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Landscapes of Recovery: Belonging and Place in Post-Katrina Literatures

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LANDSCAPES OF RECOVERY: BELONGING AND PLACE IN POST-KATRINA

LITERATURES

by

Lee M. Abbott

A Dissertation Submitted in

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ABSTRACT

LANDSCAPES OF RECOVERY: BELONGING AND PLACE IN POST-KATRINA
LITERATURES
by

Lee M. Abbott

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018
Under the Supervision of Professor Andrew Kincaid

In *Landscapes of Recovery: Belonging and Place in Post-Katrina Literatures*, I analyze

narratives of physical and social change following the events of Hurricane Katrina while

providing a critical reading of the representations of New Orleans's and the Gulf Coast's urban

landscapes in works of urban planning, nonfiction literature, and activist writing. A general line

of inquiry informs this project: how do narratives about the disaster landscape following Katrina

make visible or invisible certain political subjects? I assert that, by telling stories about the post-

and pre-disaster landscape and its urban development history, these narratives carry out the

process of displacement. Through a discursive analysis and close reading of a range of texts,

including recovery plans, government reports, creative nonfiction, and public art projects, I

explore how the writings about New Orleans's disaster landscapes maintain and remake social

differences within the urban population that make displacement possible. Overall, in *Landscapes

of Recovery*, I argue that it is through these narratives about the urban space affected by disaster

that notions of property, community, and belonging are contested.

For Ava, who made the road with me.

For my mother, Joan.

For my father, Richard.

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completed what I came there to do. Were my mother here to see this day, I believe that she would

be beaming. My son, Alberto, watched me write this project as he grew up, and so I both hope

that my completing this project brings him a sense of accomplishment as well. And I hope that he

understands one day why I did this. And finally, I give my utmost gratitude to my wife and

partner, Ava: the only person who comes closest to understanding how this project took shape,

what it means to me personally, and how it grew out of our shared love for justice and the people

and culture of Louisiana.

Introduction

Writing in *The New York Times* within days of Hurricane Katrina's impact, David Brooks announced how the storm presented a dramatic opportunity for social change: "[Hurricane Katrina] has created as close to a blank slate as we get in human affairs, and given us a chance to rebuild a city that wasn't working. We need to be realistic about how much we can actually change human behavior, but it would be a double tragedy if we didn't take advantage of these unique circumstances to do something that could serve as a spur to antipoverty programs nationwide." Displacement of the city's working-class and black majority by the hurricane was only the first step; the second step would be to relocate the displaced poor into new environments that would supply the values they need to survive as productive and self-sufficient members of society.

While we might easily dismiss Brooks as a conservative enamored with the opportunities for creative destruction, his proposals reflect the dominant political consensus about how to solve inequality and reduce poverty. This consensus follows the trajectory of the narrative about urban development that has been dominant since the 1990s. This ideology of development argues that "zones of concentrated poverty," such as inner city slums and public housing complexes, should be broken up in order for their inhabitants to "culturally integrate" with the middle-class, in the hope that middle-class values will rub off on the indigent. "The only chance we have to break the cycle of poverty," Brooks continues, "is to integrate people who lack middle-class skills into neighborhoods with people who possess these skills and who insist on certain standards of behavior." Such would be the ethical and spatial outcome of the narrative of social uplift carried

out by forces of displacement. While Brooks never uses the words "black" or "African-American" in his op-ed, his references clearly apply to the conditions of New Orleans' black majority, who comprised the vast majority of Katrina's displaced population and make up the majority of public housing residents. He conflates race with terms for class in order to suggest that the possession of "middle-class skills" can be assessed through a form of cultural integration, but also treats class like a culturally inherited or environmentally determined trait, as a lack of skills and insistence on values.

Brooks's proposal assumes the dominant narratives of development that have circulated in economic theory and urban planning advocated by proponents of modernization and neoliberalism. Disaster implied "opportunity" for social and material development, for fixing a "city that wasn't working" (Brooks). According to James Ferguson, narratives of modernization, such as Brooks's, presume a "developmental time line" that narrates history as a process of evolutionary advancement toward the idealized form of liberal democratic state operating through an industrial capitalist economy (173-4). Ferguson's discussion of the narrative of development and modernity introduces a valuable perspective for situating the concerns of post-disaster recovery and the encounters with landscape we find in post-Katrina texts. While Brooks's position had politically powerful supporters in the federal and local governments, I became further interested in the dominance of this narrative when, upon reading the work of social justice advocates working in the Lower Ninth Ward, I noticed a similar investment among the activists on the left in narratives of improvement and post-disaster opportunity. While their specific proposals differed greatly from Brooks's, members of the anarchist relief group Common Ground appeared to echo the notion that a "recovery" should not simply restore the

city to its pre-storm condition but should offer a transformative plan for the neighborhood. The Common Ground activists based their plans on a radical re-reading of Louisiana's history that emphasized the patterns of struggle and resistance faced by Louisiana's black communities. While different in terms of social analysis, both Brooks and Common Ground relied on narratives that regarded disaster as a source of social change and progress.

During the course of my reading on the recent history of the post-storm recovery plans, I came across a fascinating passage in *The Trouble with City Planning*, Kristina Ford's critical analysis of New Orleans' post-Katrina planning. In this text Ford theorizes the ethical relationship between the rhetoric of city planning and the notion of social unification:

> Good planning consists of devising a language to unify a city dealing with events both foreseeable and not, with new enthusiasm and even with new citizens. The language of good city planning doesn't suppose it can reconcile contradictory aspirations among its residents, but instead provides for their coexistence. The language of a good plan makes a place cohesive and holds its citizens together, makes them see their destiny as intertwined. (Ford 90-1)

Ford's statement argues for grounding planning in an ethical concern for the social cohesion and unity of "citizens." Underlying Ford's argument that the language or rhetoric of plans should "provide for [residents'] coexistence," is a sense that the profession of urban planning has somehow become disconnected from its socially incorporative role. Her text traces the origins of urban planning to the Progressive Era in order to argue that contemporary planning no longer functions as these socially progressive modernizers had intended, as an arbiter between the state and contending social classes; as mediator between property owners, businesses, and "interest

groups" with a shared concern over the disposition of land use and the functioning of city infrastructure and services. For instance, Ford argues that the first post-Katrina plans "focused attention solely on the physical form of the city as it might appear at some point in an unspecified future" (75), instead of indicating how residents' own desires and needs would find a place within the rebuilt city.

At the same time, I am particularly drawn to Ford's belief that the work of planning and the writing of plans is to "make a place cohesive and hold its citizens together, make them see their destiny as intertwined" (Ford 90-1). In her analysis, the failure of post-Katrina planning, and the "trouble" threatening urban planning in the U.S., in general, is the failure to secure the promises of the universal public sphere. The impact of the storm and the difficulties of implementing a plan for reconstruction after Katrina are here conceptualized as crises for the liberal public sphere that underpinned concepts of democracy. As Wendy Brown explains, the state's legitimacy is grounded in its claim to universality. For her, the state "figures an ideal in which markers of class, race, gender, and so forth no longer matter and hence in which the social powers constitutive of these markers have truly been abolished, not simply declared irrelevant" (475). This achievement is "politically ambiguous," Brown says, because it prefigures a moment of ideal standing before the law that is universal, while it also removes from the fields of vision and political redress those social powers that contrive and constitute hierarchy through difference. In this way, Ford's writing is indicative of a broader critical conversation, in which writers reflecting on different aspects of the post-Katrina recovery have observed and sought to theorize the changing relationship between the state and its citizens. My project turns to the story of post-Katrina planning and the recovery process. It is a story about how the state manages

citizenship and makes displacement a constant and repeated state of affairs for some groups of its population, regardless of legal citizenship status.

A general line of inquiry informs *Landscapes of Recovery*: how do the writings about New Orleans' recovery of disaster landscapes critique or reify differences, maintain displacement, and remake populations into subjects worthy of returning to the rebuilt city? My dissertation argues that after Katrina, narratives of development and history have been the site of struggle between planners and displaced residents. As I address the modes of cultural production and writing through which people resist displacement, I am also interested in the incompleteness of this resistance, the ways it does not always achieve its goals, or how "resistance" requires negotiation with the dominant discourses of urban planning and economic development.

In this project, I seek to frame the relationship between the state and the subjects produced by displacement caused by Hurricane Katrina and the recovery process, viewing the planning and mapping processes as contestations over the terms of citizenship, property, and subject formation. In my approach to texts produced after Katrina throughout this dissertation, I seek to critique liberal conceptions of sovereignty and citizenship, specifically how rights and the process of subject formation are inscribed in property arrangements, and how they are narrated, argued, and contested through post-Katrina literary and nonfiction narratives that contend with the transformation of the city. The shaping of space that occurred through the city's planning process, and the mapping of new neighborhoods and parks, raises questions about the meaning of citizenship and the regulation of social relations in the post-storm city: for example, how do plans for recovery actually bring the conditions of displacement to an end? How do such plans normalize displacement for non-owners and residents of neighborhoods that have "historical"

value? Drawing particularly on the work of Nicholas Blomley and Katrina Powell, I argue that displacement is a discursive project carried out both through testimonies, spatial narratives of planning, and mapping that renders certain populations disposable and displaceable. This perspective allows me to raise several questions that I endeavor to answer throughout this dissertation: do plans for return and redevelopment actually end displacement? How does planning and mapping for "recovery" in fact render certain populations displaceable? And conversely, how do plans, as biopolitical technologies, construct the ideal subjects and spaces for re-investment?

Theoretical Framework

I situate this project within narrative approaches to urban planning, disaster, and displacement. Therefore, I turn to the following works that frame my reading of planning and displacement in the dissertation. In *Planning as Persuasive Storytelling*, James Throgmorton posits a rhetorical theory of urban planning that centers the role of narrative in the conceptualization of cities and their future development. He argues that, following the period of modernist master planners, "late modern" planners must come to see themselves as, "future-oriented storytellers who write persuasive and constitutive texts that other people read (construct and interpret) in diverse and often conflicting ways" (Throgmorton 46). This "rhetorical turn" in planning theory represents an adaptation to the demise of the technocratic model of modernist planning, in which a lead planner operated from the assumption of privileged, scientific, and singular access to what was "true" and "good" for the public. The modernist model of planning was legitimated by an ethos of rational deliberation, professional training, and the application of

scientific measurements needed to coordinate the social and economic development of the built environment. A postmodern urbanism, according the Throgmorton, recognizes the fragmented nature of the city and the public. According to Throgmorton, the city is a "fragmented" place, with various groups offering divergent stories about the city, their needs, and how to implement changes in the built environment (38).

Of particular note is Throgmorton's assertion that "planners should surrender any further pretense to the neutrality, objectivity, and universal Truth and Goodness that modernists hoped to find on the central plateau… [t]hey should, instead, embrace the idea that planning is scientific *and* political, technical *and* persuasive, and that the 'tools' planners use act as tropes (persuasive figures of speech and argument) in the planning stories that they tell" (Throgmorton 5). These planners, who "surrender" their pretensions to universal representation and "embrace" the rhetorical construction of the plans they write, become one among many storytellers engaged in the narrative of city development. This perspective indicates that through the literature and discourse of urban planning, the conception of the city is itself a contested project that is constituted by the multitude of stories told about it. Rhetorical approaches to planning offered greater recognition to the situated and partial perspectives of all participants in the planning process. It emphasized the persuasive strategies and divergent responses readers bring to modern planning situations. Plans, as texts, constitute both the planner and the people and places planned for. Today, when "no one rhetoric has a *prima facie* right to be privileged over others" (Throgmorton 38), planners must engage and incorporate the "partial truths" and multiple stories that animate the everyday life of people and places that planners construct in

their work. In other words, the constitution of the city and the social relations of its inhabitants could no longer be reduced to a single narrative of modernization.

Throughout *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property*, legal geographer Nicholas Blomley similarly applies narrative concepts to the notion of "landscape," emphasizing the contested and conflictual basis upon which visual representations and material productions of land are carried out. As a concept, landscape can mean both a physical place and the visual representation of space. Because these representations and material processes are never devoid of intentions and politics, for Blomley, "[l]andscape is a social embodiment of the relations and struggles that went into building it" (53). Specifically, Blomley is interested in the means by which landscapes normalize the enclosure of land into property and serve as powerful means by which private ownership over land is enacted. Landscape is a product of spatial narratives and representations that, within dominant forms of representation, mapping, and narrative, reinforced the perception of property ownership as natural and inevitable.

In addition to his conceptual framework for thinking about landscape, Blomley provides this project with an important conception of displacement, which I develop further in Chapter One. Blomley argues that the material and representational contests over landscape are a critical means through which dispossession and displacement take place. As he points out, "stories told about place… order and legitimate native dispossession in the city. Entangled in those stories, and offering physical and representational justification for them, are landscapes that are both material and representational" (Blomley 114). Displacement in Blomley's writing involves the "spatial narratives" and visual representations of landscape carried out in literature, plans, and maps that persuasively legitimate the removal of native or original occupants. This discursive

framework implies that displacement is carried out in terms of representations, and is therefore also open to counter-representations, counter-maps, and alternative histories that "contest" the dominant narratives of spatial development and social order. This enabling and contesting nature of displacement discourses provides my dissertation with an important conceptual guide, as I seek to understand both how texts about displacement and the landscape contest the forces of dispossession.

Informing this dissertation is the contention that, at the root of displacement and dispossession are struggles over the meaning of sovereignty and citizenship. In my analysis of the narrative and visual representations of post-Katrina landscapes, I examine how narratives and spatial representations of landscape are linked to state practices of displacement. As displacement scholars Christopher McDowell and Gareth Morrell have argued, "displaced and relocated communities are a particular case because they are compelled or forcibly displaced and relocated in a situation in which past securities have been removed, and vulnerability suddenly in the case of disasters, and usually more gradually in the case of development projects, is externally but legally imposed and often sanctioned" (164). The objects of this dissertation, therefore, are also situated within this transnational context, where conditions of displacement caused by a variety of conflict- and non-conflict-based scenarios informs our understanding about the status of democratic states and the unravelling, in many cases, of their guarantees of protection and rights for their citizens. The turn of the twenty-first century has seen the intensification of two concurrent transnational developments that inform how scholars understand the transformation of state sovereignty: the consolidation of neoliberalism as the primary mode of urban governance and the normalization of displacement and mass migrations.

By neoliberalism, I mean both a political program involving the rolling back of social welfare and public services and a mode of political governance aimed at subjecting urban space and urban life to the discipline of the market. Throughout my reading of post-Katrina texts, I seek to interrogate how various spatial notions such as "landscape," "community," and "neighborhood" are re-interpreted by the conditions of neoliberal governance and state-sanctioned displacement. Based on my analysis of the writing about these various spatial concepts, I discuss how subjects of displacement are formed and how they are "rendered displaceable" through the discourses and representations of their lives and the places where they have lived.

Works in the fields of anthropology, political theory, and transnational cultural studies have sought to understand how displacement and dispossession are increasingly utilized by nation-states in order to differentiate, and thus manage and control, populations within their national territory. A particularly important text for my conceptualization of neoliberalism and displacement is Aihwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality.* In her work, Ong describes how the circumstances of globalization have induced governments to cede degrees of sovereignty over the lives, working conditions, and legal rights of their subjects to the corporations from whom they seek financial investment. Instead, according to Ong, states subject their populations to uneven forms of regulation and surveillance, creating what she refers to as "zones of graduated sovereignty" across which these states operate "a system of variegated citizenship in which populations subjected to different regimes of value enjoy different kinds of rights, discipline, caring, and security" (217). While externally the state is territorially coherent and bounded, internally it has established various spatial and social boundaries based on how populations are categorized and valued, in accordance with the state's desire to manage and

produce populations "that are attractive to global capital" (Ong 216). And it establishes the power to exclude, rather than to politically integrate, as the primary expression of sovereign authority. For Ong,

> These zones of graduated sovereignty thus call into question the uniformity of citizenship and the kinds of political or moral claims that subjects can make on state power. More and more, the state's authority as legitimized power depends on modes of regulation that are morally justified in terms of a hegemonic cultural model that defines normal and deviant subjects even as it conceals relations of inequality between the ruler and the ruled. (Ong 232)

In other words, the meaning of citizenship within a given political territory can no longer be considered uniformly applicable to all subjects. Ong's key claim is that, within a defined national territory, states may give up on the idea of "uniform regulatory authority over all their citizens" (217), leading to areas where the privatization of state responsibility has become the norm. If the bourgeois public sphere established the underpinning of liberal political theory and the role of the citizen, the transnational condition and pressures on the state alter how capital, territory, and state sovereignty intersected. Ong notes that the experience of globalization and the mobility of capital have led states to restructure their social and political relations, "refashioning sovereignty" over portions of its territory to induce capital investments and produce populations that are attractive to the labor and consumer demands of transnational businesses. This has meant that the normative ideals of the public sphere which had initially been grounded in universal accessibility have now become the subject of uneven "biopolitical investments" (Ong 217).

Chapter Descriptions

Landscapes of Recovery examines post-Katrina narratives and visual texts that attempt to grasp the problems of displacement and resettlement, as well as social and environmental recovery in relation to larger organizing concepts regarding community, urban development, and social movements. Chapters One and Three primarily examine plans for rebuilding the city or guiding its economic development practices. Chapters Two and Four offer readings of nonfiction texts from two different genres of post-storm literature: Chapter Two examines memoirs and testimonial accounts of the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina's landfall, while Chapter Four conducts a reading of nonfiction writing engaged with questions of social movements and left-wing recovery organizations. As New Orleans comes to exemplify a transnational model for radically remaking urban governance, planning, and the public sphere through neoliberal reforms, in each chapter I have sought to re-situate the texts written about Katrina within the framework of biopolitics and sovereignty.

The first chapter, "'We Were Never on the Map': Mapping Displacement and Return in Post-Katrina Plans," focuses on the maps and plans composed by two recovery planning projects after Hurricane Katrina. The first plan that I examine was produced by the Urban Land Institute, *A Strategy for Rebuilding* (2006). I compare this plan and its accompanying citywide map to a contemporary neighborhood recovery plan, the "Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Planning Workshops" (2006). In this chapter, I read these different recovery maps as narratives of displacement, through which subjects are rendered either displaceable or deserving of return and resettlement. Drawing on Blomley's conception of displacement as the socially enacted and

iterative dimension of the process of physical dispossession, I center my analysis of these plans on how each narrates and visually represents land as property and how the re-emplacement of physically relocated residents is predicated on adopting the social values associated with property ownership. Over the course of this chapter, I critically interrogate what it means to "resist" or "contest" displacement. While the official discourses of recovery planning represented by the ULI plan represented areas of the city as undesirable, dangerous, or disposable, plans that were imagined as "resistant," like the MQVN plan, negotiate with the official planning discourses that shape representations of the urban landscape and how its recovery is predicated on neoliberal conceptions of citizenship and the ownership of private property. In particular, I suggest that displacement is ultimately narrated and legitimated by these maps, and that the attempt to appropriate the tools of urban design to contest displacement by urban minority communities leads to problematic results.

Chapter Two, "Recalcitrant Landscapes: Post-Katrina Nonfiction and the Problem of Memory and Violence," continues my inquiry into displacement narratives while moving to the literary depiction of disaster landscapes in the testimonial writings related to the experience of the storm. This chapter's primary texts are Chris Rose's *1 Dead in Attic* (2005), Natasha Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina* (2009), and Dave Eggers' *Zeitoun* (2009). Each of these testimonial and nonfiction texts depict post-disaster landscapes that are shaped by acts of natural disaster and state violence, in particular the forced evacuation of the region's population *after* Katrina. In this chapter I interrogate how these works represent disaster landscapes and signs of state violence as provoking crises of individual and collective memory.

Chapter Three, "'This New Way of Governing': Resilience, Blight, and the Revision of Urban History," analyzes the condition of blight after Katrina in the context of the recent public art projects and city plans for implementing strategies for "resilient" and "sustainable" approaches to future crises and natural hazards. This chapter expands upon my earlier analyses of property, displacement, and subject formation in Chapters One and Two by examining the emergence of a "resilient" model of government in New Orleans, exemplified by the city's strategy for reducing blight. As Bruce Braun identifies, in the face of climate change and frequent natural disasters, a set of practices, discourses, and techniques of government have coalesced around the concept of "resilience," which seeks to manage urban life through adaptation to the risks of globalization and climate change. This chapter places the city government's efforts to manage and reduce blighted property, contained in the mayor's *Blight Reduction Report* (2014), in relation to public art works such as *The Music Box*, which was designed and installed by a collective of street artists and musicians who sought to recuperate the image of blighted buildings. Art projects such as these were intended to resist displacement and critique the demolition of historic properties in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. Developing this critical perspective on resilience, I argue that resilience-oriented city planners are particularly concerned with reconstructing the city's history of urban development and environmental management in order to shape how city residents accept and adapt to the risks of future economic and climate crises. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the revision of historical narratives about urban development and water management conducted by two key texts of recent post-Katrina planning, the mayor's report *Resilient New Orleans* (2015) and Goody Clancy's *A Plan for the 21st Century* (2010). These texts seek to normalize this resilient

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mode of governing urban life, revising the past by placing contemporary resilient strategies into an account of how the city's urban development and water management were practiced in a sustainable manner prior to the twentieth century.

Chapter Four, "Left in the Disaster Zone: Resisting Disaster and Forming Community in Post-Katrina Social Movement Writing," continues to survey and explore works of nonfiction writing related to the post-disaster recovery. This chapter analyzes passages from two books about the social justice movements and organizations that emerged in New Orleans following the disaster: Rebecca Solnit's *A Paradise Built in Hell* and Jordan Flaherty's *Community and Resistance.* I focus specifically on how these works discuss and analyze the role of white volunteers associated with the relief organization Common Ground Collective, an anarchist-inspired organization operating in the Ninth Ward and Algiers neighborhoods. Taking positions within a debate happening among social movement organizers involved in the recovery, Flaherty and Solnit assess the work of Common Ground and its relationship to New Orleans' histories of "cultural resistance" and black cultural expression. Both works, I argue, attempt to navigate the ethically complex questions raised by activists who have criticized volunteerism and white activist presence in predominantly black neighborhoods where displacement has significantly reduced the population. I enter this debate by looking at how the sources ground their critiques or celebrations of Common Ground's post-disaster relief work in arguments about New Orleans' cultural exceptionalism. This chapter looks at the intersection of culture, political resistance, and the effects of displacement through an analysis of how the texts assemble these concepts and attempt to fashion an ethical solution to the problem of displacement and the role of social justice movements in the re-development and resettlement of disaster-affected landscapes.

These chapters comprise a story about how, through engagement with the social repercussions of the hurricane, the consequences of neoliberal urban development are debated, interpreted, and negotiated by planners, activists, residents, and writers. Across my consideration of the various texts and genres brought together in *Landscapes of Recovery*, I argue that the urban space affected by disaster emerges as a zone in which different notions of property, community, and belonging are contested. This contestation and debate over the future post-Katrina urban space are continually being reshaped by and responding to a context of ever-deepening crisis produced by displacement and dispossession, privatization of public assets, entrenched poverty and enormous inequality, and the continued threat of environmental catastrophe and even stronger tropical weather. And yet, these crises are counterbalanced by the continual claim made by residents and activists to a long tradition of cultural belonging and histories of resistance to racial and class oppression.

Chapter One:

"We Were Never On the Map": Mapping Displacement and Return in Post-Katrina Plans

Introduction

Midway through *A Village Called Versailles* (2010), S. Leo Chiang's documentary film about New Orleans' Vietnamese-American community, two examples of post-disaster planning maps briefly appear. Both are crucial turning points in the narrative of the film. The first occurs at the public unveiling of the first post-Katrina recovery plan when the film's protagonist, local Catholic priest, Father Vien Nguyen, gestures to the Urban Land Institute's rebuilding framework map (Figure 1.1). The map shows a city divided by wide green swaths where planners envision replacing low-lying, heavily flooded neighborhoods, like Versailles, with new green spaces, parks, and flood basins. Versailles, the mostly Vietnamese-American neighborhood where the priest and his parishioners live, has been shoved entirely off the map's frame. In an interview with the filmmaker, Father Vien[1] points out that "[t]he map ended right on our border… We were not on the map, literally" (Chiang). Through the apt metaphor of "being on the map," Father Vien renders in commonsense language how maps not only reveal and represent but also arrange and occlude relationships in space, separating and marking who and what matters from who and what does not. Although the ULI map was shelved and replaced by subsequent recovery plans, it remains historically significant as an early target of residents' post-storm protests against aspects of the recovery planning process, such as its proposal to restrict redevelopment to the least inundated land and its association with the interests of real estate developers like Joseph

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[1] Throughout this paper, I refer to Father Vien Nguyen as Father Vien, following the convention used in *A Village Called Versailles*.

Canizaro.[2] Over the course of the film Chiang further extends the imagery of the map,

illustrating how the planners' failure to include Versailles within the frame of the map reflects a

deeper failure to include its majority Vietnamese-American residents in the planning process, a

continuation of the social isolation, racism, and misrepresentation they have faced for decades.[3]

In response to this act of erasure from the recovery plan, the film's second moment of

mapping involves Father Vien's collaboration with architects and planners to develop an

alternative plan for Versailles. Here, Chiang includes brief images of the new designs which were

produced with residents' input. We see renderings of what Versailles could look like: plans for a

thriving neighborhood and commercial district inspired by Vietnamese architecture and the latest

thinking in transit-oriented urban design. Attempting to challenge the erasure of Versailles, the

new community plan employs New Urbanist design and mapping techniques to compose their

own self-generated production of space. The film directly counterposes this example of

community participation and planning with the city's official planning process. Through these

moments of mapping, Chiang constructs a narrative about how the Vietnamese-American

community emerged as liberal political subjects, as citizens rather than refugees or displaced

persons, who place themselves "on the map" despite the narratives of cultural otherness imposed

on them. In this way, the film implies that plans and maps for recovery operations also

participate in the discourses and representations that seek to disable the residents' claims to equal

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[2] Kristina Ford divides New Orleans' post-Katrina planning process into four phases, of which the Bring New Orleans Back Commission oversaw the first phase. Subsequent phases, according to Ford, entailed a period of "laissez-faire" rebuilding without any overarching plan, followed by a second planning process overseen by the City Council and consultants from Lambert Advisory, LLC, called the *Neighborhood Rebuilding Planning* (2006). Finally, the fourth phase in Ford's sequence, the Unified New Orleans Plan, was initiated in 2007 with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation in an effort to kick-start the stalled recovery planning process and to secure Congressional recovery funds (Ford 237-9).

[3] Special thanks to Tuan Nguyen of Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation and Trang Tu for assistance in my research on the Versailles neighborhood.

protection and property rights. Part of what has enabled this othering, and which perpetuates that sense of disposability, is the narrative that renders the Versailles residents, and the neighborhood of Versailles itself, as displaceable.

Ultimately, *A Village Called Versailles* suggests that, through the acts of urban planning and mapping, a community can successfully resist the forces intent on displacing it. Maps and plans become genuine expressions of the community's desire to return after being forcible evacuated following a disaster. It is this depiction of resistance and contestation that I wish to complicate. Over the course of the film, Chiang counterposes the forces of displacement, represented through the official maps, with the emergence of a politicized community in opposition. In fact, according to the film's press kit, the Versailles community's environmental and political activism fits into a familiar and resonant narrative about political citizenship:

> The Vietnamese-Americans in Versailles now have a new sense of identity and pride. Their determined drive to return and rebuild has inspired and empowered other New Orleanians to do the same, and their impressive victory against the Chef Menteur Landfill has won them a political voice that can no longer be ignored. As the community celebrates the Lunar New Year once again, Father Vien speaks with pride. "Now, no one would dare speak about rebuilding New Orleans without mentioning our community, because they know we are back. They know we are here." Once upon a time, the Versailles clan was known as the quiet Vietnamese refugees way out east of the City. Now, they are Vietnamese-American New Orleanians. Now they are Americans. ("*A Village Called Versailles* Press Kit" 3).

As the press kit accompanying the film suggests, displacement is a process that can be successfully challenged through political activism, which in turn leads to the emergence of a political consciousness commensurate with the values of liberal citizenship, with being "American." In this passage, the disaster and the fight against the landfill enables the Vietnamese residents to travel across subjectivities. They gain a "new sense of identity and pride" following their transition from "quiet Vietnamese refugees" into "Americans" by exercising their "determined drive to return and rebuild" ("*A Village Called Versailles* Press Kit" 3). The solution to displacement, the texts suggests, lies in an expression of citizenship that expresses their commitment to place, a form of liberal political subjectivity which fuses the discourses of civil rights and anti-racism with the rights of property ownership. The narrative endeavors to show how disaster and displacement are transformative moments in the temporality of citizenship and liberal subjectivity, an opportunity that enables anybody to adopt the values of self-activity and participation in the public political sphere.

In this chapter, I want to explain how plans and maps used in New Orleans' recovery process reproduce displacement. According to Chiang's narrative of these events, the Versailles plan directly contests the Urban Land Institute's attempt to figuratively erase and, ultimately, materially appropriate the private property and collective landscape of this predominantly Vietnamese neighborhood. By doing so, the ULI map attempts to encode Versailles as "waste" and its population as "surplus," the residents and their role in the labor force are configured as displaceable. This process of encoding bodies and space as expendable and disposable has been analyzed by Michael McIntyre and Heidi J. Nast as the production of racialized surplus populations. They note how "surplus populations have always been tied to a *reproductive* racial

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politics in which certain *lands* and *persons* could reasonably be disregarded and treated as waste"

(McIntyre and Nast 1468). They argue that the accumulation of capital and the expansion of

capitalism cannot be separated from the biopolitical and necropolitical investments made in order

to produce racial and gender differentiated subjects, whose exploitation is enabled by this

process of geographical and racial differentiation.

It would be an oversight, therefore, to talk of planning, and the related practice of mapping,

without a discussion of the means by which planning manages and reproduces conditions of

displacement. Planning after Katrina has been entangled with the long-lasting effects of residents

being relocated and resettled by the federal government. Indeed, the forced evacuation of the city

established that residents would perceive "recovery" in terms of their ability to physically return

to their homes and businesses and receive insurance or governmental support for rebuilding. The

ongoing effects of displacement, however, were not confined to the events surrounding the

inundation of the city. Many residents faced severe difficulties returning, whether because

affordable housing was no longer available, jobs had not returned to the city, or public housing

remained closed. Far from being an accidental or isolated scenario, planning for urban

development and disaster recovery has often facilitated dispossession and displacement,

reproducing conditions of social marginalization and vulnerability. Controlling and managing the

settlement and mobility of working class and non-white people has been a routine feature of

modern urban planning. Since the early twentieth century, when the U.S. began to implement

urban planning under professional and governmental guidance, restrictive covenants and

redlining were used to segregate whites from Blacks and Latinos, often sequestering non-whites

to undesirable urban areas. Later, by the mid-twentieth century, slums and segregated enclaves

were demolished or redesigned as part of urban renewal and interstate development projects. Interstate highways were often built over the main business districts of Black communities, displacing businesses and disrupting economic and social activity. Various cycles of planning have, from this perspective, aided and abetted immobilization, isolation, and segregation, followed by displacement, dispossession, and dispersal. These dynamics linking race, class, and space continue under new articulations with the hegemony of neoliberalism over transnational urban governance.

Against this long backdrop of planned urban discrimination, this chapter examines planning, and specifically post-Katrina planning, through Nicholas Blomley's concept of displacement. For Blomley, displacement is "enacted" through the maps and spatial narratives that materially and discursively represent who owns property and who belongs on the land. These representational forms "enact prevailing property arrangements and relations as natural, appropriate and inevitable" (Blomley 114). "Yet at the same time," Blomley reminds us, "counterstories and mappings complicate the certainties of the settler-city in intriguing and unsettling ways" (114) — in particular, by showing that the discursive representation of private ownership, built on dispossession of land, can be challenged and undermined. In the examples below, I contend that displacement and planning are dialectically interwoven. The spatial narratives and maps integral to the proactive post-disaster recovery plans carry out the displacement by rendering populations conceptually removable. Additionally, Blomley points out that displacement is, like property, fundamentally insecure: "If the making of property requires sustained enactment, so does its denial. Dispossession is not necessarily complete and secure at the moment when title changes hands. The important point to note is that displacement, in this

sense, depends upon iteration… It requires shoring up by a range of 'spatial technologies of power' such as surveying, planning, naming and mapping" (Blomley 114). Here, Blomley points out the inherently fungible and alienable quality of property that underlies the effort to dispossess original or indigenous inhabitants of their property claims. "Enactment," in Blomley's terms, implies "iteration," in which "the claim to 'my' land is sustained not only by the original act of acquisition, but by continuing acts, such as fence building, maintenance of the property, and relations with my neighbors" (Blomley 50). With Blomley's analysis in mind, I argue that all recovery plans, whether created by neighborhood activists or by the official city planning commission, utilize these spatial technologies of power, and depend upon the iteration of property claims in order to sustain displacement and resettlement. This critical perspective aims to complicate how we understand attempts by residents to contest their "conceptual removal" or displacement through recovery planning, like the efforts carried out by the Versailles residents' plan. As the example of the Versailles residents plan indicates, the acts of planning and mapping also can be used to contest displacement. The plan makes efforts to reverse the effects of internal displacement and dispossession, situating their sense of belonging in a counter-narrative that weaves together a set of notions about citizenship and property ownership, urban design and nostalgia for ethnic architecture. These maps, I argue, while attempting to depict how the city should be rebuilt and to establish the timeframe for residents' return, in fact legitimize displacement.

In the following sections, I offer first a theoretical framework that informs my analysis of displacement narratives and mapping in urban planning. I then turn to two urban reconstruction plans that illustrate my concerns with the role of narratives and maps in the maintenance of

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displacement: the Urban Land Institute's *A Strategy for Rebuilding: New Orleans, LA* (2006) and the "Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Planning Workshops" (2006). The Urban Land Institute submitted *A Strategy for Rebuilding* for the city's first official recovery planning commission, the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC), the city's official recovery committee.[4] The Urban Land Institute consultants were commissioned by the BNOBC to draft a citywide plan that incorporated proposals for rebuilding infrastructure and housing, adapting to coastal wetlands loss, and job recovery. I specifically discuss how this official and government-commissioned plan laid out a historical narrative justifying the removal of people from the city's most heavily flooded areas. Interestingly, it also performed another critical function for post-storm recovery: as it narrates the abandonment of neighborhoods that were severely flooded, it simultaneously establishes the biopolitical ethos for intervening on behalf of sites and subjects which had been previously excluded from the benefits of the city's pre-Katina economy. I conclude my chapter with an analysis of the "Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Planning Workshops" (which I will refer to as the "MQVN plan"), as an example of resisting displacement. Central to the MQVN plan's conception of resistance to displacement, I argue, is its use of maps and artistic renderings to demonstrate the applicability of urban design principles to the specific needs and desires of Versailles residents. This consists of a combination of neotraditional neighborhood designs and Vietnamese architectural and landscape characteristics. In my reading of this plan, I contend that the means by which the Versailles residents "speak back" to the official plans takes the form of an appeal to the urban design principles that bespeak

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[4] The BNOBC was appointed by mayor C. Ray Nagin in 2005. Its Urban Planning Committee separately commissioned the architecture and planning firm Wallace, Roberts, and Todd, LLC, to draft a plan for recovery, the *Action Plan for New Orleans: The New American City* (2006).

a concept of meaningful citizenship grounded in the aesthetic disposition of the built environment. Together, these plans reaffirm my contention that through recovery planning, the city's post-Katrina regime seeks to manage displacement as a biopolitical interest.

