousands of unionized positions were unexpectedly terminated (M. Davis 2007), and replacement healthcare institutions became for-profit operations. A prolonged condition of



shock, as exemplified by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, produces an ideal setting for restructuring that in other times would likely be resisted (Klein 2007, Adams, Van Hattum and English 2009, Leonardo 2010, Owen 2011).

A tenuous set of circumstances that are exploited and enable sweeping change embedded with, most often unfavorable, neoliberal free-market policies are described as “disaster capitalism” by Naomi Klein. Klein straightforwardly outlines how this concept is at play in post-Katrina New Orleans in the following passage:

Well I just got back from New Orleans and I was so struck to see these huge housing developments, it's just so clear that this thing that's being called reconstruction is nothing of the sort. The tragedy, in part, was created by 25 years of neglect of the public sphere, by the culture of neglect, that allowed the levees to crumble, that allowed the transportation system to erode to the point where it couldn't handle an evacuation, that allowed FEMA to be this hollow shell run by contractors, who couldn't seem to find the Superdome for days. So here you have a disaster that was in part a disaster created by this very ideology. And then you have billions of dollars liberated in the name of the victims of this tragedy and suddenly there's a possibility for parents and teachers—for some of the poorest people in America who had been so betrayed by their government—to build the system they've always wanted, to build the housing projects that they've always wanted, and to heal from this shock by being a participant in the reconstruction. Instead of that, the trauma was actively exploited and the fact that people had been spread all over the country and separated from their families and their roots and their communities was taken advantage of, in order to turn New Orleans into this petri dish for ideas that live in think tanks (Rooney 2007).

Here Klein addresses reconstruction as coded language for sweeping changes that will ultimately not benefit the city's marginalized residents, who were previously neglected and exploited and are now struggling to return from evacuation.

Major post-storm modification to New Orleans' healthcare can be characterized as an outcome of disaster capitalism. The same holds true for housing in the city where the local government demolished approximately 5,000 homes when four of its largest public housing communities permanently closed. Despite suffering little flood damage, plans for these

residences included replacement with mixed-income housing, which complicates, if not makes impossible, the ability for low-income residents to return (Breunlin and Regis 2006, Kromm and Sturgis 2007, Finger 2011) (Breunlin and Regis 2006, Kromm and Sturgis 2007, Finger 2011). In spite of far-reaching and adverse alterations that ensue from extensive restructuring, people like Ms. Craft-Kearney, respond directly to these circumstances by building their own institutions. As a result, chronicling such work, endeavors that work both within and against disaster capitalism, merits consideration and inclusion in accounts of post-disaster recovery efforts.

Employing disaster as a means to bring about drastic change involving privatization is perhaps most visible in the post-Katrina dismantling of the Orleans Parish public school system. Within a few months of the storm's landfall, public schools were virtually erased from the educational landscape. In the higher education sector, this entailed the largest single termination in the history of the United States (Owen 2011). Relatedly, approximately 4,000 school employees were laid off and many of them were public school teachers, who just happened to be members of the biggest union in Louisiana (Quigley 2007). Teachers were the largest group of Black, college-educated, middle-class homeowners in the city, and they not only lost their professional employment, but also their pension and healthcare benefits (Buras 2010). Converting public schools into new charter schools, a venture supported to the tune of \$20.9 million by the U.S. Department of Education, took away community control and ownership of education (Ehrenfeucht and Nelson 2011). It also ignored the knowledge and experience of New Orleans veteran teachers who, in addition to fighting for school improvement, have a long history of fighting for voting rights and equal pay (Buras 2010).

Five schools existed in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood prior to Hurricane Katrina. In the wake of this storm, the first to return was an elementary school, the Dr. Martin Luther

King Jr. Charter School of Science and Technology. Delia Wendel chronicles in detail the struggles to reopen the facility (2009). A Lower Nine resident and interviewee summarized the struggles as follows:

*Yes, yes, my grandkids went there and they didn't want to open it up after Katrina. Okay, they didn't even want us in the school to clean it up. Was nothing wrong with the school, the school need to be cleaned up in and, you know, probably gutted out it - the inside or whatever, but the building was new—it was not an old building. Now, they wanted to so we had some muscle of university students down here and we had the National Guard standing in the neutral ground. The National Guard was still patrolling the area and watching everything because a lot of people wasn't back and we just wanted to clean out the school and open the school up. You know, clean out the school and get it open, get all of the trash out of it. So, they told us we couldn't go in there and they wanted to arrest all of us and they said you're going to have to put us all in jail. We wasn't all going to jail, so they broke the gate open—the students and pried open the doors and our community leaders, and yeah, we're going to clean it up and we're going to put all the trash out, you know, and open the school. We fought with them. They really didn't want this Ninth Ward—this Ninth Ward wasn't supposed to be back . . .*

*We wouldn't have gotten this far if it wasn't for them coming down and helping out, it is like MLK school. It wouldn't be open if it wasn't for the students from Harvard and Howard and another university even though they wanted to put us in jail.*

Alfred Lawless was the only public high school in the neighborhood at the time of the hurricane and in its aftermath twenty of its faculty and staff members were among the approximately 2,000 public school employees forced to retire (Buras 2010). Although the city's master plan included the rebuilding of this school, the timeline for its construction was pushed back to “phase two” and with only one of the six phases entirely funded, residents were uncertain of its future (Figure 38) (Ehrenfeucht and Nelson 2011). One resident showed me a list of the names of schools in the parish, to be built new or renovated, and the cost for this work that was included in a master plan for rebuilding New Orleans' Schools. He had cut this listing out of a newspaper to save so he could remember the estimated figure of \$35,582,027 presumably allocated to construct the

Lower Ninth Ward High School. As mentioned above, because initially publicized budgets often did not tend to match subsequent expenditures, he, like other residents, saved such newspaper clippings and used the information to hold politicians accountable when they visited the neighborhood during community meetings. The following quote from an interview addresses these issues in addition to explaining how a long-drawn-out schedule inhibits residents' ability to return.

*Lawless High School, the money is, I mean, its shrinking. The school should have been built—they did the ground breaking a long time ago. Mayor Landrieu and our state senator—he was back there with the groundbreaking and she promised us that Lawless School would be up and running, you know, and Lawless School was supposed to be completed, at first, up and running in 2014. Well, now it is pushed back to 2016 and the farther it, pushing it back—the more the money is going, slated to go someplace else, it's being allocated somewhere else. And it is supposed to be a state of the art school, but it don't matter, put up a school for the kids. If people coming back, you know, and want to come back, that have children can't because there is no school and the kids here are bussed everywhere else, to other schools—there is only one school in the area.*

The only other high school in the Lower Ninth Ward before the storm was Holy Cross, a private catholic school that chose to relocate outside of the neighborhood post-Katrina. In the wake of this decision, a fervent controversy emerged amongst neighbors over a subsequent proposal for the construction of mixed-use condominiums where the catholic campus was previously located. Despite these sweeping school-related changes, one resident called for even greater modification:

*New Orleans has to build an educational system. And that may take a generation or two. But if New Orleans has to move and become a viable city and society, it's got to improve that. They've got to have a revolution within the education system. Without which we're going to stay like this.*

While not all residents of the Lower Ninth Ward hold the views expressed above about rebuilding the educational system of New Orleans, there has been a widespread involvement from a wide variety of groups and organizations in this issue.



Figure 38- Sign posting about school rebuilding information

A Lower Ninth Ward resident tried calling to inquire about rebuilding Lawless High School where this sign was posted, but the phone number was out of service.

In fact, residents working in collaboration with outsiders to clean up and reopen the MLK school represents another aspect of disaster research that is relevant to the issue of humanitarianism and the role of humanitarian groups and organizations in post-disaster recovery efforts. The aftermath of Katrina is particularly illustrative of this in the overwhelming numbers of volunteers, nonprofit groups, and nongovernmental organizations that have come to assist with a vast array of revitalization efforts. In the Lower Ninth Ward's post-storm landscape, almost thirty nonprofit/NGO organizations have sprung up. Commentary from residents about this phenomenon in the neighborhood includes attitudes such as, "That's unbelievable, outrageous, okay . . . You know why I'm not joining with these folks—there's a lot of exploitation. Lots and lots of exploitation." Another resident expressed similar sentiments, "Nonprofits are profiteers—they are all thieves," and one more neighborhood inhabitant said, "I don't know the need for 27 nonprofits in this place . . . only a few organizations here that you can actually trust to work to help you. Where is the money? What are they doing to help the

people?” In spite of their work, or perhaps due in part to their involvement, in her most recent publication, Vincanne Adams problematizes the notion of recovery by arguing, as residents have articulated, that Hurricane Katrina is far from “over” (2013).

In this compelling research documenting “Americans who have managed to survive a second-order disaster” (Ibid), Adams illustrates how particular processes and priorities post-Katrina have generated conditions far worse than the storm itself, she calls this pattern “double disaster.” The residents of the Lower Ninth Ward are also survivors of the second disaster that is the recovery effort.

### *People's Place-making*

Disaster capitalism and double disaster are critical concepts challenging the characterization that disastrous events are singular catastrophes. They also challenge how we understand that recovery is experienced as a sentiment in the lives and minds of survivors. These considerations, along with concern for the everyday, systematic underdevelopment of Black people (Marable 1950), inform an important critique of American culture and the roles it plays in sustaining inequality and injustice, which George Lipsitz addresses in his writing about divestments in New Orleans infrastructure pre- and post-Katrina (2006). He advocates for us to “identify this cultural system, to name it, trace its origins and evolution, assess, evaluate, and explain the work it does, and to identify the already existing alternative cultural forms that might lead our society in another direction” (Ibid, 454). Lower Ninth Ward residents have engaged in this contemplative work and in their consideration of it, have cultivated action of their own to make changes post-Katrina. This work in which survivors produce and participate in their own projects to bring about transformation that they deem necessary and appropriate following calamity is a realm of

disaster-related research that I return to throughout this dissertation. By drawing attention to the post-disaster place-making of ordinary people, the aforementioned research and concepts (as well as consideration of how the reinvention of community is distinctly linked to the reinvention of self) bring to the foreground how place-making and self-making are part and parcel of the same project (Oliver-Smith 2005).

Returning to the interview with Ms. Craft-Kearney, the next steps taken by her to transition the idea of a health clinic into an actual facility were focused on activating what Bourdieu would call her “social capital.” Social networking and collaboration would prove essential to getting her project up and running:

*So anyway, low and behold she said we need a house for to put the clinic. So, I'm like yeah okay Michelle. So for whatever reason, I had talked to my friend Patricia and asked her if she—she had just retired so she was okay because she was able to retire out of the system and she had a home on one of the main thoroughfares which is St. Claude Avenue. So, I said, “Pat, I know you have bought a new home in another area, in a suburb of New Orleans called Marrero.” I said, “So what are you going to do with your house?” She said, “Oh well I don't know—I have to talk to my children, but I am not going to live in it because you know my husband” she had just gotten remarried “and we are going to live in this other area.” So I said, “Oh, okay” and I approached her and asked her if she would be interested in us renovating the house and use it as a clinic. You know sort of as like a paying it forward kind of thing and she talked to her children and she agreed and that's how the Lower Ninth Ward Clinic—the concept of it was born. And so we started working to rebuild the clinic and volunteers came from all over, as well as local volunteers helped us and, you know, people were just so generous. I mean, it was just so phenomenal that we were able to get that clinic up.*

As described above in relation to a resident's home transitioning into a clinic, and the earlier mention of St. Walgreens, the reconfiguration and reuse of space for different purposes emerges frequently in the accounts of Lower Ninth Ward post-Katrina residents. Another case in point concerns a garage storage facility that longtime resident Mr. Mack McClendon renovated into

what would become a well-known community center called the Lower Ninth Ward Village (Figure 39).



Figure 39- Lower Ninth Ward Village

The executive director, Mr. Mack, a stout and charismatic middle-aged African American greets everyone who visits the “the Village” with a hopeful smile and infectious spirit. The site located on Charbonnet Street is an arched building that stands prominently within the residential area on a road just barely wide enough for two-way traffic. Colorfully decorated with murals, the structure has accommodated large numbers of residents for neighborhood meetings, and housed countless visitors volunteering in the area. When not accommodating the installation of a cultural art installation (the pan-city “Prospect. 1 New Orleans” international exhibition), back in in 2008 to raise awareness about lack of post-Katrina recovery, the inside tended to be filled with piles of



construction material and scattered items from the latest event or project, providing hints as to the Village's most recent stage of development. Mr. Mack had many hopes for this space and years into the aftermath of the storm he worked tirelessly to set up within it an office, lending library, internet café, community kitchen, and art and recording studios.

At some point during the Village's evolution, a few blocks away Ms. Craft-Kearny was able to get the health clinic up and running. However, as she described, she ran into difficulties:

*And the thing about it was we were able to within a year, get the building together, and on the day of . . . Here go another painful experience, where the city building inspector came and closed us down on our grand opening day because they said we didn't have the appropriate permits. The issue was not about zoning because it was in a commercial corridor, but it was because, in our haste to try and get the building up and running, we got a permit for residential when it should have been for commercial, okay. So, they closed us down. Now people dying in the streets. They came on the day of (the opening). That is what I am talking about when with these oppositional forces, okay. You have people literally dying on the streets because they could not find health care services, but yet you gonna close the clinic. Now, I could have seen them saying now I want you to get x, y, and z permit completed. In days? Yes, exactly . . . This is the chilling part. This was our city government doing this. By the time we did all of these things and had gotten it together—it was maybe like February of the following year. I was just like heartbreaking because it was ready to open in August . . .*

Discussions of disappointment, as was the case detailed in the interview excerpt above, have been extremely prevalent with residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. Listening to and documenting their experiences of aggravation and weariness post-Katrina have been particularly difficult to hear. My field notes include one resident's story shared at a community meeting about being at another assembly where the efforts of "Mitch," referring to the mayor, were being described as "helping out the community." At some point during that gathering, this particular resident recalled standing up and saying to the audience, "I have a barber shop with three employees" to which everyone in attendance clapped before continuing. "And I was slapped with a \$17,000 fine. We closed the deal on November 1 and then I received a letter about the building code

violations.” He stated that the demand for payment came in the mail only a few days after closing despite his hard work to confirm that the property was cleared of such charges and outstanding liens. This testimony of this Lower Nine resident and that of others demonstrate a contentious issue that residents and business owners have contended with when attempting to redevelop their neighborhood. As explained by another neighborhood inhabitant, “[r]equests for residential areas to be zoned rather as commercial to encourage development were made by residents at various community meetings. They (city representatives) said, ‘Yeah, okay. We do that.’ And it never came out that way.” The following interview passage illustrates one more example of another frequent issue that Lower Ninth Ward residents attempted to tackle together, but to no avail.

*Honey, we had a concert. We had Irma Thomas. We gave a concert and raised thirty thousand dollars to buy a couple of bush hogs to keep the city from land grabbing on us. Because if you didn't keep your lot cut or your grass cut, they charge you a hundred dollars a day fine. So to keep that, well, we gave a concert. We bought a bush hog. They must have cut grass for about two months. After that, the bush hogs are sitting over there now. Nobody cuts grass. So everybody on their own. And the people used to drive the bush hogs say, “Well, there ain't nobody paying us to do this.” They ran out of funds. Every organization down here say they ain't got no funds . . . So, now that was a waste of money. Bush hogs. It's just sitting there, you know.*

Grass cutting became a booming business in New Orleans post-Katrina as fines were levied on those who had grass that had grown too high even though the owners, like many residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, were still struggling to return home.

It was also common to hear similar stories about excessively high water bills (as much as \$1,200) due to leaking street mains, being sent to owners of vacant lots (Van Oudenallen 2011). One resident attributed a compilation of these “double disaster” issues to the prevalence of diseases such as cancer. She said:

*There is more people with cancer here in New Orleans than anywhere now. Because the stress from Katrina made the cancer cells in your body grow, progress more. So, we have a lot of sick people here, mentally and physically. We know we've all got problems because of the devastation that we've been through.*

This, in turn, is one of the reasons why residents' highlight funeral businesses as another burgeoning industry post-Katrina. "You open the paper every day. I mean, it's just full".

