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Revitalizing the suburban dream: disaster, displacement and resilience in Eastern Orleans Parish

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REVITALIZING THE SUBURBAN DREAM:
DISASTER, DISPLACEMENT AND RESILIENCE IN EASTERN ORLEANS PARISH

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For Mom and Dad
Your unconditional love, support and patience has made all the difference

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Preface

      The 2005 Atlantic hurricane season brought widespread devastation to the Gulf Coast of the United States. In the city of New Orleans, it was the technological failure of the levee system, coupled with breakdowns in both political and social systems that caused the worst disaster in America's history. Social theorists have long sought to understand human rationality and the decision-making processes that influence behavior. Redevelopment projects in neighborhoods hard-hit by the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina provide researchers with a natural laboratory to observe human action during periods of extreme physical and emotional difficulty.

      Hurricane Katrina tested the disaster resiliency of communities throughout the Crescent City. More than four years after breaches in levees led to the flooding of one hundred forty square miles of the city, some residents are still struggling to reclaim their neighborhoods one block at a time. After such a catastrophic disaster, how does one measure the success of large-scale redevelopment? The degree of progress experienced by New Orleans lies in the eyes of the beholder. While a homeowner from the Garden District may focus on significant improvements in the area and believe the city is making substantial progress, other residents in Lakeview and Gentilly may be disappointed with the city's recovery process deeming public officials incompetent and progress unsatisfactory. Rebuilding the lives of those impacted by the storm is an arduous process that calls for a collective effort by federal, state and local public officials, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, scientists and community members. Local economic strides, repopulation, steady pace of reconstruction of homes and critical infrastructure, as well as the availability of community services and resources, are all indicators of efficient revitalization efforts that signal a turning point in New Orleans' comeback.

Eastern Orleans Parish, a section of the city that is located north of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet and east of the Industrial Canal, is a portion of the local landscape whose long-term sustainability remains uncertain. Rebuilding is extremely slow with only a fraction of residents returning to the area. The East, as locals refer to it, was experiencing rapid decline prior to Hurricane Katrina. Violent crime plagued the area and many businesses relocated to other parts of the city as economic gains faltered. Development in New Orleans East began after World War II as a result of urban sprawl. Many New Orleanians desired a more suburban lifestyle away from the hustle and bustle of the central city. Financial gains from the oil boom of the 1970's led to the construction of dozens of neighborhoods in Eastern Orleans Parish, fueling a mass expansion eastward.

Consensus over whether to continue to spend federal aid dollars rebuilding the eastern portion of the city is tenuous at best. A number of New Orleanians are reluctant to reconstruct an area that some regard as being too far gone to fully recover, with others adding that the land should be returned to its natural state as a swamp, creating a buffer that would lessen the impact of future storm surge on the historic center. The uncertainty that surrounds the fate of New Orleans East influences the decision of the local population to return and rebuild. However, there are many residents who chose to ignore the naysayers, striving to revitalize their suburban dream against all odds.

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Hurricane Katrina tested the disaster resiliency of communities throughout the city of New Orleans. More than four years after breaches in levees led to the flooding of one hundred forty square miles of the Crescent City, some residents are still struggling to reclaim their neighborhoods one block at a time. Eastern Orleans Parish is a portion of the local landscape whose long-term sustainability remains uncertain. Rebuilding is extremely slow with only a fraction of residents returning to the area. Development in New Orleans East began after World War II as a result of urban sprawl. Many New Orleanians desired a more suburban lifestyle away from the hustle and bustle of the central city. Financial gains from the oil boom of the 1970's led to the construction of dozens of neighborhoods in Eastern Orleans Parish, fueling a mass expansion eastward.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Let New Orleans be the place where we strengthen those bonds of trust, where a city rises up on a new foundation that can be broken by no storm. Let New Orleans become the example of what America can do when we come together, not a symbol for what we couldn't do."

- President Barack Obama, New Orleans 8/26/07

Figure 1. New Orleans on August 31, 2005 (www.katrinaimages.com)

Shattered Memory of Home

Built up from the marshlands as a result of twentieth-century urban sprawl, Eastern Orleans

Parish was designed to accommodate a spillover of the masses that migrated from the central city

in hopes of living the American Suburban Dream (Allen 1977; Contosta 1992; Garreau 1991;

Jackson 1985; Johns 2003; Ofori-Amoah 2007; Short 2006; Stilgoe 1990; Wright 1983).

Developers engaged in constructing America's suburban residential neighborhoods offered urbanites a new way of life, complete with affordable single-family homes, winding lanes, sprawling yards, and the promise of family togetherness and a strong sense of community (Allen 1977; Johns 2003). The suburban ideal was born from an anti-urban ideology (Allen 1977) that highlighted the array of social problems (i.e. crime, poverty) associated with living in the central city. The suburban lifestyle that residents of New Orleans East are attempting to recapture in the wake of Hurricane Katrina is quite different from the 1950's style post-war suburban landscape that sought the return to a simpler time when maintaining small town homogeneity was only second in importance to the joys of child-rearing and female domesticity (Johns 2003). The neighborhoods of Eastern Orleans Parish are socio-economically diverse and ethnically pluralistic. The people of New Orleans East view themselves as city folk whose suburban dream of gaining access to more affordable housing and bigger plots of land led them to move to the periphery of the metropolitan area.

My family was one of thousands that purchased homes in this unnatural metropolis (Colten 2005) once inhabited by an expansive cypress swamp (Colten 2001; Kelman 2006; Lewis 2003). Joining the throng of daily commuters traveling in and out of the city on Interstate-10, I recall the bottleneck of traffic that almost always formed when approaching the High-Rise Bridge. Living up to its name, the bridge that crossed the Industrial Canal was steep – the kind of steep that would make those afraid of heights not want to travel in the right-hand lane. Impatient motorists would sit bumper-to-bumper slowly inching across the bridge, honking their horns in frustration and displaying many of the signs of what our society recently labeled road rage. I remember getting carsick on my way to school in the morning from the fumes of the eighteen-wheelers lined up for what seemed like miles. There was so much activity – cars endlessly trying to change lanes to gain distance, the boom of sub-woofers blasting the latest rap beats, the deep

foghorn-like sound signaling a boat approaching the nearby Danziger Bridge. In this landscape, rush hour could be overwhelming to the senses.

When the interstate was overly congested, an alternate route to the central city through the "Dump," was a popular option for drivers running late. When I was a little girl I loved when my mother would venture through this area that was shadowed by the High-Rise. I thought it was a fascinating place. Reminiscent of the backyard seen in the 1960's television show "Sanford and Son," the streets that made up this extremely low-income area bordering the Industrial Canal had dilapidated wooden shotgun houses, old wrecked or burnt out cars, and piles of trash with everything from broken washer machines to stacks of hubcaps. I can recall an extremely old African-American man that would always wave to those in passing cars as he sat in a rickety chair on his front porch. The air sometimes smelt like burnt rubber from the tires that had caught fire the previous night, and swarms of buzzards could be seen circling discarded garbage.

Images from my memory of the bustling and often chaotic landscape stand in sharp contrast to my first experience entering New Orleans East after the area was transformed by the floods that followed hurricanes Katrina and Rita (see Figure 1). As I drove over the High-Rise two months after the storms, I felt like I entered The Twilight Zone. It was surreal; there were no cars to clutter the interstate, no sounds coming from the docks of the Industrial Canal, no smoke rising from the chimneys of the Macfrugals warehouse. The scene was a distorted image of my memory. Even the color of the sky seemed unfamiliar to me. I peered over the side of the bridge to survey the damage, wondering how many people perished when the waters of Lake Pontchartrain spilled through breaks in the levees. The scene of destruction I saw was so widespread that it made me sick to my stomach and I could no longer hold back tears. I chose to begin with these contrasting images of my experience with a place, as it is representative of the

humanistic attitude and phenomenological approach I am taking in my interdisciplinary study of disaster, displacement and resilience in Eastern Orleans Parish.

On August 29, 2005, at 6:10 a.m. CST, with maximum winds estimated near 125 mph, powerful Category 3 Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the United States. While New Orleans was spared a direct hit, the frightening scenario that most every native New Orleanian feared became a harsh reality. It's difficult to express the devastation I found upon arrival in my beloved city after several levees broke and eighty percent of New Orleans became inundated with water (see Figure 2).
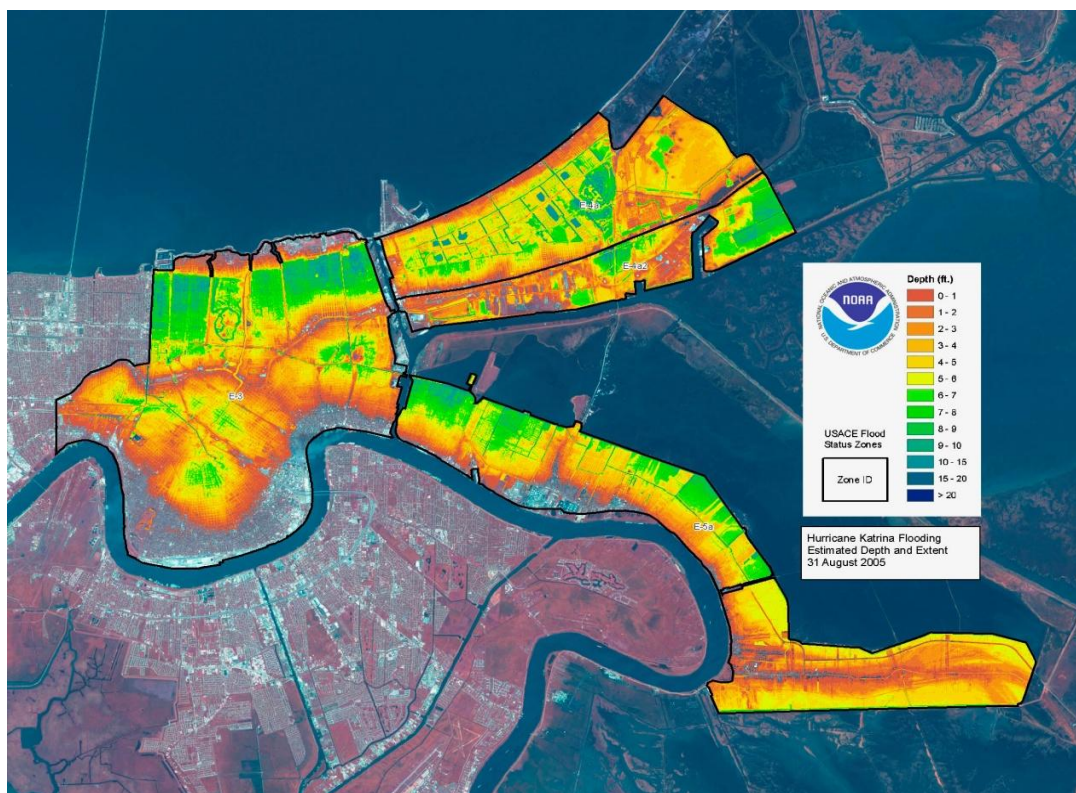
Figure 2. Hurricane Katrina Flooding Estimated Depth (in feet) – August 31, 2005 (http://www.katrina.noaa.gov/maps/maps.html)

Born and raised in New Orleans East, I was all too familiar with packing up my parent's automobile with priceless possessions and heading to higher ground on the North Shore when

meteorologist Nash Roberts suggested evacuation. Growing up in the city, I was aware of the landscape's below sea level status and the uncertain stability of area levees. For the first twenty-six years of my life, New Orleans dodged the "big one," which contributed to and created, in my opinion, a false sense of security and indifference to warnings by local media and public officials. Hurricane Katrina devastated the city, and like many residents dreaded, levees were unable to keep out the waters of Lake Pontchartain. Less than a month later, the Crescent City was dealt an awful setback when Hurricane Rita's pre-landfall storm surge breached levees and re-flooded parts of New Orleans. The negative impacts of hurricanes Katrina and Rita forever changed the physical landscape of New Orleans, affecting the cultural melting pot that defined the city in ways that are yet to be fully understood.

A Call to Research

When I set out to investigate the impact that the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season had on my hometown, I knew that I wanted to focus on the culture area I was raised in, located in Eastern Orleans Parish. While predominately an African-American suburb of New Orleans, the East, is also home to a large Vietnamese community. It is within this ethnic minority, numbering approximately five to six thousand, that I focused a significant portion of my research pursuits. Over the past four years, I conducted research concerning the effects of hurricanes Katrina and Rita on Village de l'est, a racially mixed neighborhood that is home to Vietnamese, African-Americans and a post-Katrina population of Hispanic immigrants. My fieldwork documenting community resilience to disaster incorporates Village de l'est, or Versailles, as it is known among the Vietnamese, an area bounded by Interstate 510, Chef Menteur Highway, Bayou Savage, and Interstate 10. While emphasis is placed on the sentiments, behaviors and actions of Vietnamese living within these borders, my research also sheds light on the disaster experience,

displacement and recovery of African-Americans fighting to overcome obstacles in their own unique battle to resettle flood ravaged New Orleans East. Interviews with African-American residents from Village de l'est and several other subdivisions, including Spring Lake, Goretti, and Plum Orchard, provide a glimpse into the Black community's campaign to reclaim and sustain their livelihoods in Eastern Orleans Parish.

The disaster experiences of African-Americans and the Vietnamese are entwined as they are neighbors who share not only built and cultural environments, but also a sense of loss and an overarching desire for a return to a sense of normalcy in spite of catastrophe. My research offers a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary exploration of the human impact of a disaster event. The anthrogeographical study of disaster and its effects on individuals and communities will incorporate the dualistic concepts of vulnerability and resilience, the role of social capital in recovery and long-term sustainability, risk perception, human preparedness, collective behavior and the adaptive capabilities of two ethnically diverse populations.

My journey often led me to examine how anthropology and the social sciences provide a humanistic framework for understanding the complex dynamics of natural, technological, and social disasters. It is with this insight in mind that I decided to base my research on humanistic geography, the place of resilience in disaster literature, and the phenomenological approach that examines lived experience by focusing on humanity's ordinary everyday engagement with the world.

The primary objective of my research is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities that surround the dual concepts of disaster resilience and vulnerability by documenting the disaster experiences and community recovery processes of Vietnamese and African-American populations living in New Orleans East. The following chapters will engage such questions as: how does resilience present itself in areas impacted by disaster events – what

are its hallmarks? How is resilience recognized in families, communities, and institutions? What conditions must be present for resilience to prevail, lessening a community's vulnerability to multiple hazard scenarios? How do individuals exhibit their connectedness to their extended family, community, and cultural traditions and values during and after disaster events? What role does social capital play in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery? What can be learned from the Vietnamese community of New Orleans East in terms of their adaptation and self-rehabilitation? What is the importance of "place" to community identity? And how do citizens of New Orleans East interpret their landscape? What role does ethnicity play in disaster response and the reconstruction process? And finally, what were the coping mechanisms utilized by residents and what obstacles did they face during the rebuilding process?

While in the field, I am often guided by the theories and practices of anthropology, a discipline that remains at the core of my identity. Anthony Oliver-Smith, an anthropologist from the University of Florida at Gainesville, writes extensively on hazards and disasters. From an anthropological perspective, he examines the impact disasters have on human populations. Oliver-Smith (1996) highlights three approaches to studying populations affected by natural, technological and social disasters: a political economic/environmental approach, a social change approach, and a behavioral and organizational response approach. The political economic/environmental approach investigates socially constructed patterns of vulnerability, highlighting the underlying historical-structural processes that weaken a society's ability to cope with disaster events. The social change approach explores post-disaster social evolution, cultural adaptation and development. I chose to employ the behavioral and organizational response approach in my examination of the flood-ravaged communities of New Orleans East. This approach focuses on the "behavior of individuals and groups in the various stages of disaster impact and aftermath" (Oliver-Smith 1996:305). By applying the behavioral response approach,

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I am able to examine the relationships that exist between community members and how this interaction fuels the recovery process.

The fieldwork I conducted as a candidate in the Geography and Anthropology Master's Program at Louisiana State University examined how the Vietnamese community chose to rely, in many cases on their own cultural network during and after the catastrophic events caused by Hurricane Katrina and Rita. Five months after the initial storm many of the neighborhood's population started to return and rebuild. It was rather surreal, that at the edge of New Orleans East, an area that could be defined as a virtual ghost town, there was a community bustling with life. The Vietnamese community of New Orleans East experienced rapid revitalization after a devastating natural/technological/social disaster.

Enter the Phoenix

Village de l'est is located in one of the most impoverished sections of Orleans Parish. Drug-trafficking and gang violence threaten the well-being of the community's residents on a daily basis. In spite of the community's socio-economic vulnerability, the Vietnamese enclave proved resilient to catastrophe. The Vietnamese neighborhood of New Orleans East is rich in social capital, an advantage that set the enclave apart from many of the city's storm-ravaged communities. Collective consciousness among members of the immigrant community promoted group behavior that led to a successful neighborhood-based initiative for redevelopment.

A more human(e) approach when assessing vulnerability is crucial to gaining a holistic understanding of community resilience. Disaster scientists must take into account the various ideological elements that may factor significantly in a community's ability to mitigate the negative impacts of disaster. The secondary objective of my research is to establish numerous ideological indicators that embody an appropriate framework for assessing the Vietnamese

community's capacity for resilience. Some of these ideological indicators include – collective consciousness and lifeworld, place attachment, communal experience and social inclusion, family collectivism, social responsibility, charismatic leadership, social trust, religious faith, and altruism.

New paradigms constantly reshape the principles and methodologies of scientific inquiry, with conceptual evolution occurring in all academic disciplines. Anne Buttimer, an Irish geographer who specializes in urban planning and sustainable development, would refer to this human(e) approach of assessing vulnerability as a "phoenix" moment in disaster science. In *Geography and the Human Spirit*, Buttimer explains that she uses the term phoenix to describe moments of innovation; a new conceptualization, or way of viewing phenomena (1993). Measuring a community's vulnerability to disaster holistically, inclusive of ideological indicators, is an alternative paradigm that represents a more human(e) approach to understanding resilience.

Chapter 2

Incorporating the Humanistic Tradition

"Humanists through the centuries have explored the nature of humanity, its passions and powers, while geographers have studied the earth on which humans, among many other life forms, fashion a home. For each facet of humanness – rationality or irrationality, faith, emotion, artistic genius, or political prowess – there is a geography. For each geographical interpretation of the earth, there are implicit assumptions about the meaning of humanness. Neither humanism nor geography can be regarded as an autonomous field of inquiry; rather, each points toward perspectives on life and thought shared by people in diverse situations. The common concern is terrestrial dwelling; humanus literally means 'earth dweller'" (Buttimer 1993:3).

A House Divided

Societies around the world face uncertain futures as the increasing frequency and magnitude of natural, technological and social disasters threaten global sustainability. As a community of free-thinking scholars, universities remain at the forefront in the effort to develop new approaches and methodologies designed to mitigate the negative impacts of disaster on human populations. The Age of Specialization that took shape within the halls of academia during the nineteenth century is undergoing a transformation as a result of globalization and the growing need for collaboration and active engagement. Scholars from such diverse backgrounds as the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities have the responsibility to look past their criticisms of one another and serve the greater good by developing strategies for sustainable development. The first phase in this global initiative must be concerned with gaining a more comprehensive understanding of resilience in the face of adversity.

In an era characterized by staggering rates of population growth, increasing technological dependency, global climate change and widespread socio-political conflict, scientists must learn

to embrace cross-disciplinary research that seeks unity in the world's diversity. The international community stands to gain a great deal from the dialogue generated by the union of multiple disciplines actively engaged in collaborative research. Invoking the words of Abraham Lincoln in his now famous 1858 address, "a house divided against itself cannot stand." It is time for unification among the departments of academia, for too long have we let the elements that divide us hinder our progress in solving problems of global concern. A paradigm shift is upon us, one that calls for an inclusive spirit of collaboration.

More often than not, scholarly literature pertaining to man's relationship with his milieu, presents a narrow focus that lacks holistic value. While composing a literature review for my own doctoral research endeavor, I became attuned to the deficiency of interdisciplinary projects in academia. I was puzzled by the rarity of collaboration between academic disciplines, as previous research I conducted highlights how scientific inquiry is benefiting from this period of intense global interconnectivity (Feike 2008). When examining the body of literature pertaining to disaster science and management, I found little on social indicators of vulnerability, and next to nothing detailing the role of ideology in community resilience and sustainability. Anthropological and geographical works, while laden with data collected on the socio-cultural, economic and environmental impacts of disaster, were lacking in conceptual frameworks for assessing risk and methods of hazards analysis. After evaluating the available literature, I made it my mission to incorporate knowledge and methodologies from several academic disciplines in my study of disaster, displacement and resilience.

Toward a Humanistic Framework

When I started on this research project I decided to draw largely on geography's humanistic tradition, employing phenomenological methods to elucidate the disaster experience of area

residents. Humanistic geography takes as its central goal the understanding of human experience. Exploring the underlying meanings, perceptions, attitudes and values that influence man's interaction with the cultural and physical landscapes of the world, allow researchers to appreciate both the uniqueness of the human spirit and the unity inherent in nature's diversity.

Theologians, scholars, scientists and laymen, for centuries, contemplated what it means to be human. The Italian Renaissance that began in Florence during the fourteenth century revived the philosophical treatises of classical antiquity, signaling a rebirth of the ideas of such ancient writers as Plutarch and Sextus Empiricus. Renaissance philosophers Michel de Montaigne, Rodolphus Agricola, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus refused to "accept a determinist or reductionist view of man" (Bullock 1985:197). These theoreticians laid the foundation for the study of humanness in the modern era by insisting on "the unique value and centrality of individual human experience" (Schoeck 1993:372).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, universities rejected the notion of only teaching students the accepted political and religious dogma of the state, and instead established the university as a 'free community of scholars.' National schools began training professional geographers seeking advanced degrees and a period of intellectual prosperity ensued. Classical geography ended in 1859 with the deaths of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and Carl Ritter (1779-1859). The universal knowledge that the two German masters represented could not be duplicated and the Age of Specialization commenced within the halls of Academia. In their lifetime, both men attempted to establish a "new geography," bringing about innovative paradigms of scientific study concerning 'earth as the home of man.' Modern geography took shape during this time period, with Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) calling for regional studies to be conducted. In an inaugural lecture at Leipzig in 1883, Richthofen answered the perplexing question "What is Geography?" He explained that the goal of geography was to study

the relationships that exist between the physical and human phenomena on the earth's surface. How to best understand this observable interaction between man and nature continues to be a controversial topic of debate in the new millennium. The humanistic tradition believes that the complex dynamic that exists between man and the world's landscapes is best appreciated by an examination of man's role in defining space. Experience of place shapes man's conception of the world, and in humanity's diversity, one can see the diversity of the spaces that encompass the globe. Our connection to place transforms the natural environment, making human perception, underlying values and attitudes toward place, essential components of a more holistic geographic knowledge. To read a landscape as text entails listening to the stories of its inhabitants, as their experiences imbue it with meaning.

The conceptual evolution of geographic ideas has, since antiquity, shaped how humans perceive and interact with milieu. The desire to explain "geodiversity," to borrow a term coined by John K. Wright, continues to challenge the intellect of man as he formulates new approaches and methodologies to aid in the study of earth as the home of humanity. The history of geography in America illustrates how shifts in paradigm foster new traditions that introduce novel approaches to characterizing space and place. Humanistic geography was established as a response to the "new geography" heralded during the quantitative revolution of the 1960's. Geographers that rejected the positivist approach due to its omission of human agency and consciousness in the grand schema of geographical models and theory posited an alternative philosophical orientation that was more human(e) in nature. Human agency refers to the capabilities of humans and is central to geography's humanistic tradition (Gregory 1981). Cloke, Philo and Sadler explain the criticism of spatial-analytical methods succinctly, saying that their utilization converts "human beings into 'dehumanized' entities drained of the very 'stuff' (the

meanings, values and so on) that made humans into humans as opposed to other things living or non-living" (1991:69).

While the humanistic tradition was not firmly established within the field until the 1970's, Carl O. Sauer (1889-1975) first presented a more human focused approach to understanding environmental processes during his landmark Presidential Address (*Foreword to Historical Geography*) at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, held at Louisiana State University in 1940. In his essay, "Man's Agency on Earth," Sauer explicates the overarching theme of the book stating that it embodies,

> "the capacity of man to alter his natural environment, the manner of his so doing, and the virtue of his actions. It is concerned with historically cumulative effects, with the physical and biological processes that man sets into motion, inhibits, or deflects, and with the difference in cultural conduct that distinguish one group from another" (Sauer 1956b:49).

Sauer's "humanistic" cultural geography (Rowntree, Foote and Domosh 1989) defined geographical thought at the Berkeley School for decades. As the students that studied under Sauer took positions in numerous geography departments, his teachings on cultural landscapes were transplanted throughout the country. An examination of the LSU School allows one to understand the reach of Sauer, highlighting how his methodologies and approach to the study of human environments still resonates. Fred B. Kniffen (1900-1993) received his Ph.D. from Berkeley in 1930, and under the direction of Sauer, completed a dissertation on the Colorado Delta in Mexico. In 1929 he became one of the founding fathers (the other, Richard J. Russell, was also from Berkeley) of the geography graduate program at Louisiana State University. The LSU School's "invisible college" was centered around this charismatic figure and his presence can still be felt today, especially in the new concentration in Anthrogeography that is currently being offered.

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The Berkeley School's cultural-historical approach to attaining geographic knowledge was not the only forerunner to the development of the humanistic tradition. The French tradition of *la géographie humaine* was a precursor to the humanistic characteristics of social geography. The "new geography" practiced in the French School was developed by Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918) in the nineteenth century. Rejecting environmental determinism, the Vidalian tradition emphasized the role of human agency and the interplay between *pays* (landscape) and *genre de vie* (way of life). Anne Buttimer (1938-), Irish geographer and pioneer in the field of humanistic studies, examined the pivotal roles of Vidal, Jean Brunhes (1869-1930) and Maximilien Sorre (1880-1962) in the development of a more human(e) geography. In *Society and Milieu in the French Geographic Tradition*, Buttimer outlines Vidal's social geography,

> "social geography, in Vidal's view, should examine how the varying dynamism of this milieu was echoed in mankind's social life. His twofold perspective thus includes patterns of civilization – products of human intelligence and free will – superimposed upon, and in dialogue with, the earth's various milieux. The second general principle which predominates is the expression of this man-nature dialogue in the *genres de vie* or lifestyles of particular regions" (Buttimer 1971:57).

The Weight of Intersubjectivity

The interpretive approach to understanding man and milieu taken by Vidal and his followers, stood in sharp contrast to the Comtean positivist model which articulated that "phenomena under study should be objective rather than subjective, and be defined by quantity rather than quality, by form rather than by meaning" (Ley 1980:5). The humanistic tradition of geography values human consciousness and its impact on the multifaceted relationship that exists between man and nature. Humanity takes an active role in shaping the physical and cultural landscape, with perception of place assigning meaning to the environment. After attaining a comprehensive

understanding of the values and attitudes that are assigned by resident populations, the nature of milieu reveals itself.

John K. Wright (1891-1969) stresses the importance of subjective conceptions to "geosophy" – the study of geographic knowledge (Wright 1947). Approaches taken by humanistic geographers embrace the subjective, employing it to gain access to the social construction and experience of place. By examining the rationality behind man's everyday actions, geographers can better understand what it means to be a 'terrestrial dweller' on this planet, resulting in a more holistic comprehension of the environment. The idealist approach promoted by Canadian historical geographer Leonard Guelke (1939-) sought to understand the cultural landscape of a place by examining the thought processes that influenced its social construction (Guelke 1974).

As the reality of a place is socially constructed by the human actors that inhabit it, its true nature can only be disclosed through careful scrutiny of the thoughts, attitudes and value systems of the population. Guelke argues that theory is not a necessary component when attempting to establish the underlying meanings given to a place by its inhabitants as "the explanation of an action is complete when the agent's goal and theoretical understanding of his situation have been discovered…One must discover what he believed, not why he believed it" (Guelke 1974:197). The idealist philosophy adopted by Guelke stands in opposition to the materiality of culture emphasized by Sauer and the Berkeley tradition.

While idealism failed to gain much support among human geographers (Curry 1982), phenomenology was embraced by several pioneers (Buttimer, Relph and Tuan) of geography's humanistic tradition. Phenomenology is an approach that examines lived experience, focusing on humanity's ordinary everyday engagement with the world. The perpetual interaction that characterizes the relationship of man and nature allows landscapes to speak to those that interact

with it on an experiential level. Phenomenologists seek to uncover the essence of a "place" by letting the landscape reveal itself, listening to all of the values and beliefs that are embedded in its symbolism. The landscape tells the story of the people that live their lives within its parameters, becoming a map illustrating lived experience.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the principal architect of phenomenology, introduced the concept of life-world (1936), which simply means the world as it is lived. Edward C. Relph (1944-) was the first to promote the use of the phenomenological method in geographic inquiry, describing life-world as,

> "that world of ambiguities, commitments and meanings in which we are inextricably involved in our daily lives but which we take very much for granted. It is a world in marked contrast to the universe of science with its carefully observed and ordered patterns and relationships, an in which a street is little more than a blank space between two lines on a map" (Relph 1976:3).

Landscapes interact with the individuals that inhabit them. As humanity negotiates and modifies space, it is also defined by it. Man's everyday actions are shaped by this dialectical relationship. Human agency can be understood by a careful examination of the web of meanings that influence interpretation and subsequent action. Researchers must identify these "webs of significance," and explain how man characterizes this framework of meaning.

One of the tenets of the phenomenological approach is the rejection of the objective versus subjective dichotomy that dominates the scientific approach to geographic study. Nicholas Entrikin (1947-), a specialist on philosophy of geography at UCLA expresses this point eloquently as he writes,

> "where the scientific geographer sees a continuum with endpoints labeled subjective and objective, the humanistic geographer sees degrees of intersubjectivity. The blending of the subjective and the objective was a seemingly unintentional consequence of a science of areal differentiation, but it has become one of the goals of more recent attempts to theorize about everyday actions in a manner that roots social theory in space and time" (Entrikin 1991:20).

The intersubjective approach of humanistic geographers calls for immersion in place rather than detachment from it, allowing for a more holistic understanding of place through experience with it. "Being-in-place" fosters an awareness of the landscape as well as, an acute sense of belonging. Through experience humans become aware of their place in the world.

One of the hallmarks of humanism is Socrates' appeal to 'Know thyself.' Geographers trained in the humanistic tradition attempt to elicit self-awareness in both the populations they study and within themselves. In *Values in Geography* (1974), Anne Buttimer discusses at length the importance of self-understanding in all personal and academic endeavors. In regard to geographic study, she explains how introspection should be carried out early in a person's career in order to better comprehend the values that shape how lectures/seminars are taught, how research topics are chosen and how field work is conducted. Buttimer discusses the importance of understanding the values that guide human experience, adding that she sees the need,

> "for greater awareness of values among geographers so as to liberate ourselves from the constraining influences of culture-bound or institutionally defined categories of thought. This could help us develop a relativistic and humble attitude toward the conceptual models and theories used in abstractions about social reality" (Buttimer 1974:4).

Mutual understanding and self-reflection were the overarching themes of the International Dialogue Project (1978-88) that partnered Buttimer with Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand (1916-2004). Over three-hundred people hailing from approximately thirty-five countries participated in the ten year dialogue experiment. Based at the University of Lund, the project incorporated autobiographical interviews from professors and other experts in an attempt to integrate knowledge. When laying the framework for the project Buttimer argued that,

> "if each specialist could explore connections between knowledge and experience within his or her own field of expertise and could engage in dialog with other specialists on precisely these connections, then eventually some bases for mutual understanding and better integration of research results on substantive questions could be possible" (Buttimer 1993:4).

Humanistic Environmentalism

The notion of *Verstehen* (understanding) continues to be a central premise on which humanism

rests. Man's understanding of the impact he has on the natural world is discussed by Relph and

Yi-Fu Tuan (1930-) as they speak of the realities of humanity's adverse effects on the

environment. Summarizing the tenuous relationship that exists between population, innovation

and the natural environment, Tuan explains,

> "the exercise of power over nature brings numerous benefits to man but when blindly pursued it sets off ecological consequences that are difficult to foresee and assess. Through progressive exploitation, the biological viability of man's environment declines so that it is less and less able to support its exploiters − at least not at the style to which they have become accustomed" (Tuan 1971:40).

When Tuan evokes the phrase 'blindly pursued' he is referring to man's inability to

understand the negative impacts that result from human exploitation of the environment.

Overpopulation and increasing technological dependency threaten the global population in the

new millennium. The natural landscapes that have sustained life for millions of years are being

depleted for monetary gain. Drilling for crude oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the

deforestation of the Amazon Rainforest are two present examples of how man is negatively

impacting his environment. While environmental watchdogs and the conservationists are

working diligently to inform the general public of the long-term effects of this rapid degradation,

little is being done to save the pristine landscapes of the world. Unlike the majority of the

international citizenry, the local populations that inhabit these sometimes unforgiving

environments comprehend the decimation as they are experiencing it first-hand. Their experience

of place allows them to understand the true nature of their perilous situation.

Relph argues for "environmental humility" or "geographical humility," which calls for

man to embrace the roles of guardian and custodian of the world's diverse landscapes. Relph

explains environmental humility as,

"a direction for a way of thinking, and perhaps doing, that respects what there is in the world and seeks to protect it and even enhance it without denying its essential character or right to existence. This could conceivably have some indirect and implicit effect, as humanism has had, on the appearance of landscapes. Environmental humility is marked by a concern for the individuality of places, and this requires a careful and compassionate way of seeing that can grasp landscapes as subtle and changing, and as the expression of the efforts and hopes of the people who made them" (Relph 1981:19).

I view Relph's environmental humility as a "humanistic environmentalism," that has the potential to reformulate how the conservation movement is carrying out its mission. He is calling for what I term "environmental relativism," where each landscape is interpreted in terms of its own individuality. The landscapes that blanket the earth's surface are diverse in nature, each with its own distinctive characteristics. The needs of each environment vary according to their degree of vulnerability, which can only be accessed through a careful evaluation of the underlying meanings that its inhabitants have assigned it. The resilience and sustainability of each environment must be judged according to its own unique nature symbolized by the values, perception, and attitudes inherent in the cultural milieu of the population interacting with it on an everyday basis. Methods of conservation must take into account the will of the people, as they are the best interpreters of their landscape.

Relph's notion of "environmental humility" illustrates how humanistic thought can aid in solving some of man's current environmental dilemmas. As humanistic geography is concerned with man's experience, it is not surprising that its application could also be used in the future to prevent social crisis. Peter Nash writes of the humanistic geographer,

"who is better equipped to advise on speed limits of modernization to avoid dangerous collisions between the cultural resistance of nationalists, the religious opposition of reactionaries, the impoverished many and the enriched few? Accidents at dangerous intersections may be prevented by the application of sound geographic foresight, humanistically based and exhibited with some mediagenic panache" (Nash 1986:21).

Man's interpretation of the natural environment transforms it from space into place. Before its interaction with humanity, a landscape is nothing more than a space on the earth's surface. As man experiences a space he assigns meaning to it – it is this interaction that creates place. Humans designate meaning and an "object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind" (Tuan 1977:18). Landscape is not static, but constantly evolving due to the earth's natural processes and the actions of man. As we shape and (re)shape the physical and built environments we mark the earth with our personal signature, like an artist signing his masterpiece. Our signature embodies our perception of the environment, as well as our perception of self and others. Our attitudes toward both physical and cultural phenomena are integrated into the blueprint, as we perpetually (re)design the world we live in to fit our personal preferences – whether that be based on spirituality, tradition, values, or worldview – depends on the individual experiences of the human agent of change. The environment is not a passive element in the equation of life, as it too leaves its signature on humanity. Worldview,

> "unless it is derived from an alien culture, is necessarily constructed out of the salient elements of a people's social and physical setting. In nontechnological societies the physical setting is the canopy of nature and its myriad contents. Like means of livelihood, worldview reflects the rhythms and constraints of the natural environment" (Tuan 1974:79).

Resisting the Canon

While the humanistic tradition still persists today, it has yet to regain the popularity it experienced during its formative years in the 1970's. Over the last three decades, the attempts of humanistic geographers to study the earth as the home of man in its most orthodox sense, has often been met with both criticism and indifference. Some scientists reject the humanistic

tradition because it is not overtly grounded in a theoretical structure:

> "the fact that humanistic geography is essentially a personal project, one that revolves around individual style and efficacy, makes the assessment of its products difficult, which takes us back to the tension between those who argue that explicit theory is needed for evaluation and accumulation, and those who resist the canon" (Rowntree, Foote and Domosh 1989:211).