Property and the Enactments of Displacement in the ULI Plan

My approach to the plans created for post-storm recovery builds on Blomley's study of the colonial displacement of Vancouver's First Nations inhabitants in his work *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property*. In his chapter on "Land and the Postcolonial City," he draws a useful distinction between two related and often interchangeable terms: "dispossession" and "displacement." To make this distinction, Blomley uses "displacement" to refer to the "conceptual removal" of native inhabitants, a process of representing space carried out by maps and narratives. He uses the term "dispossession" to refer to the legal and physical acts by which settlers and the state come to materially possess indigenous land, what other writers typically conflate with the term "displacement."[5] In this process, native people are physically removed from their land and white settlers are emplaced, capable of gaining title to their land under the legal framework of property rights introduced during colonization. Importantly, for Blomley, while dispossession may appear complete or finished, "displacement" is never a completed act. It is a continuing process that involves the erasure of the original inhabitants' claims to land and property. As Blomley points out, "[i]f the making of property requires sustained enactment, so does its denial. Dispossession is not necessarily complete and secure at the moment when title changes hands. The important point to note is that displacement,

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[5] Throughout this chapter, my usage of "displacement," except where discussing the text of other writers, will retain Blomley's conceptual distinction between "dispossession" and "displacement."

in this sense, depends upon iteration… It requires shoring up by a range of 'spatial technologies of power' such as surveying, planning, naming and mapping" (114). These "spatial technologies of power" perform the "iteration" and "enactment" used in Blomley's formulation of displacement. In this chapter on post-Katrina recovery maps and plans, I extend Blomley's theorization of the enactment of displacement to read the problems of narrating and visualizing the *re-emplacement* of New Orleans' local population. While the subjects of my chapter differ from Blomley's, who writes about indigenous populations and their erasure from the urban environment of settler-colonial cities, I find his postcolonial reading of displacement to be valuable for my analysis of planning after Katrina.

Underlying Blomley's concept of displacement is a dialectical relation between enacting property and contesting displacement. First, Blomley frames displacement as a mode of struggle over property and land (109). Both property and displacement are "enacted," in the sense that the maintenance of ownership is sustained through repeated performances of possession that take material and discursive forms. For Blomley, property "relies on enactments" which are "both practical and discursive. In part, such enactments seek to persuade the world of the validity and continuation of a property claim. Such persuasive claims, moreover, need to be reiterated. Thus, the claim to 'my' land is sustained not only by the original act of acquisition, but by continuing acts, such as fence building, maintenance of the property, and relations with my neighbors" (50). Therefore, "enactment" refers to the underlying performative aspect of displacement and property relations. For instance, working on the landscape in a material sense — through buildings and demarcations of ownership and agriculture — is one form of "enacting property." These material actions repeat the owner's claim in a discursive setting, and thus claiming and

securing property is a social process that also is repeated and circulated through stories, images, and maps.

While the enactment occurs through the material transformation described above, it is also sustained through spatial narratives and stories about the landscape, its ownership and inhabitants, and by the mapping process that represents, and stabilizes, what are in fact historically shifting population movements and divisions of the land into parcels for private ownership. For the purposes of this chapter, I draw on Blomley's argument that mapping is one of the critical "spatial technologies of power" for enacting displacement. Maps, he writes, tell a "proleptic story, oriented firmly on the future" (Blomley 123). This use of the term "proleptic" is interesting here due to the connotation that the map represents future events and spatial arrangements as, following the Oxford English Dictionary, "already done or existing." Under the colonial projects of planning and urban settlement "maps and maplike visualizations may also play an important persuasive role in displacement, both by conceptually emptying a space of its native occupants, and by reassuring viewers of the unproblematic and settled occupation of urban space by a settler society" (Blomley 122-3). This "persuasive" and "reassuring" role of maps "invite improvement" (Blomley 123) by emptying other layers of meaning and power created by previous histories of inhabitation.

The Urban Land Institute presented an array of maps and diagrams for strategically directing the recovery of the city, focusing specifically on the relationship between the direction and expenditure of recovery and the geography of flooding. The "Investment Zone Map" (see fig. 1.1) was both influential and contentious because it ambitiously proposed to restrict redevelopment only to those neighborhoods where flooding was least devastating, at least

theoretically during the first few years of recovery. This map in effect instituted a triage system, dividing the city into three "Investment Zones" and imposing a complex visualization of where future parks, canals, greenways, and stormwater drains would be built to handle the problem of excess capacity.

Extending their plan's central mandate to "determine the city's best land use patterns… to enhance the city's long-term sustainability" (ULI 44), the ULI planners divided the city into three "Investment Zones" (zones A, B, and C) which corresponded to the severity of property damage and the depth of flooding across the city. The plan lists additional criteria by which areas in each zone would also be assessed, including historic designations, occupancy levels, the capacity of canals and pumping stations, and "repeated incidents of damage" (ULI 44). Across these Investment Zones, the plan projects various degrees of reconstruction commitment. Zone C, which "withstood the least damage and would require the least expensive commitment from local, state, and federal sources to recover, largely corresponds with the historic settlements along the natural levee" such as the French Quarter and older areas that are closer to the river (ULI 46). Zone B is an intermediary region defined by the uneven distribution of the damage, necessitating more individual property-by-property repairs. Neighborhoods in Zone A, where the flood damage was most severe, appears in the map in dark purple. Because of the severity of damage and the projected loss of population, the plan notes that the recovery in this zone may require "the greatest amount of parcel reconfigurations for residential, industrial, and/or commercial uses" (ULI 45). On the map, thick green lines, representing proposed parks and existing canals or green corridors, absorb large areas of this zone.

A Strategy for Rebuilding was submitted as a report through the ULI's Advisory Services Program, an interdisciplinary team composed of institute-affiliated developers, architects, urban planners, and others claiming to provide "the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects" (ULI 3). While the plan's authors are careful to point out that the projection is not intended to reflect precise land and property boundaries, residents of these areas read the green lines (and the green dots in similar maps) as an implicit statement that targeted their neighborhoods and rejected their claims of belonging. As a visualization of property relations and as a statement of priorities, the disposition of "green space," "open space," and "parks" threatened New Orleans residents' property claims. Through the plan, the city appeared to suggest that it would use eminent domain to seize property in low-lying areas. These fears were corroborated by the participation of figures like Joseph Canizaro, the prominent local real estate developer, former president of the Urban Land Institute, and chair of the BNOBC's Urban Planning Committee. He had been on record arguing that the city's "footprint" would need to "shrink," "because [New Orleans'] population is expected to remain well below pre-Katrina levels for years. 'People don't want to hear that. They're afraid they will be hurt' he said" (Behre). Canizaro's blunt remarks affected public perception of the BNOBC and the ULI plan submitted on its behalf. Other real estate developers with positions in the recovery process and business-affiliated think tanks shared Canizaro's desire to shrink the city's footprint. According to the Bureau of Government Research, a New Orleans-based business and real estate-affiliated think tank, "'Unless the city's plan addresses the mismatch between the city's footprint and its population by initially directing development into more compact areas, the outcome will be random, scattered development in a sea of blight'" ("Bureau of Government

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Research"). Sean Reilly, at the time a member of the Louisiana Recovery Authority, praised the ULI's Investment Zone strategy and its vision of compact development, and was critical of earlier proposals that suggested all neighborhoods would be rebuilt. The ULI's plan, he noted "struck the proper balance between residents' self-determination and tough choices"; choices regarding which neighborhoods would be rebuilt and which "flood-prone areas to revert to marshland" (Rivlin).

As a mode of representing a scientific solution, however provisional, to the exposure to hazards and repeated flood damage, the ULI plan demonstrates how maps problematize social and environmental conditions. The map and its accompanying narrative problematizes Zone A as a site of repeated natural hazards and difficulties with environmental management. After Katrina the zone's infrastructure will continue to face additional "recovery constraints, such as environmental contamination or high repair costs" (ULI 45). And yet, establishing the zone as a site of recurrent problems enables the planners to present their preferred solution — programming open space "to reach its greatest capacity" (ULI 45). Interestingly, the implications of expanding "open space" never addresses what happens to the people who lived or owned property in this future open space. Instead, open space is rhetorically fashioned as both a means of extending the benefits of open space to "underserved" areas and a directive to incorporate such spaces in ways that are beneficial: "all of these options should be explored in a manner that improves safety and adds parks and open space to areas that are severely underserved by such basic public amenities" (ULI 45). Having thus problematized the space, the plan reframes this act of dispossession as a solution that planners can use to enhance social equity and public safety.

In its subsection titled "Urban Character and Coastal Context," the ULI plan divides the city's urban development history between the poorly planned growth patterns that preceded the storm and an environmentally sensitive and critical model of planning that accounts for New Orleans' unique ecological and hydrological conditions, its cultural history, and its architectural heritage. This narrative arc begins with a story about environmental constraints set by the bodies of water and wetlands environment in which the original French colonial city was located. Over time, the city growth was constrained by these natural constraints, which set limits on geographical direction of growth and encouraged dense neighborhoods built on the few natural levees that were above sea level. The conclusion of this narrative justifies the planners' argument that recovery efforts "must incorporate a more effective and integrated system of stormwater management and infrastructure" (ULI 39) while, crucially, maintaining the city's "unique" architecture and neighborhoods.

The ULI's narrative of the city's historical growth patterns can be understood, following William Cronon's work on environmental history and narrative, as a "declensionist" plot line. According to Cronon, in a declensionist story of environmental change, the setting may start in an idyllic or positive state but over the course of time the influence of human behavior and social systems causes a decline which affects the well-being of human and non-human entities (Cronon 1357). In the ULI's story, the history of New Orleans urban development follows a declensionist plot line, a story which refutes the upward movement of progress so familiar to modernist planning narratives that depend on Enlightenment notions of progress and the physical improvement of land as private property (Cronon 1357). The ULI chooses to start the narrative at the initial European settlement, when it was pinned between the Mississippi to the south and

cypress swamps to the north because these natural features largely restricted the expansion and development of urbanized area to the few high ridges and levees. The levees and ridges constrained the city's growth patterns and protected most of the city from floods: "The city's growth occurred westward upriver, along the crescent defined by this natural levee from the French Quarter, and eventually extended eastward downriver along the same elevation. Settlements thus were protected from flooding by either the Mississippi River or Lake Pontchartrain" (ULI 38-9). As Cronon points out, when and where one chooses to begin and end a particular story about environmental change has the power to include and exclude people and events in ways that "redefin[e] the meaning of the landscape accordingly" (1364). Because it establishes the beginning of its narrative with the colonial settlement, when wetlands and natural levees set limits on the city's size and density, the ULI suggests that the expansion of New Orleans' footprint over the twentieth century happened without careful regard for the city's precarious relationship with water.

For Cronon, environmental histories are never neutral or objective: "by writing stories about environmental change, we divide the causal relationship of an ecosystem with a rhetorical razor that defines included and excluded, relevant and irrelevant, empowered and disempowered" (1349). If spatial narratives "order and legitimate" the conceptual erasure of displaced inhabitants, displacement occurs in narratives through the selection process, as storytellers choose to begin or end in ways that either completely remove the presence of certain groups of people, or consign their experience to periods outside of the narrative. When examining the features of this short narrative and the maps presented in the ULI plan, we can see how it includes environmental management and spatial arrangements of the built environment

and erases the effects of displacement. While the narrative makes stormwater and geographic hazards visible, it renders the racial and class patterns of vulnerability to disasters and displacement invisible. This operation prevents us from directly seeing the acts of forced removal and displacement, so that once they are eliminated from political view they cannot be the focus of political redress.

This urban development narrative in the hands of the ULI planners offers a powerful explanatory tool for the flooding that occurred in 2005. In doing so, it establishes the narrative logic that justifies the Investment Zone Map discussed above, normalizing the conclusion that expanding parks and open space will facilitate recovery. This normalization is a product of its declensionist narrative plot line, which, in contrast to modernist narratives of urbanization and development, is not framed as a progressive story of struggle for technological control over a hostile and challenging environment. Instead, it plots development in New Orleans as a fateful action that set the stage for repeated crises culminating in the devastating floods of 2005. Cronon's description of declensionist narrative trajectory is instructive: "If the story ends in a wheatfield that is the happy conclusion of a struggle to transform the landscape, then the most basic requirement of the story is that the earlier form of that landscape must either be neutral or negative in value. It must *deserve* to be transformed" (Cronon 1354). The ULI narrative, however, leaves us unsure if this environment deserved to be transformed in the first place, and suggests that developing on this land again would be foolish and catastrophic. Instead, the planners close this narrative by drawing a general principle for urban development in this historical context: "The pattern of flooding [in 2005] suggests that any recovery plan must incorporate a more effective and integrated system of stormwater management and infrastructure

that will account for the city's fundamental topography and hydrology" (ULI 39). We are thus led to see the purpose of the "recovery plan" as fundamentally, and naturally, a response to this critical failure of pre-storm planning to manage urban growth and stormwater infrastructure.

The ULI's declensionist narrative argues that certain limits should be imposed on human progress and the post-disaster rebuilding, an argument that found success with city leaders and business interests in New Orleans and across coastal Mississippi (Kumar 153). The ULI plan's promotion of mixed-use and walkable neighborhoods and its celebration of the traditional urban pattern throughout the city align its perspective with the New Urbanist movement. Mukesh Kumar points out that some factions of the local business and political class found New Urbanist arguments for limiting or rethinking sprawling growth attractive because they offered an optimistic (and opportunistic) vision of the transformative potential of the recovery process. Kumar notes that, "[b]y suggesting the inferiority of what had been destroyed and the possibility of what could be built, leaders could satisfy the political need for optimism. Such narratives fit nicely into the argument of creative destruction and consequent growth that dominates in a capitalist society" (Kumar 152). As a New Urbanist influenced plan, the ULI's progressive and optimistic thrust is aimed at using spatial design to transform the quality of life of urban residents. As a planning philosophy, New Urbanism considers physical design the best practice capable of "put[ting] people of all income levels in proximity to the goods and services they require on a daily basis" (Talen 281). This vision of social equity through physical design manifests in proposals to use design to effect social mixing, deconcentrate poverty, and reintegrate the poor. In particular, New Urbanists emphasize the role of the public realm in establishing a space of "commonality" and "access" that bridges racial and class divisions.

According to Emily Talen, New Urbanists consider the public realm as a critical site of intervention in order for communities to recover from disaster because it "fulfills the function of providing a collective identity — if it is designed and located properly. This has been deemed especially important in devastated communities, where restoration of the civic realm is seen as a way of supporting and uniting a fractured community" (282).

Let me return to Kumar's assertion that New Urbanism supplies narratives that easily correspond to "the argument of creative destruction" (Kumar 152). Here, I want to draw the explicit connection between the narrative interventions of the ULI plan and the process of neoliberalization which, is characterized by the "ongoing *creative destruction* of political-economic space at multiple geographical scales" (Brenner and Theodore 351, emphasis mine). Through this definition, Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore explain that the economic, political, and institutional landscapes inherited from earlier rounds of capitalist accumulation are inevitably transformed or abandoned in the search for new accumulation strategies. They are "junked and reworked in order to establish a new locational grid for the accumulation process" (Brenner and Theodore 355). According to Brenner and Theodore, the spatial transformational processes of neoliberalism is then best understood as operating through a dialectical, context specific, interplay between destructive and creative "moments." In other words, neoliberalization (their term for neoliberalism as an ongoing process) does not proceed unilinearly, but rather entails periods where it destroys all earlier institutional arrangements that regulated capital accumulation. It also entails moments of institutional creation and combination. In this sense, we can see how the ULI's narrative exhibits both destructive and creative moments in its projection of future geographical spaces for growth and open space. While the ULI's declensionist narrative

of urban growth, which is used to justify the abandonment of the low-lying areas built over the wetlands, asserts the necessity of destroying or replacing much of the city's twentieth-century neighborhoods, land use patterns, and zoning arrangements, it also contains a "creative" moment that envisions a new set of social relations between the residents of public housing and the neighborhoods in which housing complexes have been built. This moment of neoliberal creativity, I argue, entails configuring an ideal subject and an ideal site — the "nonincluded" racial minority and the urban "neighborhood" — on behalf of which the planners and the state can ethically and spatially intervene. This creation of an ideal subject and site relates to Blomley's point that displacement "entails two related maneuvers": the conceptual removal of the original inhabitants and the subsequent and "concomitant *emplacement*" of new settlers (114). In his analysis, this refers to the settlement of white colonizers on indigenous, First Nation land. In the context of Katrina, the form of "concomitant emplacement" that occurs following contemporary climate disasters that strike settled, capitalist societies under neoliberal governance entails not only the arrival of new settlers but the configuration of new subjectivities out of the displaced. Through these new subjectivities as "responsible" and "self-managing" citizens, residents are configured as worthy of "emplacement" back into the neoliberal city that was originally their home.

My last examples from *A Strategy for Rebuilding* illustrate how the plan constructs a racialized, "nonincluded" subject through which it can articulate what it means to be "included" in the post-Katrina city. In the subsection titled "Partners in Implementation," this nonincluded subject is identified with African-American residents. This is one of the few places where the planners acknowledge the disparate impacts Katrina had on white and black New Orleanians, in

terms of personal and communal property destroyed or lost. In this passage, they point out that

disparity while also connecting the impact of this destruction to the pre-Katrina problems of

"isolation" and "noninclusion":

> Even as the loss was horrendous for all affected citizens, statistically the city's African
>
> American neighborhoods suffered disproportionately. African American homes, churches,
>
> schools, and family networks were devastated in areas such as New Orleans East and the
>
> Lower Ninth Ward. Certain physically isolated communities also were extreme pockets
>
> of poverty, symptomatic of these communities' noninclusion in the city's pre-Katrina
>
> economy. (ULI 47)

The logic of the passage appears to argue that the extremity of the losses felt by many black

communities was exacerbated because some were "physically isolated" and harbored "extreme

pockets of poverty." In light of this argument, it is not precisely clear why the planners choose

the term "noninclusion," rather than "exclusion," to describe African Americans' relation to the

city's economy. It seems to suggests some state of being in relation to economic life that is not

necessarily "exclusion." Perhaps "noninclusion" suggests the absence of inclusivity without

deliberate malice or reference to an agent. Otherwise, using "exclusion" might imply that African

Americans were purposefully excluded by some form of power. While the passage does not yield

a definitive reason for the choice of words, the terms themselves carry strong spatial and ethical

associations about the kind of social, urban, and spatial relations that existed prior to Katrina.

Therefore, the planners suggest a spatial solution (that is at the same time an ethical one) through

their association of "noninclusion" with "physically isolated" and "extreme pockets." These

terms spatialize the problem of exclusion in terms that help New Urbanists characterize the

deficiencies in the pre-Katrina urban landscape. In doing so, they allow New Urbanists to "suggest the inferiority of what had been destroyed and the possibility of what could be built" (Kumar 152).

As Nikolas Rose points out, "exclusion" is an "organizing term" within the ethics of neoliberalism (258). The "excluded" are typically configured as racialized and classed minorities whose living standards have eroded after the implementation of welfare reform and the privatization of social services. Exclusion becomes an organizing term after the effects of earlier waves of neoliberalism, such as "policies which have sought to reduce welfare expenditure in the name of competitive tax regimes and the like… produc[e] a widening gap between the 'included' majority who are seeing their standard of living rising and impoverished minorities who are 'excluded'" (Rose 258). Social policy under neoliberalism, however, seeks to "integrate" the socially marginalized (who Rose calls "abjected subjects"); it does so by reconfiguring the ethical relations and social terrain that are the conditions for "inclusion." The conditions for inclusion are now based on principles of self-management, responsibility, and consumption. In this way, as Rose states, "[i]ndividuals are now to be linked into a society through acts of socially sanctioned consumption and responsible choice… yet do not depend upon political calculations and strategies for their rationales or their techniques" (Rose 166). In other words, "integration" is conceived of as primarily the activity of economically-driven actors participating in the free market as consumers. Addressing their social, biological, or cultural needs through the politics of redistribution, however, is foreclosed.

If we turn to a later passage, this time regarding public housing, we can see how the ULI plan's proposal applies "design principles" to accomplish the spatial and ethical integration of

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residents who appear to qualify as the "excluded" or "abjected." Unlike the pessimistic and racist

depictions of public housing residents that circulated in the media after the storm, this passage

begins with an optimistic vision for redeveloping public housing "[i]n contrast to the past

practice of isolating, concentrating, and stigmatizing poor and modest-income families in public

housing" (ULI 64). Rather, the three key design principles listed, that public housing be

"dispersed," "indistinguishable," and "connected," describe how future public housing would be

linked and integrated with the other positive concept circulating through the plan: the

"neighborhood." What gives this new vision of public housing its positive charge are the

principles of design, which argue for integrating housing into the existing neighborhood

environment. Rebuilt public housing should be, as the ULI recommends:

> — *Dispersed*. Affordable and workforce housing should be dispersed throughout a
>
> neighborhood, not compartmentalized on one or two large sites.
>
> — *Indistinguishable*. Affordable and workforce housing should be designed… so that it
>
> is indistinguishable in design quality and materials from market-rate units.
>
> — *Connected*. Affordable and workforce housing should be connected to neighborhood
>
> amenities such as schools, churches, parks, retail centers, as well as to civic uses, public
>
> transit, and jobs. (ULI 64)

In other words, the solution to the stigmatization of public housing residents lies in correctly

designing housing so that it relates in complimentary ways to its surrounding neighborhoods.

Public housing, according to the ULI, can be imbued with new potential if it is designed

intentionally to integrate residents with people from across social classes and to connect them

with workplaces and institutions of social community and consumption.

While the passage does not describe public housing residents as "displaced," all public housing projects managed by HANO[6] were closed and inaccessible to their residents after Katrina. Many families and individual renters received Section 8 vouchers allowing them to return to New Orleans; however, these families were forced to relocate to completely different neighborhoods. The closure of these housing complexes resulted in the break up of the communities centered on those projects, which represented tightly knit social environments characterized by multiple generations inhabiting the same project. In the design principles, the physical building of public housing units will be re-connected to the social environment through physical design and arrangement of buildings. But the residents of public housing are also, in this way, rendered displaceable through these principles of design. The residents are resettled in these affordable and public apartments after the re-design, which proposes a new moral and ethical configuration of property and the subject within the neighborhood. The plan, then, suggests that urban design professionals recognize how public housing residents have suffered exclusion and stigmatization and seek to satisfy the social and material needs of the displaced residents through specific spatial design requirements. In each of these passages, planners construct an ideal figure of the displaced New Orleanian and their needs and desires that satisfies the new expectations for public housing residents that emerge under neoliberal government.

The Contradictions of Contesting Displacement in a Recovery Plan for the Versailles Neighborhood

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[6] Housing Authority of New Orleans.

This chapter continues by revisiting the story of resistance to displacement portrayed in *A Village Called Versailles* with which I began this chapter. I use this case, particularly the ways the community visually represented the spatial "recovery" of their own neighborhood, in order to interrogate the possibilities and constraints of contesting displacement. My larger aim is to use this case to examine the limits of theories of contestation and resistance to displacement. As Blomley points out, because displacement must be reiterated and continually performed, it is open to an array of social, political, and cultural challenges that undermine the efforts to forget the presence of prior inhabitants, or to naturalize their disappearance. Displacement, like the claims of private property ownership, "depends on iteration": the repetitions through spatial narratives and mapping which assert possession within the field of discourse that sustains property relations. This necessity of iteration, Blomley argues, presents an opening by which displacement (and property ownership) can be challenged: "Place making and the enactments of claims to land are social and political projects. They are both immensely powerful but also, to the extent that they are enacted, are partial and incomplete. For a settler society, displacement is a social achievement, but also an aspiration; it is an accomplishment, and also an assertion. To that extent, displacement is open to contestation and remaking" (Blomley 109). In this section I turn to a case of "contestation and remaking" that aims to suspend and reverse the social project sustained by the ULI plan and its construction of the historical narrative about New Orleans. Here, I turn to my analysis of the second plan, the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Workshops, or the "MQVN plan," an example of planning and mapping used by residents of this majority black and Vietnamese neighborhood to challenge the city's recovery planning commission (including the ULI map discussed above). Some of the most basic matters of social

embeddedness in a community become politicized through this plan's rhetoric and visual

rendering of the neighborhood post-storm recovery process: where should the residents of

Versailles live, when should they be allowed to return, and how should they improve their homes

and neighborhood? In this section I pursue a line of inquiry regarding the ability to contest

displacement through the discursive strategies of planning and mapping. In doing so, I pose the

following questions: For a population (or an organized and politicized segment of that

population) subject to displacement and dispossession, what discursive strategies for resisting

that displacement does mapping and planning enable? To what rights and what visual

representations of property, rights, and improvement do the displaced appeal in this plan? And

finally, what social powers that constitute inequality (and thus reproduce the conditions of

displacement) in contemporary society are rendered visible by these rhetorical decisions, which

ones remain invisible, and why?

Before I elaborate on the specific examples from the plan, I want to first focus on the role

of narrative in the contestation of displacement. As I demonstrated above in the case of the ULI's

Investment Zone map, mapping constructs the social identities that render certain populations

displaceable. Similarly, the public narratives about disasters, conflicts, or human rights deploy

various "rhetorics of displacement" (Powell 302) which present displaced persons in ways that

justify their removal. According to Katrina Powell, in "Rhetorics of Displacement: Constructing

Identities in Forced Relocations," displacement narratives are among the rhetorical strategies to

inscribe subjectivities "for the displaced by those who have power over them, including

tyrannical governments, United Nations (UN) aid workers, Federal Emergency Management

Agency (FEMA) administrators, and legislators" (302). For instance, the individuals and

agencies directing relief or social services (FEMA, governmental agencies or politicians, aid workers, etc.) can label the displaced in ways that render them powerless, victimized, passive, or responsible for their own forced removal. That passivity, Powell notes, can be used to argue that the displaced are "passive agents who contribute to their own 'out-of-placeness'" (316). In other words, they are subjects who are "rendered displaceable" (318) by the narrative expectations of displacement. Typically these explanations serve to "other" the displaced, a process that may figuratively alienate them from their identity as citizens — and thus from their political rights and moral claims on the state to take responsibility for their survival and protection.

And yet, the displaced are continually negotiating or resisting the inscribed subjectives imposed upon them by governmental authorities, the media, or human rights agencies that have control over their lives. For example, Powell notes that, in order to attain official refugee status through the UNHCR, displaced persons are expected to construct stories about themselves and their plight for the UN interviewer (305). Refugee identity is therefore constructed around the need to acquire institutional support and protection from international agencies or nation-states, an affirmation of their identity as victims of repression and conflict-induced migration. In these narratives, "the rhetorical strategies used *by* the displaced to speak back to those narratives include nostalgia, a particular sense of home, belonging, citizenry, and the right of return" (Powell 302). In other words, the association of displacement stories with the "tropes" of nostalgia or belonging come about through the discursive field of rhetorical choices and pressures in which displacement identities are constructed. Powell argues that readers in different positions of power solicit and expect different narrative portrayals of displacement, entailing tropes of dependence on aid, victimization, or longing for home. These considerations define the

ethical framework through which we confirm a displaced person's legitimate moral and political claims for protection or resettlement, such as the "right to return" or the objection to maps that propose green-space instead of reconstructed neighborhoods. I raise this point to reframe the rhetorical strategies deployed by the maps in the MQVN plan, as well as the narratives told about the maps in Chiang's film and by Trang Tu, the community planner who initiated the MQVN Workshops. Instead of "resistance," I find a complex deployment of rhetorical strategies intended to navigate and negotiate displacement; to confirm certain "narrative expectations" about the Vietnamese community and to resist other narratives; and to frame their agency through deliberate appeals to belonging, citizenship, and property in their challenge to the official recovery plan.

The MQVN plan is significant because it represents the first neighborhood-initiated planning effort in post-Katrina New Orleans. Surprisingly, this plan was never intended to be implemented, or at least not immediately or directly by the city's planning commission. Instead, this plan was conceived as a political intervention and organizing tool, a means to challenge the city's dominant recovery authority and to organize residents in Versailles in their fight against the ULI plan. Father Vien, pastor of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church, and other residents felt that their exclusion from the ULI map was not simply accidental: it was visual confirmation of the sense, felt by many in the Vietnamese community, that Versailles had been neglected and isolated by the city for a long time. In *A Village Called Versailles*, Father Vien recounts how the planning initiative gave residents the opportunity to ask themselves "If you had a say, what would you like to build here?" (Chiang), a question that would empower residents to share their desires and visions for the future, a future that the ULI map appeared to foreclose.

While there have been several studies of the Vietnamese-American community's recovery efforts and their struggles with city government after Katrina, very little has been written specifically about the maps and plans developed by the MQVN Community Development Corporation or about how these maps were used as tools by a social movement resisting displacement. One of the few sources to mention this planning process, the City of New Orleans' *Neighborhoods Recovery Plan* (the so-called "Lambert Plan") depoliticizes the origins of this planning initiative, merely stating that "[r]ecently a group of architects, design professionals, civil engineers, and housing developers came together to create concepts for the development of new community housing and the revitalization of the Versailles business district. Three focus groups — seniors, business owners, and youth — were formed to discuss their ideas for improvement" (27). The Lambert Plan includes six maps and diagrams from the MQVN plan as a sample of this grassroots proposal. Despite a few captions describing their content and imagery, the presentation of the maps here isolate them from the specific debates over displacement and resettlement that led to their creation. Additionally, the Lambert Plan does not include a discussion about the ultimate fate of these "ideas for improvement," nor does it contextualize these maps as responses to the Urban Land Institute's land use recommendations. Almost by design, as soon as the maps appear in the official record, they vanish.

And yet, the Lambert Plan does offer an interesting insight into how the agency of the displaced Vietnamese subjects is constructed. Media narratives about the recovery of Versailles and the residents' struggle to return attribute their success to notions of agency that are valued: self-management, attachment to community, and physical rootedness. Attempts to explain the "resilience" and ability to quickly return and start the rebuilding process, according to Karen J.

Leong and her co-authors, frequently recycled narratives of racial and ethnic exceptionalism. They point out that "[n]ational media coverage of the 'Vietnamese Versailles community' generally presented a narrative that fit the stereotypical Asian American model-minority myth: in less than three generations the New Orleans Vietnamese refugees had seemingly mastered the political system and overcome Katrina through the self-sufficiency and hard work associated with Asian Americans in general" (Leong, et al. 773). As the authors of this study explain, however, such narratives assert that the residents' handling of post-Katrina evacuation, relief, and rebuilding took place entirely through internal and community organized means, without the need of state assistance. Such narratives told about the displaced served to justify certain political arguments that promoted laissez-faire approaches to the recovery process, a neoliberal strategy to withdraw government support from the planning or reconstruction efforts in the low-lying areas. Consequently, leaders in the Vietnamese community have challenged these narratives that would deny the need of state intervention; like their African American neighbors who have also struggled to rebuild, they argued that government support for New Orleans East has been inadequately low (Leong, et al. 774).

Likewise, efforts to explain the Vietnamese rapid return after Katrina as an expression of the closeness and cohesion of the Vietnamese community often deemphasize other economic and social factors, such as immigrant social networks and high levels of homeownership that enabled many Vietnamese residents to easily and quickly return. Vietnamese did return sooner and at a faster rate than both residents of New Orleans East in general, or African Americans from Versailles in particular (Li, et al. 113). While attachment to place and the presence of social networks rooted in a shared refugee experience influenced many Vietnamese residents' decision

to return, or influence others' decisions to relocate, "home ownership and household income, more than racial differences, influence people's desire to return" (Li, et al. 107). However, lower income African Americans (many of whom in Versailles are renters, rather than property owners) were in fact more likely to remain in the city during the storm and also more likely to return (Li, et al. 107), a factor not explained by rates of homeownership or by the values supposedly attributed to property ownership. The value attached to homeownership in urban recovery programs indicates this ethical conception of property and private ownership with active and responsible citizenship, stemming from homeownership's "supposed effects on economic self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and community pride… By virtue of their relation to property, owners will fashion and improve a community, both physically and morally, stabilize it through their fixity and presence, and serve to represent it given their supposed interest in responsible citizenship" (Blomley 89). In other words, the narratives that celebrate the rapidity of Vietnamese resettlement activity after Katrina portray these residents in ways which conform with neoliberal social values and its associated ethical conception of property ownership. In this way, the creation of the MQVN plan attempted to help the displaced inhabitants navigate the expectations of neoliberal citizenship, as responsible property owners who are mobilized to rebuild and return through "their own" community and faith institutions.

A majority of the city's inhabitants were still dispersed across the country when Trang Tu arrived in October 2005 with the intention of directly assisting the Vietnamese community's recovery efforts. A Seattle-based urban planner, Tu entered the city soon after the mayor allowed residents to return. There, she established a working relationship with Father Vien, pastor of Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church. Father Vien had been instrumental in leading the

Vietnamese American residents in the Versailles area after Katrina, coordinating relief operations from the church and using its resources to locate and assist residents who had evacuated. Both Tu and Father Vien began developing Versailles' own plan for recovery in November 2005 when, according to Tu, she noticed an article about the BNOBC's plans to reduce the footprint of the city in the Sunday *Times-Picayune*. Tu realized that she could draw on her professional expertise as a planner to assist residents of Versailles and the Mary Queen of Vietnam church. Due to her attention to planning issues, she informed Father Vien about the BNOBC's proposed recovery strategy and the ULI's Investment Zone Map. As discussed above, the ULI's proposed map converts much of New Orleans East into parks and green space. Placed in Investment Zone A, the residents of Versailles and other neighborhoods in the East anticipated a deliberate plan by the city to abandon their communities. In Tu's view, by creating their own plan, the residents could "speak back" to the BNOBC and the mayor who, it seemed, were determined to write off the East. In the absence of an official recovery plan for Versailles, the residents themselves would advocate for their neighborhood and community through their own planning process. "This is your advocacy," Tu remembers telling Father Vien.

Tu's use of the term "advocacy" invokes the shift of professional planners during the 1960s and 1970s toward engagement with the needs and desires of urban residents who had been excluded from the planning decisions carried out by modernist planners, who spent decades imposing highways or urban renewal projects onto their communities. This tendency toward "advocacy planning," according to June Manning Thomas, "suggested that the appropriate response to inner city conditions was for planners to stop trying to represent the public interest — an impossible task, leading planners to represent the status quo — and work instead to help

empower disenfranchised groups" (Thomas 5). In order to "empower disenfranchised groups"

and contest the ULI's Investment Zone map, the MQVN Workshops adapt the discursive and

representational possibilities of master-plan mapping.

Although the MQVN's maps and diagrams contest the modes of mapping that erase the

Versailles' pre-storm inhabitants and their claims to property, they work in an odd way by

reproducing some of the birds-eye-view projections of Versailles associated with dominant and

abstract spatial perspectives. As I will explain below, the series of maps created in the Versailles

charrette process involve both "master plan" projections of property lines and zoning tracts and

artist's renderings of the new spaces at street level, both of which are common methods for

presenting final presentations in the field of professional architecture and urban design (see fig.

1.2). We are presented with maps that speak through the discourses of expertise, distance, and

detachment associated with abstract space. The maps engage displacement by combining the

expert and detached views of the neighborhood associated with professional planning and urban

design — including diagrams of traffic flow pattens, the existing zoning maps, and different

arrangements of landscape and property — with the intention of speaking to a specific, local

Vietnamese audience and what meanings, associations, and imagined uses of the space they as

readers bring to the text. In other words, the maps construct their readers and the readers'

relationship to the place. This suggests that what Tu meant by "advocacy" involves adopting the

professional methods of depicting urban space, rather than directly countering the dominant

representations of space as abstract, as such.

This adaptation to master-planning methods differs from Blomley's conception of

"countermapping" used by anti-gentrification activists in Vancouver to "destabilize the

enframings of dominant maps — with their perspective distance between space and the detached, expert viewer" and enabled opponents of the development project to "reframe space in ways that speak to local histories of use and entitlement" (70). The figurative challenges deployed by Vancouver activists to contest the dominant landscape views counterposed the plan with a different conception of space — as lived and experienced, not merely represented and projected as a set of abstract and detached sites, that is, "blank areas (*tabulae rasae*) or a simple geometrical figures to be manipulated from high above. The synoptic 'master-plan' governs, while mapping, and all its potential for engaging and evolving local intricacy, is relegated to the relatively trivial role of making location, inventorying resources and justifying future policies" (Corner 224). According to James Corner, sites are treated by master-plan maps as bounded "blank areas," parcels of land abstracted from historical and social context, and into which the plan can fill any number of potential uses, designs, and names. Likewise, the Investment Zone map produced by the Urban Land Institute removes the names of individual neighborhoods as a means of governing "from high above," justifying the dispossession of residents and the erasure of their communities by authoritatively superimposing projections of green space and "investment zones" over several neighborhoods simultaneously, arbitrarily eliminating the distinctive identities that reflect lived experience of place. The purpose of such a map is to postulate a future in which dispossession is either already complete or where redevelopment resources can be withheld.

