THE ROAD AWAY FROM HOME:
POLICY AND POWER IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore several intersections of hurricane recovery, urban planning, housing assistance, and neighborhood organizing in post-Katrina New Orleans. These intersections include the mobilization of particular kinds of evidence in redevelopment planning, the construction of “community” and “neighborhood” in the aftermath of disaster, and the changing geographical scale of community development in a post-disaster environment. Hurricane Katrina has inspired a huge amount of research; much of which has been written from either a policy or hazards/disaster perspective. I argue in Chapter 2 that the disaster literature on Hurricane Katrina can benefit from engagement with literature on urban governance and the politics of civic engagement. Similarly, I propose in Chapter 3 that economic analyses of pre- and post-Katrina data must be contextualized by the post-Katrina politics and social realities of New Orleans. In this chapter, I explore the effects of depoliticizing the issue of affordable housing in New Orleans. In engendering public uncertainty about the reliability of housing data, powerful landlords and politicians avoided a debate on housing access and instead focused legislative attention on a seemingly counterintuitive question: is there too much affordable housing in New Orleans? In this chapter, I find that a preoccupation with questions about the accuracy of housing data became a tool to shut down political debate and to present subsidized housing as a nuisance to New Orleans neighborhoods and, more threateningly, to the city’s housing market as a whole. Through in-depth interviews and observations of public meetings, Chapter 4 explores neighborhood-scale participation in the governance of post-Katrina New Orleans. In this chapter I analyze the manifestations of civic involvement in three hurricane-damaged neighborhoods and find that civic participation inside or outside of formal political structures yields different results for New Orleans’ neighborhoods, and that some avenues of participation are more easily visible than others. Finally, this thesis concludes with some
reflections on persisting inequalities in the post-hurricane recovery process and the New Orleans’
upcoming plans to standardize neighborhood participation in urban planning.
Preface

This thesis is based in part on interviews conducted in New Orleans in November, 2010. This research was approved by the University of British Columbia Office of Research Services Behavioral Research Ethics Board – Full Board. The certificate of approval is UBC BREB Number H10-01520.
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Abbreviations and Notes

ACLU   American Civil Liberties Union
ACORN  Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now
ACV    A Community Voice
BGR    Bureau of Governmental Research
BIA    Broadmoor Improvement Association
BNOB   Bring New Orleans Back Commission
FEMA   Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHA    Federal Housing Administration
FNU    Freret Neighbors United
GNOCDC Greater New Orleans Community Data Center
HANO   Housing Authority of New Orleans
HUD    US Department of Housing and Urban Development
LHFA   Louisiana Housing Finance Agency
MR-GO  Mississippi River Gulf Outlet
NHS    Neighborhood Housing Services
NIMBY  Not In My Backyard
NPN    Neighborhood Partnership Network
UNOP   Unified New Orleans Plan
USACE  US Army Corps of Engineers

Notes:

1. Destruction wrought in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina (August 29, 2005) was compounded by Hurricane Rita (September 21, 2005). Because specificities about storm damages are not my focus in this thesis, I have chosen for the sake of brevity to refer to hurricane damage and the post-storm city in terms of Hurricane Katrina. However, both storms caused considerable – and in some cases different – damages in New Orleans.

2. Counties in the state of Louisiana are called parishes. The city of New Orleans has the same boundaries as Orleans Parish. These two terms are used interchangeably.

3. Nearly all interview subjects quoted in this thesis gave me written permission to quote them by name, and no sensitive information is discussed in this document. However, due to the immediate accessibility and permanence of information once it hits the internet, as this thesis will, I have decided to change all names of people whose personal experiences in New Orleans informed my research. This being said, several interview subjects may be identifiable based on their association with named organizations. Any interview subjects who could possibly be identified in this manner have given their permission to be quoted by name and identified as affiliated with their respective organizations. Their written consent will be on file at the University of British Columbia until 2016.
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