I chose to resist the canon and embrace the humanness I believe to be inherent in geographic inquiry. As I attempt "to 'ground' science in the world of experience" (Entrikin 1976:620), I will be following in the footsteps of Buttimer and Tuan, who believe in the possibilities of a more human(e) geography. My doctoral research is a journey towards understanding disaster, displacement and resilience in Eastern Orleans Parish. By immersing myself "in-place" I hope to gain insight into the meanings that the populations of New Orleans East assign to their communities.

Chapter 3

Assessing Community Vulnerability

"While we cannot do away with natural hazards, we can eliminate those that we cause, minimize those we exacerbate, and reduce our vulnerability to most. Doing this requires healthy and resilient communities and ecosystems. Viewed in this light, disaster mitigation is clearly part of a broader strategy of sustainable development – making communities and nations socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable" (Abramovitz 2001:40).

Figure 3. Widespread flooding in Orleans Parish (www.katrinaimages.com)

An Equal Opportunity Destroyer

Disasters reveal the vulnerability of human populations. The frequency of natural, technological and social disasters underscores the need for comprehensive disaster planning that takes into account the varying degrees of vulnerability present in global communities. The devastating

impact of Hurricane Katrina illustrates how a lack of preparedness can suddenly transform a disaster into a human catastrophe. New Orleanians understand their vulnerability to tropical systems and are skeptical that the Crescent City is now better prepared for a disaster. An African-American woman in the process of renovating her home in New Orleans East's Spring Lake subdivision (see Figure 4) explained how she doesn't feel any safer, adding that

> "the East could get hit again and all of this [reconstruction] would be for nothing…I don't trust the Army Corps of Engineers or city government. They say that we are safer now, but I don't know. It's a horrible thing not knowing each time a storm comes if your house and all your things are gonna be ruined. I mean, it can happen again – even worse next time. We should've been given the money to build larger levees to withstand the big hurricane. Nobody cares about us, we get nothing except talk talk talk. Talk is cheap."

While technological advancements in the form of early detection and warning systems bring a level of predictability to some of the hazards that threaten societies, disaster scientists continue to develop methods that predict resilience and sustainability by measuring vulnerability. Talking with residents from the Spring Lake subdivision it is apparent that they understand their vulnerability, speaking to me with uncertainty about their neighborhood's long-term survival. Conversations about reconstruction efforts often lead into discussions about their fear. Fear that their decision to rebuild might ultimately prove to be a horrible mistake. Looking into their doubt-filled eyes, deep seeded feelings of insecurity abound. One elderly couple who renovated the two-story home in Spring Lake they bought two decades ago was adamant about the neighborhood's vulnerability, stating how "the city won't rebuild this area if it's hit again. We are sitting ducks each time a storm threatens to come ashore. My husband and I are too old to go through this again…if it comes, we'll just have to leave and never come back. It's all very sad."

Spring Lake is a section of the city that I know well. My parents made the decision to purchase a home in this upper-middle class neighborhood when I was five years of age. Hopeful

that the cul-de-sac Neptune Court was a safe place for a mischievous little girl to roam on her

bicycle, they made Spring Lake their home for the next thirteen years.

Figure 4. Interstate 10 Service Road entrance to Spring Lake Subdivision (photo by author)

Inhabiting a planned neighborhood that was subdivided into 204 lots and bordered by the

Interstate 10 Service Road, Cove Drive, Morrison Road and Neptune Court, Spring Lake

residents boasted of the community's family-oriented suburban atmosphere that was not located

too far away from the excitement of the Central City. I have many fond memories of growing up

in the neighborhood where I was one of two girls trying to out-play the fifteen boys who turned

the street into a sportsman's paradise every afternoon. I remember how I couldn't wait to get

home from school to play kick ball or attempt to ride my skateboard. We were all close during

our school years, constantly visiting and often walking in and out of each other's homes as if

they were our own. We played Nintendo together, had pool parties, and thoroughly enjoyed all of the adolescent adventures we embarked on from elementary to high school graduation. Neptune Court was a great place to live, at least until it was flooded with approximately six to eight feet of water after Hurricane Katrina.

America the Vulnerable

Risk is a universal phenomenon. All societies are subject to hazards, which do not discriminate against the people and landscapes they impact. Disasters know no social, political, religious or economic boundaries; they are an equal opportunity destroyer. As the population of New Orleans experienced the disaster, people from around the globe watched in amazement, bewildered by the vulnerability of the world's wealthiest country. I was visiting Europe at the time, and was able to personally observe some of the overseas reaction. While traveling to the Pantheon in Rome, I had an enlightening conversation with my Italian cab driver. When I told him where I was from he held up a newspaper that had been sitting on his passenger seat and asked, "what will your city do after this?" As I glanced at the front page picture depicting a water-logged New Orleans, I quickly replied that we would rebuild. My answer was like a reflex, there was no doubt in my mind that New Orleans could withstand any disaster, regardless of severity. Looking back in the rear view mirror he smiled and said, "but you are America eh, why so much trouble?" I understood that he was referring to our country's lack of preparedness and inability to rescue the thousands of people trapped by the floodwaters of Lake Pontchartrain. I shrugged and couldn't respond, as I too was amazed at America's lack of response and overall helplessness during this time of crisis. I explained that New Orleans was below-sea-level, applying the popular bowl analogy for clarification. He listened, nodding that he understood my explanation. As I exited the vehicle he added, "even great USA have problem. We pray for you." I smiled and

thanked him for taking a short-cut to the historical landmark. Thinking back on the conversation, I realize that the dialogue represents the great dichotomy of disaster science – resilience and vulnerability. While I was calling attention to the resiliency of the people of New Orleans, he was highlighting the apparent vulnerability of an American city.

The tragic events of 9/11 and the decimation of the city of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina signaled the end of America's invincible image. The United States, and every other society that inhabits the earth, is vulnerable to both natural and man-made hazards. But how does one define the term vulnerability? Examining literature from the fields of disaster science, anthropology and geography, it becomes apparent that each discipline describes the concept in accordance with their respective philosophies and methods of analysis. In lieu of outlining a diverse assortment of definitions of vulnerability, I choose to focus on the definition provided by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR). According to the UN/ISDR, vulnerability is "the conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards" (UN/ISDR 2004). The ramifications of a society's vulnerability are observable in times of disaster. Following this line of thought, areas hard-hit by disaster events can serve as a laboratory for assessing vulnerability and disaster preparedness. As previously noted, communities are characterized by distinct degrees of vulnerability. Hazard identification also plays a crucial role in attaining a more holistic understanding of vulnerability, as the nature of a hazard greatly influences its effect on geographic areas and their populations. A comparison of two disaster events – Hurricane Katrina and the 2007 southern California wildfires – will exemplify the notion of varying degrees of vulnerability, as well as illustrate how hazard type influences a community's capacity to cope with acute adversity.

An extensive flood protection system failed to protect the city of New Orleans from the waters of Lake Pontchartrain. Hurricane Katrina's powerful storm surge caused breaches in numerous levees (overtopping occurred in Eastern Orleans Parish) throughout the city of New Orleans. While the tropical system set into motion the devastating events that followed August 29, 2005, it was a technological disaster that caused widespread destruction and mass human casualties. The city was unable to cope with the magnitude of this "hybrid" (UNDHA 1995) disaster, turning to the state and federal governments who were equally unprepared, for help. The geography of New Orleans played a major role in its vulnerability. The city's low elevation resulted in staggering flood levels that in some places reached 15+ feet (see Figure 3). The nature of the natural hazard (i.e. flood) impeded evacuation out of the city and slowed emergency response and rescue efforts. The nature of the technological hazard (i.e. failure of the flood protection system – levees and pumping stations) was characterized by its unpredictability, which greatly enhanced the city's vulnerability. However, it was the social dimension of the event that transformed the disaster into a human catastrophe.

Lack of planning, coordination and communication left thousands stranded in the New Orleans Superdome and Morial Convention Center without food, water or medical supplies (see Figure 5). Trauma from the ordeal combined with the collective feeling of abandonment, led many to violence during those dark days in the city's history. Images of the human suffering and chaos that transpired during the week following Hurricane Katrina's landfall horrified the American public and shocked the global community.

A single mother of three from New Orleans East's Plum Orchard neighborhood evacuated to the Superdome, hoping that her small children would be safe because of the National Guardsmen stationed at the city's landmark stadium. Speaking about the days following the storm she explained how scared she was at the Superdome, describing the chaos that

permeated through the stands as people grew desperate to get out of the Refuge of Last Resort.

According to my consultant (throughout the text I use the term consultant(s) to refer to

individuals I interviewed, both formally and informally),

> "everybody wanted out because we thought we would die in there. I thought to myself, Lord, just get me and my babies out of here. People was screaming and crying and I kept hearing people talk like bad things was happening on the higher levels…you know, people be getting beaten and raped. I was terrible scared for my oldest daughter. We all went to the bathroom together…the whole time we was there I was trying to look for my cousins. I didn't know, but they found a ride to Baton Rouge. I wish I had been with them. Never again. "

Figure 5. Dead body outside the New Orleans Morial Convention Center (www.katrinaimages.com)

The young Africa-American mother and her family never moved back to New Orleans

East after the storm. She lost her Section 8 home, her job at the daiquiri shop on Crowder Blvd.

and all of her possessions. Her cousin, who lives in Woodmere on the West Bank, took the

family of four in and found my consultant a job bartending at a local lounge. A friend of mine who owns the hip-hop clothing store where I first met the young woman told me that he has seen her several times and she says that she's "still struggling, but making my way."

A Different Fate

Two years after hurricanes Katrina and Rita took aim at the Gulf Coast of the United States, the nation found itself dealing with another major disaster in Southern California. From Santa Barbara County to the United States-Mexico border, perennial drought and strong Santa Ana Winds fueled wildfires, threatening to engulf several densely populated metropolitan areas. Southern California's physical landscape characterized by expansive mountain ranges is much different from the low lying swamp lands and coastal marshlands found in south Louisiana (Colten 2005). Many of Southern California's communities are built in canyons or perched on hillsides framed by sprawling forests and thick undergrowth, making them extremely vulnerable to fire hazard. The wildfires that burned approximately 500,000 acres (internet source #1) of land in seven California counties forced the evacuation of nearly 950,000 residents, making it "the largest single peacetime movement of Americans since the Civil War" (internet source #2).

Watching media coverage of the disaster event throughout the month of October 2007, I was surprised by how well local, state and federal officials were handling the hazard. The orderly evacuation of the displaced and conditions within emergency shelters stood in stark contrast to the pandemonium that ensued after Hurricane Katrina. Unlike the Superdome and Morial Convention Center, located in the midst of flood ravaged sections of New Orleans, emergency shelters such as Qualcomm Stadium in San Diego, were out of harm's way. Evacuees, while uncertain about the fate of their property and personal belongings, understood that they were safe and believed they would be well taken care of during displacement (see Figure 6). Shelters were

well stocked with food, water, clothing, toiletries, toys and medical supplies (internet source #3), and the booths set up to disseminate pertinent information provided residents with a life-line during the disaster.

Figure 6. Young evacuees at San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium (www.flickr.com)

The nature of the hazard (i.e. wildfire) had some bearing on how evacuees coped with the situation. Unlike the multitude of survivors in New Orleans that had to swim to safety, most local Californians were able to drive out of impacted areas. Notification through reverse 911 phone calls aided the process of evacuation, with a majority of residents heeding disaster warnings. On the other hand, the nature of the "Na-Tech" (UNDHA 1995), or natural-technological disaster that befell New Orleans, set the stage for an atmosphere characterized by mass panic, desperation and misery. The psychological trauma inherent in a horrific disaster such as Hurricane Katrina, greatly affects the coping capacity of victims. As floodwaters rose, many became trapped in

stifling hot attics with little or no food and water. Those that had the ability to climb atop their roofs waited several days for helicopters to rescue them. Thousands were separated from their families, placed in the unbearable situation of wondering if their loved ones perished in the flood.

The technological disaster that occurred in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina placed Orleans Parish in a perilous situation. Damaged pumping stations were unable to drain the city of floodwaters, slowing down the monumental task of search and rescue. In contrast, while powerful Santa Ana winds fanned the flames of the Southern California wildfires, fire fighters possessed the skill and resources to effectively combat the blaze. All supplies needed to sustain relief efforts and lessen the negative impact of the disaster were readily available. In California, an integrative approach that emphasized planning, coordination and communication, proved to be a successful formula for lessening a populations vulnerability to disaster.

Understanding vulnerability is critical to disaster preparedness and sustainable development. In 2005, The World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) met in Kobe City of Japan's Hyogo Prefecture to discuss a global initiative for disaster resilience (UN/WCDR 2005). The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction defines resilience as,

> "the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure. This is determined by the degree to which the social system is capable of organizing itself to increase this capacity for learning from past disasters for better future protection and to improve risk reduction measures" (UN/ISDR 2004).

The Hyogo Framework for Action, adopted by the UNWCDR at their ninth plenary meeting in Kobe, outlines a comprehensive ten year plan for reducing the world's vulnerability to disaster (UN/WCDR 2005). In this new millennium of global climate change, overpopulation and widespread socio-political conflict, the international community faces an uphill battle against

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hazards stemming from both the forces of nature and humanity's ever-increasing technological dependency. The United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) leads the way in the development of strategic and systematic approaches designed to foster resiliency on all geographic scales (Birkmann 2006). In order to make knowledgeable decisions concerning sustainable development, policy makers must understand how future hazards will impact particular communities. Assessing a society's vulnerability to hazards is a critical component of risk reduction.

The concept of vulnerability is a relatively new phenomenon that "evolved out of the social sciences and was introduced as a response to the purely hazard-oriented perception of disaster risk in the 1970's" (Birkmann 2006:11). Disaster scientists who study the impact of hazards on human populations and the landscapes they inhabit employ numerous methods when measuring vulnerability (Birkmann 2006; Cutter 2003; Haque 2005; Kasperson and Kasperson 2001; Merriman and Browitt 1993; Smith 1992). These methods incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches during data collection and analysis, allowing for a more holistic understanding of degrees of vulnerability. When assessing a community's vulnerability researchers must "focus on the characteristics that determine the likelihood of injury, loss and other harm as well as the capacity to resist and recover from negative impacts" (Birkmann 2006:72). Hurricane Katrina revealed the vulnerability of the city of New Orleans. Below-sea-level elevation and the inability of victims to evacuate due to lack of transportation are two characteristics that shaped the city's vulnerability to disaster. In contrast, the area affected by the Southern California wildfires had a disaster plan in place that emphasized intergovernmental collaboration and communication, allowing victims to recover quickly from the negative impacts of the disaster.

In disaster science, indicators represent the various characteristics that determine a community's capacity to withstand hazards. More specifically, an indicator is "a variable which is an operational representation of a characteristic or quality of a system able to provide information regarding the susceptibility, coping capacity and resilience of a system to an impact of an albeit ill-defined event linked with a hazard" (Birkmann 2006:57). Key indicators allow researchers to evaluate the resiliency and long-term sustainability of a community. Using indicators to measure social/cultural, economic and environmental vulnerability is an arduous process requiring careful interpretation and analysis.

Researchers assessing the social vulnerability (Cutter, Boruff and Shirley 2003; Heinz 2000; Pine 2009) of an area may examine the number of disabled and elderly citizens residing within the hazard zone, percentage of population that does not have an automobile, number of families living below the poverty line, percentage of female head of households with children under the age of eighteen, level of educational attainment, and portion of population that does not speak the national language well or at all. Those interested in measuring economic vulnerability (Birkmann 2006; Pine 2009; Yohe and Tol 2001; Zandi 2006) may consider production levels, sales, unemployment rates, number of jobs, as well as number of employees. Indicators for environmental risk (Pantin 1997; Pine 2009; Villa and McLeod 2002) include number of acres of brownfields, water and air quality, number of homes within a flood zone, percentage of impermeable surfaces, and number of miles driven in automobiles.

Quantifying vulnerability (Birkmann 2006) is a complex task that entails the collection of accurate time-sensitive information. While numerical data is a significant component of risk assessment, researchers should not rely solely on statistics to measure a community's vulnerability. Just as Susanna Hoffman (2003) urges us to "think outside the box" and question

how we define the victim's of disaster, so too must we question how we measure a community's

resiliency and sustainability.

Chapter 4

Village de l'est: A Community Profile

Figure 7. Google Earth aerial photo of Village de l'est

Combating Vulnerability

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of risk and identifying strategies to combat vulnerability

can lessen the negative impacts of disasters. Disaster scientists utilize the Hazards Analysis

Process, a multifaceted approach, to foster the resilience and sustainability of communities. In

order to alleviate the vulnerability of communities to disasters, it is important to understand what

resources can be employed to minimize the adverse effects of hazardous situations. Even a

community with limited resources has the ability to prepare a community profile that outlines the

geography, demographics, infrastructure, and property that characterize a locale. The first step in

the process is to determine what hazards pose the greatest risk to the community in question. Certainly among the Gulf of Mexico's coastal communities, the annual Atlantic hurricane season puts forth the greatest risk to the livelihood of its citizens. After the process of risk identification, community members, organizations and public officials must collaborate on how best to prepare their community with the resources available.

A community profile highlights numerous factors that will either increase or decrease the hazard's effect on both the physical landscape and the socio-cultural/economic/political environment. Some examples include: how many residents live in flood prone areas or live in such close proximity to the coast that they would be impacted by storm surge; how will land elevation affect flood levels and what role will the community's water features play (could creeks/canals overflow creating runoff); what critical infrastructure will be impacted by the disaster and can certain property be used for shelters and/or post-disaster aid/supply distribution; how many residents have vehicles to evacuate and how many elderly and single head of household families make up the population. The community profile assesses a community's weaknesses, strengths and overall capacity for sustainability in times of crisis. After studying a community profile decision makers can assess how best to proceed in disaster planning, mitigation, response and recovery efforts.

Data Collection

This community profile seeks to highlight the area known as Village de l'est (see Figure 7), both pre- and post-Katrina impact. As New Orleans East's reconstruction process is ongoing, and U.S. Census data has not been updated (demographic data from the 2006 American Community Survey program of the U.S. Census did not sample Village de l'est), much of the housing statistics and demographic data used profiles the community prior to the storm. Databases

utilized include: American FactFinder (U.S. Census Bureau); City-Data (American City Profiles); National Atlas (U.S. Department of the Interior); and Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (Greater New Orleans Nonprofit Knowledge Works). Research and fieldwork conducted in the area provide information on post-storm community conditions. Sources used to assess present conditions include: The New Orleans Index (The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program); *The Times-Picayune*; data from FEMA Individual Assistance Registrants and Small Business Administration Disaster Loan Applications (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research); Mary Queen of Viet Nam Community Development Corporation, Inc.; Eastern New Orleans Neighborhood Advisory Commission; The Unified New Orleans Plan; Louisiana Rebuilds; Louisiana Public Health Institute; New Orleans East.com; New Orleans Neighborhood Rebuilding Plan; and the Road Home Program.

Property

According to disaster set (SF1), obtained in 2000 by the U.S. Census Bureau and compiled by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (internet source #4), prior to the storm there were 3,999 total housing units in Village de l'est, of which 95.4% were occupied. Of the total occupied housing units (3,817), 47.1% were owned by residents and 52.9% were renter-occupied. The majority of housing units were 1-unit, detached structures and 85.20% of total housing units were built between 1960 and 1989. Data set (SF3), also compiled by the GNOCDC, placed average contract rent in the year 2000 at $347 per month; there were 1,430 total owner-occupied housing units with a mortgage. According to a post-Katrina report on fair market rents published by the GNOCDC, the average rent in the city rose by over 46% since the storm (internet source #5). Housing unit damage estimates as of February 12, 2006 calculate that

91% of total housing units were damaged in the Village de l'est area, with 2,548 housing units listed as severely damaged/destroyed (internet source #6). Of the 1,434 Road Home applications filed for the area, 1,225 applicants decided to keep their home (internet source #7).

Figure 8. The abandoned Lakeland Medical Center (photo by author)

Before Hurricane Katrina devastated Eastern Orleans Parish, residents of Village de l'est has access to two nearby urgent care facilities – Pendleton Memorial Methodist Hospital (5620 Read Blvd.) and Lakeland Medical Center (6000 Bullard Ave.). Both hospitals were severely damaged by floodwaters and have yet to reopen (see Figure 8), forcing locals to travel approximately twenty minutes (drive time) in order to reach the nearest urgent care facilities located in the Central City (MCL/NO University Hospital located at 2021 Perdido St. and Tulane University Hospital at 1415 Tulane Ave.) or Uptown area (Touro Hospital located at 1401

Foucher St. and Ochsner Baptist Medical Center at 2700 Napoleon Ave.). In 2008, the Mary Queen of Viet Nam Community Development Corporation partnered with Tulane University School of Medicine and Children's Hospital, to open two clinics (primary care and pediatric care) in the neighborhood – The Tulane Community Health Center New Orleans East (4626 Alcee Fortier Blvd.) and Kids First New Orleans East (14401 Chef Menteur Hwy.). EMS Ambulance Service currently services the area.

New Orleans East continues to be a hot bed for both violent and petty crime. Gang warfare, drug trafficking and prostitution plague the area that is patrolled by the New Orleans Police Department's 7th District police force. While the district is the largest in New Orleans, it is one of the lowest-staffed. Until May of 2007, officers in the 7th District worked out of trailers. Their new district police station is located at 10555 Lake Forest Blvd. The 4th District of the New Orleans Fire Department services New Orleans East.

Public schools in Village de l'est and the surrounding area include: Intercultural Charter School (K-5); Joseph A. Craig School (PK-8); Einstein Charter School (K-8); Sarah Towel Reed Senior High School (9-12); Fannie C. Williams Elementary School (PK-6); Sarah Towel Reed Elementary School (PK-8); Abramson Science and Technology Charter School (K-9); H.C. Schaumburg Elementary School (PK-8); and Livingston High School (7-12). Information compiled by the Road Home Program (internet source #7) list one child care center in the Village de l'est area (Rosary Child Development Center located at 5100 Willowbrook Dr.). Rosary and the Albert Einstein Charter School offer after school programs for children.

Community members are within walking distance of five neighborhood grocery stores – A Dong Supermarket, Ly's Supermarket, Minh Cahn, Phuoc Loc and Que Huong. The Winn-Dixie Marketplace on Chef Menteur Hwy. also reopened for grocery shopping. Four places of worship hold religious services in the immediate area: Mary Queen of Viet Nam Catholic

Church, Trung Tam Phat Giao Van Hanh (Van Hanh Buddhist Center), Epiphany Missionary

Church and Village de l'est Baptist Church.

Figure 9. Vietnamese business corridor on Alcee Fortier Boulevard (photo by author)

Numerous small commercial establishments (retail stores/beauty and nail

salons/restaurants/bakeries), largely owned and operated by Vietnamese community members,

are located on Chef Menteur Highway at Alcee Fortier Boulevard (see Figure 9) and Michoud

Boulevard.

Infrastructure

Opening in 1964, the Village de l'est subdivision (see Figure 10) offers a suburban lifestyle and

provides prospective home-owners/renters with both single and double housing options. Village

de l'est encompass District 10 of the Unified New Orleans Plan for Recovery and Rebuilding (the remainder of New Orleans East comprises Districts 9 and 11). The boundaries of District 10 are: Paris Road (west), Maxent Levee (east), Lake Pontchartrain (north) and Intracoastal Waterway (south). According to UNOP, "prior to Katrina, Districts 9, 10 and 11 were comprised of 96,363 residents or 21.2% of the city's population" (internet source #8).
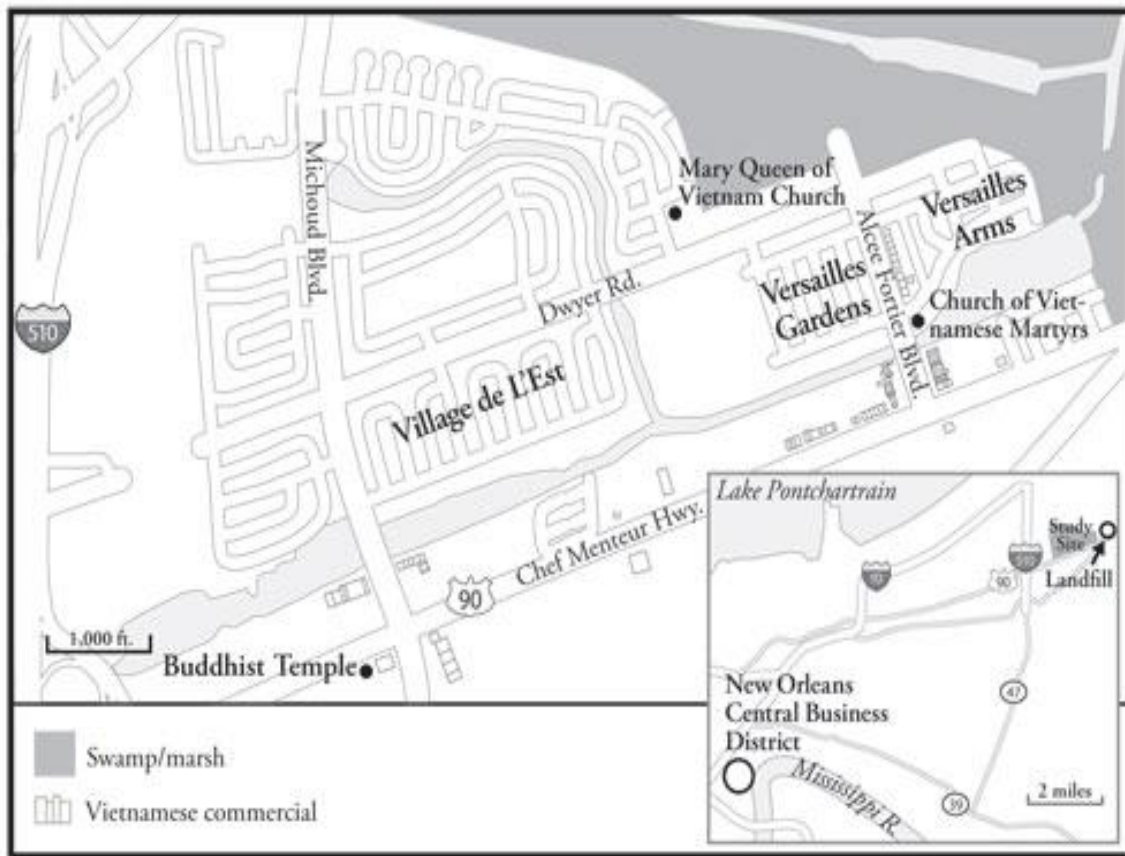
Figure 10. Map of Village de l'est

The rail line that runs parallel to Village de l'est is operated by CSX Transportation, Incorporated. According to UNOP, "the CSX Railroad links Louisiana to the Mississippi, but also serves as the present initial line of storm surge defense with its rail bed at elevation +14 feet.

This rail bed was over-topped two times by Hurricane Katrina's 20-foot tidal surge" (internet source #8). The area's principal roadways are US Route 90 (Chef Menteur Hwy.), US Route 11, State Route 47 (Paris Rd.), and Interstate 10. The community is in close proximity to the New Orleans Lakefront Airport (full-service airport) and the I-10 Twin Span Bridge, which is one of the major evacuation routes out of the city.

Completed in 1923, the Industrial Canal (Inner Harbor Navigational Canal) links the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. A section of the canal is also confluent with the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) and Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet Canal (MRGO), making it critical to the functioning of the entire city of New Orleans. The High-Rise and Danziger Bridges (see Figure 11) that cross the Industrial Canal connect New Orleans East with the rest of the metropolitan area. Orleans Parish is divided up into five levee basins, with Village de l'est located within Basin 2 (internet source #8). The United States Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for the city's extensive flood protection system. According to the New Orleans District Task Force of the Corps, New Orleans East has: 49.4 miles of exterior levees and floodwalls, 9 miles of interior levees, 9 pump stations, and 7 floodgates (internet source #9). Within this portion of the city,

> "13 separate construction projects have been identified to repair the damaged areas (not including pump stations) and restore flood protection to pre-hurricane Katrina conditions. These projects represent an estimated $89.4 million in construction costs" (internet source #9).

Village de l'est is approximately twenty minutes (drive time) from the fifth largest port in America – the Port of New Orleans. The Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans operates the water utility services for the entire city, while Entergy New Orleans provides Orleans Parish with electricity and natural gas. Both generating stations of Entergy New Orleans are located in New Orleans East (internet source #10).

Figure 11. High-Rise Bridge – photo taken from the nearby Danziger Bridge (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I-10_High_Rise_Bridge)

Residents of Village de l'est get strong AM (13 stations) and FM (20 stations) radio feeds broadcasting from the metropolitan area and surrounding locales (internet source #11). The city of New Orleans has fourteen television broadcasting stations (internet source #11), with Cox Communications providing cable and internet services to the area.

Geography

Village de l'est is located in the far eastern portion of Orleans Parish, within the 70129 zip code. According to the National Atlas (internet source #12), the area is situated at longitude 89° 54' 09" West and latitude 30° 02' 41" North (taken from a random point within the community). The neighborhood constitutes the primary urban development in a largely undeveloped section of

New Orleans East. Previously a marsh, the site of the community had to be drained before

development took place in the mid-twentieth century. According to Craig Colten,

> "for more than two centuries, New Orleans's builders struggled to expel the soggy wetlands from within their city…Only after a viable flood protection barrier was in place by the mid-nineteenth century and the effective completion of major drainage systems by the 1920's were developers able to extend streets and subdivisions across the marsh to the Lake Pontchartrain shore" (Colten 2005).

There are two waterbodies in the area: Bayou Michoud that runs through the

neighborhood and the Maxent Lagoon/Maxent Canal (see Figure 12). The community lies in

close proximity to Lake Pontchartrain and the Industrial Canal. Village de l'est is located a little

over a mile from the Bayou Savage National Wildlife Refuge. Bayou Savage is the nation's

largest urban wildlife refuge, encompassing 22,770 acres of freshwater and brackish marsh

(internet source #13).

The area is part of the Coastal Lowlands Aquifer System, which is considered a

semiconsolidated sand aquifer (internet source #12). Average annual precipitation is 60 inches.

The community is located in the Mississippi Alluvial Plains (riverine) Omernik Level III

Ecoregion – Code 73 (internet source #12). In regard to hydrologic units, Village de l'est is part

of the Lake Pontchartrain Watershed [cataloging unit number 08090202] (internet source #14).

Sitting atop Quaternary sedimentary rock deposits, the area is listed as having moderate

susceptibility/low incidence of landslides (internet source #12). Village de l'est is suffering from

major subsidence. According to a news article from WWLTV, "New Orleans East has sunk

deeper than any other area in the state and at a much faster rate" (internet source #15).

Roy Dokka of the Center for GeoInformatics and Department of Civil and Environmental

Engineering at Louisiana State University attributes the subsidence to nearby tectonic activity

along the Michoud fault (Dokka 2006). Village de l'est is located in the Central Standard Time

Zone, and is part of Congressional District 2 of the 110th Congressional Districts. The city of

New Orleans is led by a mayor-council government. For a comprehensive account of the

geography of New Orleans, refer to Colten 2005, 2001; Kelman 2006; and Lewis 2003.

**Figure 12. Maxent Canal in Village de l'est – note destroyed gardens (photo
by author)**

Demographics

Data sets (SF1, SF3), acquired in 2000 by the U.S. Census Bureau and compiled by the Greater

New Orleans Community Data Center (internet source #4), breaks down the pre-Katrina

demographic characteristics of Village del'est (statistics taken from other databases are noted):

The total population was 12,912 (47.8% male; 52.2% female). 5.9% of the population was over

the age of 65 and 36.7% were under the age of 18. The median age of residents living within the

70129 zip code was 28.7 (internet source #16). There were 3,817 households (3,086 family

households) in Village de l'est. In regard to racial makeup – 55.4% African-American; 37.1%

Asian; 3.6% White; 2.4% Hispanic. Reverend Vien The Nguyen ("Father Vien"), pastor of the Mary Queen of Viet Nam Church, estimates that approximately 1,500 – 2,000 Hispanic immigrants settled in Village de l'est in the years since Hurricane Katrina.

Of the total population 15 years and older (8,968), 44.9% were married. 24.2% of total households were composed of a female householder (no husband present) with children under 18. 36.4% of children under the age of 18 lived with their mother only and 8.3% lived with their grandparents. 54.8% of children under 6 and 60.8% of children 6-17 years of age were part of families where both parents, or the single parent works. There were 701 elderly in households, with 14.4% living alone and 83.5% residing in family households. Of the total civilian noninstitutionalized population 5 years and over, 19.9% reported living with a disability.

Of the total households, 81.8% were subsidized by wage or salary income, 14.6% by social security, and 10.4% by public assistance. 19.0% of total households reported an income of less than $10,000 per year, with 29.9% of the total population living in poverty. 57.6% of the 924 families living below the poverty level were composed of a female householder (no husband present) with children less than 18 years of age. 2.9% of occupied housing units in the 70129 zip code were without telephone service (internet source #16). 52.6% of the total population over the age of 16 was employed, while 40.6% was not part of the labor force. 50.8% of the employed population worked full-time (35+ hours per week) and 38.2% worked 50-52 weeks out of the year. 91.4% of the total population 18 years and over had never served in the Armed Forces. In terms of transportation, 20.3% of total occupied housing units had no vehicle available, with 8.4% of total workers 16 years and over relying on the RTA's Public Bus Network. Of those that used public transportation, 51.8% had to travel 60 or more minutes to arrive at their place of employment.

Concerning educational attainment, 14.1% of the total population 18 years and over have less than a ninth grade level of schooling. 22.2% received a high school diploma or GED, and 13.0% obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher. Of the 3,673 students enrolled in school, 86.9% were receiving a public school education. The total foreign-born population of Village de l'est was 3,141. Recent immigrants (between the years 1995 and 2000) accounted for 7.5% of total foreign-born, while 92.5% were listed as arriving prior to 1995. The most common place of birth for foreign-born residents living in the 70129 zip code was Vietnam at 91% (internet source #17). Percentage of total population that spoke other languages at home and spoke English "not well" or "not at all" – 1.8% (ages 5-17); 12.0% (ages 18-64); and 38.6% (65 and over).

The pertinent information gained from community profiles is critical when trying to avoid a disaster becoming a human catastrophe. Hurricane Katrina unveiled the weaknesses that exist in the local, state and federal government's planning and mitigation strategies. New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, and the United States government were not prepared for the devastating events that unfolded after the technological failure of the city's flood protection system. However, we can learn from our mistakes by improving communication, fostering collaboration and placing more importance on the process of hazards analysis. Researchers, public officials, and community members have to work together to ensure resilience. Identifying the hazard and understanding how it will impact a community is essential in determining who and what is most vulnerable, or at greater risk. Only by evaluating the potential risk can appropriate measures be taken to mitigate the negative consequences of disasters.

Communities need to understand risks and the likelihood of those risks occurring in the future. Citizens should be made aware of the impacts that hazards could have on their lives, physically, emotionally and economically. Disaster scientists and emergency management officers have a responsibility to provide local citizens with pertinent information that will aid

them when making decisions in a disaster situation. However, local residents need to share some of the responsibility by making their voice heard, becoming immersed in the mitigation process.

Chapter 5

Resilience in the Wake of Disaster

"People make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given, and transmitted from the past" (Marx 1852:457).

Figure 13. Father Vien Nguyen comforts an elderly parishioner (photo by MQVNC)

The Miracle of Versailles

The Vietnamese community of Eastern Orleans Parish serves as ground zero for conceptualizing human agency and the motivations behind collective action. In Versailles, community members joined together in a group effort of self-rehabilitation, reconstructing homes and public spaces in order to regain the physical and cultural milieu that imbued the geographical area with meaning.

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To residents of the ethnic enclave, the social and private spaces of the locale are central to collective identities and communal bonds. Faced with the potential demise of community, inhabitants declared their intentions to rebuild, acting as social agents for redevelopment. Father Vien The Nguyen, pastor of the Mary Queen of Viet Nam Church in New Orleans East, explained, "for us to come back and rebuild was never an issue, never a question. The question that was raised was how can we speed up our return? That was the question. Never should we, should we not return." Father Vien spoke with optimism and determination. No tone of uncertainty in his voice when he talked about the resolve of the community to remain resilient throughout the long-term process of recovery (see Figure 13).

The Vietnamese of New Orleans East relied on an ethnically-inclusive mode of survival during both the disaster and subsequent rebuilding process. Experiencing rapid revitalization that no other Eastern Orleans Parish neighborhood was able to duplicate, the enclave is dubbed a miracle by local officials and mass-media. The community turned inward for emotional support, relief, and aid. Their extensive cultural network defined by a common ancestry and belief system sustained the ethnic population in a time of crisis. Before commencing discussion on the ideological dimension of the ethnic enclave's disaster recovery, I will briefly highlight the concept of ideology and how I am applying it in my research on community resilience.

