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Bulldozed: Innovative Strategies for Addressing the Mental Health Consequences of Gentrification

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Bull-dozed


Innovative Strategies for Addressing the Mental Health Consequences of Gentrification

Vanessa Jackson, LCSW

Lionel Scott, Ph.D.

Georgia State University

Community Forum 2008



A stick on its own is easily broken but if you put sticks in a bundle that bundle becomes very strong, so strong that you cannot break it.

A spirit on its own can be easily broken. But bundled together we will not break. That is our power and our strength.

Malawian Proverb

Four Healing Questions

- 1) What happened to you (your people)?
- 2) How does what happened to you (or your people) affect you now?
- 3) How, in spite of what happened, have you (your people) been able to triumph?
- 4) What do you (your people) need to heal?

Many thanks to Pemina Yellow Bird for the three original questions and to Makungu Akinyela for the addition of question three.

The image features a dark, gradient background that transitions from a light brownish-grey at the top to a dark grey at the bottom. A thin, pixelated horizon line is visible at the top, showing a landscape with hills and a sky. The text "What Happened to Us" is centered in the middle of the image in a white, serif font.

What Happened to Us

The image features a dark, gradient background that transitions from a light brownish-grey at the top to a dark grey at the bottom. At the very top, there is a thin, horizontal strip of a pixelated landscape, showing a horizon line with some light blue and brown tones, suggesting a sky and ground. Centered in the middle of the dark area is the text "Springfield, Illinois" in a white, serif font.

Springfield, Illinois



























Atlanta, Georgia



*" A Weed and Seed Community:
The Key Question is who is being weeded and
who is being seeded?"*



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Senior Center Across the Street from the Federal Prison







Thomasville Heights Public Housing Complex slated for closure in 2008 (no relocation plan in place). To the east of the complex is a HUGE landfill.



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APARTMENTS

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APARTMENTS
&
SENIOR APARTMENT
HOUSES

LEASING FOR
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How does what happened to us affect us now?

What is root shock?

Root shock is the traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem. This metaphor is taken from botany. Plants suffer from root shock when they are relocated from one place to another. The loss of the familiar soil—with its particular texture and balance of nutrients—and the inevitable damage to the root system cause the plant injury or early death.



Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity
A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon
General (2001)