My interest in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina – beyond spectacular interest in breaking news coverage of the evacuation and near-complete flooding of a city of almost 500,000 residents – was inspired by the receipt of several emails from the CEO of a consulting firm for which I used to work in Fairfax, Virginia. “The Road Home Program: fact versus fiction,” read one message, “Real Facts about the job we’re doing.” The emails, sent over several months in late 2007, informed the firm’s employees of “the facts” about the company’s biggest contract, the Road Home Program, which was implemented by the State of Louisiana in 2006 to disperse billions of dollars in federal recovery funds to Louisiana homeowners and small-rental owners whose properties were damaged by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The stated goal of the Road Home Program was to make up the difference of repair costs that were not covered by private home insurance. In 2006, my former company was given a three-year, $912-million dollar contract to manage the dispersment of these funds to Louisiana citizens. While I did not work on the Road Home contract, I heard much about it from the CEO’s emails and from the stories of coworkers who returned to headquarters after long stints in New Orleans and Baton Rouge spent verifying homeowner eligibility and repair costs. From my coworkers’ perspectives, the Road Home program was plagued by cumbersome government oversight requirements and the challenge of ferreting out deserving applicants from those who were just trying to game the system. From the perspective of Louisiana homeowners – and eventually the media and the Louisiana State House of Representatives – the management of the Road Home Program was a travesty. Program applicants complained that the time it took to receive Road Home grants essentially negated the program’s assistance: 18 months after the storm, only 97 grants had been distributed to 130,000 applicants (Carr et al. 2008). In late 2007, the Louisiana
State House of Representatives voted to force the governor to cancel the contract, but state leaders ultimately decided against the cancellation because it could involve wasting even more federal money.

The Road Home Program was meant to allow homeowners and small-rental owners to rebuild after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which together destroyed over 100,000 of the state’s housing units (Carr et al. 2008). Between eligible dates in 2006 and 2007, the Road Home Program received over 200,000 applications (The Road Home 2011). The federal government and the government of Louisiana hoped that dispersing grants to people with damaged property would allow the region’s housing stock to recover quickly and make returning home a viable option for most evacuated families, regardless of their pre-storm income. While some homeowners have indeed benefited from the program, data from the 2010 census show that this has not universally been the case in New Orleans. Housing recovery and population return are deeply divided on the basis of race and income. Historically entrenched geographical separations of poor and wealthy/middle-class residents mean that these divides show up clearly on maps of population and housing loss by neighborhood (see Figure 1.1 below). At the time of writing, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center is in the midst of a lawsuit against the State of Louisiana, alleging that the Road Home Program discriminated against Black applicants in the city of New Orleans. The program granted financial awards based on either pre-storm property value or the cost of property repair, whichever was lower for each Road Home applicant. The lawsuit states that “homeowners in African American neighborhoods, where property values are lower due to decades of institutionalized housing discrimination, received less money to rebuild because of the formula. As a result, many homeowners in predominantly African American neighborhoods in New Orleans have still not been able to complete repairs to their homes and move back into their communities” (GNO Fair Housing
Figure 1.1: Census counts of population by neighborhood in 2000 and 2010 present the most holistic available picture of population change in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. However, some of this change is attributable to factors separate from the hurricane, such as job loss and foreclosures. Source: Greater New Orleans Community Data Center 2010.

In addition to this type of high-profile discrimination, I am interested in other, less visible manifestations of inequality in New Orleans’ recovery and rebuilding processes. As other authors have shown, governments and political or social interest groups often use the disorganization and confusion that accompanies disasters and economic shocks to their advantage, rapidly implementing changes that did not have popular or political support before the incident (see Klein 2008; Woods 2009; Edgington 2010; Peck 2010). I began this project with an interest in how inequalities in the process of rebuilding New Orleans – whether pre-existing institutional inequalities or those that capitalize specifically on the upheaval of a disaster
– materialize and have effects long after the initial shock of a hurricane. Rhetoric of an inclusive recovery from then-Mayor Ray Nagin and then-president George W. Bush promised to rebuild equitably in a highly segregated city that had been in decline for several decades before 2005. The city’s planners and developers also spoke of the storm as an “opportunity” to right the entrenched income and racially-based inequalities that haunted the city’s geography (see Campanella 2007). Recovery practitioners promised to incorporate citizen involvement at all levels of planning what post-Katrina New Orleans would look like.

During three weeks of fieldwork in New Orleans in November 2010, I conducted interviews with residents, developers, nonprofit employees, government workers, and members of neighborhood organizations. My interviews were semi-structured, but usually veered in the direction of my subjects’ post-Katrina experiences and impressions of the city’s recovery approximately five years after the hurricane. Interviews with members of neighborhood organizations usually focused on specific neighborhoods, while interviews with nonprofit employees, developers, and government workers provided a broader perspective on New Orleans’ city-wide recovery. I also attended several public meetings related to hurricane rebuilding, and the events that transpired at these meetings provided me with context on the climate and rhetoric of recovery five years after Hurricane Katrina. It was at these meetings that I met many of my interview subjects. My few initial interview subjects in New Orleans were also generous in introducing me to subsequent contacts. A listing of my interviews and the public meetings I attended is provided in the appendix at the end of this thesis.