The Concept of Ideology

For over two hundred years scholars have debated the concept of ideology, offering dynamic interpretations of the term originally coined by the French Enlightenment philosopher, Antoine Destutt de Tracy (Larrain 1979). French sociologist Raymond Boudon discusses the perplexity that surrounds any deliberation of accurately defining the concept, explaining,

"the impression given by the literature on ideology and the explanation of the ideological phenomenon is very likely to be one of great confusion. Definitions differ enormously between writers, and explanations of the phenomenon are based on a wide variety of principles. Overall, the impression is that the same word is used to describe a multitude of phenomena rather than a single one, that theories of ideology are at odds on something they define differently, and that the large corpus which they constitute seems therefore like a dialogue of the deaf" (Boudon 1989:17).

With this helpful insight in mind, I choose not to engage in the arduous task of summarizing the plethora of scholarly literature penned on the subject of ideology, but rather, will focus here on the particular form and definition of the concept that is most applicable to the community-based initiative for redevelopment in Village de l'est. In contrast to the Marxian conception of ideology that posits the notion of class domination (Rossi-Landi 1990; Seliger 1977), I employ what Thompson (1990) characterizes as a "neutral conception of ideology" (5) that is more in tune with Karl Mannheim and Max Weber's sociology of beliefs (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1980). I draw largely on symbolic anthropologist, Clifford Geertz's (1973) approach to the study of ideology that emphasizes the expression of shared meanings, beliefs and symbolic cultural practices. Berkeley-trained sociologist, David Hummon, explains how Geertz,

"proposes that ideology is a distinct cultural form that serves specific symbolic as well as social and psychological functions. Thus, although ideology certainly legitimates political, class, and other social interests, although it can channel frustration caused by psychological strain, Geertz emphasizes that ideology first provides a symbolic rendering of the world, one that gives concrete form and meaning to life…Ideology involves a way of thinking that is public. Rather than view thought as a personal process that takes place 'in the head.' Geertz argues that thought is basically 'extrinsic,' a process in which individuals draw upon cultural symbols to interpret perception and experience" (Hummon 1990:37).

Anthropologist Talal Asad provides a succinct definition of ideology that I believe encapsulates a conceptual framework for observing the ideological dimension of disaster resilience. Asad descibes ideology as, "the culturally inherited lens of a given society by which

external reality is filtered and internalized for its members, or as the system of symbols by which

their direct experience is rendered uniquely communicable" (Asad 1979:621).

The 2006 United Nations University publication, *Measuring Vulnerability to Natural*

Hazards: Towards Disaster Resilient Societies, underscores the need to establish a set of

ideological indicators designed to aid in vulnerability assessments of diverse populations.

According to Birkmann et al.,

> "there are a number of indicator sets linked to the economic, social and
> educational dimensions. There are a very limited number of available indicators
> for determining the political, physical and environmental dimensions, while there
> are insufficient indicators describing the institutional, cultural and ideological
> setting" (Birkmann et al. 2006:98).

It is my hope that the ideological indicators of resilience established in the following

pages will address this need, and shed light on the significance of incorporating the ideological

dimension when considering the social coping mechanisms and adaptive capabilities of

communities negatively impacted by disaster.

Collective Consciousness and Lifeworld

Various ideological elements factored significantly in the ethnic enclave's resiliency. Before

discussing the successful components of mitigation, it's essential to call attention to the

conceptual framework used to understand the rationality of Vietnamese community members.

The Vietnamese were motivated to action by a communicative rationality that,

> "represents a shift away from individualistic and self-interested philosophies of
> consciousness…and toward a philosophy acknowledging consensus and the
> collective/cooperative origins of human action" (Miller 1992:26-27).

A collective consciousness among members of the immigrant community promoted

group behavior that led to a successful neighborhood-based initiative for redevelopment. While

an ideological indicator in its own right, collective consciousness (Buckland and Rahman 1999;

Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Green and Haines 2002; Vaughan and Nordenstam 1991) is the source from which all other ideological elements of the community's resilience emerge. Collective consciousness is formulated through daily social interaction on a community level scale (Habermas 1984). The notion of lifeworld is paramount to understanding why human beings carry out particular actions collectively. According to Miller,

> "the 'lifeworld' forms a symbolic space of collectively shared background convictions within which cultural traditions, social integration and normative structures (values and institutions) are reproduced and transformed through an ongoing interpretive process of communicative action" (Miller 1992:26-27).

Phenomenology approaches the lived experience, focusing on humanity's ordinary everyday engagement with the world. As a method of intellectual analysis, phenomenology allows researchers to subvert the dominant paradigm of Cartesian dualism that separates subject from object in scientific inquiry. Modes of knowing or understanding human experience of the world must be firmly rooted in a framework that is not distinctive from modes of being-in-the-world. It is the interaction and daily exchanges that occur between human actors, as well as between human actors and the physical and cultural landscapes of the world, that influences both individual and collective behavior along a time-space continuum. People are not separate from the world in which they live and researchers must seek to encounter human subjects within the ideological and built environs that inspire the dynamic character of human engagement with the world.

The participant-observer who attempts to gain an insider's perspective of the culture under study is not a passive element in the field experience, but rather an active partner in the formulation of social reality. The dialectic relationship that ensues between researcher and subject is shaped by human perception of other and the behaviors exhibited during contact. Mutual understanding and self-reflection is paramount when beginning a journey in all personal

and academic endeavors. To fully appreciate the lifeworld that shapes the communicative rationality of others, the participant-observer must adjust their cognitive apparatus for deductive reasoning and not focus solely on human action, but rather investigate the underlying meanings, values, and symbolism that govern social interaction and an individual's being-in-the-world..

A person's consciousness is revealed in their everyday engagement with the world, with individual actions offering observers a glimpse into the inner psyche that defines a subject's unique personal experience of engagement. The concept of lifeworld encompasses all of the taken-for-granted components of human experience – understood as a given, routinized in socially constructed patterns of man's worldly existence. The lifeworld that surrounds each individual is intrinsically entwined with experience of place. The ongoing relationship between humans and nature offers landscapes the opportunity to speak to those that interact with it on an experiential level. Each time one encounters a specific landscape the experience is different. Places are not static like illustrations in a book, but rather constantly evolve through time and space.

To know the world, one must experience it. This experience of "place" influences intentionality and the goals of human actors as agents of social change. Being in the field and engaging a consultant allow me the opportunity to see the landscape as defined by the humans that interact with it. When I enter their world, I document everyday lived experience, and attempt to understand how these experiences are shaped by the poetics of place. The meanings that are present in the symbolism of the landscape emerge as a result of my interaction with "place" and dialogue with residents. My engagement with place permits me to interpret the performance of the neighborhoods, resulting in a text that portrays its spirit or character. Employing phenomenological methods, my immersion "in-place" allows the Vietnamese community to reveal itself as itself.

As Vietnamese residents returned to the destruction at home, their outlook toward the task ahead of them was guided by a collective consciousness defined through the lens of a traditional lifeworld shared by members of the ethnic community. The communal lifeworld took the form of social capital, with a shared system of values, sacred beliefs, heritage and customs becoming the impetus for the recovery process. Similar to other immigrant communities located across America, the Vietnamese enclave of New Orleans East is a tight knit social entity where interpersonal relationships foster collective identity and place-based cultural support networks.

Place Attachment

A sense of belonging can be paramount to an individual's happiness within society. As human actors, we connect with other like-minded persons and are drawn toward a collective spirit that offers security through solidarity. Place attachment is best understood as an emotional connection to a specific neighborhood/community/landscape (Norris et al. 2008). The concept of place attachment is well documented in both social science and disaster science literature (Altman and Low 1992; Barton 1969; Brown and Perkins 1992; Cox and Holmes 2000; Day and Murdoch 1993; Martson 2000; Manzo and Perkins 2006; Murphy 2007; Perkins et al. 2002; Tartaglia 2006) Membership in a group such as an ethnic community, religious institution, political organization or recreational hobby, influences who we are as individuals. How we define ourselves and those around us is inevitably affected by our daily associations in group settings. While human actions are inextricably linked with perceptions of place and the significance assigned to constantly evolving surroundings, "the effects of place and community on the origins and dynamics of collective action remain, in large part, untheorized" (Miller 1992:26-27). In the case of the Vietnamese victims of Hurricane Katrina, a strong sense of community and attachment to "place" stimulated collective behavior, resulting in the

revitalization of a New Orleans East neighborhood. It is my hope that a thorough study of the

disaster-resilient enclave will provide useful knowledge that can be incorporated into theories

seeking to explicate the complex and abstract relationship that exists between place, community

and collective action.

When a population inhabits a particular landscape, they leave an imprint through

adaptations made to both the natural and built environments. Just as a landscape is assigned

meaning by its inhabitants, "collective identities are formed through the common occupancy of

space" (Rustin 1987:34). The soul of the Vietnamese community can be found in the communal

ties that bind neighbors collectively working to preserve the cultural values passed down through

generations. As residents of the enclave were temporarily displaced by the floodwaters of Lake

Pontchartrain, they longed for the sense of familiarity that only their neighborhoods could

provide. Attachment to place proved to be a fundamental ideological indicator of the

community's ability to mitigate the negative impacts of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season. Tuan

Nguyen, Business Development Director at the Mary Queen of Viet Nam Community

Development Corporation, explained what he missed most during his month-long displacement

in Houston, stating,

> "I missed the familiar faces of family and friends. I missed the community, the
> food, New Orleans in general. I was born and raised here. You know, it's home.
> There's no other place like home. There's no place like New Orleans, you kind of
> fall in love with it. My wife and I both absolutely love this city, so we will
> probably never leave. We will probably die here."

Since the arrival of the immigrants in the 1970's, the eastern most section of Orleans

Parish experienced a transformation into "Little Vietnam," complete with a market-gardening

landscape, Vietnamese restaurants and bakeries, a pagoda and elaborate household altars (see

Figure 14). The ethnic community continues to engage in "place making" after the storm, leaving

an Asian signature on the Crescent City. Geographer Joseph Wood captures the spirit of

Vietnamese place making stating,

> "Landscape involves a continual shaping of social identity and expressing of social relations. It can be argued – indeed, celebrated – that Vietnamese Americans have become important actors in the suburbanization process, reinventing themselves as Americans and reconfiguring the spaces and places they have inherited. Beneath the veneer of elements unfamiliar to most of us, through which we must look closely to see, are places that serve immigrant communities in multiple material and symbolic ways" (Wood 1997:70).

The enclave provides residents with a link to a native homeland. While Vietnam is thousands of miles away from the city of New Orleans, its essence can be felt upon entering the neighborhoods of Versailles and Village de l'est. Women tending their gardens wearing traditional conical hats, children making bamboo lanterns for the Mid-Autumn Festival (Tet Trung Thu), and the smell of bun bo hue (spicy beef noodles) filtering out of a Chef Menteur Hwy. Vietnamese restaurant, are just a few examples of the symbolic markers present in the community offering extended families and friends a connection with the land of their forefathers. The Vietnamese are part of an agricultural culture. Father Vien explained how values embedded in this culture aid in the recovery, stating, "people are attached to the land. It's the agricultural culture. People are attached to the land with families, with relatives, with friends. And so for them to return here is something quite natural because they've adopted this place as their own." Love of "place" motivated residents to return to their neighborhoods and reclaim the community that serves as an anchor to a past that is far removed but never forgotten.

Communal Experience and Social Inclusion

Interviews conducted with Vietnamese residents bring to light the correlation that exists between communal experience (Alkon 2004; Callaghan and Colton 2007; Norris et al. 2008; Twigg 2007) and the ability to unite in times of crisis. John Twigg of the Benfield UCL Hazard Research

Centre, identifies communal experience as one of the characteristics of a disaster-resilient

community, defining the term as "community experience of coping in previous events/crises or

knowledge of how this was done" (Twigg 2007:26). Members of my research population share a

distinct legacy of displacement that goes back more than half a century. For some senior citizens

living in the Vietnamese community, the mandatory evacuation out of New Orleans prior to

Hurricane Katrina, marked the third time they had to endure a mass displacement.

Figure 14. Entrance to the Mary Queen of Viet Nam Field, Post-Katrina
(photo by author)

When North Vietnam fell under communist rule in 1954, thousands of rural farmers fled

to coastal communities near Saigon. Families had little more than the clothes on their backs as

they stood determined to make the best out of a new life in the fishing villages of South Vietnam.

According to one Vietnamese man, "that migration was much greater than the one out of New Orleans before Katrina. Greater in the sense that it was more chaotic, it was much more difficult."

The end of the Vietnam War brought more uncertainty as Saigon fell to communist troops on April 30th 1975, and thousands were again forced to flee under fear of retribution. As waves of Vietnamese immigrants made it to the shores of the United States they were faced with the psychological turmoil inherent in their refugee status. A young Vietnamese man in his late 20's spoke of stories of suffering passed down through the generations, adding that,

> "if you go back to what many of the residents went through in the Vietnam War. Losing country, losing home, and having to start over. Lot of folks would say, if we've done it before, we can do it again. Katrina is small potatoes in comparison."

Several individuals I had the privilege of speaking with told of the hardships their families suffered during the relocation. They explained how they struggled financially until they were able to master the English language, how confused they were by the modernity of American living, and the discrimination they encountered during the daily routines of life. Residing in a foreign land was at times extremely difficult for the immigrants who longed for their native Vietnam. One Vietnamese man from the neighborhood described how,

> "most of the community members, especially the first and second generation, have experienced something worse, by far. When you ask the older residents they say, 'oh, this is nothing.' I mean it's serious, but it's not like losing your country. At least you have the option to come back home and rebuild. That's where they get their resiliency from."

The internal experience of the Vietnamese gave them strength when floodwaters enveloped their community. An elderly man in the neighborhood lives about a block away from the church. If you saw him taking an afternoon stroll down Dwyer Road you would probably never guess the horrific and dreadful experiences he endured as a young man. During the

Vietnam War he put his family on a boat, hoping that they would make it to safety in America. He stayed behind to protect his home. The law in Vietnam stated that the government could seize any home that was left vacant. He stayed so that if his family didn't make it, they would have a home to return to. When he received news that they arrived safely, he set off on an incredible journey that seemed impossible. He walked by himself through Vietnam, across Cambodia, all the way to Thailand. At night he walked through the bloody and treacherous landscape immortalized in the 1984 British film drama, *The Killing Fields*. After spending two years in Thailand, he was finally reunited with his family in America. "Katrina was an inconvenience," stated a Vietnamese community member who added,

> "that's part of who we are, part of our experience. When we came here to build our life, we literally had nothing. No knowledge, no language, nothing. So after thirty-five years we made it to where we are, so to rebuild here is much easier than all of the previous events."

Through all the past ordeals they looked to each other for emotional support, gaining the courage to reclaim their livelihoods in a new setting. As the enclave grew, so too did the strength of the cultural support networks that provided community members with the audacity needed to carve out a space in the landscape of New Orleans and make it their own. The communal experience of displacement, resettlement and place making, allowed for a collective spirit to develop and later flourish into a form of social capital that lessened the community's vulnerability to disaster. In an article documenting the adaptation of second generation Vietnamese in New Orleans East, Zhou and Bankston examine the use of ethnic resources stating,

> "ethnic social integration creates a form of social capital that enables an immigrant family to receive ongoing support and direction from other families and from the religious and social associations of the ethnic group" (Zhou and Bankston III 1994:842).

Figure 15. Flooding in Village de l'est (photo by MQVNC)

The Vietnamese community is extremely industrious as a result of a high degree of ethnic

involvement and community cooperation. Talking about the laborious task of renovating homes,

a Vietnamese man explained how people in his neighborhood are always there for each other:

> "first we cleaned and gutted our house. When we were done with it, we helped
> with my wife's family home. We help each other, we help our neighbors. That is
> who we are. You learn not to rely on the government. The community has learned
> with or without the government's help you gotta be able to rebuild, it's up to
> you."

Inhabitants of Village de l'est engaged in mutual reciprocity and communal labor during

the process of neighborhood revitalization. An atmosphere of social inclusion led to voluntary

actions by Vietnamese citizens who developed community-based adaptive strategies to cope with

extensive flooding in the enclave (see Figure 15). Social inclusion (Abrams, Hogg and Marques

2005; Baumeister and Leary 1995; Hogg and Abrams 1988; Tyler and Blader 2000) refers to how people relate to each other as "interdependent entities" (Abrams, Hogg and Marques 2005:19). The spirit of inclusion in social life allows for interpersonal relationships that foster a sense of belongingness and access to valuable material, social and psychological resources. Inclusion provides a framework of social support that motivates humans to engage in collective action in times of crisis (Barrera 1986; Cottrell 1976; Ganor and Ben-Lavy 2003; Goodman et al 1998; Kaniasty and Norris 2004; Norris et al. 2007; Pfefferbaum et al. 2005; Tse and Liew 2004).

Family Collectivism and Social Responsibility

Traditional family values are celebrated within a majority of the households found in the ethnic enclave. Strong relationships exist between members of large extended families, with mutual responsibility serving as the key to successful collectivity. Allegiance to the family and respect for others is paramount in Vietnamese culture. Children understand from a very young age filial piety and the dangers of individualistic behavior. They embrace what is best for the family unit as a whole, which frequently entails great sacrifice of self. Confucian philosophical beliefs, such as the ethical weight placed on duty to family, have permeated the traditional value system of the Vietnamese for thousands of years. A Vietnamese mother of two shed light on the role that family values plays in everyday community life, stating how,

> "people tend to take care of their parents, their grandparents. Generations tend to stay together, living under one roof. We're taught or we're raised to not forget the parents or the elderly. Someone has got to take care of them. It's got to stay in the family."

The roles that culture, religion and ethnicity play are quite measurable factors that can be charted and analyzed when considering their importance as integral and influencing components

within the aid utilization process. As social variables, they serve as pattern components when accessing and identifying the dynamics of why and how disasters can be more effectively overcome within the community (Bolin and Bolton 1986). The culture of the Vietnamese community emphasizes the importance of family collectivism (McCubbin et al. 1997; McCubbin and McCubbin 1993, McCubbin, Thompson and McCubbin 1996). According to Rolfe,

> "resilience is viewed as involving two distinguishable but related family processes: (1) adjustment, which involves the influence of protective factors in facilitating the family's ability and efforts to maintain its integrity, functioning, and fulfill developmental tasks in the face of risk factors, and (2) adaptation, which involves the function of recovery factors in promoting the family's ability to 'bounce back' and adapt in family crisis situations" (Rolfe 2006:13).

Extended family units interacted with other elements of the community's social system and through this supportive relationship, revitalization was achieved. An ideology of family collectivism is grounded in the

> "notion that kin group is far more significant than the individual…Ancestor worship affirmed the sacredness and essential unity of the kin group, as well as its permanence in comparison to the transience of the individual. It also highlighted obligation as a key feature of a member's relationship to the kin group. The central obligation of the family member was to place the needs and desires of the kin group over and above any personal ones…The family is an individual's most reliable source of support" (Kibria 1994:90).

Obligation to family and community was a prevalent theme in several conversations with young adults in the ethnic enclave. Shortly after rebuilding efforts commenced, I conducted an informal interview with a man in his twenties who returned to his former neighborhood to gut homes that were rampant with mold. He left the community two years prior to Hurricane Katrina in order to shorten his commute to the Kenner, Louisiana restaurant where he was employed. After talking with him for only a few minutes I realized how much reverence he had for the people of Versailles. He explained how,

> "this will always be my home. My family is here and that is where my home is. My apartment is nice, but I love being able to come here. There are a lot of good

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people in the neighborhood and sometimes that's hard to find in other places. Everybody here has been through so much. I'll never forget where I came from. I will always come home to help."

He felt responsible to help the community rebuild, even if he no longer resided in the enclave. While he was presently engaged in repairing the damage his grandparent's home sustained, he planned to aid in the reconstruction of numerous homes in the neighborhood. He explained that he was even considering moving back for a short period of time to help family members and friends get back on their feet. Pointing to several houses on the neighborhood block he described what repairs needed to be done, smiling saying that he had his work cut out for him.

It is customary in Vietnamese culture to treat members of one's native village like family. These fictive kinship ties affect all interpersonal relationships, promoting communal bonds, collective identity, social trust and mutual respect. The previous account is representative of an attitude of social responsibility that factors prominently in the community's ability to lessen the negative long-term impacts of the hybrid disaster (Adger 2000; Davidson 2006; Grootaert 1998; Mayunga 2007; Murphy 2007; Shaw and Goda 2004; Tobin 1999; Twigg 2007). An aura of social responsibility among members of a community allows for effective disaster preparedness, risk reduction and recovery (Twigg 2007).

Kinh "Ken" Nguyen, owner of Ken's Pharmacy (see Figure 16), was part of the original group of Vietnamese immigrants that settled in New Orleans in 1975. Describing the exodus out of Vietnam he stated,

> "I was much younger then. Luckily all my immediate family came over. We lived in a farming community, but we had an uncle in the fishing community where we had access to escape. We were fortunate enough to have the whole family escape."

Ken's Pharmacy had extensive roof damage and was broken into during the storm. Most of his goods were looted and his private residence had about four feet of standing water. While he had insurance, he did not qualify for the Road Home Program.

Figure 16. Ken's Pharmacy in Village de l'est (photo by author)

As soon as Mayor Nagin allowed New Orleans residents to return, Ken came home to provide members of the community with their prescription medications. He got his store up and running so quickly that it was one of a handful of places on the original list of businesses for the city to use. Talking about the nature of the community and his displacement experience in Texas, Ken explained,

> "before it was tight knit. Since the storm it was tighter tighter knit. I saw people helping other people. For example, when we evacuated to Houston we were lucky to have family and friends that gave us a place to stay. I spend my time

volunteering to help people. A lot of people who evacuated to that same area were my customers, so I had prescription profiles on hand. That's the only thing I brought with me, the prescription profile on my laptop. So I was able to help them with that."

Another community member discussed how neighbors that rode out the storm in their homes looked out for one another when the water began to rise explaining how "people gathered at the church when the floodwaters rose. People were helping each other get out of their homes, helping each other get on boats and get to the church. They watched out for each other." Discussing the value Vietnamese refugees placed on maintaining communal ties, Haines, Rutherford and Thomas explain, "community is important because family is important. Traditionally, family means lineage…for the Vietnamese, community means lineage" (1981:316). The New Orleans East Vietnamese community celebrates the customs and rituals of their native homeland, connecting them to millions of other fellow countrymen (dong-bao) scattered by the Vietnamese Diaspora.

As the floodwaters inundated the ethnic enclave (see Figure 17), donations from concerned individuals of Vietnamese descent poured in from around the globe. Such expression of financial and emotional support signified a communal bond that did not recognize socio-political boundaries, but rather the social responsibility and group solidarity that exists among the world's Vietnamese population.

Boat People SOS, a refugee assistance agency, provided the displaced with information about everything from food stamps to school enrollment. Organizations such as United Vietnamese Americans and the Viet Heritage Society joined with Boat People SOS to coordinate the donations that were streaming in from other Asian organizations and individuals around the world. Vietnamese communities from all over the United States jammed telephone lines, and logged-on to websites in order to see how they could aid in the relief effort.

Figure 17. Navigating through Village de l'est by boat (photo by MQVNC)

Charismatic Leadership and Social Trust

When the National Hurricane Center announced the projected path of powerful Hurricane

Katrina, the enclave's community leaders began organizing an orderly evacuation out of New

Orleans. They urged the residents to stay calm and gave pertinent information at numerous

emergency neighborhood meetings held in the community. The web of social and kinship

relations provided a stage for dialogue concerning the potential threat to the community. The

ethnic population turned to Father Vien for guidance. The importance of charismatic leadership

during times of adversity is documented in social science and disaster literature (Ganor and Ben-

Lavy 2003; Goodman et al. 1998; Maton and Salem 1995; Norris et al. 2008; Perkins et al. 2002;

Pfefferbaum et al. 2005; Wandsmerman and Florin 2000).

The pastor was no stranger to the fact that his community looked to him for advice and decision making. As the head of a large Catholic Church he became the source of calm in moments of hardship. He took over for Father Dominic Luong in 2003, when Luong became the first Vietnamese Bishop in United States history. In two short years, Father Vien became the community's spiritual and social leader. He came to America with other Vietnamese refugees in 1975, and he understood firsthand what mass evacuation and subsequent displacement was like. Father Vien quickly called for meetings in his church to discuss the options the community had in the wake of the oncoming crisis. He suggested evacuation to those that were able, and informed everyone that he was staying to help those that decided to ride out the storm. This collective decision to leave spawned, for some of the older generation, the third mass evacuation from their homes.

Extended families packed up their cars with friends and loved ones, leaving most all their material possessions behind. Everyone in the community expected to be able to return home in a matter of days, as their section of New Orleans East fared well in previous flood events. Not completely understanding that the fate of their possessions depended on the city's aging levee system, the Vietnamese left with not much more than the clothes on their backs. Speaking about his family's pre-disaster planning, one Vietnamese man who evacuated to Dallas to stay with a brother and his family explained,

> "the mentality is, oh, it will pass like every other hurricane since we've been here. So, when you evacuate it's like a mini-vacation. You took only a couple of days of clothes. We were displaced until the mayor opened up the city and then we stayed with my sister and brother-in-law in Houma. So we went back and forth cleaning up the house. Another brother evacuated to California and stayed there. There was no doubt with me and my fiancée about coming back. There was doubt with my parents because they were old and didn't know if they would be able to handle another storm. Once the community members and some of my friends found out the church was coming back, they were like okay, we're coming back."

A majority of the ethnic population set off for Houston and Dallas, while some consultants I spoke with evacuated to Austin, Shreveport, Beaumont and Little Rock, Arkansas. Others chose to stay closer to home and drove to higher ground in Metairie and the West Bank. Several of the Vietnamese moved around a bit and traveled from such cities as Houston to Garden Grove, California. One predominant theme that surfaced was a sense of acute aggravation at the city's evacuation plan. Most consultants complained about how long they sat in traffic during their exodus. One interviewee expressed frustration with the city, proclaiming that it was "ridiculous that they [city officials] waited so long to call for a mandatory evacuation and to start contra-flow on the interstate out of the city."

Vietnamese evacuees relied on an ethnically-inclusive mode of survival during their temporary displacement. Many carpooled and decided not to take shelter at the "refuge of last resort," fearing that conditions in the Louisiana Superdome could deteriorate rapidly. Instead, throngs of residents headed west on Interstate-10 toward Texas, where they could acquire evacuation information by tuning into 900 AM, a radio station that was part of the Saigon Television Broadcasting Network. The local broadcaster told Vietnamese evacuees to head toward the Hong Kong City Mall, located in Houston at 11201 Bellaire Boulevard (see Figure 18). At this strip mall comprised of Asian-owned businesses, volunteers set up a make-shift reception area for Katrina evacuees.

Vietnamese-speaking volunteers greeted the displaced with food, water, and other supplies. Donations of shoes and clothes sat in boxes alongside tables that were set up to record information and disseminate pertinent references to various services. Over the next several weeks history repeated itself as Vietnamese victims of the storm claimed refugee status once again.

Figure 18. Hong Kong City Mall – Houston, Texas (photo by MQVNC)

Vietnamese residing in Texas and farther abroad took in the displaced, providing them

with food, shelter, clothing and other necessary provisions. In contrast to a large majority of New

Orleans residents who felt abandoned by local, state and federal government officials, members

of the enclave were comforted by the charismatic leadership of a pastor who remained steadfast

in his determination to sustain communal ties in the midst of disaster.

Traveling to numerous points of evacuation, the pastor acted as a shepherd to his flock,

lifting spirits by hastily making plans to return and rebuild. Father Vien explained that he was,

> "evacuated at about 5pm on Friday. Somebody picked me up from Lafayette. The
> next morning I met with my people in Houston. From then on I continued to move
> to other locations where my people were, to meet with them to prepare for the
> return. I appointed different people at different locations to be in charge of the
> return, to be in charge of connecting with others. So that when the return comes
> and they hear the call, they would come back…The month we were displaced I

drove all together about 10,000 miles. I went through several states. Connecting. I don't think I stayed in any place more than two days. "

The church became the base of operations, and slowly, residents began to come back to the devastated area and initiate community restoration. The leadership skills of the pastor guided the ethnic enclave through the long and arduous recovery process. By remaining firm in his resolve to revitalize the community that he and his parishioners considered home, Father Vien provided Vietnamese residents with hope that full recovery from the storm was possible (see Figure 19).

The Vietnamese community has an aura of social trust. Trust between community members, as well as between community members and external agencies is essential to effective disaster preparedness, mitigation and recovery (Buckland 1999; Callaghan and Colton 2007; Coleman 1988; Green and Haines 2002; Mayunga 2007; Nakagawa and Shaw 2004; Neal and Phillips 1995; Putnam 1993, 1995; Sampson et al. 1997; Twigg 2007; Western et al. 2005). Daily interactions between neighbors are guided by traditional cultural values that call for respect, mutual reciprocity and relative equality. Social networks,

> "generated by such patterns of sociability constitute an important form of 'social capital' in the sense that they increase the trust that individuals feel towards others and enhance their capacity to join together in collective action to resolve common problems" (Hall 1999:418).

As residents were faced with the monumental task of reclaiming their community, they looked to one another for positive psychological reinforcement. One middle-aged couple I spoke with explained how their decision to return was not made until they saw others invested in the rebuilding effort. The woman explained,

> "we weren't sure how things were going to end up. We didn't want to fix our house until we knew for sure others were coming back. It was going to cost us a lot to get everything fixed. We didn't want to jump into fixing up everything if we were the only people here. Just repairing the fence was hard work. It was nice because our sons and their friends help us with everything. It was a lot to do."

Citizens of the enclave trust each other's ability to tackle the obstacles that undoubtedly lie ahead, paving the way for the community's revitalization and long-term sustainability.

Figure 19. Father Vien speaks to displaced community members (photo by MQVNC)

Religious Faith and Altruism

The Vietnamese of Eastern Orleans Parish are predominately Catholic, with a small minority practicing Buddhism. The Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church and the Van Hanh Buddhist Center serve as spiritual and cultural centers in the ethnic enclave. Sacred belief in the supernatural is evident in the homes of countless Vietnamese who incorporate elaborate household altars into their living spaces. Altars that are adorned with statues of either Quan Am (Buddhism) or the Virgin Mary allow visitors to promptly identify the family's religious affiliation (see Figure 20). In regard to ethnic socialization within the community, religion plays

an active role in maintaining group solidarity, promoting both altruistic behavior and civic

engagement. Places of worship serve as ethnic institutions of cultural transmission, as regularly

held afternoon classes instruct the young about Vietnamese values, heritage and language. When

discussing immigrant religious congregations Bankston and Zhou explain,

> "to say that religion in a given ethnic community is the key to ethnic identification is to say that religious activities occupy a central place in the life of the community. Religious institutions are 'foci' of social networks, and the ethnic religious institution is a focus of the network of ethnic social relations. The linkage to the ethnic network provided by the religious institution is a more important means of influencing behavior than any specific program sponsored by the institution" (Bankston III and Zhou 1996:31).

The Vietnamese of Versailles and Village de l'est are, by in large, a deeply religious

population. An unshakeable faith stemming from sacred beliefs found in Confucianized

Catholicism and the Buddhist tradition, gave residents of the enclave the fortitude to collectively

confront the destructive force of Mother Nature and retrieve a landscape imbued with cultural

symbolism. Literature has shown that religious faith increases resilience and helps heal victims

of traumatic experiences (Koenig 2006; Peres et al. 2006; Schuster et al. 2001; Smith et al.

2000). Speaking of faith and surviving the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina Father Vien explained,

> "faith is personal belief, as in the role of God in a person's life. Some people were asking me did my people question God? The act of God was only sixteen hours. It was the human act that we had to struggle with, and are still struggling with. In terms of faith, we never questioned God. It's humans that gave us trouble."

The pastor discussed at-length the importance of the Catholic Church to all stages of the

community's recovery. He spoke about the crucial role that organized religion played in the

revitalization stating,

> "religion plays a role in the community's recovery. Organized religion. Meaning the community revolves around the church, church life. And so when people are elsewhere, are totally scattered, we still have a place together – the Church. So if you can imagine, the very first weekend returned we had mass. There were about 300 people who came. The rest of New Orleans, except for the West Bank, was totally vacant. There was no one here. So you drive through all of that and you

come in here and you see 300 people. That's a lot of encouragement. The next week it was 800. Then the third week we invited the Archbishop for mass and invited all the people in New Orleans East to attend. So there were 2,200. And then the question was what would the next week be like? It was 1,600. It held steady, never under 1,600. So by the time we reached 2,500 we had to split up the masses. For the New Year Festival at the beginning of February we had about 20,000 people. So think about it, outside of this there was nothing, everything was devastated. For those three days we completely forgot that there was Katrina outside of the church compound."

Figure 20. Vietnamese home in Village de l'est (photo by author)

Social participation was paramount to the enclave's neighborhood-based initiative for redevelopment. As residents returned to the community, they gathered together to discuss how they would go about the rebuilding process. According to Russell Dynes, "after disaster impact, the citizenship role expands in the sense that the normative requirements now specify that a citizen should do anything he can to help the community" (Dynes 1974:97). During fieldwork I witnessed firsthand expansion of the citizenship role. The importance of altruistic behavior

during and after disaster events is well documented in scholarly literature (Dynes 2005; Dynes and Quarantelli 1971; Erikson 1976, 1994; Fukuyama 2001; Murphy 2007; Perry et al. 1983; Scanlon 2003).

Many of my consultants talked a great deal about how important their community was to them. One interviewee was a twenty-two year old college student pursing a degree at the University of New Orleans. He explained that he could have moved to Metairie after the storm, but instead felt a duty to return and help with the rebuilding process. He told me that the community had given him so much, it wasn't right to just turn his back on it when times get rough. Born and raised in Versailles, the young man spoke fondly of his neighbors and the circle of friends he grew up with. While discussing his views on the long term sustainability of the community he commented that if disaster strikes again, "they [the community] will rebuild again because this is home." Pharmacy owner Ken Nguyen shares this sentiment, explaining that while he may do things differently next time, he "would still give it another chance if there are people. If there are people returning, I would return." The residents of Village de l'est illustrate how "love for thy neighbor" can transform a community in even the most dire of circumstances.

Chapter 6

The Poetics of Place

"The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls" (Calvino 1974:10).

Figure 21. Entering New Orleans East from I-10 Twin Span Bridge

Community Attachment

Intense attachment to place fuels the revitalization of Eastern Orleans Parish. Residents of New

Orleans East are struggling to reclaim their communities, one house, one block, one

neighborhood at a time. A work in progress, this painstakingly slow process will take years to

fully complete. However, citizens of New Orleans East remain diligent, often snubbing those

who doubt the long-term sustainability of their suburban dream. Voices calling for the East to be returned to its natural state as green space are met with adamant opposition by residents who are determined to save their neighborhoods. The landscape that the population of New Orleans East evacuated from nearly five years ago left an indelible mark that continues to strengthen many people's resolve to build back a place central to their identity. The landscape's imprint on the minds of residents was observable during interviews conducted in the area since the storm.

While in the field, I engaged in open-ended discussions with little structural format, allowing consultants to take conversations in the direction they were most comfortable with. By listening to their narratives I hope to understand each interviewee's unique experience of Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent rebuilding process. During both formal/informal conversations, I often shifted the dialogue toward discussion of how the consultants feel about their community and why they were so determined to return and rebuild. I want to learn about their attachment to place and how this attachment defines who they are as individuals. Experience of place shapes humans' conception of the world, and it is this conception that guides the citizens of New Orleans East through the struggles and pitfalls of reconstruction.

African-American residents living in the neighborhood directly behind the Saint Maria Goretti Catholic Church on Crowder Boulevard share with each other a sentiment of community attachment. Over a two week period I interviewed numerous homeowners living on Aberdeen Road, Lomond Road, and Curran Boulevard, three streets running parallel to the Goretti Church (see Figure 22). Predominately composed of White homeowners at its inception, the neighborhood became racially mixed in the 1980's. White flight out of New Orleans East occurred in the last decade of the twentieth century, with many neighborhoods such as Goretti becoming almost completely African-American in the years immediately preceding the storm.