According to Tu, while the leaders of the Vietnamese community were organizing residents to attend the BNOBC meetings, she and Father Vien decided that Versailles residents needed to develop their own "parallel process" that could contest the BNOBC's official plans for New

Orleans East (Tu). Prepared between December 2005 and January 2006, they planned a series of

"charrettes," or guided planning workshops, that would be held two days before Tet, the

celebration of the Vietnamese New Year. Under the auspices of the newly formed Mary Queen of

Vietnam Community Development Corporation (MQVN-CDC), the charrettes identified two

project areas to be planned: a senior housing complex attached to the Catholic church and a

design for remodeling the local business district. The MQVN-CDC assigned these projects to

four teams, or "concept groups," composed of residents, business owners, architects, and

planners. Twelve architects and planners were recruited from across the country to participate in

the process, listen to the residents, and draft visual diagrams based on their input and suggestions

(Tu). With local elected officials expected to attend the Tet celebration, unveiling the products of

the charrettes to the public during the festival would achieve maximum political effect,

pressuring leaders to recognize the desires of residents to remain in Versailles and to demand

resources for reconstruction of the neighborhood (Tu).

     While the MQVN plan was originally conceived as a mode of "advocacy" contesting the

political decisions that threatened to permanently remove residents from New Orleans East, the

maps in the plan also constitute a displacement narrative aimed at contesting the "conceptual

erasure" of the Versailles residents, and the cultural presence of Vietnamese Americans.

Therefore, it is necessary to interrogate how the visual diagrams of the plan not only establish the

desire to return to Versailles, but represent "return" through the aesthetic and material

improvement of the existing landscape. First, in the artistic renderings for the remodeled

business district we can see the influence of New Urbanist design principles, evidenced by the

way the various diagrams prioritize the design of distinctive and accessible public spaces for

people across social, cultural, and racial backgrounds to interact. For example, the images composed by "Business Concept Group B" (see fig. 1.3) of the proposed business district depict human figures standing on new pedestrian pathways lining a nearby canal. Improvements to the physical design and streetscape predict a walkable urban setting with access to "nodes" where pedestrian, vehicular, and public modes of transit can be integrated. The plan contrasts photographs of the current buildings in the business district with a watercolor sketch of future commercial buildings. In this arrangement the plan narrates the "before-and-after" transformation of an architecturally indistinct, strip-mall (which appears as a series of low-rise, brick and concrete buildings common to many working-class suburbs), into a place that fulfills New Urbanist aspirations of accessibility, interconnectivity with modes of transportation, and diversity of social interactions in public. But most importantly, these images demonstrate how the same New Urbanist principles of walkability and neotraditional design expressed in the ULI plan can also be incorporated into the available sites for commercial and residential property in Versailles. The plan adapts the ULI plan's emphasis on the public realm and the value of neighborhoods and "speaks back" through the same narrative expectations. The ULI plan insists on the uniqueness of New Orleans' "urban pattern" and "authentic neighborhoods," specifically identifying "authenticity" as a characteristic found throughout the city: "In New Orleans, authenticity is not restricted to a few areas or designations. Moreover, many cornerstones of urban design in this historic city — such as context, scale, and contributions to the streetscape — can be instructive for new infill development elsewhere" (39-40). Although the authors of the ULI plan most likely intend this statement to affirm the value of neighborhoods other than the most historic and recognizable, like the French Quarter, the Marigny, or Treme, they probably

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did not intend it to refer to the recently built suburban subdivisions areas built throughout New Orleans East in the 1960s. The visual representations of the Versailles business district, however, insists that "context, scale, and contributions to the streetscape" can be meaningfully adopted by a suburban neighborhood that would otherwise be considered an unsustainable product of suburban sprawl located on a flood-prone and dangerous site.

If the notions of "authenticity" and "urban design" can be articulated with Versailles' existing disposition of land use and property, then the presence and return of Vietnamese residents can be further enhanced by the adoption of Vietnamese architecture. In one example, the concept design for the business district includes a series of photographs depicting "well known landmarks and building structures in Vietnam" ("MQVN Community Workshops" 4; see fig. 3), suggested as a model for redesigning the district's commercial buildings. Whereas before Katrina, all ninety-nine small businesses in the area were already owned by Vietnamese Americans (Li, et al. 109), changing the facades suggests a rhetorical strategy on the part of the charrette participants to claim belonging — and to deny displacement — by making "Vietnamese identity" visible in the built environment. In other words, the ownership and uses of the businesses will not be changed, simply how they express the cultural identity of the owners and the presumed consumers of the environment. The inclusion of these design elements suggest an interesting rhetorical decision on the part of the planners and charrette participants to obliquely confirm the displacement narratives being told about the Vietnamese community that emphasize their sense of ethnic solidarity and disaster resilience. Such narratives attempt to explain the Vietnamese residents' rapid recovery and self-initiative as indicative of having developed a "close-knit community that is rooted in culture and the church" (Lambert Advisory 27). This

interpretation is also suggested by Chiang's documentary, which draws viewers attention to the diagrams for the business district and the prominent use of the Vietnamese language in the planning documents (see. fig. 1.4), while Trang Tu and another priest speak in voiceover about the prospects of a "Viet Village" emerging from the community planning workshops.

Interestingly, Trang Tu confesses that the MQVN Workshop designs actually conflict with what she considers "the main tenets" of her professional training. In her interview with me, she admits that reducing the urban footprint of a city and increasing the density of residential areas are standard practices for rebuilding areas that continually face severe flooding. In her education as a planner, Tu was taught that development should be concentrated on higher ground and that smart planning requires increasing density and reducing sprawl. These are also common tenets of New Urbanism, which seeks to overcome the social and racial segregation and sprawl of suburbanization by promoting compact development, mixed-use zoning, integration with public transportation, and increased investment in the features of public realm, like parks, sidewalks, and streetscapes. The ULI plan followed these tenets precisely when it proposed reducing the city's footprint and prioritizing redevelopment in the city's urban core. In contrast to the ULI plan and the recommendations of the BNOBC, the MQVN Workshops envision a highly vulnerable community resettling a hazardous site.

Additionally, Tu's admission raises a point about the contradictions at the root of resettlement projects and recovery plans which hinge on the notion of "return." As a negation of displacement, "return" may simply connote the reversal of acts of physical removal or "uprooting." Christopher McDowell and Gareth Morrell, in their review of the scholarship on non-conflict displacement, point out that the conventional definition of displacement as "physical

uprooting" reductively posits "rootedness" in a single place as a universal human condition,

"opposed to a more nomadic understanding acknowledging movement as a fundamental human

characteristic" (5). McDowell and Morrell do not present this criticism in order to deny the

effects of involuntary migration and forced resettlements. Rather, they propose reconceptualizing

displacement as the state of "being alienated from physical, social and cultural resources

essential to maintain a life and livelihood of choice which may be the fate of people who remain

in the same location as a result of actions taken by others to deny access to those resources and is

not necessarily linked to relocation" (McDowell and Morrell 5). Under this definition, the

conditions that can alienate a person from the "physical, social and cultural resources essential to

maintain a life and livelihood of choice" can occur to people who are never forcibly removed

from the places they already live in. "Displacement" or "dispossession" under this definition

does not require physical removal. What, then, does it mean to "return" after a period of

involuntary, physical resettlement, such as what the population of Versailles (along with the vast

majority of people throughout New Orleans) endured? Does the collective production of a plan

for their own return "undo" or "reverse" displacement? McDowell and Morrell suggest a

continuous temporality of displacement, arguing that "it is unrealistic to suggest that

displacement can only be considered to have ended once the processes that are responsible for

displacement have been reversed as vulnerability, insecurity, human rights violations and

impoverishment may persist or even intensify after return" (McDowell and Morrell 19).

Therefore, if the conditions of alienation from "physical, social and cultural resources" become

an enduring effect of life after resettlement, can the "displaced" be said to "return" in a way that

suggests that their displacement is officially "over"?

In this sense, the MQVN plan cannot bring displacement to an "end." Rather it extends the time of displacement by spatially imagining the physical return of an un-alienated, ethnically and politically conscious community. The temporality of displacement offers opportunities to reveal the workings of displacement as a mode of conceptual erasure and the alienation from resources to maintain life that occurs throughout the less visible and mundane conditions of insecurity. The MQVN plan politicizes displacement, rendering visible the exercise of spatial technologies of power through the simple act of proposing an alternative to abandonment. The presumption, however, is that displacement can be negated by enacting a narrative of citizenship, a story in which the residents' alienation from home and from politics was resolved through their engagement with the public sphere and through their ethical association with property ownership and ethnic community. Tu and Father Vien used the planning process to configure the residents of Versailles as universal subjects — subjects who expect an equal claim on government support for rebuilding their neighborhood and private property.

Conclusion

Displacement and dispossession are not incidental to the project of urban planning. While planning can be deployed to find humane and just ways to return people subjected to various forms of relocation and migration, as McDowell and Morrell point out, forced displacements can occur with varying degrees of planning, legal precedence, and consultation with the resettled populations (25). The storms and floods of 2005 that swept through New Orleans triggered waves of forced migration, emptying a region of nearly a million people of its population. Even today, in 2018, the city's population has not recovered its pre-storm numbers, in either net population or racial demographics. The city is whiter than before the storm, and decidedly less

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poor and working-class. This transformation of the population has occurred alongside speculative increases in property values, leading to a wave of urban gentrification in which rising property values, combined with shortages in affordable housing, continue to push out working class African Americans from areas that are now valued highly by new residents.

In this chapter, I have approached the changes to land use through planning as a manifestation of dispossession and displacement. Following the work of Blomley, Powell, and McDowell and Morrell, I have maintained that displacement is an active process carried out through discursive, political projects, rather than a definitively completed and naturalized event that is finalized once the original inhabitants have been physically relocated. As such, displacement is maintained discursively, a function of the narrative and spatial technologies invested in the biopolitical management of urban space. By this I mean that the state is invested in the transformation of urban space — in all the permutations of its development, including the attraction and dispersal of populations, the subjection of some to greater police surveillance and control, or the systematic withdrawal of regular state and municipal services or the maintenance of public works, in ways that reassert the racialization of space. In this chapter I addressed the themes of displacement and mapping, which centered on the narratives and visual representations of urban land through which the conceptual erasure of people and their claims to land and belonging is carried out. From the Urban Land Institute's Investment Zone map to the MQVN plan's adoption of New Urbanist visual perspectives and Vietnamese architectural references, these texts demonstrate means by which neoliberal planning narratives construct the ideal subjects worthy of resettlement. In this chapter I have shown that the value attached by planners to the rhetorical figures of the emerging Vietnamese "citizen," the "nonincluded"

African American population, or the concept of the "neighborhood," offers alibis for various other devaluations produced under a neoliberal regime that has aggressively devalued and disposed of other bodies through criminalization, police violence, gentrification, and privatization of public schools, healthcare, and housing. This perspective allows me to raise several questions that I endeavor to answer throughout this dissertation: do plans for return and redevelopment actually end displacement? How does planning and mapping for "recovery" in fact render certain populations displaceable? And conversely, how do plans, as biopolitical technologies, construct the ideal subjects and spaces for re-investment? In the next chapters I will take up these questions through my examination of different texts and projects which attempt to raise the problems of displacement and place the powers that produce it into view for political redress. In chapter 3, I specifically undertake an examination of the themes of "resilience" in urban recovery and blight remediation strategies as modes of biopolitical governance specific to the crises of climate change and New Orleans' specific economic and environmental histories. In chapter 4, I direct these questions to the literature of social movements and post-disaster communities of resistance to racism and neoliberalism. However, in the following chapter, my second, I address head on the issue of the representation of Katrina's moment of forced displacement through the landscapes of disaster depicted in post-storm nonfiction and testimonial literature.

Fig. 1.1. The Urban Land Institute's "proposed rebuilding framework" and Investment Zone map from Urban Land Institute, *New Orleans, Louisiana: A Strategy for Rebuilding,* Urban Land Institute, January 12-18, 2005.
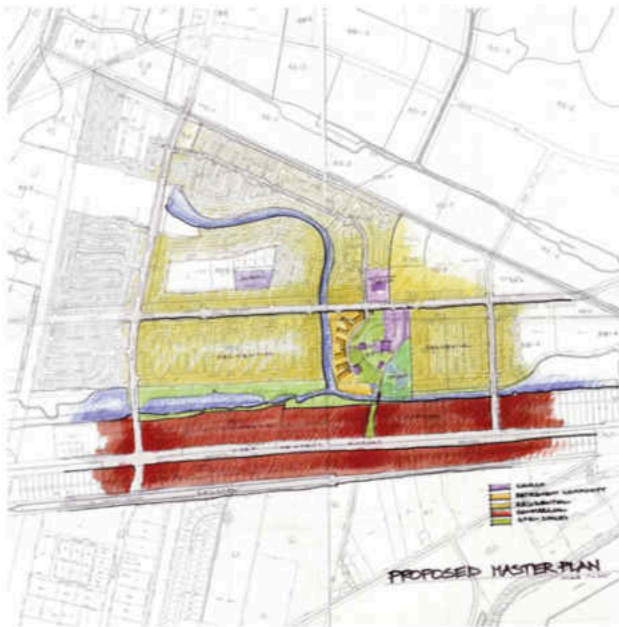
Fig. 1.2. Housing Concept Group C's "Proposed Master Plan" for the Versailles neighborhood. Includes the location of the church, residential community, and business district, superimposed on the neighborhood zoning map, from "MQVN Community Workshops," MQVN-CDC, February 2006.
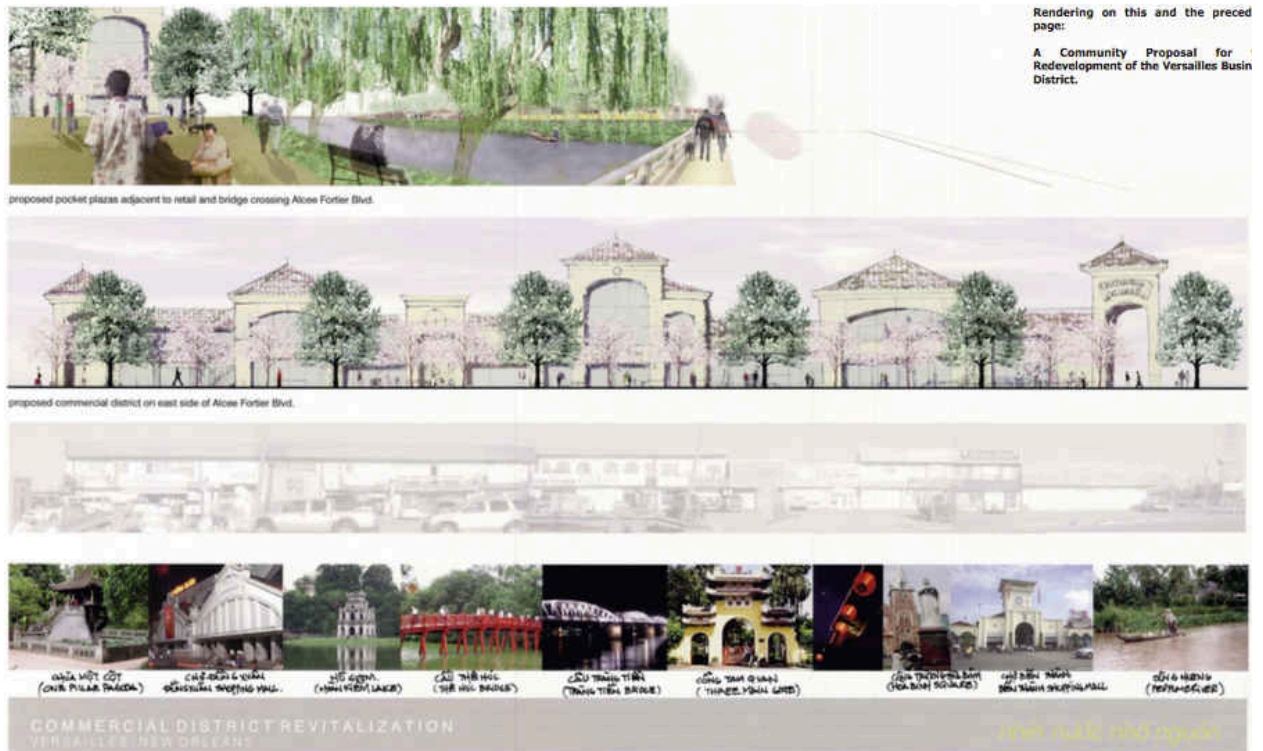
Fig. 1.3. Business Concept Group A's "Commercial District Revitalization" for the business district on Alcee Fortier Boulevard. The top image depicts a street-level view of a "pocket plaza" adjacent to the retail buildings and connected to the street bridge. Middle images illustrate the proposed remodeled design for the commercial district, followed below by panoramic photograph of the existing commercial buildings. Final row of images are landmarks and distinctive buildings in Vietnam. "Group A presented these as models to be used to design the appearance of the Versailles business district: bridges that connect the housing community to the business district. Main gates at the east and west entrances to the business district (large arch that reads 'Vietnamese Village')", from "MQVN Community Workshops," MQVN-CDC, February 2006.

Fig. 1.4. Housing Concept Group D's "master plan for the housing community," includes church, community center, celebration platform, community housing, and a park that includes docks and recreational areas allowing access to the adjacent wetlands. From "MQVN Community Workshops," MQVN-CDC, February 2006.

Chapter Two:

Recalcitrant Landscapes: Post-Katrina Nonfiction and

the Problem of Memory and Violence

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argue that displacement is maintained through the discursive

and visual narratives operating in maps and plans composed by disaster recovery planners. The

maintenance of displacement figures into the state's investment in the biopolitical management

of urban space. In this chapter I explore the relationship between structural violence, collective

memory, and the transformation of regional landscapes depicted in testimonial and nonfiction

literature written in response to Hurricane Katrina. The memories and recollections expressed in

post-Katrina testimonial writing respond to the concerns about the viability of local culture,

sustainability of the landscape, and the return of the local community. The texts that I examine,

Chris Rose's *1 Dead in Attic*, Natasha Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina*, and Dave Eggers' *Zeitoun*,

associate these memories with forceful critiques of the state, specifically its lack of preparation,

the neglect of its most vulnerable citizens, and incidents of brutal mistreatment of survivors

carried out by police and military forces that were operating in the disaster zone. These

testimonial accounts challenge the legitimacy of the state and its official narratives about the

displaced. The works I examine in this chapter offer counternarratives that resist portrayals of

catastrophe as an event that brings about desirable change for local residents who were displaced

or forced to relocate. The mode of resistance that these testimonials pursue, though, are not

always articulated as conscious opposition to the current political state of affairs. My approach,

then, accounts for how, in the search for new ways to express the conditions of destruction and loss, these authors manipulate the existing language of citizenship, rights, and property.

An analysis of landscape depictions in post-Katrina memoir and testimony opens avenues for understanding the contours of structural violence that characterized state actions during the storm and the following recovery period. By structural violence I mean the forces of class and social inequality that reproduce and maintain social vulnerability. This form of violence is often regarded, if at all, as normal, chronic, and routine. According to Kenneth Hewitt, such forms of structural violence "seem different from our more extreme concerns, usually being of dispersed, if widespread, incidence. What links and distinguishes, perhaps contains these socially, is *routine* treatment" (89). They are, by definition, part of the structure of inequality maintained by capitalist development that shapes the differential exposure to risk, poverty, financial and health insecurity suffered by people in working class communities. By this term, I intend to close the conceptual distance between forms of physical and bodily violence carried out by agents of the state and the policies and patterns of discrimination against minorities and women that render entire racial and gender groups socially vulnerable to economic and natural catastrophes.

I conduct this analysis through a close reading of three post-Katrina nonfiction/ testimonial texts: Chris Rose's *1 Dead in Attic* (2005), Natasha Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina* (2009)*,* and Dave Eggers' *Zeitoun* (2009). I use the term "testimonial writing" as shorthand for this multi-genre body of writing that includes memoir, testimonials, graphic novels, and creative nonfiction. Post-Katrina testimonial writing also include examples of oral history, interviews, and self-published accounts. These works constitute a small part of the field of post-Katrina

literature and related storytelling genres. Testimonial literature about the storm and the recovery afterwards found a national readership that had been galvanized by months of media coverage of storm and the government's handling of the evacuation. The interest in stories from storm survivors developed into a literary and cinematic niche filled by non-fiction writers, witness testimonies, memoirs, and documentary films. Literary output on Katrina include works of memoir and creative nonfiction that retold survivors' ordeals, including Eggers' *Zeitoun* (2010) and Phyllis Montana-Leblanc's *Not Just the Levees Broke* (2009). Contributions by a number of public intellectuals confronted the storm as a political crisis of national proportion, including Tom Piazza's *Why New Orleans Matters* (2005), Ivor Van Heerden's *The Storm* (2006), Jed Horne's *Breach of Faith* (2006), South End Press' *What Lies Beneath* (2006), David Dante Troutt's collection *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning of Hurricane Katrina* (2006), and Michael Eric Dyson's *Come Hell or High Water* (2006). These explore matters of collective memory, social justice, and the nation's future prospects of environmental and disaster management. Poets also contributed early artistic responses to the crisis, including Patricia Smith's *Blood Dazzler* (2008), Katie Ford's *Colosseum* (2008), Andrei Codrescu's *Jealous Witness* (2008), Raymond McDaniel's *Saltwater Empire* (2008), and Nicole Cooley's *Breach* (2010). Concerted efforts to capture the voices of New Orleanians affected by displacement from the city and the turmoil of the recovery are reflected in the University of New Orleans' Neighborhood Story Project, which connected writing instructors with local teenagers and community residents to write books about particular streets, schools, housing projects, and subcultures (including bounce music, brass bands, and Mardi Gras Indian traditions) whose existence appeared threatened with permanent displacement.

In the post-Katrina texts that I have selected, I explore how each work describes and contends with the material and visual transformation of the landscape. Two of these texts, Rose's *1 Dead in Attic* and Eggers' *Zeitoun* are primarily set in New Orleans. Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina* is set in Mississippi, and primarily the city of Gulfport. These texts creatively explore the tensions between regional distinctiveness and the sudden insertions of global forces on the landscape, such as the repercussions of the War on Terror for local Muslims caught in the storm and the overdevelopment of coastal communities in the name of the tourism industry. In the following sections I engage with the ways that these texts encounter and process the specificity of global processes being imposed upon the Gulf Coast, a region that has been represented as an exceptional space within the history and geography of the United States.

The first text that I analyze is *1 Dead in Attic,* a collection of vignettes and observations first published serially in the Times-Picayune, for which Rose was a staff reporter during Katrina. Next, I examine Natasha Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina*, a text which incorporates memoir and poetry to produce a literary "meditation," in her words, on the effects of disaster and development on post-storm Mississippi's coastal landscape. The final text that I will analyze is Eggers' *Zeitoun*, a work of creative nonfiction which draws on the stylistic conventions of testimonial eye-witness narratives and novels. *Zeitoun* is primarily set in New Orleans, where, over the course of the story, the city experiences catastrophic flooding. While the city is largely underwater, the title character, Abdulrahman Zeitoun, witnesses the state's aggressive use of force to reassert control over the urban area, in what amounts to a military occupation. Eggers incorporates Zeitoun's narrative as a survivor of the storm, relaying his lived experience of the storm and its aftermath. The condition of the landscape following the catastrophe is the primary

concern of these works. Through meditation or description of the present devastation, the

narrators construct memories about the social and cultural life that existed prior to the

devastation. For Trethewey, reflecting on the devastated condition of the landscape allows her to

elaborate on the dialectical relationship between physical changes in the built environment

brought about by both disaster and capitalist development and collective dynamics of cultural

memory and forgetting. For Eggers the landscape of catastrophe appears as a disturbing setting

through which his interlocutor plies his canoe. In this flooded landscape, the author configures

the visual setting to provoke moments in which Zeitoun recalls his family, his life in Syria, and

the travels he has experienced. These texts offer perspectives on two different temporal moments

relative to the events of Katrina: on the one hand, *Zeitoun* focuses on the immediate moments of

impact when the hurricane struck and the lived experience of surviving the floods that followed.

Beyond Katrina, on the other hand, is interested most in the moments of "aftermath" and

"recovery."

I have chosen these three testimonial works for analysis not because they represent all

post-Katrina nonfiction literature, but because they allow me to examine three distinct writers

and their attempts to portray disaster landscapes. Before I continue, I need to explain how I am

using the term "landscape." The decision to use landscape as the central framework for thinking

about place in this chapter stems from the language used in these testimonial works. Trethewey,

for instance, uses "landscape" in a number of ways that draw on the visual field, specifically the

aesthetic concept of landscape derived from art history. Her usage of the word reflects the

contemporary sense that all visual perspectives of a place, including urban and rural spaces, are

considered "landscapes." This sense can be extrapolated from the portmanteaus created for

various contemporary senses of landscape that come from photography and architecture, including cityscapes, seascapes, or moonscapes. However, regimes of private property are themselves organized and made legible through the visual depiction of landscapes. According to John Berger, as a description for vistas and natural settings, landscape provides an aesthetic framework for representing visual space. It is a way of seeing that emerged out of European oil paintings during the seventeenth century. The genre of landscape paintings embodied, in their particular form, the social relations of status and property ownership, and the ideology underpinning those relations that were changing throughout England at that historical conjuncture (Berger 108). According to Berger, oil painting gave a sense of tangibility to the things it depicted, and thus represented itself as the object embodying the class status of private ownership. Through the visual language of landscape painting, artists inscribe persons, property, and territory together in ways that embody ideological understandings of the modern political system. While the disaster landscapes discussed in this chapter are literary, they also are ways of seeing and thus ideological frames through which the authors I examine encounter the effects of disaster and structural violence.

Thinking about how these texts conceptualize the relationship between the author or protagonist and their landscape allows me to explore landscape as a social and political form in crisis. This crisis manifests in the complex historical processes converging on the Gulf Coast, a region encountering the interlocking processes of climate change and intensifying natural disasters, neoliberal austerity politics, and transnational movements of capital and people. What is at stake in post-Katrina nonfiction's use of landscape is not their capacity for "accurate" representation of the devastated area, but the possibility of an ethical apprehension of the

transnational dimensions of the crisis facing the region. It is through disaster landscapes that the legitimacy of state power and authority is challenged. Landscape as a spatial representation has been employed directly in the crucial practice of reproducing modern political subjectivity. Ideologically, modern planning serves this notion of a unified national space and history by configuring landscapes that situate their citizens within a natural "place." In the spatial layout of cities, property, and natural environments, landscapes model the ties between the civic ideal, political participation, and subjectivity. For example, American attitudes toward landscape derive, in part, from the agrarian vision propagated by Thomas Jefferson. J. B. Jackson's work illustrates how, for example, Jefferson's 1785 National Survey imposed a grid system that divided the nation's territory into uniform lots, a model that connected the logic of planning to the spatialization of national citizens in the landscape. These lots represented the natural spatial form for the new democracy as envisioned by the agrarians. They imagined this model policy as constituted and sustained by the orderly and "equalitarian" spatial arrangement of small landowners. As Jackson points out, "the grid system, as originally conceived, was thus a device for the promotion of 'virtuous citizens'" (5). More than simply lines on a map, the grid system was deeply ideological and utopian. The grid served as a nexus between the imaginary, the economic, and the political, a method of siting the use of landscape amongst a variety of spatial and ideological purposes, not all of them necessarily visible on the land itself, including financial speculation, regional identities, utopian philosophies, and methods of reproducing "virtuous citizens" (Jackson 5). Here the representation and imposition of an ordered landscape secures a means of reproducing society for the purposes of state allegiance and capital accumulation. While later challenged by industrialization and financial speculation, this representation of

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national landscape and social unity still holds residual power over American notions of national space, citizenship, and public virtue.

As a spatial form linked to national ideologies of virtuous citizenship, landscape should not be understood merely as the backdrop or scenery for subjects of testimony and literature about natural disaster and social catastrophe. Landscape is a site of ethical conflict. Depending on the type of catastrophe, authors reframe how affected landscapes are either incorporated into or excluded from the ethical frame. To think about the depiction of landscape and disaster through an ethical frame means that the frame for thinking about past and future of national and regional history are disrupted and in conflict. In the specific case of the Katrina crisis, testimonial writings and memoirs configure the disaster landscape as a literary figure for witnesses to assess and apprehend the historical processes that conditions "Katrina" as a social catastrophe with national and transnational dimensions. The degree to which the catastrophe is apprehended as an incident of state and structural violence is contested. One in which the author's or interlocutor's perspectives are engaged in a process of applying ethical assertions about the role of the nation-state and class struggle in the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast and New Orleans.

In this chapter, I use the concept of "landscape" to explore how notions of citizenship and national history are related through the genre of testimony and memoir. Landscapes are more than scenery for testimonial drama; they are emblematic of what I am calling the problems of incorporation and recalcitrance that are engaged in these three texts. By taking social dislocation and the threat to collective memory as a common subject matter, post-Katrina testimonial writings bring to light the contradictory ways that the testimonial or memoir subject is politically

incorporated into the project of national history. In the post-storm context, the manner and means of political incorporation hinges on what is often termed the moment of "recovery" in post-disaster discourse. Regarding this process of incorporation, according to Andrew Kincaid, memoirs activate the memories of the writer who reflects on a formative period of her or his life: "As [memory's] literary equivalent, the memoir claims each of us has a story to tell and the potential to introduce complexity, the individual voice, into the supposedly shared narrative of history" (211). The incorporation of the memoirist's story into the "shared narrative of history" establishes a mode for the political incorporation of the subject into history, demonstrating how the memoirist's experiences have been shaped by recent events. It often serves to explain how the narrator's present success or situation has mirrored the inexorable force of historical time, tracing the nation's story of development and modernization.

In this context, it is useful to contrast this definition of memoir with the genre of *testimonio*, a genre that emerged in Latin America during the 1950s and reached international attention during the 1980s with the publication of *I, Rigoberto Menchú* (1982). *Testimonios* are strongly associated with first-person narratives of marginalized people speaking for nations or communities under conditions of oppression, war, and vulnerability. Menchú, for example, spoke as an indigenous woman involved in the Guatemalan Civil War as a resistance fighter. According to Joanna Bartow, "[t]estimonios generally carry the collective import of a group experience — a principle distinction from autobiography through a single witness or many witnesses, marginalized in some way" (12).

While memoirs can signal ambivalence or nostalgia toward the effects of social and economic modernization, Kincaid suggests that the memoir writer ultimately strives for inclusion

into the narrative of history, which is tied to the state's projected path to economic development. In contrast, *testimonio* problematizes the nation-state and the legitimacy of its modernization agenda. In terms of historiography, John Beverley offers a theory of *testimonio* as a narrative which complicates and "interrupts" the temporal presumptions of nationalist history. If the nation-state's central problematic is to incorporate a diverse population into a single, national subjectivity as citizens of a representative democracy is taken for granted, *testimonio* reveals the failure of that project and its modes of political and literary representation. For Beverely, *testimonio* subjects speak from a space of "ungovernability… the space of resentment, recalcitrance, disobedience, marginality, insurgency" in which "the subject that speaks in *testimonio* has a differential relation with nation and the 'general will' expressed in representative democracy: it is what is not, or not yet, the nation" (18). Beverley positions *testimonio* as form of resistance to the historiography and political subjectivity contained in the concept of national citizenship.

Reading the Unseen Displacement in Chris Rose's *1 Dead in Attic*

In "Aggregates Unseen: Imagining Post-Katrina New Orleans," political theorist James Johnson distinguishes between two modes of visualizing disaster, one that emphasizes pathos and suffering through human representation and another that amasses images of deserted and desolate landscapes damaged by the rising waters. Photography has a long history of engagement with disaster, a history which largely falls into either of two positions, one which Johnson calls the "lineage of 'liberal' documentary photography" or "traditional documentary realism" (662). Against the documentary realist approach, he offers examples from recent photography

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collections of post-Katrina photography by Robert Polidori and Richard Misrach that attempt to capture the scale of Katrina disaster through depictions of deserted landscapes rather than suffering people. According to Johnson, the documentary realist approach to disasters has focused on realist portraits of individuals (living or dead) and their experiences of hardship, suffering, and pain in order to generate humanitarian concern and sympathy. As such these photographs attempt to establish a shared empathy between the subject and the viewer. Insofar as this approach generates political engagement and attention to the crisis being depicted, Johnson argues that the aesthetic position of liberal documentary photography reduces what is systemic or "aggregate" about the catastrophe to the image of an individual (662). This reductionism "de-politicizes" the event and demobilizes critical thinking (662). Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, Johnson defines critical thinking as "making others present," which "'by the force of imagination… makes the others present'" (Arendt, qtd in Johnson 659). For Johnson, critical thinking and political imagination might be "expanded" through those photographic depictions of Hurricane Katrina that attempt to depict New Orleans as a site of forced migration. Misrach's and Polidori's photographs circumvent the problem of reduction by devoting their entire collections to abandoned landscapes and deserted homes; no visible human bodies or individuals appear in these photographs. By refusing to include the human body among the scenes of destroyed built environment, these two photographers establish a method of using the landscape to ethically read the disaster, going beyond the implied appeal to moral or virtuous sympathy made in the works of photographic witness. The ethics of reading landscapes after catastrophic moments means establishing the means of connecting the apparent causes and effects of disasters to problems of violence and coercion that underlie contemporary everyday life.

For Johnson, Polidori's and Misrach's photography are examples of how to represent

forced migration as a systemic problem, making its effects irreducible to the affective appeals

generated by the human image. This is not because human beings and their suffering do not

matter in Johnson's argument. Rather, Johnson finds such images saturated with pathos, which

ultimately individualizes the course of action available to the viewer. Called upon to attach their

compassion or frustration to visible individuals, the viewers' support or blame can be directed at

specific persons. As a form of political explanation, the photographic depiction of human

suffering ultimately closes off questions about the systemic political and economic conditions of

forced displacement. Polidori's and Misrach's photography, Johnson argues, "make others

present" (665) not because they have captured moments of individual suffering, but, ironically,

because they expand our imaginative capacity to grasp Katrina as an aggregate experience. This

is a critical insight about the relationship between disaster and the role of landscape photography.

For Johnson, it is necessary to categorize Katrina as a specific type of catastrophe, in this case a

forced displacement and regional depopulation. Such photography "amplifies our ability to

imagine both the disorienting situation confronting New Orleans after Katrina and the ways that

people approached that situation" (Johnson 665). Rather than close off the political question

regarding how to imagine post-Katrina New Orleans, Polidori and Misrach "prompt viewers to

question what they are seeing, to ask how it might possibly have occurred, and to cast about for

an appropriate response to the mayhem the images depict" (Johnson 666). Unable to attach our

sympathy to images of suffering people, Misrach and Polidori also deprive us of people to blame

for the catastrophe. Their strategic choices shift our contemplation away from a focus on

empathic attachment, and thus "prompt viewers" to seek explanations for the social catastrophe.

The abandoned and depopulated streets of New Orleans figure prominently in Chris

Rose's *1 Dead in Attic*. In the chapter "1 Dead in Attic," Rose describes a street in the city's

Eighth Ward, where "tucked down there behind St. Roch Cemetery, life looks pretty much like it

did when the floodwater first receded 10 weeks ago, with lots of cars pointed this way and that,

kids' yard toys caked in mire, portraits of despair, desolation and loss. And hatchet holes in

rooftops" (Rose 65). The everyday objects that fill the landscape, at one time the evidence of

human interaction and manipulation of the environment, have been rendered useless by the

flood. Each object is reinterpreted through the lens of disaster, which disjoints the objects from

their conventional uses. Encountering these objects reveals the scale of displacement. He

includes the last image of "hatchet holes in rooftops" indicating how many people had to break

out of their own attics in order to escape the water.

In another passage from the same chapter, Rose encounters the signs of displacement

from another perspective, the city's cultural distinctiveness and its relation to national history. On

his drive through the empty Eighth Ward, he notices several Mardi Gras Indian headdresses

nailed to the front of empty, partially-destroyed houses. The presence of the headdresses is at

first startling to him, because, as he admits, he did not know the tribe members were present in

the Eighth Ward. But more importantly, they symbolize the homeowners' and tribes' intention to

return. However, as he places their desire to return in the larger scale of devastation as well as the

structural impediments facing many New Orleanians who desire to return, he believes that the

communities they belong to will be struggling to return to a landscape that can no longer support

them.