As another part of my fieldwork, I took in a tourist’s view of New Orleans on a “Hurricane Katrina Bus Tour.” Gray Line Tours in New Orleans runs a three-hour bus trip billed as “an eyewitness account of the events surrounding the most devastating natural – and man-made – disaster on American soil!” (Gray Line New Orleans 2010). The tour guide prefaced the
afternoon by announcing to the bus that “this is intended to be a non-political tour.” Everyone laughed. He explained that he would simply be telling us facts, and that if we had any questions we should speak up. The tour was intended to demonstrate to our busload of tourists that every part of New Orleans had been equally damaged during Hurricane Katrina.

**Figure 1.2: Katrina Tattoo**

As we drove through upscale and historic neighborhoods, the guide reminded us that just as many people had died here as in the Lower Ninth Ward. The poorer areas, however, were the only areas where the guide could show off the devastation wrought by Katrina and Rita (see Figure 1.2 above). In wealthier areas, much less evidence remains of the storms’ physical toll on
the city’s infrastructure.

An interesting tension exists between the tour’s sensationalized displays of destruction in lower-income neighborhoods and repeated declarations that this sort of damage had occurred equally throughout the city. The purported nondiscrimination of Katrina damages is quickly refuted by statistical analyses of the connections between extent of storm damages and neighborhood demographics. Several authors have shown that, on average, New Orleans residents who were low-income, racial minorities, or both, were more likely to live in areas of the city that experienced the most storm damages (Cutter 2006; Logan 2007; Smith 2006). Measuring or generalizing about the material manifestations of unequal recovery is vastly more complicated. The Gray Line Tour showed that some areas of the city have recovered and are continuing to recover more quickly than others. And while most areas of New Orleans experienced some level of storm damages, the level of damages does not always correlate with the speed of recovery; amongst the most-damaged neighborhoods there is a large disparity in how many former residents returned and how quickly each area’s population returned (Fussell et al. 2010).

Postal delivery data shows that the number of occupied addresses in wealthier neighborhoods, such as Uptown and the Lower Garden District, have occupancy levels nearly the same as before the hurricane; poorer and/or more damaged areas, such as Lakeview, Central City, New Orleans East, and the Lower Ninth Ward, have been slower to repopulate and still have occupancies well below their pre-storm levels (Carr et al. 2008, Fussell et al. 2010; Plyer and Ortiz 2011). Post–Katrina housing is more unaffordable for renters than before: 58 percent of renters in the city paid more than 35 percent of their pre-tax income on rent and utilities in 2008, up from 43 percent of renters in 2004 (Plyer 2010).
The factors that affect neighborhood inequalities in post-hurricane recovery are numerous and contingent. For instance, my fieldwork interviews suggest that the level of citizen involvement in a neighborhood’s recovery process was often positively related to the speed of recovery and post-storm condition of New Orleans neighborhoods. But the relative success of citizen participation is also contingent upon which and how many citizens decide to be involved, their particular skill-sets, and the capacity of their organizations to influence city government bodies and other purveyors of resources.

Despite the difficulty of digging beneath census numbers that point to disparities in neighborhood recovery, it is important to persist in examining these disparities. New Orleans’ recovery effort was billed by all levels of government as a process that would be equitable and would revitalize a city that was already in decline before the hurricane. When then-President George Bush delivered a speech from New Orleans on September 15, 2005, three weeks after Katrina, he stated the following:

When communities are rebuilt, they must be even better and stronger than before the storm. Within the Gulf region are some of the most beautiful and historic places in America. As all of us saw on television, there is also some deep, persistent poverty in this region as well. That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday, and let us rise above the legacy of inequality (Bush 2005).

The New Orleans city government was slow to follow Bush’s statement with recovery plans. Several iterations of planning began and then evaporated without much being accomplished, including the mayor’s early plan to let “the market” take care of the city’s recovery (Ford 2010, 33) and several rounds of planning carried out by neighborhood groups and private consultants from 2006-2008. Finally, the development of a plan “with the force of law” was approved by New Orleans voters in 2008. The resulting “Master Plan” promised an inclusive recovery, based on urban planning models that highlighted equity and citizen
participation (City of New Orleans 2010b). Remarking on its commitment to an inclusive style of planning, the Master Plan states that:

Historically New Orleanians have competed in the political arena along lines defined by race, neighborhood, income, and other differences. The process for creating the Master Plan was itself a tool for inviting people to cross these lines to find shared solutions based on data, technical analysis, trade-offs, and similar qualities in place of the politics of affinity. Shared destiny and a culture of planning will depend on a broad commitment to inclusiveness that extends benefits equitably and establishes the foundation for a broadly-shared political will that supports the tough decisions essential to addressing significant challenges. One of the most important steps, early in this process, was the widespread willingness to craft a plan equally committed to every place and every person in New Orleans (City of New Orleans 2010, 19).