Figure 22. Renovated home on Aberdeen Road (photo by author)

I am quite familiar with the neighborhood bordering Goretti Church and personally know several of the families living within its parameters. Before moving to Spring Lake subdivision in 1985, my parents owned a home next to my grandparents on Aberdeen Road. My great grandparents and cousins lived a block behind on Lomond Road, making it easy for all of us to enjoy the advantages of having relatives in close proximity to home. I remember fondly riding my motorized Strawberry Shortcake motorbike to visit my great grandparents on the next block, as my mother watched from afar. While all of my family members moved to the North Shore years before floodwaters ravaged the community, many of those original neighbors I knew as a child returned after the storm to rebuild their homes. They, like those in the Vietnamese

community, were determined to rebuild in the only New Orleans neighborhood they considered home. One African-American grandmother of seven explained,

> "we invested everything in making this home. We would never just walk away. All of our children were raised here; actually one of them was married here. My husband and I have a lot of close friends on this street. Some of them came back, some of them didn't. You know, some were scared to rebuild because there's always a storm that could come and mess up everything again. But my best friend is back, I wouldn't let her leave me. We've been best friends for twenty years. She's a widow, so it's her son that fixed up her place. The street has come back. There are even some new people living here. It took a really long time though, for a while I thought things weren't ever going to be normal again. At least now things are getting green again. It was so depressing when everything was grey colored. Everything was dead. I sure thank the lord almighty that people went ahead and came back. I was so worried. My children kept saying, 'momma, nobody is gonna come back here. New Orleans East is gone.' I told them just wait and see; people will fight and do what they have to do to get back home. And they did. We survived Katrina."

Several members of the neighborhood spoke extensively about the hardships they encountered during displacement and how happy they were to finally be living back in their homes and out of FEMA trailers. One African-American man who lived in his FEMA trailer for nearly a year while remodeling his home on Lomond Road stated,

> "that damn FEMA trailer was so small, I thought I was gonna go stir crazy. My wife wouldn't have any part of it. She moved in with her sister on the West Bank while I fixed up the house. It went slow, but it's done now and she's glad to be back in it. So am I, for that matter. It was the hardest thing we ever had to go though, being away from each other. I was just so tired trying to make that commute down to the East from the West Bank every day. It was breaking my health, so I decided to just stay here some nights so I could wake up early and fix things. My daughter and son-in-law helped me a lot and we hired some Mexicans to do the rest. A lot of my neighbors did something like that. We thought whatever it takes to get home is what we're gonna do. We love this place. It's getting back beautiful too. It's a long time coming. Our church is back, we just need more places to shop out here. But we're making the best of things. We have to."

Walking down Aberdeen Road I couldn't help but feel proud at how the neighborhood was able to come back after such devastation. I knew that my great grandparents, who both passed away at the beginning of my college career, would have been proud as well. They always

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told me, "now sugarfoot, nothing comes easy, especially not the good things. When things get hard, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again. You just don't give up, you keep going." People in the Goretti neighborhood did just that. The storm turned their lives upside down, but did not make them lose their attachment to the community. They were vulnerable to flooding, but resilient in character. A young couple who bought a home in the community just months before Hurricane Katrina also decided to return and rebuild in the embattled neighborhood. They described how they were welcomed by their neighbors and in a short time, began feeling like this place was meant to be their home. The wife explained,

> "on move-in day our next door neighbor brought us a delicious apple pie, telling us that if we ever needed anything to just holler. I thought that was so nice. We used to live Uptown off of Carrolton. Nobody ever said much to us over there. We fell in love with it here right away. My daughter loves it too. We have a big back yard, plenty of space for her to play. She goes to school at Lake Castle right around the corner."

By in large, a majority of the houses in the Goretti neighborhood are no longer vacant. Driving through the community at night, light illuminating from windows of now occupied homes tell the story of a people who refused to give up on their community even when rebuilding efforts seemed hopeless and futile.

Back to Little Vietnam

Our connection to place transforms the natural environment, making human perception, underlying values and attitudes toward place, essential components of a more holistic knowledge. Landscapes interact with the individuals that inhabit them. Humans negotiate space, but they are also defined by their experience of space. Their decisions are a result of this dialectical relationship. The collective behavior of the Vietnamese population was partly determined by their relationship with and experience of place. Social support networks are

embedded in the cultural landscape of the community. Group solidarity is a result of a strong

sense of community that defines the landscape, but is also defined by it. Conversations with

consultants many times became discussions highlighting the importance of community, and how

they wanted to rebuild because their community was their extended family. Residents spoke

about how much they loved their neighborhood and wanted to quickly reconstruct it so their lives

could become normal again. Attachment to place was apparent and I got the sense that many of

the consultants defined themselves through their community identity. A Vietnamese woman

whose parents moved to the community before she was born described growing up in Village de

l'est and how determined her family was to renovate their home as quickly as possible. She

stated,

> "when Katrina came I was so upset. I thought we would just be gone for a few days. We stayed with a friend of my cousin in Houston until we were allowed back. We actually came back the very day that ban was over. I saw how bad the rest of New Orleans looked; I had seen it on the news. It was terrifying to me and my mother. We thought oh, what are we going to do? When we got back home the floors and walls of our house was covered with mold. Our friends helped us get everything out and we started fixing up our fence immediately. And we had roof damage too. Most of our things got wet and ruined. But everybody helped out and we got it all back together pretty fast…we never thought we couldn't do it, we knew we could. That is what I love about this place, nobody gives up. It's always been like this. Whatever the problem was, we'd fix it together. It's special, you know. This is a community, not just a neighborhood. I loved growing up here because I knew that no matter what, I always had support from my family and friends. It's the Vietnamese way. Our place here has people that encourage each other to work hard at what you want. Me and my fiancée plan to raise our children here because we want the same for them. We want them to be near all of the generations. That's really important to us. Some people my age want to move away, they want something better for their children. But I disagree. I know things aren't perfect here, but at least we are in a place where we can say that people watch out for us."

Interviewing members of the community, I listened to what they said about their

landscape. However, I gained more understanding of the true nature of their experience with

place by listening to how they spoke of their home and community: a young boy with excitement

in his voice when he explained how he met his friends every day after school to play basketball at the field, a young mother's facial expression when she spoke of her fears concerning a lack of police presence in the neighborhood, a man whose eyes twinkled when he showed pictures of his grandchildren and the happiness of his smile when he told me in broken English that they all lived close by.

Landscape as Text

Streets of Versailles

The streets of Versailles, rich in poetics of place,
Traditional conical hatted elderly women, with weather-beaten face.
Tending their gardens, young rarely giving a hand,
The older generation still has a close band.
Their many past experiences can provide quite a tale,
Vulnerability and displacements still have not left them stale.
The recent influx of residents gives a new sense of place,
There is no regard to religion, sex, origin or race.
Working side by side, Hispanic, African-American, and Vietnamese stand,
Wanting to make this a better community, a freer land.

--Meredith Morgan Feike

The neighborhood of Village de l'est contains a story that can be read by anyone that rejects the dualistic nature of subject and object. Instead of upholding the Western dichotomy of subjectivity and objectivity, interpreters of landscape deconstruct this dualism and subject/object become one. When writing of how poetics of place allows for this alternative pathway of engagement, Smiley explains,

> "the ontology is a being-in-place, according to which we are immersed in place, not detached as subject and object…poetics of place leads to possible nonjective conceptualizations of the relation between humans and world" (Smiley 1999:35).

My engagement with place permits me to interpret the performance of the neighborhood, resulting in a text that portrays its spirit or character. Employing the phenomenological method,

my immersion "in-place" allows the Vietnamese community to reveal itself as itself. The

landscape can reveal its stories, or text, in a way that lets me participate in the reality of the

ethnic enclave.

Figure 23. Resident handing out ice and bottled water (photo by MQVNC)

The meanings that are present in the symbolism of the landscape emerge as a result of my

interaction with place and dialogue with residents. I view the performance of the community in a

temporal sequence, much like the script of a play. A continuing saga, the landscape leaves

imprints of both past and present. The neighborhoods embody a personality or spirit, which is

referred to as *genius loci*. According to Smiley,

> "spirit of place, or genius loci, is a poetic way of conceptualizing place as more
> than what we have built into it; it allows for poetic being to arise in a place which
> is no longer held as merely subservient to human intentions and

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meanings…places are more than just what we write into them and what we read out of them: they have their own spirit" (Smiley 1999:50).

Human agency is apparent in the character of the landscape. Shortly after residents were allowed to travel back into the devastated areas to survey damage to their property, the rebuilding effort in the Vietnamese neighborhood began (see Figure 23). When I visit the area, I feel an aura of hope and determination not present in many other hard hit areas of New Orleans. The residents have a strong will to succeed, and the rebuilt landscape is proof of this resiliency. Group attachment to place fuels collective action by inhabitants of the neighborhood, allowing for transformation of the landscape. The population experiences this transformation and this in turn influences future decision making and overall perception of place. Phenomenology provides a means of analysis that delineates "the nature of what it is to be human, how worlds are created and maintained, and how meaning provides a framework for action" (Pickles 1985:xi). To know the world, one must experience it. This experience of place influences intentionality and the goals of human actors as agents of social change.

Residents that returned to Village de l'est found a landscape greatly impacted by the storms. They remembered what their community meant to them and how the physical and cultural landscape was part of their identity – an identity that was now being threatened. The population drew strength from their memories of life before the hurricanes, collectively deciding to take action and repair damage to their neighborhood. Members of the community reminisced about their prior experience of place, becoming determined to reclaim the landscape that had become part of their character. My job as a scientist is to "give an account of the earth as the world of man" (Pickles 1985:xii). Being in the field and engaging consultants allow me the opportunity to see the landscape as defined by the humans that interact with it. When I enter their

world, I document everyday lived experience, and attempt to understand how these experiences are shaped by the poetics of place.

Maintaining Ethnic Tradition

A Legacy

From a war torn land they came,
To a distant place much more tame.
As a people, they would solidly band,
Making the most of their new land.
Wonderful market garden produce to sell,
Their unique story was something to tell.
From faraway areas comes their seed,
Crops aplenty for all to feed.
Tending the gardens were the old,
Proudly displaying bounty to be sold.
The gardens of the elderly that take the lead,
Symbolize the commitment of solidarity to fill the need.
The young are taught by the wise that came,
Traveling so far, working, leaving their mark and name.

-- Meredith Morgan Feike

Speaking about their displacement, consultants told of how they missed the hustle and bustle of the Saturday morning Farmer's Market (see Figure 24) and being able to walk to the home of a friend for tea and a dose of friendly gossip. The physical and cultural landscape of the neighborhood was forever part of them and they were determined to feel at home once again. The market gardening landscape that continues to thrive in New Orleans East's Little Vietnam represents a form of cultural expression. I view the gardens as a lens through which to observe human interaction, social norms, and the perpetuation of ethnic traditions. Gardens grown in the backyards of homes in Village de l'est symbolize ties with a native homeland that is far removed but never forgotten in the hearts and minds of Vietnamese immigrants carving a place of their own in an urban metropolis.

Figure 24. Saturday morning Farmer's Market on Alcee Fortier Blvd. (pre-Katrina) (photo by MQVNC)

Gardens offer researchers a means to observe people's dynamic relationship with nature. Archaeological evidence suggests that the origination of gardens coincided with the earliest human settlements, signaling humanity's inherent need to imbue a geographical area with meaning and secure a sense of place that would serve multiple functions for members of diverse populations. Read as text, the design, upkeep, and utility of garden landscapes illustrate lived experience and the various social norms, traditions and cultural heritage that transform space into place. Hoping to attain a more holistic understanding of the significance of gardens, researchers continue to investigate garden landscapes from various spatial, ecological, and socio-cultural perspectives.

Market gardening is a label used to describe the practice of intensive vegetable, fruit, and flower production for monetary profit. The Vietnamese community of eastern Orleans Parish

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lays claim to a market gardening landscape that proved resilient to the devastating effects of

disaster. As residents of the ethnic enclave returned to their neighborhoods after Hurricane

Katrina, they set out to revitalize their community by gutting homes, reconstructing vital

landmarks, and replanting their vegetable and herb gardens – an act that was integral to restoring

a sense of normalcy in the aftermath of disaster.

In 1994, geographers Christopher Airriess and David Clawson (1994) published an article

that examined the Vietnamese market gardens in New Orleans from both an ecological and

spatial perspective. Conducting surveys that inventoried plants and mapped backyard gardens

and larger levee garden plots, Airriess and Clawson identified seasonal crop assemblages, noted

genetic diversity, described spatial variations in cropping scale and composition, and explained

the agricultural cycle of planting and harvesting, various crop uses (i.e. dietary role) and the

technological inputs (i.e. equipment, fertilizer, water, etc.) used in the gardening practices of

community members. After establishing the ecological relationships and spatial variations that

provided the basis for the demarcation of a three-garden typology, Airriess and Clawson

interviewed gardeners to gain knowledge of the gardening activities utilized in this form of

polyculture. The authors stressed that garden upkeep is almost exclusively the responsibility of

elderly community members, adding that the garden landscape is an integral component in

maintaining ethnic identity in the midst of the acculturation process (see Figure 25). For a review

of additional research conducted by Christopher Airriess in New Orleans East, refer to Airriess et

al. 2008; Airriess and Clawson 1991; Chen et al. 2007; Leong et al. 2007; and Li et al. 2010,

2008.

While the extensive community levee gardens (see Figure 26) have yet to return after

Hurricane Katrina, the Mary Queen of Viet Nam Community Development Corporation

spearheads the Viet Village Urban Farm, a project designed to allow Vietnamese gardeners to

carry on the community's agricultural tradition. The farm will be,

> "an intensively used productive landscape that will include a major produce
> market, commercial agriculture, and community gardens. These key functions
> will be supported by a network of green infrastructure and a range of community
> facilities that encourage the use of the site by everyone in the community. The
> farm is designed to be sustainable both culturally and environmentally. The farm
> will be built in several phases. Phase one of the implementation (scheduled to
> begin spring 2010) will involve site clearing, composting of vegetation,
> construction of the major circulation elements including roads and irrigation, as
> well as construction of community plots (25 x 25 feet) and part of the farmer's
> market. Phase 2 will involve the expansion of commercial plots, and Phase 3 will
> involve the rest of the farmer's market and livestock area" (internet source # 18).

Figure 25. Elderly Vietnamese man tending his garden (photo by MQVNC)

Community members are excited over plans for the Viet Village Urban Farm, speaking candidly about how market gardening (see Figure 27) maintains the Vietnamese agricultural culture and allows traditional foodways to be passed down through the generations. According to one young Vietnamese man,

> "market gardens play a huge role in everyday community life. You've got a lot of greens, a lot of vegetables that many typical markets like Winn-Dixie or Wal-Mart do not have. And a lot of these can only be found at our market. And so it plays a huge role. That's the food that our family buys and lives off of. And so without it, you wouldn't be able to have this good food that my mom cooks or my grandmom cooks for the family."

Figure 26. Google aerial photo showing remnants of destroyed levee gardens

A ninety-four year old Vietnamese woman from the community still grows vegetables in her garden. She sells the produce at the Saturday Farmer's Market, sending the money she makes

to her son who is a pastor on an island. That is how she helps him with his ministry without

having to rely on her other children for financial assistance. She has complete monetary control

over it. Commenting on the role of market gardening in the community, Father Vien explained,

> "it's part of the agricultural culture. It's also a good source of exercise for the old
> people. Not only exercise, but also they can sell it at the market and make money
> from it. When you think about it, older people still feel that they have control.
> That they're still useful. So, it's mental health as well."

Figure 27. Market Gardening in Village de l'est (photo by MQVNC)

Discussing the market gardens with Tuan Nguyen, Business Development Director of the

Mary Queen of Viet Nam Community Development Corporation, I began to gain a clearer

understanding of how the gardening tradition is perceived by the younger generation. Talking about gardening and how his own family follows the ethnic tradition he stated,

> "that's something community members have always done. Our culture, our heritage has always been to grow. Both my parents spend a large amount of time in their garden. It's their hobby, it's what they do. Whatever they grow they'll eat, and whatever the surplus is it's given to others in the family. My mom started one little garden for me in my backyard. So I have peppers back there, cilantro and basil, and aloe vera in case I get burned. So, it's kinda passed on unintentionally to kids and you don't even realize it. They've taught us. It's funny because I have it in my backyard and I'm not a farmer by trade. I don't think I have a green thumb, but now I have these things in my life."

One business owner in his forties explained how convenient it was to have a farmer's market in the neighborhood, adding that the gardening culture allows for sharing between family members and friends. He commented how,

> "for fresh vegetables and all the materials we use for cooking, it's quite a big convenience as far as to shop. Some grow it to sell. But for most people it's for themselves and then whatever they can't consume they pretty much give out to the other people in the community. To their friends and neighbors. Just like now, my father-in-law has some fishes for us. They go fishing and they share whatever they catch."

Understanding Vietnamese Human Experience in NOLA East

The experience of the Vietnamese of New Orleans East is written in the landscape of the community – it is in their gardens, their shops, and their church. Damage from the floods tested the will of the population, as well as the sustainability of the environment. Every rebuilt structure symbolizes the victory of human agency in a time of crisis. The collective experience of the Vietnamese during this emotionally trying time forever changed how they perceive the space that surrounds them. Interviews with consultants reveal that the population became even tighter knit since the commencement of the rebuilding process. Many say that their community is stronger than ever, and feel they made the right decision while displaced – a collective decision to return

in masse and rebuild infrastructure one day at a time. When asked if he thought the community

was stronger than it was before the storm Father Vien commented,

> "absolutely. I think that the community now believes that it has a voice. The community has seen its successes in terms of influence in the local government. And so, it is more self-determined in many ways. There's a mutual respect between the youth and the elders. The elders pre-Katrina felt that the youth were losing their roots. The youth were feeling that the elders were not in touch with reality; they were still talking about Vietnam and living on the memories. Well, then came Katrina. Most of the older people did not completely understand English enough to follow the news. So it had to be translated, or really interpreted for them. And then they needed help filling out their forms and all that. They needed the English of the young people. But then in terms of the returning and rebuilding, the young people never had this experience. That's why it's so good that Katrina happened now, while the first generation is still alive to anchor the return. The younger generation learns about the older generation, how they dealt with that. So now that knowledge is engrained in them. Thirty years down the road something happens again they will be the next generation to deal with it. That's where the young people really respect the old. In the sense of saying, man these are some tough cookies. We look at each other now saying they didn't lose their roots. And the younger ones are saying we're glad they live on the memories because we had to rely on that."

While the overall sentiment is optimistic, fear of future floods weighs heavily on the

minds of residents. When they look at their landscape they see the transformation and understand

the hard work entailed in reconstructing their lives. They experienced the hardships and obstacles

first hand and do not want to have a replay of the situation when the next hurricane targets the

area. One Vietnamese restaurant waitress explained,

> "we come so far, it's been really fast how we got everything back opened. My house had roof damage and water, but we removed everything quick. We are just worried about a new storm. There won't be more money for us next time cause the government not want us to rebuild in the East. We will have to leave for good next time, maybe go to Texas and live. I'd try to come back anyway. This is home to my family. It's easy for us here. You can walk everywhere."

Consultants express frustration at the lack of federal government aid available and remain

suspicious of local officials who promise the construction of safer levees. In conversations the

government and city officials are often described as dirty and corrupt. As they gaze upon their

landscape they realize that it can happen again, in the blink of an eye. One family I interviewed

in the year following the storm talked about their disgust with city officials, and the uncertainty

the community is facing due to the district as a whole not rebuilding at an equivalent rate.

According to the patriarch of the family,

> "the rest of New Orleans East is no good, nobody is rebuilding. If they did things
> would be better for us. I want people to come back and fix their houses because
> there are many places abandoned out here. We worry that the city will say no to
> money for us if they are not back fixing houses. And we need hospital back, this
> is very important."

**Figure 28. Dong Phuong Restaurant and Bakery on Chef Menteur Highway
(photo by author)**

Many are worried about crime in the neighborhood and gang violence. Others complain

of a lack of city services still not available years after the initial impact of the hurricanes. Their

experience of the revitalization process brings mixed sentiment – they are proud of what they

have accomplished and feel that the community is stronger as a result of the collective effort to rebuild; however, they fear the future effectiveness of levees threatened by potential storms. A woman in her fifty's commented how, "the levee is not better, just the same. They should do it stronger so we don't have water next time. We are all here, you understand. They should make it so we won't have to worry so much."

Legacy of Strength

A Collective Spirit

Fleeing from war in the Far East,
The ethnic community settled, wishing for peace.
Hardship and conflict was what they previously knew,
Families were displaced, but wanted unity so.
2005 brought Hurricane Katrina, a dreaded name,
Bringing the area destruction, memories of same.
The residents came together to make things right,
Their speedy collective recovery was quite a sight.
The enclave unified, working both day and night,
Even when the area still had no light.
2010 reflects more progress and sustainability now,
The ethnic community deserves quite a bow.

-- Meredith Morgan Feike

The *Lebenswelt*, or life-world, of the New Orleans East Vietnamese, was altered by the events that followed August 29, 2005. My interviews with consultants often turn into story time, as they want to share their experiences of the hurricane and its aftermath. Everyone has a story to tell, and in many cases, the retelling of experience is therapeutic. Several consultants thanked me for listening to their story and commented that they wished more people would be interested in understanding their experience of the hardships inherent in the rebuilding process.

According to consultants, New Orleans East's Vietnamese population enjoyed a relatively peaceful existence in the city prior to the 2005 Hurricane Season. The ethnic enclave,

while located in a major metropolitan city, was structured in a way that allowed residents to

maintain the close social and kinship ties characteristic of the Vietnamese worldview. According

to one Vietnamese man in his early thirties,

> "the community is similar to what it was before. It's still as tight knit as it was before. There are a lot of extended families. You'll have three or four generations in some families. Here there is a sense of comfort. You can walk on foot if you need to go shopping, or you can walk to church. In other cities that are larger the communities are not as concentrated."


Figure 29. Chef Menteur Hwy. entrance to Vietnamese Strip Mall (photo by author)

During interviews with citizens that emigrated from Vietnam after the 1975 fall of

Saigon, I came to understand the community's legacy of displacement and forced migration. The

mass evacuation from New Orleans' below-sea-level property marked the third time some

Vietnamese were torn from their homes. Labeled "Boat People," the seaborne refugees that fled

Saigon became the future residents of Village de l'est. One Vietnamese woman who works as a

secretary described the exodus,

> "I was young, but I remember a good bit. I remember getting on a boat with my mother and sisters who were babies. I remember being sick, having stomach problem. My mother kept saying, 'it will be okay.' I remember that we had nothing when we came here. We were in Arkansas first, then here. The Catholics helped us; they made it so we could come here. We felt safe here in New Orleans. It's a great city, I love everything about it. I am never leaving. The hurricane was bad, but nothing like my people went through in the past."

As they stepped onto American soil they brought with them not just a legacy of

displacement, but also a strong sense of community characterized by the importance of family

values and religious faith. The older generation of Vietnamese immigrants that experienced such

turmoil earlier in life is the glue that holds today's ethnic enclave together. They are the

matriarchs and patriarchs of the community, called on for guidance and respected in every sense.

One elderly woman whose home was damaged by the storm was determined to make the

renovation of her home happen as quickly as possible. She was really hounding her son to hurry

up with the reconstruction process. Her son said, "mom, we can't come back. There's no

electricity, no water, no air conditioning." Her question to him was, "well, why can't we come

back?" The matriarch could not understand her son's rationale, as she spent a major part of her

life without any of the comforts of modernity. So for her, what's the problem? She spent two

years at the refugee camp in Malaysia. So what's the big deal? This experience of hardship

allowed the older generation to push for the neighborhood's self-rehabilitation. The elders are the

backbone of the community.

After interviews with several elderly Vietnamese it was apparent that they were the stronger generation, "sturdy stock" as my mother would say, much like our own "Greatest Generation" that lived through WWII. One senior citizen whose grandson was translating my questions for her joked, saying, "we can survive with little. All we need is some noodles and we will be okay." She had a hearty laugh and tickled her grandson with the witty answer. She went on to explain that, "the young people now are so materialistic. They have so much, things we never dreamed of having before. We did the best we could and that had to be enough. This generation needs to learn to work hard like we did."

Figure 30. Displaced citizens of Village de l'est (photo by MQVNC)

Vietnamese senior citizens often live with their children's family, expanding the "nuclear family" prevalent in Western societies. Interviews conducted with this portion of the population

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shed light on the reasons behind the community's ability to achieve such rapid revitalization.

While visiting a business on Alcee Fortier Blvd., I spoke with a man and his mother. She spoke a

little English, but her son had to interpret all of the conversation. She described how the storm

was nothing like what she and her husband endured during the Vietnam War. According to the

elderly woman,

> "we had to leave some of our family behind in Vietnam. That was hard because
> we knew they would not be safe. But we had to leave when we did, there was not
> enough time. When we got to America we were sick and worried. We found out
> much later they were okay. We started over here and things got better. We made
> things better over here. The city has been good to us; we owe the church a lot.
> When Katrina came we knew we could make it better again. This was not like
> before, everybody was together. It was just hard work and then it was done."

The owner of Ken's Pharmacy also shed light on his people's legacy of displacement and

how this influences the way people perceive the recent disaster. Ken stated,

> "we as Vietnamese went through a whole lot worse than this. The older
> generation had to go through so much hardship. Running from a storm is not
> running from gunfire. With gunfire you have to look over your shoulder.
> Hurricane Katrina is mostly a setback for us. It's more of an inconvenience."

Hard work, faith in God, and the love of family and friends were the three factors that

most of the older generation expressed to me when asked how they accomplished such a

remarkable feat. Standing in line at the Vietnamese bakery on Chef Menteur Hwy., I talked with

two ladies that were in their fifties. We spoke first about how I loved the bakery's pastries,

explaining that I had to buy extra for my mom and dad. They laughed when I added that my

parents were diabetic and really shouldn't be eating them at all. I asked how bad the hurricane

damaged their homes and why they decided to come back to New Orleans. One of the ladies

commented, "this is our home, you see. All of our family is here, our children, our grandchildren.

They are in good schools. Our house had a little water, but water is just a little thing. We cleaned

everything out and that was that." Her friend added, "our people have been through much worse than a little water everywhere."

Parishioners Unite

Consultants I spoke with highlighted the fact that the community was home, and they were staying no matter what. One great-grandmother, whose son was translating for her, expressed to me the importance of staying close to family, friends, and her church during hard times. Her son explained that they could make it through anything with God on their side. The son translated for his mother,

> "I feel that this place will be okay in the future. We know how to make things keep on and grow. Great things are happening here all the time. We Vietnamese understand what it means to be knocked down; we know how to get up. Go to church and listen to our pastor. He made things get together fast. God watched over our people in New Orleans."

Figure 31. Parishioners attending mass in the damaged MQVN Church (photo by MQVNC)

The Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church is the core of the community (see Figure 31). Almost every single Vietnamese person I talked to was either a parishioner of the church, or a family member of a parishioner. Before the storm, community members looked to the church for guidance and plans to evacuate were quickly made. During displacement it was the church that kept morale high. And when it was time to return and rebuild, it was the church that organized, galvanized and fought for the revitalization of the community. Consultants spoke with reverence and gratitude when discussing the role the church, and its pastor, played in the reconstruction process. According to one local business owner,

> "the community is all around the church. The church is the community. When Father Vien came back that was pretty much the pulling force that got the people here. Without the church there would probably be little by little. And there would be a few people that would come back no matter what. But the church pulled it all together and made it much quicker and easier."

To some residents of the enclave, the church is the most important element of the landscape. Talking with families hard hit by the storm, I found that the well being of the church was for several, top priority. The people I talked with were still suffering from the financial hardships brought on by gutting their homes and other flood related expenses. However, many seemed more interested in conveying to me the relief they felt when they returned to find their church still standing. The church is the focal point of the landscape. It is a place of worship, a meeting place for dialogue, and the overall center of community life. The church embodies all of the qualities needed to recover from disaster – love, faith, hope, courage, and selflessness.

Father Vien described how the structured nature of organized religion aided in the community's recovery. He explained,

> "the church was very structured in the sense that every parishioner has a territorial membership, so they belong to a zone. That zone has its own leadership. Each zone has several hamlets; each hamlet has its own leadership. In order to reach someone all I needed to do was to call the Pastoral Council. The Pastoral Council then gradually would get down to that person. It has a structure, a very organized

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structure so there is no question about who's leading, who's not. This is very clear. This is a community; other groups are neighborhoods outside of here. There's no one over anyone. It's a loosely connected membership thing. It's more territorial. No one has jurisdiction over it per se, outside of the government. Here we have jurisdiction. And that, in times of chaos, that's crucial."

My journey into the world of phenomenology changed my process of conceptualization and aided me in the discovery of new pathways of engagement. According to Christopher Tilley,

"the key issue in any phenomenological approach is the manner in which people experience and understand the world. Phenomenology involves the understanding and description of things as they are experienced by a subject. It is about the relationship between Being and Being-in-the-world" (Tilley 1994:11).

Studying communities devastated by disaster, I came to understand how the poetics of a place affects resilience and sustainability. While Vietnamese residents spoke about the priceless belongings that were ruined in the floodwaters and the mildew that overran their homes, they all were thankful to be able to return to the community that defines them. For members of the ethnic enclave, attachment to place fueled the recovery process and strengthened community solidarity.

As human actors, we strive to leave our imprint on the various landscapes that dot the earth. The landscape is constantly changing as a result of our motivations, attitudes and goals. The built environment is tangible and easily accessed; however, the spirit or character of a place remains abstract and more difficult to define. Scientists are gradually uncovering how the landscape shapes the everyday lived experiences and perceptions of man. Our connection to place, and experience with it, affects our behavior. In the case of the Vietnamese of New Orleans East, experience of place influenced collective behavior that resulted in the revitalization of an ethnic community.

Chapter 7

Exploring the African-American Perspective

Figure 32. African-American victims of Hurricane Katrina (www.katrinaimages.com)

Rejecting the Shelter of Last Resort

As Vietnamese residents evacuated out of New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina's landfall, their collective decision not to join thousands of evacuees in the city's Shelter of Last Resort, the Superdome, was blatantly evident. But why had they decided against the local refuge? It is certainly not because they weren't used to being around African-Americans, as the racial makeup of New Orleans East is 86.8% black (Brown University Report 2006). They shared their neighborhood and attended classes with African-Americans at district public schools. So why did

they not evacuate to the same location? Lydia Lum put forth a compelling argument for the transcultural disjunction, explaining how the Vietnamese community of New Orleans East has lived alongside the African-American population for the past three decades, often having a front row seat to observe the racial inequality endured by the city's Black residents. According to Dr. Nien-chu Kiang, director of Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts-Boston,

> "the distrust of New Orleans officials by the city's Vietnamese population may have had its roots in the Black community. When the officials designated the Superdome as a safe haven, Vietnamese residents seemingly knew what to expect. The Superdome would become a 'Black Shelter.' The Vietnamese didn't believe [Superdome] officials would provide Blacks with adequate services in response to Katrina, so their fate would be the same unless they turned to other Vietnamese" (Lum 2005:24).

Data sets (SF1, SF3), acquired in 2000 by the U.S. Census Bureau and compiled by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, break down the pre-Katrina demographic characteristics of Village de l'est. As of 2000, the racial makeup of the community was 55.4% African-American, 37.1% Asian, 3.6% White, and 2.4% Hispanic. Any examination of the post-Katrina racially mixed neighborhood of Village de l'est would be incomplete without the inclusion of an African-American perspective of the storm and its aftermath. In the following chapter, discussions with African-Americans from Village de l'est, Plum Orchard, Spring Lake and Goretti, are incorporated into an ethnomusicological study I conducted immediately after Hurricane Katrina. The interviews showcase the plight and viewpoints of African-Americans victimized by the disaster.

Songs of Resistance

Musical expression explores the underlying meanings, perceptions, attitudes and values that influence our interaction with the cultural and physical landscapes of the world. Human experience is often immortalized in the lyrics and melodies of songs that encapsulate both the

essence of place and the lived reality of its inhabitants. As a child growing up in New Orleans, I quickly became attune to the various sounds that embody the soul of the Crescent City. Listening to an old Royal Street blues musician play his harmonica, an outing to Preservation Hall for a jazz performance, or simply watching my mother teach her dance students a routine to Scott Joplin's *The Entertainer*, are experiences that allowed me to observe first-hand the city's distinct musical legacy. Yet at such a young age I was still naive, unable to fully comprehend the circumstances surrounding the birth of the city's African-American musical traditions and how this celebrated legacy was reflective of a cultural heritage shaped by the poetics of racial and social inequality.

Songs of resistance that protest the racial inequalities found in the Deep South have been sung by African-Americans, free and enslaved, for nearly three-hundred years. Since the inception of slavery in New Orleans during the eighteenth-century, the city's African-American population has often turned to their unique musical traditions to express life struggles. Now in the twenty-first century, it is fitting that the newest vehicle for African-American musical expression, rap and hip hop, be employed as a tool to protest the severe social and racial inequalities exposed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The musical lyrics composed in response to the government's handling of the worst disaster in American history provide a provocative portrayal of a new African oral tradition that embraces a legacy of resistance. Rap and hip hop artists from around the country used their music as a medium to articulate the frustration and hopelessness felt by the victims of Hurricane Katrina. The musicians offer a testimony of the horrific events that occurred in the days following the storm and lend a critical voice that emphasizes the discrimination and blatant bigotry that exists in America.

The 2005 Atlantic hurricane season unveiled racial disparities previously obscured by long held romantic notions of the antebellum south and the Big Easy's laissez-fare attitude.

Trauma from the ordeal combined with the collective feeling of abandonment (see Figure 32), led some to violence during those dark days in the city's history. Images of the human suffering and chaos that transpired during the week following Hurricane Katrina's landfall horrified the American public.

Figure 33. An African-American woman makes her way through floodwaters (www.katrinaimages.com)

The government's handling of the crisis solidified the worldview of many African-Americans who deeply believed that the country's lack of timely response was inextricably linked to the racial makeup of the disaster area. Their collective memory of racial injustice signaled that history was repeating itself in the new millennium. An African-American woman from Village de l'est explained,

"some things never change. We might not be slaves now, but we still not treated right. If America gave a damn about us they woulda came and saved us. All those poor people were hacking through their attic and sat up on roofs for days before Bush sent the choppers in. If this was White's they sure woulda done things differently. I mean, this is pitiful; it's a sad state I tell ya…These Vietnamese people don't have it any better. Ain't nobody doing nothing for them either. They doin it for themselves, you know. Ya got to have White skin to make it here."

In order to gain a holistic understanding of the root causes behind such distrust of the federal government, one must view the struggles of African-Americans from a historical perspective. During the period of enslavement African-Americans were denied the basic human rights guaranteed to all men by the country's founding fathers. When the principles of the United States Constitution were at long last accurately interpreted by Abraham Lincoln and other abolitionists, African-Americans were emancipated, but in no way free to attain the American dream. The era of Reconstruction that followed the Civil War brought with it the hope of a new beginning, a hope that was quickly dashed when the promise of forty acres and a mule did not materialize. The progress that the United States experienced over the next century was largely facilitated by the labor of African-Americans, who constructed levees, built railroads and dug canals. When the nation was called to arms during the great wars of the twentieth century African-Americans fought gallantly, only to return to the United States as second class citizens forced to endure the humiliation inherent in the Jim Crow Laws. Many were lynched, beaten, ridiculed and treated as subhuman, at a time when America was proclaiming an ideology of freedom and equality. In the 1960's, the African-American community saw the assassination of a leader who fought diligently for equal rights, declaring from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, that separate did not mean equal. Now, decades after the death of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., African-Americans are dealing with new forms of discrimination that, while not as overt, are certainly just as dehumanizing. Racial profiling, political disenfranchisement and institutional racism, are several key issues of injustice currently plaguing the African-American

population. By relying on the collective strength of community, an unshakeable faith and desire to overcome adversity, African-Americans remain resilient in the face of prejudice and inequity. From the time of their forced relocation to the Americas to the present, their resistance to inequality has found a voice in musical traditions that capture the essence of what it feels like to be black in America.

Figure 34. African-Americans braving floodwaters to reach safety (www.katrinaimages.com)

A group of young African-American men gathered outside a neighborhood home in Village de l'est listen to the latest hot rhymes on their car stereo. The sound of Tupac is heard from nearly a block away thanks to a powerful amp and sub woofers. They've seen me before

talking with people in the neighborhood, so they don't seem too unnerved when I stop to ask

them if they would mind answering some questions about their experience of Hurricane Katrina.

I explained my project the best I could to the young men, describing how I'm using rap music to

show how Blacks are speaking out about the racial injustices of the disaster. Talking about the

disaster one African-American boy commented,

> "yeah, it messed my people up pretty bad, coulda been worse though. All my family is alive, we know some that ain't though. It's crazy here in New Orleans, ya never know what's gonna happen. People drownin, getting shot by the police, crazy niggas rapin people. It'll blow ya mind if ya think too much, you know. I think the city don't plan on doin jack for us Black folk, they want us up outta here, quick like. They know we can't come down here if there's no place to be, no work. They keep us poor, they got a perfect way to get rid of us…that's tight what ya doin with the rap beats, they tellin it like it is, ya heard."