As Rose confronts these symbols of black cultural tradition in his writing, he displays both curiosity about their customs and a nostalgia for what he could have known about them before they were displaced:

> As many times as I have reveled in their rhythmic, poetic and sometimes borderline absurd revelry in the streets of our city, I now realize that if you asked me to explain the origins and meaning of the Mardi Gras Indians — I couldn't do it… I could have learned something about a people whose history is now but a sepia mist over back-of-town streets and neighborhoods that nobody's ever heard of and where nobody lives and nothing ever happens anymore; a freeze frame still life in the air, a story of what we once were. (Rose 66)

Here the condition of the post-disaster landscape elicits more than an incidental connection with displacement. While Rose's language exaggerates and generalizes, his choice of metaphors and imagery emphasizes a sense of temporal break or stalling. For Rose, even as a long-term resident of New Orleans, the Mardi Gras Indians appear to be a strange, "borderline absurd" tradition, something elusive and ultimately unknowable. His language also overgeneralizes for exaggerative effect, assuming the Eighth Ward is a place "nobody's ever heard of and where nobody lives and nothing happens anymore." However, the passage describes how, with the displacement of the community and, implicitly, the breakup of the local ties and community grounded in that neighborhood, the history of the Indians will merely become a "sepia mist" and "freeze frame still life." Through these metaphors from the history of photography and video recording, Rose evokes the sense that history involves movement. Once it stops moving, we can only apprehend it through a kind of static image, which has been captured or paused the history.

Implicitly, this outcome is a loss not only for the culture, but for the "we" Rose refers to: his citywide audience of local residents struggling to return and rebuild.

In this sense, Rose depicts disaster through landscape in a way that not only captures an aspect of its "unseen aggregate" of forced displacement, but also engages with how this mass displacement entails the loss of memory and cultural meaning which, without the masses of residents, will simply become a matter of history. In this way, the disaster for the culture of the Eighth Ward is the potential failure to transmit its traditions through the channels of local memory. It is interesting that, upon seeing the signs of the Indians' presence, even within a deserted landscape, Rose attempts to recollect them. In a sense, they are have already become problems for living memory, because Rose cannot imagine how they might continue to be transmitted. As the effects of displacement take hold, and the social context for the reproduction of this culture is unraveled, this tradition only will be remembered through its representations. For Rose, the objects found in this landscape indicate how one aspect of Katrina's catastrophic effect will be breaking the supposed continuity of New Orleans' unique cultural traditions. The Indian headdresses indicate efforts to communicate that Rose pessimistically believes will be overwhelmed by the scale of destruction and total depopulation of these neighborhoods.

Inscriptions "Cross-written" on the Landscape: Narratives of Development and Region in Natasha Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina*

In Natasha Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina*, we find an exploration of landscape and region as shifting social constructs, the meaning and significance of which has been severely disrupted by the forces of disaster and development. More so than other Katrina testimonies, Trethewey

writes about the aftermath of the storm and the changes brought to Mississippi's Gulf Coast during the period of reconstructing the region's economy. Trethewey observes the tide of transformations that are reworking the local economy and obliterating much of the historical landscape that developed over generations. Throughout her writing, the changes to the cultural and economic landscapes force her to question the capacity of local people to retain, rebuild, and sustain a uniquely regional culture and understanding of the landscape. Caught between nostalgia for a past that was difficult and painful, and an uncertain future, returning residents have been thrown into a dilemma regarding how they will retain their past while adapting to the current full-throttle development that is rapidly transforming the coastal landscape. *Beyond Katrina* exemplifies a recurring post-Katrina ambivalence and suspicion towards developmental narratives which depend on moralistic explanations for crisis and disaster.

In terms of its format, the text is narrated in the first person by Trethewey, who uses the term "meditation" to describe the writing style and to subtitle her work. The title pages that separate sections of the book are made to appear like lined pages, suggesting the ruled lines of a diary. Also, the first section's title "2007" placed at the top of the page drives home the chronological journaling mode that the text hopes to invoke. *Beyond Katrina* uses this journaling structure to organize the meditations that move between various periods in the Mississippi Gulf Coast's history and Trethewey's own family history. Because Trethewey's writing is actively meditating on the coast's history, what we might call the "story" is less straightforward. As a meditation, *Beyond Katrina* invokes the idea of contemplation and intellectual work directed at a particular problem or investigation. The particular problematic at the center of this "meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast" is the inherent instability of the coastal landscape's identity, and

with it the instability of local memory. The coastal landscape is interrogated through multiple stories of loss, trauma, and historical revelations, all in Trethewey's effort to uncover the contradictory history of coastal development that was intended to improve the region's economic growth but which instead exacerbated the area's environmental insecurity and eroded collective memory with each passing storm. In her work, collective memory refers to socially mediated memories and stories that are crafted out of group experiences and self-images. These stories and memories are, as the author points out, built on "a preferred narrative [which] is one of the common bonds between people in a time of crisis. This is often the way collective, cultural memory works, full of omissions, partial remembering, and purposeful forgetting" (Trethewey 20). Remembering is bound to forgetting, a mutually informed process that defines the community of recollection. It is also affected by changes in the physical and social surroundings, the spaces of imagination and social relations.

In order to tease out these dynamics between memory, forgetting, and the physical alterations to the region, Trethewey employs several metaphors for writing and texts to process these contradictions. In the prologue, for example, she demonstrates how one of her earlier pre-Katrina poem's meditation on Hurricane Camille and the figurative impossibility of returning to one's home had in some sense been reconfigured by her experience of Hurricane Katrina:

> Although I had intended to consider the impossibility of returning to those places we've come from — not because the places are gone or substantially different but because we are — by August of 2005, the poem had become quite literal: so much of what I'd known of my home was either gone or forever changed. After Katrina the words I had looked to for their figurative values gave way to the reality they came to represent. For

me, the poem no longer meant what it had before — even as the words remained the same. In this way, the poem undergoes a kind of revision as it appears here — not unlike the story of the Gulf Coast, which is being revised even now: rebuilding and recovery in the wake of devastation and erasure. (Trethewey 2)

In this rich passage, Trethewey rhetorically explains how the changes brought on the coast also subject the pre-Katrina poem to processes of revision and erasure. In the earlier poem, the "impossibility of returning" was not predicated on the literal impossibility of physical return. The disaster has, in her view, collapsed the distinction between the literal and figurative value of words. Or, we might say that its figurative expressions could no longer merely be figurative or metaphorical. As such, the poem itself had been transformed; it is now "impossible" for her to return to its original meaning. This analogy between the "revision" of the poem, caused by the shifting historical and material circumstances of disaster, and the "revision" of the Gulf Coast, allows her to discuss landscape as a discursive creation. Landscape is subject to alterations in form and meaning that exceed the intentions of its inhabitants.

The above passage exemplifies one of Trethewey's thematic concerns and ethical dilemmas: how can a writer depict the coastal landscape through periods of development and loss? This dilemma was approached by James Johnson, discussed above, who argues that properly politicizing Katrina involves grasping the scale of disaster and the aggregate impacts of forced displacement and collateral destruction of the urban landscape. Trethewey, on the other hand, seeks to explain the post-storm crisis as a conjuncture of man-made interventions and state violence carried out at the level of collective memory and cultural landscape. To do this, she applies an extended metaphor of the "landscape as text" upon which narratives are "inscribed,"

histories are erased, and memories of previous ways of life, including damaging and traumatic

experiences, are overwritten. Throughout the text, Trethewey repeats two main ideas about

landscape. The first of these are the constant and contradictory effects of development practices.

The second are the "revision" and "inscription" of narratives onto the landscape left by this

history of development and environmental change.

Throughout *Beyond Katrina,* recovery and rebuilding are treated as narrative acts

"inscribed on" the landscape, not simply as a physical and material process to restore the built

environment: "It is another way that rebuilding is also about remembering — that is, not just

rebuilding the physical structures and economy of the coast but also rebuilding, revising, the

memory of Katrina and its aftermath" (20). Landscape is the text's primary anxiety, through

which collective memory, history, and political possibilities are marked out. *Beyond Katrina*'s

story is largely set in and around Gulfport, Mississippi, and specifically North Gulfport, the

historically black township where her maternal side, the Dixons, retain deep cultural and

ancestral roots. The text uses this family history to weave a story of Gulfport's successive

landscape changes. For example, in the chapter "Before Katrina," Trethewey relates a history of

the coastline that situates her family's experiences through the larger transformations happening

to Gulfport from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first centuries. She covers the emergence

and decline of casino gambling during the 1920s and 1930s, the fishing industry, the creation of

the sand beachfront in 1955, and finally the state's deregulation of casino gambling in 1992. As

African-Americans in the Deep South, the Dixons' experience of these social and economic

changes was inflected by the entrenched racial segregation policies of Jim Crow-era Mississippi.

This story is retold with an emphasis on how Trethewey's ancestors navigated these segregated

spaces. The entrepreneurial example of Son Dixon, Trethewey's great-uncle, exemplifies the

different type of story about segregation that the author wants to tell. While certainly a story

about the enforced separation and political disenfranchisement of black Mississippians, Son

Dixon's story also demonstrates how a black man, living in a segregated community, could

establish a successful business and profitably manage several properties in North Gulfport. His

ability to do this, Trethewey notes, was conditioned by the segregated economic spheres at the

time, allowing Son Dixon to secure the market for black-only hotels and housing which catered

to black entertainers and travelers, a clientele who frequented Gulfport's newly developed

beaches and worked in the local tourism and entertainment industries.

Trethewey's treatment of landscape as a "text" constitutes an extended use of ekphrasis, a

rhetorical device through which one artistic medium describes or represents another work of art.

In many places in the text, she describes the landscape as "inscribed" and written on, a rhetorical

use of ekphrasis to illustrate in poetic terms the transformational process of economic

development. This repeated rhetorical strategy reflects the author's desire to demonstrate the

repeated intersection of memory and space, which she maintains with the figurative terms

"inscription" and "narrative." There are descriptions of multiple types of "inscriptions,"

including "traces" of lost or replaced landmarks, names of forgotten Native American tribes, or

communities of former slaves; American presidents and democratic ideals in the street names of

North Gulfport; business regulations that displace older industries after the storm but encourage

newer industries and economic relations between state and capital. The figurative terms that she

employs highlight the mutability of history and space, signifying the dialectical relationship that

the changes in development practices have on collective memory and ultimately on the dominant

historical narrative of the coast. For example, Trethewey's comments on how rising insurance

costs displaced commercial fishing expresses the shifts and consolidations in the local economy

in narrative terms. In this case, state officials removed restrictions on land-based casinos,

allowing them to build on the beaches for the first time: "This post-Katrina effect and the need to

get the economy of the coast rebuilt quickly made the state of Mississippi open the door to

rebuilding the casinos on shore. The history of the coast is full of such transformations, and this

is not the first time that economic decisions have instigated the overlaying of a new narrative on

the Gulf Coast, reinscribing it — transforming it" (12). Trethewey's interpretive process enacts

her ethical reading of the landscape. Recognizing that space and memory are mutable and

dialectical, her attention to landscape reveals the stakes in development decisions. At its most

basic level, Trethewey reveals how economic development and collective memory are

manufactured and "written." In this context, Trethewey reads the state's choice to act expediently

on behalf of corporate profits as one in a series of "overlaying" narratives, in this case one that

threatens to erode the sense of cultural heritage and the local character of place. Moving from

development practices to cultural memory, the story refuses to lose a grip on the past and

constantly seeks gaps through which the past might puncture through the stable image of the

present.

In one key passage, the author presents a history of Gulfport's coastal landscape, shifting

between history, memory, and recollection. Recollections of racially segregated Mississippi

beaches are interwoven with Gulfport's postwar development boom. This period had its own

material benefits for Trethewey's uncle Son, as mentioned above, who profited from the

economic upswing even within the constraints of the racially segregated economy. But it is

Trethewey's particular concern with the impact of repeated storms that leads her to further

contextualize segregation and economic development within the history of coastal shore erosion.

The parallel effects of these "inscriptions," deriving from multiple sources, depict the coastal

landscape as a product of surprisingly contradictory forces:

> County officials saw the creation of the sand beach as a way to boost tourism and the
>
> postwar economy of the coast. The highway literally paved the way for more urban
>
> waterfront development — hotels and restaurants — and began the inscription of several
>
> new narratives, cross-written over the landscape. (Trethewey 41)

Following this, she turns her attention to a photograph of her grandmother, standing on the newly

constructed beach, smiling in a polka-dot dress. Her grandmother's memories contextualize the

beach as part of Mississippi's mode of economic development which maintained and reproduced

racial segregation. "She is smiling, though it will not be until 1968, four years after the passage

of the Civil Rights Act, that the beaches are finally fully integrated" (42), Trethewey remarks in a

narrative aside that seems to make her grandmother's momentary pleasure seem incongruent

with the historical narrative contemporary readers know. Gulfport's growth and increasing status

as a tourist destination led to further development of the coast, which, according to Trethewey,

"would begin to inscribe a troubling narrative on the landscape of coastal Mississippi.

Opportunities followed growth, but so did environmental havoc" (42-3). This growth, though,

created material benefits to Trethewey's family. Her great-uncle Son built and managed

properties in predominantly black North Gulfport. Positioned to profit from the completed beach

and the burst of growth in Gulfport, Son Dixon's experience exists somewhere between inscriber

and inscribed upon. Written into the landscape of Jim Crow development, Son Dixon's property

development belongs to the same "troubling narrative" of opportunity, growth, and havoc inscribed on the coast.

In the passage above, we notice how inscription follows development. The photograph referred to in the third sentence is shown on the facing page, an image of her grandmother, Leretta Dixon, as a young woman on that newly-built beach. "She is smiling" the author notes, but her smile seems out of place or out of time, since "it will not be until 1968, four years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, that the beaches are finally fully integrated." Trethewey uses that image to pivot from the historical and descriptive retelling of the coast's transformation to her grandmother's recollection and story, a move that shifts us from one form of inscription to another — in this case, the exclusion of black people from full participation in the coastal economy. First, it is based on a legal structure of racial segregation, and then, after 1968, the method of exclusion transitions to class and income. Leretta's recollection, then, suggests the contradiction of coastal development and coastal desegregation: neither economic development nor expanded rights to public spaces could be fully guaranteed to all of Gulfport's residents. Furthermore, Dixon's own success was conditioned by this segregated economy. We are left with an uncomfortable, uneasy narrative, further complicated by the fact that the historical struggle for racial integration, a struggle which is also for the redistribution of the benefits of economic development and public space — occurring onshore were contributing to, or ignorant of, the persistent problem of shore erosion, a factor that would imperil all coastal communities. Expanded development and public space did not extend the public sphere of democratic participation and access to space. Such a contradiction in the fundamental ideology of modernity and development was ignored and repressed in the liberal imagination of progress.

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We are thus presented with a narrative that incorporates alternative sources, personal

memories, and family stories in order to challenge the received official narratives of

Mississippi's economic growth and the desegregation of its public spaces. Pointing to the

environmental consequences, a fact made relevant by the impact of Katrina, Trethewey shifts the

narrative in order to alter the coordinates of our historical understanding: "[o]pportunities

followed growth, but so did environmental havoc" (43). But she also undoes the standard

understanding of black southerners' experience under segregation. On the one hand, Leretta's

story is familiar territory, demonstrating in many ways the tale of white frustration and resistance

to black people's hard-won right to assert their presence in public spaces, including municipal

beaches. But immediately following this recollection, Trethewey processes another story, this

time returning to the decade 1940-1950 to illustrate how Son Dixon's property business

experienced its own growth during Gulfport's population expansion and post-war economic

boom. Son Dixon's success is depicted as a wrinkle in the received narrative of Jim Crow-era

Mississippi: a black entrepreneur successfully navigating the exclusionary public spaces and

divided economies of Gulfport. His success is largely due to his having cornered the local market

for affordable housing catering to black people (who were excluded from the whites-only hotels

along the beach). Trethewey counterposes the modernist narrative of development and rising

standards of living told by county officials with the recurring experience of exclusion faced by

black Mississippians. While Son Dixon positioned himself to benefit from Gulfport's burgeoning

economic growth, Trethewey further undermines both the city's and her family's narrative of

development by weaving in the story of the "environmental havoc" brought on by reckless

building on the shore. In her dialectical and self-reflective meditations, the otherwise powerful

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narratives of modernization and development are continually undermined by the experiences of people and places that are excluded from the benefits and wealth that are accrued.

The permutations of metaphor and description she undertakes to grasp this form and to represent it constitute her text's ethical dilemma. This ethical dilemma is frequently tied to two related concerns: the first relates to her term *pentimento*, which "requires the collective efforts of a people — each citizen contributing to the narrative — so that a fuller version of the story can be told" that will establish "continuity of culture and heritage fostered by ongoing change and honest, inclusive remembrance of the past" (61). The second draws on her interrogation of the nostalgia pervading coastal residents' hopes for the future, the confrontation with *ruin* and negation that propel and stabilize dominant images of the past. Her apprehension of this situation involves what she calls "my national duty, my native duty, to keep the memory of the Gulf Coast as talisman against the uncertain future" (62).

As a landscape "cross-written" with various official and counter-narratives, Trethewey offers a reading practice that challenges the linearity of capitalist development, specifically the narratives of regional improvement and racial-uplift. The uncertainty about the present leads her meditation to reconfigure how the past, even her own family's history and experience, are placed into a meaningful relationship with the landscape and its periods of development:

> Hegel writes, 'When we turn to survey the past, the first thing we see is nothing but ruins,' As I contemplate the development of the coast, looking at old photographs of once new buildings — the pride of a growing city — I see beneath them, as if a palimpsest, the destruction wrought by Katrina. The story of the coast has been a story of urban development driven by economic factors and a much-less-than-needed awareness or

consideration of the effects of such development on the environment. It can be seen in all

the concrete poured on the coast — impervious to rainwater, a strip of parking lots and

landfill. It can be seen in the changing narrative, since 1992, of the landscape of historic

buildings into a casino landscape of neon and flashing lights and parking decks.

(Trethewey 51)

Trethewey employs the figurative language of "palimpsest," and later "pentimento," to signify a

mode of resisting the coastal landscape's absorption into the "story of urban development." She

reads the coastal landscape through a range of literary, archaeological, and artistic metaphors.

These metaphors and images illuminate a reading practice focused on the landscape that few

post-Katrina memoirs and testimonies attempt. Specifically, Trethewey's language depicts the

landscape itself as a social form in crisis. The language used to depict this crisis relies on the

simile of the palimpsest, which refers to a form of manuscript that has been "scratched again,"

erasing a body of writing and over-writing it with another. Derived from a process of viewing

older photographs and contemplating development, the impact of Katrina in the present moment

has produced a critical view of the coast's history. While that history is "a story of urban

development driven by economic factors," it is also a story of ruin and displacement rather than

pride and improvement. Repeated cycles of creative destruction tore down the familiar structures

of the built environment that held together social memory and identity. Palimpsests represent the

intrusion of the past, the emergence of discontinuous patterns of struggle that appear residual or

archaic in contrast to the imperatives set by the state's reconstruction program and its inscription

of official history onto the landscape. Its appearance as "ruin" harks back not only to Hegel, but

to Walter Benjamin's "Angel of History." What Benjamin's angel sees as "ruin" is the entire

accumulation of history, or what the historicist calls "progress." Trethewey's confrontation with the past through the palimpsest of history is a confrontation with the consequences of disaster and failures of modernization.

Lost in the process of assimilation is the difference of the past, the picture of life held together by the "before" photographs. But this past is built on its own mythology, as Trethewey carefully examines her own desires for a story with straightforward villains and causes of coastal erosion: "and yet turning to survey the past, I did not expect to find what I did. I was going back to read the narrative I thought was there — one in which gambling and the gaming industry, responsible for so much recent land and economic development on the coast, was a new arrival, not something already ingrained in the culture of the place" (51). Instead, she arrives at a consciousness where the act of viewing her historical photographs trigger a vision of "ruin" overlaying the images of progress and development on the coast — the buildings, beachfront, and casinos. The palimpsest of ruins which she can no longer stop from seeing contradicts the narrative of progress and modernization such buildings symbolize in the story of urban development. As a project that sustains a careful engagement with her alienation from the region, Trethewey's testimonial writing posits a recalcitrant landscape through the figurative reading of social and environmental change. This recalcitrance is gleaned from memories that disappear or become marginalized during each turn in the coast's history of business cycles, disaster, and rebuilding. Narratives and inscriptions work both ways, marking the landscape as well as deployed by the landscape onto people and memories which sustain potential resistant and ungovernable stances toward the recovery agenda of local governments.

The story of urban development that Trethewey sees as "ruin," in its coastal Mississippi articulation, is a story about how the coastal landscape progressively meets the conditions of modernity, how it is folded into the history of state-formation and recovery. While that story's power has covered the coast in concrete and lit it with neon, it is a story that was in the process of displacing people and the collective memories sustaining their link to the past: "Aesha tells me there are no recognizable landmarks along the coast anymore, and I see this too as I drive down the beach. No way to get your bearings. No way to feel at home, familiar with the land and cityscape" (Trethewey 61). At stake is the role of memory to shape the past for the purposes of the present. Given this crisis, Trethewey's self-critical meditation plots a course that both differentiates the path to modernization as well as the personal desires bound up in the search for origins to the coast's ecological crisis and economic dependence. Through the metaphor of palimpsests and pentimentos, Trethewey tries to reclaim landscape for another project, one that meets people's needs but does not seek to justify every action for the purpose of capital accumulation.

Thinking of landscape as a form of narrative enables us to focus on the spatial elements of abstract political subjectivity at the core of nationalism and modernization. As postcolonial critics have stressed, nationalist historiography has deployed the narratives of modernization and development to discursively construct the subjects of modern, capitalist democracies. This is accomplished by incorporating populations, nations, and territories into the modern nation-state. But, as Saskia Sassen and other scholars have emphasized in critical studies of nationalism and globalization, the space of the national was never fully unified, with varying levels of regional or local differentiation depending on varying convergences of investment, migration, and state

intervention. In Trethewey's meditation, her use of the metaphor of palimpsest stresses the return

of memories that are threatened with erasure. She strives for a regional recovery that looks to the

political promises of civil rights and equal opportunity in the capitalist economy, but which are

denied to so many residents struggling to live in the new coastal economy. Appearing to be a

rupture with the ideology of American capitalism, *Beyond Katrina* stops short of the radical

critique of capitalism and nationalism that would show that such narratives of progress and

improvement are constantly part of liberalism's apology for the necessary social inequality and

exploitation produced by capitalism.

Dave Eggers' *Zeitoun*: Between Incorporation and Recalcitrance

In this section I turn to the third and last text of my analysis of post-Katrina nonfiction,

Dave Eggers' *Zeitoun*. I use this analysis of Eggers' text in order to interrogate how testimonial

writing draws on images of landscape and memory to represent the physical alteration of the

urban landscape brought about by natural and manmade disaster. My broader purpose in this

section is to further develop the questions initiated by my discussion of disaster photography, in

particular the question of how representations of disaster enable critical thinking about the social

construction of disaster. Like Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina* and Rose's *1 Dead in Attic*, *Zeitoun*

depicts a landscape radically transformed by natural disaster. Significant portions of the book

focus on the title character's movement through and exploration of his city while the vast

majority of it is underwater, a situation that enables Eggers, the author, to insert and play with

elements of Zeitoun's life story and family history. Details of his life in Syria during the period

of rising pan-Arab nationalism and his travels around the world as a merchant seaman during the

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1970s and 1980s are inserted throughout the narrative during moments of introspection, dreams, and recollection. In this way, memory is also a critical concern of Eggers text, though he does not use the same explicitly ekphrastic or theoretical rhetoric that Trethewey uses. All three texts also deal with the intersections of disaster, displacement, and "race," in the sense that all three authors gesture toward the realization that racial difference is produced by processes of natural disaster, uneven development, and discriminatory state authorities.

A recipient of the 2010 American Book Award and honors from the Muslim Public Affairs Council and the Council on American-Islamic Relations, *Zeitoun* retells the story of Abdulrahman Zeitoun's experiences in New Orleans during Katrina and his wife Kathy Zeitoun's efforts to locate and free him after he was arrested and held without trial as a suspected terrorist. The narrative is based on extensive interviews conducted by Eggers and volunteers from Voice of Witness, a series of books published by McSweeney's "that use oral history to illuminate human rights crises" (Eggers 335). Their story focuses on the ways in which, during the catastrophe, the rule of law was effectively suspended and Arab and Muslim people could be subject to extraordinary forms of human rights violations, including indefinite incarceration in the name of fighting terrorism. Kathy and Zeitoun's story was initially included in the Voice of Witness collection and later expanded by Eggers into a full length nonfiction "novel." It is this mixture of nonfiction testimony and a third-person narrative voice that gives *Zeitoun* a novelistic literary quality. The ordeal that the Zeitouns describe demonstrates how the disaster of Katrina enabled the state to expand the operations of its security apparatus within the nation itself.

Before I move into my analysis of Eggers' text, I want to first elaborate on the relationship between disaster and narrative. In "Making Progress: Disaster Narratives and the Art

of Optimism in Modern America," Kevin Rozario argues that a "poetics of disaster" descending from classical theories of dramatic and narrative structure has enabled American narrators and witnesses of disaster to process the chaotic aftermath of destructive crises in an optimist light. Such narratives make sense of the disaster by establishing an order to events and placing moments of catastrophe within a narrative. Following the conventions of narrative plots, American writers have historically situated disaster as a necessary obstacle or crisis in the narrative's linear projection of forward-moving time. Drawing on Aristotle's notion of *peripeteia*, which signifies a turning point or a reversal of circumstances, Rozario argues that the classical narrative structure already depends on disaster. The *peripeteia* is a crisis or calamity that animates the narrative and drives it forward: "In most plots, there is a reversal of fortune or a moment of adversity that throws the hero or protagonist into turmoil. In 'comic' plots, a crisis or disruption of some sort presents an obstacle that must be overcome, a propulsive force that enables the development, growth, and insight that eventually produces an emotionally satisfying happy ending" (Rozario 33). Drawing on examples of disaster narratives that were written after the Chicago Fire of 1871 and the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, Rozario argues that American narratives of disaster, typically, underscored a belief that the catastrophe was a necessary "turning point" in the history of urban development. Disasters and narratives together constitute a model of time and historical progress that turns destructive incidents into "adversities" against which characters (individuals, cities, or entire nations) struggle. By working through these anxieties in a narrative form, the cathartic expression of social fears allowed audiences to process the emergence and inevitable defeat of fear and disaster. The moment of disaster pulls the

narrative toward an optimistic ending that resolves the narrative tension and posits disaster as a necessary force to move history forward.

Rozario's perspective on disaster as a function of narrative plot informs my approach to *Zeitoun*. However, unlike Rozario's examples of disaster narratives that emerged after the 1871 Chicago fire and the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the climax of *Zeitoun* does not coincide with the landfall of the storm or the moment when the city's canals and levees were breached. Instead, the storm arrives early in the narrative and passes with relatively little incident. The *peripeteia*, or turning point, of Eggers' text occurs at the moment two thirds of the way through the book when Zeitoun and his three companions are arrested by members of the National Guard patrolling the city. In this way, Eggers is interested in locating the "disaster" in the government's militarized response to the social disorder, a response that Eggers consistently portrays as an incomprehensible violation of democracy and civil rights. Through the experience of its title character, Abdulrahman Zeitoun, *Zeitoun* explores a unique aspect of Katrina that shows how deeply the national security apparatus and disaster response had been transformed by the War on Terror and the state-sanctioned surveillance and discrimination directed at Muslims in the United States.

After this turning point, *Zeitoun* follows its main character's detention at the city's passenger train and bus station, the Union Passenger Terminal, which the military had transformed into a temporary detention camp referred to as "Camp Greyhound." Held at the bus station for several days, Zeitoun and his companions were accused, without evidence, of being members of al Qaeda. Their detention, along with many other people they witness during their time, resembles incidents of extrajudicial confinement and prisoner abuse associated with

America's facilities in Guantanamo Bay. After being processed and held at Camp Greyhound, Zeitoun is later transported fifty miles north to the Elayn Hunt Correctional Center in St. Gabriel where he is held, without a lawyer or communication with the outside world, as a suspected terrorist. Through the intervention of an unknown missionary working in the prison, Zeitoun eventually reunited with his wife, Kathy, after months of incarceration. In this section, I analyze these moments in the text where Zeitoun interacts with the flooded city and sees it transformed by the security operations of the state. In this way, the landscape of flooding is counterposed to the landscape of post-disaster militarization.

Eggers establishes the relationship between Zeitoun and the state as a pivotal conflict in the text. Throughout the text, Eggers relates how being Muslim and Syrian-American informs Zeitoun's identity and self-understanding. This conflict stems from how Zeitoun's incarceration is presented as a consequence of state paranoia and the wartime abandonment of due process. It becomes apparent that Eggers' chief concern is an exploration of an incident that highlights the suspension of human rights possible even in an ostensibly modern liberal democracy. Toward the end, Kathy's thoughts perhaps capture Eggers' central questions: "She finds herself wondering, early in the morning and late at night and sometimes just while sitting with little Ahmad sleeping on her lap: Did all that really happen? Did it happen in the United States? To us? It could have been avoided, she thinks, So many little things could have been done. So many people let it happen. So many looked away. And it only takes one person, one small act of stepping from the dark to the light" (319). The first half of the text establishes the days leading up to the hurricane's arrival, as well as Zeitoun's personality, family, and his upbringing in Syria. A painter and construction contractor by trade, Zeitoun had been living in the United States for more than

twenty years before Katrina struck. Before arriving, he had served on various cargo ships and tankers that allowed him to travel the world. Eggers interweaves Zeitoun's memories of his life as a seaman and his family's relationship to the ocean, especially life in the fishing village of Jableh. Despite the threat of the storm, Zeitoun decides to remain in the city while Kathy, his wife, and their children evacuate. In the first chapter, Eggers vividly describes Zeitoun's frantic efforts to save the furniture and valuables in his home as it begins to take on several feet of water. The middle chapter recounts the efforts of Kathy and Zeitoun's brother, Ahmed, to locate and free him from his unlawful detention.

Eggers begins *Zeitoun* far from New Orleans. The first passage in the text unfolds with a slow and dream-like image: "On moonless nights the men and boys of Jableh, a dusty fishing town on the coast of Syria, would gather their lanterns and set out in their quietest boats. Five or six small craft, two or three fishermen in each. A mile out, they would arrange the boats in a circle on the black sea, drop their nets, and, holding their lanterns over the water, they would approximate the moon" (Eggers 3). We learn this is both dream and memory, and that a young Abdulrahman Zeitoun was in one of these boats. The opening lines are presented as if we are given a flashback, though on the page above these lines Eggers includes a heading which dates the events of this section "Friday August 26, 2005." While at first it is difficult to place the events chronologically, it is worth noting where Eggers chooses to begin his story about Katrina and New Orleans: off the coast of an obscure Syrian village. From the beginning, Eggers draws readers into a space that is already transnational, complicating standard narratives of Katrina as a "national catastrophe." A page later, Eggers rapidly brings us up to the actual date given in the heading: "Thirty-four years later and thousands of miles west, Abdulrahman Zeitoun was in bed

on a Friday morning, slowly leaving the moonless Jableh night, a tattered memory of it caught in a morning dream. He was in his home in New Orleans and beside him he could hear his wife Kathy breathing, her exhalations not unlike the shushing of water against the hull of a wooden boat" (4-5). Eggers pulls Jableh into the present, a narrative decision that metaphorically illustrates the presence of transnational movement. More than simply a metaphor for globalization or nostalgia for the transnational migrant's homeland, Eggers uses Zeitoun's dream of Jableh's moonless nights to establish a spatial and temporal mixing of the global and the local. Here, moonless Jableh and the New Orleans morning slide into one another. From these passages we can glimpse Eggers' themes regarding the presence of the transnational in New Orleans before Katrina, as well as the use of memory as a crucial index of the changes happening to the landscape.

Eggers' depiction of landscape and water in the passage above establishes a link between the tranquil past of Jableh and the flooding that will take place in the narrative's future sections. As Zeitoun explores the submerged urban environment in his boat in the middle sections of the book, he experiences and performs seemingly minor crossings of social boundaries that are embodied by property law and land use: "It was a strange sensation, paddling over the man's yard; the usual barrier that would prevent one from guiding a vehicle up to the house was gone. He could glide directly from the street, diagonally across the lawn, and appear just a few feet below a second-story window. Zeitoun was just getting accustomed to the new physics of this world" (Eggers 97). As the reader follows Zeitoun's journey through the flooded city, Eggers captures the wider range of mobility and the strange way that the failure of the city's levees and pumps enables a new, complicated appreciation for his surroundings.

He was conflicted about what he was seeing, a refracted version of his city, one where

homes and trees were bisected and mirrored in this oddly calm body of water. The

novelty of the new world brought forth the adventurer in him — he wanted to see it all,

the whole city, what had become of it. But the builder in him thought of the damage, how

long it would take to rebuild. Years, maybe a decade. He wondered if the world at large

could already see what he was seeing, a disaster mythical in scale and severity. (Eggers

96)

He sees the environment both as a landscape that has been made visually strange and a landscape

of property. As his perception moves back and forth between these perspectives, he starts to

grasp a new spatial awareness, which Eggers describes as a "physics," that entails an awareness

of the temporary disjuncture with the social boundaries of the pre-disaster world.

While *Zeitoun* contains a flood narrative, it is also a narrative of displacement centered

on the actions of a racist national security state. Two-thirds through the book, Zeitoun and three

other men who had joined his efforts to survive the floods are suddenly arrested, without

explanation or charges, by a team of National Guard and militarized police forces. As they are

taken by boat through the flooded streets, the mysterious and cosmic disposition of the city gives

way to increasingly violent and threatening series of military checkpoints. Familiar intersections

of major arteries and boulevards are filled with armed soldiers and photographers. Besides

naming a few of these important streets that define much of the Uptown area, Eggers does not

comment on their meaning. At "the intersection of Napoleon and St. Charles" (208) they are met

by another host of armed guards, who roughly tackle and handcuff Zeitoun and his friends.

Readers familiar with New Orleans' streets, would certainly understand that the intersection of

Napoleon and St. Charles lies in the middle of the Garden District, one of the city's wealthiest and majority white neighborhoods. Knowns for its opulent architecture, St. Charles is lined with picturesque oak trees under which the historic streetcar lines draw significant numbers of tourists every year. Eggers again uses Zeitoun's observation of familiar landmarks to counterpose with the strangeness of the disaster. From his window inside the military van, Zeitoun sees a familiar landmark: "This was a busy intersection that he passed every day. He could see Copeland's restaurant, where he'd often eaten with his family, right there on the corner. Now it was a military post, and he was a captive" (209). The transformation of the intersection and the familial restaurant into a militarized outpost produces and shapes the memory.

Elsewhere in the text, Eggers constructs several moments in which Zeitoun actively meditates on the past, particularly through scenes where, in the milieu of the flooded city, he recounts events in his family history. In one such passage, Zeitoun returns with his canoe back to his flooded home after a long day searching the streets and rescuing people stranded in their homes or on various rooftops. He enters the house through his upstairs window and immediately searches for a picture of his older brother Mohammad that he had recalled earlier in the text. Instead he finds another photograph, which Eggers includes in the text, of his older brother in 1958 being congratulated by the vice-president of Lebanon after a winning long-distance swimming match. In this passage focused on the photograph of his Mohammad, Eggers depicts Zeitoun's act of recollection, in which Mohammad Zeitoun's victories in several international long-distance swimming competitions, and the photographs commemorating the moments of his victory, also belong to the story of Arab nationalism in the 1950. The swimming matches that Mohammad won stunning upset victories in were organized as commemorative events marking

the union of Syria and Egypt under Gamal Nasser's pan-Arab movement, "in which swimmers from all over the Arab world would swim thirty kilometers through the Mediterranean. It was the first race of its kind on the Syrian coast" (112). Mohammad's accomplishments are bound with the commemorative politics of nationalism. This act of recollection ties together different places and times connected by Zeitoun's active recall of the past. At the end of the section, Eggers returns to his third-person narration of Zeitoun's interior monologue, which explains how the recollection further develops Zeitoun's character, how he draws on memory to reinforce his moral determination: "It had been forty-one years since Mohammad's death. Mohammad's incredible rise and premature passing had shaped the trajectory of Zeitoun's family in general and of Abdulrahman in particular, but he didn't like to dwell on it… All he could do now was honor his brother's memory. Be strong, be brave, be true. Endure. Be as good as Mohammad was" (116).