Too often, however, the city government’s rhetoric of a planning for New Orleans’ residents’ “shared destiny” (City of New Orleans 2010, 22) takes the place of an equitable recovery process. The “products” of planning are influenced strongly by the process (and rhetorical language) that results in these products (Watson 2006). The disconnect between the rhetoric and practice of recovery is where inequalities can often be located. Disparities in the practice of New Orleans’ hurricane recovery, and the processes that produce this practice, are my primary concern with this thesis. To narrow the scope of this admittedly ambitious goal, I focus primarily on affordable housing recovery and the politics of neighborhood organizations active in city planning. It is my hope that examining these less visible, less publicized moments in the recovery process, removed by several years from the hurricane itself, will further enrich the wealth of scholarship on Hurricane Katrina.

In the chapters that follow, I explore several intersections of hurricane recovery, urban planning, housing assistance, and neighborhood organizing in New Orleans. These intersections include the mobilization of particular kinds of evidence in redevelopment planning, the construction of “community” and “neighborhood” in the aftermath of disaster, and the changing geographical scale of community development in a post-disaster environment. The disaster has
inspired a huge amount of research by government agencies, private organizations, and academic researchers; however, much of this research has been written from either a policy or hazards/disaster perspective. I argue that there is much to be gained from the addition of theoretical literature on urban governance restructuring and the politics of civic engagement, which helps to contextualize the social and structural changes seen in the long-term aftermath of the hurricane. In addition, consideration of the negotiations between scales of governance in a post-disaster context will add to the existing literature. A little-examined complexity of the disaster recovery is the presence of multiple governing bodies that converge and attempt to reinstate order in a fragmented policy environment. More broadly, I am inspired by Wyly’s (2009) appeal for the strategic use of scholarship to respond to inequitable policy-making and by Watson’s (2006) assertion that the process of city planning should be the focus of as much critical analysis as planning’s products.

In the rest of this introduction, I provide some brief background on the geography of New Orleans, the Katrina disaster, and the recovery and redevelopment efforts that followed. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature on Hurricane Katrina, as well as theoretical scholarship related to important themes in New Orleans’ hurricane recovery: critical literature on consensus-building and (in)equitable urban planning, theories of community and government-through-community (cf. Rose 1999), and literature that explores disaster recovery and affordable housing in the US. In bringing these literatures together, I develop the context for the two empirical chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 considers affordable housing through an examination of a 2009 debate surrounding the post-Katrina New Orleans housing market. Given that more than 70% of New Orleans’ affordable housing stock was damaged by the hurricane, affordable housing continues to be a major issue in the city’s recovery. New Orleans’ “Big Four” public housing complexes
were demolished in 2008 and slated for redevelopment as mixed-income, lower density residences. These demolitions were rooted in disaster rhetoric from the city planning commission and city council: the housing projects were damaged during the hurricanes and would be unsafe during future storms. Furthermore, both the city and private developers have invoked dependency myths and stereotypes to argue that concentrations of poor people, bad schools, and single mothers in the inner city perpetuate “societal breakdown” in post-Katrina New Orleans (Flaherty 2010, 196). In Chapter 3, I explore a less-researched action against subsidized housing for low-income residents in New Orleans. In 2009 the Louisiana State Bond Commission, with the support of several prominent New Orleans landlords, succeeded in blocking for over a year the funding of affordable housing projects with state monies while attempting to re-direct these funds to programs for repairing roads and blighted homes (Mock 2009a). In order to release the funds for housing subsidies, the Bond Commission argued, it needed “proof” that New Orleans needed additional affordable housing – this when homelessness had increased by 100%, average rents by 44%, and the number of people applying for housing subsidies by more than 50% since the hurricanes (Plyer et al. 2009). Through contrived uncertainty about housing data, powerful landlords and politicians were able to create a seemingly counterintuitive question (is there too much affordable housing in New Orleans?), endow it with political credence, and shift the burden of proof from the providers to the consumers of affordable housing.