Returning again to Ms. Craft-Kearney's narrative about her clinic, she next described what the clinic meant to her and those affiliated with it. She highlighted some of its unique characteristics as follows:

*The clinic was for us a way to try some new and innovative things that we had not seen in the past because we knew that many of our people in the community were being seen very late in the disease process. We were very proud of the work that we did because we dealt with the people not just on a physical level, but on a behavioral health level and spiritually also because some of the people were in just such a distress. The clinic served its purpose. And we were able to affect many people's lives and I think the most profound thing was that we were able to take care of those breadwinners so that those breadwinners could be healthy and so that they could take care of their family. So, it was a true trickle down effect.*

For several years, when I would visit the Lower Ninth Ward, I included a stop at the clinic, sometimes with university students fulfilling their service learning there. The Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic staff was limited, and it was thus convenient for them work with student nurses as well as a variety of volunteers. Yet being from the community themselves, the staff was acutely aware of specific needs along with the likely preferences and tendencies of neighborhood residents. Ms. Craft-Kearney described one such instance as follows:

*Then you have the gentleman that was a minister and we had . . . We knew the type of population that we served okay. They were not always the best at coming back for . . . It was hard to get them back sometimes, you know—like look, we need you to come back for this appointment and many of them—their blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol levels were just out of whack. So this one gentleman, his blood pressure, but we had them to sign a paper to say, you know, can we talk to your significant other? Can we leave a message? Can we talk to them? So he said, "You can communicate with my wife." So we called her up and said, "Maam, your husband didn't come for his appointment." She said, "Baby,*

*don't you worry, he is going to be there for that next appointment." So, he did come and we were able to get his blood pressure under control. Now, because he was in his fifties, he had never had a colonoscopy. Our doctor recommended that he get the colonoscopy and he did. He went for it. So, they discovered he had colon cancer, but it was in its very early stages. He was able to have the surgery and now we didn't know any of this—we didn't know it. His wife came back and told us that because he had the colonoscopy, they found the cancer in the early stages, he had the surgery, he did not even need chemo. She said, "you saved my husband's life." So, we, you know, those were just some of the stories.*

This interview passage clearly illustrates how familiarity with the type of patients coming into the clinic was particularly helpful, and also influenced the staff's communication strategies.

This closeness to the population served was not without sensitivity as Ms. Craft-Kearney pointed out next:

*What I did know was that with this clinic that I wanted to make it a place where people would feel comfortable at home, it would be their medical home and so even before that term became popular that is what I was telling people, this is what I want you to feel, I want you to be comfortable—like you coming home and it was unreal that we were able to attract people that we knew because a lot of times people don't want to go to a facility where I know you because you know my business and I know you from the neighborhood and I don't want you to know my business. So, but we adopted this slogan: what goes on in the Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic stays in the Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic. It's not going anywhere and so they trusted us and we were able to take care of them.*

The building design, work style, and quality of care harmoniously created a distinctive establishment for the community. This was also particularly special to the team as Ms. Craft-Kearney relates in reminiscing about the positive outcomes the clinic made in so many lives.

However, as her narrative continues, they also faced many difficulties, some which became too much to bear.

*I had three medical assistants, I had Mrs. Berry Hill was the clinical person that was there—she was clinical director. I was the executive director. So Mrs. Berry Hill basically ran the clinic and I was trying to, you know, make sure everything was right. It was just a lot. However, there was no financial person so I had to take on a lot of that responsibility and so when I tell people and I have been working with some of the academic research people here they want these small nonprofits to work with them, but I tell them I said when you get these big federal*

*grants I said the reporting is so, it is cumbersome. I said, I had help as far as an accountant okay and at one time, I had a consultant, but what I am saying is—the reporting is so rigorous that by the time I would finish the report for them it would be the next month. You know, it was like you just never finish because I was the only one there that was doing it. You know what I saying? Like, I didn't have anybody to delegate it to so I would tell them that is one of the reasons why, you know, the small nonprofits—they just don't have the infrastructure to do the reporting that is required for that federal piece and so I could see why it is just hard to get to the next level because you don't have the infrastructure in place and that is basically what caused us as a clinic not to be successful because we just didn't have the infrastructure in place. To make a long story short—we had many challenges and like I said I just can never just enumerate the number of challenges that you have and the fact that you had so many oppositional forces against us.*

*(Today) the clinic is closed . . . It was a good time. It was a time for me of great growth because I was pushed, kind of catapulted into this, I guess, and at one point, I guess I will tell you guys how it really came into being because it was not me that it came into being—it was truly a divine call that was put onto my life that I had to basically—I didn't have a choice to do it so that is how the clinic really came about.*

Despite the strengths of the workforce, in addition to the effective and inspiring nature of the enterprise, the clinic is no longer in operation. As Ms. Craft-Kearney described, many overwhelming factors were at play and they eventually proved too great to overcome. When listening to her recount the materialization of the clinic, it resembles what scholars outline in their description of the best practices for recovery from disaster: local, affected residents intimately involved in the return of their community, using fostered skill sets while gaining new abilities, on projects they deem imperative and valuable, in partnership with others when considered necessary. Clearly, this project emerged through the ingenuity and perseverance of Ms. Craft-Kearney and her management of it was thoughtful and guided by dignity. She touches on these issues in her comment, “We had become known for the good work that we did.”

Initiatives directed by community outsiders may be acceptable (and more successful), but not exceptional in their support of the Lower Ninth Ward's recovery. Stories like this one of Ms.

Craft-Kearney's failed attempt to create and run a healthcare clinic herself demonstrate that even failed initiatives may be supportive of recovery. She also spoke to that point, which has been a burdensome factor post-Katrina, and emphasized agency, her own as well as the agency of other residents: "You know we have a lot of concerns about our ability to govern ourselves and not to have other people superimpose their will on us and it seems like a lot of things have happened where other peoples will has been superimposed on us." Her assessment is particularly disturbing when one considers that she affirmed that going forward, "I would love to work full time with folks from the Lower Ninth Ward." And had the clinic not closed, she would likely still be doing just that.

### *Temporality & Transformation*

These few post-disaster attempts of Lower Ninth Ward residents to create their own institutions are illustrative of divergent efforts to recover in the aftermath of Katrina. Such practices are rooted in a Lower Ninth Ward attitude or orientation toward recovery (what Bourdieu would call a "habitus" of the residents) that values self-reliance and their resourceful participation—qualities found elsewhere, as I argued above, in the longstanding New Orleans traditions of mutual aid societies, church families, social aid and pleasure clubs, and Mardi Gras Black Indian "gangs." Consequently, there is a cultural logic to and engagement with the Lower Nine residents' social and material rebuilding projects. They embody an orientation or habitus that evidences a particular set of neighborhood values they see as imperative to (re)establish and (re)invest in the spaces they are recreating as home. In this chapter we have seen that the places that residents make for themselves are common conventional establishments, however, the social and cultural spaces that were created inside these institutions are exceptional in that they are

localized forms of standard offerings. For instance, converting a home into neighborhood health clinic produces comfort and familiarity in what could have been a cold and unwelcoming institutional setting. Additionally, because many of the employees inside the building are residents of the Lower Ninth Ward themselves, this adds to the sense of confidence and closeness to the clinic, which is further supported its ability to provide patients sociocultural-competent medical care. Each of these factors influenced the making of a very special place that lamentably no longer exists.

Although not explicitly anticipated, what became particularly apparent through residents' disaster recovery-related efforts, as emphasized in Ms. Craft-Kearney's aforementioned analysis of her toil, are the meaningful transformations in residents' lives and livelihoods through their work on the landscape of recovery. Mr. Mack and his experience with the Village also illustrates this pattern. A few years after the garage was converted post-Katrina, the particularly active community center caught the attention of New Orleans native and rapper Lil' Wayne who, in partnership with Mountain Dew and a New York brand strategy group, invested in a skate park at the Village. Shortly after construction ended for the skate park, the community center faced foreclosure due to a funding shortage created by insurance and code violations, which put the entire operation on hold (Lipinski 2014). Unfortunately, less than a year later, at 61 years of age, Mr. Mack passed away from cancer (Lipinski 2015).

Before passing away, his words echoed those of Ms. Craft-Kearney in that each of them credited others in their reflections upon post-Katrina recovery efforts. Whereas Ms. Craft-Kearney attributed the impetus for her work to spiritual forces, Mr. Mack credited the matriarch of his family as the inspiration for his service to his community.

*My rewards is living my purpose. This is what I was born to do. In no way could I do this at this level if I wasn't born to do it because then if it wasn't my purpose*

*there's no way with all of the things thrown at me I could sustain that and have a positive mind. You don't know when I am doing bad or good because I am the same way all the time. Now how can you do that when you losing your house through no fault of your own . . .*

*You would think the way I would have handled it—I would be done a thousand times - because I am not stressing about it. And it is because and I don't know how your faith is but my mother is a missionary. Now, let me tell you how powerful that was for me—to have a mother that's a missionary and did missionary work all of her life. I didn't even know I was paying attention. She would say "go right" and I would automatically go left if there was something you didn't want me to see. I was a terrible kid. You know. But she loved me in spite of it. The things I do today is what she instilled in me and I wasn't even paying attention. So she done this all her life. I have become my mother and I see the joy that she gotten out of this because she would give you—if you just had enough food to feed one person and it was her food, she would give it to you. I'd seen her do that many times. So I have become my mom and it is a joy seeing what she did and the way she did it. I'd had closure before my mom died, she died about four months ago. Yeah, but I had sixty years with my mom, come on.*

With the Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic no longer in operation and doors to the Village closed, do these efforts matter in the story of post-disaster? If so, what, if anything, does the labors of these two individuals tell us about the aftermath of calamity? Has the stage of recovery advanced by these residents' efforts? Alternatively, should we assess this work as having only made limited contributions to a return that has fallen short if not completely stagnated? Attention to these residents' place-making enterprises attests to an (in)distinguishable process of recovery that has important consequences for residents. Sherry Ortner describes this as:

The importance of subjects (whether individual actors or social entities) lies not so much in who they are and how they are put together as in the projects that they construct and enact for it is the formulation and enactment of those projects that they both become and transform who they are, and that they sustain or transform their social and cultural universe (1995).

When I apply this perspective to the assemblage of residents' individual projects and practices and reframe them as a collective project, a unique form of stewardship becomes more visible, one in which the residents use their experiences and knowledge to not only critique but also to



influence change in less-than-ideal, post-disaster recovery conditions. Whether influenced by family mores, a profession, or passion, the nurturing of a new enterprise amidst one's own personal return from a catastrophe is an incredible feat—especially if one considers that securing one's home for many in the Lower Ninth Ward has been in and of itself large unachievable. The actions of residents also resist the erroneous categorization of individuals affected by disaster to be helpless and destitute victims. The few instances of residents' projects described in this this chapter, however momentary on the landscape, further reveal how responsibility has in part contributed to the convalescence of the inhabitants' physical and sociocultural well-being, and thus such stories are particularly meaningful to acknowledge in the neighborhood's process of recovery.

From the perspective of de Certeau, residents' rebuilding of community and commercial enterprises is tactical, given that their particular use of space so often runs head-long into formal institutional power and official strategies of recovery while also involving the reconstruction of social aspects of the neighborhood in innovative ways. Bourdieu's ideas about cultural and social capital help to tease out the ways residents employ their professional, familial, and community relationships to create plans together and secure facilities. Residents can also be seen to use various facets of their cultural capital, such as schooling and professional expertise, to resource new projects they undertake. This praxis works to not only further their return, but to do so in a way that recreates social structures that would otherwise be missing in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As these practices change the spatial features of the community, they additionally transform the lives and livelihoods of residents engaged in them. Looking at this ethnographic material with an anarchist squint highlights how their individual stories validate a collection of deeply felt forms of socio-spatial local knowledge. This includes what residents

deem to be necessary to have rebuilt and reconstructed in their neighborhood. In implementing the work themselves, the reliability and resourcefulness of residents is confirmed, even while it has been so often characterized otherwise. Moreover, such toil enhances the dignity of residents as they return because they do not have to rely solely on volunteers, experts, and outsiders, who are likely to be uninformed about local preferences and values (or worse, turn out to be simple opportunists).

Lastly, these findings contribute to our understanding of the ways that individuals affected by disaster use damaged possessions as outlets of expression and as a means to connect with other survivors (Webb, Wachtendorf and Eyre 2000). They also expand our understanding of practices that enable members of marginalized communities and disadvantaged groups to claim roles as storytellers (Enarson 2000). The ephemerality of Lower Ninth Ward residents' post-Katrina place-making practices evidences unique stories that illustrate the complexity of the concept of recovery. The personal transformations issuing from such efforts also exemplify notions of calamity-related change, including my own. This has been brought home as I reflect upon how my understanding of such post-disaster emergencies shifts my appreciation for not just how I want stories to end, but rather, for their relevance to understanding how they begin.

## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **“The Original Rooftop Riders”:**

#### **Place-making through Memorials and Commemorations**

Sometime after the floodwater from failed levees inundated the city, Google Maps, as well as other search engine map services (Sullivan 2007), replaced their images of a devastated post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans with pre-storm satellite imagery (Conroy 2007). The change became plain to many, particularly individuals using these images as documentation to show insurance companies evidence of their damaged or destroyed properties. In determining what imagery Google decides to provide, John Hanke, their director for maps and satellite imagery said this process involves “a combination of factors including imagery dates, resolution and clarity” (LA Times 2007). Be that as it may, the House Committee Science and Technology’s investigations and oversight subcommittee chairman Brad Miller (D-N.C.) wrote in a letter to Google Inc. CEO Eric Schmidt that, “Google’s use of old imagery appears to be doing the victims of Hurricane Katrina a great injustice by airbrushing history” (Ibid). Craig Colten, a geographer at Louisiana State University who often employs Google Earth imagery in his classroom called this switch, “unbelievable” (Ibid).

The incident, albeit produced by technology and since modified to display the most current imagery, attests to the significance of representing the past and present. As shown

through this example there is substantial power in possessing control over the portrayal of something. Upon learning about this news story, I found that it related to the multiple ways in which memory can be nationalized, medicalized, aestheticized, gendered, bought, sold (Tidball, et al. 2010) and, as publicized with the Google case, willfully deleted. I also connected this matter to important questions anthropologists have raised about narratives concerning what events are or should be remembered and why, specifically in light of the fact that there are, “lots of stories to tell, lots of stories that have been told already, lots of stories that could still be told” (Bowman and Bowman 2010, 456).

The Google Map spectacle and related events prompted me to consider the ways I would situate this chapter exploring memorialization of Hurricane Katrina including how different social groups commemorate the anniversary of the storm. What follows is a general overview of rituals and memorials, including those associated with New Orleans, to provide background for the next section that juxtaposes vignettes focused on publicly-performed memorization by government and recovery officials, as well as a Lower Ninth Ward resident’s own memorializing effort. The examination of place-making in the aftermath of disaster through two distinct commemorations that annually occur in the Lower Ninth Ward highlights a new practice that has developed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. However, despite their recent emergence, storm-affiliated commemorations have roots in long-established customs, and thus constitute innovation of a tradition. This recognition, along with forthcoming discussion of others including notions of identity and place attachment, problematizes the forms and duration of transformation. As other scholars have noted, “[w]hen disasters disrupt the routine functioning of a community, its members collectively define the situation and creatively adapt to ambiguous circumstances” (Webb, Wachtendorf and Eyre 2000, 9). The authors concur that community members’

“definition of the situation manifests itself in the items they produce; these cultural products, both material and nonmaterial, are important and should be studied” (Ibid). This investigation of commemorative practices considers such material and nonmaterial as cultural products, in addition to diverging from research that studies the ways people lament their desperate situations by focusing instead on particular techniques survivors apply to difficult conditions (Schmuck 2000).