To analyze such moments in the text requires unpacking the complicated frames within which "memory" is depicted. For instance, it is necessary to recall that we are reading a testimonial-like work of nonfiction, written by Eggers but based on his interviews with Zeitoun and Kathy. While the dialogue is taken from statements given in the interviews, Eggers composes these moments of recollection that take place at various times with the otherwise straightforward chronological retelling of events. By inserting moments like the passage above that digress into a kind of historical contextualization framed by a character's interaction with a photography, Eggers refracts their memories through the narrative conventions of a novel. He re-organizes events, holds back and reveals details, and creates characters who we are able to access their internal thoughts and emotions. We are therefore left not only with a question about why

Zeitoun recalls Mohammad's victories, but why Eggers constructs such an act of recollection, one that configures a character's past in relation to an important historical movement that appears to have little connection with the "present," the specific catastrophe of Katrina. According to historian Patrick Hutton, in theories of historiography, "recollection" of the past constitutes "the moment of memory with which we consciously reconstruct images of the past in the selective way that suits the needs of our present situation" (xxi). Eggers does not explicitly connect the events of Katrina and the moments of rising nationalism in Syria and the Arab world during the 1950s. However, the act of recollection itself, as Hutton argues, presupposes a "need" for which the memory is reconstructed in order to satisfy. In terms of character development, Eggers presents this act of recollection to further contextualize Zeitoun's personal ethos. However, this interpretation depoliticizes the way in which Mohammad's life was shaped by sociohistorical movements, a larger narrative about the nation through which his life, in this moment of recollection, takes on meaning. He becomes, in this photograph, not only a member of Zeitoun's family and a beloved older brother, but a symbol of Arab nationalism and pan-Arab unity.

Moments of recollection like these, whether in the form of dreams, extended contemplations of photographs, or encounters with familiar landmarks that are radically re-contextualized by the flooding and the military occupation, point to the ways in which the narrative of *Zeitoun* configures memory as a problem. The ability to remember the past, in some sense, always appears to be threatened with obliteration. In the final chapter of *Zeitoun*, after Kathy has located and gotten the state to release Abdulrahman from Hunt, she begins to suffer from episodes of post-traumatic memory loss. Eggers begins the chapter with this plain and

direct passage: "Kathy has lost her memory. It's shredded, unreliable. The wiring in her mind has been snapped in vital places, she fears, and now the strangest things have been happening" (Eggers 293). Eggers shows how, during her daily routines of visiting the bank or operating the family painting business, the traumatic events episodes of the disaster have psychologically damaged Kathy's own capacity to remember. The effects of post-traumatic stress have taken form in the forgetting of names and dates, her loss of concentration. At the bank, Kathy experiences a dissociative moment that, in how it is portrayed and written by Eggers, obliquely links together the problems of memory, testimony, and writing: "She didn't know how to write, or what to write, or where. She stared and stared at the checkbook; it became more foreign by the moment. She couldn't identity the purpose of the checkbook on the counter or the pen in her hand… The teller said something but Kathy couldn't understand the words… the sounds coming from her mouth were garbled, backward" (294). The next page indicates a few other things that Kathy is forgetting, demonstrating that in regards to her own memory, the disaster has left her changed. But Eggers leaves the larger connection between memory and social catastrophe unstated. And because the narrative voice presents this episode in a more or less straightforward and prosaic way, with very few figurative devices, the scene seems to only demonstrate in detail the effects of trauma on Kathy's ability to remember and to utilize language. In other words, Kathy's difficulty remembering is not meant to stand as a metaphor for the disaster itself and Eggers does not seem to be making a larger argument about memory and disaster, but merely cataloging the psychological trauma caused by the state's violation of Zeitoun's human rights.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have approached the depictions of landscape and disaster through testimonial and nonfiction literature as a way that Katrina's witnesses have attempted to understand the manifestations of displacement, post-storm development, and state violence. Following the work of Johnson and Rozario, I have maintained that narrative depictions of disaster present various ways to configure the problems presented by changes to the social and material landscape. From Rose's *1 Dead in Attic*, Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina*, to Eggers' *Zeitoun*, these texts demonstrate the means by which testimonial writing on Katrina constructs the problematics of cultural memory in the face of catastrophic state and economic practices. In this chapter I have shown that the depiction of landscape and the problem of memory are linked in each text, that memory is presented as an abiding and persistent problem for narratives about floods and depictions of post-flood damaged urban environments.

Chapter 3:

"This New Way of Governing": Resilience, Blight, and the Revision of Urban History

Introduction

As New Orleans neared the ten year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the city's elected leaders began to see urban blight as a critical obstacle to a full economic recovery. When Mitch Landrieu took office in 2008, nearly 44,000 residential addresses, accounting for roughly twenty-five percent of the city's residential properties, were categorized as either vacant or abandoned. By September 2010, the percentage of vacant addresses in New Orleans had exceeded those of other economically distressed cities, including Detroit, Cleveland, and Baltimore (Plyer and Ortiz 3). Recognizing that this degree of blight was stifling economic development, the administration set about reforming the code enforcement measures and government accountability, bringing blight management to the forefront of the city's post-Katrina priorities. The reforms evidently paid off — according to the city's *2013 New Orleans Blight Reduction Report*, the Landrieu administration claims to have successfully forced owners to improve or demolish 10,000 units of property between September 2010 and April 2013 (4), reducing the overall amount of nuisance properties by 30 percent, out of the 43,755 such addresses counted by the US Postal Service (8). In the period between September 2010 and March 2012, the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center reported that 9,000 previously unoccupied homes "became active" (Plyer and Ortiz 1).[7]

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[7] Comparatively, the *Blight Reduction Report* points out that Landrieu's predecessor, Ray Nagin, only brought 8 properties into code compliance in eight years (City of New Orleans 14).

Landrieu's solution to the persistent blight problem, which his predecessors had been unable to resolve, was a neoliberal one: streamline and consolidate the enforcement powers over blight that were spread between twelve different governmental agencies; create an online portal where the public can view properties in violation of code and monitor the enforcement process; and subject the city government workers to market-based performance measurements through the new Office of Performance and Accountability. The new blight eradication process, however, is not simply about these abandoned properties. In a 2015 article for *Politico Magazine,* "The Battle for New Orleans," Eric Velasco extolls the remediation efforts carried out by Mayor Landrieu's administration, considering it an optimistic, consumerist vision of urban governance transformed by data processing and tracking software in which the assessment of government itself is subjected to efficiency and tracking. He claims that through these recent applications of data to government services, "New Orleans… embraces the 21st century in its quest for renewal. Modern performance measurement — counting, dissecting, setting goals, measuring results, adjusting based on data — now is a template throughout the city government, from budgeting and contacting to policing and helping the homeless" (Velasco). Guided by data-driven metrics, the techniques of blight tracking have become the model for the city's handling of all other social issues. In this way, the Landrieu administration is engaged in a "fight" against both the pervasiveness of property nuisances and the inefficiencies of previous ways of governing the city.

As I analyze the examples below, I intend to complicate the understanding of the term blight. Throughout this text, I utilize the term much in the same way that my sources intend: as a designation for property (a built structure or a lot) that, through disuse, abandonment, or destructive event, has reached a state of disrepair. However, the terms I use to define blight, the

notions of "disuse," "abandonment," or "disrepair," are themselves subjective from the point of view of different centers of social authority and power. According to Yi-Fu Tuan, in a short essay on the interpretation of "visual blight," the concept of blight connotes a sense of "disease" and "organic malfunctioning" (26), which we necessarily impart on our understanding of the health of the social environment. "By 'visual blight,'" he writes, "we may simply mean that we are judging the health of society on the ground of visual evidence in the landscape" (Tuan 26). In other words, visual evidence of disrepair signifies social disrepair. While these concepts can be applied to the aesthetic quality of a building, they also connote an ethical relationship between the physical appearance or structural quality of the property and the social enactment of property relations. Blighted properties represent, in the narrative provided by liberalism for the emergence of private property, the failure of owners to enact their moral responsibility to improve the value, and thus the rent, to be gained from privatized property (Blomley 85-6). According to this ideology of liberal property, owners "[b]y virtue of their relation to property…will fashion and improve a community, both physically and morally, stabilize it through their fixity and presence, and serve to represent it given their supposed interest in responsible citizenship" (Blomley 89). Drawing on this ideological analysis of private property, I explore how the narratives of blight in my examples are revised through their engagement with the concept of resilience.

The blight eradication program, because of its neoliberal techniques and application to solve other social issues, frames the removal of neglected property through the problem of governance. As Landrieu explicitly states, his administration's blight program and its subsequent recovery initiatives represent the adoption of a new ethos in municipal government: "'We're applying this new way of governing… It's everybody sitting at the table, putting in their part, cooperating and not being ideologically bent. You've got to find answers. There is no ideological

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way to fill a pothole'" (Velasco). In this vision of depoliticized governance, "ideology" is

replaced by an image of participatory problem-solving: "everybody sitting at the table, putting in

their part." The new ethos of municipal governance reduces the problems of urban life to matters

of service provision and the maintenance of infrastructure. This includes Landrieu's data-driven

strategies, which signal the city's transformation into a "'hub of innovation and

change'" (Velasco). Because this "new way of governing" embraces technocracy over politics, it

aligns data and scientifically-managed renewal with the emerging concept of "resilience."

The concept of "resilience" is used by the city to designate the adaptation of urban life to

the challenges of the 21st century. Resilience has become a way of seeing the crises of natural

hazards, climate change, economic volatility, and government accountability as interlocking

domains over which both government and subjects can adapt to and prepare for. For example, the

authors of the Rockefeller Foundation's article "New Orleans and the Birth of Urban Resilience"

draw explicit connections between various "disruptions" stemming from climate change and

transformation in the global economy. For this foundation, the local socioeconomic and

environmental situations are linked to global crises caused by climate change and economic

globalization in what is a single socioecological feedback loop: "Today, disruptions, fueled by

the intersecting forces of globalization, urbanization, and climate change, have made crisis the

new normal for cities around the world… If it isn't decades-old racial and class tension, its water

shortages, traffic congestion, or some other stress that is eating away at the fabric of the

community" ("New Orleans"). Rather than find engineering solutions to these "intersecting

forces," crisis is accepted as the "new normal for cities." However, this is not a defeatist

approach; rather, it reveals how the "intersecting forces" are seen as part of a single integrated

system, a socioecology that encompasses various environmental, economic, and social systems that interact with each other across scales.

Narratives of resilience frequently arise after catastrophes, stemming from the need to anchor the recovery process in an assuring and optimistic storyline. Governments and their supporters often deploy rhetorics of resilience after a disaster to help secure the political legitimacy of the regime (Vale and Campanella 340). The concept of "resilience" as it emerges in post-Katrina New Orleans, however, goes beyond simply securing the political legitimacy of Landrieu's administration. Rather, this concept offers a way of reading the representations of New Orleans' adaptation to an assemblage of social, ecological, and economic crises. It is this multiform, pervasive sense of crisis that the concept of resilience itself formulates and arranges into an object of government and a means of administering urban life. Stephanie Wakefield and Bruce Braun write that while previous modes of disaster management sought to prevent or forestall crisis, resilient urbanism accepts that environmental and economic disruptions to social life cannot be stopped for good. Resilient urbanism names the way "government evokes and seeks to manage an inherently volatile world in which crisis is ubiquitous and the disaster-to-come is inevitable" (5). Within this framework, I extend Wakefield and Braun's analysis of resilience as a mode of government to include blight, which appears as another crisis through which municipal governments exert control over urban life. Since the emergence of city planning in the twentieth century, cities have developed different means to govern urban life by eradicating blight (which took different historical forms such as dense, downtown slums or informal settlements on the urban periphery). The matter of blight enforcement is not new; what is new and significant is how, through the ideology of resilience, the social and aesthetic

problems associated with neglected property emerge as an object of government at this time —

that is, how it becomes a mode of administrating urban life and maintaining neoliberal

arrangements of capitalist growth.

In the following sections, I offer first a theoretical framework based on Michel Foucault's

concepts of governance, biopolitics, and *dispositif* that informs my analysis of the rhetorics of

resilience. In my third section, I then turn to examples of blight management that comprise two

seemingly disconnected elements in the apparatus of resilient urbanism: first, the *Blight*

Reduction Report and its accompanying online portal, and second *The Music Box*, a public art

project. The report, as I have discussed above, details the collaboration between reformers in the

mayor's office and private sector organizations to modify how the city could exercise greater

authority over negligent land owners. In this report blight is variously defined by its relation to

property use, by negligence and by the economic and environmental crises affecting the city's

property landscape. The artists who created *The Music Box*, on the other hand, present a resistant

approach to the plans that would replace overgrown and abandoned lots with newer construction

projects — buildings that they claim would raise the property values and hasten the displacement

of the neighborhood's remaining working class and black residents. This project is also,

therefore, situated at the intersection of debates regarding race and gentrification. This

installation piece draws its architectural inspiration from the buildings in the surrounding

neighborhood that could be classified as "blight" by city authorities. By reclaiming these

buildings, the artists develop an aesthetic concept that runs counter to the designs of city planners

or developers who are eager to build new apartments, especially in areas regarded a gentrifying

or losing historical structures. Defined in these ambiguous ways, I contend that the objective of

the mayor's program is not strictly the full eradication of nuisances, but the means to control the use of urban property and the public realm and to introduce new sites of intervention through online mapping and tracking software. In this way, abandoned or neglected property becomes a source of constant management and tracking, never definitively "reduced" or "eradicated," but sustaining modes of authority. I read both this report and the installation piece for how the concept of "blight" is redefined in resilience discourse as an object of governance.

Following my discussion of these interventions in blighted and abandoned property, I turn to my final examples in which resilient governance is legitimated through a revision of history. These two reports, Goody Clancy's *A Plan for the 21st Century* and the Office of Resilience and Sustainability's *Resilient New Orleans* discuss the concept of "living with water" in reference to establishing resilient living and planning. Central to the interpretation of recovery in two post-Katrina planning documents, "living with water" involves reinterpreting the history of the city's environmental management and natural hazards response. I propose that the city's adoption of the rhetoric of resilience is sustained through a revision of the city's history of environmental management and disaster response.

"Urban Resilience" and the Government of Life

In this section I work through my key terms and concepts, explaining the materials and methods used in the rest of this chapter that illustrate the consolidation of resilient urbanism in the governance of post-Katrina New Orleans. By examining both the city government's efforts to eliminate or reduce blight, as well as the work of local street artists to incorporate the physical materials and aesthetics of abandoned property, I explore how "blight" becomes an object of

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government. In this chapter, I work primarily with examples of the rhetorics of blight and resilience, rather than with specific abandoned buildings. This section proceeds by closely exploring how two principle texts redefine what "resilience" and "recovery" mean in the aftermath of Katrina. In the context of urban recovery and government policy, "resilience" is a means of reshaping government through "the pervasive imagining of cities as integrated socioecological networks, intimately tied to global systems in a recursive process in which cities are understood as at once transformative agents and vulnerable subjects" (Wakefield and Braun 4). Using the work of scholars in resilience and biopolitics, I define resilience is an apparatus of power that envisions how life should be subjected to political control and social regulation in the face of climate change and economic globalization, processes which threaten the authority and integrity of the nation-state.

In the context of post-disaster reconstruction, "resilience" and "recovery" typically connote the processes by which a city and its population make use of their material, social, and political resources to bring back the city's social and economic productivity. Resilience, as Lawrence Vale and Thomas Campanella demonstrate, can also take the form of rhetorics and narratives that never can be removed from the political interests of those who tell them. For instance, narratives of resilience can mask the power dynamics at work within a recovery process, naturalizing both the exploitative conditions that rendered some groups more vulnerable to catastrophe as well as the profits and power that elites are able to accrue through the recovery process. In this sense, they argue that "the notion of a resilient city is a societally and economically productive form of denial. Even the most horrific acts of destruction have been interpreted as opportunities for progressive reform, and the process whereby this narrative is

assembled often happens very quickly" (Vale and Campanella 340). This politicized dimension

of all resilience narratives allows us to place redefinitions of the terms "recovery" and

"resilience" in post-Katrina plans as radical departures from the ways urban governments have

previously handled rebuilding after disaster. "Recovery," for instance, typically connotes how

planners, government, and residents imagine the city will be rebuilt. How the term is defined can

suggest either a desire to return the city to its pre-disaster form and function, or an understanding

of return as an "opportunity" for new ways of governing. For example, in a surprising passage,

the Rockefeller Foundation argues that for "recovery" to take place, a city can no longer simply

recreate the conditions of the past. Rather, recovery requires that citizens and governments

execute a dramatic break with the building practices and past. This break is necessary because as

residents rebuild, the authors posit, they are inevitably pulled to return to their pre-crisis ways of

life, whether it is to rebuild in vulnerable areas or to restore the same disaster prevention

technologies. Instead, the foundation argues, "[r]ecovery must defy the understandable human

tendency to revert to how things were before a crisis. In order to protect a city — or entity, or

individual — from the vulnerabilities that initially exposed it to danger, the rebuilding process

must necessarily be a time for rethinking — and, ultimately, revitalization" ("New Orleans").

The language here is striking and provocative: recovery is a defiant action against the "human

tendency to revert." In this sense, life is not only to be protected, but how it is imagined and lived

must also be altered and adjusted to grasp the opportunity afforded by the rebuilding process.

Similarly, Goody Clancy, the architectural firm that composed *A Plan for the 21 Century*,[8] redefines "resilience" for a new and challenging historical moment. Echoing the Rockefeller Foundation's discussion of "recovery," in the plan's chapter on "Resilience and Living with Natural Hazards," Goody Clancy qualifies their concept of resilience. Due to the changing environmental and economic circumstances facing urban areas — of climate change, economic recessions, and population movements tied to globalization — resilience involves "not just the capacity to return to a previous state" but "the capacity to adapt to changing conditions, including uncertain, unknown, or unpredictable risks'" (Goody Clancy 12.1-2). The capacity to adapt, rather than "return to a previous state" expresses the ethical prescription of resilience to managing and ordering life facing "uncertain, unknown, and unpredictable risks" which requires a completely new approach to managing disaster recovery and living with the persistent hazard of flooding. Furthermore, this state of exposure to uncertain risk is generalized. According to the Rockefeller Foundation, the state of "crisis" facing urban areas today does not simply represent the moment of a natural disaster, but a continuous spectrum of events both catastrophic and mundane: "Today, disruptions, fueled by intersecting forces of globalization, urbanization, and climate change, have made crisis the new normal for cities around the world. If it isn't a hurricane, it's an earthquake, or a blizzard. If it isn't decades-old racial and class tension, its water shortages, traffic congestion, or some other stress that is eating away at the fabric of the community" ("New Orleans"). Urban life is depicted in this passage as consumed by a variety of

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[8] Completed and approved in August 2010, the Plan for the 21st Century is the culmination of five years of post-disaster urban planning. As the city's current "comprehensive master plan," it both replaces the previous master plan completed over 20 years ago and builds on the recommendations of the previous three post-disaster recovery plans created after Katrina: the Bring New Orleans Back Commission's plan (including the Urban Land Institute's *A Strategy for Rebuilding*), the *Neighborhoods Rebuilding Plan* (also called the "Lambert Plan"), and the *Unified New Orleans Plan* (a replacement for the BNOBC's planning process and funded through grants from the Rockefeller Foundation).

"stresses" and "disruptions" that constitute "the new normal for cities around the world." In this rich and startling passage, the Rockefeller Foundation establishes the premises upon which resilience rethinks the role and function of government.

In their essay "Governing the Resilient City," Stephanie Wakefield and Bruce P. Braun explain how resilience represents a shift in the techniques of government:

> A common thesis is that while in the past, technologies of government sought to prevent this or that specific crisis, projecting a utopian future beyond all crises, today government evokes and seeks to manage an inherently volatile world in which crisis is ubiquitous and the disaster-to-come is inevitable. By this view, the 'beyond' is forever deferred, and crisis is no longer that which is to be warded off, eliminated, or overcome, but that which must be absorbed, attenuated, and survived. (4-5)

Wakefield and Braun describe how the emergence of resilience-thinking in planning and urban governance marks an ecological turn in which cities are understood as tied in a "recursive" feedback system to global processes of globalization, population movements, and climate change. According to the paradigm of resilient urbanism, cities are understood as "*integrated socioecological networks*, intimately tied to global systems in a recursive process in which cities are both transformative agents and vulnerable subjects" (Wakefield and Braun 4). The circuits between the global and the local are imagined as perpetually generating crises, to which adept and strategic urban leadership must adopt a flexible approach. Adaptation to a world of inherent crisis, therefore, differentiates how resilience operates as a mode of governing urban life from previous forms of government associated with social democracy, welfare state capitalism, and modernist planning. Crisis, they point out, must now be accepted as a constant feature of urban reality, a reality that cannot be, in this discourse, prevented or wished away. Instead, government

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intervenes in new ways, engaging with these technologies so that forces of crisis and disruption to human life can be "absorbed, attenuated, and survived" (Wakefield and Braun 5). For the elected leaders of post-storm New Orleans, the crises of Katrina, the BP Oil Spill, and the 2008 recession are all symptomatic of the need to understand and respond to the integrated networks that have had destabilizing effects on corporate profits and investment, environmental quality, the housing market, and the local tax base. Mayor Landrieu's equation of the city's blight and the transformation of the city into a mode of innovation rests on the emerging alignment of urban recovery thinking under the rubric of resilience.

As a mode of governance, Wakefield and Braun note that the institutionalization of resilience has been primarily an urban project, carried out at the scale of municipal governments rather than at the level of the nation-state. Indeed, New Orleans become one of the first cities to join the 100 Resilient Cities, a global initiative funded by the Rockefeller Foundation to embed resilience strategies and policy programs throughout local government bodies. Through this initiative, the Rockefeller Foundation provides funding for a dedicated government official, the Chief Resilience Officer to "ensure that the city's resilience-building resources stay tightly coordinated, with one conductor at the orchestra's helm" ("New Orleans").

Resilience, Wakefield and Braun argue, is the form in which the governance of life emerges under conditions of extreme environmental and economic turbulence; resilient government "seeks to manage an inherently volatile world in which crisis is ubiquitous and the disaster-to-come is inevitable" (5). By projecting a volatile future of climate crises and economic turbulence that it cannot directly prevent, Wakefield and Braun argue that resilience reframes the social spaces through which urban life is managed. In a separate essay, Bruce Braun explains that

the form of government expressed by resilience introduces control into new "sites of intervention" such as fuel efficiency monitors and other "technical objects" that manage urban life without an explicit use of the law. Instead, he writes "urban life is subject to technological modes of management in new and novel ways: the technical object itself becomes a site of intervention, a site in which 'efficiencies' can be introduced" (56). The fuel efficiency monitors in vehicles, for instance, relate information about the rate of energy consumption directly to the driver, a technical intervention that regulates carbon emissions through an interface with the driver (53). The driver's behavior is modified and "modulated" in such a way that she is brought into the circuit of feedback and data provided by the car. By intervening in the act of driving itself, Braun argues, technical governance does not rely on the law to administrate and control individualized behavior (54). While he acknowledges that technical interventions in personal behavior are not entirely new, and that modes of governance involving the legal system and sovereignty have not disappeared, resilience configures (and thus manages) life as systems and circuits between the human and nonhuman systems. This, Braun argues, encapsulates something novel about the administration of life under resiliency: it seeks to "modulate affects" rather than to "mold subjects" (54).

My reading of blight follows Braun's conception of "resilience" as an intervention in the affective sites of urban life. The rhetorics of municipal recovery plans and city authorities configure blight as an object of government. These plans, laws, strategy documents, online databases, works of art, and historical narratives belong to a *dispositif* of "resilience thinking" that establishes neglected property as a site of intervention. *Dispositif*, or "apparatus," is a term drawn from Foucault's work which describes the assemblage of a heterogeneous set of elements

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— discourses, technologies, architectural forms, scientific or philosophical ideas, etc. — and the networks established between them (Braun 51). The notion of *dispositif* helpfully demonstrates how the diverse array of practices applied by post-Katrina planners, public officials, and artists attain coherence as a legitimate "crisis" facing city officials, homeowners, and the public. It is the application of government to produce effects — the formulation of a problem that requires solutions and around which "apparatuses of government coalesce" (50).

Building on the concept of *dispositif*, Braun defines "government" as a configuration of various elements and ideas that emerges and seeks out a problem to be solved, something which "must be seen as an ad hoc assemblage that in advanced capitalism proceeds in a relatively aimless fashion, introducing 'management' into diverse sites and practices in a piecemeal and contingent way in response to a dynamic and changing world" (Braun 51). In the following sections, I explore how blight emerges as problem for government through the city's remediation efforts and the work of artists working with abandoned buildings. These two contemporaneous practices participate in the management of life, and both are focused on the physical object of buildings. Within both of these projects, "blight" is configured as a contested site of moral and social problems, through which the meaning of life in the post-disaster city can be defined. In the next section, I bring together municipal blight remediation policies with art installations that invoke resilience in two apparently conflicting ways.

Narratives of Resilience in the Management of Blight

If the planners of New Orleans' future have redefined the meaning of resilience to include the capacity to adapt to an uncertain and unpredictable world, the city's landscape of vacant or

dilapidated buildings provokes a number of efforts to mark this adaptation. This section explores the emergence of resilient governance *through* blight — that is, how the apparatus of government comes be shaped and organized through its construction of blight. To make this case, I explore two different approaches to the problem of nuisance properties. My first example, as I briefly described in my introduction, is the 2014 *Blight Reduction Report* and BlightStatus, an online monitoring and mapping tool. Through these tools, the public sector itself is subjected to forms of measurement and control that suggest that the attention to nuisance property offers neoliberalism an indirect means of modifying the exercise of state power over private property. The second object that I examine is *The Music Box*, a work of public art which, through its incorporation of debris, salvage, and scrap, critically engages with the official rhetorics of blight and resilience.

I take my first example from the mayor's *Blight Reduction Report* and BlightStatus, the online portal for tracking and mapping the legal process of remediation developed for the city government by Code for America. Issued in January 2014, the report explains how the Landrieu's administration met its goal of remediating 10,000 units of property. While the report touts a significant reversal of the city's blight trends, the remediation is not simply about maintaining the aesthetic or physical quality of buildings and vacant lots. As Velasco reported in his article about the "fight" against blight, this program reflects a larger social achievement for the city government: the opportunity to tell a story about how the city has changed since Katrina. Resolving the blight problem allows Landrieu's administration to depict the transformation of the city into a "model of innovative" government. In other words, the report is not merely interested in how many units are rehabilitated or their subsequent effect on property values or crime.

Rather, the reform of the blight removal process seeks to discipline the city government's operations.

Here, I turn to my analysis of the *Blight Reduction Report*, which I discussed briefly in my introduction. As an example of how government emerges around a perceived problem, this text demonstrates how the city authorities have fashioned new disciplinary and surveillance strategies to identify, map, and track the problem of blight. In my inquiry into the formation of this problem, I utilize Braun's description of resilience as a *dispositif*, a mode of governing life that emerges in response to a "perceived problem" and through which a network is established between the elements and techniques deployed to tackle the problem. In this section, I ask how these emerging systems construct blight as a problem to be managed by the city, and how these processes in turn render subjects governable.

Before proceeding further, I want to first establish how blight is defined by the *Blight Reduction Report*. In its introductory pages, it simply states that "[d]ilapidated properties and overgrown lots, otherwise known as blight, have long been among New Orleans' most vexing challenges" (4). In its section on "What is Blight?" the report refers to Chapter 26 of the City Code, which sets out the minimum standards for owners' use and maintenance of their property and the means available to the city enforce compliance: "Property owners in violation of Chapter 26 can be found guilty in an administrative hearings process. This results in fines of up to $500 per violation per day, as well as authorization for the City to remediate the property through demolition and/or lot clearing" (*Blight Reduction* 7). While blight seems have a vague definition within the report, the report is more explicit about its consequences, noting that "[c]oncentrations of blighted properties reduce property values, harm quality of life, and threaten public

safety" (4). In this way, "blighted properties" are defined not simply by what they *are or look like*. Rather, they are defined by what they *do* to the value of land and the morality of the surrounding area — that is, how they "reduce," "harm," and "threaten" other properties. As unmanaged property, blight appears to possess a peculiar agency: as a form of property that no longer follows the "story line" and "master narrative of liberal property," it appears to mark a regression of property back towards a pre-privatized sense of "waste" (Blomley 85). Thus, in this narrative formulation, vacant or nuisance properties threaten the formation of socially desirable subjects. We can see this confirmed in the city's *Code of Ordinances*, which defines blight by its relation to other properties in the built environment. Any unoccupied property (a building or vacant lot) can be considered "blighted" if its condition has become "detrimental to the health, morals, safety, public welfare, and the well being of the community, endangers life or Property or is conducive to ill health, delinquency and crime as a result of dilapidation, decay, or unsafe or unsanitary conditions" (*Code of Ordinances* Article III, Sec. 28-37).

With the legal steps at its disposal to force property owners to repair or demolish their property, the report defines blight as a violation of both the law and the logic of private property. Even when the report acknowledges how New Orleans' high rate of abandoned or damaged property has been caused by unique disasters and a steady rate of population loss since 1960, the city still locates the responsibility for blight solely in the behaviors of individual property owners. In addition to the gradual population loss since 1960, the *Blight Reduction Report* discusses the role played by natural disasters in creating the significant numbers of blighted properties in New Orleans. Eighty percent of the housing stock suffered flood damage during Katrina, and many of those lots remained vacant or the structures continue to stand but were

never restored. In one passage, the authors acknowledge that "[b]light is often a symptom of an imbalance between the supply and demand for housing, especially in cities that have experience sustained population decline, such as New Orleans, whose population peaked in the 1960s" (*Blight Reduction* 9). But this acknowledgement does not excuse those who the city deems to be the primary agent in blight, negligent property owners: "At the end of the day, every property has an owner and that owner is responsible for the maintenance of her property" (9). In the report's list of blight's causes, "Responsibility of Property Owners" is the only one in which the report can identify an agent. Otherwise, the city code lacks any way to hold the social and environmental incidents of "natural disasters" or "population loss" legally culpable. The compulsory powers of law can only act on entities that it recognizes within the framework of private property ownership; displacement, migration, and the exposure of life and property to natural hazards are the result of structural and social problems. Thus, the report retained the restricted definition of blight to matters between the owner and their property. In this way, the remedy for blight can reduced to the matter of the property owner's relationship to the state, and thus maintains the primacy of private property ownership protected and regulated by the state.

Once the report establishes that private owners bear the only legal-recognized responsibility for the condition of their property, the narrative pivots to the matter of governance: how the enactment of reforms to the city's blight enforcement policy has enhanced the "efficiency" and "transparency" of the public sector itself. For example, the report highlights how Landrieu reformed the "organizational architecture and processes" of the affected departments in order to "create a streamlined management structure that has clear lines of accountability for accomplishing citywide blight reduction goals and has the capacity to deploy

tools necessary to achieve goals" (*Blight Reduction* 11). Further emphasis is placed on efficiency

through the "strategic deployment of resources," government agencies will "deploy blight

eradication tools with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency consistent with the

City's vision, mission, and values" (*Blight Reduction* 11).

As the report explains, the city has now adopted a variety of techniques and legal tools in

order to enforce building code ordinances and bring negligent owners into compliance.

According to the report, over fifteen local and statewide public agencies, charitable foundations,

university research centers, and non-profit organizations participated in creating the new

administration's reformed blight enforcement procedures (*Blight Reduction* 11). These

conversations recommended that the city utilize its existing enforcement tools, including code

violation liens and sheriff's sales, which enables the city to foreclose on the properties and bring

them to auction, "result[ing] in a clean transfer of ownership from the original owner to a third

party, who can then remediate the property to put it back in commerce" (*Blight Reduction* 15).

While the enforcement procedures simply reactivated the available codes and ordinances,

the city did create new technical instruments for enhancing the public's ability to monitor how

the city adjudicates code violations. For example, by adopting so-called "data-driven decision

making" (12), the city introduces a new rationality of surveillance that enlists public

participation. Through the BlightStatus website, users are able to search for nuisance properties

throughout the entire city or narrow their search to properties with code violations in specific

neighborhoods. Lots and buildings with code violations show up as pins on the map, which link

to a page that further describes the particular infractions reported against the owner. Clicking on

the individual pin associated with an address reveals how the property is proceeding along a

timeline of enforcement procedures, what the *Blight Report* calls the "blight pipeline" (13).

Viewers can see when the case was opened, inspected, and in violation of code; they are

provided the date of its hearing and when a judgment was rendered. From this page one can

follow links that provide further details about the ownership and zoning restrictions of the

property through the city's Property Viewer. This additional mapping website also uses GPS

information to encode every tract of land throughout the city, providing data about the property's

current ownership, zoning district, future land use designations, taxes, and local historic

preservation districts. In this way, the individuals are inserted into an information circuit with the

city agencies that monitor and regulate property, by tracking the remediation process. However,

this form of tracking does not simply regulate the property owner. As a demonstration of the

city's new "data-driven" management of blight, the online mapping process also "promote[s]

transparency and accountability" from the municipal government itself. The direction of

regulation is reversed, aligning the functions and operations of the blight management program

with the property market. In this way, the program reinvents the site of administration, acting on

the environment by producing a digitally archived landscape of property. And by creating

BlightStatus, the city introduces a "potent site" for the administration of everyday life (Braun

55). As Braun notes, "the point here is *not* that these forms of government will overcome" (56)

the particular crisis. Rather, crises such as the state of the property market enable urban life to be

"subject to technological modes of management in new and novel ways" (Braun 56). Through

BlightStatus' mapping program, the user of the website becomes inserted into an aspect of the

management process, gathering information about how properties are classified as blight and

how they move through the enforcement process. From there, users can learn how to report on

nuisance structures or purchase such properties. By combining the data with GPS mapping, BlightStatus solicits new ways to imagine the city as a landscape of property in which various buildings and lots are proceeding forward along different timelines toward remediation or sheriff's auctions. In this way, the user is inserted into the process as node that observes and "regulates" both the market and the administration of city government itself.

The Music Box and the Recuperation of Blight

Although the magnitude of the city's blight problem offers the Landrieu administration an chance to circulate narratives of the city's economic and governmental crisis that justify the reforms it has imposed on city agencies, artists have used the same conditions to tell an oppositional narrative about property, recovery, and displacement. In one of the most blight-affected regions of the city, New Orleans Airlift, a local nonprofit dedicated to exporting New Orleans musical traditions and artistic to global audiences, took advantage of this widespread state of deterioration. Airlift's centerpiece project, *The Music Box*, was built from the remains of a Creole cottage that had collapsed during renovations. Working together with New York-based street artist Swoon, Airlift's Delaney Martin and Jay Pennington initiated a collaboration between twenty artists to build and install a "shanty town sound laboratory" on the abandoned lot ("Dithyrambalina"). This aspect of the Music Box has made the project a surprisingly long-lasting art project: each "house" within *The Music Box* incorporates "musical architecture," outfitting the building's component parts — its doors and windows, mirrors, and floorboards — with pipes, strings, and percussion, horns or digital synthesizers. Anyone walking into these buildings can manipulate the musical instrumentation built into the architecture, creating a varied

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and cacophonous "symphony" out of individual interactions with the space. This publicly

accessible village stood on the same lot on Piety Street between 2011-12, when it was

disassembled for a touring exhibition.[9] Piety Street is located in the Bywater, a historic district

downriver from the French Quarter that has become synonymous with gentrification as its racial

and socioeconomic demographics shifted after Katrina from a predominately working-class and

black neighborhood to one with whiter, more professional, and upper-income profile. *The Music*

Box, with its rough and unpainted surfaces, salvaged building materials and instrument

components, and open-air playground-like atmosphere, signals the artists' decision to take an

oppositional stand against the rebuilding efforts occurring in the name of "revitalization." Their

efforts underscored a desire to contest the negative connotations placed on "blighted" and

"neglected" property.