Little research has been done on the relationship between civic participation and recovery in New Orleans’ neighborhoods, with the notable exception of a survey carried out between 2006 and 2010 by researchers at Louisiana State University. The survey of 6,000 households gathered

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1 In response to the arguments about unsafe infrastructure, researchers and public housing activists have cited evidence that most public housing complexes sustained only minor storm damages and could have been repaired inexpensively; see Flaherty 2010; Ford 2010; May Day Housing and Human Rights Organization 2010.
data about respondents’ housing damage, recovery, social connections, and feelings about recovery. Each household was assigned a civic engagement score based on their attendance at public meetings and neighborhood events, involvement with charity or social welfare organizations, and participation in other local clubs or committees. By comparing civic engagement scores with recovery in each census tract in New Orleans, the researchers found that higher civic engagement in 167 census tracts correlated significantly (p<.01) with stronger repopulation and less damage, blight, and violent crime (Weil 2010). Weil posits that a new style of engagement is emerging in post-Katrina New Orleans. Due to the meager resources that the city government can make available to neighborhood-based organizations, these organizations have evolved away from competing with each other for city resources and have taken their new-found autonomy in innovative directions. New forms of activism include “(a) increasing organizational capacity and autonomy, (b) greater strategic sophistication, (c) increasing citizen participation, (d) a new cooperative orientation and the emergence of new umbrella groups, and (e) new recovery resources from “outside-inside” the community” (Weil 2010, 5). The “outside-inside” community refers to intra-community resources, such as faith-based groups and social clubs. Weil also notes that nonprofit organizations have stepped into a supporting role formerly occupied by the city government.

Continuing this research direction, Chapter 4 of this thesis takes a ground-level approach and uses in-depth interviews to examine the post-Katrina evolution of community organizing and planning in New Orleans neighborhoods. Based on interviews with New Orleans developers, planners, and members of neighborhood organizations, I trace the post-Katrina trajectories of three neighborhood-based organizations. Within these three cases, I consider the strategies of civic participation that these neighborhoods are using to address their damages and futures. I show that in the post-Katrina context, civic involvement may be moving away from using
neighborhood organizations to acquire resources from the city. Instead, some organizations are using their increased autonomy to pursue other types of action. I follow this with a brief reflection on what is omitted in my case studies and interviews. This section is followed by a conclusion in which I reflect on the experiences of community groups as they choose to work either within or outside of the city’s governance processes. I consider the multiple scales of recovery politics in post-Katrina New Orleans, and I reflect on a recent attempt by the city to formalize community participation within its governance structure.

1.2 A brief geography of New Orleans

An analysis of Hurricane Katrina’s effects on New Orleans is necessarily informed by the city’s historical and environmental geographies. The city was established for its proximity to three major waterways which for the past 300 years have been simultaneously vital to economic growth and threatening to human life and property. Tremendous human transformations of the physical environment have allowed the city to grow, but also created the conditions for repeated hurricane destruction. In his historical geography of New Orleans, “Bienville’s Dilemma,” Richard Campanella (2008) provides a physical and environmental account of the city that is worth paraphrasing at length. As is the case with all cities, the specific developmental trajectory of New Orleans’ physical environment is tied to the present-day locations of rich versus poor neighborhoods, and desirable versus undesirable structures and land uses.

Officially founded in 1718 by Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, New Orleans is located at the crossroads of three important water bodies: Lake Pontchartrain, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Mississippi River. The land beneath the historic center of the city, the Vieux Carre (French Quarter), is above sea level and was built up over years of (non-disastrous) flooding of the Mississippi River. Treed areas surrounding the Vieux Carre were transformed throughout the 1700s into cotton and sugar cane plantations. In 1805, New Orleans was formally
incorporated as a municipality. The area now known as the Lower Ninth Ward (see Figure 1.3 below), site of some of the worst Katrina destruction, was the eastern limit of the newly-incorporated city. Given that it sat at the city limits, this area became the default location for structures and uses that the city’s planners wanted to locate away from downtown. A sewage treatment plant, slaughterhouse, sugar refinery, and military hospital were established there. Campanella sees this as the beginning of the Lower Ninth Ward’s marginalization, writing that “this would become a familiar theme for the future Lower Ninth Ward: first on the list for urban nuisances, last in line for amenities” (2008, 149).

As New Orleans’ population grew, large plantations were subdivided into more densely inhabited residential districts. Wealthier Anglo populations settled nearest to the natural levees of the Mississippi River. At this time, there was little expansion away from the river because swamplands prevented most types of urban development. The downriver (eastern) expansion that did occur tended to be done by people who were markedly less well-off: large numbers of immigrants that arrived in New Orleans in the early-to-mid 1800s. Rudimentary city zoning began in 1805, when “wards” drawn along old plantation borders became a political-geographic unit. Between 1852 and 1880, city planners adjusted the ward borders to equalize ward populations. The 1880 ward borders continue to be used in the 2010 Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance of New Orleans.
Urbanization of the Ninth Ward (which today comprises both the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East) and other outlying areas began in the 1840s. Planters realized that they could make more money by subdividing plantations for urban development. However, city planners continued to locate undesirable facilities in the Ninth Ward, especially following a 1873 US Supreme Court decision that supported consolidation of the city’s stockyards and slaughtering facilities (United States Supreme Court Reports 1873). Due to this decision, the Ninth Ward had plenty of working-class jobs, but low property values.