### *Performing Place in New Orleans*

The term “ritual” refers to the ways in which social groups celebrate, maintain, and renew their inhabited worlds, and given that they constitute a feature in all human societies, they have long fascinated anthropologists. Rituals occur in many settings and comprise sacred to secular forms of repetitive behavior with symbolic instead of direct technological consequence (Loudon 1966). Victor Turner defined ritual as "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers" (1967, 19). Turner has also described them as a “stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests" (1977, 183). In addition to these broad definitions, there are many types of rituals including calendrical cycles, rituals of misfortune, and social transition (rites de passage) (Helman 2007). While particular interest in this chapter concerns rituals of death and mourning, since this theme includes funerary customs and bereavement practices, the following passage from a New Orleanian resident attests to the importance of all kinds of celebratory events:

*New Orleans is a place where community and family is a continuum on a daily basis, whether it is celebrating someone's birthday, having crawfish every Friday,*

*a crawfish boil throughout the crawfish season, February to June. How you celebrate Carnival. If you eating King cake, if you going to a second line parade, if you participate in a jazz funeral, if you going to a Saints football game. These people here are more ritualistic than anything I ever seen anywhere. Period. They do everything with a religious fervor. Just to go to a football game. Next week there's going to be a football game here. Drive downtown. Just go down there anywhere close to the Superdome and see how serious people are about football here. Or just walk through this neighborhood, and you're going to see black and gold everywhere. They're going to have the jersey on. Everything from the child that was born last night to somebody that's in their funeral. [laughter] They're going out in black and gold. They're going to have it on. You going to say, "Damn, I thought it was just a football game!" But people here, they serious about the rituals that they participate in.*

This interview extract highlights just a few of the many rituals that residents of this city participate in throughout the year. As briefly mentioned above, second line parades and jazz funerals constitute public performances particularly unique to New Orleans and which anthropologists have thus studied considerably. Research by Helen Regis highlights the ways that that public funerals produced in working-class black communities “emphasize communal admiration and respect for men and women who have successfully negotiated lives of integrity in a highly inequitable society” demonstrating leadership in the community and neighborhood (2001, 754). Her work also identifies these funerals as times for a community to express grief for residents who “died too young” and as a result she is able to demonstrate that such traditions are not only surviving, but are “constantly being reappropriated and revised for new circumstances” that beside making collective claims, give voice to individual subjectivities (Ibid, 767). This passage also references second line performances. The term refers to subaltern participatory street processions that demarcate lived space and meaningful places (Lovell 2011). They take place every Sunday for nine months of every year as a “platform for community, music, dance, theater, self-expression, historical memory, public grievance, ethnic customs, and social bonding that speaks to every idealistic impulse we have for art and culture yet remains uncelebrated even

in its own city” (Dinerstein 2009, 615). Second line represents a parade, dance steps, a rhythm, in addition to referencing followers of the parade who come behind the first line made up of a brass band and the sponsoring social aid and pleasure club (Figure 40).



Figure 40- Undeclared Divas Social Aid and Pleasure Club parade  
Photo credit: Shannon Dosemagen

Social aid and pleasure clubs are also referred to as “social clubs” and these neighborhood-based, benevolent societies are “active in their communities throughout the year, organizing dances, balls, birthday parties, fundraisers, and massive anniversary parties” (Regis 2001, 755). Joel Dinerstein describes the roots of these clubs as follows:

SAPCs began as dues-paying African-American community organizations that created both an economic bridge for financially strapped members (e.g., food, rent, medical bills) and a guarantee of funeral insurance and burials. In this, they were oriented to a traditional *gemeinschaft* (community) model similar to many other ethnic immigrant groups in New Orleans (e.g., Italians, Irish, Polish), and the latter groups also used music and parades as sources of community affirmation. The African-American social clubs emerged from a combination of post-Civil War Freedman Societies, benevolent societies, religious reform groups, and fraternal organizations (2009, 621).

A Lower Ninth Ward resident expressed the following sense of how these social aid and pleasure clubs operate:

*But in the club, also, if we have somebody (die), we pool our money, and the power's in the numbers. So, if you got thirty-two men, somebody dies, we need to get something together, we might have to all put in two hundred dollars each. [claps hands] Bam! We can do that in one night. Here's the two hundred dollars. "Miss Johnson, here's sixty-eight hundred dollars to get this burial together. We going to march in the parade, we going to . . . he'll have the band, we'll do all that. We'll have food for the repast. There you go." So, the power is in the numbers. That's the only way it works is to—so you have all kinds of unexpected deaths that happen throughout a year. And right now is high season. Between November and February, more people die in general. So, we have a lot of parades and deaths that you're going to deal with. That's an average time that they die. And winter months are tough.*

These kinds of details contribute to the uniqueness of second lines and their distinction from others, like the processions of Mardi Gras Krews, characteristically associated with New Orleans. The following overview of offerings in the city, including participation in these events was provided to me by a resident I interviewed:

*Easter parades. Seafood parade. You name it, they're going to have it. They have festivals. They have 376 festivals in South Louisiana. Period. So there's something going on all the time. And they have Gumbo Festival, you name it,*



*we've got it, we're going to do it. We're having it. Everybody's going to show up. They going to be there. I don't care if it's 149 degrees in the summer or the middle of the winter. They don't care. They going to be there. We doing it. Because they know what the value of life is, you got to try to hurry and celebrate your life while you got the chance. So that's how they do it.*

What this resident did not mention in his broad overview of celebratory events across the city is that new ones continue to materialize alongside those that are already established. For instance, after noticing some signs set up along a boulevard running through the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood, I asked a resident, “Who is Mr. Magic?” to which they responded, “you mean, who *was* Mr. Magic” (Figure 41)? She went on to describe how Mr. Magic had passed away a few years ago; however, his loved ones decided to host an annual “birthday bash” in his honor.



Figure 41- Sign for the late Mr. Magic's 2nd annual birthday bash

Regis also argues that second lines are richly varied and constantly evolving. “Libations and routes, which trace the individuals lives onto the streets of the city, are part of a complex cultural repertoire of memorial discourse in New Orleans” (2001, 764). Whether it is a jazz funeral, a second line, or another similar demonstration, parades function to help define cultural

identity in spatial terms by staking out routes in urban cultural landscape, and to claim the symbolic importance of places (Hayden 1995). These rituals call communities into being through performance (Lipsitz 1998). In an interview with Mr. Stark, a Lower Ninth Ward resident and the business manager for the Big Nine Social Aid and Pleasure Club, he discussed what goes into planning a parade route (Figure 42).



Figure 42- The Big Nine Business Manager, Mr. Robert Stark  
Left photo credit: Unknown. Photo gifted to author by Mr. Stark  
Right photo - Mr. Stark displaying the Big Nine flag, which to his surprise  
had not been destroyed in Hurricane Katrina flooding

Such work begins with getting a permit. Social clubs' parade permits are good for four hours and in post-Katrina New Orleans, the police have drastically raised the cost of permits, from \$1200 to nearly \$4000, to cover an increasing crowd control support (Dinerstein 2009). A resident I spoke with about this increase had the following to say:

*Police taking the parade, jacking it up from 300 dollars to seven thousand dollars. Because the police have always associated, and would like to tag social aid and pleasure clubs with being violent organizations, when it's never the club . . . I said, "What the hell? Seven thousand dollars to parade?" the permit cost fifty-five dollars. Now you telling me that the detail is seven thousand dollars. So, we went to battle on that one. We got them down to twelve hundred. But they turned around and charged all the other social aid and pleasure clubs the same thing. It was only because we went and represented ourselves, and said, "This won't fly."*

In addition to the expense of the permit, this resident also talked about another complication regarding scheduling. While social clubs tend to have a particular date in which they annually parade, this is not always possible to adhere to for a variety of reasons.

*But consistency is what folks try to do. That day is known as an anniversary day, that's what they're going to stick to. Those big events rarely ever, they might cancel, but they're not going to change the day of the event. Because there's too many other events crammed in. Not only is it a city with all these events going on like that, but you have social events like sports games that take precedent. You can say I'm going to have my parade this weekend at three o'clock. And the police going to say, "Tough luck, baby. Saints game. I've got two hundred people working the Saints game. We don't have anyone to commit to you." So you have to really pay attention to what's going on around you in the city at the time. It's tricky.*

Once the date is set and the permit is in hand, during the four-hour parade period, club members accompany the hired second line bands and other participants to each stop. Parade routes are thoughtfully planned in terms of walking speed and with regard to sites visited. Parade stops along the route are also subject to change each year and reflect deep social ties that the members have by highlighting specific residents at their homes, as well as visiting other affiliated social organizations, community institutions, and business establishments. As one resident described, "We have fairly standard route. It varies sometimes." To be a formal stopping point along a social club parade confers important social implications as it signifies a safe and appreciated site important to the celebratory event. Figure 43 includes a map of the Big Nine's changing parade routes from three years. In determining the routes, Mr. Stark explained:

*We're going to start from this side and come over and end on our side so that is basically what we do now. I used to go to from St. Ferdinand street but after I got introduced to that guy that owned the Hi-Ho Lounge—right there on Mariny and St. Claude and he opened up his arms and said that we can start the parade from his place down into the Lower 9—we have about 5 or 6 stops now typically at one stop at the 6 and 9 Social Aid and Pleasure Club, the Jewish organization, and they opened their arms up so its ok we'll meet you all and we come on down so we do them and come on down the bridge at this bar and restaurant and this bar and restaurant and we end up at Ronald's house and then we end up at St. Claude and Lamanche Street. Mercedes' Place a restaurant and lounge on Burgundy, come around to Mickey B's restaurant and lounge there, and then Ronald's house.*

The routes illustrated in the map show slight changes in stops that have to do with things that have taken place since the last year's parade. Should misunderstandings or disputes be resolved, places that were removed can be included again as stops, which provides social recognition and, sometimes, financial benefits for a commercial enterprise. At the end of the parade, it is important to “end in your own territory”.

*Yeah, land on your own turf, cause just, community. Guess to me it's a community thing. The Big Nine is not about the Big Nine anymore. It's about community because like you got your grandparents there, you got your grandchildren there, all these different families in the Lower Nine. So, it's basically their parade. It's the communities parade. Not about the Big Nine anymore. It's about the community. It's their celebration once a year. Everyone wants to know what they are wearing. We got black and white (this year). Everybody go and get their outfit and suited up and that is what it is all about. The community want to be involved, everybody wants to be dressed like the Big Nine. It their day to do their thing peaceful, quiet, and enjoy.*

In the years after Hurricane Katrina, having a second line parade proved to be difficult with members still elsewhere in the post-disaster diaspora. With so many businesses and organizations yet to return, another issue for the viability of these parades was the lack of establishments given that these stops provide essential support along the way. Such establishments make available to residents' various goods and services all year long in addition to constituting vital roles in the continuation of cultural traditions like second line parades.

# THE BIG NINE

*Social Aid and Pleasure Club*  
PARADE ROUTES AND STOPS

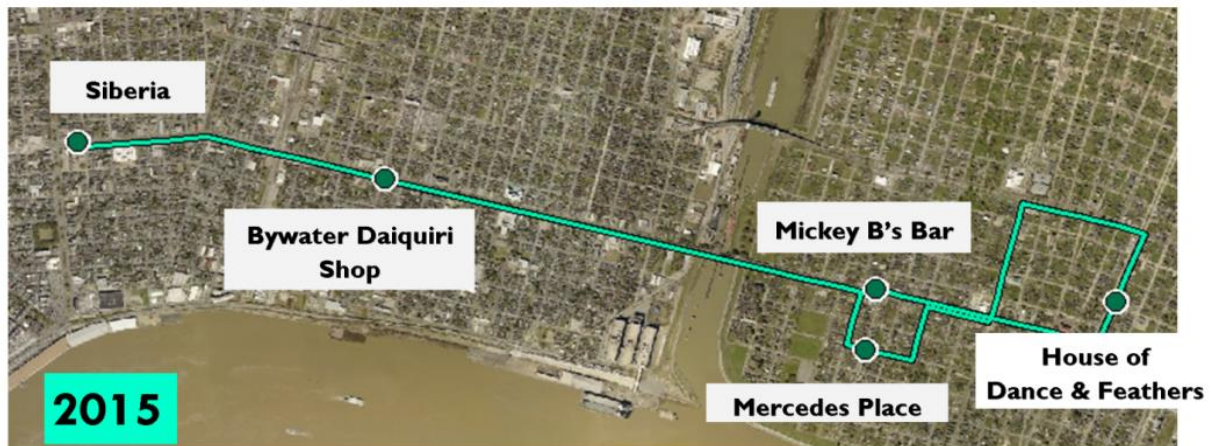
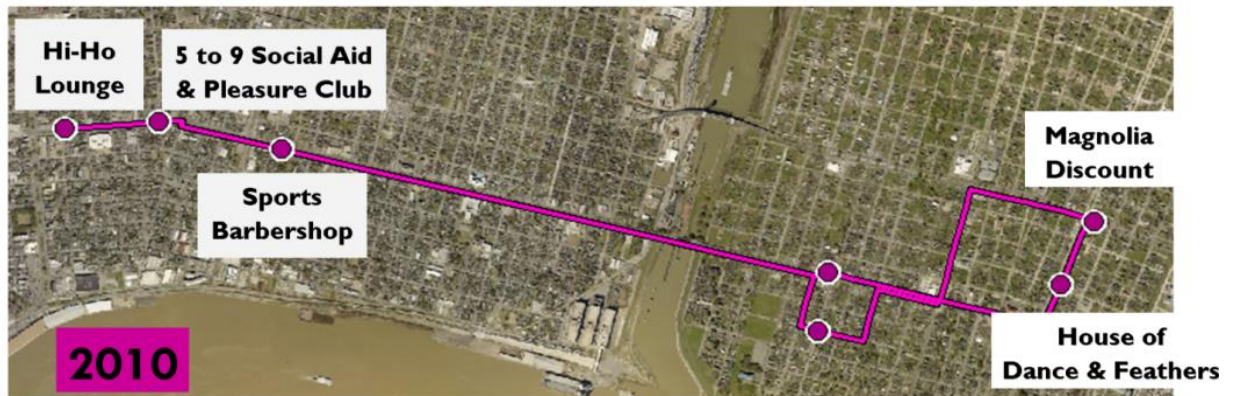
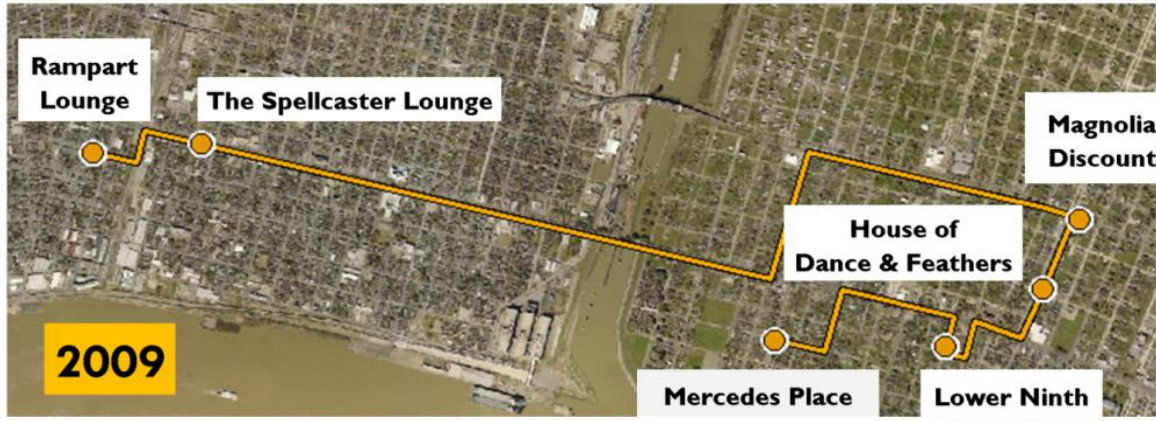


Figure 43- Social Aid and Pleasure Club The Big Nine parade routes and stops

### *Forms of Memorializing Hurricane Katrina*

Anthropologists use the term “contested ground” to describe a primary focus in the unmaking and remaking of places (Hinkson 2017). In this research, complexity perhaps is of more relevance since almost all the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward collectively, in some way shape or form, were working to return and recover from a disaster that substantially impacted so much of their neighborhood. This new post-disaster circumstance challenged residents’ place (re)attachment given all the moving parts that needed to fall into place to begin the process of seeking out and adapting to new situations (Low and Altman 1992). Basso considers the magnitude of these issues and argues that “[w]hat people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth” (1996, 7).

But what happens when inhabitants struggle to reconnect with home and their neighborhood communities? A consideration of Hurricane Katrina memorials and commemorations may begin to address such issues including what they involve and express, thereby disclosing necessary toil that encompasses important values and meaningful symbols of life and death. Such an exploration attends to the struggles that affected individuals endure to reconstruct their life worlds, “that clearly articulates their continuity and identity as a people again” (Oliver-Smith 2005, 48) and refines our consideration of the various sites and methods of black urban place-making in the post-Katrina period (Carter 2014).