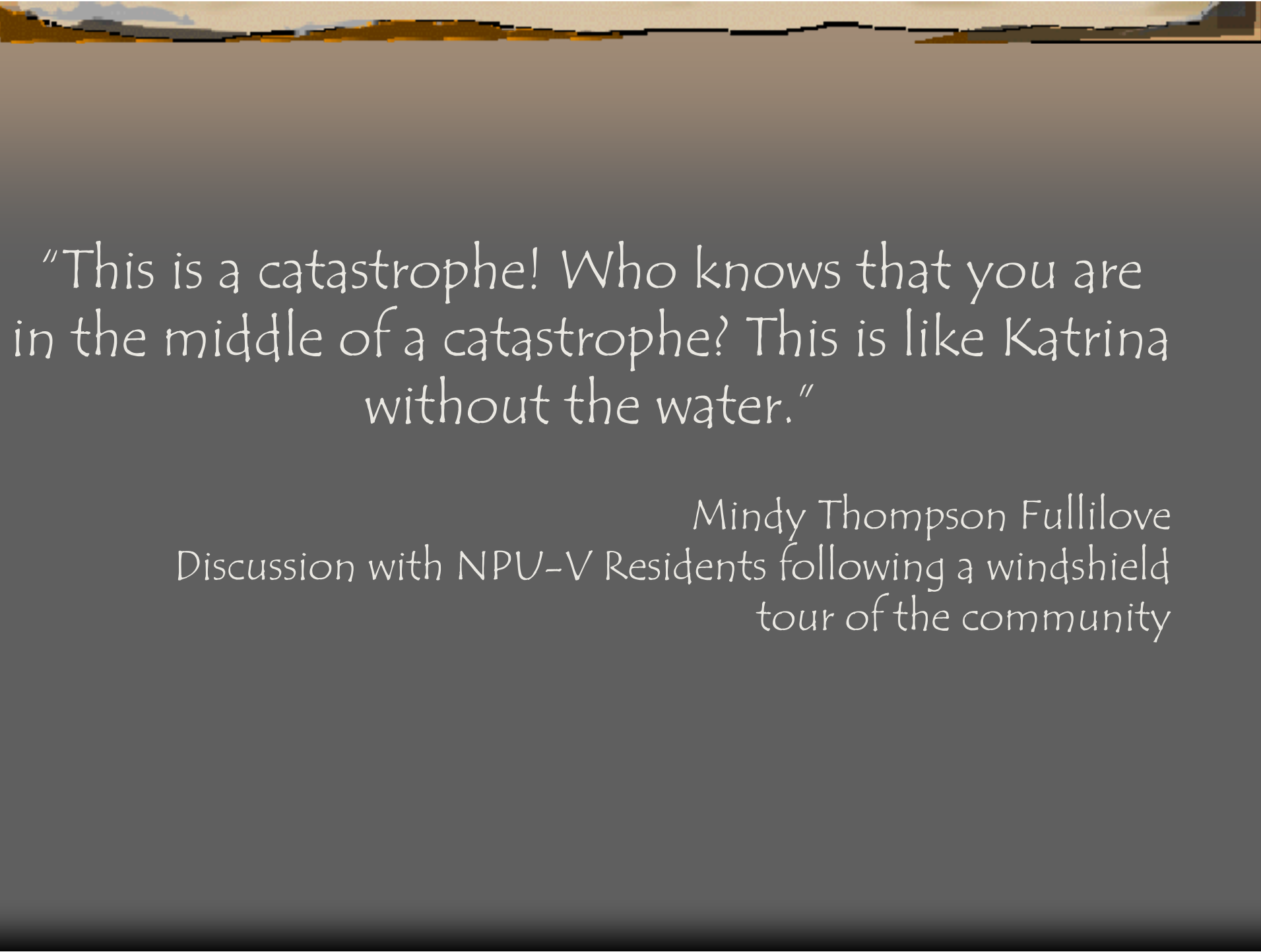
A major finding of the supplement is that racial and ethnic minorities bear a greater burden from unmet health needs and thus suffer a greater loss to their overall health and productivity.

Racism and discrimination adversely affect health and they place minorities *at risk for* mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. Whether racism and discrimination can by themselves cause these disorders is less clear, yet deserves research attention.



Speak Out/Brainstorm

Based on your experiences and/or observations, how has development induced displacement and economic under-development of targeted (read: Black) communities negatively impacted the mental health of residents (displaced and remaining)?



"This is a catastrophe! Who knows that you are in the middle of a catastrophe? This is like Katrina without the water."

Mindy Thompson Fullilove
Discussion with NPU-V Residents following a windshield
tour of the community



Recurrent Themes in Community With Survivors of Development Induced Displacement

- ◇ Anger /Rage
- ◇ Fear/Anxiety
- ◇ Grief
- ◇ Invisibility
- ◇ Despair
- ◇ Worthlessness
- ◇ Challenge Sustaining Hope



"We have lost our wisdom."


Comment from a Photo Voice participant as she reflected on the mass relocation/dislocation of elders in the community due to gentrification

Fiscal Trauma

While this concept of poverty as trauma requires further study, it is a useful metaphor to utilize in dialogues with low-wage earning individuals because it appropriately captures the life-threatening and shame inducing experiences that result from inadequate income and resources.

When fiscal trauma is explored in clinical settings, individuals often report feelings of anxiety and panic, depression, despair, hopelessness, fear, anger, rage, a sense of worthlessness and low self-esteem. These feelings can often persist after economic stabilization has been achieved. It is useful for clinicians to explore what impact economic lack has on an individual's sense of self, their relationships with family and friends, their views about economic and career possibilities and their relationship with their community.

Clinical conversations should also include a discussion of external factors (social, economic, political, geographical) that impact the individual's access to necessary resources.



How, in spite of what happened, have we been able to triumph?