Given its strategic location on three key waterways, New Orleans’ port became one of the most important in the US. Expansion of the shipping industry in the early 1900s led to the 1918 digging of the Industrial Canal, creating a waterway between Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River (see Figure 1.5 below). The new canal brought more job opportunities to the Lower Ninth Ward, but also physically separated it from the rest of New Orleans. Once the
canal opened in 1923, the neighborhood’s residents had to use drawbridges and railroads to get to the rest of the city. Another human-dug waterway, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, was completed in 1949. This channel runs 1,050 miles and enables barge transports between Texas and Florida, stopping conveniently at the Port of New Orleans.

**Figure 1.4: Hydraulic Pumps**

The Intracoastal Waterway split the Ninth Ward in half, (hence the present-day designations of Upper and Lower Ninth Ward), and runs confluent with the Industrial Canal along the western border of the Lower Ninth Ward. Finally, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MR-GO, colloquially referred to as “Mister Go”) was dug in the mid-20th century to provide a shorter route between the Gulf of Mexico and the Port of New Orleans. MR-GO connects to the Intracoastal Waterway on the outskirts of the Upper Ninth Ward, which is usually known as New
Orleans East. Through the construction of these waterways, sea water from the Gulf of Mexico was directed into New Orleans. The water was channeled into many canals that ran north-south and subdivided the city’s neighborhoods. Floodwalls and levees were constructed to hold back the canal waters. MR-GO channeled Hurricane Betsy’s waters directly into the Lower Ninth Ward in 1965, and cycles of neighborhood flooding have persisted ever since (Campanella 2008).

Since the early 1900s, New Orleans’ population growth has been made possible by drainage projects that have allowed expansion onto large amounts of former swampland. Hydraulic pumps (see Figure 1.4 above) in the canals work constantly to pump water out of New Orleans. Annual flood cycles historically provided constant sediment deposition, which prevented subsidence of the land. Elimination of these cycles through levees, dams, and the creation of new water channels has given New Orleans its oft-cited “bowl” shape, which in 2005 allowed Hurricane Katrina’s storm surge to stagnate in the city for weeks. In the 1950s, drainage of swampland in Jefferson Parish created newly inhabitable land to the west of New Orleans, to which middle class New Orleanians relocated and converted into suburbs. White flight to the suburbs persisted throughout the next few decades, and the Black population of New Orleans proper grew (Lewis 2003, 124). Income disparities and racial segregation continued to divide the city’s residents by neighborhood. Highly visible security measures were erected to separate public housing developments and low income areas from surrounding tourist attractions and affluent neighborhoods. This sort of divisive housing and transportation planning ensured that public housing projects were isolated from most of the city’s residents. Public housing was systematically marginalized to the extent that, as late as the 1980s, the locations of public housing projects were not depicted on city maps (Lewis 2003, 134).
While a large portion of the city’s affluent, white population relocated to the surrounding suburbs, a significant population remained in the New Orleans city limits, concentrated in East Bank\(^2\) neighborhoods that border the Mississippi River and are thus protected from flooding by the river’s natural levees. Gentrification of other neighborhoods along the Mississippi, particularly Uptown and the Warehouse District, accompanied expansion of housing for middle- and upper-class residents. In the 1990s, as public housing projects began to be demolished under

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\(^2\) The East Bank, somewhat counterintuitively, refers to all parts of the city which on the map appear north of the Mississippi River. The West Bank neighborhoods, conversely, appear south of the Mississippi River. However, the designations of north and south are not used.
the HOPE IV program,\(^3\) gentrification spread east along the Mississippi, though the French Quarter, Marigny-Fauberg, and the Bywater (see Figure 1.5). Black and poor residents, as well as other marginalized groups, relocated to New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward (Campanella 2008). At the time of Hurricane Katrina, over 85% of New Orleans East and 98% of Lower Ninth Ward residents were Black. The poverty rate in the Lower Ninth Ward was 36.4%, far greater than the New Orleans average of 27.9%. The poverty rate in New Orleans East was near the city’s average. (US Census Bureau 2000a).