Anyone interested in paying homage, from anonymous persons to state bureaucrats, can create memorials at informal to more regimented spaces. Sometimes these take the form of meticulously planned projects. At other times, they are spontaneous, which tends to be the case with unexpected and violent deaths and post-conflict situations. Spur-of-the-moment

memorialization typically involves an accumulation of mementos that create a shrine at the site of impact (S. M. Hoffman 2002). One example that's become more and more frequent is "ghost bikes" which are roadside memorials of bicycles painted white and staged near where a cyclist was severely injured or killed. Irrespective of the spontaneity, they resemble other roadside memorials where tragic accidents have occurred. Although wooden crosses are characteristic at these sites, Thomas Ferrella, a Wisconsin-based artist who has photographed these memorials for over twenty years opines that "if you sit and look you'll realize how incredibly rich they are" (Figure 44) (Finn 2017). In another context, involving loss from a massive landslide, Oliver-Smith describes survivors gathering to mourn and place crosses to honor the dead at a site nearby the slide "scar" (1986). Survivors of the landslide also grieved for places and objects that no longer existed, and in their frequent reminiscences about "this chapel" or "the little corner store" such ritual expressions signified values of the lost past (Ibid, 188). Antimemorialization constitutes another form albeit less common than those just mentioned. Examples include the tearing down of Japanese internment camps as well as the apartment complex that serial murderer Jeffery Dahmer lived in (Robb 2009).



Ghost bike memorial in New Orleans



T-shirt memorial in the Lower Ninth Ward



Assorted items displayed outside a destroyed home in the Lower Ninth Ward

Figure 44- Vernacular memorials

Ana Croegaert (2011) describes public memorials as spectacular sensory events and explains they tend to involve displays of objects, and stir emotions while they powerfully invoke and condense loss. Public memorialization constitutes a major cultural expression for society and individuals coping with grief and striving to heal. Two common assumptions in the literature on memory and memorials are that memorials exist to remember events, and they convey something



fundamental about the culture of the memorializers. Some anthropologists challenge such claims by proposing that memorials are products of cultural compromise. This is particularly the case for people who experience catastrophe and “may bring their own inchoate and grotesque memories of particular moments and tragedies with them when they visit” (Simpson and De Alwis 2008, 7). These shared encounters then provide more than honor since they are productive of realities for the living in addition to being open to constant renegotiation.

Commemorative rituals of mourning enable the bereaved to integrate loss into their lives including grieving for communities, homes, social networks, significant sites, structures, and people. Affected people employ ceremonial days to commemorate the past, often including the one of the traditional days that the dead are celebrated (e.g. All Souls Day as well as birthdays) and a new ceremonial day that takes place on the anniversary of the disaster. Anthony Oliver-Smith (2005) argues that these times, in addition to the celebration of other secular and religious holidays, help to reconstitute a community’s social existence. In the wake of disaster, the evocations of symbols that provide anchors to community identity in the past also contribute to social reconstitution in the present. Oliver-Smith further describes the relationship between history and memory as:

the means by which community members oblige authorities to acknowledge their losses and injuries and to redress these through reparations and reconstruction. As their material losses are recognized and validated, people feel validated, which furthers social reconstitution. Not only are land and buildings repossessed, but also the history and identity of the community. Protest and resistance, even twenty-five years after the displacement and resettlement process, enable people to create a politics of identity and to undertake processes of recovery that are meaningful in terms of fidelity to local cultural tradition (based on Jing 1999:324–343) (Ibid, 64).

Commemorations enable survivors to meet face-to-face with officials. They create opportunities for each group to pause and take an inventory of accomplished goals along with acknowledging the work that still needs to be completed.

### *Spacing Hurricane Katrina Memorialization*

Across the city of New Orleans, there is a diverse presence of Hurricane Katrina memorials. Examples include a simple line designating the height of flooding inside a cafe, public-space art exhibitions (i.e. graffiti and sculptures), and personal memorials composed of candles, photographs, stuffed animals, clothing, flowers, and the like (Figure 45). The official New Orleans Katrina Memorial is located on Canal Street, one of the city's busiest thoroughfares, and is a particularly formal instance where the city dedicated space and monuments to eighty-three victims of the storm whose bodies are unidentified or unclaimed (Figure 46). While visiting this site with a Lower Ninth Ward resident I heard the critique that it is a shame this memorial does not also include recognition of identified individuals who perished in the storm. They became even more frustrated later that day when we traveled to see the Hurricane Katrina memorial in St. Bernard, located sixty miles into the parish adjacent to Orleans on Shell Beach, at the final point of a dead end road (Figure 47). While the monuments at both sites consisted of black granite, the one in St. Bernard listed the names of victims who were residents of the parish.



On a wall in a café, a painted blue line denotes flood depth level inside of the building



Post-Katrina graffiti decorating a Lower Ninth Ward levee wall with portions subsequently painted over

Figure 45- Hurricane Katrina related memorials throughout the city of New Orleans



Figure 46- The city of New Orleans Hurricane Katrina Memorial



Figure 47- Hurricane Katrina Memorial at Shell Beach, St. Bernard Parish

The Lower Ninth Ward has the Hurricane Katrina Memorial Park, a frequent stopping point on tours, as was discussed in chapter 3 (Figure 48). A year after the storm, District E Councilmember, Cynthia Willard Lewis and the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Council dedicated the memorial to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. “The citizens of the Lower Ninth Ward need a landmark visible to the entire community,” said Councilmember Williard-Lewis, “we will grieve together and allow the healing to begin.” The memorial (those who paid for it) and its dedication was described by the city council thusly:

The Memorial Park, located on the neutral ground at Claiborne Avenue and Tennessee St, consists of a large granite memorial donated by the MR-GO Litigation Group, benches and landscaping provided by Lowe’s Home Improvement Warehouse, two forty-foot high American and New Orleans flags that frame the site, and the outline of a Lower Ninth Ward home where no one is home. The home was designed by Kevin Benjamin of Stull and Lee architects from Boston . . . Walton Construction donated all construction services for the site. Governor Kathleen Blanco, Mayor Ray Nagin, Council President Oliver

Thomas, Councilmember Cynthia Hedge Morrell, State Senator Ann Duplessis, State Senator Diana Bajoie, State Senator Ed Murray, State Rep. Charmaine Marchand, State Rep. Karen Carter and other elected officials were on hand for the ceremonies. The flags were raised with the help of neighborhood leaders and the Lowe’s Team. Citizens laid roses at the base of the monument. Many were holding photographs of their deceased loved ones. “The residents of the Lower Ninth Ward who perished must be remembered,” said Councilmember Willard-Lewis (New Orleans City Council 2006).

In response to me asking a neighborhood resident about their perspective on this particular installation, they shared the following insights (it should be noted that this interview took place in the aftermath of Hurricane Isaac during which the memorial was damaged):

*What’s on Claiborne—it signifies Katrina, the chairs broken, and everything is laying on the ground. It’s like this just happened. What I had visualized for a memorial is a plaque with all the people that had drowned their names on it. A real memorial. Maybe it could have been a nice park with the benches, like a real memorial where you could go and visit. To be able to take someone there and say this is my loved one that I lost in Katrina, with their name you could show on there. But what I see now is like a disaster. A storm just happened, Isaac. Like everything else, unrecognizable.*



Figure 48- Hurricane Katrina Memorial Park in the Lower Ninth Ward

New Orleans also hosts a broad spectrum of public, post-Katrina commemorations each year on the anniversary of the date that the storm made landfall. The city organizes one such event that is televised for local viewing audiences. Speeches given by prominent members of society are accompanied by singers, artists and musicians who provide music and spoken word performances. A little later that morning, it has become tradition for local politicians to hold a similar, albeit smaller scale event in the Lower Ninth Ward. Shortly afterward, a Hurricane Katrina march and second line, hosted by local hip-hop radio personality Wild Wayne and poet, singer, and activist Sunni Patterson, begin next to the breached levee in the Lower Ninth Ward, and concludes with a rally at Hunter's Field in the Seventh Ward. Later on that same afternoon, a Lower Ninth Ward resident hosts another annual commemoration.

Despite the similarities of the annual commemorations in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, these ritual practices also include many differences, such as the changing of attributes that contribute to the transformation of how place emerges, becomes enacted, is remembered, and manifests. Consequently, the official- and resident-organized commemorations reviewed later in this chapter include a description and analysis. Given that the resident-organized event includes reclamation of particular experiences and place, in the analysis I argue that the event involves transformative qualities of consequence for identity, space, and traditions of residents of Lower Ninth Ward. Before detailing the first official commemoration, some background about what such events entail, or should include, from the perspective of a Lower Ninth Ward resident is warranted. This discussion includes descriptions of other events that occur annually in the neighborhood on the anniversary of the storm. The following excerpt is from a conversation I had with a resident during an interview about upcoming commemorative events I would be attending a few days later.

[M.H.:] *With the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and commemoration coming up, I am wondering what constitutes an appropriate service. For instance, what does or should this include?*

[V.S.:] *A wreath for the people that drown and lost their lives. That we honor the people that drown and lost their lives and we take and get a wreath, a band, and then we pray for them. And we pray and after that we drop the wreath in the water for them and then we celebrate. We celebrate death after.*

[M.H.:] *How about keynote speakers?*

[V.S.:] *Normally we would have keynote speakers—like we have had Maxine Waters. We have had Marc Morial. We've had myself, we have had councilmen, the mayor, it is appropriate to have these people and have somebody from the community to speak also. You know, that went through it.*

[M.H.:] *I have recently heard a concern from some residents about having flags flown for the commemoration . . . I do not believe they are up on the poles yet.*

[V.S.:] *There's two flags by the memorial and we have two flags on them. One is the American flag and the other flag represents the people that drown.*

[M.H.:] *You have a flag that represents the people that drown?*

[V.S.:] *Yeah, I think I may have a picture at home to show you. That is very important because you know, you raise the flag the national guards - they do. That is part of what they do, they comes and they salute. You know, they do their thing. And normally we get somebody from King School to sing. The little girl, I don't know why she wouldn't, I know she didn't graduate yet. I can't think of her name- to sing the national anthem because she got a hell of a voice, as young as she is—and we would get one or a couple of school bands. Sometimes we would get more than one. Like one year, we had Carver and MLK. We gets a high school elementary school and all. We try to get them from the Ninth ward if possible.*

[M.H.:] *What about food?*

[V.S.:] *Food is donated. The city normally give in the morning time donuts and whatever, milk or cold drinks. Something like that in the morning, you know—when it's in the morning . . . its city held. They set up their little tents and they have their little give away and people set up their little tables that have things going on, like different organizations want to do their little advertisements and whatever.*

[M.H.:] *Who comes to the commemoration?*

[V.S.:] *People from all over the world that have lived here. They comes home for that one special day and you get a chance every year you see somebody different that you thought were dead or drown or something and they appear—people that you haven't seen in years. It's be like a reunion in a sense.*

[M.H.:] *Does it feel good to have the commemoration or is it difficult?*

[V.S.:] *No, it feels very good to have it now. You know, it was difficult the first year they had it. I think it hit everybody kind of hard the first year of it because it was really fresh. You know, you've seen a lot of tears, you know. All you could do is give a lot of hugs, a lot of hugs and love for the people that lost someone down here and drown, like the Perkins, you know. But everyone comes out for it.*

[M.H.:] *Journalists?*

[V.S.:] *Yes, you have journalists, you have news media from all over the world be down for this. They will be packing in.*

[M.H.:] *Is there anyone that doesn't normally come that should be there?*

[V.S.:] *I don't know anyone that's missing. Tell you the truth—because, you know you get CNN live coverage and all so it goes national news, you know. The Advocate is there—the Advocate newspaper is there so they are national news. Everybody in DC know what's going on—in the White House—because they have the Advocate. If you want something to get to Washington, you give it to the Advocate.*

[M.H.:] *I heard about another issue—where the commemoration should take place and if it will involve walking to the bridge? Where is it appropriate to be held?*

[V.S.:] *Where it have always been—at the memorial, right there at the site of Tennessee and Reynes on Clayborne—where the memorial is. And you walk—the police block. The police block one side of the bridge.*

[M.H.:] *Do they have to pull a permit for that?*

[V.S.:] *Yeah [right] the city! I don't know what they do about that. They can't stop the police from closing down one side of the bridge where everybody lost their lives. But they will charge everyone else to close down things [streets, parks]. Right, like my cousin asked me at the funeral. He said did I have any connection down here. He was trying to get Oliver Bush Park to do a big family reunion. Now the park is named after his father, okay—which is my cousin so they want to charge him \$700 to use the park, to do a family reunion in it. And I told him - they out they mind. So I told him don't worry about it— am going to take and work on that because, you know, if I got to talk to Mitch (New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu) - they ain't no such a thing. I mean the city making money and then we got to pay for policemen, you know, to detail it and I mean aint nobody rich. They crazy just to use the park. Ain't nobody use the park anyway back there so I mean why you gonna charge us \$700 dollars. If we wanted to go back there—and have a party back there—you would never even know it. See what I am saying. If you didn't think anybody wouldn't get irate out there walking in. You know what I am saying. They ain't losing no money because they ain't charge to use the park so why are you going to charge \$700 dollars.*

[M.H.:] *What about the event to be held after the commemoration. Is that a new thing or has it always been that way?*



[V.S.:] *No, it's always been this way. Robert will do something for his mother and granddaughter. And the way he do it normally he take and go to the gravesite first and put flowers on his mother's and granddaughter's grave and then—or sometime he do it reverse—and then he'll have a second line band leave from his house all the way to the tree where the house floated to—where she drown at and he always put a wreath, a pretty wreath on the tree that particular day.*

[M.H.:] *Where does everybody get their wreaths from?*

[V.S.:] *The florists, yeah, you pay for that. There's so many florists. Whoever get you the best deal. People, community members, residents will come around to that event.*

[M.H.:] *Make It Right also does something too?*

[V.S.:] *Yeah, they just start something in the past couple of years. They started coming aboard because they are building homes in the community and they need to give something back to the community—so this is what they do.*

[M.H.:] *What is it that they do?*

[V.S.:] *They do—this year they're doing the second line, the Indians, we'll have a band and they have tents, they have catered foods, chairs. Everything is catered, they have games for the kids, they have giveaways and something to keep the kids busy.*

[M.H.:] *They do it right?*

[V.S.:] *Yeah.*

This dialogue provided a great deal of insight into forthcoming commemorative events I would be attending, specifically memorials hosted by officials and the resident, Mr. Green. The discussion prepared me to look for and appreciate the diversity of intentions, objects, and program agendas making up the anniversary ceremonies held in the Lower Ninth Ward on August 29.

*“Thankfully, we have made some progress”*

As weeks drew closer to the ninth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, “the storm” became a frequently discussed topic on the street, at community meetings and in various media outlets, along with increased mention of forthcoming remembrances being scheduled throughout the city.

One of the events taking place in the Lower Ninth Ward was the Ninth Annual Katrina Commemoration—a memorial organized each year on August 29 by the office of the Councilman for District E, which includes the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East. The 9 a.m. start time was announced the day prior during the local five o’clock news during a listing of remembrance-orientated activities planned for the next day. On August 29, 2014, an onsite news reporter announced during the early morning broadcast that the commemoration held in the Lower Ninth Ward was now planned for 8:30 a.m.. This change in time quickly prompted my phone to ring. Longtime resident of the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood, Mrs. Valerie was calling to confirm that I was aware of this update. Shortly afterward, we met at her house, walked down the block, where we were among some of the first to arrive at the memorial on North Claiborne Avenue between Tennessee and Reynes Street. Underneath a tent, placed on each of the fifty-some metal folding chairs were photocopied event programs that would quickly gain a second purpose as fans in the intensifying heat. The seats faced a temporary stage positioned below two towering flagpoles, erected in front of a memorial site that greeted a bridge crossing over the Industrial Canal. Hanging from the stage was the banner, “Katrina Commemoration – Bravery, Strength, Resilience... Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow” (Figure 49).



Figure 49- Officials from District E at the Hurricane Katrina Commemoration-

As the number of participants gradually grew, so did the murmuring sound of conversations among audience members that often started with questions such as: And what block did you live on? When were you able to get back into your house? From where are you visiting (Figure 50)? Bottled water and ice mingled in coolers sat next to a table dressed atop with individually packaged breakfast snacks and napkins. Some attendees helped set up more tables, chairs, and leaflets under other tents that were quickly assembled by community organizations and local business owners. Surely, these individuals were aware of the potential publicity since reporters from the local to national level were present at the site, ready to document the state official's attendance and participation, or possibly a human-interest story. Police officers defined the perimeter of the ceremony by barricading off a few immediately surrounding blocks that rerouted traffic from the major thoroughway off into the residential streets.