One of the component installations within *The Music Box* extends this contestation over

the meaning of blight and neglect by connecting the destruction and debris of Katrina with the

detritus and industrial waste produced under capitalism. Describing the inspiration for her "River

House," an installation contributed to *The Music Box*, Eliza Zeitlin explains that its design was

intended to be a vision of the future. But rather than a modernist future of new and sleek

materials, the future embodied by the "River House" involves a "return to an industrial world

where you have to pull the pieces back out and build something new" (MacCash). As an

expression of musical design, the "River House" allowed users to operate a sound bank of pre-

recorded loops by manipulating various piano strings that dangled from the ceiling. In its form,

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[9] This chapter discusses the 2011-12 incarnation of this art installation/performance space. *The Music Box* returned to the Bywater in 2016, where it was constructed as a new "village" occupying a significantly larger site near the Industrial Canal and continues to offer free public hours and access to its musical architecture, as well as art and welding workshops, artist markets, and ticketed performances.

the building evoked the improvisational design and recycled materials used in tree-houses and

hunting camps that can be found in wetland communities throughout south Louisiana. Zeitlin use

of these salvaged materials — "the stuff that's left over" from industrial society — to evoke the

wreckage left behind by New Orleans' recent experience with disaster and offers to the

building's users to generate experiences of pleasure, creativity, and surprise from the repurposing

of what had been considered debris (MacCash).

Through these installations that repurposed the destruction and demolition of buildings

classified as blight, the organizers of *The Music Box* presented an alternative narrative of their

neighborhood's future. In opposition to the city's dominant story that portrays dilapidated houses

and overgrown lots as impediments to progress and "renewal," *The Music Box* tells a story in

which the possibility of renewal does not require the destruction of the old. These artists find

inspiration in the state of decay and deterioration that these buildings undergo. According to

Martin, director of the nonprofit New Orleans Airlift which manages *The Music Box*, this project

was intended to respond to the rapid destruction of abandoned buildings residents were

witnessing in the area. With the city considering proposals to build new high-rise condos in the

Bywater neighborhood, she and her allies decided that the homes threatened with demolition

needed to be saved: "'I would hate to see these old, beautiful properties bulldozed and thrown

away, and these new developments put in…That's not our neighborhood anymore if we do that.

So [*The Music Box*] was our answer to it … [it] was important to us to create out of this blight…

a sense of wonder and possibility'" (Osborn). In opposition to the patterns of creative destruction

abetted by the city and developers, the official narrative of *The Music Box* indirectly sets itself in

opposition to dominant property narratives, like the one used by the blight remediation program,

to suggest a different moral and ethical relationship to the built environment. Rethought as sources of "wonder and possibility," the meaning of abandoned property can no longer be defined strictly by the relations between owner and the state. This narrative offers both alternative relations with property and "denaturalizes" the moral prerogatives of the dominant property narrative, which casts gentrification and development as "improvement" and erases the presence of previous inhabitants.

For opponents of gentrification, Blomley writes, "drawing upon bittersweet local histories of dispossession and successful resistance, a moral distinction is drawn between the rapacious, individualized property claim of the developer, and the collective, embedded entitlements of local residents" (101-2). In effect, the artists reclaim blight (and thus property) from the official discourses of nuisance, which assert a proper, market-oriented function for private property. In other words, these works adopt and lay claim to the aesthetics that are otherwise read as "nuisances." By utilizing the debris and "waste" of blighted buildings, these artists highlight the state of decay and erosion that the Landrieu administration is committed to removing from view. And in doing so, the installation uses the form of property itself to tell a story of post-storm recovery that unsettles narratives of progress and improvement.

Arguably, however, the creation of an art installation out of a hurricane-damaged cottage is itself a form of property improvement. As people who had legal permission and access to work on the property before it collapsed, acts of artistic manipulation are still legally and conceptually ratified by the principles of private ownership. "Urban land," Blomley reminds us, "is expected to undergo sequential 'improvement' premised on private ownership" (84); this teleological expectation is so embedded in our conception of property and buildings that it is nearly invisible.

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Even as *The Music Box* offers an oppositional narrative that explicitly critiques the narrative of "renewal" that accompanies gentrification and naturalizes the destruction of damaged and "unused" property, it itself relies on and extends the logic of property by virtue of the fact that New Orleans Airlift owns *The Music Box*. In this way, the organization exerts proprietary rights to manipulate the lot and property itself, and possesses the right to charge audiences for public musical performances hosted at the site.

Given this ambiguous and contradictory relationship to property improvement, why is Martin's oppositional narrative of *The Music Box*'s origin offered at this particular moment? The working through of materials in the disaster-affected landscape are a form of storytelling, and thus recovery. As Maria T. Brodine explains, "people in post-disaster situations have a heightened reflexive awareness of their relationship with landscapes, objects, and space" (Brodine 82), leading to various types of intervention in the damaged and debris-filled environment. This awareness of the landscape, according to Brodine, finds expression in the physical appropriation of the objects and surfaces that have been transformed, damaged, or rendered "useless" by the catastrophe. Working with these objects becomes a form of "recovery" in which artists critically engage with the narratives and representations of disaster.

Similarly, these stories of opposition to the official narratives of renewal can express a sense of political solidarity with the neighborhood's displaced black, working-class residents. As such, Martin's story about *The Music Box*'s origin and intentions can be read as an attempt to establish an ethical position toward the "pre-Katrina" built environment — a story about "these old, beautiful properties" (Osborn) threatened with demolition. By placing an aesthetic value on the properties that existed before Katrina, *The Music Box* stands in opposition to the waves of

private investment and newcomers descending on the neighborhood, even though the project is itself a post-Katrina appropriation of these old properties. Displacement of the Bywater's residents, according to geographer Richard Campanella, occurred after the storm, brought on by the slow recovery and the dismantling of public education. *The Music Box*'s relationship to displacement, therefore, is itself complicated and ambiguous, despite its noble origin story. As Campanella points out, the Bywater is situated on one of the older and higher points of the city, along the natural levee facing the Mississippi. Because of its relatively higher elevation, it was not as exposed to the catastrophic flooding that occurred during Katina. Therefore, it was not property damage that displaced the Bywater's pre-Katrina black population. Instead, the closure of public schools removed from the neighborhood a critical institution which supported its multi-generational community. The loss of these schools, which changed the landscape of public property, in turn signaled the demographic transformation of the Bywater from a black, familial, working-class area into a predominantly whiter, professional, generationally homogenous area:

> Bywater's elders, families, and inter-generational households… have gone from the norm to the exception. Racially, the black population, which tended to be highly family-based, declined by 64 percent between 2000 and 2010, while the white population increased by 22 percent, regaining the majority status it had prior to the white flight of the 1960s-1970s. It was the Katrina disruption and the accompanying closure of schools that initially drove out the mostly black households with children, more so than gentrification per se. (Campanella)

Campanella's assessment of the demographic transformations taking place in the Bywater helps situate *The Music Box*, and the other place-based art projects popping up in the area, in a

landscape in which the meaning of private and public property have shifted. In this sense, *The Music Box* occupies an ambiguous moment: opposing the changes in demographics and property values occurring in the Bywater that animate discourses of resilience and blight, while itself transforming property into artworks that attract more investment and demographic changes.

Discussing "Rue St. Denis," a similar art exhibition space that was created out of a dilapidated building in the St. Claude Arts District,[10] Brodine cautions that artistic interventions through blighted property enable gentrification: "[w]hile the presence of artistic and transformative projects can result in reduced crime and greater community participation, they can also increase property values resulting in homogeneity and standardization of services among formerly unique neighborhoods" (83). For Brodine, the emergence of these projects does not negate the creative potential of public artworks to intervene in the questions and problems of "recovery." Reviving abandoned properties constitutes a type of recovery that "itself involves a process of 'moving around debris, burying past living surfaces, and rearranging the landscape'" (82). In this sense, these works offer a counter-argument to the resilience narratives of the blight eradication efforts, one that refuses its binary distinctions between "appropriate" uses of property and "nuisances."

"Living with Water": Adaptation and Its Historical Contradictions

My chapter now turns to two planning texts associated with emergence of resilience thinking and ideology during Landrieu's tenure in office. As I have discussed earlier in this

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[10] The St. Claude Arts District is itself a newly minted "cultural district" created under the Louisiana's plan to invest in the "cultural economy."

chapter, the adoption of resilience as an ethical precept for planning and government reform is predicated on viewing the city and urban life as the site of continual crisis. I use these texts to interrogate how the adaptation to a continuously "volatile world" depends on the recollection of a supposedly forgotten historical experience for the purposes of the present. In order to make adaptation to the costs and threats of climate change and rising waters seem both possible and desirable, the narrators in these plans hope to find historical justification in the geographical limitations imposed on New Orleans' urban development prior to the twentieth century. Narratives of resilience depend on a revision of the past. To analyze this process of historical production, I examine two texts, *Resilient New Orleans* and *A Plan for the 21st Century*, which propose a revisionist interpretation of the city's history of urban development in which the city's past becomes the future model for "adaptation." Both texts utilize the same key phrase, "living with water," to articulate an ethical conception of resilience. In this section, I propose that climate change and the experience of powerful natural disasters thrust the question of adaptation and resilience to the forefront of economic planning and development. Faced with this crisis, these texts call on residents to remember the city's forgotten historical "experience of living with water" (*Resilient New Orleans* 33). In order to reconstruct this forgotten experience, the advocates of resilience in effect commemorate the environmental constraints that had placed geographical limits on earlier periods of the city's growth. For example, claiming that successive government-led stormwater drainage projects have "systematically hidden water from our daily experience" under culverts and behind retention walls, the authors of *Resilient New Orleans* recommend a variety of educational programs, urban design models, and physical infrastructure that would facilitate residents' recovery of this forgotten memory. These passages enjoin readers

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to revise their memory and recover their "lost" and "forgotten" relationship with water. They call for places where residents can "regularly encounter the water that surrounds us, learn about how it shapes our city, and explore ways to manage its presence" (*Resilient New Orleans* 33). By "regularly encountering" water, the task of management becomes a collective process that, the plan presumes, each individual can become proficient in. Tellingly, it is left unsaid what role those who have encountered the presence of water and learned how it shapes the city will have in its future management.

When it comes to remembering the past, the incorporation of "resilience" into post-Katrina planning involves rethinking how the city has managed natural hazards in the past. Rather than repeat the recovery strategies used by the city before Katrina, the plans propose that life in this coastal, flood-prone city should accommodate the intrusion of water into the built environment using a variety of building techniques and flood protection measures such as runoff basins and bioswales. But in order for resilience to be a satisfactory model for managing hazards in the future the advocates of resilience challenge and discredit the modes of planning, construction, and disaster management used before Katrina. In their place, they propose new modes of governing through the natural and integrated networks to adhere between society and environmental systems. The city can achieve a sustainable adaptation to the water and wetlands environment by adjusting the conduct of residents, creating more points of contact and interaction between the population and the surrounding water within the urban landscape.

In order to endure the crisis of climate change and the specific threats of rising sea levels, *Resilient New Orleans* and *A Plan for the 21st Century* critique the ways New Orleans has used development to "hide" and "forget" the city's history of managing water. In *Resilient New*

Orleans,[11] the mayor's Office of Resilience and Sustainability asserts that "our historical experience of living with water in Southeast Louisiana has been largely forgotten" (33). The planners note how, through the development of powerful drainage systems and levees, Louisianians "have systematically hidden water from our daily experience. We need spaces where we can regularly encounter the water that surrounds us, learn about how it shapes our city, and explore ways to manage its presence" (*Resilient New Orleans* 33). The rhetoric in these statements evokes the actions of memory and recall, implying that by visually and materially "encounter[ing] the water that surrounds us" those who go about their everyday lives in New Orleans will have greater understanding of the risks and opportunities of living in the coastal delta.

The rhetoric of living with water explicitly draws on the metaphor of memory, primarily casting it as a "historical experience" that has been as "forgotten." According to *Resilient New Orleans*, changes in the global climate now threaten to the turn the city's economic advantages of the delta and coastal location against it. In order to adapt to climate change and recover from "chronic stresses and acute shocks" (10), the residents of the city are urged to "embrace" what they have subsequently hidden and forgotten about their history. *Resilient New Orleans* insists that "[w]e must align our infrastructure and urban environment to the realities of our delta soils and geography. Rather than resist water, we must embrace it, building on the confluence of Louisiana's culture, history, and natural systems" (32).

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[11] The authors explicitly reject the term "plan" for their text, instead describing it as a "road map for implementation" based on the recommendations of several previous planning initiatives, including the *Unified New Orleans Plan* (2007) and *A Plan for the 21st Century* (2010) (*Resilient New Orleans* 22).

In "Resilience: Living with Water and Natural Hazards,"[12] the architectural firm Goody Clancy reads the history of how New Orleans managed hazards in the interlude between Hurricane Betsy in 1964 and Katrina in 2005 for the city and federal government's failure to understand and adapt to the changing conditions of natural hazards in the region. According to the planners, New Orleans' "historic response to disasters" could easily be summarized as a fixation on "return[ing] to the familiar" (12.4), a desire to quickly return the city to normal operations. For instance, it had become conventional at that point for the city to rely on the Army Corps of Engineers to maintain the levee system. Because these structural protections were the primary line of defense from storms and floods, there was little incentive to adjust building codes or rethink development decisions that continued to place residents in low elevations that had a propensity to flood. Even in areas with less frequent flooding, such as New Orleans East, residents "had no risk information to weigh in making decisions about where to live" (Goody Clancy 12.3) because their low elevation areas were generally well protected from minor stormwater flooding. "All of these activities during the 40 years between Hurricane Betsy and Hurricane Katrina," Goody Clancy argues, "made New Orleanians believe that their risk was being managed and controlled" (12.3). The fault of these projects was that they attempted to manage risk, but that they failed, as the planners claim, "to incorporate the adaptability and flexibility that is the true sign of resilience" (12.4). It is this last phrase, "the true sign of resilience," that points to the importance of these re-interpretations of the past. Incorporating the definitional key terms of resilience — "flexibility" and "adaptability" — Goody Clancy sets the terms through which it reframes the meaning of the past.

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[12] A supplementary chapter to *A Plan for the 21st Century.*

The narrative mode of these texts makes, I believe, two important moves. First, the past is divided conceptually between a "good" past — long before the twentieth century — in which the population was more in tune with their building conditions because of the natural limitations to safe construction, and "bad" recent past — starting around the 1940s — when technological improvement allowed building to take place in formerly wetland environments, which increased vulnerability and exposure. Simultaneously, these actions produced a population-wide memory-loss, leading to repeated attempts to build on dangerous, flood-prone land. Worse still, this memory-loss has, according to the planners, led residents and engineers to believe that "resilience" meant simply returning the built environment back to its pre-catastrophic conditions. The model of resilience they had adopted sought to stop or prevent flood-related disasters entirely, rather than recognizing that the city's geography and hydrology would continually expose areas of the city to repeated flood. The invocation of historical experience alongside water management reform efforts, under the aegis of "resilience," suggests to me how governmentality produces effects on subjects by coalescing around a problem that requires solutions to be found. Here the problems of flood and water management find their solutions through the production of historical memory which contribute ideological support for reforms within the management of the public sector and municipal democracy. In order to explore the above examples, it is useful to return to the concept of *dispositif*, which expresses how a mode of governance *emerges* from diverse and disconnected elements, "the diverse and often divergent means by which life in liberal societies comes to be managed and modulated in the face of an 'urgency' or 'crisis'" (Braun 50). For Braun, "resilience" reframes our thinking about how government will manage urban life under conditions of climate change and globalization. In this

sense, new sites of governance emerge where urban life can be managed in its relationship to these global processes. As he notes, "[t]he point here is *not* that these forms of government will overcome the climate crisis, or that forms of sovereign and disciplinary power disappear, but rather that in response to the 'crisis' of climate change, urban life is subject to technological modes of management in new and novel ways" (Braun 56). For these plans, the site of intervention and management lies in the rhetoric of resilience, which seeks to locate a historical justification for each residents' assumption of personal responsibility for living with water. For example, in *Resilient New Orleans*, recovering the forgotten history of living with water requires the reshaping of New Orleanians' values and behaviors. Calling for "spaces where we can regularly encounter the water that surrounds us, learn about how it shapes our city, and explore ways to manage its presence" (33), the plan outlines various ways the city and its partners in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors can intervene in the education, culture, and built environment. For example, through collaborations between educators, engineers, and designers, the planners highlight the efforts by a local nonprofit organization, Ripple Effect, to teach "water literacy," a program that "teaches students about relationships among water, land, and people in New Orleans" (45). Highlighting the example of Rotterdam, the planners point out how the Dutch combine education with the built environment: "[f]or the Dutch, learning to live with water and adapting to a changing delta environment start at a young age…Water is ubiquitous in the lives of Rotterdammers, who every day cross scenic canals that flow through their city. Environmental awareness and education are deep and ongoing — as critical to the city's future as floodwalls and water plazas" (43). In this future-oriented story, plans are made to shape the local populations' behaviors and affects by modifying the infrastructure of public spaces to create

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more unconscious encounters with water. Likewise, the proposed educational reforms seek to tie

public schools and universities to the city's economic development incubation plans in the fields

of water management, disaster recovery, biomedicine, and public health.

Although both *Resilient New Orleans* and the Goody Clancy plan assert that reliance on

bigger and stronger flood prevention structures severed residents' memory of their relationship

with water, the work of environmental historians Craig E. Colton and Ari Kelman suggest that

New Orleans' "historical experience of living with water" is more socially and politically

complex than merely "forgetting" a lost past. Their work explores how, for much of its history,

the city was preoccupied with the management of water, which it viewed as a source of both vast

economic potential and deadly threats to property and public health. As these authors

demonstrate, the "hiding" of water behind walls and canals, under culverts and beneath sewers

was completed in an effort to develop drainage systems that would adequately protect the city

from recurrent floods. However, both Kelman and Colton further complicate this historical

narrative, explaining that the completion of these drainage and sewerage projects for the first

time enabled the city's white supremacist elite to impose racial and socioeconomic segregation

onto the residential geography. In other words, water management and infrastructure in New

Orleans has been a mode of biopower that enables the state to distinguish, differentiate, and

control populations according to the construct of race. Once a series of centralized, public plans

were initiated and the surrounding wetlands successfully drained, new residential neighborhoods

could be established that were racially and socioeconomically segregated. By bringing more land

into commercial circulation, the white supremacist city government could finally subject New

Orleans' dense, multiracial residential areas to the same rigid racial and class ordering prevalent

elsewhere in the South. Race and class largely determined who lived on the higher and safer ground and who were sequestered on the lower, flood-prone land.

Ari Kelman contends that the application of rational planning and technical "artifice" to control the river and its deluges is best conceptualized as a social and psychological need to manage the anxiety stemming from the "disjuncture" between New Orleans' "site" and "situation." For Kelman, "site" refers to the placement and location of a city on a particular type of land, whereas situation refers to "a more abstract measure of a metropolitan area's advantages relative to other places" (Kelman 696). Since the colonial era, New Orleans situation was considered economically and strategically advantageous, positioned as it was to control the mouth of the Mississippi and thus the entry and exit of trade between the river's continent-wide basin and the Gulf of Mexico. However, the very conditions that gave New Orleans its situational advantage — its access to large, moving bodies of water — have always been in tension with its site, the precarious, low-lying earth located between these two massive bodies of water. The conditions of this site, therefore, were always a source of anxiety for city leaders and historians who found their situational advantage constantly threatened by water-related hazards.

As Kelman notes, the "disjuncture" between site and situation was frequently expressed as an anxious desire to delineate the boundary between the urban and the natural world. Indeed, the city elite saw its ability to exploit the potential of New Orleans' situation bound up with the need "to domesticate its landscape, to secure the border between itself and its surroundings by ensuring that water would remain where people wanted it: either outside the levees or within the neatly delineated confines of the drainage system. Once more New Orleans would improve its site to capitalize on its situation" (Kelman 701). Plans for citywide drainage canals and pumps

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began to take shape in the 1890s and, over the twentieth century, pulled water out of wetlands behind the natural levees (where safe urban development had been restricted), and consequently making more land available for development. However, these various technical means to divert and remove water from within the city involved building an entire "artificial river system" (Kelman 701) of interlinked gutters, sewers, canals, and collection basins. Because of the city's bowl-shaped contours, this system required greater technical "artifice" — using the pumping stations — to push the water out of the city against gravity (Kelman 701). It is perhaps unsurprising that the efforts to settle these anxieties created conditions for further disasters. The borders that the elite desired to seal were porous *because of* their efforts to cordon off the boundary between the urban and the natural.

According to both Kelman and Colton, a further consequence of the drainage and water projects was the implementation of racial segregation in New Orleans' neighborhoods. Because the geography of New Orleans prior to the 1890s restricted all development to the natural ridges and levees, it created a racial geography that was decidedly more mixed than other Southern urban areas. The geography made the enforcement of racially segregated housing impractical. When drainage projects began to successfully transform the wetlands, the access to improvable land provided "an opportunity to revamp the city's racial geography" (Colton 78). According to Colton, between 1910-1920, black residential development followed the extension of drainage infrastructure into the lowest-lying areas where the black population was already concentrated (95). Along the newly drained lakefront, the city created white-only residential areas when it passed its first residential segregation ordinance in 1924. The ordinance codified existing residential patterns by restricted blacks from renting or buying property in a "white

neighborhood," a practice that private developers and real estate agencies continued even after

the ordinance was struck down, using restrictive covenants to exclude black residents from

purchasing, renting, or congregating on the newly available lots (Colton 99). By 1930 residential

segregation began to harden — newly developed neighborhoods along the lakefront became

exclusively white, while areas of lower elevation near the center of the city became increasingly

majority-black (Colton 100).

Colton links the citywide drainage and water service plans to the Progressive Era reforms

that drew on rational and scientific principles to implement plans for improving public health.

Because these reformers understood epidemics and hazards to be systemic in their character, no

areas of the city could be isolated from improvements to drainage or water access. As Colton

points out, it was typical for urban governments in the South to decide that it was in their interest

to also extend public sewerage and drainage services into their predominantly black

neighborhoods once the wealthy, white residents became concerned that unsanitary conditions in

these areas would negatively impact their own health (80).

However, this did not mean that black neighborhoods received adequate or equal

environmental services; the building of sewerage and water services in New Orleans replicated,

to various extents, this unequal provision of services between racial populations (a situation

which also reproduced class inequalities across racial categories). Despite the official intention to

extend the drainage system to all areas (guided as it was by rational principles of comprehensive

planning, engineering, and public health), a number of constraints, including construction costs,

budget shortfalls, and political priorities meant that the construction was carried out unevenly, at

least initially. Despite Colton's presumption that the "rational engineering principles" underlying

the city's drainage reforms would be contradicted by the segregationist principles of Jim Crow, the achievements of citywide drainage, sewerage, and indoor water planning maintained and extended white supremacist class power by enabling New Orleans to spatialize its racial and class-based inequities in the form of racially segregated neighborhoods.

By achieving this racialized geography the city would govern by shaping its subjects through differential exposures to risk. These Progressive Era improvement projects, including beatification projects building parks and lining boulevards with oak trees, were intended to shape the urban environment, in part, "to manipulate the behavior of the city's residents in a positive way" (Colton 75). The resolution of tension between the site and situation and the efforts over time to "improve" the site have always been tied to efforts to shape subjects in relation to the forms of political and moral authority. And most importantly, these efforts have always been invested in reproducing differentiated subjects along racial and class terms, sustaining relatively unequal environments.

While both Kelman and Colton demonstrate a causal relationship between the emergence of racial segregation in New Orleans and the enforced separation of urban and natural realms, I contend that these technological, discursive, and policy elements intersected to form a distinct mode of governing and managing urban life. All of these elements — Progressive Era notions of public health, Jim Crow policies of residential segregation, rational planning, and the development of structural barriers and technological solutions to drainage problems — combined in a *dispositif* that held together the contradictory principles of racial segregation and universal access. If city leaders came to identify the threats of flooding and public health from sources of water outside and within the urban environment, the consequence was not a "failure" to preserve

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life. Rather, life was managed, preserved, and threatened simultaneously through the institution of differential exposures to risk based on race and socioeconomic class.

Interestingly, Kelman concludes by noting how post-Katrina plans at the time of his writing appeared to be following the same model of governing life and the environment, aiming "to engineer itself out of harm's way, once more attempting to improve its levees and drainage system. The various committees seem captivated by the notion that it is possible to separate the city from its surroundings, a myth that will not die, no matter how many of New Orleans's residents do" (703). In this criticism, Kelman appears to corroborate Goody Clancy's narrative of resilience. He notes how, before Katrina, the maintenance of a disjuncture between nature and the urban, the site and the situation, created a moment in which "few people realized the danger because the city's borders with nature appeared more secure than ever. The levee hid the river. And the urban wetlands were gone. Only during catastrophes were New Orleanians forced to reckon with the peril" (Kelman 702). The disjuncture between "site" and "situation" is now approached through the lens of "resilience." The situation to be gained is from governing in relation to the particular advantages gained by the site. As I have discussed above, many of the planners working on resilience in New Orleans have drawn on this same critique, noting how the separation between safety and nature was "illusory," that previous modes of separating water from the urban environment not only failed, but entrenched and exacerbated the problem. The reliance on engineered solutions created the conditions for new vulnerabilities. In contrast, urban resilience seeks modes of governing that reject the overt attempt to control the site in the way modernist and rational planning had done in the past.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have approached the changes to blight management and the artistic appropriations of abandoned buildings as manifestations of resilient governance. Following the work of Wakefield, Braun, Kelman, and Colton, I have maintained that blight is defined through its relationship to social crisis and the history of urban environmental management. The definition of "blight," as it stands, can be used variously to signify the state of property, its use, and its effects on the social environment around it. City ordinances suggest that abandonment and neglect cause both property devaluation as well as impact the "morals" of the surrounding area. As a "nuisance" it can be targeted for legal action and potential demolition. Symbolizing both physical and moral "illness" or "decay," blight transforms whatever it is attached to into something which must be reformed or removed from the visual landscape. For artists working in neighborhoods where property rates are rapidly increasing, the city's interventions against blight are counterposed with an aesthetic appreciation for these buildings' form, their history, and social context. But in the context of New Orleans' official economic recovery agenda, property constructed as abandoned, neglected, or vacant enable the city to intervene in the functioning of government itself. The exercise of "government" comes to mean the biopolitical management of urban life, particularly the methods through which life in the city is discursively related to global environmental and economic crises. In this chapter, I addressed the ways in which the blight reduction program carried out by Landrieu's administration connects the problem of blighted property to the crises of maintaining life and responding to natural hazards

Resilience, as Braun notes, "connects diverse and at times contradictory urban practices into a *dispositif* or 'system of correlation'" (51). The elements of blight discourse that I have presented in this chapter — an administration subjecting its own workforce and procedures to date-management and surveillance; an art project conceived as a response to development; a foundation seeking to align climate change and disaster management through a transnational network of urban governments; an emerging discourse about water and natural hazards that revises the city's history — can all make "resilience" appear like a commonsense approach to resolving both the continued vulnerability of the city to disasters and to fix. The purpose of this system of correlation is to confirm the sense of continual threat posed by climate change and economic globalization. While resilience and recovery seek to prepare the city to respond to disaster, the long-term threats are recognized only in so far as they create new sites through which life can be managed. In this sense, I have focused on "living with water" as an intervention in the production of history, through which the city hopes to justify its eventual departure from building on low-lying land and rebuilding neighborhoods in flood-prone neighborhoods.

Figure 3.1. "Shanty-town" structures of the *Music Box*. Photo by Morgan Sasser, in Kathleen Osborn, "In the Music Box, New Orleans Residents Hear Hope," *National Public Radio*, 25 January 2012.
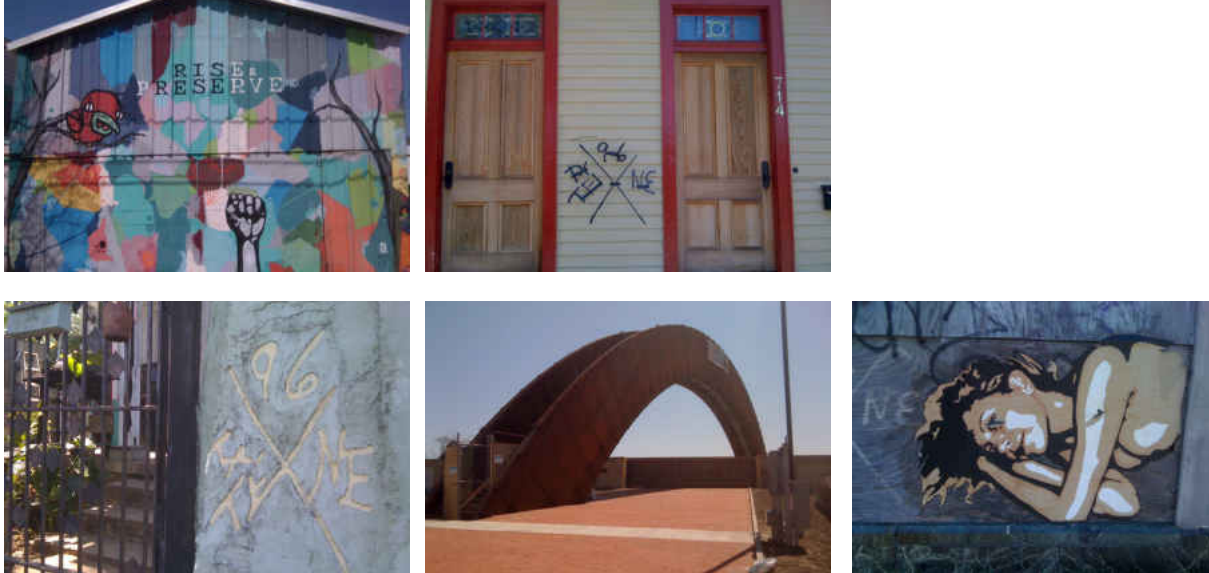

Figure 3.2. Examples of street art and public art installations on Piety Street. Photos by the author.

Chapter 4:

Left in the Disaster Zone: Resisting Disaster and Forming Community in Post-Katrina Social Movement Writing

Introduction

Malik Rahim became the face of Common Ground because he happened to stay behind during the storm. A former member of the Black Panther Party and current Green Party activist, Rahim lived in Algiers, a historic neighborhood directly across the Mississippi from the French Quarter. Like the French Quarter, Algiers was built on a natural levee close to the river which prevented much of the area from being inundated. From his home, Rahim could observe the chaotic days and weeks when, in the absence of government services and police, desperate people who were fleeing by bridge or ferry from across the river were attempting to find dry ground and safety in Algiers. Many were left stranded in 90 or greater degree weather without hospital services or clinics. A number of black men had also been targeted by white vigilantes who had already shot and killed another man believed to be a looter. Within a few days of witnessing the disaster that was the government's lack of response, Rahim called out to his networks of friends and comrades across the country for relief supplies and help in organizing a community-led crisis response. Since the 1960s Rahim had been involved in radical politics and community organizing, experiences which led him to call on other organizers for assistance to respond to the government's failure. In his call to fellow organizers and other progressive activists, Rahim noted that the source of disaster was not the natural event itself. The disaster was a consequence of the neoliberal reforms to housing and public services that were already

being implemented over the previous decade: "When you see all the poor people with no place to go, feeling alone and helpless and angry, I say this is a consequence of HOPE VI. New Orleans took all the HUD money it could get to tear down public housing, and families and neighbors who'd relied on each other for generations were uprooted and torn apart" (Rahim 66). This perspective emphasizes what Rachel E. Luft identifies as a key element in the political orientation adopted by the first post-Katrina social movement organizations. These groups, including Rahim's Common Ground Collective, argued that in order to respond to the disaster radically, organizers needed to refuse what she calls "disaster exceptionalism" (Luft 506), the dominant perception that casts disasters and natural hazards as "'sudden' or 'explosive,' discrete or 'unique,' and 'acute.' These designations have sought to render exceptional both the disasters themselves and the experience of the people who encounter them" (Luft 506). These organizations put forward a "social constructivist" analysis of disaster and hazards, associated with the critical scholarship on disasters by writers such as Kai Erikson, E. L. Quarantelli, and Kenneth Hewitt. These scholars argued that "disaster" is largely a consequence of the social conditions, maintained and legitimated by state practices of planning, deregulation, and protecting private property, that place people in vulnerable physical or economic circumstances. According to Luft, this field of disaster scholarship "emphasized the ongoing conditions of 'social vulnerability' — poverty, racism, sexism — that construct and intersect with disaster" (506). The first group of social movement organizations that developed in post-Katrina New Orleans identified with this social constructivist analysis, leading many to approach disaster relief and organizing through protests against government housing and education policy reforms, especially those that would close or privatize public housing and schools and lead to further

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displacement. Through these actions, Common Ground and other groups sought to "recontextualize threat, hazard, and trauma in the daily conditions faced by disenfranchised groups" (500). In this way, the first-generation of post-Katrina activist organizations rejected narratives of "disaster exceptionalism" which "sought to render exceptional both the disasters themselves and the experience of the people who encounter them" (Luft 506).

Like other volunteer efforts led by nonprofits and religious organizations, Common Ground was able to tap into the national wellspring of support from working and middle class people who were deeply troubled by the failure of the federal government. Many who watched the crisis unfold were galvanized by the intense media reporting that showed continuous images of stranded residents and desperate survivors waiting to be evacuated, and then struggling to return home. Within a few years, Common Ground became one of the better known political movements that emerged after Hurricane Katrina. Its volunteer base demonstrated the practical impact that young people could have rebuilding homes and helping residents return, while also politicizing the context of the storm and demonstrating an alternative model of disaster relief outside of institutionalized charities and government aid. Through Common Ground, volunteers from around the country contributed to relief operations at a time when the U. S. government appeared to have abandoned much of the Ninth Ward and other predominantly black communities to the market. In this chapter, I examine the writing of social movement activists and writers associated with the politics of the radical left, focusing in particular on how two of these texts critique Common Ground Collective's intervention in the Ninth Ward. In both Rebecca Solnit's *A Paradise Built in Hell* and Jordan Flaherty's *Floodlines*, the story of

Common Ground is particularly salient to their discussions of the role of social justice

movements play in the creation of egalitarian forms of disaster relief.

The organizers centered around Rahim formed Common Ground in response to the

absence of government aid and resources reaching New Orleans. At the time, Common Ground

may have become, according to Sue Hilderbrand, et al., the "largest anarchist-inspired

organization in the U.S." (90). In the absence of government and nonprofit relief operations,

Rahim's call for support generated widespread desire on the part of activists and contributors to

establish an aid distribution program, a free health clinic, community gardens, and housing

gutting operations.[13] Through these projects, such as the health clinic, Rahim and the organizers

of Common Ground envisioned that their organization would become "a parallel social

infrastructure," capable of sustaining community-controlled, free social services and recovery aid

in place of the market or the apparatus of the state (Hilderbrand, et al. 80). Common Ground

recruited thousands of radicalized young people to participate in the arduous work of providing

physical labor and social services for residents attempting to return to the Lower Ninth Ward

when much of the city's services and social and health resources were decimated.

Along with similar community organizations that took up direct relief work immediately

after the storm, including People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF), People's Organizing

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[13] Rahim's email, titled "This is Criminal," detailed the racial violence and state of negligent occurring in New Orleans. In the message, he called on progressive and left-wing activists, in particular members of the Green Party, to which he belonged, to join him in the Algiers neighborhood and build an alternative relief organization that became Common Ground.