Today's digitally charged social climate is providing African-American musicians with

unprecedented access to the masses. Black Entertainment Television (BET), Music Television

(MTV), downloadable mp3's on the Internet, radio broadcasting stations, and social networking

sites such as MySpace and Facebook, give African-American song writers a platform to transmit

their lived experiences, attitudes and perceptions. This cultural diffusion allows the general

public to gain insight into the worldviews of an American minority group. Hip hop and rap

music are leading the way in the transmission of black culture, topping the charts in the record

industry, while becoming the popular music of choice for millions of America's youth. At its

inception, this form of black musical expression was celebrated solely by African-Americans

inhabiting the nation's most impoverished and socially marginalized ghettos. Now in the new

millennium, rap and hip hop are part of mainstream musical experience, with devoted listeners

from all walks of life. Over the past fourteen years, I had the opportunity to witness the musical

genre transform into a cultural phenomenon that unites Americans across conventional ethnic,

racial and social boundaries.

A Common Denominator

Born in 1979, I was too young to know anything about Grandmaster Flash or The Sugar Hill Gang. Instead, my introduction to rap came from two sources, DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince's *Parents Just Don't Understand* and Salt-n-Pepa's *Push It*. I attended my first rap concert in 1994, at the famous Tipitina's on Tchopitoulas. While watching Mystical perform, my girlfriends and I definitely drew some stares, as we were the only whites in the audience. I'm sure the concert goers thought we were either a little crazy or had some serious guts, as rap concerts held in New Orleans were not yet racially integrated. Over the next decade, I attended a multitude of concerts in various local venues. Some of the performers I had the privilege of seeing live include Scarface, Cash Money, DMX, Woo Tang, Snoop Dog, Dr. Dre and my personal favorite, Nate Dog and Warren G. Through the years I observed the gradual ethnic and racial integration of New Orleans rap and hip hop concerts, an integration that I believe is representative of a shift in how African-American music and culture is perceived within the borders of the United States.

Several months after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans, I ventured down to the French Quarter to watch Juvenile and Partners-N-Crime perform at the House of Blues. Looking at the packed dance floor I was surprised by the racial diversity of the crowd. African-Americans, Whites, Asians, Hispanics and Arabs were anxiously awaiting the show, dancing and singing along to the latest rap tunes. They had come together as a result of one common denominator – a love for hip hop. To gain a better understanding of their connection to the hip hop culture, throughout the concert I spoke with several White and Asian attendees. What I found was an attitude of inclusion, characterized by a sense that they too were part of this African-American musical tradition. Watching them rap the words of Juvenile's lyrics I realized

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that they were not classifying the musical genre in racial terms, but rather embracing the common ground that presently exists between distinct socio-cultural realities.

Figure 35. Abandoned home in the Plum Orchard neighborhood (photo by author)

Hurricane Katrina's impact on the city's poor African-American population is apparent upon entering the Plum Orchard neighborhood in New Orleans East. Abandoned homes (see Figure 35) are the majority, with renovated properties few and far in between. Conversations with African-Americans residing in the devastated neighborhood tell of drug trafficking, desperation, and an intense feeling of hopelessness. One African-American elderly woman who was able to finance the reconstruction of her home explained,

> "I'm glad I came back, but I don't know if I can stay. Things gotten so bad round these parts, I'm scared at night. This place has turned into nothing but dope deal city at night. I hear gun shots and think oh Lordy, those bullets are gonna fall on

me. Only one of my close neighbors came back, and well, it's two of them so that's safer. But I just don't know if I can stay here with hardly any people here. I came back and fixed up the place cause I invested so much in it. I thought it was the right thing to do. I don't know anymore. You see those shoes up there on the wires? That means they have a crack house over there. It's gotten so bad, fiends walkin the streets at night. This used to be a nice place to live. Not no more."

Figure 36. Homes in Plum Orchard – note shoes hanging from power lines (photo by author)

A young African-American couple from the Plum Orchard neighborhood shared the

elderly woman's sentiments adding,

"drugs are a real problem in the neighborhood. They were before Katrina, but now it's worse. There are so many abandoned houses that are being used as crack

shacks and flop houses. We really need more police patrolling the neighborhood. I think they scared to come back here, actually. We hardly ever see them. More people would come back if they thought the city was behind it. They not gonna spend their money to fix up these houses till they know for sure everything ain't gonna be leveled. I can see something like that happening in this crooked city. They don't care about Black people's homes; they want to level everything out here in the East. They want it to be bad so they have an excuse to bring the bull-dozers. I'm tellin ya, they not gonna save this place, not a chance. Them people in charge will never understand how things are for us down here. We gonna stay till we can't no more, this is my momma's house."

A Counterculture is Born

Rap music and the counterculture that it perpetuates originated during the late 1970's as the American economy was experiencing multiple recessions that negatively impacted African-American enclaves throughout the country. In contrast to many musical traditions,

> "rap's arrival was not engineered by Tin Pan Alley or other big business interests. Instead it emerged from the streets of inner-city neighborhoods as a genuine reflection of the hopes, concerns and aspirations of urban Black Youth. Rap is essentially a homemade street-level musical genre (Powell 1991:245).

During the years of reactionary republicanism brought by the Reagan and Bush Sr. presidencies, inner-city projects were filled with unemployed African-Americans that were only a little less well off than their neighbors who struggled to pay bills with minimum wages. At a time when Louis Farrakhan was proclaiming ideas of black supremacy as he reformed the Nation of Islam, rap originated on the streets of New York's Harlem and the South Bronx. Over the next two decades musical artists such as LL Cool J, Run-DMC, N.W.A., Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls set the stage for the evolution of rap and hip hop into a cultural force that forever changed how many African-Americans express their complex identities.

Human experience shapes how we interpret our surrounding cultural milieu. The lyrics of rap music often describe the plight of the African-American who is struggling to overcome the racial disparities inherent in the social, economic and political frameworks of the United States.

Nowhere are these disparities so pronounced as in the geographical region of the Deep South, or "Dirty South," to borrow a label coined by Southern rappers. The desire to sample Creole cuisine, take part in elaborate festivals and observe round the clock debauchery in the French Quarter attracts visitors from all parts of the world to the city of New Orleans. Sightseers try to tap into the history of a bygone era, touring antebellum plantations and booking excursions on riverboats that meander slowly down the mighty Mississippi River. As tourists walk through the wings of grand estates they listen to the commentary of guides, who highlight the magnificent opulence of plantation life, often editing out the horrors endured by both field hands and house servants.

For centuries Louisiana has been a hotbed for inequality, with countless residents assigning inferior status to an African-American population whose customs are often misinterpreted, becoming the punch line of degrading jokes. The microcosm of Uptown New Orleans is illustrative of the extreme racial and social difference that exists within the Pelican State. The affluent Garden District that runs along the historic St. Charles Avenue is an urban landscape characterized by extreme privilege and class. Wealthy residents often drive luxury vehicles, shop at high-end specialty clothing stores and purchase groceries from gourmet food markets. Children typically attend private schools and many young women follow custom, making their debut during Mardi Gras festivities. The mansions that host the lavish galas and banquets organized by socialites of blue-blooded descent are a far cry from the impoverished ghettos that line the area's backstreets.

Just blocks from St. Charles Avenue and its inhabitant's easy-living lifestyle stand some of the city's worst projects and ghettos. As is the case with other impoverished sections of America, a large number of homes are dilapidated, with some lacking air-conditioning, a formula for

misery during the sweltering hot summers of the South. Many inhabitants seek government assistance, a move that in no way guarantees that they will ever get ahead financially.

Several African-Americans I interviewed since the storm explained that big business politics often hinders them from acquiring a decent job that pays above the minimum wage. A woman trying to fix up her grandmother's home in Plum Orchard to sell explained,

> "I'm trying to do this for my grandmaw, she gets too upset coming down here and seeing all the destruction. I'm outta work right now, so I have time to come out here and make sure the Mexicans are doing right work. I used to work at the Wal-Mart over on the Service Road. They never opened back up after Katrina. It's hard to find a good job now in New Orleans. They just don't have none. And if they do, they goin to others, not me. You gotta know somebody these days."

Others discussed the appalling conditions of area public schools that sometimes are deficient of everything from decent plumbing, working air-conditioning systems and functioning classroom equipment. According to one African-American from Village de l'est,

> "my daughter used to go to Abramson High School. It's been closed since Katrina wrecked it. It needs to be torn down; it was horrible in there before the storm. The hallways smelled like piss and everything was falling apart. I hated that my baby girl had to go there. It was depressing having to send her there. But, that's where most of her friends in the neighborhood went."

Scores of young students drop out of school and adopt the life of the streets, a culture often synonymous with drug-trafficking, gang violence and teenage pregnancy. Several black youths articulated some of the societal problems negatively affecting their population, calling attention to substandard health care options and a shortage of afternoon programs for at-risk teens. Prior to the storm, projects such as the Calliope, Melpomene, Iberville and Magnolia, and the mixed Vietnamese/African-American New Orleans East neighborhood of Village de l'est, were breeding grounds for the drug trade and turf wars, both major contributing factors in the city's staggering annual homicide totals.

Out of the poverty stricken housing projects and low-income neighborhoods came the Big Easy's own version of hip hop and rap, New Orleans Bounce. I first heard the signature energetic style of Bounce as a freshman in high school when Ricky B was droppin' rhymes on the local Q93.3 radio station. I fondly remember riding the streets of Uptown with my girlfriends as we rapped word for word the lyrics of Ricky B's hit single *Shake for Ya Hood*. Rap artists such as Lady Redd, DJ Jubilee, U.N.L.V., Cheeky Blakk, and Soulja Slim gained popularity among both white and black audiences. In the 1990's rap groups NO Limit and the Hot Boyz emerged on the New Orleans music scene, gaining widespread commercial success. New Orleans hip hop placed the South on the map in terms of both mainstream popularity and respect within the nation's rap culture. Local venues began holding rap battles and a generation of rappers added a new chapter in the history of African-American musical tradition.

Rappers Speak Out

Hurricane Katrina greatly impacted the New Orleans rap scene, destroying a majority of the aforementioned venues and displacing a wide assortment of musicians. One of the rappers temporarily displaced was Juvenile, who rose to fame as part of the Cash Money Millionaires, the originators of hip hop's popular "bling-bling" cultural phenomenon. Shortly after the storm Juvenile sat down for an interview with AllHipHop.com, discussing the loss of his home and the hardships experienced by family members that were stranded in the embattled city for days after Katrina's landfall. He explained *Reality Check*, the title of his 2005 album, as

> "basically what we all go through sometimes in life. Or, some of us ain't even had our reality checked yet, you know what I'm saying? But for me, Katrina was mine…My reality check was like man, no matter what you do or how big you make it or how much money you made – I built my house – no matter how much you accomplish, you still a nigger…The truth is the levees didn't break. The levee was breached, but not by water. It was breached by military, by military firearms. People heard a boom, then the waterways. So, you know it's a whole bunch of lies man…

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What happened was the water was backing up in the wrong areas: the tourist areas"
(internet source #19).

While the majority of rappers around the country did not speak publicly about belief in

conspiracy theories, they were extremely vocal in their criticisms of President George W. Bush

and the American government's handling of the disaster event. David Banner, a Mississippi

rapper and founder of the Heal the Hood Foundation, expressed his perception of race relations

in America stating,

> "I think Hurricane Katrina has exposed America for what it is…We front like it's all good, but we know the levels of racism that are in America. I think this is more than just pulling the race card. It shows that America doesn't give a damn about people in the hood, period…America is the most powerful country in the world, but it takes four days to get here? I blame Bush for the time it took for them to react to the situation. I blame Bush for not taking this situation as seriously as they did after 9/11. This is ten times worse than 9/11. These are communities; whole cities of people, just gone. We're talking about a whole coast of people. These are the same states that helped assure that Bush was gonna get in office, and then he turned his back on them" (internet source #20).

Broadcasted images of human suffering and desperation unified and mobilized the rap

community. While some hip hop artists lent support by contributing millions of dollars to

disaster aid, others joined forces to perform at fundraisers such as the Heal the Hood Concert that

took place at Atlanta's Philips Arena in September 2005. As members of the hip hop culture

banded together in an unprecedented relief effort, several rap artists used their lyrical talents to

pen songs that declare the hypocrisy of the Bush administration. The musical compositions

released in response to the racial inequality unveiled by Hurricane Katrina embrace a legacy of

resistance and protest.

The rhymes on Public Enemy's 1988 album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us*

Back, marked the commencement of politically charged rap lyrics that buck the government

establishment. Afflicted by high rates of unemployment and unequal access to essential

community resources, African-American rappers began to write lyrics that reflected the

discrimination they experienced in everyday life. An African-American woman from Village de l'est talked about her experience living in the East and what she went through to get aid after the storm,

> "us Blacks are never gettin out of the ghetto. They gonna keep us here till we rot like those bodies in that water. This block is better than those others in the East, but all the East is now is one big ghetto. It's rough down here, I always gotta watch my back…When I tried to get my Red Cross money at the place in Slidell I had a hard time. My car was almost outta gas so I couldn't wait in that line. It went on for so long, miles and miles of cars lined up. I parked far down the road and walked. When I got up there they said I couldn't get my money cause I wasn't in my car. I was so mad, I coulda hit somebody. I jumped in the car with a family that saw what was happenin. Then they drove up and I was able to get my money, but they wasn't able to get theirs. I don't know why. Then when they dropped me off by my car I thought man, I hope they don't try to jack me. It was cool though. My family got Road Home money, but that didn't help my momma find a job. Nobody wants to hire an old Black woman with health problems. They give all the good jobs to the other people. It's dirty down here."

Viewing the African-American population as a community of the oppressed, a new rap aesthetic was formed that called for group solidarity and pride in one's African ancestry. Rap groups such as Public Enemy and the X-Clan promoted an Afrocentric culture that "positioned Black Nationalism in its political aspect at the center of hip hop" (Henderson 1996:326). Over the past twenty years the world of hip hop has protested how blacks are treated in American society, highlighting such events as the police beating of Rodney King and the introduction of crack cocaine into the nation's ghettos, as topics in rap's lyrical rhymes.

During the socially conscious decade of the 1960's America saw the development of the Black Arts Movement (Gladney 1995). The movement's goal of encouraging black art to serve a function, such as bettering the societal conditions negatively affecting the nation's African-American population, is being met by today's socio-political rap lyrics. By exposing the urban blight and the government's lack of resolve in helping to turn things around for black Americans living a life complicated by racial inequality, hip hop is informing the public and calling for

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change. The "work of the Black Arts Era and hip hop both provide a distinct and conscious

connection between artistic expression and the frustration of black people existing here in

America" (Gladney 1995:293). Surely the frustration that Gladney accentuates was felt by

thousands of Hurricane Katrina victims that were first trapped in a city besieged by floodwaters,

then displaced and separated from loved ones.

Conducting interviews with African-American consultants living in New Orleans East

allowed me the opportunity to better understand how African-Americans characterize

governmental response to the disaster and the role they believe race played in their experience of

the crisis. A large majority of consultants discussed feelings of abandonment and shock,

explaining that they could not believe a nation as rich as America could not have done more for

its citizens. An African-American woman from Spring Lake talked candidly about the role she

thought race played in the disaster stating,

> "I believe the Blacks were discarded like trash during Katrina. I cried watching all
> those news reports. I thought to myself, this country hasn't made all that progress.
> We still at the bottom of the barrel. Me, my son and his family evacuated to my
> cousin's house in Jackson, Mississippi. Thanks be to God that we got outta there
> when we did. We would of drowned if we stayed at home. My house is one-story
> and I can't swim. When I think of how bad other people had it at the Superdome
> and Convention Center it makes me sick. We were treated like animals. Like dirty
> pigs. That's just not right."

Thousands of young African-Americans suffered severe emotional trauma during

Hurricane Katrina's aftermath (see Figure 37), forever shaping how they perceive the world in

which they live. In a televised interview on CNN News, Dr. Irwin Bedlener, President of the

Children's Health Fund, explained that there are approximately 50,000 children still among the

displaced as of December 2007. Studies are finding extraordinarily high rates of mental health

problems in children and their parents, with symptoms such as sleep disorders, behavioral

problems, and serious depression, prevalent in what he deems "one of the most psychologically

vulnerable populations in the country" (Bedlener 2008).

Figure 37. African-American youth outside the Convention Center (www.katrinaimages.com)

The physical and mental suffering that the population of New Orleans experienced is

recounted in the lyrics of musicians who use rap as a medium for social protest, illustrating how

the genre's socio-political lyrics have become "a – or, perhaps the – principal medium for black

youth to express their views of the world" (Smitherman 1997:5).

Cry For Us

In *Cry For Us*, Virginia rapper Big Sty provides listeners with an account that chronicles the

struggles of storm victims, while criticizing the Bush administration's lack of timely response

and appropriate action. Featured on the track is Big Sty's label mate, Deshara Renee, whose

voice I believe is what makes the song so emotionally moving, tapping into the painful reality of

the human experience of Hurricane Katrina. The song opens with a sound byte taken from WWL

correspondent Garland Robinette's interview with New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, conducted

shortly after eighty percent of the city became inundated with floodwaters. Robinette is heard

asking the mayor, "do you believe that the president is seeing this, holding news conference on

it, but can't do anything?" To which Nagin responds,

> "tell him we had an incredible crisis here, and that his flying over in Air Force One does not do it justice. This is ridiculous. I don't want to see anybody do anymore goddamn press conferences. Don't do another press conference until the resources are in this city. Now get off your asses and let's do something and let's fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country" (internet source #21).

To set the critical tone of the song, Big Sty included the now famous interview clip

showcasing Mayor Nagin's frustration with President Bush and the unacceptably slow arrival of

emergency aid to the city. Explaining why he wrote the musical composition that protests the

government's lack of comprehensive disaster management and preparedness Big Sty states,

> "I was on the road doing a promotional gig. I passed through Dallas, and a friend of mine who was with me had family members that had just relocated from New Orleans. I had a chance to talk to them and see the whole struggle they were going through…Hearing the story from their mouths prompted me to do the song" (internet source #22).

The lyrics of *Cry For Us* offer a glimpse into the horrific circumstances that those stranded

in the city had to endure, stressing the hopelessness and desperation of individuals (see Figure

38) struggling to survive a disaster event that was significantly worsened by the decisions of

government officials and the lack of coordination between federal agencies. I chose to include

lyrics from several verses, as I believe they embody the attitudes and perceptions of many

African-Americans who experienced the human catastrophe:

Gotta letter for Bush from my man in New Orleans
He said stop treatin' us like we ain't important
The government's supposed to be here to support us
But when we needed you, you just ignored us
For four whole days we had to wait
And I ain't had no car, so I couldn't evacuate
The levee broke cause you stopped the funding
You knew Katrina was comin', you shoulda did somethin'

But you was out huntin', playin' golf or tennis
They voted you in office, but you ain't ever in it
I gotta daughter named Tina, and they call me a looter
Cause I stole bread just to feed her

And where the hell is FEMA
The Red Cross is somethin' cause dawg we sure ain't seen them
I lost my home, everything I own
My girl got raped in the bathroom at the Superdome

You turned your head and closed your eyes
How could you sit back and let us die
And I'm sick of them lies and propaganda
Dawg I got questions, I'm waitin for answers

So who's gonna cry for us
When the government lied to us
They ain't sent no supplies to us
They turned their heads and closed their eyes to us
I've been waitin' on the troops
For four days on the top of my roof
I lost everything so I had to loot
So, i'm that brother you gonna have to shoot (internet source #21)

Big Sty's musical composition calls attention to the violence that occurred in the wake of

Hurricane Katrina, the inability of the poor to evacuate to safety, and the inexcusable failure of

the United States government to provide timely rescue and essential provisions for a population

facing the direst of conditions.

Figure 38. Desperation at the Convention Center (www.katrinaimages.com)

Criticism of President George W. Bush is widespread within the African-American communities of New Orleans. A number of the people I interviewed believe that the president's actions during the crisis illustrate his status as a racist that could care less about the nation's black citizenry. One African-American male living in the Goretti neighborhood was adamant that George W. Bush is a racist. He stated,

> "everybody knows he and his daddy are racists, it's no secret around here. And they proved it to the world in Katrina. If it wasn't a Black city the food and water would have been here a whole lot faster. He doesn't care about us at all. He sure would have cared if it happened to Texas. Well, he probably wouldn't of cared if it was in the Mexican Ghetto. He probably hates them more than us."

George Bush Doesn't Care About Black People

The rap song penned by K.O., entitled *George Bush Don't Like Black People*, succinctly

describes how many African-Americans perceive the character of the 43rd President of the

United States. The artists based their remix of Kanye West's popular hit *Gold Digger* on the

infamous statement "George Bush doesn't care about black people," a remark that West declared

during NBC's live televised Hurricane Relief Telethon. The lyrics describe the horrific story of

people trapped in attics as rising floodwaters threatened the lives of tens of thousands of New

Orleans residents. K.O. addresses numerous issues such as incorrect information disseminated by

government officials and the controversial nature of looting during disaster events. An excerpt

from K.O.'s lyrical rhymes depicts President George W. Bush as a bigot leading a nation still

consumed by racial discrimination:

> Hurricane came through fucked us up 'round here
> Government acting like it bad luck down here
> All I know is that you better bring some trucks 'round here
> Wonder why I got my middle finger up 'round here
>
> People lives on the line you decline any help
> Since you takin' so much time, we survivin' ourself
> Just me and my pets and my kids and my spouse
> Trapped in my own house lookin' for a way out
>
> Five days in this motherfucking attic
> Can't use the cellphone I keep getting static
> Dying cause they lying 'stead of telling us the truth
> Other day the helicopters got my neighbors off the roof
> We screwed cause they say they're coming back for us, too
> That was three days ago I don't see no rescue
>
> See a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do
> Since God made the path and I'm tryin' to walk through
> Swam to the store, trying to look for food
> Corner store's kinda flooded so I broke my way through
> I got what I could but before I got through
> The news say police just shot a black man tryin' to loot

George Bush don't like Black People (repeat four times)

I ain't sayin' he a gold digger
But he ain't lookin' for no broke niggas
I ain't sayin' he a gold digger
But he ain't checkin' for no broke niggas
Five damn days, five long days
And at the end of the fifth he walkin' in like, "Hey!"
Chillin' on his vacation sitting patiently
Them Black folks gotta hope, gotta wait and see
If FEMA really comes through in an emergency
But nobody seems to have a sense of urgency

Now the latest we're reduced to crime
I guess Bush said niggas – we're used to dyin'
He said "I know it looks bad just have to wait"
Forgettin' folks are too broke to evacuate
Niggas starvin' and they dyin' of thirst
But he had to go and check the new refineries first
Makin' a killin' off the price of gas
He woulda been up in Connecticut twice as fast
After all that we been through nothin' has changed
You can call Red Cross but the fact remains that
George Bush ain't a gold digger
But he ain't fuckin' with no broke niggas
George Bush ain't a gold digger
But he ain't fuckin' with no broke niggas (internet source #23)

Nearly three years after Hurricane Katrina devastated large portions of the city of New

Orleans, a significant percentage of local residents remain frustrated at the slow pace of

recovery. Random cross-sections of the population are often highly critical of local, state and

federal lawmakers, who in the words of one consultant, "dropped the ball from the beginning" of

the crisis. Many believe that the commander in chief would have responded differently to the

disaster if it had occurred in a "whiter" and "richer" region of the United States, an idea that

K.O. touched upon when rapping that Bush "woulda been up in Connecticut twice as fast." The

notion that race and social class played a role in government response time is by no means a

topic of conversation solely discussed by lower-class African-American victims of the storm, as

this belief was espoused during dozens of informal interviews with individuals representing

multiple races, diverse economic backgrounds and varying degrees of educational attainment.

Katrina Klap

While the vulnerability of critical infrastructure greatly reduced the city's capacity for resilience,

it was the government's failure to take into account the extreme vulnerability of the

impoverished population of New Orleans that transformed the disaster into a human catastrophe.

In *Katrina Klap*, rapper MosDef lashes out at George W. Bush and the racial and social

disparities that continue to permeate all corners of the social, political and economic fabric of

American society. The song, which is a remake of Juvenile's popular Magnolia Projects rap

anthem *Nolia Klap*, compares Bush's treatment of African-Americans to the way garbage is

handled by the general public. An African-American woman from Mid-City, whom I played the

track for, explained how MosDef was relaying a perception prevalent among members of the

New Orleans black community. She discussed how most of her family and friends truly believed

that the president did not deem the city's poor African-Americans worthy of saving as the crisis

unfolded. Decades after the equal rights movement, it is troubling to note that portions of the

nation's black population are still made to feel inferior in a country that touts itself as a nation of

immigrants. The following excerpt from MosDefs's politically charged lyrics addresses the

widespread poverty that afflicts those living in the ghettos of New Orleans:

> Listen homie, its dollar day in New Orleans
> Its where there water everywhere and people dead in the street
> And Mr. President he about that cash
> He got a policy for handlin' the niggas and trash
> And if you poor you black
> I laugh a laugh, they won't give when you ask
> You betta off on crack, dead or in jail, or with a gun in Iraq

And it's as simple as that
No opinion my man its mathematical fact
Listen, a million poor since 2004
And they got illions and killions to waste on the War
And make you question what the taxes is for
Or the cost to reinforce the broke levee wall
Tell the boss he shouldn't be the boss anymore
Ya be ameen

God save these streets
One dollar per every human being
Feel that Katrina Clap
See that Katrina Clap
God save these streets
Quit bein' cheap nigga freedom ain't free
Feel that Katrina Clap
See that Katrina Clap
Lord have mercy
Lord God God save our souls
A-God save our souls, A-God
A-God save our souls
Lord God God save our souls
A-God save our soul soul soul
Soul Survivor

Its dollar day in New Orleans
Its where water everywhere and babies dead in the streets
Its enough to make you holler out
Like where the fuck is Sir Bono and his famous friends now
Don't get it twisted man I dig U2
But if you ain't about the ghetto, then fuck you too
Who care bout Rock 'n' Roll when babies can't eat food
Listen homie that shit ain't cool
Its like dollar day for New Orleans
Its where the water everywhere and homies dead in the streets
And Mr. President's a natural ass
He out treatin' niggas worse than they treat the trash (internet source #24)

Rappin' the phrase "freedom ain't free," MosDef points out the hypocrisy inherent in the

Bush administration's stance on domestic and foreign policy. Numerous individuals I talked with

highlight how the president went to war on a platform of bringing freedom and equality to those

suffering under brutal dictatorships, while doing nothing to secure freedoms and further racial and social equality in the American homeland.

Figure 39. Protesting the government's handling of the disaster (www.moveon.org)

Hell No, We Ain't Alright

The wars presently underway in the Middle East are also mentioned in Public Enemy's *Hell No, We Ain't Alright*. Chuck D and Flavor Flav, notorious for using lyrical rhymes as a means to protest racial discrimination, provide listeners with a provocative portrayal of the disaster event through the eyes of two African-American musicians. The song draws attention to the fact many

National Guard members from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama were unable to aid in the

Gulf Coast rescue and recovery process because they were overseas waging the War on

Terrorism. Emphasizing how blind to reality the American government has become under the

leadership of George W. Bush, the rappers lyrics convey the idea that equality in America is

nothing but an illusion. The controversy that surrounds using the label "refugee" to describe

displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina is touched upon in the track, as is the conception that

mass media outlets communicate viewpoints that neglect the lived experience of African-

Americans:

> Guess it gotta come down to this
> In order to see things for what they are and what they is
> We still may not be free up in this piece or treated very equally as
> Far as I can see. Now if you saw what I saw
> And see what I see on the TV that lead me to write this song
> After talking to my father
> But the anger in this song seem to write its damn self
> Hell No We Ain't Alright
> It's your boy Son of a Bush. Hahaha
>
> Now all these press conferences and breaking news alert, this just in
> While your government looks for a war to win
> Claim for the blame game, names where I begin
> Walls closin' need to get some help to my kin
> While the rest of this Bush nation stands
> The drama unfolds as we the people under the stand
> Fifty percent of this Son of a Bush nation
> Is like hatin' on hatin' aspect of assassination
> Ask Pat Robinson, quiz him
> Smells like terrorism
> Racism in the news, still one sided views
> Sayin' whites find food
> Pray for the National Guard who be ready to shoot
> Because they be sayin' us blacks loot
> New Orleans in the mornin', afternoon and night
> Hell no! Hell no. We ain't alright! (repeat two times)
> New Orleans in the mornin', afternoon and night
> Hell no! Damn damn
> "Neva bada than" - Bring the noise

Now I see we be the new faces of refugees
We ain't even overseas, but stuck here on our knees
Forget the plasma TV, ain't no electricity
New world's upside down and out of order
Shelter? Food? Wassup, where's the water?
No answers from disaster, them masses hurtin'
So who the fuck we call – Halliburton?
Son of a Bush, how you wanna just trust that cat
To fix shit, when all the help is stuck in Iraq
Makin' war plans, takin' more stands than Afghanistan
2,000 soldiers there dyin' in the sand
But that's over there, right? What's over here?
Is a noise so loud
That some can't hear
But on TV I can see
Bunches of people
Looking just like me
And they ain't alright (internet source #25)

Chuck D and Flavor Flav, like most of the international citizenry, watched tragedy unfold from a distance. Visiting Europe at the time of Katrina's landfall, I was overwhelmed with feelings of helplessness and angst, unable to fully process the extent of the devastation. While I had difficulty wrapping my mind around the incompetence demonstrated by the American government, I was not surprised that the city's African-American population was suffering disproportionately. The degree of racial and social inequity that exists in the Deep South is evident to anyone that calls the region home. I was incensed by the government's lack of preparation and failure to properly handle a disaster situation predicted years ago. The amount of time it took for food, water and other essential provisions to arrive in the besieged city was totally unacceptable. A number of consultants I spoke with believe that the lack of presidential leadership during the catastrophe was grounds for the impeachment of George W. Bush (see Figure 39).

Journalists covering the story in New Orleans reported the atrocities that occurred in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, forever changing how the Crescent City is perceived around the

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world. Astonished by televised scenes of desperation, the American public began questioning decisions made by government officials, forcing the Bush administration to actively engage in damage control. I recall watching the White House Press Secretary try to repair the image of the American government, a mission that proved fruitless as stories told by storm survivors fueled public outcry against local, state and federal government agencies.

Figure 40. The trauma of Hurricane Katrina (www.katrinaimages.com)

New Orleans

Video footage documenting the human misery (see Figure 40) inspired rapper Jahi to pen poetic verses that protest how the United States government handled rescue and relief efforts. In a song simply entitled *New Orleans*, the musician provides his listening audience with imagery that chronicles the racism unveiled by the disaster. The lyrics spotlight the deaths that occurred in the

refuge of last resort (the Louisiana Superdome), the inability of FEMA to disperse disaster aid in

an efficient and timely manner, and how funding for levee repairs was cut in spite of hurricane

predictions. The following verses illustrate how Jahi embraces the African-American legacy of

resistance to racial injustice:

> Hey yo, overseas watchin the news it ain't all good
> Hurricane Katrina did tore up the hood
> Oh New Orleans, it seems homes are gone
> And bodies being stacked inside the Superdome
>
> Four days after a godly disaster
> If it was a white city relief would be faster
> Post 9/11 preparation was bullshit
> Study pointed out this Cat 5 would hit
>
> But the Bush government cut back on the funds
> Vision on video of daughters and sons
> Mentally shaken up, floodwaters got us wakin' up
> Here's another reason for gas to go up
>
> Middle finger to FEMA, help was way too late
> Please tell me how long do it take to get organized
> I see the panic and despair in the eyes of the elderly
> Kanye dissed the President on NBC
>
> And Debra Lee caught a benefit on BET
> But facts still remain that Black people not free
> Yo, it's bigger than the Bush government never representin'
> Remember, constitution had to be amended
>
> They say that hurricanes are Africans who refused to be slaves
> Buried at the bottom of the Atlantic floor
> I guess the spirit of Tupac said it best
> They got money for wars but can't feed the poor
>
> Or maybe nature's sendin' a wakeup call for us to unite
> Perish or fall. Time will tell if it's a revolution.
> Depends on what happens next
> I wish I could speak to Marcus Garvey or Malcolm X (internet source #26)

The socio-cultural reality presented by Jahi exemplifies how "rap music lyrics are a

potential source of 'Nommo' or truths that can reach the masses" (Cooper 2002:66). In a verse

that quotes a political statement declared by deceased West Coast rapper Tupac Shakur, Jahi sheds light on the inconsistencies that continue to impede America's progress toward equality. Distinctive from the musical compositions of other rappers examined, Jahi underscores the need for group solidarity and African pride in the continued struggle for equality. The tone of Jahi's lyrical rhymes is emancipatory, evoking an ideology of Black Power that calls for African-American unity in times of adversity. Jahi concludes the track by questioning whether the racial inequity revealed in the city of New Orleans will foster a twenty-first century African-American revolution in the United States.

The poignant testimonies heard in songs rapped by Big Sty, K.O., MosDef, Public Enemy and Jahi, represent the lived experiences, perceptions and attitudes of countless poverty stricken African-Americans struggling to exist in a country that remains debilitated by a heritage of racial prejudice. While all of the aforementioned tracks protest how poor black New Orleanians were treated during the catastrophe, it is a song penned in the first-person perspective of George W. Bush that offers the harshest criticism of the president and his administration's policies.

I'm Guilty

Rapper Mark Scott (a.k.a. Woo Child) attacks the character and decisions of the commander in chief in a thought-provoking lyrical composition. According to Bill Beene of the *St. Louis American,* "in less time than it took President George W. Bush to mobilize relief to Hurricane Katrina victims, local rapper Woo Child penned, recorded and fired a Protest song at the widely ridiculed commander in chief" (internet source #27). The hook of the song, a sped-up vocal track of a woman chanting "I'm guilty," depicts George W. Bush as the villain responsible for the mishandling of the disaster.

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Figure 41. Protesting in New Orleans (www.katrinaimages.com)

Woo Child takes the president to task on such controversial issues as the misinformation

surrounding Iraq's nuclear weapons program and the Patriot Act, which many liberal-minded

United States citizens believe lessens civil liberties:

Yeah Katrina hit N.O. when I was vacationin'
People dyin', it took a few days to take it in
Wasn't ready to leave yet, but to show that I cared
I cut it two days short and still wasn't there
Leader of the free world, who put the blame on a man
Who never had the resources to be prepared
Compare him to Giuliani, question his leadership
While I sit and do nothing to save this sinking ship

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Play the politics, they need to ask for help
Instead of common sense, people left for death
As simple as mobilizin' food and water
I let days past as Americans viewed in horror

Black faces pleadin', thinkin' they been abandoned
Hackin' through the attic stranded, and couldn't understand
That incompetence starts from the top and works its way down
You knew it when I was elected, nothin' left to say now

Let's get the spin machine goin', label them refugees
Make them less than citizens, so it ain't affectin' me
Show the worst of the worst, globalize the looting
But don't show the dead bodies floatin' in the sewerage

Don't show the mothers searchin' for baby supplies
Or the vast majority takin' what they need so that they can survive
Cause I haven't sent them water or food
And seriously, in the midst of hopelessness what's a father to do

Keep dehumanizing the survivors
Talk up the lawlessness to keep my hide up out the fire
Cause, I coulda sent troops, they not all in Iraq
Stop the foolishness, I ain't callin' them back
I gotta make this a bipartisan issue
America's not ready to face race, it's much harder to get through
It'll be an easy sell, cause i'm not a racist
You never heard me use the word nigger in public places

When Rehnquist died I breathed a sigh of relief
One death in five days not provided by me
Plus I can change the subject
Nominate a replacement faster than I can save the public

Hold a press conference, show that i'm displeased
Keep talkin' about the process instead of sendin' relief
I'm a busy man, that's for Homeland Security
It's FEMA's job, I gave 'em every opportunity
So they weren't qualified, well neither am I
And i've been president not once, but twice
How can anyone be mad, when you know I lied to your face
And sent the troops to Baghdad

I got you to give me the Patriot Act
I got all the power I need to start invadin' Iraq
But not enough to save a dad, or a mother, or children
And definitely not no sisters or no brothers (internet source #28)

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The politically explicit lyrics penned in protest of the human suffering endured by victims of Hurricane Katrina, challenges the general public to question the domestic and foreign policies of the United States government. The rappers examined used their lyrical talents to confront President George W. Bush and other government officials on their failure to protect the impoverished African-American population of New Orleans. Music leaves an indelible imprint on the minds of listeners who embark on a journey of understanding through interpretation. Human experience communicated through music has the potential to be a powerful impetus for change. By illustrating the injustice that occurred during the disaster, the musical compositions are attempting to deconstruct the illusion of racial and social equality in America.