Figure 50- Audience members at an official commemoration

Although scheduled to perform later on in the program, a couple dozen students wearing matching outfits from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Science and Technology caught the attention of most attendees. The students walked toward the event site from their school behind a marching band flag with instruments in hand. The young musicians filed by one-by-one into a slightly awkward arrangement within the neutral zone. Unprotected from the sun, the students stood behind the audiences' chairs, squeezed in front of the "Welcome to the Lower Ninth Ward" sign. I remembered earlier in the week the recent landscaping of the area around that sign: grass trimmed, mulch redressed, and fresh flowers planted (Figure 51). Although the maintenance improved the area around that sign, the other welcome sign for this neighborhood, at the base of the bridge, remained hidden in tall grass and weeds. The cosmetic effort of sprucing one of them up in preparation for the commemoration seemed ironic given the lack of attention and repair to major, large-scale infrastructural issues throughout the neighborhood.



Figure 51- Landscaping around Hurricane Katrina Memorial Park  
Preparation for the official commemoration.

As the grade school band began to perform, the air filled with the strident sounds of brass instruments and drums; audience members turned around in their seats to watch. Some stood up, while others went for refreshments or clapped and swayed to the songs. The music interrupted what I sensed as an uneasiness to begin the formal memorial proceedings. It seemed to squelch attendees' frustration with the event fueled by varying startup times, insufficient food offerings, absent speakers, missing flags, and uncertainty as to whether the wreath laying procession would proceed to the granite memorial marker just behind the stage, or to the bridge as it had in past years to honor those who drowned in the floodwater.

The momentary comfort the performance provided, or perhaps it was hoped it would deliver, to the persisting and ever-mounting struggles of return and journey to recovery of residents was soon dismissed. A woman would dutifully inquire, as the music played, if any attendees were experiencing issues with the Road Home Program. Presumably, she was available to document residents' concerns at a nearby table. Asking about issues with Road Home certainly addressed one of many provocations amplifying the already charged atmosphere.

Annual recognition of one of the country's largest residential disasters is commemorated each year in the midst of the looming potential that another hurricane season brings, and this year the anniversary was compounded by recent violence that happened a few blocks from where the ceremony was now taking place. Only two weeks prior, a drive-by shooting in the Holy Cross neighborhood killed two people and injured five others, including children. This deadly event underscored ongoing issues of crime and safety that heightened tensions in the neighborhood and elsewhere. With the city operating on a limited police force, the recent announcement of New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Ron Serpas's retirement furthered the precarious, albeit familiar, situation and fueled a great deal of conversation. Who would be the interim chief of police? Could this individual increase the number of new recruits direly needed? How would they handle the most recent series of aggravated assaults and incidents of battery, rape, armed robbery, and theft? Such news provided ample fuel to speculate upon or discuss in the summer heat that, in turn, made it convenient to slow down and engage in such contemplation. Such concerns also provided plenty of material for the lineup of commemoration presenters to address publicly. However, it appeared as though the mishaps and missteps throughout the ceremony left more of an impression than the content of the speeches.

Reverend Willie Calhoun gave the invocation. Councilman Gray noted right afterward that his prayer was so powerful it was responsible for blowing out the microphone. Some attendees shook their heads and signaled irritation in their sighs at the technological glitch. Next up in the program was "The Star-Spangled Banner" and the singing of the national anthem by Beyoncé—not in person, but rather through a cellular phone held up to the microphone. As the mobile device played a recording of her performance from President Barack Obama's second inauguration, I heard around me a few sounds of disapproval. I was not sure if the grumbling was

a response to the quality of the audio transmission or to not knowing where, during the anthem, to direct attention without flags on the poles, as some of the attendees had been worried and commented about earlier. Perhaps it was a combination of both.

The councilman continued the program with a story as attendees sat back down in their seats. It was an account that he reminded the audience had “become a standard for the anniversary of Katrina.” As the wind picked up, a stray cloud provided a welcomed moment of shade, and he began:

*Katrina left us facing a tall and rugged mountain, but we'll be okay. God gave us strength to climb. In the nine years since the Hurricane Katrina, we have climbed mountains, and we have mourned for the lost lives, homes gone, the loss of family and friends. Today we remember how we live, we treasure the past and we honor it, but we also look forward. We have climbed that mountain and we have some climbing left to do. Thankfully, we have made some progress.*

As with this passage, sentiments expressing triumph and tribulation formed the essence of the other speeches given that morning. Beyond the obligatory social graces of appreciation during public events, gratitude and service were the additional themes of prominence for the religious leaders, elected officials, and representatives who spoke during the ceremony. Cynthia Willard-Lewis, a previous District E councilmember and state representative, began her speech by giving thanks for the presence of all those in attendance. She next acknowledged Police Captain Chris Goodley, members of law enforcement, and nonprofit organizations including Global Green, Levees.org, and Brad Pitt’s foundation Make It Right. In addition to her recognition of the politicians and staff representing them, she also drew special attention to the honorary mayors of the Lower Ninth Ward. Mr. Irvin who was identified as “the first mayor right after Katrina,” and Mrs. Schexnayder as the “mayor in the recovery... because we gotta have a woman and she is our female mayor of the Lower Ninth Ward.” The audience met these particular shout-outs with the loudest round of applause of the entire ceremony. Praise for the MLK marching band

followed along with talk about preparing a legacy for the children to inherit. Willard-Lewis affirmed, “I know my history... fight onto victory, fight for the victory of our families to return and community, continue to fight for wholeness and completion.”

Speeches from the other presenters listed in the program followed, except for that of Senator Mary Landrieu. I took the councilman’s seemingly spontaneous requests during the ceremony to invite non-listed speakers up to the stage and share a few words on the microphone as a strategy designed to bide her more time to make an appearance. One of these speakers was a particularly awkward CVS representative who swiftly told the crowd about their excitement at the opportunity to build a pharmacy in the Ninth Ward sometime next year. Although I also considered that this waiting period for Senator Landrieu presented a fitting opportunity for a few of the more valiant Lower Ninth Ward residents interested in speaking to the audience to get on stage, I later reconsidered this interpretation. Upon further reflection, I realized that it was instead an inept attempt to cater to attendees in the follow-up to a meeting earlier that month where the councilman refused to hear and respond to a few residents vocalizing their thoughts and concerns.

Once briefed, Councilman Gray apprehensively confirmed to the audience that the senator was on her way and might say a few words after Reverend Charles Duplessis led the procession prayer for the laying of the wreath. His words began with a praise to God “given in our individual and collective lives” where, “our Father, we stand and sit in an area devastated by wind and water to lay a wreath in remembrance of what happened on that August day. We remember who perished in the storm, remember those who survived the storm, remember those who are surviving it even ‘til today.” Once the Reverend placed the microphone into its stand as



the prayer ended, those on stage rose and headed down the platform stairs to the back of the stage. Audience members also stood up and then followed the presenters.

We quickly realized that the procession would not continue to the bridge for the wreath to be lowered into the canal, as had been done for this commemoration every other year, and which residents previously explained was the “right way to do it.” Instead, the procession led to the Lower Ninth Ward memorial stone. Reverend Duplessis read the text inscribed on the stone aloud as the wreath was placed into position. A loud generator shutoff as he concluded with an “amen.” Councilman Gray stepped in and stated, “the latest information is that Senator Landrieu will be here in 96 seconds, so we are going to stay here at the... ah, here at the wreath and let her come.” Reporters that I had shared laughter with earlier that morning about the stark differences in our video camera size and qualities made their way to the front of the crowd. Other camera operators used their stature to work themselves to secure prime spots. Attendees without equipment to capture the moment, were pushed to the back, including many shorter audience members who could only listen as they stared at the back of the person standing in front of them.

Congressman Cedrick Richmond arrived on the scene a moment later. Councilman Gray playfully welcomed him as he walked toward the crowd, “Congressman, we have been waiting for you . . . all morning. Get up here Cedrick.” As he began to speak, Congressman Richmond recalled that at the time of Hurricane Katrina, he was the chair of the Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus.

*We made a vow that we would protect and help every neighborhood come back. Now as a Congressman that effort is still there, still renewed and we still have work to do. No one is here today on the ninth anniversary saying we're finished, the job is done. In fact, what we are saying is that the job is still incomplete, there are still too many people not back at home, and there is still work to do . . .*

After the senator arrived and gave her final remarks, the crowd was asked to move back so photographs of the politicians and clergy could be taken in front of the memorial marker next to the wreath of pink, red, and yellow flowers. A journalist asked the group of representatives to comment on this area as they lined up for the pictures. “Not right now,” said Councilman Gray. About a minute later, as cameras continued to click, he remarked, “The truth of the matter is, every day in life is productive,” and he then added that some of these individuals would soon be up for reelection and it was critical for them to have strong support to continue the fight.

Members of the audience soon began to spread out to the perimeter of the neutral ground area as others retreated from the setting. While watching a reporter interview Senator Landrieu, I noticed a woman walk up to the Congressman. She pointed toward an area just down the street where she explained that nine to ten blighted properties surround her newly rebuilt home. During her description of this issue, an older white reporter walked up to them and asked the woman for her name. The reporter then scribed the resident’s response and notes about their interaction onto his pad of paper. “I’m going to work it out,” said Congressman Richmond. The resident replied, “Oh, we are? Okay, then I’m happy,” and put out her hand to shake on their agreement. With hands clasped, raising up and down, the resident continued, “You got my vote and I’m going to have my friends vote for you too.” Looking toward the congressional representative, the journalist chimed in, “It’s only nine years later.” Without missing a beat, the woman turned to the reporter and replied in agreement, “It’s nine years later, right? And everybody wants me to be quiet.” “No, I don’t want you to be quiet,” said the congressman as he scanned the crowd, “because I am going to get your councilman.”

I wandered back toward the tents set up for the commemoration and took a seat next to two residents I knew who were engaged in an animated discussion. Although the smiling thirty-

some-year-old woman, a rap-artist and award-winning documentarian, was teasing the senior citizen for not sharing more of his knowledge about the neighborhood's history with the people, there was an edge of seriousness infusing her humor. Their conversation abruptly stopped a moment later when a middle-aged African-American man began speaking into the microphone to the few remaining people in the area. Unlike those who spoke earlier, he was not dressed in a suit nor did he speak from the platform. On the ground next to the stage, with cars now passing along each side of the median, he shared the following:

*Okay, we are looking at two flagpoles that don't have the flags flown right now and I'm a resident wondering why are they not flown? Why are the flags not out here? So, I just want to, like myself and some other folks out here—to please have the councilman and the representative to have our flag flown, right now. We should of had it flown right now. We really should have had the flags out here. But it is not. And I just wanted to, you know, try and have, at least have the flags out here flown and if you can please have the people to let the officials have a flag out here flying because we paid for this. We got lights out here, but it has no flags. We just have the lights beam and installed it out here, just sitting there. And it been out here for the last three or four years. So if you can have them and myself, please tell them to have a flag out here at least because my dad is a World War II veteran, I got some folks out here that's Vietnam veterans—that live around the corner and around the block in the neighborhood. They're not going out here because they don't see a flag out here, you know. So, this is really bad that you have something of this nature out here that's not being addressed and respected. We have got to have respect for the flag and ourselves. At least have a flag for Katrina . . . at least. Thank you—thank you.*

The woman who had been standing next to this man as he spoke thanked him in return after he handed her the microphone. The handful of attendees still present clapped. A few minutes later, those of us remaining had the opportunity to speak with him. As we talked, he reaffirmed that he had a house full of people that were ready to attend the commemoration, including an uncle and cousin, however, after walking toward the event and realizing that no flags were being flown, everyone in their group turned around and headed back from where they had come from. He then expressed to us his strong interest in volunteering to tend to the flags if they were to stay at the

memorial following the commemoration. He confirmed that he was committed to raising and lowering them as appropriate and necessary, just as he does with his own American flag that flies from a pole in his front yard, and which he said he dutifully changes about every seven months.

This vignette detailing an official Hurricane Katrina commemoration in the Lower Ninth Ward exemplifies one form of public memorialization occurring in the aftermath of the storm. A primary purpose of public commemorations such as this is to remember those tragically lost. As described in the episode above, this includes those who perished during Hurricane Katrina and in the later flooding caused by the storm. Officials tend to employ these events as a means to recognize and affirm publicly, extreme social and physical violations that have taken place and discuss contemporary efforts of restoration. The politicians and representatives in attendance made them with marked optimism. The affirmations that ran throughout the formal ceremony's discourse, in addition to the national flags on stage (not atop the flag poles), the singing of the national anthem, the presence of journalists and camera operators alongside administrative and religious leaders, all contributed to the political currency of this commemoration.

However, after the commemoration ended, a particularly significant moment transpired. With formal participants and almost all attendees gone from the setting, many were not present to hear the criticism that one resident expressed about this event's lack of flags. His critique concerned citizenship—a theme that permeated my fieldwork and interviews with residents in the neighborhood. Perhaps the first time I heard a resident talk about his identity as an American citizen was on an organized “fieldtrip” to the Lower Ninth Ward in 2009. It included members of the American Anthropological Association in New Orleans for their annual meeting. One of the local presenters stated during his talk, while we stood at the site where his grandmother's house

previously stood before having been removed by the city because he did not have the resources to repair it as he had hoped:

*Those that did not evacuate or move to find refuge—those left abandoned—they were left to die. My sense from the way of truly doing it was that we must not be part of the U.S., but rather occupants of some other enclave.*

In time, during conversations with residents I would hear similar comments addressing “unjust treatment” and feeling that “the government was not taking responsibility.” Another such statement I heard was: “I just feel like my rights have been violated.” The following interview excerpt with a Lower Nine resident was her response to a question I asked her about what it means to her to be a U.S. citizen in the twenty-first century:

*Well, since Katrina, after Katrina, I was wondering if we were a U.S. citizen, the way we was treated, tell you the truth. The way the federal government handled this situation with us. It was almost like we were not. I mean, I didn't really think we were living in America, tell you the truth. I was just bitter with the federal government, the governor, the mayor. I mean, this is not being a U.S. citizen getting treated like this here. Homeless and just thrown all over the country. I mean, no aid to us, people drowning. Left on bridges. In the states, I mean, violence all over. Come back, still find bodies, dead animals. I think being a U.S. citizen in this twenty-first century, you should be treated like a citizen. And I don't feel like we were treated like one. And, I don't know. Maybe now things beginning to look up a little bit. You know, I might feel like I belong here. I tell you, for a minute, I didn't think I was even a U.S. citizen.*

In this passage she expresses frustration associated with the ways in which the government treated survivors of Hurricane Katrina during and in the prolonged aftermath of the storm. Her disbelief primarily relates to how emergency management was handled, which differs from another Lower Ninth Ward resident who, rather than blame officials, took personal responsibility:

*And then it gets worse. Let me tell you—because I trusted people to do the right thing—that's what makes it my problem and I trusted the wrong people. What I mean is you would think our government and our public officials—you could trust them to do the right thing because that's the position they in . . . that's where the*

*problem lies. See most governments are set up and they don't say this, but they believe in their hearts of hearts—we work for them.*

As expressed in this quote, some residents struggle with the trust that they granted to those supposedly in charge. This resident holds himself, along with elected politicians, responsible to act and respond appropriately, but therein lies an important disconnect in understanding. In contrast, during another interview with a Lower Ninth Ward resident, they discussed notions of citizenship and expressed how the government's accountability (or lack thereof) has minimal influence over their identity:

*Well, with citizenship, by and large, two kinds, of course. An act of birth, of course. And the other one is by your own decision to become a citizen, that sort of thing. But I feel as a citizen, as a citizen, I feel first of all, I am a citizen, number one. I feel I am an American, number one. And, and I feel that, that, that I aspire to all the rights and attributes as an American. Now has that, has that, has that met my standards? Has America met my standards? Well, of course not. But the fact that America has not met my standards doesn't make me feel I'm less of an American. Okay? So I don't think that I'm any better than anybody else. But I don't think anybody else is any better than I am. So, I don't have a lesser degree of myself because, because I'm black, and saying, well, I'm less of an American than somebody else. I'm 100 percent American. I wasn't born any place else, and my parents weren't born anyplace else, and my grandparents weren't born anyplace else. So we got all these generations of people here that are Americans, even though we put these adjectives in front of them. Which the liberals would like for us to maintain.*

Although the official Hurricane Katrina commemoration did not explicitly discuss or animate notions of citizenship in the event, residents bring up this topic when discussing memories of the storm and in reflection upon their recovery from it. They also talk about this aspect of their identity in discussions with and about officials. While it varies from resident to resident as the last passage shows, there tends to be an association with how residents reflect upon themselves in relation to officials and their roles and responsibilities. The flag—a powerful symbol of nation and citizenship—which in its absence atop a pole during the commemoration, served as a

particularly potent reminder and confirmation that residents of the Lower Ninth Ward are not being treated equally as full citizens of the United States.