Committee, and ACORN,[14] Common Ground attempted to built long-term relationships with

residents and to facilitate both their return home and to organize residents to demand the

restoration of municipal services, the reopening of schools, and to resist early attempts by the

city to bulldoze damaged houses. Moreover, Common Ground went further by envisioning their

post-disaster relief contributions as part of a dual strategy that involved restoring black New

Orleanians to their homes and "building alternative institutions and local power" (Hilderbrand, et

al. 96). In this regard, Common Ground built on Rahim's background in the Black Panthers to

initiate programs reminiscent of the "survival programs." The slogan adopted by Common

Ground, "Solidarity, Not Charity," reflects a number of political and ethical mandates: their

organizing perspective, their differentiation from "mainstream" disaster relief organizations and

nonprofits (such as various religious charities or the Red Cross), and their sense of relation to the

residents with whom they volunteered and collaborated: "we offer solidarity with the goal of

creating permanent and sustainable solutions. As outsiders, our role is to work with residents to

determine needs and use privilege to acquire resources" (Hilderbrand, et al. 92). This method of

aid-provision was intentionally connected to community organizing.

　　　　According to Common Ground organizers Sue Hilderbrand, Scott Crow, and Lisa Fithian,

the survival programs initiated by Common Ground presented organizers within the U.S.'s

radical left movements with an opportunity to shift from a program of simply protesting against

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[14] Several other organizations were formed later on as the social movements developed and specialized in different projects, such as women's health and reproductive justice and providing services to Latino immigrants and workers in the construction industry (Luft 503-5); these three groups, however, constitute what Rachel Luft calls the "first generation" of post-Katrina social movement organizations. The acronym ACORN stands for Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, a national alliance of community organizations that was headquartered in New Orleans.

state policies to one of replacing the structures of the state with more democratic and accountable forms of organization:

> The collapse of government structure at all levels, save for the military, created a political vacuum… As activists working for social change, we are accustomed to fighting the structures that hold inequalities in place. We tend to be reactive and spend the bulk of our energy pushing against state power. With the collapse of almost the entire civil infrastructure, organizers were in a position to be proactive in filling the void.
>
> (Hilderbrand, et al. 87).

The authors refer to this as "building 'dual power'" (92) in which networks and structures of local power replace the government's relief and recovery operations. The "void" was filled, however, with people who were largely not from the devastated areas in the city, and who did not, for the most part, share the residents' racial, class, or cultural backgrounds. This presented various ethical and political conundrums for the leaders of Common Ground, as the authors point out, "the question of whether those of us who are outsiders were the appropriate ones to fill that void was frequently asked" (87). The leadership of Common Ground assumed that the presence of outside volunteers in the Ninth Ward would be temporary, envisioning a point when local residents would eventually replace "outside volunteers" (96). However, as the authors admit, it became harder to enact this vision, in their view, because the displaced residents of the Ninth Ward returned much more slowly than expected. There, the city was especially slow to restore electricity and gas services, and the absence of functioning schools, workplaces, and economic amenities like grocery stores made it difficult for residents to believe that their return would be

sustainable. These structural impediments prevented black residents from returning and thus taking over Common Ground operations, as the organizers intended (81).

The continued presence of a large organization of white activists, conducting disaster relief work in the name of radical politics of liberation and working in a primarily black working-class neighborhood, provoked critical responses from organizers working primarily through a feminist women of color perspective. In an essay included in the same collection as Hilderbrand, et al.'s essay on Common Ground, Alisa Bierria and her co-authors bring a gendered analysis of disaster visibility and sexual violence to their analysis of the forms of solidarity represented by Common Ground's overwhelmingly white volunteer force. These radicalized white volunteers, they contend, "contribute to the changing demographics of the city" (39) by either eventually moving into devastated communities where original residents could not return to (what they call "back-door gentrification" or "volunteer fallout" (42)) or by increasing police surveillance and control over spaces where they operate, due to the systemic ways police authorities respond to white victims of crime. Criticizing Common Ground's leadership for its failure to collaborate with women of color led organizing already operating in the city, Bierria, et al. argue that such styles of organizing continue the process of "rendering invisible the rich legacy of social justice organizing in New Orleans" (41).

Hilderbrand, et al. also admit that the activists joining Common Ground occupy a problematic position on account of their racial and class backgrounds. Writing as white, radical activists, the Common Ground theorists admit that

One challenge to our work has been ourselves. The vast majority of volunteers, however social-justice oriented, are products of American society, complete with the insidious

baggage of oppressive behaviors. The large number of white volunteers inevitably brings

the issue of white superiority to the table — varying degrees of active and unexamined

racism, directly affecting the ability to work in solidarity with a traditionally marginalized

community. Those of us who are white out-of-towners constantly struggle with our role

in the rebuilding process: Have we overstepped our boundaries? Are we honoring the

local wisdom or assuming we know what is best? Will we know when it is time to leave?

(Hilderbrand, et al. 97)

Demonstrating an awareness of the criticism leveled toward Common Ground, the authors'

questions and concerns highlight the ways that solidarity and community, at least as they

understand these concepts, are not automatically generated by working in the devastated

neighborhoods. The ethical questions posed here are interesting to me because they are also

spatial questions. Terms like "boundaries," "local wisdom," "out-of-towners," and "traditionally

marginalized community" not only refer to ontologically real things, but also configure a set of

spatial connotations regarding unequal power relations, belonging, accountability, and

obligations that configure "outsiders" and "locals" in diametrically different roles.

      Bierria and her co-authors complicate these questions further, noting that, due to the long

history of racism that produced the conditions of economic underdevelopment and police

violence affecting places like the Ninth Ward, these volunteers are not simply acting in solidarity.

They in fact participate in the systems that render communities of color, and women of color in

particular, invisible. By this they mean that, during moments of catastrophe, visibility of

displaced people vacillates between rendering survivors' stories and crises invisible. On the other

hand, survivors, especially people of color, are rendered "hypervisible" when government

officials want to keep certain populations from return; in these narratives, the displaced residents of public housing and working-class communities are rendered both lazy or criminal, and thus deserving of their displacement. These forms of visibility conform to established narrative frameworks about "disaster" in modern cities that evoke social anxieties among urban elites and the suburban middle-class about moments of catastrophe unleashing episodes of rioting, looting, and other forms of working class revolt.

The dialogue between Bierria's and Hilderbrand's essays centers on the figure of the "white volunteers," with each of these texts assessing how such volunteers can ethically relate to the contrasting figure of the "local community." While Hilderbrand, et al. believe that through antiracist education white volunteers can be radicalized and attentive to local community leadership, for Bierria et al., white volunteers, despite good intentions, "remain unaccountable to local folks" and "have the capacity to compromise women's and other community members' safety" (41). For Bierria and her co-authors, the costs appear to be too great to ethically support a vision of volunteerism in which white activists may end up reproducing existing racist hierarchies and further exposing black communities to police violence. Informed by a critical, feminist analysis of the power of whiteness and class mobility that sustains unequal access to resources, means of transportation, and social support for many volunteers, they counter Common Ground's method with their own demand that solidarity between "nonlocal allies" and the "devastated community" follow a more prescribed spatial ethics. "Nonlocal allies could do work in solidarity with New Orleans *from where they live* by supporting displaced survivors *in their own local communities*" (41, emphasis mine); otherwise, they contend, "'despite our best intentions, we find ourselves only *taking up space* and *inserting ourselves* in communities in a

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way that reflects our internalized colonial attitudes and privileges'" (42, emphasis mine). The

spatialized language supports a dichotomous framework of solidarity and locality, which

establishes apparently hard boundaries between the "local community" and "nonlocal allies," and

raises questions about the spatial politics of solidarity as they are framed within unequal racial

and gendered relationships between communities that have been subject to unequal degrees of

development, state support, and social investment. As I turn to the two primary texts of this

chapter, this dialogue regarding Common Ground's volunteer organization contextualizes how

the contemporary actors in the rebuilding struggle debated the concepts of "community" and

"solidarity."

This chapter takes up the representation of "community" in two texts that are interested in

the radical modes of resisting capitalist and racist modes of state authority. Both Rebecca Solnit's

A Paradise Built in Hell (2010) and Jordan Flaherty's *Floodlines* (2010) filter the experiences of

organizers who challenged displacement through the concept of "community." Each text

acknowledges the ways in which dominant narratives about disaster and displaced persons

ultimately configure the displaced either as victims or as responsible for their own plight.

Displacement narratives, as Katrina Powell argues, seek to render persons displaceable by

"depict[ing] them as agents who contribute to their 'out-of-placeness'" (316). Such narratives

about the displaced "conform to expectations of victimhood, nostalgia, and subsequent 'saving'

by the state" (Powell 316). As such, they impose persuasive stories that reify differences between

populations, casting some lives as worth saving, rescuing, and restoring. Those populations who

are discursively excluded from the resettlement or recovery agenda are most often dependent on

rental or public housing, or for whom the housing market has displaced as higher rents are

sought after in neighborhoods primed for transplant, high-income earners looking for "quality of life" amenities in historic sections of the city. As I noted in my first chapter, if these subjects do return, their re-incorporation is predicated on conforming to the model of housing consumers seeking mixed-income housing or privatized education services, which encourages residents to adopt a more mobile sense of housing options across the urban area. Contestation of this mode of biopolitics, therefore, always involves a spatial practice, redefining the spatial conceptions and material world upon which biopower is continually asserted through the spatial technologies of codes, ordinances, maps, and plans that are given the force of law.

Powell argues, however, that the expected tropes and images of the counter-discourses deployed by the displaced (or on behalf of them), which may also call upon human rights discourse and state-led interventions on their behalf, are caught in the same "judicial power" to define and exclude who receives support, and who does not. This discursive power animates official displacement narratives, solicits testimony from survivors, and categorizes worthy recipients. As she pointedly asks, "[w]ho wants these narratives, and how are they used?… human rights laws set up exclusionary language, making hierarchical decision-making parameters that deem the dispossessed as 'worthy' of saving. The judicial power to make decisions about human life simultaneously includes violence: the violence involved in constituting the law and the violence that sustains it" (317). Therefore, displacement narratives supporting — in this case, survivors and devastated communities — must be read for their imbrication in the power to create exclusions. The discourses to recuperate the lives (and spaces) of the dispossessed are simultaneously bound to the exclusionary language and violence which

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constitutes law and sovereignty, the same law and sovereignty that can be suspended in order to make territories and populations disposable.

Focusing on the forms of politicized disaster relief that coalesced around organizers who remained in New Orleans during the storm, such as Malik Rahim and the organizers of the Common Ground Collective, Solnit's and Flaherty's texts identify "community" as the primary social basis for resisting displacement narratives and the forces of physical dislocation. This chapter interrogates how Solnit and Flaherty rely on the concept of community: Who does it apply to? How does it serve as the basis for a successful contestation of displacement? In order to answer these question, I will need to return briefly to Nicholas Blomley's notion of contestation, which I discussed in Chapter One. Blomley's primary example and subject matter are the challenges brought by First Nation artists and governments against the abrogation of Canadian land treaties. In these cases, the displacement, or "conceptual erasure," of native peoples was carried out by colonial mapping and "spatial narratives" that erased native property and land clams and naturalized their absence from cities. The forms of contestation of native dispossession and displacement in the twentieth and twenty-first century that Blomley examines have taken the form of counter-mapping, legal suits and claims over provincial territory and hunting rights, as well as artistic interventions that reassert the presence of native peoples within the urban setting. They challenge the spatial technologies of colonial and state-directed mapping which naturalized a set of geographies of ownership and narratives of displacement, through which indigenous people are "imagined as outside the city" (Blomley 135); as such, mapping reinforced notions of belonging that continue to exclude native people from the urban realm. For Blomley, these contestations of displacement by indigenous activists are critically important

because they undermine the principle of private property and the presumption of liberal subjectivity sustained by the geographies of ownership and property. This ownership model configures the liberal subject of the state as individualized, self-possessing, and conferred with private rights against "a threatening collective (either the state or other institutions)" (Blomley 5). For Blomley, because native claims constitute collective contestations of private ownership guaranteed by the liberal state, they "unsettle" the presumed fixity of private property. In this way, they also challenge the geographical orders of knowledge upon which the liberal subject is constituted. In the two texts I discuss in this chapter, "community" constitutes a means for each author to theorize a collective unsettling of the liberal presumptions of state sovereignty over disaster relief.

In the following sections I offer a theoretical framework that informs my analysis of how social movement organizations oriented toward disaster relief. I then turn to two nonfiction texts that illustrate my concerns with the limits and possibilities of contestation as practiced by Common Ground and other radical left organizations. Both *A Paradise Built in Hell* and *Floodlines* feature first person narratives that engage with the work of Common Ground and other relief organizations that emerged in New Orleans' Algiers and Ninth Ward neighborhoods during the chaotic events of the storm. By examining the work of two social movement writers

who identify with the anti-authoritarian left,[15] I seek to understand how their critiques of the

dominant politics of disaster management determine what kinds of subject(s) and narratives

could be alternatively constructed through these radical interventions in disaster recovery work.

Both texts contribute to a revised and political notion of "community," one which expressly

redefines the concept of disaster and its relationship to social order and government. In this way,

these two texts function as testimonial inquiries into the meaning of belonging and disaster.

Bridging the theoretical work of Blomley and Powell, which I introduced in Chapter One, I look

to these texts to understand what subjects such alternative spaces are capable of emplacing.

A Paradise Built in Hell: The Improvisation and Latency of Disaster Communities

In *A Paradise Built in Hell*, Rebecca Solnit discusses how the response to disaster is often

characterized in media reports, government policy, historiography, and political philosophy as a

collapse of order and an attendant period of chaos. In many cases, this interpretation of disaster

as chaos justifies the exercise of state violence to reassert the administrative control of social

elites, what Solnit calls the "elite panic" that frequently results from fear that "if they themselves

are not in control, the situation is out of control, and in their fear take repressive measures that

become secondary disasters" (21). Because of this propensity to view disaster as foundational

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[15] While Solnit and Flaherty both demonstrate affiliations with social justice movements inspired by anarchism, neither explicitly states an organizational affiliation or identification with anarchism, per se. However, both identify strongly with what was termed the "global justice movement," a set of protests and organizations rooted in opposition to capitalist globalization; a diverse and multi-tendency movement which constituted the primary form of globalized resistance to neoliberalism and globalization between 1990-2001. These movements, especially in North America, were characterized by an "anti-authoritarian" ethos, rejecting both the formalized organizational culture represented by the liberal democracy and nongovernmental organizations (though some NGOs were participants in these movements) and the cadre organization and democratic centralism that characterized Leninist-inspired socialist parties, which were also seen as authoritarian and hierarchical. Anti-authoritarianism, with its emphasis on local autonomy, networking, and consensus decision making, offered an explicit alternative to both the state apparatus of capitalist democracies and the "rigid" and "top-down" forms of organization exemplified by previous incarnations of the international left.

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threat to social power, "a power struggle often takes place in disaster" (21). Throughout each example Solnit provides, she consistently reproduces her initial thesis, which holds that disaster is a unique temporal moment that reveals the hierarchical and authoritarian structures that command everyday life. In the opening provided by moments of catastrophe, Solnit writes, the people affected and living through the crisis are often able to create a "fleeting order" that differs substantially from the ways modern, capitalist states organize the social relations of everyday life. She argues that the people who experience disaster or "chaos" are capable of generating an "order" that is not reliant on top-down methods of control or organization. As she explains in a passage connecting her discussion of the theory of mutual-aid societies to the emergence of disaster communities, "[a] disaster produces chaos immediately, but the people hit by that chaos usually improvise a fleeting order that is more like one of Kropotkin's mutual-aid societies than it is like the society that existed before the explosion or the earthquake or the fire. It liberates people to revert to a latent sense of self and principle, one more generous, braver, and more resourceful than what we ordinarily see" (95). In this passage, Solnit assembles several concepts that express her underlying assumptions about "disaster communities" and how they both relate to and contrast with everyday life. Notably, she draws on the concept of "mutual-aid societies" from Peter Kropotkin, the Russian theorist of mutualist anarchism, whose works she examines earlier in the chapter, to suggest that, underneath the surface of state-regulated and market-dominated social life (i.e., "the society that existed before the explosion"), forms of civil society exist that re-emerge in the face of crisis. These forms of social organization "never went away entirely, even among us, here and now" (95); their presence or potentiality is constantly called

upon during moments of catastrophe and chaos to provide safety, aid, and forms of collective decision-making.

Conceptually linked to these persistent, if underground, sources of mutual aid are Solnit's key terms for describing the difference and potential of disaster communities. These communities "hit by that chaos," she writes, fashion a type of order that is both "improvised" and the product of people now able to "revert to a latent sense of self and principle." Noting how this emergence of "utopian" social relations can be found again and again in the history of disaster response, she inverts the question of origin, explaining that "[t]he real question is not why this brief paradise of mutual aid and altruism appears but rather why it is ordinarily overwhelmed by another world order — not eradicated, for it never ceases to exist quietly, but we miss it at the best of times, most of us, and feel bleak and lonely for its lack. Disaster, along with moments of social upheaval, is when the shackles of conventional belief and role fall away and the possibilities open up" (Solnit 97). Once the "shackles" of ideology are removed, the latent impulses of mutualism are free to operate. It is these two concepts, the idea that disaster communities are defined by their ability to "improvise" and by their "latent" existence, hidden within the civil societies of capitalist states, that, I contend, define her conception of "disaster community." In my reading, I argue that Solnit's reading of disaster and community depends on a normalization of the daily devastation experienced by marginalized people under capitalism, a move that, while intended to find sources of spontaneity and resistance, also fetishizes impacted communities.

Although Solnit explores the emergence of "disaster communities" in response to various natural, man-made, and economic catastrophes, for this section I focus my analysis on the

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passages in her text that directly relate to the experience of Hurricane Katrina. In the passages below, I explore how Solnit uses the terms "improvise" and "latent" to describe the forms of disaster community that emerge during moments of disruption and social struggle such as Hurricane Katrina. A key concept of Solnit's is the "latent" possibilities of civil society: the potential of communities built out of solidarity and mutual aid that already exist in society but are typically repressed or constrained in everyday life by the hierarchical and authoritative forces of government, its institutions, and the competitive pressures of capitalism. In the epilogue, she notes that the history of disaster

> suggests that… everyday life in most places is a disaster that disruptions sometimes give us a chance to change. They are a crack in the walls that ordinarily hem us in, and what floods in can be enormously destructive — or creative. Hierarchies and institutions are inadequate to these circumstances; they are often what fails in such crises. Civil society is what succeeds, not only in an emotional demonstration of altruism and mutual aid but also in a practical mustering of creativity and resources to meet challenges. (Solnit 305)

I find this passage both telling and surprising. The first lines I present here reflect Solnit's incorporation of social constructionist theories of disaster, which reject treatments of disaster as "exceptional" events separate from the daily forces of domination, exploitation, and privation that make people physically and materially vulnerable to natural hazards. According to Luft, social constructionist perspectives on disaster "move to displace 'natural' disasters as the greatest risk to human well-being and to replace them with an understanding of the social and ongoing conditions that produce daily risk, suffering, and trauma" (506). Solnit goes further, though, by defining disasters as "disruptions" that upend everyday forms of social risk, alienation, and

exploitation. Following this, there are two main oppositions that Solnit maintains in this passage: on the one hand, that between "hierarchies and institutions" and "civil society," and on the other, between the destructive and creative potential of disaster. Civil society, the "demonstration of altruism and mutual aid" and the "practical mustering of creativity" is what both "succeeds" and what "floods in." The latent potential for creativity bound up in civil society is "hemmed in," but disaster presents a moment akin to revolutionary change.

According to the disaster studies scholar Kenneth Hewitt, "[d]isaster threatens and involves destruction or disintegration of the extensive, orderly patterns that bind together the large space and many places of modern material life. Disasters are problems that are, by implication and in fact, out of control, in that they break out of the modern mold, or challenges its effectiveness" (Hewitt 89). For Hewitt, it is problematic that a considerable amount of disaster studies research both reasserts the exceptionalism of disasters and seeks to understand and improve the ways that state administrations "restore order": "In this context, the social problem of disaster is not primarily one of, say, crisis, devastation, extreme experience, and emigration, let alone of tragedy, violence or misrule" (89-90), but rather how a problem is constructed around the events we classify as "disasters" by virtue of how they demonstrate the failures of governance and social authority (90). In Solnit's writing, what is restored is less a form of political authority or civil security, but a "civil society" defined by its capacity to deliver "creativity and resources to meet challenges" (305). As she goes on to note, "Two things matter most about these ephemeral moments. First, they demonstrate what is possible or, perhaps more accurately, latent: the resilience and generosity of those around us and their ability to improvise another kind of society. Second, they demonstrate how deeply most of us desire connection,

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participation, altruism, and purposefulness" (305-6). It is to this concept of "improvisation" that I turn to next.

A key condition of these communities and their relationship to the circumstances of necessity and disruption is "improvisation." This term, as Solnit uses it, can refer to the creation of networks and alliances between people across established social divisions; the making of spontaneous social units and organizations to distribute medical aid, food and building materials to people in need; or the invention of new places — like outdoor kitchens, impromptu cafes, and health clinics housed in abandoned storefronts. Improvisation is a characteristic of disaster communities that allows them to operate effectively but also to produce a type of society that can only exist when the hierarchical structures and commodified relations of everyday life are disrupted. In her chapters on Hurricane Katrina, she describes Common Ground Collective's first project, the creation of a health clinic in the Algiers neighborhood, as an example of the improvisational tactics that emerge from disaster. Organized in response to immediate crisis and the absence of state resources, Common Ground's ability to adapt and respond to the specific, rapidly-changing circumstances on the ground constitute the form of improvisation that Solnit sees reoccurring in diverse instances of natural catastrophe.

The collective's growing list of projects were organized on the basis of collective decision-making and the need to build bridges between residents during a time of disorder when racist white vigilantes were shooting at black men in the neighborhood, treating any black man in the area as a suspected looter. According to Solnit, Common Ground's informal organizational structure and adaptable projects allowed it to improvise approaches to disaster relief and to proliferate project-groups as the organization expanded from Algiers to the Lower Ninth Ward.

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Solnit emphasizes these modes of improvisation created by moments of crisis and catastrophe in opposition to the rigidity of state and market-led responses, noting that "[o]ften while the big groups [larger, better funded nonprofits] were still sorting out their business or entangled in bureaucracy, the small groups these radicals begat were able to move faster, to stay longer, to sink deeper, to improvise more fitting responses to the needs of the hour" (287). Modeled on the "survival programs" of the Black Panther Party, which founder Malik Rahim had been a member of decades earlier, Common Ground drew on those lessons in its food distribution and medical work. In the Ninth Ward, Solnit explains, Common Ground established a tool-lending station, bioremediation projects, soup kitchens, volunteer housing stations, community gardens, and a housing cooperative (292).[16] In her description of "groups descended from the countercultures," including the Black Panthers and anarchists, Solnit notes the contrasting abilities of these politicized organizations vis-a-vis larger nonprofit relief organization. This adaptability and expansion reflected, as Solnit sees it, the need for flexibility in the times and places where the state and market no longer dominate. These forms of organization had the capacity to reach people in need with greater efficiency and meaningfulness than larger relief organizations like the Red Cross.

While Solnit uses the example of Common Ground to reveal the re-emergence of improvisational elements common to wherever disaster communities arise, she looks to New Orleans' black cultural traditions and working-class community for both latent elements of civil society and for models of creativity in the face of everyday disaster. In these passages about New

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[16] During my first-hand research on Common Ground's base of operations in 2006, I observed the volunteer headquarters, as well as Common Ground members who had started a publicly accessible computer lab for residents, a tree-cutting service, and a radio station project. The housing cooperative, based in an apartment complex called The Woodlands, was closed after a few months of operations, after the original owner pulled out of the arrangement with Rahim and Common Ground and evicted the tenants.

Orleans, I find that Solnit's application of the concept of disaster communities to New Orleans troubling. By far, she delivers a more complicated analysis of New Orleans culture than she does examples of other cultures and communities where mutual aid and utopian communities have emerged during past disasters. In her description of pre-storm "community," she does not explicitly identify the racial background of the New Orleans communities that she is writing about, though implicitly and based on certain details, she describes African American people and black cultural traditions. In tones that evoke nostalgia for a lost past, her description of "community" in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina embodies stereotypes about Southern hospitality and pre-modern social bonds that somehow escaped the alienation of capitalist urbanization, for "[t]hey lacked that shrinking fear of strangers and sacralization of privacy that governs much of the architecture of suburbia and the growth of gated communities, the sprawls where no one mingles or, it sometimes seems, gets out of their car except in parking structures. Theirs was an old-fashioned conviviality that could be too bacchanalian to meet the earnest desire for civic revival held by many social critics but was nevertheless vibrant and embracing" (Solnit 268). Though this passage does not exactly define the racial background of the "they" who possess such "old-fashioned conviviality," the residents are implicitly coded as black and creole, as this passage is framed by her descriptions of a conversation with "a creole man" and in the following paragraph she encounters "older African American women" who exemplify this sense of community. She uses this description to set up both the sense of loss that followed the disaster, the recognition of what was displaced during the floods, and the elite efforts to use planning to push low-income and working-class communities out of heavily flooded neighborhoods.

Moreover, as further passages reveal, in her search for a latent sense of community and "belonging" — which she claims existed among the city's residents before the storm, Solnit reproduces troubling racial codes that equate "belonging," and utopian notions of "community" with indigeneity and pre-industrial culture. After describing a particularly emotional encounter with an older African American woman who had returned to the Ninth Ward and was living in FEMA trailers, she writes:

> I had long wondered whether there was a society so rich in a sense of belonging and purpose that disaster could bring nothing to it, a society where there was no alienation and isolation to undo. I'd always thought I might find it in Mexico or a traditional indigenous community. I found a little of that in New Orleans. The disaster there was so horrific it begat little of the ebullience of many other disasters — though it created some remarkable disaster communities and even positive social change. (Solnit 268-9).

New Orleans surprises her because it exemplifies a kind of social connectivity and immersion that she considers are only possible in non-Western or pre-modern societies, which have "no alienation and isolation to undo." While her position may be somewhat hyperbolic, the language of this passage codes race, modernization, disaster, and belonging in ways that are quite problematic. The linkage of associations between the terms "Mexico," "a traditional indigenous community" and "New Orleans" immediately signify a congruence between these polities, the racial classification of their populations, and how discourses of modernization construct nonwhite and non-Western societies as "backward," "developing" or "Third World."

In the following pages, Solnit transitions toward her full discussion of Common Ground, listing the challenges that faced New Orleans after the storm, including the loss of public

housing, the increase in rents, the still widespread problem of vacant and blighted buildings throughout the city. The extremity of the damage caused by the flooding demonstrates the limitations, in her view, of simply organizing disaster relief through local traditions of mutual aid, "the scale of the devastation and loss meant that mutual aid was not enough" (279). Even though bureaucratically-managed governmental institutions "choked" (279) and "strangled" (280) the aid and resources necessary for rebuilding, there is still something in these passages that suggests that what grassroots organizers were capable of delivering would not be enough on its own to rebuild the city. As she notes with a degree of measured optimism, "[e]normous amounts of assistance from outside were required, and they came in bureaucratically choked dribbles from government agencies and in unstinting waves from the huge quantity of volunteers who came from around the country to rebuild New Orleans. Eventually a handful of visionary projects would be launched in New Orleans, bringing real if limited benefits to a troubled place" (279).

For Solnit, Common Ground's application of direct democracy and volunteerism exemplifies the improvisational capacities of informal, emergent organizations that Solnit celebrates throughout the text. According to Emily Posner, one of these volunteers who Solnit quotes, the effectiveness of Common Ground's improvisational methods lay especially in the interpersonal and interracial encounters that it enabled: "'[w]hile it's an informal thing, there are friendships that have been made that will last forever, and those friendships will be needed in the future for sure. We're a network of people now that if a storm happens we know what to do. And we'll all call each other'" (293). According to Rahim there was a transformative impact of white volunteers working in solidarity with black residents. The thousands of volunteers, who were

mostly white and came from middle-class backgrounds, came through and developed community in solidarity with the affected residents and with each other. Solnit summarizes Rahim's and Posner's perspectives, claiming that "[w]hen it worked well, people on both sides of the old racial divides went away with changed perceptions. The volunteers mitigated the racial violence and demonization of the first days after the storm. And they went back to their homes and communities around the country, often transformed in some ways by the experience, and spread the word" (293). This is one of the few moments where a discussion of racial interaction occurs, and it largely leaves out the debate, happening within Common Ground as well, about the spatial ethics of solidarity. As I have shown above, and in my section on Flaherty below, other scholars and activists take a more critical view of the impact of large numbers of white volunteer activists working in devastated, predominantly black neighborhoods. It is surprising, therefore, to read how Solnit largely takes Rahim at his word on this matter of solidarity and the community.

Solnit downplays the problematic of white volunteers because her conception of disaster communities and the latent potential of civil society puts forward a different notion of belonging, one in which disaster disrupts not only the forms of institutional and administration order, but also the orders of hierarchy and difference imposed through ideologies of race and class. For example, in another surprising set of passages that follows her rich description of New Orleans' conviviality and extensive social and familial networks, she explains how the comprehensive devastation disrupted even the community's latent potential for mutual aid. The scale of devastation, and the type of disaster that flooding brings, leads her to argue that the forms of disaster community that emerged during other catastrophes, like the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, did not readily emerge in New Orleans. Instead of feeling empowered or capable of

creating spaces of civil order, "[t]hat sense of agency was not so widespread in Katrina…

Staying in the city meant being utterly overwhelmed by the scale of the catastrophe, stranded by

the water and seeing the authorities go berserk" (Solnit 278). The type of disaster as well, a

citywide inundation, made it particularly difficult to establish the forms of community that occur

in what she calls "comparatively clean disasters" such as fires and earthquakes (Solnit 278). On

the other hand, Katrina left a "filthy, stinking, soggy mess dismaying to those who came

back" (279).

A host of other problems beset the residents who remained and those who started to

return, including the incidents of murderous vigilantes attacking black men in Algiers and

episodes of horrendous police violence, in many cases leaving several black men dead on bridges

where they had fled to avoid the floodwaters. Drawing on this larger context and the geographic

scale of the disaster, it appears that Solnit describes an actual impediment to the creation of

utopian possibility. In one sense, this passage runs counter to her own argument about the

emergence of disaster communities. Katrina survivors were unable to experience what she calls

"positive disaster experiences," drawing on Charles E. Fritz who "ascribed his positive disaster

experiences only to those who are 'permitted to interact freely and to make an unimpeded social

adjustment.'" (Solnit 279). New Orleanians after Katrina, Solnit argues, were instead subject to

neglect, abandonment, and at times routine state violence that limited people's sense of agency

and the capacity to rebuild on their own (279). Therefore, the "disruption" to the normal order of

everyday life, as it occurred in New Orleans in 2005, did not automatically produce a liberatory

space. I find this admission surprising, partly because it seems to admit that disaster in some

sense overwhelms the latent and improvisational capacities of civil society, even in a community

that she describes as already have a strong sense of belonging. A few pages later, she does find

the liberatory thread of her story when she turns to the origins of the Common Ground

Collective. While violence and devastation occurred in Algiers as well, where Common Ground

was founded, it was spared much of the flooding the rest of New Orleans experienced; from their

still dry home Rahim and Sharon Johnson were able to house and organize the first operations of

the Common Ground clinic.

Solnit's discussion of Common Ground provides a number of examples of how she

conceptualizes the possibilities and potentials of "community" and "disaster." This potential,

however, seems to be grounded in an unacknowledged and unexamined racial coding — forms

of black cultural expression appear as evidence of a latent "sense of belonging" and the absence

of alienation; and in associations of race with development that are expressed in modernization

theory and the historiography of development. In other words, the ideal figure of belonging —

the racially coded resident who exhibits pre-modern forms of social attachment and

"conviviality" — is in fact displaced from the city by the catastrophic scale of the floods. The

disruptive force of Katrina appears to have broken these older community connections, and into

their place new organizations were required.

Floodlines: Exceptionalism and Resistance

Jordan Flaherty's *Floodlines*, like Solnit's text, is written from a radical antiauthoritarian

perspective. Unambiguous about his politics, Flaherty reads post-Katrina recovery activism and

pre-Katrina cultural resistance through the lens of an antiracist community organizer and

participant in the global justice movements. Positioning himself as a journalist, an eyewitness to

the events of Katrina, and a cautious interlocutor for the city's black cultural traditions, Flaherty provides readers with a politically radical perspective on forms of community organizing and solidarity work in New Orleans. As Flaherty recounts various events related to the storm and its aftermath — including the city recovery plans, the first Mardi Gras after the storm, the closure of Charity Hospital and the public housing complexes, and the organizations that emerged to protest displacement — he draws on first hand interviews and research from the organizers involved in these struggles and from scholars aligned with progressive social movements. Throughout each of these stories, Flaherty maintains a fundamental commitment in his writing to intentionally center the voices of black leaders and organizers and to emphasize the cultural traditions of black New Orleanians.

Flaherty's chapters confront the continued struggles of black New Orleanians to recover from the storm. In particular, throughout the text, his discussion of social movements prioritizes and continually returns to "ways in which culture and community serve as tools of resistance" (91). For instance, everyday efforts on the part of black residents who were initially displaced to return to the city for work or school, every performance of cultural tradition of music and foodways, constitute forms of "resistance." His objective, as he defines it, is to relate to readers the "ethos of steadfast resistance" (Flaherty 1) among the residents and the black community by documenting and assessing the forms organization and mobilization that followed after Katrina. Flaherty directly links this ethos of resistance to the city's African American community and its traditions of culture and music, in which "resistance to white supremacy has cultivated and supported a generous, subversive, and unique culture of vivid beauty. From jazz, blues, and hip-hop to secondlines, Mardi Gras Indians, jazz funerals, and the citywide tradition

of red beans and rice on Monday nights, New Orleans is a place of art and music and food and traditions and sexuality and liberation" (7-8). These traditions are, according to Flaherty, both unique to New Orleans and a result of popular struggle against white supremacy. This "legacy of resistance" (10) defines New Orleans culture, and in turn, establishes the city's cultural difference from the rest of the United States: "New Orleans has a unique and resilient set of cultures, with a history of place and a legacy of resistance. This city is defined by its difference, its cultural separation from the rest of the United States" (10). In his reading of culture and community, a continuous thread of cultural traditions and folk customs exists in New Orleans that links present day struggles against the economic and political repression of black communities with the experiences of slavery and Jim Crow. These traditions and customs testify to the resilience and survival of black New Orleanians, which, for Flaherty, form the spiritual inspiration and social expression of the terms that he links together in his subtitle, "community and resistance."

By connecting resistance and community, Flaherty's text makes a number of interesting moves. First, Flaherty places the New Orleans' cultural traditions within a double frame: the city's cultural distinction derives from its African American traditions, and these traditions are the result of a legacy of continuous social struggle. This is a reading that finds a continuous thread, a cause and effect relation through all varieties of black New Orleanian traditions. In this way, jazz, blues, secondlines, and Mardi Gras Indians, hip-hop and bounce (all definitive musical forms that have origins or important passages through New Orleans) are defined as part of the same temporal continuity of struggle of black people against the hegemony of the white supremacist state. For Flaherty, this distinct set of traditions and practices derive from histories

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of resistance, which in turn inform the specific mode of resistance that defines everyday life in New Orleans. For example, he points to the tradition of "secondline" parades conducted by jazz funerals and social aid and pleasure clubs, which hold public parades through the streets accompanied by brass bands, as examples of "revolutionary" practice taking place as an everyday occurrence. These secondlines move through the streets and gather participants along the route, so that "[t]hrough the parades that each club throws, they transform a revolutionary act — taking control of the streets — into something everyday… At global justice protests and other demonstrations, people frequently chant, 'Whose streets? Our streets!' And at those gatherings it can feel like a new world is being created simply through the reclaiming of public space as a liberated zone. In New Orleans, we get that feeling every Sunday. And it's beautiful" (9). The analogy here is interesting, because it seems to allow Flaherty to use the secondline as an example of both the ways that expressions of cultural and community "serve as tools of resistance" (91) and a way to demonstrate the exceptionalism of New Orleans, a place where culturally distinctive performances produce liberatory spatial interventions on a regular basis. In this way, he shares with Solnit a desire to find in the racialized cultural traditions an analogy to contemporary social protest and place where the social values of "revolution" are realized in everyday life.