Chapter 8

Revitalizing an Ethnic Enclave

Figure 42. Vietnamese community members gather at a temporary shelter (photo by MQVNC)

A Plan for Rapid Revitalization

The Vietnamese recovery process began with the formulation of a well-structured plan to achieve rapid revitalization. Community leaders set goals that could be achieved through hard work, perseverance and collective action. Village de l'est was able to adapt to changes in the environment, illustrating resilience and sustainability. Residents went through the physical and

psychological stress of disaster and mitigated the adverse effects by relying on each other for support. The collective strength of the community lies in the strong will and unshakable faith of its population. As the Vietnamese citizens of Eastern Orleans Parish became refugees displaced from their neighborhoods (see Figure 42), they mobilized and fought to keep the social fabric of their community intact. The Vietnamese community had their own plan for rebuilding the neighborhood. They did not wait for the federal, state or local governments to set goals for their community; instead, they set their own goals and worked collectively to achieve them. I believe that this formula for resilience set the ethnic enclave apart from other neighborhoods in New Orleans still struggling to rebuild.

At the commencement of the recovery process, Vietnamese community leaders set into motion a blueprint for success: Before large numbers of displaced residents started returning to the flood-ravaged area, teams of community members began the rebuilding effort. Four large neighborhood groups were formed: team one was in charge of repairing and decontaminating homes; team two managed the medical needs of workers (i.e. tetanus shots); team three cooked for those engaged in rebuilding the community; and team four was in charge of transportation. Some Vietnamese were even in charge of doing acupuncture on fellow community members that were having a hard time coping with the physical and psychological stress inherent in the post-disaster resettlement process. The revitalization of the Vietnamese enclave represents disaster recovery at a community level. According to Smith and Wenger, disaster recovery is defined as "the differential process of restoring, rebuilding, and reshaping the physical, social, economic, and natural environment through pre-event planning and post-event actions" (Smith and Wenger 2006:237).

Figure 43. Gathering of Vietnamese community members (photo by MQVNC)

Functions of Community Social Systems

The social structure of the enclave fostered collective action that resulted in the rehabilitation of an ethnic neighborhood. Roland Warren (1963) developed a list of normative functions of community social systems: production-distribution-consumption, socialization, social participation, social control, and social support. All five functions of the Vietnamese community's social system were crucial to neighborhood recovery.

The first function, production-distribution-consumption, is best appreciated by examining the role Vietnamese commerce played in the revitalization of the community. One young mother explained that she could not have moved back and started the rebuilding process without the

Vietnamese grocer back in business. She lived with her grandmother who helped her raise her two young sons, ages five and eighteen months. The family of four did not have an automobile and depended on public transportation. She expressed frustration at the slow pace of the district's recovery, and said she was thankful to live in an area that had grocery stores and bakeries within walking distance. According to the woman,

> "some of the businesses opened immediately, they were running on generators. The main supermarket ran on generators and they were able to get products shipped in on a regular basis. So, everyone went there. If they did not open so quick we would have had a really hard time staying here. We walk everywhere and there was nothing else open out here. I don't know what the rest of New Orleans East is going to do from now on. They have to get more businesses open fast."


Figure 44. Damaged Alcee Fortier Blvd. Strip Mall (photo by MQVNC)

The second function of the community's social system, socialization, also played a part in neighborhood revitalization. Sociologist Dennis Wenger discusses how socialization (as a function) is altered during periods of social crisis. According to Wenger, "the traditional, central concerns inherent in this function are reduced in priority. The mass media became increasingly important as agents of socialization" (Wenger 1978:31).

When they understood that Hurricane Katrina was going to affect New Orleans, many Vietnamese evacuated to Houston, Texas. As previously noted, once in Houston, evacuees could tune into 900 AM, a radio station that is part of the Saigon Television Broadcasting Network. Vietnamese newspapers and websites also disseminated pertinent information to the residents of Village de l'est. During the disaster, Vietnamese media outlets kept the temporarily displaced connected, allowing for collective decisions to be made. Father Vien explained how he kept his parishioners connected by taking pictures in the various locations of displacement. The pastor stated, "we kept in touch with each other during the displacement. Wherever I went I took pictures. Whoever traveled with me took pictures. And then at the next location we had slideshows, so each location would still see the others." A young woman in her early twenties commented on how she used social networking sights to stay connected with friends and other family members. According to the consultant,

> "I talked with my friends and other people from the community on Facebook and Myspace while I was staying with my aunt in Austin. It was great to be able to still communicate with people while we were gone. Everyone updated each other on things like what schools we were going to and stuff. I was already graduated but some of my girlfriends were still in school. It was hard for them at the new schools, they didn't know anybody. But I think staying connected on Facebook really helped all the young people."

Social participation is another function of the community's social system that aided in the ethnic enclave's resilience. As residents returned to their neighborhoods, they gathered together to discuss how they would go about the rebuilding process. Participants of the meetings fought

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for the survival of the community and laid out a blue print for attaining rapid revitalization. According to Russell Dynes, "after disaster impact, the citizenship role expands in the sense that the normative requirements now specify that a citizen should do anything he can to help the community" (Dynes 1974:97).

During fieldwork I witnessed expansion of the citizenship role. Many of my consultants talked a great deal about how important their community was to them. One of my consultants was a college student pursing a history degree at the University of New Orleans. He explained that he could have moved to Metairie after the storm, but instead felt a duty to return and help with the rebuilding process. He told me that the community gave him so much, it wasn't right to just turn his back on it when times get rough. Born and raised in Versailles, the young man spoke fondly of his neighbors and the circle of friends he grew up with. While discussing his views on the long term sustainability of the community he commented that if disaster strikes again, the community will rebuild again because this is home. The young man explained,

> "this place is home to all of us Vietnamese, my parents are here, my grandparents, all my aunts and uncles and cousins. A lot of my friends from growing up are here too, so are their families. Everybody knows everybody, that's just how it is. If somebody gets sick there is always a family member to help them out. When Katrina hit everyone pulled together and Father Vien pulled us all back together, you know. We started cleaning out the homes as soon as we were allowed back. My brother and I actually snuck in before that to see about the house. A lot of people were sneaking in. If another storm comes we will be able to build back faster since we went through this now. I think everyone will know that we can do it, so it won't be that big of a deal. We have experience with these types of things now. You know, all of the insurance things and Road Home paperwork. "

New Orleans East turned into a hotspot for criminal activity over the last few decades. Being born and raised in the East, I am familiar with the drug trafficking, prostitution and gang violence that forced many homeowners to move out of the area. When I took on this research endeavor, my mother was horrified that I would be doing fieldwork in Village de l'est.

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Figure 45. Salvation Army truck servicing the people of Village de l'est (photo by MQVNC)

Her fears were well founded, as the enclave is located in one of the most unsafe sections of Eastern Orleans Parish. When I was twelve years old my mother and I were held up at gunpoint and car jacked while in front of a snowball stand on Lake Forest Boulevard. Two days later the car was located by police involved in a drug stakeout at a house in Village de l'est. Needless to say, my family was not thrilled with my choice of field site. I tried to lessen their anguish by promising that I would conduct my research during the day and leave the area before dark, a feat that I did not accomplish on numerous occasions.

I gained a greater understanding of the fourth function of the community's social system, social control, during an interview conducted several months after the storm. On one particular afternoon I revisited a widow that lived with her son's family. She spoke wonderful English and

we talked for close to an hour about her experience of the rebuilding process. The last time that I met with the soft-spoken grandmother was five months after the storm when her family was engaged in gutting their home and mending the backyard fence. As our conversation ended, one of her grandsons got home from playing basketball with friends. I quickly noticed his tattoos, and he noticed my curiosity. He asked if I would like to speak with him and his friends, and when I said yes, he grinned and signaled to me that they were outside. Out in the driveway stood several Vietnamese boys ranging in age from approximately fifteen to nineteen years old. I don't know who looked more shocked, me or them, as white women are often somewhat of a rarity in the neighborhood. The grandson introduced me to his friends, and explained what I was doing there. Most of the boys just stared at me, but a few of them were very talkative.

As I was talking to one of the boys about how I grew up in the East, two of the young men began boasting about their contribution to the community's revitalization process. They told me that after the storm, many houses were getting broken into by looters, so they started watching over the neighborhood. When I asked why the police weren't handling this, one of the boys commented back, "what police?" They explained that since the storm, police presence in the area is virtually non-existent. As I later drove home I wondered if they were telling the truth about their vigilante-like status during the early stages of reconstruction. If they were, this was definitely a new spin on who became enforcers of social control during times of crisis.

Several community members I interviewed in the past year say that there is no more gang activity in the area. One Vietnamese man stated, "there are no more gangs in the neighborhood, Hurricane Katrina cleaned them all up." Others say that the gangs are still there but gang members are not as open about their gang affiliation since the storm. There are still stabbings and robberies reported within Village de l'est. The day after I interviewed a local business owner on Alcee Fortier Blvd., someone was stabbed and collapsed in front of the Mary Queen of Viet Nam

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Church on Dwyer Road. One local store owner explained that crime was always a concern in the neighborhood adding, "now that the National Guard pulled out things are getting back to the way they were before Katrina. It's pretty dangerous around here at night."

The last function of the community's social system is mutual support, by far the most important factor in the ethnic enclave's resilience and subsequent sustainability. During the rebuilding process, members of the community acted as social agents for redevelopment. According to Wenger, "the post-impact period is highlighted by an emergency social system that greatly encourages physical and emotional support and reassurance . . . at the individual level it has been proposed that a 'mass assault' is begun to provide support" (Wenger 1978:30). Mutual support was present in all stages of the Vietnamese community's disaster experience. Prior to and during the storm, residents chose to rely on an ethnically inclusive cultural network for their survival. Many members of the community I spoke with evacuated in groups to places where large numbers of other Vietnamese sought shelter. Vietnamese relief agencies, such as Boat People SOS, supplied the evacuees with clothes, food and other everyday necessities. Vietnamese families located in various cities across the country took in the temporarily displaced in their time of need. According to my consultants, sticking together as an ethnic group was a top priority.

Some families I talked with rode out the storm at the Houston Astrodome (see Figure 46). They commented that floodwaters ruined many belongings with strong sentimental attachment. One of the women explained how she didn't bring many of her family photographs with her because her home never flooded before. She went on to describe how upset she got when she found out the extent of the flooding, knowing that she probably lost some of her most precious family heirlooms. The only thing that brought her comfort was being able to lean on her family and friends for emotional support. She explained,

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"I just knew that a lot of things got destroyed, before I even got back to see it. The water didn't get up to it, but the mold ruined so much. I knew some of my friends were suffering not knowing too. We talked to each other about it and said well, what happened is what happened. We had no control over anything and that didn't feel good. But we got through it. Next time I will do things different."

**Figure 46. Vietnamese evacuees at the Houston Astrodome
(photo by MQVNC)**

When the floodwaters began to subside, the Vietnamese residents of Village de l'est

turned to each other, and the pastor of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church, for

guidance. The social support network of the community kicked into high gear and the collective

decision to rebuild was made. However, less than a month later, the enclave was dealt another

blow as Hurricane Rita caused massive flooding once again. Conversations with consultants

highlighted how much this setback affected their psyche. A young couple that lived with

relatives in Dallas during the storm explained to me how they almost gave up on ever returning

when they saw images of the city flooded for a second time. Instead of throwing in the towel and resettling on higher ground, the couple returned to the neighborhood and started the process of emptying the moldy contents of their home. They said that community members who fared better in the storm helped them physically, emotionally, and financially throughout the period of reconstruction. The wife commented,

> "we could not have done everything without our family and friends. They are a blessing and so is the church. When we were gutting our house we got hot food everyday from the church. That helped a lot. A neighbor helped us with putting up new shingles because we didn't know how. The people here care about each other and that matters so much when things like this happen. We were fortunate to have help when so many others in the city didn't."

The altruistic nature of the community's recovery is a result of shared cultural values and religious faith. The residents of Village de l'est illustrate how "love for thy neighbor" can transform a community in even the most dire of circumstances. The Vietnamese that I interviewed explained that they didn't mind helping others in the community because they knew that the only way to survive was for everyone to pitch in and help each other. This strong sense of community is absent in many New Orleans neighborhoods, which I believe hinders the city's overall recovery process.

The roles that culture, religion and ethnicity play in disaster resilience are quite measurable. As social variables they can serve as pattern components when accessing and identifying the dynamics of why and how disasters can be more effectively overcome within a community (Bolin and Bolton 1986). The culture of the Vietnamese enclave emphasizes the importance of family. During interviews, consultants often discussed how support from their extended family aided them in this time of crisis. Extended family units interacted with other elements of the community's social system and through this supportive relationship, revitalization was achieved. The family unit also relied on external social support systems prior

to, during and after the disaster. People of similar ethnic background and religious belief stood behind the community's decision to rebuild and raised funds to lessen the stress created by the overwhelming material loss sustained by the enclave. Social support was key to the survival of the community, and continues to play a significant role in long-term recovery.

Today's technologically advanced landscape brings with it many complex and diverse advantages. But with all the perks, comes the possibility of various negative occurrences. In the city of New Orleans, it was the technological failure of the levee system, coupled with breakdowns in both political and social systems that caused the costliest disaster in America's history. Worldwide, fragmented implementation of response plans is quite prevalent. In preparing disaster response strategies, a pliable broad-spectrum approach to mitigation is needed.

The nation's response to Hurricane Katrina is proof that present federal disaster management plans are lacking. Survival, revitalization, and sustainability in the wake of disaster is possible when government entities work together in a strategic, unfragmented network, starting at the federal level, and carried down through state and local communities. According to an article in *DHA News*, "the most effective form of mitigation remains preparedness and, where possible prevention" (United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs 1995:5). In retrospect, if this statement was taken to heart and acted upon, much of the disastrous results seen in New Orleans might have been avoided. Some time prior to Katrina, numerous researchers and professionals notified high ranking government officials and agencies that a hurricane of strong magnitude could hit the city causing catastrophic damage/loss of life. Yet, appropriate preventive measures and comprehensive disaster management was not prioritized at any government level.

Hurricane Katrina exposed the ecological instability of the Crescent City. With the international citizenry continuing to grow, more people will be forced to live in vulnerable locations, increasing the likelihood of disasters. It is the global population's responsibility to

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devise strategies that lessen the negative effects of such instances of crisis. Disaster researchers are teaming up with a wide variety of scientists in an interdisciplinary collaborative effort to better understand the impact of disasters on human societies. By studying how populations adapt to post-disaster physical and cultural landscapes, scientists can formulate models for resilience that are applicable to future disaster situations.

Chapter 9

Reconstructing Communities after Disaster

"The harm being done to those displaced and disposed in the wake of Katrina may very well not simply be a case of well-meaning experts bumbling along and doing harm. Most likely it's a muddled combination of do-gooders and care-me-nots, the avaricious, the civil servant and the profiteer. This is post-Katrina New Orleans, and the stakes in reconstruction are desperately high" (BondGraham 2007:7).

"My friends help me and I help them in turn. This makes me aware that those who help other humans and save them are the real human beings" – Suma Ward, Kobe temporary shelter/male in his 50's (Shaw and Goda 2004:16).

A Similar Fate

The vast geographic and cultural divide that separates the victims of Hurricane Katrina and Japan's 1995 Great Hanshin Awaji earthquake (Kobe earthquake) is transcended by the shared human suffering inherent in the uncertain and immensely tragic aftermath of catastrophe. While the nature of the disasters that befell the cities of New Orleans and Kobe is distinct, the anguish and monumental sense of loss that characterize the personal experiences of the victims illustrates the universality of affliction in the wake of disaster events. Worlds apart, the survivors of the disasters know little to nothing of each other's pain, unaware of the similar struggle that mobilized academics, urban planners and a host of other professionals and laypersons to create a sustainable future for the inhabitants of the devastated cities.

In both New Orleans and Kobe community rehabilitation is ongoing, with the reclaiming of livelihoods occurring at a far faster rate than the healing of psychological wounds inflicted by the trauma of disaster. As the earthquake that demolished portions of Japan's Hyogo Prefecture occurred in 1995, the citizens of Kobe are significantly ahead of New Orleanians in the arduous process of achieving a full-scale recovery. Thousands of New Orleans residents remain displaced

in cities across America, unable to return to their native landscape due to the slow revitalization

of many local neighborhoods. Tensions run high as local inhabitants survey the city's sluggish

recovery, fueling mistrust of government officials leading the massive rebuilding efforts.

Homeowners from New Orleans East, the Ninth Ward, and other largely African-American low-

income storm ravaged neighborhoods face uncertainty as the city's leadership continues to be

vague when communicating plans for various areas of the city that are considered highly

vulnerable to the risk of storm surge. Knowledge that future hurricane seasons could once again

devastate the below-sea-level city leaves New Orleanians with a well-founded sense of extreme

uneasiness and insecurity.

In January of 2007 the general public got its first glimpse at the Citywide Strategic

Recovery and Rebuilding Plan, popularly known as the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP).

Since its publication the action plan has drawn both praise and harsh criticism from researchers,

public officials, and community members invested in the city's recovery. The objective of this

chapter is threefold – to highlight the approach to recovery outlined in the Citywide Plan,

inclusive of the assumptions and limitations stated by its creators. To examine the written

literature evaluating the perceived effectiveness and feasibility of the strategies laid out in the

recovery plan. And finally, to explore the role of citizen participation in both the Unified New

Orleans Plan and the Kobe Action Plan.

The Unified New Orleans Plan

The Unified New Orleans Plan is explained in a 395 page document available online at

www.unifiedneworleansplan.com. Written so as to be understandable by the average layperson

untrained in urban planning and development, the document seeks to demonstrate that the city of

New Orleans possesses a comprehensive revitalization plan that will in time, afford all locals,

those that have already returned and those still displaced, the promise of residing in a better,

safer, and more sustainable built and cultural environment. Proposing a ten year timeframe for

renewal, the Unified New Orleans Plan divides the city into thirteen planning districts,

emphasizing recovery projects to tackle pressing issues of flood protection, infrastructure and

utilities, transportation, housing, economic development, healthcare, education, historic

preservation/urban design, environmental issues, community services (public safety, recreation

and libraries), and cultural resources. Referred to as a "two-tiered planning process," the Unified

New Orleans Plan is composed of the aforementioned Planning District Recovery Plans and the

Citywide Plan that advocates,

> "a framework for the investment of scarce public funds and manpower assets
> across the City geographically and across a specific planning timeframe, based on
> the demonstrated desire of residents to return and the status of ongoing flood
> protection improvements" (UNOP 2007:9).

Building on the collected data and ideas of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission

(BNOB) and the City Council's Neighborhoods Rebuilding Plan (Lambert Plans), urban

planners/designers, architects, professors, and community members, under the leadership of the

New Orleans Community Support Foundation and the Community Support Organization,

formulated the Unified New Orleans Plan to guide the city's recovery and instigate the

implementation of policies that would result in the city's long-term sustainability. After five

months of intensive planning, the Unified New Orleans Plan presented the New Orleans citizenry

with a vision of how funding from numerous sources including the Greater New Orleans

Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund, and DaimlerChrysler, will be

utilized in projects/programs designed to transform the city into a more resilient home for the

New Orleans populace. Citizen participation was essential to the creation of the Unified New

Orleans Plan, and should be celebrated as the hallmark of New Orleans' proposed rebuilding efforts.

Figure 47. Map of planning districts and neighborhoods (Lambert Plan)

With the help of AmericaSpeaks, an organization known for successfully facilitating the inclusion of public input, planners were able to connect with residents locally and in locales inhabited by the displaced population. The UNOP document accentuates how civic engagement took root in the recovery plans through Community Congresses and District Meetings, various grass-roots outreach programs, a website, newsletters, call-centers, and surveys (UNOP 2007:14). In section five of the Unified New Orleans Plan implementation of citywide strategies

for recovery is discussed, emphasizing the centrality of New Orleans residents in future decision-making and policy development. According to the Citywide Plan,

> "New Orleans now has an educated army of "citizen-planners" who have found their voice and worked tirelessly over the many months of planning. They can provide a meaningful voice in implementing their plan and guiding all future government policy-setting and decision-making. Neighborhood residents need to be involved as their plans go forward: to ensure that their spending priorities are followed, that their neighborhoods revitalize as they envision, that their city becomes a vibrant home with opportunity for all" (UNOP 2007:149).

Public outreach programs allowed victims of the disaster to share their concerns about the annual risk posed by hurricanes that enter the central Gulf of Mexico. The population of New Orleans collectively held their breath during the past three hurricane seasons since the one-two punch inflicted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, hoping desperately that any tropical systems would spare their city that was already struggling to stay afloat amid reconstruction efforts and the recent economic recession. As powerful 2008 Hurricane Gustave churned toward the city of New Orleans, the public understood that history could repeat itself, which led the majority of metropolitan and surrounding area residents to heed mandatory evacuation orders and become temporarily displaced once again. While Hurricane Gustave spared New Orleans, wreaking widespread damage instead on the capital city of Baton Rouge, New Orleanians had a profound sense of what could have happened if the Big Easy was dealt a direct hit. The thought of the city in shambles again with three years of reconstruction efforts essentially washed away, was traumatic for many in communities throughout New Orleans to even contemplate. The issue of flood protection rates number one in the eyes of countless locals who want their family, friends, property and local haunts to remain secure from the storm surge of Lake Pontchartrain and other area waterways.

The Unified New Orleans Plan includes information on what sections of the city have made strides in restoring and/or upgrading flood protection systems, a helpful recovery

assessment in regard to decisions governing both private and public reconstruction investments.

For instance, residents contemplating rebuilding homes/businesses in New Orleans East can

examine the planned improvements for Drainage Basin 2 (Planning Districts 9, 10) and then

assess whether or not reconstruction is a smart financial investment. It is worthy to note that

while all residents are welcomed back to the city and allowed to rebuild in even the most hard-hit

of areas, they do so at their own risk due to severe deficiencies in portions of the city's hurricane

protection system. While a total of forty-eight projects (see UNOP pp. 350-354) are proposed for

Planning District 9 (New Orleans East – including Little Woods, Pines Village, Plum Orchard,

Read Boulevard East, Read Boulevard West, and West Lake Forest – excluding Village de l'est),

the area will remain extremely high risk for an undetermined amount of time. In a statement

regarding flood protection in the eastern section of New Orleans, the Unified New Orleans Plan

states,

> "storm surge in the eastern part of the City – is less amenable to such a quick fix.
> It will take years to plan, design, obtain environmental permits, and then construct
> engineered systems in the coastal zone that will retard and redirect future storm
> surge so that it doesn't overwhelm the City's hurricane protection levee system.
> Until these systems are well underway, the eastern part of the City will continue
> to be vulnerable to storm surge…the eastern part of the City and St. Bernard
> Parish will continue to be susceptible to storm surge until coastal restoration
> projects come to fruition, which may take decades" (UNOP 2007:37).

The Citywide Strategic Recovery and Rebuilding Plan attempts to provide the city of

New Orleans with a blueprint for a more resilient future where repopulated neighborhoods are

reconstructed under a comprehensive framework designed to reduce vulnerability to natural,

technological and social disasters. Both the Citywide and District Plans endeavor to revitalize

diverse communities across the metropolitan area, taking into account the visions of the general

public while working diligently to maintain the unique architectural and cultural ambience that

sets New Orleans apart from other global metropolises. Section six of the Unified New Orleans

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Plan – the citywide/district financial plan, aims to figure the costs of proposed sustainable

development, outlining various financing principles, priorities, strategies, and potential sources

of funding. Project summary sheets included in the appendix of the UNOP document offer the

local citizenry a comprehensible glimpse of the city's proposed rebuilding plans, highlighting the

project description, estimated costs, and anticipated outcomes for each of the ninety-five

citywide projects.

A Realistic and Unified Plan for Citywide Sustainable Redevelopment?

Shortly after the city's recovery plan was submitted to the City Planning Commission, the

Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR), a local non-profit government watchdog research

organization, released a report that slammed the feasibility and effectiveness of the Unified New

Orleans Plan. In *Not Ready for Prime Time: An Analysis of the UNOP Citywide Plan*, policy

researchers argue that the Unified New Orleans Plan is more a utopian vision than a realistic

action plan for the city's recovery and long-term sustainability. According to the BGR Report,

> "the city needs a blueprint, a plan that makes sense. Unfortunately, the Citywide
> Plan fails to deliver a cohesive, workable roadmap for recovery. Instead, it
> proposes a sweeping list of projects without placing them in a realistic financial
> context. As for recovery strategy, it offers a continuation of the indecisive and
> confusing approach that has characterized New Orleans' recovery for a year and a
> half. Despite the good intentions behind it, the Citywide Plan suffers from
> fundamental shortcomings. It is internally inconsistent, and not well-crafted. It
> does not set priorities or provide realistic timelines. Rather, it embraces abstract,
> unexplained principles. It employs a vague and bewildering scoring system. It
> fails to connect findings with policies in some places, and avoids envisioning and
> ranking projects based on realistic financial constraints. It offers vague
> programmatic ideas in some places and overly detailed ones in others" (BGR
> Report 2007:11).

Broadcast to the public through various mass media outlets, the BGR's harsh criticism of

the Unified New Orleans Plan left many residents of New Orleans contemplating whether the

city could realistically fulfill its promise to rebuild a smarter, safer, and more sustainable built

environment for both present-day citizens and future generations. Discussing how the plan prioritized proposed recovery projects the BGR posits that the,

> "fundamentals that affect everyone in the city, like improvements to the crumbling streets, antiquated sewer/water/drainage systems, and deteriorated schools, fall somewhere in the middle of the wish list. Repairing and restoring the city's historic forts ranks on the same level as these essential infrastructure items" (BGR Report 2007:1).

The multi-level flood mitigation strategy proposed in the Unified New Orleans Plan hinges upon the implementation of voluntary elevation programs by area residents. Two such programs, "Elevate New Orleans" and "Slab-on-Grade Remediation," utilize FEMA Base Flood Elevation (BFE) guidelines to lessen the vulnerability of reconstructed housing and commercial structures. The BGR Report calls into question the overall effectiveness of UNOP's plan for "flood protection," labeling its attempt at policy/program formation as "flood proofing." According to the critical analysis,

> "other than recommendations to advocate for and study better flood protection, the plan does not include any flood protection projects. It claims that flood control projects, such as levees and coastal restoration, are adequately funded by dedicated sources of revenues. The claim is incorrect, given that adequate plans to protect the entire city have not even been conceived, much less fully funded" (BGR Report 2007:7).

The BGR report red flags how discussion of the methodology employed by the Unified New Orleans Planning Team was absent from the final document, adding that at times the team seemed more interested in winning a popularity contest than developing a holistic and feasible plan to guide the city's long-term recovery process. The government watchdog group argues that, "overall, it is unclear where and how community input, professional judgment or data drove tenets of the plan to support some of its priorities. To be sure, the UNOP planners deserve credit for a tremendous outreach effort. However, the process and its results raise uncertainties" (BGR Report 2007:4-5).

Controversy also surrounds the commission of architect/planner Andres Duany and his wife Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (Duany Plater-Zyberk) to design the city's neighborhood revitalization plans. Some locals, including Reed Kroloff, Dean of the School of Architecture at Tulane University are very much against rebuilding New Orleans in Duany's New Urbanist style (Castenell 2007:7). A *New York Times* article investigating the Gulf Coast's reconstruction states that "critics of New Urbanism argue that Mr. Duany and his allies seek to create a picture-postcard image of the past and will squander the opportunity to start anew" (Pongrebin 2006).

While harsh criticism from the Bureau of Governmental Research cast doubt on the feasibility of the long-term vision proposed by the UNOP Team, the Citywide Plan has been heralded as a success in terms of its public outreach efforts that resulted in extensive citizen participation. John Clayton Thomas from Georgia State University's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies emphasized how "the process appeared to work in engaging participants effectively in the planning process, reportedly 'enabling conversations across difference'" (Thomas 2007:40). In a case study documenting the role of civic engagement in the creation of the Unified New Orleans Plan, author Carolyn Lukensmeyer explains,

> "by bringing citizens from across the diaspora together with those still living in New Orleans, showing them that they cared about the same things and giving them a real voice in the decision-making process, the Unified Plan restored a sense of connection and extended community (and, ultimately, hope)" (Lukensmeyer 2007:7).

Disasters test the resilience of communities. In times of extreme crisis, the altruistic behavior of victims often becomes an essential source of social capital that can mitigate the negative impacts of disaster events. Citizen participation is paramount to the long-term recovery process that will shape the diverse physical and cultural landscapes of New Orleans for years to come.

The Role of Civic Engagement in the Recovery of Kobe City

As the survivors of Japan's Great Hanshin Awaji earthquake (Kobe earthquake) took refuge in temporary shelters, they longed to return home to the familiar social support networks that comforted during trials of hardship and affliction. Years after the massive 7.2 magnitude earthquake devastated portions of the Hyogo Prefecture, the people of Kobe joined together and devised a plan of action designed to create a sustainable civil society (*shimin sakai*) that could lay claim to a higher degree of self-sufficiency and resilience to adversity (Shaw and Goda 2004). The community solidarity that emerged in the wake of the Kobe earthquake provided a form of social capital that played "an important role in the reconstruction process in terms of speed and satisfaction. The community with social capital is proactive in collective decision-making and contributes to a speedy recovery" (Shaw and Goda 2004:32). In the years following the disaster, government officials hastened repairs to infrastructure but maintained a policy of 'no personal compensation.' The population of Kobe grew impatient with the effects of what was deemed an 'eighty percent recovery,' signifying the fact that the "urban infrastructure has been fully rebuilt, however, victim's lives and livelihoods have not" (Shaw and Goda 2004:22).

In 1998 the People's Rehabilitation Plan (PRP) was devised in order to achieve 100 percent recovery in communities throughout Kobe City. The plan "focused on community activity for livelihood recovery and creating a safer and more sustainable environment" (Shaw and Goda 2004:24). The Kobe Action Plan was created three years later by a non-government organization known as NGO-Kobe. According to Rajib Shaw of the United Nations Centre for Regional Development, NGO-Kobe argued that,

> "a long-term rehabilitation process should be community driven, and needs to incorporate livelihood issues. The model rehabilitation program thus not only focuses on the reconstruction of earthquake-resistant houses, but also includes sustainable livelihood options for people, improvement of the quality of life including education, healthcare and environment" (Shaw 2003:126).

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The Kobe Action Plan is a community based initiative for recovery and long-term sustainability that relies on active civic engagement to accomplish three overarching goals: unify livelihoods and community, develop civic activities, and achieve a sustainable civil society (Shaw and Goda 2004:30). The victims of the Kobe earthquake chose to develop novel approaches that strengthen their collective resilience to disaster. Whether the victims of Hurricane Katrina will decide to follow a similar path of long-term civic engagement remains to be seen, however, if widespread citizen participation in the Unified New Orleans Plan and other grassroots neighborhood renewal projects is an early indication, the outlook for the coming decades is promising.

Chapter 10

Building a Sustainable Future

"My vision for the community is for it to become more self-sustaining, more self-determining in terms of education, in terms of health care, the basic needs for families. We would become more involved in the politics of the city, of the state. It is time for us as a community to move on. In the past we've been the recipients of good will from the city, from the state, from the federal government, as refugees. Now, thirty-five years later, we are at a new generation. It's time for us to give back; it's time for us to contribute to the betterment. Now we have our homes, we have our cars, we have our jobs. Now it's time for us to say okay, what can I do for society? How can we make it better? I think the time is coming."

-- Father Vien Nguyen

Figure 48. Village de l'est community members beautify the neighborhood (photo by MQVNCDC)

Understanding Disaster as a Social Phenomenon

Theories and methodologies found in the social sciences can contribute greatly to the

understanding, prevention, and mitigation of natural, technological and social disasters.

Providing a humanistic framework to observe a disaster's impact on human behavior, disciplines such as anthropology and geography unveil disaster as a social phenomenon shaped by a historical process. Revealing the interpersonal relationships and power structures often hidden in the social fabric of society, disasters offer social scientists an exceptional opportunity to evaluate socio-cultural change and man's relationship with the natural, built, and cultural environment.

Too often are disasters viewed with a narrow focus that lacks holistic value and fragments data destined for solving problems of global concern. An expanded horizon is needed in the field of disaster studies, one that calls for the collective spirit of inclusion and collaboration. As societies strive to develop plans for a sustainable future, academics are responsible for pioneering cutting-edge interdisciplinary research designed to minimize the negative impacts of disaster. To understand the vulnerability creating processes that threaten the long-term sustainability of human populations, scientists must investigate root causes deeply embedded in a culture's social structure. Social scientists can play an important role in advancing scientific knowledge on the underlying dynamic pressures that increase risk on various scales.

This research on disaster, displacement, and resilience in Eastern Orleans Parish benefited greatly from my training in the bidisciplinary department of geography and anthropology at Louisiana State University. As a human geographer and cultural anthropologist who studies disaster, I am constantly motivated to understand how cultural systems are at the heart of a community's disaster vulnerability and preparedness. Over the course of my fieldwork I came to appreciate how culture influences human behavior in times of extreme adversity. Geography's humanistic tradition and phenomenological approach offered me an invaluable framework for understanding socially constructed patterns of vulnerability and cultural adaptations intended to increase community resilience to disaster. As humanistic geography takes as its central goal the understanding of human experience, I was able to use its interpretive

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approach of embracing the subjective to examine how individuals experienced the complete life-cycle of the disaster event. Led by a phenomenological methodology that called for immersion in-place, I sought to investigate the underlying meanings, values, and symbolism that govern daily social interaction and an individual's being-in-the-world. Their lived experiences of disaster allowed me to gain a more holistic understanding of collective action and the range of culturally informed social responses and adaptive coping strategies inherent in the recovery process. Hurricane Katrina is now part of the social memory of its survivors, forever changing how they assign meaning to and interpret the world around them. The actions that state and city officials take to fully restore the physical and cultural landscapes of New Orleans will ultimately determine how local victims of Hurricane Katrina define their sense of personal loss and how they cope with future instances of hardship and misfortune.

A Valuable Lesson Learned

The state of Louisiana's precarious geographic position necessitates development of regional guidelines intended to enhance resilience to multiple hazards. Widespread devastation resulting from the one-two punch inflicted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita demonstrated the vulnerability of the region's natural and built environments. Neighborhoods encompassing socio-economically diverse locales suffered immensely from a lack of supportive regulatory mechanisms that incorporate dynamics of risk into long-term community development planning. The observed complacency of government officials and community leaders in formulating minimum standards for comprehensive disaster reduction placed local environs at heightened risk during the disaster event. Initiatives that promote sustainable development, capacity building, civic engagement and effective hazard planning are crucial steps in re- establishing community vitality across impacted areas of the embattled Pelican State. To ensure implementation of policies that strengthen

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community resilience to disaster, a conceptual framework informed by multiple stakeholders must outline priorities for strategic action. A pro-active and inclusive approach to developing principles that govern sustainable community development is essential to long-term socio-economic prosperity in the region.

The Establishment of the Louisiana Recovery Authority

The Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA), established by Executive Order No. 63 of 2005 and in statute through Act 5 of the 2006 1st Extraordinary Session of the Louisiana Legislature (internet source #30), was the first step in a continuously evolving revitalization process designed to facilitate recovery and advance a regional policy of sustainable development. As a state agency, a primary purpose of the authority is "to recommend policy, planning, and resource allocation affecting programs and services for the recovery" (internet source #31). The LRA creates specific guidelines that govern how disaster funds awarded by Congress to the Louisiana Community Development Block Grant Program (LCDBGP) will be spent, prioritizing funding for action plans and recovery programs. The CDBGP is overseen nationally by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), with the State of Louisiana Division of Administration – Office of Community Development (Disaster Recovery Unit), administering funds allocated for Louisiana in the Gulf Coast Hurricane Relief package.

Focusing on the immediate recovery of storm-ravaged communities, while also establishing policies to regulate long-term sustainable development practices, the vision of the Louisiana Recovery Authority necessitates that "hurricane impacted regions of the state are rebuilt and revitalized to be physically safe and economically strong providing a high quality of life while maintaining Louisiana's rich cultural heritage" (internet source #30). One of five key goals outlined in the LRA's strategic plan calls for affected portions of the state to be rebuilt

according to principles of smart growth and following the priorities negotiated in the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan (internet source #30). In an era characterized by overpopulation, increased technological dependency and threats posed by global climate change, the mission of those engaged in the region's recovery must entail the development of policies, programs and planning initiatives that strengthen community resilience and promote sustainability.

Louisiana Speaks

Louisiana Speaks is a long-term community planning initiative of the Louisiana Recovery Authority. After an intensive process that spanned eighteen months, the *Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan: Vision and Strategies for Recovery and Growth in South Louisiana*, was created in May of 2007. The regional plan, which offers a fifty year framework for revitalization and sustainable growth, incorporates the innovative ideas and strategies of multiple stakeholders, planners and scientists, as well as input from over 27,000 Louisiana citizens. The framework for action outlined in the plan represents a novel and holistic approach to building community resilience through informed planning influenced by the needs and ideals of local populations. The overarching goal of the community planning initiative is threefold – recover sustainably, grow smarter and thing regionally (internet source #32). Louisiana Speaks stresses the importance of partnerships in achieving revitalization and sustainable development, emphasizing the roles shared by local state, and federal governments, nongovernmental organizations, community members and a host of other invested stakeholders.