1.3 Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina made landfall east of Orleans Parish early on the morning of August 29, 2005. MR-GO funneled storm surge waters into the Intracoastal Waterway and into the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish, which borders Orleans Parish to the east. Water from the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway continued into the rest of New Orleans and breached the floodwalls to the north and west of the Lower Ninth Ward, inundating the neighborhood from both directions. Further into New Orleans, the floodwaters breached the levees along the Industrial Canal, 17\(^{th}\) Street Canal, and several others. Natural waterways, including the Mississippi River and the bayous (naturally-occurring water channels) that flow north-south through New Orleans and border many neighborhoods, did not overtop their banks. By 9 am, there were 6-8 feet of water in the Lower Ninth Ward. Water continued to flow into New Orleans for several days, stabilizing at 3-4 feet in the highest areas and 10-12 feet at the lowest (Campanella 2008). Attempts to plug the breached canals with sandbags dropped from helicopters failed. Emergency crews had to wait two days for Lake Pontchartrain to drain back into the Gulf of Mexico before beginning temporary levee repairs. One month later, most of the floodwaters were pumped out of the city. When Hurricane Rita hit the city on September 23-24, 

\(^3\) A federal government initiative, begun in 1992, to transition public housing projects into mixed-income developments.
however, some of the makeshift levee repairs breached again, flooding the Lower Ninth Ward and adjacent areas for a second time. On October 5, 2005, residents were allowed back into the city everywhere except the Lower Ninth Ward, which was still mostly uninhabitable. By mid-October, the Army Corps of Engineers had finally pumped out all flood waters from Katrina and Rita (Campanella 2008).

1.4 What is recovery?

Consensus on a definition of recovery has not been reached within the disaster research community. In an exploration of scholarship exploring disaster recovery, Chang (2010) found that recovery can mean (1) a return to pre-disaster conditions, (2) attaining what was expected or predicted to occur without the disaster (e.g., a certain amount of economic or population growth), or (3) reaching a different, relatively stable state that is different from both of the former. The third definition allows the most flexibility in defining the recovery of a disaster-stricken city or community; however, defining and agreeing upon what constitutes a new stability is a complicated undertaking. Hence the popularity, amongst many disaster scholars and practitioners, of a definition that hinges on a return to “normal,” a return of population and a rebuilding of what was lost. Various post-Katrina recovery indices have been published on one, two and five-year anniversaries of the hurricane, presenting quantifications of various recovery indicators in an attempt to show a holistic picture of New Orleans’ recovery (see Liu and Plyer 2007; Carr et al. 2008; Plyer and Liu 2010). Many of these reports reveal large differences in the recovery indicators for different parts of the city, making it difficult to make holistic statements about how the New Orleans recovery efforts are going. Similarly, when I asked New Orleans residents from a variety of neighborhoods about how they thought the city was recovering, the answers differed widely. Most interview subjects were hopeful about the city’s recovery and pointed to successes in some areas, but many were also concerned about inequalities in the
recovery process and distribution of disaster assistance funds. There are many different types of recovery rhetoric coming out of New Orleans. Sustainable development, cleaning up poverty-stricken areas, getting back to “normal,” and increasing economic development and community resilience are the main recovery themes touted by city planners and several developers interviewed for this study (City of New Orleans 2010b; Personal Communications, November 2010). There is less agreement about who is responsible for turning these recovery key-words into action. An uneasy coalition of federal, state, and city funds, combined with private insurance and individual loans, makes financing the recovery process a complex process.

1.5 Government assistance after disasters

Government support of housing recovery after large disasters has been a norm in the US since a number of disasters in the 1970s. This model assumes that most Americans will be too poor and devastated after a large disaster to pay all of their own rebuilding costs (Comerio 1998). Most “First World” governments take a similar approach to large disasters, and the model has been applied internationally through relief organizations such as the Red Cross, which finance and oversee rebuilding in countries with governments that are too poor or incapacitated to direct recovery operations on their own. In the US, a Presidential Disaster Declaration is issued during particularly large and devastating domestic disasters, which directs federal funds to response and recovery efforts and invokes the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. The Stafford Act, signed into law in 1988, provides statutory authority for most federal disaster response activities, predominantly as directed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA 2007). The Stafford Act states that FEMA will reimburse state and local governments for some response and recovery actions, but only those that result directly from the disaster (FEMA 2007). In New Orleans, the source of damages was often difficult to pinpoint. For example, did the damage to a house occur primarily due to flooding or primarily due to the
decaying state of many of New Orleans’ housing units? (Logan 2007).