    Before I elaborate further on this text, I want to briefly focus on how Flaherty regards New Orleans' difference and "cultural separation," or what we might term its "exceptionalism." In order for Flaherty to make these arguments about cultures of resistance, he draws on various examples of what I call "genres of exceptionalism" that attempt to explain New Orleans' social and cultural difference. This cultural difference is defined more specifically as a source of

"separation" from the nation. In his first chapter, he claims "[t]his city is defined by its difference, its cultural separation from the rest of the United States" (10). First, he attributes this difference to historical processes like the legacy of French colonial slave codes that permitted more autonomy among enslaved people and free people of color than places that developed under British colonialism. The legacy of French colonialism, in this reading, meant that black people in New Orleans (and Louisiana) retained and practiced more African traditions than other places in the mainland United States, where they were often systematically forbidden and suppressed. Second, Flaherty uses the genre of geographical narrative to explain the city's cultural distinctiveness and the sense of "closeness" supposedly experienced by its residents. He notes how the relative compactness of the city, brought about by the constraints placed on its early development by the river and surrounding wetlands, allows for a sense of association and "familiarity" that is unlike other cities.[17] "This geography helps create a sense of closeness, as if we're all neighbors and together in our trials. The same families have frequently lived next door to each other for several decades. Imagine this and you begin to understand the special kind of familiarity experienced here" (Flaherty 10). Finally, he points out that the city's low levels of transience and out-migration also explain its sense of cultural continuity, writing that "[m]ore than anywhere else in the United States, New Orleans is a city where people often live in one neighborhood their whole lives and multiple generations can live on the same block" (9). In fact, while there is a degree of truth to these readings of New Orleans history and geography, they can leave out important past and present transnational linkages and movements that New Orleanians participated in over the three centuries of its existence. For Flaherty, these various explanations

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[17] A feature of the city's urban geography born out of the hydrological constraints on its historical development, which I have explored above in Chapters 1 and 3.

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reinforce the image of New Orleans that he relies on, depicting it as a unique place that differs from the rest of the United States, both in terms of its cultural traditions that are the sources of its distinctive forms of community and resistance.

In popular and academic discussions, the cultural traditions most associated with New Orleans — its food and music — form what Matt Sakakeeny calls "the pivot upon which the city's exceptional reputation rests" (725). Since Katrina, critical and popular representations of New Orleans have sought different ways of reckoning with the city's distinctive music and culture, seeking to explain the disaster and its aftermath through local accounts of city politics, class inequalities, race relations, and economic underdevelopment. Sakakeeny argues that cultural exceptionalism is typically treated in polar opposite ways: either as intensely vibrant expressions of local color and regional distinctiveness which explain the conundrums of post-storm redevelopment; or it is disregarded as "local color," a distraction from a critical structural analysis of the role played by neoliberal policy, underdevelopment, and national-level business and political coalitions that have made the city a "laboratory" for privatization of the public sphere. For example, he discusses David Simon's television series *Treme*, which explores in detail many of the structural problems facing the post-storm recovery. Even though the series presents an incisive look at the struggles of the city's working musicians with the new agenda of the post-Katrina regime, Sakakeeny argues that their struggles with governmental and economic forces "are presented as peculiarly local phenomena, disconnecting government corruption, police negligence, and the deconcentration of public housing, for instance, from policies and patterns at the level of the nation-state" (724-5). *Treme*'s commitment to humanizing and celebrating the distinctiveness of New Orleans' musical traditions and the everyday life of

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musicians as workers adjusting to the unevenness of displacement and return ends up reducing

many of these post-storm problems with development, privatization of education and public

housing, or police brutality to "precarious geographies and regional idiosyncrasies" (725). The

reverse approach has been to ignore the role of culture and focus entirely on how "recovery" in

New Orleans has meant the complete implementation of neoliberal reforms throughout the public

sector.

In order to resolve this binary approach that Sakakeeny observes in relation to culture and

critical analysis of neoliberalism, he proposes that theorists recognize that New Orleans'

exceptional or distinctive culture "is entwined with — not isolated from" matters of race, social

control, labor, and political governance (725). "Music and culture," he writes, "are not mere

symbols of distinction and autonomy; they are social processes that are integral to political and

economics infrastructures" (725). Black working class people who embody New Orleans culture

— who Flaherty celebrates throughout his text — are making culture in the context of a market-

driven reform of public institutions and urban space, part of a global pattern in which

governments are implementing neoliberal policy and market-driven control over urban public

spaces. These cultural workers are subjected to the demands of the ideal neoliberal citizen,

through which the ideal economic subject is the entrepreneur of the self, one who "conducts his

or her life, and that of his or her family, as a kind of enterprise, seeking to enhance and capitalize

on existence itself through calculated acts and investments." (Rose 164). They are increasingly

pressured to define their behavior — and thus their cultural work — in strictly economic terms,

to manage their families, housing, and risk themselves without government intervention. In this

new "cultural economy," cultural workers are configured both as service workers in the tourism

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and cultural economy or as potential criminals under new ordinances that regulate public performances and live music clubs.

Discourses of cultural distinction or exception are now sites of neoliberal economic and governmental intervention. Sakakeeny points out that through their role as musicians and cooks, the bearers of New Orleans' culture are in fact deeply integrated into the unequal structures that sustain the city's purchase on the global economy. Indeed, as he points out, Louisiana's political elite, including then-lieutenant governor Mitch Landrieu, commissioned plans to capture this rich cultural expression and make it work for economic development. Today, local culture and musical traditions like jazz and brass bands have been thoroughly converted into a commodity for the tourist, entertainment, and service industries. Furthermore, because these cultural traditions are already reproduced within family or neighborhood environments, the degree to which the state or benefiting industries need to subsidize them is quite low. According to Mt. Auburn Associates, authors of *Louisiana: Where Culture Means Business*, the state's diverse and multicultural heritage gives Louisiana a "competitive advantage" (10) in the global economy, providing the state with "a clean and renewable natural resource, that, with proper stewardship, will not be depleted" (10). Because these traditions are tied to specific regions and neighborhoods, culture is resistant to "outsourcing" (10). This plan demonstrates that it is in fact quite difficult to separate out or purify cultural expression from the market-relations that have enveloped it as a tool of economic development and global competitive advantage.

Having defined New Orleans as a culturally distinct place, Flaherty engages with an important ethical question: what does it mean to practice solidarity, particularly as a subject that is afforded different degrees of social power within a racist, sexist, and classist society? To this

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end, he explores the case of Common Ground and how the organization encouraged the travel and movement of large numbers of temporary residents — mostly white volunteers engaged in disaster work — into the disaster-affected Ninth Ward. While Flaherty examines how the volunteers engaged in solidarity work from the point of view of an antiracist critically examining the ethical responsibility of white movement participants in Common Ground's ostensibly radical politics of disaster relief, I approach Flaherty's assessment by arguing that the question of solidarity volunteerism in New Orleans' post-disaster social movements also involves questions of transregional mobility; that is, examining how some subjects are able to move in and out of disaster spaces and while others may be prevented from returning.

Throughout *Floodlines*, Flaherty demonstrates an acute awareness of his racial position as a white male journalist who is writing about the struggles of African American people. He writes early on in the text that, "[a]s a white organizer who relocated to this city where so much African American culture has its origins, and where significant aspects of the city's history have been shaped by conflicts around race, I believe it is vital to lift up Black voices" (2). This sense of racial responsibility and self-reflexiveness is a hallmark of his style in each chapter, and appears to guide how he approaches the exceptionalism of New Orleans' black culture. For example, his introduction wrestles with the anxiousness of being an "outsider," where he claims that designation when he writes about cultural traditions. He notes, for instance, that his various identity markers separate him from the cultural milieu that he discusses and works in solidarity with: he is a white man in a majority African American city, an "outsider" who moved to New Orleans as an adult, and a participant in global justice movements and community organizing.

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Indeed, Flaherty is quite conscious to draw a line between himself and those who properly "belong" or have a claim to these cultural traditions. As he writes in his introduction, "I recognize that, as a white writer, it is problematic for my book to serve as a filter for Black voices… I am also concerned that by celebrating a long history of resistance of which I cannot claim to be a part, I am in some ways benefiting from others' struggles" (Flaherty 2). At other times, however, Flaherty speaks as the "insider." He spends several passages educating his readership about the necessary details of New Orleans' difference, including a long description of Mardi Gras culture and the history of its racial segregation and integration. Adopting the voice of an antiracist organizer, he often takes pains to establish his racial position and the context of his perspective. This self-reflexive and reflective discourse captures the ethical anxieties of solidarity work, including the act of writing in support of social movements of the disenfranchised.

However, while these explanations reinforce aspects of the narrative of cultural exceptionalism often applied to New Orleans, Flaherty also draws parallels between the struggles against displacement in New Orleans and global struggles for social and environmental justice, such as the movements against displacement and state violence in Palestine. Through this example he demonstrates how New Orleans' traditions of resistance share a bond with other movements, and how those forms of "resistance" also take shape through cultural expressions of music, parading, and commemorations for the dead. For example, he draws a fascinating comparison between the ways that death is commemorated "as a public ritual" (Flaherty 91) in both New Orleans' black community and in Palestinian resistance movements. He explains that "the deceased are often also memorialized on t-shirts featuring their photos embellished with

designs that celebrate their lives… these t-shirts remind me of the martyr posters in Palestine, which also feature a photo and design to memorialize the person who has passed on. In Palestine, the poster's subjects are anyone who has been killed by the occupation, whether a sick child who died at a checkpoint or an armed fighter killed in combat" (91). He notes that post-Katrina housing rights organizers deliberately sought parallels with these movements, adopting the "right to return" slogan to signify the shared experience of displacement (Flaherty 91).

Flaherty conducts some of his most critical analysis of the post-Katrina social movement organizing when he discusses the efforts of Common Ground Collective. While he maintains a deep respect for its founder, Malik Rahim, he finds Common Ground's over-reliance on "mostly young, mostly white activists" (99) problematic because these activists had, according to Flaherty and some of his sources, reproduced racist power dynamics while operating in the predominantly black Ninth Ward. Flaherty attributes Common Ground's success at generating movement attention and attracting volunteers to the inspirational figure of Rahim, whose experiences as a housing rights activist and an organizer in the Black Panther Party during the 1960s lent revolutionary credibility to the model of mutual aid Common Ground practiced. This model, according to Flaherty, appealed to many activists already inspired by the global justice movement and its anti-state and anti-corporate ethos. Rahim was, in Flaherty's words, "redefining relief, in the way that the Black Panther Party redefined revolutionary party work by mixing radical politics with social programs like free milk for schoolchildren" (99). Flaherty, however, contends that more activist volunteers gravitated toward Rahim's group, rather than to other groups like People's Hurricane Relief Fund, because race and racism did not seem to hold as important a place in how leadership and power were practiced in Common Ground (99). Once

Rahim's widely distributed call for volunteers and assistance went out through progressive media channels and activist networks, thousands of volunteers participated in Common Ground initiatives and projects, including the work of gutting mold-infested homes, distributing supplies and food to the homeless and returning residents, and operating the collective's free health clinic.

Due to Flaherty's explicit concern with his own racial position as narrator of movements for liberation, he spends several pages detailing the debate about the role of white volunteers who joined Common Ground's efforts in the Ninth Ward. The volunteers who joined Common Ground, who Flaherty — like Bierria, et al. — constructs as "white" and "outsiders," came to work in solidarity with the local community. In his analysis of their participation in Common Ground, Flaherty makes an interesting rhetorical move, explaining how his own political development led him to admire Rahim's work and how his participation in global justice movements convinced him of many of Common Ground's goals:

> For years before Katrina, I jumped at any chance to listen to Rahim, to try to learn from his wisdom and experience. So I felt a kinship with the Common Ground volunteers who came to New Orleans. Many were part of the anticorporate global justice movement that had shaped much of my political development. As revolutionaries, we believe we can do better than the government and corporations. We believe we can fill the needs of people in crisis in a more effective and compassionate way, informed by radical values. Common Ground seemed to be our movement's opportunity to show that we could build a better world. Many young activists felt that this mission lent their efforts a sort of trump card — they must be doing the right thing if they were working with Rahim and had the best intentions. (Flaherty 99)

This passage resonates with how Sue Hilderbrand and her co-authors' explained Common Ground's work was intended to demonstrate a "proactive" response on the part of the U.S. left. However, Flaherty argues in this quote that solidarity is more than "intentions" or a sense of "mission," even one seemingly validated by working under the leadership of a local black organizer. The sense of "kinship" he expresses, while denoting a shared political affiliation, cannot be entirely separated from a racial connotation because Flaherty also explicitly includes himself in the racial milieu of white radical activists.

Acknowledging the critical support these volunteers brought to the Ninth Ward's recovery, Flaherty shifts to his most interesting and introspective problematic, how these activist volunteers and relief organizations "engaged in relief responsibly" (107), in relation to their surroundings and to the black residents of the Ninth Ward in which they were operating. Without systems of accountability or long-term investment in the success of their projects, Flaherty argues that these volunteers reproduced racial hierarchies and overlooked (or even displaced) the local traditions of resistance and local organizations operating in the city before Katrina. For example, according to Casey Leigh, a white activist and former volunteer coordinator for Common Ground, whose critiques Flaherty includes, "the roots of the problem [within Common Ground] was the short-term volunteers, because they were not from the community and came without an understanding or analysis of the intersections of race and other power dynamics" (100). For Ingrid Chapman, another white activist involved in Common Ground who became critical of how volunteers operated, many of these relief volunteers failed to hold themselves accountable for the long-term successes and impacts of the projects they initiated, noting that "'many of these projects started by folks from out of town lasted for very short

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periods of time and when they left town, they often took with them the resources they had

originally brought in and or gained while they were there'" (Flaherty 101).

According to both of the sources quoted above, the problem of the volunteers stems, in

part, from their spatial relationship to the area Common Ground operated within. They are

described as "from out of town" or "not from the community." While acknowledging that

Chapman and Leigh's critiques may stem from real experiences of unexamined and

unaccountable racist behavior and assumptions on the part of white Common Ground members,

it seems that Flaherty includes their critiques because they identify this "outsider" status as part

of white volunteers' problematic behavior. Otherwise, Flaherty fails to include specific examples

of how these activists reproduced racist power structures in the disaster zone. For example,

Flaherty notes how Common Ground's ambitious cooperative housing project, The Woodlands,

closed when the original owner of the apartment complex withdrew his agreement with the

organization, expelling the renters and Common Ground's staff, rather than a failure of the

organization itself or its volunteer participants. Even after providing an overview of personality

conflicts and splits between the leaders in PHRF, Common Ground, and ACORN, Flaherty says

very little about the specific ways that white volunteers did harm to organizing efforts within the

Ninth Ward. For Flaherty, the failing of these volunteers, it seems, derives from what appear to

be ethical contradictions inherent in providing transnational, and translocal, forms of solidarity.

As he notes earlier in the chapter, based on his experience with international solidarity with the

Palestinian struggle against displacement, "I learned many ways in which volunteers can be

helpful; I also saw way in which they could do harm, mostly by assuming they knew more about

what should be done to bring justice than the people they were ostensibly coming to

help" (Flaherty 94). For Flaherty, these internal critiques from white activists indicate how the model of disaster relief and solidarity exercised by Common Ground proved to be "unsustainable" and failed to exemplify the form of solidarity necessary to create a revolutionary alternative to the disaster of the capitalist state.

I have used this text to interrogate how a racially conscious white author explores the question of belonging through an account of his own participation in and observations of the social movement organizations operating in New Orleans after Katrina. Flaherty's analysis and criticism of volunteerism in New Orleans draws on his analysis of Common Grounds' shortcomings. Flaherty provides a more critical assessment of Common Ground than Solnit does, because he adopts a more self-reflexive approach to race that includes reflective thought on his own racial positioning as a white man. This leads him to adopt a more nuanced perspective regarding race and power and to deliberately valorize New Orleans' black culture as he tries to establish what types of subjects can be re-emplaced in the city along the lines of race and culture.

By critically examining Common Ground's experiments in radical politics and disaster relief, Flaherty asks what it means to practice solidarity and to inhabit spaces reshaped by the needs of catastrophe. In this case, we might turn to the question I posed earlier in this chapter: what type of subjects come to inhabit the space of solidarity and disaster relief? Do left-oriented disaster relief groups produce, however fitfully and imperfectly, new spaces for nonhierarchical social relations? Or do they, as Bierria, et al. suggest, potentially reproduce spaces of oppression, displacement, and state violence? Flaherty holds that, while for a short time governmental agencies and state actors may have failed, the disaster landscape is still permeated with social power relations and hierarchies. Indicative of how Flaherty and Bierria, et al. conceive of the

spatial relations enacted by white volunteers in disaster zones, both quote from the Rethinking Solidarity collective, which discusses "the pitfall of activist tourism." Such tourism occurs when an activist exercises

> 'the privilege of visiting other countries and movements and informing oneself with a firsthand account without the responsibility of full engagement, of being a stakeholder. So long as social movements remain something to go and see as opposed to something we live, then despite our best intentions, we find ourselves only taking up space and inserting ourselves in communities in a way that reflects our internalized colonial attitudes and privileges' (Flaherty 107).

This framework for thinking about volunteer work and the space of solidarity politicizes the mobility that "visiting" volunteers possess, which may not be shared by residents of the area they are working in. Following a familiar rhetoric that counterposes visual interaction to "lived," physical and material work, the Rethinking Solidarity statement constructs "communities" as bounded, and discrete, vulnerable to the effects of outsiders who variously "take up space" and "insert" themselves. In this arrangement, mobility and temporariness configure these activists in much the same way tourists are popularly critiqued: they are unable to develop a truly ethical relationship with the "people most affected" because their mobility and movement through places constructs those they encounter as objects of visual consumption and objectification, as merely "something to go and see." As I noted above, for Bierria, et al., the only ethical pathway in such a space of unequal mobility and forced displacement is for activists to conduct solidarity "from where they live by supporting displaced survivors" (Bierria, et al. 42). Revolutionary activists may seek to operate within this space to demonstrate how a non-coercive society could

fill the gaps in which working class communities under the capitalist state are neglected and subjected to the routine environmental and economic risks. However, in Flaherty's analysis, the alternative spaces made by revolutionary disaster relief organizations are not separate from the larger sociopolitical and historical context of the United States' colonial and white supremacist society. Therefore, he argues, white subjects are called to ethically move through solidarity work with an explicit recognition of how race operates in this historical and political context, stating that "white folks need to acknowledge and address issues stemming from their privilege. Not just because it's morally correct, but also to be effective in social justice work" (102).

Conclusion

Ultimately, Common Ground outlasted other organizations from the first generation of post-Katrina organizations that were oriented toward disaster relief. These organizations, including Common Ground, PHRF, ACORN, and People's Organizing Committee had prioritized disaster relief and service provision, while also pursuing protest activities against FEMA, the housing authority, and city planners (Luft 504). As I have demonstrated above, the crisis facing communities in Algiers and the Ninth Ward presented an opportunity for Common Ground Collective to rethink radical left/anarchist approaches to civil crises and natural disasters. They attempted to "fill the void" left by the state by creating alternative institutions that provide direct services to residents, with the intention of ceding these projects to the neighborhood's residents when sufficient numbers of people returned. However, by December 2007 many of these projects were either closed or downsized as national attention and organizing networks shifted to other movements and interests (Luft 505). Because these first generation groups had

drawn on established national networks of activists and depended on sustained national media attention on Katrina, their momentum faded when that attention shifted elsewhere.[18] Common Ground continued to operate, but with a significantly narrowed focus on housing rehabilitation work. As Luft describes in her research on social movements after Katrina, the landscape of post-Katrina movement-building shifted to a second generation of organizations, some of which started as direct service programs initiated by People's Hurricane Relief Fund. They included the New Orleans Women's Health Clinic; New Orleans Women's Health and Justice Initiative; Safe Streets, Strong Communities; and New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice (Luft 504-505). Together, these groups comprise what Luft calls the "second generation" of movement organizations. Primarily led by feminist women of color, these groups responded to the first generation's organizing strategy by adopting an "integrated model of service provision and grassroots organizing" (Luft 500). Utilizing these services as "base building" projects, the second generation of post-Katrina movements rejected the dichotomy established during the first generation between protest and service provision, and instead sought to develop the local leadership and capacity of marginalized communities (Luft 506-7).

Both texts examined in this chapter use "community" in different senses, which are constructed in relation to notions of race and social power that link people together prior to moments of disaster. Both Solnit and Flaherty extol the cultural traditions of community and parading that form a central and extraordinary feature of New Orleans culture, which for Flaherty is explicitly situated in the long history of survival and resistance to racism among black

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[18] Common Ground underwent further contractions when, in 2008, it was revealed that co-founder Brandon Darby had been acting as an FBI informant (Flaherty 106). Darby had been one of the four founders of Common Ground at Rahim and Johnson's home in 2005; by 2007 he had taken over leadership of the organization as Rahim stepped back from leadership responsibilities.

New Orleanians. Each text explains the city through its difference, and to explain that difference as originating in forms of political struggle against white supremacy. These texts differ, however, in both their application and use of the term, especially in their approach to the same disaster relief organization, Common Ground Collective. Interestingly, both authors describe community as a source of "resilience" and resistance drawn on by people experiencing a catastrophic event. However, "community" as a metaphor for "belonging" is treated differently by both authors. Jordan Flaherty's approach to "community," for instance, relies on certain nationalist equations of culture, belonging, and territory that resemble what Liisa Malkki has called the "national order of things." Malkki has critiqued such "functionalist vision[s] of identity" that depend on a territory in which one is constructed as culturally and socially "rooted" (511). For Malkki, this presumption assumes "that state sovereignty as we know it… is part of a natural or necessary order of things" (511). This "national order of things" constructs refugees and displaced persons as "a kind of person" (513), in need of prescribed forms of territorial re-emplacement. In this discursive context, which frames how knowledge about displaced people is constructed in institutional and political settings, the presumption is that "uprooting" or displacement damages or destroys "one's identity, traditions, and culture" (Malkki 508). "Belonging" is rendered as fundamentally "sedentarist," and "home" is equated with the nation-state.

In a situation like the aftermath of Katrina, where the displacement occurred primarily within the borders of the United States, rhetorics of belonging that turn to "community" depend on a more localized set of concepts — the neighborhood, the "authenticity" or "irreplaceability" of local culture, and the notion of "deep roots" and low rates of transience among the local, pre-storm population. As she explains, the orders of knowledge sustained by this presumption of

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territorial belonging and identity configures the displaced as both a problem for the nation-state system and the nation-state (or the form of territorial national belonging) as the solution to displacement. "Just as power secretes knowledge," she writes, "the national order of things secretes displacement, as well as prescribed correctives for displacement" (516). The modalities of community claimed and validated by *Floodlines* and *A Paradise Built in Hell* respond ambiguously to this national order, seeking alternatives to state models of social organization and power while also contending with powerful, identity-based claims to belonging that are activated by the genuine anxieties and severe injustices of displacement.

Conclusion

Throughout *Landscapes of Recovery: Belonging and Place in Post-Katrina Literatures*, I have explored representations of the built environment through testimonial depictions of disaster landscapes, recovery planning maps, and narratives about the environmental history of New Orleans in order to argue that the stories told about the disaster landscape are engaged in establishing the ideal subjects for displacement and return. In each of these chapters, I have sought to understand how the narratives and visual descriptions of the built and devastated landscape construct ideal subjects and spaces for re-investment and re-population. In matters of displacement, as I have argued drawing on the works of Nicholas Blomley and Katrina Powell, return and recovery are not simply matters of physical reoccupation; moving from displacement to resettlement entails a continuous process of subject formation carried out through the stories told about the people displaced and the landscapes they traverse. As a way to restate a few of themes of this project, I will briefly share an observation from a text that characterizes one of the more contentions figures of post-Katrina recovery, the urban recovery professional.

Anne Gisleson and Tristan Thompson's edited collection *How to Rebuild a City: Field Guide from a Work in Progress* (2010), offers a number of vignettes about the efforts of citizens and local activists involved in recovery projects across the city of New Orleans. Each piece in the collection is conceived as a "how-to" guide about some aspect of post-disaster recovery work. These stories and "guides" are darkly ironic, intending to capture the sense that there will soon be a need (and an audience) for practical guides to the experience of displacement and citizen-led recovery work. "Now you're stuck with a colossal mess, your friends and family are scattered, some are homeless, many have lost their jobs. The future looks bleak and even more

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uncertain than usual. Where do you start?" (9) ask the authors on the opening page. Presented as

a guide book, *How to Rebuild a City* seeks to highlight "the resilience and creativity of the local

individuals who have rallied to fill the civic voids left in the wake of the destruction" (9) by

offering examples from five years of post-storm activism. The sense of activism is conceived

broadly, including the work of nonprofits and community organizations united generally by the

fact that these recovery efforts were initiated "to fill the civic voids" left when government

support stalled or immobilized large scale public reinvestment in the city.

The collection explores various figures involved in the rebuilding process, it also brings

forward the voices of "newcomers," volunteers and professional workers who arrived after

Katrina to assist in the rebuilding process and who stayed on years later. While a relatively small

segment of the city's overall population, in "Confessions of a Carpetbagger," Ariella Cohen's

contribution to *How to Rebuild a City*, they are an identifiable "other" within a city where

displacement and dispossession have transformed the racial and class demographics of the city.

Cohen, in keeping with the ironic/serious tone of the collection, offers her own "guide" to

owning and accounting for her position as an outsider from the Northeast who arrived in New

Orleans to "contribute to positive change" (101), or a "carpetbagger" in Southern parlance.[19] She

writes that, "The first rule of being a carpetbagger is to *talk about it*. Early and often. The way to

do it is ironically, over a local microbrew at a local bar with your friends who are also

carpetbaggers. By bringing it up first you steer clear of any confusion over your own naïveté.

You are saying: *I know what is going on here*" (101). Delivered in its own ironic tone as a series

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[19] A term coined during the post-Civil War Reconstruction era (1865-1877) for Northern liberals who moved to the South in order to work in the rebuilding of the Southern economy, often perceived as intent on exploiting the local inhabitants during a period of intense economic and social disruption.

"rules" of behavior, Cohen asserts that being a "carpetbagger" — defined by her as a young, white, professional, hailing originally from the Northeast — is a subject position fraught with anxiety over the role played in the continued dispossession of pre-storm residents. For Cohen, the ironic assumption of the outdated, pejorative identity of the "carpetbagger" offers a possible ethical position within the recovery process, acknowledging one's ambiguous role as participant in displacement and recovery, one who "*know*[s] *what is going on here*." As she notes, "New Orleans is famous for its high nativity rate… One fear is that people like me — young, professional, white and new to the city — will replace the people who lived here before the storm. Talking about this fear is part of being a carpetbagger. Feeling guilty about it is, too" (101). The thorny ethics of participating in post-storm recovery is humorously resolved by Cohen's acknowledgement that anxiety and guilt are part of this subject position. And yet, Cohen's logic seems oddly and intentionally circular: even though "talking about this fear is part of being a carpetbagger," it is left unsaid if she means that "to talk about it" makes one a carpetbagger or if being a carpetbagger, ethically, means to talk about this fear openly (as she suggests at the beginning). She closes by asserting a possible ethical practice that appears to resolve the dilemma of guilt and anxiety, arguing that "[t]he challenge, then, for us young, liberal carpetbaggers is not just to talk the guilt-and-big-word-ridden talk. If there is anything that has become clear in the years since Katrina it's that rebuilding requires all hands on deck. Even the soft Northeastern ones" (101). In this way, Cohen settles on a seemingly practical resolution to this anxiety, that "Northeastern" hands are just as necessary to the recovery process; the practical work takes precedence over any guilt-ridden confessions.

I briefly touch on this imagining of the young liberal professional newcomer (similar in some respects to the figure of the white volunteer recovery activist examined in my fourth chapter) because Cohen's writing captures the recurring theme of insecurity as New Orleanians — native residents and newcomers alike — continue the dialogue about displacement and configure the ideal subjects for return and resettlement. In her estimation, the "carpetbagger" belongs as much as the native resident because "rebuilding requires all hands on deck" (101), though the figure of the carpetbagger is necessarily an anxious and insecure one. It is a subject position that has been established by the structural transformation of the city into a place which, Cohen confesses, after the hurricane provided a quality of living, housing, and job opportunities that well-educated and highly mobile Northeasterners like herself were able to exploit. By identifying such an anxiety about her own role in displacement, Cohen's identification of (and with) this particular subject aims to resolve that anxiety. On the margins of the page near Cohen's final paragraph, the text includes an inset with a multiple choice question and three optional answers: "Rebuilding a city requires: Natives; Newcomers; All of the Above" (101). The reader is left to make a determination by checking a box next to any of the three options, they enact their choice of ideal subjects in the recovery process. Thus, I see Cohen and the collected pieces in *How to Rebuild a City* pointing to the next iteration of displacement narratives about post-Katrina New Orleans and its landscapes. Like the official narratives created by urban planners and government officials intent on creating a "resilient" and "adaptive" approach to future crisis, these stories will openly acknowledge the community-led civic recovery projects, the ongoing displacement of black working class residents, and the increasing wealth inequalities of the New New Orleans. But the politics of solidarity that could possibly link Cohen's newcomers and the

residents displaced by gentrification and an overpriced housing market will remain occluded and silenced. The ironic tone attempts to resolve these contradictions through winking acknowledgement, but in effect masks an unacknowledged acceptance of the neoliberal recovery program already in full swing. Cohen, it seems, could posit a more radical, class-oriented criticism of the recovery process, in which she positions her own working conditions in solidarity with the struggles for affordable housing and jobs faced by the displaced. The question would then be reversed: "rebuilding a city" requires both newcomers and natives, but definition of "rebuilding" itself would be open to political critique regarding the objects of rebuilding and who controls the rebuilding process itself. A critique such as this would therefore require another framework for imagining the subjects of recovery and displacement, and necessitate new stories.

As the narratives explored in this dissertation demonstrate, the stories told about the disaster landscape engage in the process of displacement as they construct the ideal subjects for both dispossession and return. Displacement, as Blomley reminds us, involves the conceptual removal of persons and peoples; as a concept, displacement invites us to think through the rhetorical and compositional decisions made by post-disaster texts that produce the conditions for erasing the presence of the dislocated. In this sense, the narratives that I have examined all seek to establish who can return, while establishing qualifications for excluding others. For instance, returnees may be conceived of by recovery planners as the formerly "nonincluded" residents of public housing (in the ULI's *A Strategy for Rebuilding*). Residents and property owners returning to the city are expected to learn from the city's past and adapt to an urban future in which "living with water" frames government approaches to hazard management and private property (*Resilient New Orleans*). Likewise, we are also invited to think about how the

texts of resistance, the writings by the displaced themselves or by their advocates and allies, also compose their own displacement narratives. In this way, I sought to show how the displaced construct displacement narratives that also create ideal subjects for return, a process that their texts, plans, and memoirs participate in alongside the texts derived from the "official," government sources. Furthermore, as planners, city officials, nonprofit foundations, and corporate elites seek popular support for their development and recovery agenda, the displaced are incorporated into the post-storm recovery as figures of a population previous "underserved" by planners, public schools, and the pre-storm economy. Throughout this project I have sought to demonstrate how the ideal subjects constructed for displacement and resettlement are not reducible to any singular figure. Instead, they are solicited and engendered by the rhetorical decisions and discourses within which each text is situated. By reading the narratives about New Orleans' post-storm landscapes, we can attend to the various ways space is conceptualized and imagined so that the removal of people is naturalized, and how landscapes are prepared for resettlement not only because they are physically rebuilt, but because the discursive frameworks for accepting and incorporating returnees and new settlers has been paved by the stories told about who belongs and what new social expectations are imposed on them.

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Urban Land Institute. *New Orleans, Louisiana: A Strategy for Rebuilding*. Urban Land Institute, January 12-18, 2005.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Lee Martin Abbott

Place of birth: Plano, TX

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Modern Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Department of English, May 2018
    Dissertation Title: "Landscapes of Recovery: Belonging and Place in Post-Katrina
    Literatures"

M.A., Modern Studies University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Department of English, May 2007

B.A., Major in English, Emphasis in Writing and Culture, Louisiana State University, May 2003

PUBLICATIONS

"Uprising in Wisconsin," *Left Turn: Notes from the Global Intifada*, no. 40, July/August 2011.

"A Braided Conversation: UWinterIM Courses in New Orleans after the Hurricanes," *Myriad*,
    UWM Multicultural Student Center publication, Fall 2008.

"Student Profile: Catherine Van Leer," *Myriad*, UWM Multicultural Student Center publication,
    Fall 2008.

"Storied Recovery: Participant Observation Courses in New Orleans," *Myriad*, UWM
    Multicultural Student Center publication, Fall 2007.

"Student Helping to Rebuild the Ninth Ward," *Myriad*, UWM Multicultural Student Center
    publication, Fall 2007.

"Coming to a Post-Colonial Poetics of Being Post-Cajun," *The Antigonish Review*, n. 146, St
    Francis Xavier University: Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Summer 2006.

PRESENTATIONS

"'We Were Never On the Map': Contesting Displacement in New Orleans' Versailles
    Neighborhood." American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting, New Orleans,
    April 10-14, 2018.

"'It All Became Ours': Close Reading Disaster Narratives to Recuperate an Ethics of Possibility." Modern Language Association of America Annual Convention, Chicago, January 9, 2014.

"The Strategy of Belonging: Inscriptions of Agency on the Post-Katrina Landscape." Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures Student Symposium, School of Architecture & Urban Planning, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 16, 2012.

"'Not Refugees': The Struggle for Self-Identification of Katrina Survivors." Conference on Critical Refugee Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, November 3-4, 2011.

"Worker Education Forums." *Troubling Boundaries: Social Action and Composition* session co-leader with Royal Bonde-Griggs. Conference on College Composition and Communication, San Francisco, March 2009.

"Shattering the Idealized Community: Visions of Autonomy in Language in Thought about the University" with Erik Chandler. Rethinking the University Conference, Minneapolis, April 2008.

"Memory, Activism, and Planning: The Common Ground Collective's (In)Visible Political Performances in Post-Katrina Urban Space." Performing (In)Visibility: Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference, Milwaukee, February 2007.

INVITED LECTURES

 "Using Student Notes," First-Year Composition Instructor Orientation, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. August 2007.

"Genealogies of Whiteness/Genealogies of Blackness," UWM Student Union Sociocultural Programming Panel on Race, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. March 2006.

WORKSHOPS

"Expanding on "WEF": Graduate Unionism and Initiatives at Worker Education." Alliance of Graduate Employee Locals Conference, Eugene, OR, June 2009.

"Conceptualizing 'WEF': Worker Education Forums (WEF) and the UW-M Newspaper for Worker Democracy." Reworking the University Conference, Minneapolis, April 2009

"Power and Privilege: Exploring Classism and the History of Labor in Milwaukee." Public Allies Milwaukee Training and Learning Program, Milwaukee, WI, October 2008.

"Dialogics and Pedagogy: Putting Quotation Marks around 'Academic Discourse' in the 101 Composition Course." Composition Forum. Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. March 2006.

TEACHING

Instructor, Department of English, Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, WI, 2014-2016
     English 200: Autobiography and Life Stories
     English 101: Persuasive Writing
     English 102: Research Writing

Instructor, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Kenosha, WI, 2013
     English 100: Fundamentals of English
     English 101: Composition and Reading

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2005-2013
  Courses independently taught and designed:
     English 277: Introduction to Ethnic Minority Literature: Hurricane Katrina, Race, and Class in US Literature and Film
     English 248: Literature and Contemporary Life: Katrina in Context
     English 215: Introduction to English Studies
     English 102: College Writing and Research
     English 101: Introduction to College Writing

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Chancellor's Award Fellowship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2005.

DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Graduate Student Representative, UWM English Department Modern Studies/Plan E Advisory Committee, May 2008 – May 2009.

Planning Committee, Faking It!: Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference 2009, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Organizing Committee. May 2008 – February 2009.

Planning Committee, Living Remains: Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference 2008, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Organizing Committee. May 2007 – February 2008.

Planning Committee, Performing (In)Visibility: Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference 2007, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Organizing Committee. May 2006 – February 2007.

COMMUNITY WORK

Co-President, Milwaukee Graduate Assistants Association, AFT 2169, 2009-2011
Member, Executive Committee, Milwaukee Graduate Assistants Association, AFT 2169, 2007-2011
Conversation Leader, Milwaukee Film Festival, 2012-2014

MEMBERSHIPS

American Association of Geographers, 2017-present

Modern Language Association, 2012-2014