### *A Vernacular Commemoration*

The following episode focuses on the annual commemoration efforts Mr. Robert Green, a longtime Lower Ninth Ward resident; this older, friendly black man was one of first residents I met in the neighborhood. In time, I came to learn he graduated from St. Olaf College and worked as a tax accountant. He is also a divorced father of three sons, two of them twins, a set of twin daughters, and a proud grandfather. His own grandfather had 10 children, all of whom served in the armed forces. In addition to being a U.S. Navy veteran who worked at an army port in New Orleans, Mr. Green had also been the family caretaker of his 73-year-old, wheelchair-bound mother. They lived together in her home of 38 years along with his brother and mentally disabled cousin. In many regards, Mr. Green and his family counter the negative dominant public narratives evoked by political figures and that circulated in Hurricane Katrina news coverage that portray New Orleanians as poor, black, unemployed, dependent, and irresponsible.

As hurricane Katarina approached, Mr. Green and a few family members attempted to evacuate the city, however, due to heavy traffic they had to come back. In another effort to find better shelter to weather the storm, they also went to the Superdome, but again returned home given the dense crowd and long lines to gain access. Although the Green family would come to survive the hurricane, the same cannot be said of the storm's aftermath when Industrial Canal levee failed and the lives of two of his family members were lost.

With water quickly rising to the treetops, the Greens took to the roof of their home as it floated down the street. While transferring family members across rooftops, one of Mr. Green's

granddaughters slipped off and downed in the floodwater. Hours later, his mother passed away atop a roof while she and the remaining family members waited to be rescued. While the state of Louisiana ended house-to-house searches for the dead at the beginning of October, the body of Mr. Green's granddaughter was found at the end of that month. She was buried in November. Despite repeated efforts to inform various officials as to where his mother's body would likely be located, Mr. Green and his relatives ultimately found her themselves four months after the storm. They buried her in January 2006. Documentation of Mr. Green and his family's Hurricane Katrina experiences have been recorded in newspapers, magazines (T. Turner 2014), public radio (Woodruff 2006), television (CNN 2007) and have even been shared with university audiences, including my own, UWM. On the other hand, Mr. Green's annual commemorative efforts described in the following vignette have not received similar interest and attention.

### *The Original Roof Top Riders*

A few hours after public officials held their annual Hurricane Katrina commemoration on Claiborne Street in the city's Lower Ninth Ward, behind a memorial monument alongside the major thoroughfare, another anniversary event took place in the neighborhood. It was co-hosted by longtime resident Mr. Robert Green and folks associated with Brad Pitt's Make It Right foundation. Walking up the sidewalk to this event, I noticed many Lower Ninth Ward residents making up the volunteer force required for such an event. They were donned white tops and nametags, and were setting up and assisting with the activities spread across lots adjacent to Mr. Green's side yard—spaces that were vacant and overgrown just days before. The scene today starkly contrasted with the earlier appearance of these areas and his home (then a FEMA trailer) when we first met in 2009.



A quick scan of the area around Mr. Green's house showed numerous stations had been set up (Figure 52). Underneath a green tent, two young men set up a deejay studio. They played diverse kinds of music that seemed to please the already present multigenerational, predominantly black crowd. Hanging from one side of their tent was a banner that read, "9<sup>th</sup> Annual Hurricane Katrina Anniversary & Rebuilding Celebration – Special thanks to our sponsor T-J-Maxx." Underneath another larger tent were long tables lined up and facing the sound system for attendees to eat, converse, and watch the dancers. A few volunteers in that area handed out complimentary backpacks with donated supplies to the school-age attendees that about a dozen or so residents and I had assembled earlier that week. Back-to-school haircuts were being given on a patio under Mr. Green's home next to cooks grilling chicken and deep-frying fish. Once the aluminum meat pans were filled, they were quickly carried across the lots to another set of tents where fresh fruit, potato salad, chips, and cold drinks were served. Alcoholic beverages were available for purchase at a table in Mr. Green's front yard as were frozen treats from the Snowball Jubilee truck parked on a nearby street. In addition to jumping around in four rented blow-up bouncy houses, children were having their faces painted.



Figure 52- Stations set up at in the lot next to Mr. Green for his commemoration (food tents, DJ stage, bouncy house, and snow cone truck)

Mr. Green and his family wore matching t-shirts that day with that year’s motto: “The Original Roof Top Riders – 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, August 29, 2005”. The family posed together in a line for attendees to take photographs, and when they turned around for another shot one could see, printed on the back of their shirts was a collage of two women’s faces surrounded by the words, “Truly Loved, Deeply Missed, Never Forgotten, Joyce and Shaniya, 8-27-2014” (Figure 53). Following the brief photo shoot—one of many that day—the Green’s annual second line parade took place. Music from a small brass band played behind the family as they began to dance up the middle of Tennessee Street; behind the family were Mardi Gras Indians from the Comanche Hunter (Figure 54). They were followed by parading attendees who danced, took sips from their drinks, played tambourines, snapped photos, waved fans, and carried umbrellas. Unlike most other second line parades that include a handful of stops, this parade has only one stop and the route never changes. The parade begins and ends at Mr. Green’s home and the one stop is at a

tree approximately, one block away (Figure 55).



Figure 53- The Green family showing their Original Roof Top Riders t-shirts  
Right image - t-shirt designs from previous years



Figure 54- Parade participants

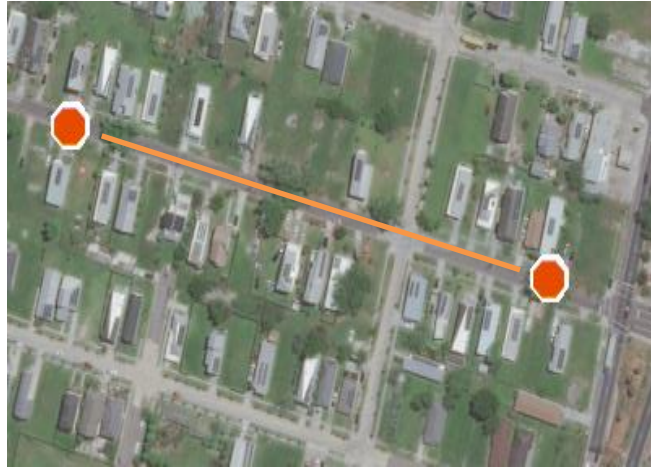


Figure 55- Resident's parade route and stops

The sound of the band amplified as the crowd gathered around Mr. Green who moved to the rousing sounds of the brass instruments and the drums taking his time to dance with a wreath as well as hold it up in the air for all to see (Figure 56). After slowly climbing up the ladder, he replaced the wreath hung the previous year. The crowd accompanying the Greens danced their way back home and placed the old wreath close to the tombstone monument in their family's front yard (Figure 57). The band continued to perform back over at Mr. Green's home where attendees joined the younger family members dancing on the lawn. A young man that had just been playing his trumpet took the microphone as the rest of the band continued to play and said, "Yes, that's right y'all—we'd like to say rest in peace to Joyce y'all, rest in peace baby. We want to keep it rolling in that Ninth Ward—play your horn, here we go!" Another band member took the microphone next and said, "Rest in peace Shaniya as well." before handed it off to another family member as he climbed down onto the lawn.



Figure 56- Mr. Green placing a commemorative wreath on the tree



Figure 57- Gravestone in front of the Green's home

### *Placing Transformation*

[T]here have been vigorous debates among scholars and policy advocates about how to rebuild the many lives displaced by Katrina—and most of all the lives of

New Orleans' black poor. Researchers and the media seized quickly in the weeks after the storm, on the "return or move on" question: Given the barriers to rebuilding, as well as the social and economic problems that predated the storm, should many who were displaced be encouraged to relocate their lives (with assistance) or to simply wait out the basic clean-up, in hopes of the fastest possible return (de Souza Briggs 2006, 121)?

This chapter closes with this passage focusing on predominate aspects of a discourse that quickly emerged in the almost immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The first part of this quote emphasizes the prevalence of the expert knowledge guiding dialogue—if not making decisions—about recovery for Hurricane Katrina afflicted subaltern residents in the diaspora. The next sentence then highlights how specialists and professionals framed possibilities for residents in the wake of this storm. At the time of his writing, sociologist and planner, de Souza Briggs stated that "no reliable data are available on the top-of-mind preferences of the displaced, much less on the *informed* preference that should drive public policy and community action" (Ibid). He closes with the point that a "deliberate planning process inclusive of displaced persons would take advantage of extensive community-labor networks" (Ibid). How does the work of de Souza Briggs relate to the vignette describing my participation in and observations of a Lower Ninth Ward resident-led Hurricane Katrina commemoration practice? This excerpt helps to highlight, through juxtaposition with my account of the commemorations, the disconnect between how "officials" and many residents understand the realities with a post-Katrina return to the Lower Ninth Ward.

In light of the place-making practices already discussed in this dissertation, exhibiting the enormous efforts of residents to return home and reconstruct their lives, as well as those around them in their communities, this work goes beyond deliberation and distinguishes action reaching toward goals that did not involve decision-making in the first place. De Souza Briggs notes that there was no data concerning this issue, but recognition of residents' intense place attachment

may have been the best predictor. Once residents were physically able to return to the Lower Ninth Ward, they began embarking upon journeys (literal and symbolic) that would bring them back, which included resuming cultural traditions that have, in turn, been modified in response to their extensive Hurricane Katrina-related experiences. The second commemoration described above illustrates how a resident performed a memory of Hurricane Katrina with parading, which is also employed to remember and honor family members lost in the disaster. There are, however, changes from year to year in the way that Mr. Green's commemoration event unfolds.

Having attended Mr. Green's commemoration on a few occasions, repeated participation gave rise to my becoming aware of temporal dimensions within post-disaster change. For instance, this vignette describes an event that exemplifies ephemerality in that it only occurs one day a year, on August 29. Regarding the temporary the conversion of empty and overgrown lots into one large manicured yard, the residents' provisional efforts resembled the busy municipal employees who, only a few days prior, trimmed grass, redressed mulch, and planted fresh flowers to aesthetically enhance the area where the highly photographed "official" administrators' commemoration would be held. Landscaping efforts that enhance the neighborhood are most welcomed by residents; however, their appreciation is limited because they recognized that it is done just a few select times a year (when the wider world is watching), for the sake of giving the appearance that the trees, shrubs, grass and flower beds are in this kind of shape all the time. Many residents living in this neglected landscape—an area that becomes starkly dark every night after sunset due to a lack of repaired streetlights; has roads still impassable due to potholes, leaking water mains, and debris; and lost neighborhood inhabitants, institutions, and businesses—shake their heads at such frivolous efforts that result in such short-lived results.

Other instances of ephemerality in this vignette include locations previously devoid of much human activity temporarily turned into vibrant areas, and in which designated regions (such as podiums and areas for seating) appeared with various activities taking place. Diverse social groups gathered to participate in this community event included residents/neighbors, family members, non-resident visitors, journalists, photographers, and possibly a few academics. Such a get-together creates a fleeting soundscape that fills the air in a 12-block radius. Ephemeral change noted elsewhere in the neighborhood included cultural artifacts like handmade street signs since replaced years after the storm with aluminum-engineered signs, a levee wall once decorated with graffiti now covered with gray paint, and intermittent Hurricane Katrina bus tours that illicitly travel the neighborhood.

Further examination of this commemorative practice reveals other temporal-related insights. Given that the enactment of this commemoration happens every year on the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina (and the death of his family members), its annual repetition denotes a lasting change in the aftermath of disaster and which it is anticipated, if not expected, that Mr. Green will continue to host. Although his tradition honors his deceased mother and granddaughter and includes neighbors, it holds clear resemblance to the yearly festivals held in and around New Orleans. Although components within it change each year, it has become an event that he will continue to host and which neighbors have come to expect and participate in.

Yet, along with the lasting qualities of the parade, in consideration of the city's legacy of jazz funerals, the parade is simultaneously indicative of transitory change since the practice illustrates an innovative continuation of a revered cultural tradition of honoring the dead through both mourning and celebration. Another example of this practice exemplifying a transitory change concerns New Orleans renowned second line tradition. Whereas parading social aid and



pleasure clubs characteristically incorporate multiple parade stops at sites of specific relevance to them (be it a favorite drinking hole or homes of friends of the club), the one and only stop of Mr. Green's parade is unique. However, knowing the significance of this tree, there is logic as to why it is the sole stop in Mr. Green's second line, and why this parade stop does not vary year to year as is the case with many social aid and pleasure club parade routes. Certainly, this parade route symbolizes the disruption and distance that the Green's family home traveled as it floated away from its foundation in the floodwaters. As participants embody this path each year they parade, their kinetic movement through space inscribes the memory of Hurricane Katrina into the public sphere and onto the street. The one stop at the old majestic oak tree is important for another, albeit unexpressed, reason. Trees are emblematic of and signify life and the homage residents pay at this site represents a tribute to the lives lost alongside the lives that continue to persevere. As a result, the tree itself is a living commemorative memorial not unlike the other Hurricane Katrina monuments discussed earlier in this chapter. However, its status as such is not recognized by outsiders or officials.

Complexities also materialize when considering the assortment of material culture associated with this practice of paying homage to the passing of Mr Green's family members. One instance of this, and which represents living memory, relates to the photos of Ms. Green and Shaniya printed onto clothing that year. While the commemorative t-shirts printed each year typify a lasting form of change, these wearable artifacts concurrently mark change that is transitory in that the slogans, which have included "Roots Run Deep" and "I'll Fly Away," differ with each year. What subsequently emerges within the aftermath of the storm is an ongoing dialogue that continually transverses the past (and future) bringing it into the present. Other examples include a strategically placed piece of duct tape covering part of a sign reading "I AM

COMING HOME” that distinctively shifts the message to “I AM Home, and the revised business card of Burnell Cotlon (a Lower Ninth Ward resident) asserting that the neighborhood’s market is not a future thought but a current reality (Figure 58).



Figure 58- Demarcating symbols of return

Finally, in printing the previous year’s design from the annual commemorative shirts, with the theme “The Original Roof Top Riders” onto ceramic coffee mugs, an emergent marketing of Hurricane Katrina-related themes determined by Mr. Green expanded, which is an additional example of creative participation in the tourism economy. The memorial wreath for Mr. Green’s event also exhibits two forms of transitory change (Figure 59). On the one hand, the artificial floral arrangements and glued-on photos differ from one year to the next. On the other hand, Mr. Green’s commemorative practice of replacing the wreath that has hung on the tree for the past year with a new one, also exemplifies a lasting form of change, akin to the granite memorial grave marker that remains in his front yard.



Figure 59- Wreaths from Mr. Green's commemorations

Such details attest to complexities of transformation in the wake of disaster and illustrate how practices (and various components of them) emerge, become enacted, and manifest through patterned forms of ephemeral, transitory, and lasting commemorative changes. The final vignette of this chapter reveals that these dimensions of change are not mutually exclusive; their multiple, coexisting intersections with the past and the future further complicate answering the simple question of my friends, family members, and colleagues who have asked throughout the course of my research: “So how has the neighborhood changed post-Katrina?”

My attempts to make more visible the qualities of transformation make it evident that subtle as well as more substantial forms of change carry significant meaning. Employing place-making as a category of analysis to examine processes of change through residents’ practices in the return from a major catastrophe confronts assumptions of change. Mr. Green’s commemorative event provides an important glimpse into the less often visible New Orleans’ Lower Ninth Ward, post-Hurricane Katrina. There is much to glean from this fragment of place-making extracted from a much larger mosaic of practices occurring in the aftermath of disaster. Yet the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood and community continues as emergent, influenced by past conditions, enmeshed with contemporary happenings and evolving events that transpired

throughout the multiple periods of my fieldwork, and which continue to unfold. My focus on these dynamics aids our appreciation of the variant qualities of transformation, including convergences. Beyond developing a temporal perspective on change, my analysis points to deeper social implications in which seemingly incongruent practices, or paradoxical emotions, exhibit forceful capacities wherein residents' practices counter dominant narratives and challenge the erasure of history—an important component of structural violence.