Love Is Our Bloodline

Love is profoundly political. Our deepest revolution will come when we understand this truth. Only love can give us the strength to go forward in the midst of heartbreak and misery. Only love can give us the power to reconcile, to redeem, the power to renew weary spirits and save lost souls. The transformative power of love is the foundation of all meaningful social change. Without love our lives are without meaning. Love is the heart of the matter. When all else has fallen away, love sustains.

bell hooks, Salvation: Black People and Love







The Center for Black Women's Wellness
founded by the Black Women's Health Project in
Collaboration with Community members in 1988.
Operating as an independent organization since 1996

NPU-V Mental Health Collaborative

The Mental Health Collaborative was formed in 2006 to address the complex mental health consequences of family and community dislocation due to gentrification on Neighborhood Planning Unit V which includes Adair Park, Capitol Homes, Mechanicsville, Peoplestown, Pittsburgh and Summerhill neighborhoods in Atlanta, Georgia. We are committed to working collaboratively to ensure that the individuals and families receive culturally appropriate mental health resources to assist them in dealing with forced relocation and the loss of multigenerational relationships due to gentrification.

The Mental Health Collaborative is represented by the Adinkra symbol Eban which means love, safety, and security. This symbol reflects the commitment of collaborative partners to create safe, loving and secure communities for new and existing families living in NPU-V.

The Dirty Truth

The Dirty Truth Campaign represents a group of residents of Neighborhood Planning Unit-V (neighborhoods in Atlanta near Turner Field) and partner organizations who want an end to the trash, construction debris and vacant properties that are plaguing the community.

In 2006, approximately 20 residents of NPU-V used a process called Photovoice (see www.photovoice.com) to take pictures, tell stories, and reach policymakers about the issues that concern them the most. The theme that kept resurfacing was the impact of the built environment on residents' quality of life. Our technical assistance request to The Neighborhood Data Advisory Group revealed that there are 1296 vacant or unoccupied properties in NPU-V, representing 42% of all properties.

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Relational View of Healing

o Emphasizes the importance of community to individual well-being. Individual healing was not possible without consideration of extended social relationships.


o Black healers grounded their work in notions of spiritual power, human relationships and community resourcefulness, thus addressing a wider range of healing needs than slaveholders considered legitimate.

Healing Principles for African Americans

- Privileges the experiences/stories of the person.
- Based on an understanding of the historical, economic, social, political context of the person.
- Honors the spiritual traditions of the person.
- Fosters connections with family and the wider community.
- Creates space for the expression of grief and anger that has been historically denied to African American people.
- Creates space for recovery and celebration of resilience and creativity stories.
- Expands the concept of healing space beyond the consultation room.



What Do We Need To Heal?



It is important for us to ground our political movements in an understanding of history because the forces of oppression that have so effectively silenced and separated us benefit from our ignorance regarding past abuses and successes.

Vanessa Jackson
In Our Own Voice: African-American Stories of Oppression, Survival and Recovery in Mental Health Systems

Promising Interventions

- ◊ Self Help Groups
- ◊ Community Listening Circles
- ◊ Conflict Resolution skills to address the mistrust that can tear organizations apart and block the exchange of information.

Proposed Projects for 2008

- ◊Communiversality
- ◊ Movie Night community gathering
- ◊ Ropheka Community Café (literacy and discussion group)
- ◊Black Top Circus Improv Workshop
- ◊Community Mental Health clinic at Dunbar Center in collaboration with Georgia State University
- ◊CBWW Healthy Body/Healthy Spirit Education/Support Group (body image and emotional eating)
- ◊Continue Dirty Truth Campaign

Group Discussion/Brainstorm

How can the GSU community best support the NPU-V community?

Consider individual and institutional interventions and collaborations.

What are some interdisciplinary projects that might be beneficial to the NPU-V community?



We are, all of us, richer than we think we are.

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Guardians of Our Own Health

“The experience left me with many convictions, none stronger than believing that significant change in relation to issues of health is most likely to come about when those most affected are empowered to take action. I also learned the flipside of this equation- that unless those affected by illness take leadership, especially those in poor neighborhoods, then they will never receive the resources they deserve. There is no choice but to take leadership and action.

America Bracho

Latino Health Access