Four interconnected and mutually dependent planning processes indicative of spatially distinct geographical scales – building planning, neighborhood planning, parish planning and regional planning – are imbedded in the regional planning effort, representing "the most extensive project of its kind ever undertaken in the United States" (internet source #32). To

increase the adaptive capacity of buildings and house structures, Louisiana Speaks enlisted the aid of architects from Pittsburgh-based Urban Designs Associates (UDA) to create pattern books and a planning toolkit outlining sustainable architectural styles designed to guide (re)construction of both residential and commercial districts in the region. As the long road to recovery is usually traversed one neighborhood at a time, urban planners from internationally known Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company held charrettes (local neighborhood workshops) in the city of Lake Charles and in Vermilion and St. Bernard parishes. Redevelopment strategies that integrate hazard mitigation schemes were recommended, along with disaster resilient housing prototypes and plans for downtown revitalization. SmartCodes (integrated land development ordinances) were utilized to guide development patterns in the aforementioned locales. The University of Louisiana at Lafayette School of Architecture and Design also held a charrette for residents of Cameron, Louisiana. Citizens who took part in the Community Design Workshop shared their vision for the future and aided in the creation of two master plans (20yr/35yr) designed to guide reconstruction efforts and future community development projects (internet source #33).

Only by forging strong and long-lasting partnerships between federal agencies and local, state and parish governments, will Louisiana be able to successfully recover from the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season. In lieu of this concerted effort for collaboration, the LRA's Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR) planning teams partnered with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Support Function-14 Long Term Planning Division (internet source #34), to advance rehabilitation in the state's hard-hit parishes through the development of comprehensive recovery plans. The Louisiana Speaks Parish Recovery Planning Tool (Parish RPT) allows "LTCR parish teams, federal and state agencies, local parish governments, the general public and displaced Louisianians access to the planning process" (internet source #35).

The transparent nature of parish recovery plans encourages both civic engagement and feelings

of social responsibility in the aftermath of the successive disasters. The piecing together of

parish-by-parish community visions for rapid revitalization and sustainable development

produces a constantly evolving regional plan of action designed to increase Louisiana's

resilience to multiple future hazards.

A Comprehensive Regional Plan

The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan represents the culmination of all community and parish

planning initiatives for recovery and smart growth. Working closely with a multitude of

stakeholders including the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) and planners

involved in the creation of the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP), the Louisiana Speaks

Regional Planning Team is dedicated to reducing the vulnerability of coastal Louisiana and its

rural and urban centers. Community involvement in all stages of the recovery and long-term

planning process has been the central premise of the project since its inception. The Louisiana

Speaks Policy Guide describes how public participation influenced the regional plan explaining

that,

> "public input paints a clear and consistent picture of what Louisianians envision
> for their future, and the plan reflects this input. Overall, Louisianians expressed a
> strong desire for a comprehensive approach to planning that addresses risk
> management, infrastructure planning, economic and land development, and
> transportation" (internet source #36).

The plan is divided into three sections according to the goals it hopes to accomplish –

recover sustainably, grow smarter and think regionally. Strategies and subsequent priorities for

action that must be adopted to achieve each of these goals are explained in a way that is easily

comprehended by the average layperson. In order for communities to recover sustainably and

grow smarter, (re)development projects have to be in alignment with a broader regional vision of

a resilient future. Viewing the devastation inflicted by the hurricanes as a rare opportunity to increase the adaptive capacity of hazard prone areas of the state, regional planners argue "Louisiana is now uniquely positioned to become a worldwide leader in new housing technologies, coastal sciences, and restoration techniques" (internet source #37). Team members collected baseline data after the consecutive storms ravaged the Gulf Coast of the United States, evaluated the various planning processes of local, state and regional authorities, and conducted numerous surveys among members of the general population. According to the plan, sources of data included: U.S. Census Data, post-hurricane population and economic data, environmental land cover data, flood zone data, elevation and bathymetry, and a land-use coverage map of the region (internet source #37).

Goal #1: Recover Sustainably

While the flooded city of New Orleans received a majority of the televised media coverage, scores of other communities across the state experienced similar hardship and affliction. After floodwaters receded and the extent of the damage was assessed, many residents wondered whether their families should return and rebuild in such an inherently high risk and vulnerable environment. Levee failures and the government's inept handling of the disaster event fueled feelings of insecurity among a general population that understood the likelihood of future tropical systems making landfall along the coast. The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan attempts to negate this fear and lack of confidence by embracing a deliberate plan of action designed to protect communities from the threat of storm surge. The plan calls for the adoption of the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) Master Plan and the implementation of strategies that "link land use, transportation, and economic development to the locations of CPRA's planned investments" (internet source #38). Senate Concurrent Resolution

No.11, approving the CPRA Master Plan for Coastal Protection, was adopted during the 2007 Regular Session of the State Legislature (internet source #39). In addition to implementing the CPRA Master Plan, Louisiana Speaks argues that the State Uniform Construction Code must be upheld in order to maintain sustainable development in the future.

After mandatory evacuation orders were lifted in the state's hard-hit parishes, many residents returned to their communities to find devastated neighborhoods and massively damaged homes. For a large percentage of citizens without insurance, acquiring enough money to begin reconstruction signified an unattainable goal. To recover sustainably, the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan proposes a policy of insuring our recovery "by identifying obstacles to affordable insurance and acting to keep private insurance available to households and businesses" (internet source #40). Actions that lead to statutory and regulatory reform are underscored in the regional plan for community recovery and smart growth. Act 459, abolishing the Louisiana Insurance Rating Commission (internet source #41), represents a legislative accomplishment in the reform process designed to draw private insurers to the state.

The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan maintains that sustainable recovery must start at the community level, calling for economic investment in neighborhood districts throughout the region and the expansion of recovery-critical industries by "building a robust local housing industry, supporting a coastal-sciences technology sector, and using existing infrastructure to capture growth opportunities" (internet source #40). Other plans of action to achieve revitalization and community resilience address the needs of businesses and the labor force, including provisions for accessible healthcare, training programs for prospective workers, and adequate schooling for the younger generation.

Goal #2: Grow Smarter

A fifty year strategy for smart development is laid out in the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan. According to the regional planning team,

> "a better future requires that we create safer, more sustainable communities by building in safe, sustainable locations. That will mean investing in storm protection and a restored coast, and pursuing strategies to nurture strong and growing economies" (internet source #42).

The somber reality of yearly tropical systems potentially impacting areas bordering the central Gulf of Mexico has prompted planners to devise strategies that effectively manage risk. The plan outlines how future community development should take place in locations that are characteristically less vulnerable to flooding hazards. Some of the actions posited in the plan include: successful infill development, implementing coastal zoning codes, utilizing base flood elevation data to direct building, and creating a Conservation and Mitigation Trust Fund to aid in the acquisition of parcels of land designated as high-risk (internet source #42). Improving quality of life remains at the forefront of any comprehensive planning process guiding future development within the borders of Louisiana. One method explored by urban planners is to invest in the building of more pedestrian-friendly urban centers, which would entail upgrading the public transit infrastructure of the state's major metropolitan areas. The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan proposes multi-modal transportation corridors that will incorporate busses, rail-transit and improved roadways to alleviate traffic congestion.

The push to diversify the state's transportation network is closely linked to strategies that foster economic sustainability. In the months following Hurricane Katrina, many across the nation were shocked at the sheer number of businesses that were destroyed, heavily damaged, or deemed inoperable due to a shortage of employees. The state's economy suffered greatly as a result of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season, with economic gains plummeting in the wake of the

storms. Policies that advance economic diversification will strengthen the state's resilience to multiple hazards. The first step in ensuring economic prosperity is to invest in the education (primary and secondary) of local inhabitants who will one day join the work force. The regional plan outlines numerous additional measures that will transform the vision for a sustainable economic future into a plausible reality. Some of these plans of action include expanding knowledge-based industries (i.e. coastal sciences and biotechnology), providing incentives for small businesses, strengthening infrastructure critical to maritime trade, and reenergizing the state's tourism industry.

Goal #3: Think Regionally

The monumental task of rebuilding communities ravaged by floodwaters and hurricane force winds can only be achieved through the hard work and vigilance of multiple stakeholders. Investments in the recovery effort must take into account the broader vision of creating a safer and more sustainable future for the residents of Louisiana. Those involved in the Louisiana Speaks long-term community planning initiative understand the importance of developing partnerships between local, parish and state governments, federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations and community members. The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan illustrates how obstacles can be overcome through teamwork, arguing that "it is only through cooperation among cities and towns acting together as a region, and through regions acting together as a state, that we will be able to effectively engage these challenges" (internet source #29). The policies proposed in the plan represent informed strategies for action designed to effectively manage risk and strengthen the socio-economic resilience of the region. Louisiana Speaks hopes to transcend the geographical boundaries of the southern region to include central and northern

parishes of the state in a comprehensive framework that guides planning processes throughout Louisiana.

The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan proposes over one hundred actions to steer Louisiana through the long and arduous processes of rehabilitation and sustainable development. By establishing informed policies that serve as guidelines for neighborhood, community and parish planning, Louisiana Speaks created a comprehensive and unified vision for the state. While coordination and collaboration between governmental and nongovernmental agencies is required, active community participation during every stage of recovery and planning is critical to the overarching goal of building a more resilient Louisiana. Residents are hopeful, as "nearly seventy percent of citizens polled by Louisiana Speaks believe that the qualities that made their communities special can be reestablished through recovery" (internet source #38).

Louisiana Speaks is presently working to create a Louisiana Location Index that utilizes geographic information system (GIS) database mapping to determine where future urban and rural development projects should be located. To ensure both long-term sustainability and economic prosperity in the region, Louisiana Speaks seeks to establish an Office of State Planning to oversee the organization and management of state-wide planning efforts. Urban planners and designers, scientists, academics, government officials, and community members must work together to enhance the adaptive capabilities of the region. Implementation of the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan signifies the first step in the complex and dynamic process of building a more resilient and sustainable Louisiana.

Criticism of Post-Disaster Recovery

While the aforementioned vision of the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan bodes well in theory, it will take years to properly assess appropriate implementation of tasks and the long-term

effectiveness of actions designed to achieve community revitalization and sustainability.

Criticisms of the Louisiana Recovery Authority and the Road Home Program abound among

citizens living in the New Orleans metropolitan area. Discussions with New Orleans residents

from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds frequently highlight one overarching

sentiment – those in charge of recovery efforts at times cannot be completely trusted.

Distrust of local and state officials is no doubt the result of Louisiana's long history of

political corruption. From the network of patronage that backed the aggressive leadership tactics

of Huey P. Long to the current imprisonment on racketeering charges of another former

Governor, Edwin W. Edwards, Louisiana is no stranger to underhanded politics and back room

deals that overwhelmingly favor the well-connected and those in positions of power. The idea

that deception, fraud, and bribery could plague rebuilding efforts is not outside the realm of

possibility in the minds of Louisiana's population. In an article published in 2008, sociologists

Kevin Gotham and Miriam Greenberg call attention to the potential for corruption and the

controversy that surrounds management and allocation of recovery funds stating,

> "the LRA was set up to operate outside the normal system of checks and balances,
> with a board composed of business owners and executives. Since 2005, the LRA's
> funds have been mired in political conflict with only a small amount making their
> way to affected communities. As of August 2008, for example, less than half of
> the $33.2 billion allocated had been spent, according to the LRA" (Gotham and
> Greenberg 2008:1051).

The Road Home Program is also not without controversy. Eastern Orleans Parish

homeowners interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the long and frustrating process of

acquiring grant money, explaining how the program was mismanaged and completely

unorganized. One African-American couple from the Goretti neighborhood called the program

"crooked," and said that it was hard for them to even get a live person on the phone to complain

about bad customer service. Some consultants interviewed did not qualify for available funding,

making the arduous task of rebuilding much more difficult to accomplish during the country's

recent economic recession. According to Gotham and Greenberg,

> "the program, the largest single housing recovery program in U.S. history, has been the subject of steady criticism from government officials and homeowners for failing to award grants fast enough, bogus calculations to appraise pre-storm home values, and slow progress in awarding grants to needy homeowners…the Road Home Program skews benefits toward homeowners and higher-income taxpayers and away from lower-income taxpayers who happen to be renters. Rather than ameliorating post-disaster problems, the neoliberal emphasis on privileging the private sector in delivering resources to affected communities benefits the affluent, bypasses low-income people, and continues to aggravate social inequalities" (Gotham and Greenberg 2008: 1051).

The article goes on to highlight how storm-ravaged neighborhoods are suffering as a

result of changes that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) made to

the Community Development Block Grant Program. In New Orleans,

> "HUD waived the CDBG 'public benefit' restriction and limited local planning and administration. Activities such as advertisement to support tourism in the disaster area raise concerns that CDBG funds were used to develop tourism rather than rebuild the community. Moreover, these actions reduce transparency and public oversight, and may not fulfill program goals because recipients of the grant have unprecedented discretion and little accountability" (Gotham and Greenberg 2008:1052).

On several occasions interviewees spoke candidly about how city officials seemed to

"care more about getting people back to the French Quarter than fixing our streets." An elderly

African-American woman from Village de l'est complained about New Orleans East's slow

recovery stating,

> "they don't mind if we suffer around here, all they are worried about is getting the tourists back for Mardi Gras and all that other stuff that brings in the big money. I understand that that's important, but so are we. They need to be worried about us cause we're the people that live here. I don't think enough is being done out here, it's like somebody is just sitting on all that money. What are they waiting for, we're here."

Conversations with Vietnamese community members also showcase feelings of aggravation over how New Orleans East is often "neglected by the people in charge of rebuilding." A young Vietnamese man explained, "it's everything else first. They fix all the other places first then we have to fight for leftover money. It's very hard. But our neighborhood is getting a lot of attention because we spoke up. We spoke up loudly and they hear us now."

Village de l'est: The Fight for Sustainability

The Vietnamese of New Orleans East are determined to remain living in Village de l'est, an area of the Crescent City they carved out for themselves decades ago. Considered a Little Vietnam in New Orleans, the community is bustling with improvement projects designed to beautify the streetscape and revitalize the coveted tradition of maintaining a market gardening landscape. Community members are actively engaged in the process of preserving the neighborhood's long-term sustainability. The devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina is often viewed as more of an inconvenience, rather than a catastrophic disaster event. Speaking about the community's recovery one local business owner stated, "I believe it was an opportunity for us not to only come back, but to be better." This sentiment is shared by many Vietnamese residents of Village de l'est who are now taking steps to strengthen their community. According to Father Vien,

> "I think the community is now much more attuned to what is going on outside the community. We know that it can influence us or have an impact on us. And so we are also more attentive to outside issues and trying to influence them. Our involvement with court cases, our involvement with the crime situation, our involvement with the city government. Now we have questions, we are much more attentive to the issue of the environment. We have moved from being voiceless to having a voice. How weak, how strong, I don't know. But at least we have a voice and we do voice what we believe."

The highly publicized Chef Menteur landfill dispute (see Figure 49) is one of the pressing issues the residents of Village de l'est will face in the coming years. Father Vien's frustration

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was apparent when I sat down to talk with him about the ongoing battle to secure the

environmental health of the community. Father Vien explained,

> "post-Katrina the mayor decided to suspend the city ordinances, to claim emergency power. He opened the landfill that is 1.2 miles from our community. In 1997 that same site was proposed as a landfill and we fought. The City Council did not give them the temporary permit to change the zoning. After the hurricane the mayor suspended the ordinance in exchange for twenty-three cents on the dollar for the city. He probably did not understand that we were determined to come back. So we started the battle with them saying you can't put it there for many different reasons. The older people were very conscious of the fact that if the landfill opened there, their children and grandchildren would not return. In that sense, it threatened the very existence of community. That's why they fought. And so, the battle went on and finally on August 12th 2006, they were shut down. But there are still 230,000 cubic yards of debris that's in there that has to be extracted. The company, Waste Management Incorporated, wants to put a three foot clay layer on top of it and walk away, period. And we say no, no, no, you put it there, you take it out. The estimate is that it will cost about twenty-five million dollars. And our response is so, you took the risk. You lost. So we're still in court fighting it. The people who operate this landfill are deeply rooted in the political system. We have a common saying that you touch a certain branch and it shakes the whole forest. This is part of that branch."

Speaking candidly about how people from the community blocked the gate of the landfill

Father Vien added,

> "in regard to the action we did against the landfill, to block the gate. We had to be very careful that those who are willing to be arrested must be American citizens, so that they wouldn't be deported. We had a sign-up list. Thirty three people signed up. Thirty of them were sixty something or older. Only three were in their twenties. So, the young ones mapped the direct action, but the ones that volunteered to be arrested were the older ones. Leading the chant, that's the younger one. But the one who's really there and doing it and willing to go to jail is the older one."

Many citizens of New Orleans East criticized the government's handling of the disaster.

Dozens of consultants describe their battle as ongoing. They frequently highlight the many

hurdles they must conquer in order to achieve full recovery.

Figure 49. Community members protest Chef Menteur Landfill at City Hall (photo by MQVNC)

A local business owner who did not qualify for the Road Home Program expressed his disapproval of how the disaster was managed by public officials. According to the Vietnamese man,

> "the response was definitely too slow. I wish there were some quicker decisions being made, especially right after the storm. I mean, we were left in limbo pretty much. We did not know if they would even allow us to be back. At one point we were thinking that this whole area was going to be green space. We still have to fight for everything. The portion of money just for street repair we have to fight for now. And that's just basic needs. It's basic infrastructure and we still have to fight for it."

The Vietnamese continue to fight for community sustainability. The Viet Village Urban Farm Project, the opening of two neighborhood health clinics, and the success of the Intercultural Charter School are examples of what citizens can accomplish when they join forces and actively initiate neighborhood redevelopment (see Figure 50).
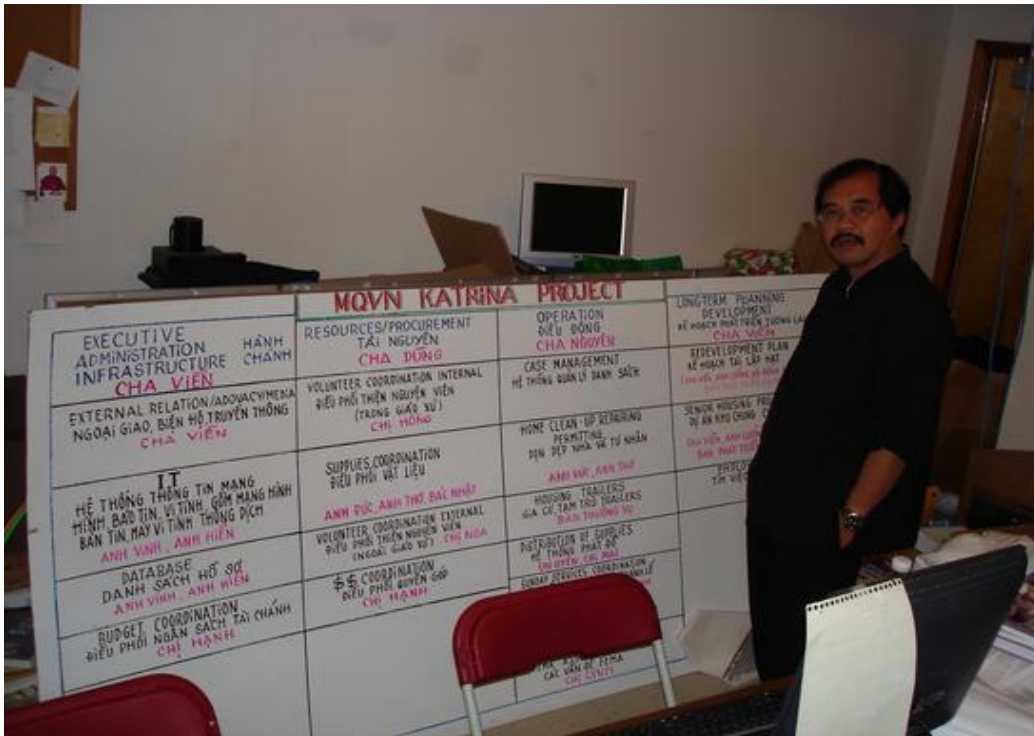
Figure 50. Father Vien discusses the recovery plan (photo by MQVNC)

A prevailing spirit of social inclusion is coursing through the veins of the community and collaboration is no longer a sentiment shared exclusively by Vietnamese. Explaining the newfound partnership between Vietnamese and African-American residents of Village de l'est one young man noted,

> "within Village de l'est most African-Americans came back. We've always lived side by side. But there's always kind of been like an invisible barrier. We lived together peacefully; there was no problem or anything. But we never worked together, we never really communicated as much as we should. Post-Katrina people realized that you gotta work together. Now I see the two ethnicities working together, there is a line of communication."

Resilience in Eastern Orleans Parish

Driving down the streets of New Orleans East I see a portion of the city whose battle scars are painstakingly apparent at every major intersection and curve of the road. Looking around I often think back to how things used to be prior to Hurricane Katrina and find myself recalling vivid

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memories forever encapsulated in my mind. New Orleans East seems almost unfamiliar to me at times, causing an emotion that is both deeply unsettling and profoundly sad. Four years after the storm, I feel a since of loss undiminished by the passing of time. My nostalgia sometimes gives way to frustration at the slow pace of recovery in the area. I remind myself to have patience and maintain a positive outlook when assessing the lengthy and arduous path to full recovery. Surveying neighborhoods of remodeled homes and newly built public landmarks I see the resilience of the people of New Orleans East. In the midst of uncertainty and armed with the knowledge of the difficult task ahead, they chose to return home and reclaim their landscape one home at a time.

The rapid revitalization of Village de l'est serves as a beacon of hope for citizens of New Orleans East. African-Americans struggling to overcome obstacles and return to a sense of normalcy speak candidly about how the Vietnamese "got their act together as a people and did what needed to be done." While many African-American neighborhoods of Eastern Orleans Parish have a long way to go before accomplishing the level of recovery achieved in the ethnic enclave, their resolve remains strong and self-rehabilitation is ongoing. Citizens residing in Spring Lake subdivision and the neighborhood behind the Saint Maria Goretti Church are steadfast in their determination to maintain community solidarity in the coming years. However, there are several neighborhoods in New Orleans East that are composed of blocks of abandoned homes owned by a population that may never return. The risk of these communities being leveled is an eventual reality that seems highly probable with every passing day. And then there are the neighborhoods like Plum Orchard that show signs of life, although inhabited homes are few and far in between. Sprinkled randomly here and there within the devastated landscape, the newly renovated homes are surrounded by blight (see Figure 51) and homeowners worry about

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the neighborhood's long-term sustainability. Drug-trafficking is a major problem in the area and gangbangers take full advantage of limited neighborhood patrols by district police officers.

Figure 51. Abandoned home in Plum Orchard (photo by author)

The people of Eastern Orleans Parish know that they are living on borrowed time and the next hurricane season could wash away their suburban dream forever. They want better flood protection, levees built to withstand Category 5 hurricanes, and pumping stations that work efficiently. Those that came back to the embattled section of the city understand that their communities will most likely not be rebuilt if devastated by a future storm. However, African-Americans and Vietnamese alike embrace the risk and refuse to accept that their built

environment should be returned to its natural state as a swamp. New Orleans East is their home, their place of refuge, and they will continue to fight for what they believe in.

My Return Home

In the first ten years of the 21st century the global population experienced a series of disasters that caused widespread scenes of mass destruction, obliterated livelihoods, and traumatized countless individuals who lost loved ones in heartbreaking tragedies. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the catastrophe that occurred in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina forever erased America's invincible image at home and abroad. While most people recognize that disasters are inevitable, very few understand that humans create their own vulnerability. As the international citizenry continues to grow, more people are living in high-risk locales that offer little security from multiple hazards. In New Orleans, people are aware of the city's below-sea-level status and accept that another hurricane could devastate the urban landscape once again. The stakes are incredibly high, but New Orleanians take the gamble and choose to live in the Crescent City despite all of its shortcomings as an unnatural metropolis. I am one of those individuals that are determined to stay in the city that often becomes water-logged during a heavy rainstorm.

Many questioned my judgment when I announced plans to move back to the city after years of living on the North Shore. My answer was simple, New Orleans is my home. I don't mind parking my car on the neutral ground when a rain system stalls over the area. I accept that my tires will get knocked out of alignment countless times due to horrendously bumpy streets that are legendary for potholes big enough to fit small children. I understand completely that home invasions, carjackings, robberies and violent crimes can occur in any section of the city at any time of the day or night. I am an anthropologist/geographer that studies disasters. I realize

the risk, but still I choose to reside in the Big Easy. When my fiancée and I started house hunting we knew that the smart thing would be to find a home in Metairie located on higher ground. Where did we end up? Back in Uptown New Orleans in a newly renovated home that got several feet of water during Hurricane Katrina. Maybe we are crazy, but we love it and wouldn't live anywhere else. My city is resilient and I am extremely proud to once again be a part of such an excitingly wonderful place.

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Appendix

The Place of Resilience in Disaster Literature

A Prominent Theme

Over the past decade, the concept of community resilience has become a prominent theme in literature seeking to outline a framework for disaster risk reduction applicable in diverse socio-economic and ecological environments. A community's capacity to recover from a disaster event with little or no outside assistance, is an ongoing subject of debate among scientists working diligently to lessen the human impacts posed by potential hazards. The Hyogo Declaration, adopted in 2005 by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), proposed a framework designed to promote resilience to natural, technological and social disasters, calling for a proactive approach to reducing community vulnerability. The introduction of the concept of community resilience to disaster discourses represents a phoenix moment in the field of disaster science and management, heralding a new way of thinking about neighborhood revitalization and strategies of preparedness, mitigation and response.

Offering a novel way of conceptualizing disasters and their effects, the inclusive character of the philosophy of resilience allows scientists the opportunity to enhance the coping capacity and livelihoods of communities experiencing disaster related hardships. A community's resilience is measured by its ability to absorb negative impacts, respond productively and adapt to the post-disaster climate with resourcefulness. Community resilience is a process dependent on the collective behavior of residents who become social agents for redevelopment in the face of adversity. Taking steps to understand and improve community-specific measures of disaster

risk reduction, local citizens are the first line of defense in combating future disasters. Personalized adaptive strategies become a powerful asset in the fight to build community resiliency to multiple hazards. Long-term social, economic and environmental sustainability is the goal of communities facing the numerous threats posed by disaster events. Community sustainability ensures area residents will be able to preserve their way of life in spite of the risks associated with a variety of hazards.

The inclusion of the concept of resilience is becoming more prevalent in literature that seeks to understand how to improve disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery strategies in global communities. Gaining a holistic understanding of the complexities that surround the dualistic nature of human vulnerability and resilience is a critical element in the inherently universal goal of achieving long-term sustainability.

Understanding Disaster Resilience

While conducting research for the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coastal Services Center Community Resilience Index (CRI) Project, I compiled an extensive annotated bibliography of publications written on social, economic, and environmental resilience to disaster events. This appendix section attempts to establish the defining characteristics, meaning and place of resilience as it is represented in contemporary disaster literature penned by a broad consortium of hazards scholars.

Kathleen Tierney (1993) explores disaster preparedness and response within the social science literature in a paper presented at the US-ROC Workshop on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Taipei, Taiwan. Tierney highlights the importance of examining the processes utilized by other countries/cultures engaged in disaster preparedness and response, underscoring the need for a more inclusive database of research findings. The paper is meant to introduce readers to the

study of disasters in the social sciences, with Tierney compiling a lengthy reference section to aid those desiring more in-depth discussion of various research topics outlined in the text. Elements of successful preparedness activities and factors that influence degrees of preparedness are investigated, as well as the need for comprehensive risk assessment.

How scholars from the social sciences have impacted disaster research and transformed processes of policy development is discussed in an article penned by Russell Dynes and Thomas Drabek (1994).Underscoring sociological studies of disaster events, the authors highlight various issues such as the multiple settings and funders/users of disaster research. Dynes and Drabek distinguish between three uses of disaster research – the instrumental (action), the conceptual (understanding), and the symbolic (political). The primacy of research that promotes a more holistic conceptual understanding of disasters is illustrated. Examining how sociological research continues to transform how the nature of disaster is perceived, the article argues the advantages of multidisciplinary approaches to disaster research. Dynes and Drabek call attention to the increasing use of mitigation and preparedness activities in disaster policy development.

Author Donald Geis (2000) offers readers an insightful look into the concept of a Disaster Resistant Community (DRC) and outlines how they can be created. He discusses factors that disaster resistant design must consider and highlights why the term "resistant" was chosen over "resilient." Ten principles of a DRC are developed and the role of the built environment is explained. Geis examines how obstacles in implementing comprehensive mitigation programs can be overcome and stresses the benefits of quality-of-life development. Design guidelines are presented, along with an example of how to develop/redevelop a transportation system and facilities in a natural hazard context. The article charts the history of the DRC concept and concludes with discussion of its present use and future application.

John Twigg (2007) of the Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre authored a useful guidance note that defines the various characteristics of a disaster-resilient community. The guidance note, while just a pilot version designed for fieldtesting, provides valuable information concerning the concepts of disaster risk reduction (DRR), community, and resilience. Meant to serve as a manual for both government and nongovernment agencies engaged in community-based disaster risk reduction, the document emphasizes the importance of partnership, capacity building, advocacy and community participation. Based on a conceptual framework developed by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), the guidance note examines components of resilience, using five thematic tables to categorize the characteristics of a disaster-resilient community – governance, risk assessment, knowledge and education, risk management and vulnerability reduction, and disaster preparedness and response.

Tobin and Whiteford (2002) take an interdisciplinary approach to understanding community resilience in an article that incorporates knowledge and methods from the disciplines of disaster science, geography, and anthropology. Applying a theoretical framework of analysis that integrates elements of established models (mitigation model, recovery model, and structural-cognitive model); Tobin and Whiteford discover the socio-political and economic vulnerability of communities located in the faldas of Ecuador's Mt. Tungurahua. The study underscores health risks and social/economic disruptions associated with evacuation and long-term displacement during both disaster and post-disaster time frames. Issues relating to perception of risk are discussed, as well as strategies that limit the negative human impacts of evacuation practices.

Manyena (2006) examines how disaster resilience is conceptualized, highlighting the role of vulnerability in resilience discourse. The article addresses the characteristics of resilience and vulnerability, accentuating their differences while exploring how these dual concepts relate to each other. He argues for the prioritizing of resilience over vulnerability. Four themes are

highlighted: attaining a concise meaning of resilience; determining whether resilience is the opposite of vulnerability; establishing in what way resilience relates to people and establishments; and understanding the consequences of eliminating the use of the term resilience in discussions of risk reduction. The term resilience is analyzed to ascertain whether it is a new paradigm or an expression.

Tobin (1999) takes a highly critical stance on the feasibility of any community ever achieving "true" resilience and long-term sustainability in the face of disaster. Questioning sustainability as a guiding principle of disaster planning, Tobin stresses how the complexity that characterizes the relationship between resilience/sustainability and hazards leads to multiple problems in effective application. He uses three models – Waugh's mitigation model, Peacock and Ragsdale's recovery model, and Tobin and Montz's structural-cognitive model – to illustrate how resilient/sustainable communities might be achieved. After a short synopsis of each of the aforementioned models, Tobin uses the state of Florida to explain why he believes planning with the goal of creating community resilience and sustainability in this period of globalization is problematic.

Human Vulnerability

A new disaster paradigm, comprehensive vulnerability management, is introduced in an article that offers a comparative analysis of existing approaches to the study and practice of emergency management (McEntire, et al. 2002). The authors review the concepts of disaster-resistant community, the disaster-resilient community, and sustainable development/sustainable hazards mitigation, emphasizing their strengths, as well as their inherent weaknesses. The article states that the aforementioned paradigms are not truly holistic in nature, and fail to place adequate weight on issues vulnerability. McEntire's invulnerable development approach to disaster

reduction is highlighted and then adapted to form a new policy guide/disaster paradigm –

comprehensive vulnerability management. The remainder of the work is dedicated to discussion

of this new, more holistic and integrative approach to disaster management.

Author Omar Cardona (2003) provides readers with an informative and succinctly written

analysis of the concepts of vulnerability and risk in this chapter that emphasizes the need for a

more holistic perspective governing disaster risk management. Cardona underscores the

importance of understanding individual and collective perceptions of risk, as well as the notion

of global vulnerability. Outlining how the natural sciences, applied sciences, and social sciences

differ in their methods of understanding and calculating disaster risk and vulnerability, Cardona

follows up with a critique of the various approaches. He argues that vulnerability and risk must

be conceptualized by employing a holistic approach that takes into account all structural,

geological, economic, social, political, and cultural variables.

Defining and assessing vulnerability is evaluated in an article published by the Benfield

Greig Hazard Research Centre (University College London). Heijmas (2001) argues that the risk

management equation must be holistic in nature, incorporating all factors that contribute to

vulnerability. Three distinctive views of vulnerability are explored: nature as cause

(technological/scientific solutions), cost as cause (economic/financial solutions), and societal

structures as cause (political solutions). The author explains that addressing vulnerability

requires listening to the communities that are at risk, while exploring strategies that promote and

enhance sustainability.

Turner II, et al. (2003) examines the concept of vulnerability and its place within

"sustainability science." Conceptual frameworks of both the Pressure and Release (PAR) model

and Risk Hazards (RH) model are evaluated. The article argues that the existing design of

vulnerability assessments should be reworked, calling for a new framework that measures the

resilience of a system threatened by hazards. Six elements to be included in an effective vulnerability analysis for sustainability are outlined. The new conceptual framework of vulnerability presented in this article was developed by Harvard University's Research and Assessment Systems for Sustainability Program.

Various approaches to measuring vulnerability are explored in a book published by the United Nations University Press. Compiling the research findings and theories of forty scholars dedicated to understanding the concept of vulnerability, Editor Jörn Birkmann (2006) offers readers an extensive and highly informative text that encapsulates how a population's vulnerability can be assessed and quantified using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Several themes highlighted by the various authors include: the concept of vulnerability/vulnerability indicators, the relationship between vulnerability and environmental change, approaches to measuring vulnerability and risk at numerous scales, community-based disaster risk assessment/coping capacity, and institutional vulnerability.

Cutter, Boruff and Shirley (2003) examine the multidimensional nature of social vulnerability in an informative article published by the *Social Science Quarterly*. The authors call attention to a void that exists in research conducted on social vulnerability, stressing the importance of developing a set of indicators that can be used when comparing the degrees of social vulnerability present from one locale to another. Employing a factor analytic approach, the researchers created a Social Vulnerability Index (SoVI) for the United States. In this comparative analysis the hazards-of-place model of vulnerability was used to explore the various elements of social vulnerability. The dynamic factors that influence levels of social vulnerability were discussed, as well as the geography of social vulnerability. The article includes an extensive table that illustrates the concepts and metrics of social vulnerability.

Geographer Daanish Mustafa (1998) shares the findings of a case study detailing vulnerability to flood hazard. Fieldwork conducted in five villages of central Pakistan brings to light three structural causes of vulnerability: entitlement relations, empowerment relations and political economy. The article underscores the integral role social structure plays in determining vulnerability to hazards. Mustafa discusses various approaches to hazards research – the technocratic approach, behavioralist/pragmatist analysis, and the more recent, inclusive approach. The study illustrates the importance of comprehensive vulnerability mitigation to practices of sustainable development. Mustafa's case study examines vulnerability at both the macro and micro level, accentuating the interrelatedness of varying scales. He applies Blaikie's "pressure and release" (PAR) model to data results, using a chart that identifies structural and conjectural pressures to explain the progression of vulnerability.

Pelling (1997) documents the vulnerability of Guyana's capital to flood events in a case study that incorporates empirical data from four high flood risk wards located in Greater Georgetown. Conducting a comparative qualitative study that assesses the vulnerability of household units to floods, Pelling examined socio-economically distinct neighborhoods representative of low-income suburban, low-income inner city, low/mixed income peripheral squatter, and mixed/high income suburban areas of the capital. His descriptive analysis sheds light on the human impact of flooding, with questionnaires and interviews providing insight into the personal experiences and perceptions of local residents. Research findings illustrate how institutional weaknesses increase degrees of vulnerability, highlighting the need for community initiatives, sustainable community development and projects that facilitate infrastructure repair.

Pelling and Uitto (2001) discuss the vulnerability of small island developing states (SIDS) to natural disasters, focusing on how global processes interact with local dynamics to influence degrees of resiliency and capacity for long-term sustainability. The journal article

examines the dual concepts of vulnerability and resilience, highlighting how both are inextricably linked to an international climate of constantly evolving socio-political and economic systems. The various components of global change are outlined to emphasize the importance of including these factors in local policy decisions designed to strengthen island resilience. Pelling and Uitto give credit to the United Nation's International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), explaining how it lessened vulnerability through increasing SIDS disaster mitigation capacity. A case study of Barbados was included to illustrate the interplay between global forces and local systems, accentuating how disaster mitigation must be integrated into policies meant to promote sustainable development.