From the perspective of de Certeau, residents' memories and their participation in the neighborhood commemoration are tactics. This is because they constitute counter narratives to those claims put forth by politicians and New Orleanians from outside of the neighborhood that maintain there was *nothing* in this neighborhood before Hurricane Katrina. Their action is also tactical in the sense that residents use their own bodies to not only indicate what this community used to be comprised of, but to also reenact physically for Mr. Green and symbolically for the other participants their experience of surviving the Hurricane Katrina flooding. Regarding the work of Bourdieu's ideas about habitus help one to see that a particular, embodied and performed set of commemorative practices are stitched together by Lower Ninth Ward residents in the daily toil to remake themselves and their community year after year in the wake of the storm. The praxis of reminiscing and participating in Mr. Green's commemoration becomes an embodied political statement that shows they will grieve and pay respects to those who have perished in ways they deem appropriate, and as we saw, may transform over time in various, sometimes unique ways. Perhaps more importantly, the residents' praxis exemplifies and brings into being a political solidarity—they are not going away. Exercising Scott's anarchist squint one last time, we see how different Hurricane Katrina memorials and commemorative events disregard or give agency to how residents prefer to remember and mourn lost aspects of their

lives, livelihoods, and landscape. Their efforts also evidence the power of human connections to place, including those places that have been drastically altered and from which they are estranged. Residents' memorials and commemorations provide ways in which to heal themselves and their once familiar places, and a habitus distinct to Lower Ninth Ward community by working to mend these tattered fragments of adversity and agency in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

## **CHAPTER 7:**

### **Conclusions**

This dissertation continues documentation of the Hurricane Katrina saga by including, during an especially egregious period of U.S. history, a lesser-known story about affected citizens' everyday perseverance and meaningful toil to continue surviving in the wake of the storm. The practices enacted by residents in the storm's aftermath, which I define as place-making throughout this research project, have largely been overlooked or disregarded by scholars. Yet, their recognition and analysis reveal important insight about the return process to a radically-altered built environment and social fabric. This research project has produced important findings that contribute to our understanding of the long-term impacts of Hurricane Katrina and disaster—perhaps more aptly described as recovery-related studies and literature more broadly—that is of growing importance as the likelihood a disaster grows for all communities in the era of global climate change. In this new era, radically-altered built environments and social fabrics may very well be part of the long-term lived experience of the majority of the world's population. This study then, continues to hold relevance today for its focus on the everyday work of place-making post-disaster, not in the immediate aftermath, but in the long-term.

### *Praxis of Return*

In chapter 3, examination of resident-led tours revealed how some residents have chosen to respond to place de-attachment by engaging with an influx of outsiders to their neighborhoods. I show that the spatial narratives shared through these tours empower the residents' voices, and facilitate their ability to distance themselves from the destruction, including all that accompanies it, be it subsequent issues of blight, emptiness, or crime. I explain that residents in the Lower Ninth Ward embodied orientation to their post-storm condition (following Bourdieu, a habitus) that draws upon a wider New Orleans set of practices as a means to remake their themselves and their community. In doing so, they use tours as a political statement to insist that the neighborhood's appearance is not how this community previously looked, and its present condition is considered dreadful and damaging to residents. I also demonstrate that resident's tactical deployment of tours is a praxis they use to reidentify themselves and become acquainted with not only an unfamiliar place but contend with a place and way of life that has dramatically changed, including sites permanently removed from the landscape. Humans cannot decide what a disaster destroys, however, people have agency in how they experience it (Rivera and Miller 2007), which subsequently transforms their engagement with the consequences of its aftermath.

Exploring civically-oriented, everyday engagements in chapter 4 provides an important perspective on how residents confront a non-existent recovery. I present how some time-honored political traditions of New Orleans are employed to negotiate the contemporary post-storm issues of stagnancy and neglect. This praxis includes active participation at meetings, frequent interaction with officials, use of the media, and traditional political action including protesting and rallying at the U.S. capital. Yet this chapter also makes visible how residents are not only making requests for assistance, but also hold themselves accountable in making sure they stay

emboldened, productive, and collectively working toward shared goals. This in turn yields a powerful display of autonomous practices that are simultaneously meaningful for individuals and yet rooted in cooperative action that works for the betterment of the collective. Such communal confrontations express political solidarity by refuting a supposed completed phase of recovery. Yet because this work of residents simultaneously demands to be treated with decency, dignity, and worth, the praxis also yields healing from some of the endless suffering endured in the storm as well as post-Katrina.

My investigation of community and commercial enterprises in chapter 5 identified the ways in which residents innovatively rebuild and reconstruct community offerings. I explain that residents employ their social and cultural capital to establish these enterprises, and that such work constitutes a praxis informed by previous employment and education. I also revealed in this chapter that the residents' return from disaster entails reorientation of social structures, particularly involving the direction and work of one's life and livelihood. Neighborhood initiatives resemble mutual aid in their on-the-ground organization and attempt to create a survivable environment through spaces that provide appropriate and needed assistance. While I also show that these efforts sometimes come to untimely ends, manifesting in only short-term impacts on the social and cultural landscape, they render lasting meaningful impressions on those involved.

Examination of Hurricane Katrina memorials in the sixth chapter additionally reflects upon experiences and materials involved in commemorative rituals. I demonstrate how the resident-organized ceremony carries particular symbolic strength as it follows in the wake of another annual commemoration, one hosted by political officials with a particularly different program and agenda. I also reveal that the resident-led commemorative ceremony is a praxis



drawing upon an assortment of aspects found in the embodied orientation, or habitus, of Lower Ninth Ward residents, including the ways they engage in a funeral-like procession with a social aid and pleasure club, second line parade, and Mardi Gras Indians. I also show that while the resident-hosted commemoration is particularly personal in a number of regards, the performance encourages the participation of all those present. I additionally explain that in the reenactment of this commemoration, each and every year residents' memories become political and the performance contributes to solidarity of the neighborhood, further solidifying their particular embodied orientation.

I have chosen to focus on these particular practices because they constitute activity that I observed taking place throughout my fieldwork. Perhaps this is due in part to intentionally embracing an asset-based approach to what I noticed happening, which also came to influence the analysis of the data collected. Upon returning from the field, as I spent time transcribing interviews, creating data sets for maps, and typing up field notes, patterns began to materialize. These practices that I had documented seem to me now to form a collection of evolving and multifaceted, place-making practices that constitute, for Lower Ninth Ward residents, a resourceful embodied repertoire of disaster aftermath responses. I have turned to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of habitus to try to account for this sense that residents of the Lower Ninth Ward have developed a particular outlook on (and way to) recover from Hurricane Katrina.

Rich traditions and cultural logic are enmeshed within a praxis that did not occur in isolation, but rather alongside other "official" practices, orders, and narratives. For instance, corporate operations offered Hurricane Katrina tours, however residents felt the need to give their own. Regarding all of the rebuilding plans and nonprofit organizations that came down in

the aftermath and set up shop to help with the recovery, residents determined the community and commercial establishments they felt necessary and worked to create these throughout the neighborhood. Concerning the local and national government's broken promises to fix infrastructure and failed programs to aid homeowners with the rebuilding of their houses, residents felt compelled to organize civically-oriented engagements. And although authorities hold formal commemorations each and every year on the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, residents host their own for the neighborhood and its residents. Thus, when residents enact such practices in their performance of recovery, they are also performing (and enacting) a kind of collective autonomy, which not only works to remake place as home and a habitus that is distinct to Lower Ninth Ward residents, but also legitimizes their return, and in doing so contributes to the symbolic capital of their project. My findings also contribute to scholarship focused on phenomenon that will not be forgotten, specifically the ways in which Lower Ninth Ward residents have chosen to return and have *had* to respond. Such documentation defies the erasure of history that Paul Farmer warns us occurs as part of structural violence (2004). I hope this work becomes a resource for others to learn from, as I have, and a testament to so much of the work that remains.

### *Forms of Place Residents Have Made*

In this dissertation, I demonstrate that residents create different forms of place in their return from Hurricane Katrina. For instance, in chapter 3, at the various sites frequented and throughout the journey through the neighborhood, resident tour guides draw upon their personal memories and subjective experiences. They communicate perceptions about what previously was and where things are at present, in addition to providing explanations for the vast range of questions

visitors ask. In doing so, residents not only represent place to the visitors, each participant becomes a go-between in the distribution of understanding what life is like in the Lower Ninth Ward as they collectively contribute to its making.

In chapter 4 that centers on residents' everyday (civic) engagements, I describe how their practices create political spaces to voice dissatisfaction and express dissent. Whether out in the street or at an office in Washington D.C., residents make use of public and symbolic venues to hold politicians, and other authorities tasked with recovery efforts, responsible for failures in assistance programs, divestment and diversion of funding, and overall negligence in their handling of officially-sanctioned recovery efforts. I also show that residents make another kind of "place" while traveling back to New Orleans on the chartered bus. This space embodied the essence and had the feel of gathering around a hearth to share stories; even while they were seated in a linear arrangement, facing toward the front of the bus, and listening to whoever was using the microphone. The impromptu "campfire moment" that transpired on the road trip back formed a distinctly reverent place for discouraged residents to sing songs for one another, recite poems, and share motivational speeches as a means of healing and to encourage hope. Given that residents did not find such solace at their intended destination, they created a place for it themselves.

The community and commercial enterprises founded by residents that are the focus of chapter 4 illustrate another type of place they made. Although residents are constructing conventional establishments, the spaces they create within them are particularly unique in that they are localized versions of standard offerings. A residential home converted into neighborhood health care clinic effectively produces comfort and closeness. Inside of the facility, employees who are also local residents have sociocultural awareness of ailments common to the

community served, in addition to being sensitive to certain norms and state of affairs. All this together generates a very special space unlikely of being reproduced by outside experts.

In chapter 6, I discuss a variety of Hurricane Katrina memorials and describe official and vernacular versions of them. I describe how the sense of place made through the vernacular neighborhood commemoration, through performance and memory, includes various sorts of changes over time. I also show that while this created place provides a familiar and sacred space for the resident (Mr. Green) hosting the event and his family to bereave, pay homage, and heal, the performance also provides an accessible place for the community who are present and participating.

Despite the variation in the places made by residents, there is a thread of continuity amongst them in that they each have an ephemeral quality. While these practices do not leave enduring imprints on the landscape, the enactment of these endeavors cultivates meaningful transformation in residents' lives and livelihoods. Reflection on the transient nature of each practice reveals that: 1) residents randomly conduct them, as they happen on different days and at different times; 2) acts of civic engagement occur intermittently; 3) not all of the community and commercial enterprises established by residents post-Katrina continue at present as some have been closed down; and 4) the resident-led commemoration, though an annual occurrence, is short in duration, lasting only a few hours on one day of the year.

After decades of disaster-related research, scholars have derived important lessons for planning disaster response and recovery. Some academics creatively propose effective strategies should develop as habits (Rodríguez and Fullilove 2017). Mark Schuller takes another approach in the afterword of his book, exploring the role of nongovernmental organizations in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake, whereby he presents specific recommendations for grassroots

organizations as well as various other constituencies including governments, donors, citizens, even for readers of the text (2012). Despite this important wealth of established knowledge, as this dissertation shows, there is still much to learn about the intersections of people, place, and disaster. My research maps out an approach through examination of place-making practices in the wake of calamity that evidences that there is still so much to learn and gain from continuing these endeavors.

This dissertation records details of a specific community, in a particular locale, for a select duration of time. Although this ethnography provides a limited snapshot in time and space, it lays the groundwork for future work. Future work could include exploring what new practices have since emerged in this neighborhood, or examining the themes addressed here in cross-cultural analysis, or over an even longer time span. This research could also be developed through consideration of how juveniles without memory of the phenomena experience or understand the significant structural changes it brought about, and the ways they are memorialized and reenacted.

### *Problematizing Recovery and Reality*

In distinguishing places made by residents in the wake of catastrophe, our understanding of recovery expands. The concept of recovery further develops and is problematized by including within it the toil residents embarking upon it themselves, sometimes by choice and at other times due to necessity. In light of the ephemerality of the places made by residents, recognizing both their emergence and disappearance on the built landscape deepens understanding of recovery to encompass efforts that while resulting in limited physical permanence, manifest significant change within the lives of residents engaged in such work.

These stories of determination and intentionality challenge the assumption that recovery inevitably follows disaster, a dominant narrative in the post-disaster literature. Instead, in this study we see significant struggle alongside enormous strength in the journey to return home, an ongoing and seemingly unending journey. The efforts of the Lower Ninth Ward residents show us how recovery is spontaneous, emergent, resourceful, ephemeral, and ambiguous—aspects that are overlooked if we are not careful about how we look at places like the Lower Ninth Ward post-Hurricane Katrina.

The places residents make and their ephemerality in the aftermath of this storm complicates how we understand recovery. For them, returning to what once was following a disaster may not be acceptable even while those affected may not passively accept the inability to achieve that minimal outcome. Instead, residents negotiate this reality of post-Katrina circumstances and conditions by initiating, and at other times directing, efforts to reestablish that which they consider essential to their future while also recreating a social world that is familiar to them. Returning from the wake of disaster thus involves labor not conventionally associated with recovery.

As illuminated throughout this dissertation, the restorative work of affected residents includes reclaiming bonds to the neighborhood and their dwelling places. Residents have also had to reaffirm their identities by remembering who they are and where they come from without connecting to the physical markers on the landscape that are so often indicative signifiers of their social being. Another aspect of this issue has been residents' acceptance of embodying different roles and thereby embracing their own demonstrable transformation.

Reestablishing networks is another undertaking that is important to understanding the ongoing work of recovery for Lower Ninth Ward residents. As presented in this case study, such

work includes the formation of new relationships and collaborative partnerships, perhaps most notably with outsiders such as vacationing visitors and volunteering college students (myself included). Identifying such matters post-Hurricane Katrina entails mapping out everyday perseverance and meaningful toil, which would likely be otherwise indistinguishable to the wider world.

Since last year's historic flooding in the Driftless area of Wisconsin where I live (as I described in the preface), local communities have once again begun to experience road closures, breached waterways, and submerged farm fields due in part to the frequency and intensity of rain events associated with global warming. However, inhabitants of the area this summer are also learning what life is like without repaired dams; although the dams were an especially contentious local topic previously, they nonetheless provided significant protections as river waters rose. As we continue waiting to learn how federal, state, and township authorities will deem it fit to proceed, in addition to determining how much (if any) funding will be made available to implement such plans, we continue to bear witness to the magnitude of global climate change.

As temperatures rise, seasons become frost-free, precipitation patterns alter, droughts and heat waves increase, hurricanes become stronger and more intense, sea levels rise, and the arctic becomes ice-free (NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory 2019), the lessons we learn from Hurricane Katrina become more important than ever. This is particularly so considering what the future holds for humanity trying to recover from localized to worldwide-scale disaster. This dissertation documents fragments of the work many of us will likely confront and provides small fragments of insight to the incomprehensible losses we will likely endure. Surely such experience is already familiar to Haitians in the aftermath of the 7.0 magnitude earthquake in 2010; the Japanese in

2011 following the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in their country's history; Puerto Ricans in the wake one of the island's deadliest storms, Hurricane Maria in 2017; and the experience of Americans with the Camp Fire just last year, California's deadliest and most destructive wildfire. Although it may not be known where precisely the next disaster will occur, there is certainty that the next catastrophe looms close in our future and that we have only just begun to grapple with how to persevere when it becomes our time to endure.



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APPENDIX A:  
STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Project Title: Transformations In Place: An Ethnography Of Social Change In The Aftermath Of Disaster

Principle Investigator (PI): Dr. William Wood

Co-Principle Investigator (Co-PI): Monique Hassman

To obtain informed consent, the Co-PI will read the informed consent document before beginning any interview and attain written permission for consent to audio, visual, and photo recordings. Participants are provided a copy of this document including the PI and Co-PI contact information.

Background

- What is your name?
- What year were you born?
- What is/was your profession?
- Where do you live?
- How long have you been a resident there?
- How do you describe the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood prior to the storm?
- Historical legacies
- Prior to the storm, describe a typical day in your life.
- What organizations were you part of and what roles did you have in the community?
- What places did you frequently visit?
- How do you get to and from these places?
- What kinds of activities occurred here?
- Where do these occur and why?
- If you were to map the neighborhood prior to the storm, what would you put on it?