Community-Based Mitigation and Social Capital

An initiative outlined in a booklet produced by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (Davies and Murshed 2006) provides a framework for the implementation of Community-based Disaster Risk Management, highlighting its guiding principles and practices designed to strengthen community resilience to disaster. With the goal of reducing the human impact of disaster, the document accentuates the importance of incorporating strategies of disaster management into policies and programs governing processes of long-term sustainable development. The indicators of a resilient community are examined, along with elements of risk reduction and pertinent guidelines to follow when executing community-based projects on disaster risk management. Both process and outcome indicators are discussed, providing insight into how to effectively enhance community coping capacities.

In a discussion paper published by the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, Terrence Loomis (2002) outlines a conceptual framework for sustainable community development designed to promote social cohesion and the overall well-being of New Zealand

society. The paper calls for active government engagement in community building, highlighting the advantages of a coordinated approach that takes into consideration the various partnerships involved in fostering long-term sustainability. The author stresses the importance of community assessments that inventory the various resources that a population has at its disposal. Arguing that sustainable development is a highly beneficial investment, the author examines the tools needed to enhance community capabilities and adaptive capacities.

In a short, yet informative paper published by the United Nations Centre for Regional Development, community based disaster management is highlighted as an effective tool in building resilience to disaster. Pandey and Okazaki (2005) accentuate the benefits of including community members in all phases of the disaster management process. Empowerment and active engagement is the overarching theme of the article, with case studies outlining successful community initiatives for sustainable development. A list of eight major lessons learned in the pursuit of implementing community based sustainable disaster risk management concludes the paper.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's recent initiative is designed to strengthen community resilience and promote sustainable socio-economic development in a region that continues to struggle with the devastating impacts of frequent disaster events (de Guzman, et al. 2008). The catastrophic effects of the 2004 Asian Tsunami on countless human populations led to the formulation of the initiative that takes as its central focus regional/national cooperation in disaster risk management and the community capacity-building process. Three pilot projects undertaken in India (livelihood approach to development), Indonesia (recovery support) and Sri Lanka (integrated early warning systems) illustrate the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships and the advantages gained from sharing lived experiences of disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. Six

recommendations were laid out: strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships; enhance livelihood security and development; strengthen the social dimensions of communities; develop end-to-end early warning systems; sustain CBDRM and community development initiatives; as well as, various recommendations for action.

Mayunga (2007) proposes a capital-based approach in measuring the resiliency of communities to multiple hazards. In this conceptual framework, five forms of capital (social, economic, physical, human, and natural) are used to assess community resilience. Considerable attention is paid to defining the concept of disaster resilience and the development of a Community Disaster Resilience Index (CDRI). Mayunga discusses three methods to combine indicators, as well as methods employed to solve problems caused by the "cancellation effect." The paper also outlines five approaches used to assign weight to various capital domains, guidelines for determining the unit of analysis, and the importance of mapping through the use of GIS-based technology.

Callaghan and Colton (2007) discuss how communities can bolster their resilience to hazards through the development of community capital. The authors commence with a brief summary of the concepts of sustainability and resilience, laying the groundwork for a discussion detailing the interconnectedness of various forms of capital and the benefits that can be gained from incorporating a comprehensive framework when engaging in processes of sustainable development. The bulk of the article outlines the various forms of community capital: environmental capital ("natural capital"), human capital, social capital, cultural capital, public structural capital and commercial capital. Callaghan and Colton use a pyramid of community capital and energy flows to underscore how maintaining a proper balance between forms of community capital is essential to building community resilience.

In a preliminary paper written by Russell R. Dynes (2005), a founding director of the University of Delaware's Disaster Research Center, the multifaceted role played by social capital in community disaster response is examined. Six forms of social capital are offered and effectively explained: obligations and expectations, informational potential, norms and effective sanctions, authority relations, appropriable social organizations, and intentional organizations. Dynes suggests nine plans of action designed to enhance social capital and guide policy development. Investigating the utility of applying social capital theory to research on disaster response, Dynes outlines both advantages and numerous issues that remain unresolved and warrant further examination.

Nakagwa and Shaw (2004) provide readers with two case studies from Kobe, Japan and Gujarat, India to illustrate how social capital and active leadership can lead to the rapid revitalization of communities hard hit by disaster. The collective action of citizens and a high level of mutual social trust figured prominently in the rehabilitation of the devastated communities. The authors highlight the frequent absence of social capital in disaster management frameworks, arguing that it is a vital tool in building community resilience. The article emphasizes how city planning, community participation, and disaster management complement each other, reducing vulnerability and mitigating the negative human impacts of disaster events.

Promoting Coastal Resilience

Adger, et al. (2005) illustrates the importance of nurturing the sometimes tenuous relationship that exists between society and the ecosystems of coastal environments. Viewing the concept of resilience through a theoretical lens, the authors call attention to the adaptive capabilities that can be fostered in communities inhabiting high-risk locales. The role of local and regional

governance systems in lessening social vulnerability is highlighted, as well as the significance that must be placed on limiting environmental degradation. The article draws on two case studies (the 2004 Asian Tsunami and the response of small Caribbean islands to the threat of hurricanes) to demonstrate how institutional forms can strengthen the sources of social-ecological resilience to disaster.

The main objectives and organizational activities of the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program (NTHMP) are examined in an article published in *Natural Hazards* (Jonientz-Trisler, et al. 2005). The program's mission is to aid in the building of tsunami-resilient communities through hazard assessment, warning guidance and mitigation. Placing the program in a historical context, the authors describe the reasons behind the formation of the NTHMP, and the role of NOAA in the development of an effective strategy designed to reduce community vulnerability to tsunamis. The strategy's four goals are listed, along with five defining characteristics of a tsunami-resilient community. An extensive table included in the article outlines the program's planning elements, accomplishments and proposed future actions. The authors also detail mitigation products (i.e. signage, evacuation brochures, community outreach products, etc.) the program utilizes in efforts to promote tsunami resilience. The criteria that define a TsunamiReady community are highlighted, along with an appendix that lists the specific activities/needs of each of the five states represented in the NTHMP.

In a report of the Coastal States Organization (CSO) Coastal Resilience Steering Committee (Collini 2008), it is recommended that resilience not be used as a Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) performance measure. While this white paper rejects resilience as a tool to measure the progress of states toward the objectives outlined in the CZMA, the centrality of resilience to coastal management is emphasized. A background on the CZMA is given, along with a table outlining resilience indicators projects presently underway. The projects will help

better define and measure community resilience. The report concludes with a list of actions/recommendations to aid in the advancement of coastal community resilience. The appendixes of the report are informative: the CZMA Performance Measurement System; contextual indicators that support performance measurement; definitions of resilience; an overview of existing and emerging tools to promote resilience.

The Oregon Natural Hazards Workgroup (ONHW) at the University of Oregon prepared a report that discusses the long-term recovery and reconstruction process that coastal communities located in the Pacific Northwest of the United States will undergo following a major earthquake in the Cascadia Subduction Zone (LeDuc and Mitchell 2006). In efforts to prepare for and gain a holistic understanding of what will be needed in the aftermath of a catastrophic disaster event, a pilot community (Cannon Beach, Oregon) participated in a post-disaster recovery forum. The project was organized into three phases that emphasized raising community awareness and local participation in both the short-term and long-term recovery/reconstruction process. A community post-disaster recovery planning forum manual was created to aid other at-risk coastal communities, incorporating lessons learned from the Cannon Beach Pilot Project.

Lorna Victoria (2002) of Thailand's Asian Disaster Preparedness Center investigates the impact, effectiveness, and replicability of the Pilot Orissa Disaster Management Project. The pilot project was conducted from March 2001 to October 2002 in villages within seven coastal districts of the State of Orissa, located on the east coast of India. An area frequently impacted by tropical cyclones and major flood events, the Orissa project was designed to increase the resilience of local populations through an initiative of multi-stakeholder community disaster preparedness and mitigation. Community Contingency Plans (CCP) were developed by team members focused on capacity building, sustainable development, and vulnerability reduction.

After assessing the effectiveness of the project, Victoria concluded that the project had successfully established a local disaster management system in the high-risk coastal area.

Atiq Ahmed (2006), a team member of the US IOWTS Program, outlines several key objectives of the 2006 CCR Workshop held in Bangkok, Thailand. Participants of the workshop identified the major factors of coastal community resilience, developing methods to strengthen the region's long-term sustainability. The document highlights the importance of collaboration and coordination in developing a comprehensive Coastal Community Resilience guide. Workshop participants presented case studies from Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia, Thailand, and India. Presentations aided in defining the concepts of risk, vulnerability and resilience. Emphasis was placed on building both human and ecological coastal resilience, stressing the need for community oriented education as prevention. Participants underscored the importance of increasing national, regional, and local capacities. The NOAA Community Vulnerability methodology and GIS resources were demonstrated.

In a study published by the German Red Cross in cooperation with the Community Based Disaster Preparedness Programme (CBDPP) of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) at Cox's Bazar, author Bashirul Haq (2007) discusses techniques involved in constructing cyclone resistant houses located in high-risk coastal areas prone to wind damage and storm surge. The survey conducted by Bashirul Haq and Associates Ltd. examines the architectural and structural details of house structures in the area and the traditional building methods of inhabitants. Maintaining dialogue with the local citizenry is the central premise of Haq's approach to understanding all aspects concerned with house construction and the varying degrees of vulnerability to disaster present in portions of coastal Bangladesh. The shared experiences of the local population were used by the research team as an integral source of knowledge, paving

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the way for a more comprehensive assessment of housing problems, while allowing for greater acceptance of guidelines for sustainable development.

In the introduction to a theme issue of *The Geographical Journal* the main arguments of seven papers presented at a conference held at the Royal Geographical Society were highlighted (Nicholls and Branson 1998). The papers discuss the concept of coastal resilience in relation to the coastal zones of Britain. A holistic approach to sustainability is a common theme addressed by the researchers as they discuss such issues as the quantification of resilience, environmental and socio-economic elements of sustainable development, coastal flood and erosion, coastal zone management activities, and the benefits of insurance programs. The article concludes by calling attention to a deficiency in the understanding of socio-economic resilience, particularly in its relation to natural resilience.

An interdisciplinary ecological economics approach to determine sustainable uses of Great Britain's extensive coastline is employed by Turner, et al. (1998). The authors discuss the importance of coastal resource systems, highlighting development in coastal areas. Coastal zone functions, uses, and values are explained, along with strategies for future coastal zone management. Topics addressed include: socio-economic drivers, environmental pressures, climate change and coastal processes variability, environmental changes and their potential impacts, and policy response options. The article evaluates current depletion and long range exploitation of resources along the UK coastal zone. The role of climate, tourism, population growth, extraction trends, and pollution was also discussed.

The concept of coastal resilience and its implications for Dutch coastal management practices are discussed by Klein, et al. (1998). The authors provide a conceptual framework for coastal vulnerability assessment and identify three types of resilience – morphological, ecological and socio-economic. They propose a comprehensive definition of resilience that

incorporates all three processes and highlights the evolving nature of coastal systems, as well as functional aspects that benefit human societies. A synopsis of Dutch coastal management practices, past and present, is outlined. *Growing with the Sea*, a study that continues to stir controversy in the Netherlands is also discussed at length, shedding light on the dual concepts of managed retreat and land reclamation.

Climate Change and Human Adaptation

Hultman and Bozmoski (2006) investigate the link between disaster management and anthropogenic climate change in a recent article published in the *Journal of International Affairs*. The authors stress that international cooperation is necessary for effective climate change mitigation. The article explains how climate change poses a risk to national security, outlining three specific threats. Hultman and Bozmoski argue that climate change mitigation increases socioecological resiliency to natural hazards. Policy mechanisms that successfully distribute risk are introduced. The Dutch Model that incorporates a "living with water" strategy is also outlined, illustrating a proactive approach to adaptation that fosters resilience to both climate change and natural hazards.

Author Rajib Shaw (2006) explores community-level adaptation in a case study that details how a Canadian non-governmental organization sought to lessen the devastating human impacts of climate change in rural areas of Vietnam. In efforts to strengthen the resilience of agricultural communities hard hit by flooding, the NGO teamed up with local, state, and national governments to promote community initiatives designed to protect the livelihoods of rural inhabitants. The concept of human security/development is examined, as well as its relationship to local environments and disaster management. The three-year project sought to develop

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community-based climate change adaptation strategies among adversely affected populations, focusing on the need for policy development that increases community coping capacities.

In a case study conducted in the Thua Thien Hue Province of Central Vietnam, Tran and Shaw (2007) examine the gaps that exist between disaster and environment management programs/policies. The article highlights the connection between environmental degradation, human vulnerability, and intensity of disaster events. Tran and Shaw argue for an integrated approach that incorporates both environmental studies and methods of disaster management, stressing the centrality of disaster research to sustainable development. Rural/urban collaboration in assessing vulnerability, resilience, and long-term sustainability is stressed, as well as the need for reform and adaptation of extant agricultural methods.

Elasha, et al. (2005) documents the risk that extreme temperatures and climate variability pose for populations of the Sudano-Sahel region of Africa. The authors explain how the community-based sustainable livelihood assessment method and strategies of emergency management are being used to mitigate the devastating impacts of drought. Five sustainable livelihood capitals/assets used to measure adaptive capacity were highlighted: natural, financial, physical, human, and social. The implementation of a pilot project in Gireighikh, Bara Province of North Kordofan State illustrated the effectiveness of the sustainable livelihood approach.

Community resilience and vulnerability within remote areas located in an Arctic environment is examined in a journal article published in *Arctic*. Robards and Alessa (2004) argue that a social-ecological system (SES) based on man's dynamic relationship with his milieu, can be a guiding force when determining the best methods for strengthening the resilience of populations inhabiting the Circumpolar North. The authors highlight four primary practices ("social-ecological timescapes") in their study – hunting/gathering, pastoralism, agriculture, and market-based economy. Understanding the complex relationship that exists between these

timescapes and community members is essential to any effort that seeks to foster resilience and long-term sustainability. Integrating common cultural values into adaptive processes and becoming aware of ecosystem variations is paramount when trying to design effective strategies to reduce vulnerability.

In a recent publication of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (2008b), the value of integrating indigenous knowledge into policies and practices of disaster risk reduction is discussed. The role that indigenous knowledge has played in reducing risk and fostering sustainability in communities throughout the Asia-Pacific region is celebrated in chapters that outline eighteen indigenous practices designed to mitigate the adverse effects of multiple hazards. While detailing how communities faced with such disasters as drought, typhoon, earthquake, tsunami, and landslide, used indigenous knowledge to cope with disaster impacts, the document informs readers about the applicability of indigenous practices and strategies in communities plagued with similar instances of adversity. Active community participation and a more holistic understanding of local environments are highlighted as advantages gained from the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in disaster risk reduction policies.

The critical role that women play in strengthening their community's resilience to the various weather-related disasters that result from climate change is explored in a publication of the UNISDR (2008a). Women that inhabit the world's developing countries are considered the managers of natural and environmental resources, signaling the need for their inclusion in disaster risk reduction and sustainable development planning. Examples of grassroots women's leadership are provided, as well as the advantages gained from female participation in disaster preparedness and response. Case studies from communities around the globe emphasize the importance of women's knowledge and experience in the formulation of comprehensive climate

change adaptation strategies. Issues such as land use and management, community-based development, and alternative livelihood options are also highlighted.

Assessing Seismic Resilience

Michel Bruneau and Andrei Reinhorn (2004), employing a probabilistic framework, discuss the quantification of seismic resiliency. Specifically, the authors are attempting to quantify the seismic resilience of acute care facilities located within the parameters of a predetermined geographic area. Bruneau and Reinhorn begin the paper by defining what constitutes a "resilient" system, incorporating four properties of resilience: robustness, redundancy, resourcefulness and rapidity. In the seismic resiliency assessment, two quantities are measured – quality of life and treatment capacity of total hospital infrastructure. The quantification of engineering resilience is also outlined, with the resilience of both structural and non-structural components analyzed. The "Reinhorn-Bruneau Sliding Pair of Fragility Curves" is introduced as an assumption made by the authors to assess non-linear structural seismic response. Closing remarks stress the importance of investing in additional research on quantitative resiliency measures.

In a paper given at the 2005 IABSE Symposium in Lisbon, Portugal, former director of the Multidisciplinary Center for Earthquake Engineering (MCEER), Michel Bruneau (2005), argues that methodologies/tools used to tackle earthquake engineering problems can be modified to enhance the resilience of global communities threatened by multiple hazards. He commences with a definition of resilience, followed by a diagram that illustrates a schematic representation of seismic resilience. Bruneau emphasizes the need for integration, calling for a multidisciplinary approach when faced with the task of implementing strategies that promote multi-hazard resiliency. The paper outlines both pre-event and post-event earthquake engineering technologies

that are applicable to numerous disaster situations. A 3-D representation of the interrelationship between research, critical infrastructure and hazards/threats is also provided, signaling the importance of solutions that are holistic in nature.

Cimellaro, Paolo, Reinhorn, and Bruneau (2005) offer a quantitative definition of seismic resilience using a non-dimensional analytical function. A distinction is made between uncoupled and coupled resilience, emphasizing the latter's role of indicating functionality/performance. The proposed methodology allows for the estimation of losses (structural and non-structural) and loss recovery time in the event of a disaster. Three recovery functions are outlined: linear, exponential and trigonometric. System fragility is assessed through the use of a formula that denotes the multidimensional performance limit state threshold (MPLT). The researchers concluded the paper by applying the methodology to measure potential direct and indirect losses of a hospital located in California's San Fernando Valley.

In a paper presented at The 14th World Conference on Earthquake Engineering, Miles and Chang (2008) discuss ResilUS, a model developed to simulate the recovery dynamics of various scales – socio-economic agents (i.e. households and businesses), neighborhoods and communities – after a disaster event. The authors offer a conceptual model of community capital resilience, outlining five interrelated elements: physical capital, economic capital, socio-cultural capital, personal capital and ecological capital. A list of variables that are classified according to community capitals is also included. Ability to perform and opportunity to perform are the two indicators of recovery utilized in the model. Miles and Chang describe ResilUS as both modular and scalable. The remainder of the paper discussed application of the model (Northridge Earthquake case study), its limitations, and current study area (Gulf Coast of Louisiana).

The development of a community resilience model that assesses potential lifeline-related losses in the event of disaster is outlined by Chang and Chamberlin (2004). The authors offer a

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succinctly written synopsis of advancements made in the modeling of earthquake resilience on a community scale. The model, which focuses on multi-source economic losses, was applied by the research team to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP). The article highlights the benefits of utilizing an agent-based model structure implemented in object-oriented programming language and explains how simulation software is presently being used to evaluate possible impacts on area businesses. Chang and Chamberlin stress that seismic mitigation of utility infrastructure increases community resiliency.

Ian Buckle, director of the Center for Civil Engineering Earthquake Research at the University of Nevada, Reno, provides a descriptive account detailing the concept of performance-based seismic design. System-level performance criteria are used to assess the resilience of the nation's highways and bridges to major earthquakes. The author explains how a desire to significantly reduce economic losses resulting from the interruption of transportation systems is the overarching impetus for quantifying the resilience of critical infrastructure. System loss-estimation models that determine approximate recovery times are essential tools in establishing quantifiable data sets. Buckle details the selection of hazard levels and performance objectives for bridges, as well as the notion that components of the total highway system differ in regard to degrees of vulnerability. Buckle mentions three other critical infrastructure systems – mass transit, water supply and telecommunications – that could benefit from the performance-based methodology.

Rajib Shaw (2003) illustrates how the effectiveness of earthquake disaster management is strengthened by the active engagement and multidimensional roles played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Emphasizing multi-stakeholder coordination in comprehensive action plans of disaster reduction, Shaw provides readers with a framework for successful NGO cooperation. Shaw distinguishes between the various classifications of NGOs, highlighting how

categorization is dependent on the particular mission and operations prescribed by the NGO. The article includes several case studies that exemplify the numerous advantages gained from NGO involvement in earthquake disaster management – NSET (Nepal)/GHI (USA), AKUT (Turkey), NGO-Kobe (Japan), and Abhiyan (India).

Information, Innovation and Critical Infrastructure

Allenby and Fink (2005) provide readers with a thought provoking introduction to the "portfolio approach" to enhancing resiliency and the promising future of dual-use tools/technologies. They explain that several modes of analysis must be combined in order to develop an effective strategy for reducing vulnerability to a wide variety of risks. The article underscores the need for investment in new innovation that protects society from potential risks while providing the general public with both economic and social benefits. Arizona State University's Decision Theater is briefly mentioned as evidence of the growing interest in tools that strengthen the information infrastructure of urban systems. The authors discuss how network-centric organizations are transforming urban work environments, strengthening their resilience to disaster and improving productivity and employee quality of life.

In a report published by New Zealand's Resilient Organizations Research Programme (Dantas, Seville and Nicholson 2006), the relationship between efficient and timely electronic data and information sharing during and following a disaster event and effective organizational response and recovery is discussed. The report critically evaluates New Zealand's existing emergency management apparatus, offering long-term solutions with potential to improve organizational response time. An emergency event that occurred in Matata is used as a case study to evaluate existing inter-organizational data/information sharing and decision-making practices. The authors call for the implementation of a Dynamic Geographical Information System (DGIS)

framework in coordinating emergency response among organizations involved in maintaining the resilience of New Zealand's State Highway network. Various challenges inherent in the implementation process are explained, as well as potential opportunities resulting from decreases in recovery time and overall cost.

Bosher, et al. (2007) addresses resilience and emergency management in relation to the critical infrastructure of the United Kingdom. The article explains that attaining a sustainable environment requires an integrated approach, incorporating both individuals from the construction industry and emergency managers. The authors stress the need for preventive and pro-active measures that demand joint responsibility in the quest to lessen the vulnerability of transport networks, emergency services, public health facilities, and the energy/water supply.

In a CRS Report for Congress (Parfomak 2007), the vulnerability of geographically concentrated critical infrastructure is discussed. The report outlines the need for federal policies that combat threats to United States critical infrastructure, highlighting the benefits of geographic dispersion. Disasters that could negatively impact critical infrastructure are detailed, along with the frequency in which they occur. Policies that have an effect on infrastructure capacity and location include: prescriptive sitting, economic incentives, environmental regulation and economic regulation. Several policy options that work to increase critical infrastructure resilience are evaluated and include: eliminating policies that encourage geographic concentration of critical infrastructure, implementing policies that bolster dispersion, and adopting policies that ensure both survivability and recovery capabilities.

Economic Resilience

Adam Rose (2007) provides readers with an informative account of economic resilience to disaster. He commences with a lengthy dialogue on defining economic resilience, incorporating

discussion of numerous conceptual and operational definitions prescribed by various academic disciplines. Rose explains that resilience takes place at three distinct levels (microeconomic, mesoeconomic and macroeconomic), emphasizing the distinction between static and dynamic economic resilience. Conservation, import substitution and market strengthening are several of the resilience activities highlighted in Rose's analysis. Resilience is quantified through the inclusion of mathematical equations, with a following section reviewing attempts to measure resilience through simulation studies. Rose concludes by discussing actions and policies that enhance economic resilience, while pointing out that resilience can be eroded by both internal and external conditions.

In an article published in the *Journal of Regional Science*, Rose and Liao (2005) discuss economic modeling and its function in disaster impact analysis. The authors begin by contrasting the input-output (I-O) analysis employed in the past with the more recent nonlinear computable general equilibrium (CGE) analysis, characterized by its ability to better model economic resilience. While Rose and Liao explain the various benefits resulting from the simulation of behavioral responses to changing market conditions during and following a disaster event, the limitations of CGE analysis are also examined. The authors argue that CGE analysis must be refined in order to produce more accurate estimates of the potential economic impacts of disasters. The adjustments made to CGE analysis are represented in a case study that models the economic impacts resulting from a hypothetical earthquake that disturbs the normal functioning of the Portland Metropolitan Water System.

An asset-based approach to understanding the negative impacts of natural disasters on rural populations is presented by Carter, et al. (2004). Published by the BASIS Research Program on Poverty, Inequality and Development, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the comparative study utilizes longitudinal data on economic assets to assess the long-

term sustainability and resilience of rural households in Ethiopia and Honduras adversely affected by prolonged drought in the Horn of Africa and devastating Atlantic basin Hurricane Mitch. The research findings accentuate the need for informed development policy that promotes asset protection and recovery strategies to aid rural communities in developing countries. The article highlights that the poor often suffer disproportionately, outlining a pattern of "weak resilience" that is rectifiable through the creation of "social safety nets" that cushion the economic blows brought by disaster.

Radloff (2006) describes the purpose of a survey conducted by the Saskatchewan Economic Developers Association in an article published by the Community-University Institute for Social Design at the University of Saskatchewan. The Community Resilience Model was utilized in the survey of economic developers. The author explains that there are four dimensions of resilience included in the Community Resilience Model: resilient people, resilient resources, resilient organizations, and resilient communities. The study established the need for greater education among economic developers, integration of principles, and the introduction of resilience building ideas into communities.

The Global Fight for Disaster Risk Reduction

A collection of papers presented at an international conference hosted by the World Bank's Disaster Management Facility and the ProVention Consortium, address growing threats posed by urban vulnerability to disaster events and the need for informed policies that facilitate sustainable development and comprehensive disaster prevention (Kreimer, Arnold and Carlin 2003). Each of the four sections of the volume put emphasis on the interdependence of systems on all scales (global, regional, national and local) and the importance of changing the perception of risk among human populations. The main umbrella topics covered in the volume include:

globalization and the economic impacts of disasters; environment, climate variability, and adaptation; social vulnerability to disaster impacts; and protecting critical infrastructure. The chapter concerning the resilience of coastal megacities is particularly insightful, with the authors calling for the inclusion of adaptive capacity and resiliency in policy frameworks and emergency management goals.

A summary of the discussions that took place during a workshop funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was provided by Bull-Kamanga, et al. (2003). The workshop (Disasters, Urban Development and Risk Accumulation in Africa), held in Nairobi, Kenya, explored the risks (from everyday hazards to major disasters) that impoverished urban populations are facing as a result of inadequate processes of urban development and poorly planned urban management. The participants of the workshop discussed reasons why urban governments are not engaging in active risk reduction and how this problem can be alleviated through integration and a shift away from non-collaborative sectoral disaster programmes. Posed with the question of how to develop understanding of the risks associated with poor urban communities, two critical points were made: the necessity of rooting understanding in local contexts, and creating a locally owned process of risk identification and reduction.

The ongoing partnership between the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the United Nations Development Programme's Special Unit for South-South Cooperation produced a document that examines initiatives in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that were successful in linking disaster risk reduction and poverty reduction (UNISDR 2008c). Emphasizing how the world's poor suffer disproportionately from disaster events, the document illustrates the role of non-governmental organizations in implementing projects that combat both poverty and disaster risk. Securing livelihoods and increasing resilience through comprehensive water and environmental management is discussed, as well as numerous drought risk reduction

initiatives. Each case study includes sections describing the initiative, along with lessons learned, major obstacles encountered and views on project replication.

In a discussion paper published by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2008), a project designed to increase the resilience of children and youth inhabiting areas hard hit by disaster is discussed. Strategies that strengthen a community's capacity to offer physical and psychological security to orphans and separated children and youth (OSCY) remains at the forefront of UNESCAP's project to rehabilitate areas devastated by the 2004 Asian Tsunami. Sumatra's Aceh province serves as ground zero for testing programs of social rehabilitation designed to enhance capacity development and empower the local population. The discussion paper argues that child protection strategies must be included in disaster response policies in order to protect the most vulnerable of society's population. Lessons learned in numerous workshops/meetings that took place in the region are also included in the document.

In a report submitted to the Commission on Poverty Task Force (Ngai-teck 2007), the concept of community resilience is applied to practices and strategies designed to alleviate poverty among the disadvantaged populations of Hong Kong. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess district level poverty alleviation, with research conducted in three pilot districts of Hong Kong – Sham Shui Po, Yuen Long, and Kwun Tong. A multitude of stakeholders took part in the study, filling out questionnaires that were later analyzed and used to highlight both district strengths and weaknesses. Making communities more self reliant and resilient to adversity is celebrated as the premise of district poverty alleviation work. The study lists six factors contributing to community resilience that should be cultivated: clear directions, people-oriented, district participation, link directions with actions, address the community needs, and coordinate district mechanisms.

A variety of successful practices and programs designed to strengthen the resilience of disaster-vulnerable communities are discussed in a document published by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (2007). The role that non-governmental organizations play in implementing effective action plans for community-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR) is illustrated in case studies from some of the most impoverished and highly vulnerable landscapes of the world. Education of local populations, grassroots disaster management, and the need for collaboration among multiple stakeholders is highlighted throughout the document. Serving as a guidebook for communities facing similar risks, the document offers feasible practices that have the potential for replication. The activities of such NGO's as Tearfund, Oxfam GB, Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development (CORDAID), and CARE International are celebrated in this report that details the various actions being taken to foster community resilience to disaster events.

In a paper authored by Suvit Yodmani (2001), Executive Director of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) in Bangkok, Thailand, the linkages between human poverty and increased vulnerability to disasters are explored. Yodmani argues that poverty reduction and disaster reduction programs must become integrated, underscoring the need for the inclusion of disaster reduction strategies in sustainable development planning processes. Characteristics of community-based disaster management and strategies of community-based risk reduction are discussed, along with several examples of successful integration of disaster/poverty reduction programs – ADPC's joint initiative program: "Livelihood Options for Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia," the Bangladesh Urban Disaster Mitigation Project, the Community Based Flood Mitigation Project in Cambodia, and the Kathmandu Valley Earthquake Risk Management Project.

Landau and Saul (2004) present a conceptual framework for understanding family and community resilience to disaster events. After discussion of the psychosocial impacts of disasters on individuals, families, and communities, the authors put forth the LINC Community Resilience Model that can be applied to adversely affected populations engaged in the arduous process of recovery. Two case examples – a study conducted in post 9/11 communities of Lower Manhattan and a community-wide intervention project located in an area of Buenos Aires, Argentina experiencing socio-political unrest – illustrate how an approach to recovery that utilizes a resilience metaframework can facilitate community resilience and long-term sustainability. The chapter concludes by establishing four overarching themes of community resilience.

Gail Hochachka (2006) documents the plight of rural families affected by civil war and violence in the town of Huancavelica, located high in the Andes Mountains of Peru. The non-profit Institute for Action and Progress (INAPRO) worked with the indigenous group in an effort to build community resilience and self-sufficiency. A four quadrant approach was utilized to tackle such pressing issues as social/cultural marginalization, domestic violence/child abuse, exclusion/oppression, and poverty. The case study demonstrated the effectiveness of the all quadrant approach in empowering and motivating community members.

Kathleen Tierney (2003), in a preliminary paper published by the University of Delaware Disaster Research Center, examines the city of New York's community and organizational response capabilities in the wake of the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center terrorist attack. The succinctly written analysis stresses the role that resourcefulness played in the organized response of all actors mobilized after the disaster event occurred, highlighting the creative and improvisational nature of the coordinated efforts that ensued as a result of both collective sensemaking and collective action. Tierney outlines the concept of resilience, stressing the four R's (robustness, redundancy, resourcefulness and rapidity), while distinguishing the technical,

organizational, social and economic dimensions of resilience. Evaluation of post-disaster activities indicates the importance of effectively managing convergent and emergent groups involved in emergency response.

Kendra and Wachtendorf (2003) document the destruction of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in New York City's World Trade Center in an article published in *Disasters*. Despite the chaos that ensued during the terrorist attack, the EOC managed to maintain its functionality by relocating to temporary bases of command. The authors stress the instrumentality of multi-organizational coordination, interpersonal communication and information exchange. The study found that resilience to disaster demanded a high level of craftsmanship and the ability to react and interact within the realm of social, technological and natural systems while adjusting to extreme situations.

In a recent roundtable sponsored by the Center for Biosecurity of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), the concept of community resilience in relation to catastrophic health events was discussed (Schoch-Spana, et al. 2008). The roundtable examined issues surrounding the implementation of Homeland Security Presidential Directive 21 (HSPD-21), which lists community resilience as one of four essential elements in maintaining public health. The primary components of HSPD-21 are preparedness, coordination, regional initiation, involvement of non-governmental, private and academic entities, and collective participation by members of the community. Participants in the roundtable highlighted the importance of pro-active measures, cross-partnerships, and community/faith-based organizations in the process of strengthening community resilience.

Phillips and Stoney (2006), in a paper prepared for the Public Health Agency of Canada, argue for the active engagement of the voluntary sector in Canada's Health Emergency Management. Coordination, collaboration and partnership between governmental agencies and

voluntary organizations embody the central premise of the paper, with the authors illustrating a shift in paradigm that is manifested in both the National Framework for Health Emergency Management and the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan. Phillips and Stoney draw on case studies of past emergencies in North America (i.e. SARS outbreak in Toronto, 9/11 and the 1998 ice storm), observing and evaluating the role of the voluntary sector. The authors examine benefits gained from voluntary organizations participating in all stages of emergency management – preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery.

In hopes of encouraging more countries to develop national platforms for disaster risk reduction, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (2008d) provided examples of successful institutional mechanisms employed by various nations around the world. The National Platforms of such countries as Costa Rica, Germany, China, Iran, Nigeria, and Switzerland demonstrate the centrality of multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral coordination in building resilience and long-term sustainability. Each of the nine countries showcased offer the global community of nations an in-depth look at how platforms for disaster risk reduction are implemented on a national scale. The document details successful practices of disaster risk reduction, limitations/challenges inherent in initiatives, and the potential for replication.

While strategies of disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery are benefiting from the recent inclusion of a multidimensional philosophy of resilience in disaster literature, more interdisciplinary collaboration is needed to attain a greater holistic knowledge of what allows diverse environments and human populations to remain resilient in the face of extreme adversity.

Vita

Meredith Morgan Feike was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1979. She attended the Louise S. McGehee School, located in the Lower Garden District of New Orleans, where she currently serves on the Alumnae Association Executive Board. In 2001, she graduated *cum laude* from H. Sophie Newcomb College of Tulane University with a Bachelor of Arts in history and minor in political science. While at Tulane University, Meredith was chosen to serve on the executive board for the Newcomb Chapter of the National Mortar Board. She was also selected for Newcomb Oak Wreath for outstanding leadership, scholarship, and service. Appointed to the Newcomb College Alumnae Association Board of Directors, Meredith serves on the student programming and New Orleans committees and is an interviewer for the Newcomb Oral History Project.

In 2007, Meredith graduated *magna cum laude* from Louisiana State University with a Master of Arts in anthropology. Her thesis, *Logging-on to Sai Baba: The Poetics of Sacred Globalization*, was published as a monograph by a scientific publishing house in Germany. Meredith was awarded the Southern Anthropological Society's Student Paper Competition Recognition Award in 2003 for her work detailing the complex identity of the Louisiana Plantation Mistress. Since 2005, she has conducted fieldwork in Village de l'est, a largely Vietnamese community located in Eastern Orleans Parish. Her research offers a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary exploration of the human impact of a disaster event, shedding light on the complexities that surround the dual concepts of disaster resilience and vulnerability. Meredith also served as a researcher on the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coastal Services Center Community Resilience Index (CRI) Project.

As a graduate student in the bidisciplinary department of geography and anthropology at Louisiana State University, Meredith presented papers at both national and international conferences, including several annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, the conference of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments (Oxford University, U.K.), the International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities (American University in Paris), and the International Conference on the Social Sciences (Honolulu, Hawaii). In 2008, her research on community resilience to disaster was published by the Berkeley-based International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments, in its *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Working Paper Series.* Meredith's ethnomusicological study on the use of rap and hip-hop as a tool to protest the social and racial inequalities exposed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, has been submitted and accepted for publication in the forthcoming *Rhythmic Rituals of Performance: The Gulf South and Circum-Caribbean Musical Discourses*.

Her professional affiliations and academic organization memberships include the American Anthropological Association, International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments, Society for Humanistic Anthropology, American Ethnological Association, Southern Anthropological Society, National Mortar Board Honor and Service Society, Phi Alpha Theta International Honor Society for History, Pi Sigma Alpha National Political Science Honor Society, Gamma Beta Phi National Honor and Service Society, and the National Society for Collegiate Journalists/Press Club. She is an Adjunct Professor of Anthropology at Tulane University, teaching Anthropology of Disaster, a course she developed in 2009. In 2010, after receiving her doctorate in geography (anthrogeography concentration) and graduate minor in disaster science and management from Louisiana State University, Meredith will continue teaching and conducting cross-disciplinary research on the interconnectivity of people, culture, and nature.