Hurricane Katrina

- What happened to you during Hurricane Katrina?
- How did you return?
- What resources have been necessary?

Place-making

- After the storm, describe a typical day in your life.
- Have any of your roles changed for you or others?

- Who has (not) come back to the Lower Ninth Ward community?
- What has (not) come back to the Lower Ninth Ward community?
- What has (not) been rebuilt?
- What things have (not) changed?
- How do you describe these differences?
- What places in this area are significant?
- Personally, historically, culturally?
- Why are these sites important?
- If you were to map the neighborhood presently, what would you put on it?
- What would you want to be on the map that is not there and why?

APPENDIX B:  
UWM IN NEW ORLEANS PROGRAM SERVICE-LEARNING PLACEMENT PARTNERS

- ASHE Cultural Arts Center
- Chartres-Ponchartrain Mental Health Clinic
- Dillard University Archives
- Lower Ninth Ward Village
- Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic
- MLK Charter School of Science and Technology
- New Orleans Food and Farmer Network (NOFFN)
- Our School at Blair Garden
- Program of All Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE)
- Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association (NENA)
- The House of Dance and Feathers
- Vietnamese Initiatives in Economic Training (VIET) Village
- Women and Agriculture (WandA)

APPENDIX C:  
FIELDWORK TIMELINE AND DURATION OF TRAVELS

<b>2009</b>	January	1 month
	August	2 weeks
	September	1 week
	October	1 week (with Lower Ninth Ward residents in Milwaukee, WI)
<b>2010</b>	January	1 month
	March	1 week (with a Lower Ninth Ward resident in Merida, Mexico to present at a Society for Applied Anthropology conference)
	October	1 week + 1 week (with Lower Ninth Ward residents in Milwaukee, WI)
	November	1 week
<b>2011</b>	January	1 month
	March	1 week
	July	2 weeks
	October	1 week
<b>2012</b>	January	1 month
	March	1 week
	May	1 week
<b>2013</b>	March	1 week
	July	1 week + 3 days (traveling with New Orleans residents to/from Washington, DC)
<b>2014</b>	July	1 month
	August	1 month
<b>2015</b>	August	1 week



APPENDIX D:  
INTERVIEWS

	<b>Interview Participants</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>	<b>Interview Locations</b>
1	Sexagenarian, African-American, married, grandmother, retired, New Orleans native, long-time Lower Ninth Ward resident (50+ years)	January 2010 January 2013 March 2013 July 2014 August 2014	At a kitchen table, in a living room, bedroom, and front patio
2	Middle-age, African-American, mother, professional, New Orleans native, lifelong resident of the Ninth Ward	January 2009 August 2014	At an NGO and cafe
3	Sexagenarian, African-American, grandfather, retired, longtime Lower Ninth Ward resident	January 2009 August 2009 January 2010 August 2014	In a driveway, garage, and at a NGO
4	Septuagenarian, African-American, male, retired, New Orleans native, Ninth Ward resident	August 2014	At a kitchen table
5	Septuagenarian, African-American, widow, grandfather, retired, New Orleans native, longtime Lower Ninth Ward resident	January 2012 August 2014	At a fast-food restaurant, in a living room
6	Tricenarian, African-American, mother, professional, New Orleans native, resident of the Lower Ninth Ward	January 2009 January 2010	In a living room and community garden
7	Sexagenarian, African-American, father, married, retired, New Orleans native, longtime Lower Ninth Ward resident	January 2011 January 2012	At a kitchen table
8	Middle-age, white, father, married, laborer, rural Plaquemines Parish resident	January 2009	Outside patio
9	Middle-age, African-American, father, professional, New Orleans native and resident	January 2010	In a living room

10	Septuagenarian, African-American, male, retired, Lower Ninth Ward native and resident	January 2010	In a living room
11	Sexagenarian, African-American, mother, semi-retired, New Orleans native and resident	January 2009 January 2010	At a NGO
12	Sexagenarian, African-American, father, semi-retired, New Orleans native, longtime Lower Ninth Ward resident	January 2009 January 2010	At a NGO
13	Septuagenarian, African-American, widow, great-grandmother, retired, New Orleans native and longtime Lower Ninth Ward resident	January 2009 August 2009 January 2010 January 2012	In a living room
14	Middle-age, African-American, grandfather, semi-retired professional, New Orleans native and longtime Lower Ninth Ward resident	January 2010	In a living room
15	Septuagenarian, African-American, father, married, retired, New Orleans native and lifelong resident	January 2009 January 2010	In a living room
16	Middle-age, African-American, mother, professional, New Orleans native and lifelong resident	January 2009 January 2010	At a NGO and kitchen table
17	Middle-age, African-American, father, longtime Lower Ninth Ward resident	January 2009	In a living room
18	Middle-age, African-American, male, professional, Lower Ninth Ward resident	January 2009	At a NGO
19	Middle-age, African-American, mother, professional, New Orleans native and lifelong resident	March 2012	At a NGO
20	Middle-age, African-American, mother, professional, New Orleans native and	August 2009	At a kitchen table

	longtime resident of the Lower Ninth Ward		
21	Middle age, Vietnamese, mother, married, professional, longtime Ninth Ward resident	October 2011	At a NGO
22	Middle aged, white, female, New Orleans resident	July 2011	At a kitchen table
23	Sexagenarian, African-American, grandfather, married, professional, New Orleans native and lifelong resident	January 2009 January 2010 January 2011	In living rooms and at a kitchen

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### MONIQUE HASSMAN

#### EDUCATION

**Ph.D. Dissertator** ~ Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2010 – Spring 2019 (Expected)

Post-Disaster Place-making Concentration; Critical Geographic Information Systems (GIS)  
(Advisor: Dr. William Wood)

**M.S.** ~ Anthropology & Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Certificate (2008)  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2010 (Advisor: Dr. Cheryl Ajitrotutu)

**B.A.** ~ Anthropology & Africology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, January 2005  
Cum Laude, National Senior Honors Roll, & Departmental Honors

**Technical Degree** ~ Automotive Repair & Maintenance, Milwaukee Area Technical  
College, May 1998

#### FELLOWSHIP AND AWARDS

- 2018 UW-Milwaukee Graduate School R1 Advanced Opportunity Program Fellowship (award: \$16,500)  
UW-Milwaukee Anthropology Memorial Award (award: \$750)  
UW-Milwaukee Anthropology Student Union Travel Grant Award (travel and accommodations to attend American Anthropological Association annual conference, San Jose, CA)  
UW-Milwaukee Geographic Information Systems Travel Grant Award, Spring 2018 (\$1500)
- 2016 Wisconsin Land Information Association's Damon Anderson Memorial Scholarship (award: \$1000)  
UW-Milwaukee's Center for Community-Based Learning, Leadership, and Research Outstanding Faculty Member Recognition
- 2015 UW-Milwaukee Anthropology Student Union Travel Grant (award: \$366.67)  
UW-Milwaukee Graduate Student Travel Grant (award: \$450)
- 2011 UW-Milwaukee Anthropology Student Union Travel Grant (award: \$300)  
UW-Milwaukee Graduate Student Travel Grant (Fall Semester) (award: \$250)  
UW-Milwaukee Graduate Student Travel Grant (Spring Semester) (award: \$250)
- 2010 Imagining America Publically Active Graduate Educator Fellow (award: travel and accommodations to attend annual conference, Seattle, WA)  
UW-Milwaukee Graduate Student Travel Grant (Fall Semester) (award: \$300)

Society for Cultural Anthropology Travel Grant Award, Spring 2010 (\$100)

- 2008 Environmental Science Research Institute's Student Assistantship (award: travel and accommodations to attend annual International Users Conference, San Diego, CA)  
UW-Milwaukee American Geographical Society Library, 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the "Best Student GIS Map Project" for "*Johnson Park Health Alliance Community Food Assessment*"  
UW-Milwaukee GIS Club Travel Grant Award (award: \$150)

#### **ACADEMIC AND PUBLIC LECTURES**

- 2018 Academic Opportunity Fellow Panel, Graduate Diversity & Inclusion McNair Visit Day, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, July 27
- 2016 Graduate Student Research Presentation, Innovation Center's Lunch and Learn Series, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 25
- 2015 "Treme: Exploring New Orleans After Hurricane Katrina On Film" Sociocultural Programming, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, March 31  
<http://uwm.edu/humanities/event/treme-exploring-new-orleans-after-hurricane-katrina-on-film/>
- 2015 "Critical History of Race in the United States", Race, Culture, and Activism Program, Youth Initiative High School, Viroqua, WI, April 2  
"Critical Anthropological Perspectives", Literature of the Oppressed, Youth Initiative High School, Viroqua, WI, April – May  
Ethics and Interviews Workshop, Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures Field School - "Field Study - Washington Park", Oral History Training, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, June 15
- 2014 "Planting and Place: Politics of Agriculture", Ethnographic Methods, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, April 30
- 2013 "Academic Perspectives of First Lego League's "Nature's Fury", 5-8 Grade Girls Robotics Team sponsored by the local Girl Scout Council, Notre Dame Middle School, Milwaukee, WI, October 9
- 2012 "Ethnographic Notes from the Field—Disaster Recovery and Resilience", Ethnic Studies: Global Violence, Disease, and Death, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, April 3
- 2011 "Culture(s), Place(s), Disaster(s)", Multicultural America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, April 20, October 18
- 2010 "Cultural Roots Run Deep Here", Multicultural America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, November 10  
"Social Intersections of Disaster", Introduction to Ethnic Minority Literature, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, November 6

“Post-Disaster Language: Katrinaisms”, Architecture Studio New Orleans,  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, September 14

2009 “Planting Place and Purpose: Localizing Urban Agriculture”, Globalization,  
Culture, and the Environment, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, November 5

### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

Instructor/Cartography  
Youth Initiative High School, 2018 - 2019

Adjunct Professor and Lecturer/Cultural Anthropology: Multicultural America  
UWM Department of Anthropology, 2013-2016

Instructor/Pre-Urban Planner Studies: GIS & Urban Planning  
UWM School of Architecture and Urban Planning, 2009

### **GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS**

Graduate Project Assistant, August 2007 – December 2013  
Cultures and Communities Programs: Community/University Partnership Grants,  
Community Scholar-in-Residence, UWM in New Orleans, development with Hmong  
Diasporic Studies and Islamic Studies Certificate, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee,  
Milwaukee, WI

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Winter Session, 2009 - 2012  
Departments of Anthropology and Social Work, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Winter Session, 2010 – 2011  
Department of Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Winter Session, 2009 - 2011  
Departments of Dance, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Graduate Teaching Assistant, August - December 2009  
Department of Architecture, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Graduate Teaching Assistant, September - December 2006  
Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

### **OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Internship, June 2018 – current  
Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Department, Viroqua, WI

GIS Technician, Land Information Office  
Land and Water Conservation Department, Viroqua, WI 2008-2010

Student Coordinator, August 2006 - May 2008

## **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

Ghana, West Africa, January 2005.

University of Wisconsin winter abroad Africology program - intensive study of cultures, politics, and economics in Ghana. Research included travel to rural and urban areas visiting historic and cultural sites (including a departure point for the Middle Passage and W.E.B DuBois Museum) and scholarship about cultural traditions, languages, and socioeconomic conditions.

Senegal, West Africa, May-July 2004

University of Wisconsin summer abroad Anthropology program and ethnographic field school – rigorous study of sociocultural and religious traditions. Research included travel to rural and urban areas to visit universities, mosques, community organizations, cultural centers, and historic sites (including a departure point for the Middle Passage on Gorée Island and Toubab Dialaw). Intensive foreign language study of Wolof and practice with ethnographic methods including participant/observation, fieldnotes, interviews, transcriptions, and documentary filmmaking.

Milwaukee, WI, United States

Multiple periods of living and working throughout the city conducting field research for thesis focused on practicing agriculture within an urban context to explore ethnic/racial and sociopolitical influences on practitioners and their related-activities. Sites frequented during this study and from which interview participants were established involve community gardens and organizations across the city (including Alice's Garden, Milwaukee Urban Gardens, Victory Gardens, and Milwaukee Urban Agriculture Network).

New Orleans, LA, United States, August 2009 – present

Multiple periods of field research for dissertation focused on post-disaster recovery-orientated activities taking place in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Research activities explore sociospatial transformation by establishing contacts with residents and organizations, visiting sites across the city and in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood, attending various nonprofit, community, religious, and governmental meetings. Also conducted (in)formal interviews and oral narratives with residents and collected spatial data for GIS mapping. Attended cultural traditions including festivals, art exhibits, music performances, Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs second line parades, funeral processions, and Mardi Gras Indian practices. Co-facilitated on site Community Scholar-in-Residence program and related activities (including tours, lectures, presentations).

## **REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS**

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Journal of Museum Anthropology, University of New Mexico, 2018  
Oxford University Press, 2016

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND PAPERS

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- 2018 “Try and Be A Lead On It”: Spatiotemporality in the (In)Distinguishable Process of Recovery Post-Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, LA, American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, San Jose, CA, November 14-18
- 2017 “This Is Not Normalcy Here”: Exploring Ethnocartography and Sociospatial Narratives in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, LA, American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Washington D.C., November 29 – Dec 3
- 2015 Transformations in Place: “The Original Rooftop Riders”, American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Denver, CO November 18-22
- 2011 “The Semiotics of Spatial Justice In Embodying Practice, Protest, and Processes At Madison, WI”  
American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Montreal, QC, Canada, November 16-20
- “Complex Aesthetics: Formal and Informal Expressions of Post-Disaster Louisiana”,  
National Social Science Research Association, New Orleans LA, October 9-10
- “I Can Get through Anything with Satsumas”: Agriculture, Landscape, and Productions of Knowledge” Co-authored Paper, Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA, March 29 – April 2  
<http://sfaapodcasts.net/2011/05/01/urban-food-systems-culture-and-security/>
- “The Worst Thing After Katrina Was The Silence: Reclaiming Community Through The Language Of Public Memory”, Co-authored Paper, Urban Affairs Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans LA, March 16-19
- 2010 “Examine the Role of Place and Place-makers in Civil Society”, Invited Roundtable Panelist, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Symposium on Power, Locale, and Embodied Placemaking, Milwaukee WI, October 7
- 2010 “Toward a Movement of Mutuality: Reflective Research in Rebuilding & Resiliency in New Orleans”, Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life National Conference, Seattle WA, September 23-25
- “Planting Place and Purpose in Milwaukee: An Ethnography of Localizing Urban Agriculture” Central States Anthropological Society Annual Meeting, Madison WI April 7-11
- “The Worst Thing After Katrina Was The Silence: Reclaiming Community Through The Language Of Public Memory” Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meeting, Mérida, México, March 24-27



2009 From Milwaukee to New Orleans: Organizing a Public Scholarship Project Within and Between Campuses and Communities”, Co-facilitator, Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life National Conference, New Orleans LA, October 1-3

## **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS**

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American Anthropology Association  
Association for Feminist Anthropology  
Culture and Agriculture  
National Association of Practicing Anthropologists  
National Association of Student Anthropologists  
Society for Applied Anthropology  
Society for Cultural Anthropology  
Society for Urban, National, and Transnational/Global Anthropology  
Society for the Anthropology of North America

## **VOLUNTEERISM AND SERVICE**

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Crawford Stewardship Project, Annual Love the Land Event Fundraiser, Co-coordinator of provisions 2016 - present

Louisiana Heroic 1811 Slave Revolt Tour Mapping for Louisiana Museum of African American History - Hidden Histories, New Orleans, LA, 2012

GIS Student Organization Vice President, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee 2010

Lindsay Heights Neighborhood Health Alliance Community Food Assessment Mapping, Milwaukee, WI, 2009-2010

Architecture Design Studio Reviewer, Studio New Orleans, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, October 26, 2009

New Orleans Food and Farm Network and Milwaukee Urban Agriculture Food Talk Farmer Poster Partnership Exchange, Spring 2009

Urban Ecology Center, GPS/GIS mapping assistance of new/existing food plots, Milwaukee, WI, 2009

GIS Council Student Representative, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2008-2009

## **TECHNICAL SKILLS**

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- Adobe Acrobat X Pro
- ArcGIS Desktop 10.5
- Desire to Learn D2L
- Google Blogger
- Google Earth Pro
- Microsoft Office Suite
- NVIVO
- Prezi
- SPSS Word Press
- Survey Monkey