**1.6 Planning: Iterations of recovery**

In the many planning efforts that have taken place since August 2005, New Orleans has championed its incorporation of community involvement into recovery and reinvestment plans. As a result, the city has held hundreds of public meetings every year. The city government’s capacity to provide services was permanently diminished after Katrina. While services and positions were slowly restored at City Hall, a displaced population of city workers, a lack of tax revenue, and slow-moving federal recovery dollars resulted in a general and permanent reduction of city services and staff. In early 2007, the city laid off nearly all of its planners due to budget shortfalls (Ford 2010). The mayor’s office, city council, and city planning commission have relied upon outside contractors to spearhead the city’s recovery planning efforts, with the city taking a facilitating role between contractors, citizens, and federal requirements that had to be satisfied for funding purposes. Several authors have chronicled in detail New Orleans’ recovery planning endeavors since 2005. The following chart provides an overview of post-hurricane planning efforts and is meant to provide context for the more detailed accounts of neighborhood recovery that follow in Chapter 4.

**Table 1.1: Post-Katrina Planning Efforts in New Orleans**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Planning Effort</th>
<th>Details and Implications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 2005 – January 2006</td>
<td>Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOB) – group formed by Mayor Nagin that consisted of businesspeople, lawyers, and public figures. Expert consultants (planners, developers, and bankers) hired to create New Orleans’ first rebuilding plan.</td>
<td>Rebuilding plan (January 2006) states that New Orleans will “shrink” and that residential density on natural levees will increase. The plan shows six “green zones,” which represent storm-damaged areas that will be transitioned into parkland where future floodwaters will flow (see Figure 1.6 below). The plan essentially splits New Orleans into two sets of neighborhoods: some located on safe, natural levees, and others on unsafe, low-lying ground. Plan is abandoned after it fails to get buy-in from citizens, who are worried about “shrinkage” and “density.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Planning Effort</td>
<td>Details and Implications</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2006</td>
<td>Mayoral press release states that “the market” will suffice for a recovery plan. New Orleans will be rebuilt according to the decisions of individual property owners.</td>
<td>If “enough” residents return to rebuild their houses in a given neighborhood, then city services will be extended to them. Planners employed by the city are not asked to work on a recovery land use plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2006</td>
<td>Mayoral press release encourages neighborhoods to plan for themselves. Enough residents must return to each neighborhood in order to prove neighborhood “viability.”</td>
<td>Federal recovery funds for rebuilding public infrastructure are tied to the existence of a city-wide recovery plan and thus do not arrive in New Orleans. Homeowners in damaged neighborhoods cannot get guarantees of city services or insurance coverage and thus are slow to return and rebuild. Renters have few options for housing if they want to return and rents are high. People who lived in public housing before Katrina are not allowed to return. No plan to bring evacuated residents back to the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>City council bypasses the mayor’s office and hires a planning consultancy to develop plans for 50 neighborhoods flooded by Katrina. (Informally known as the Lambert Plan).</td>
<td>Planning consultants hold public meetings to solicit citizen feedback on plans for rebuilding New Orleans. These plans are abandoned when the mayor announces another new planning effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2006</td>
<td>Mayor announces that a citywide planning effort is necessary so New Orleans can get federal funds to rebuild city infrastructure. With grant from Rockefeller Foundation, hires five planning consultancies to create Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP).</td>
<td>UNOP will include a city-wide plan and individual plans for each of the city’s 72 neighborhoods. Neighborhoods will work with their choice of consultants. New public meetings are held. Citizens are encouraged to “think big” about revitalization improvements for their communities, but many of these improvements are later deleted from the plan because they are not covered by federal recovery money. Consultants are supposed to use “modern telecommunications” to interact with neighborhoods where no residents had returned. Lambert Plans are supposed to be folded into the UNOP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2006</td>
<td>Mayor announces an “out of the box” planning initiative to bring in high-profile architects to transform the city’s waterfront and attract wealthy new residents.</td>
<td>Additional public meetings are scheduled for citizens to attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Planning Effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2007</td>
<td>Mayor hires Ed Blakely as New Orleans “recovery czar” to direct the recovery effort.</td>
<td>Blakely begins to make plans based on his theory that rebuilding commercial centers will attract new and displaced residents to move to New Orleans. More public meetings are scheduled on the locations for rebuilding commercial centers. Blakely announces that every neighborhood will receive $200,000 for recovery efforts, regardless of extent of neighborhood damages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2007 – May 2008</td>
<td>Unified New Orleans Plan is presented. City planning commission votes to adopt it and puts Blakely in charge of investing federal recovery money as it arrives.</td>
<td>All pre-Katrina land use decisions are unchanged. Citizens are largely happy with the plan. No stipulations for flooded neighborhoods to respond to future flood risks. One year later, federal recovery funds are slow to arrive, the most-damaged neighborhoods are slow to rebuild, and there is still not help for renters and rental property owners. High levels of apartment blight exist in low-income areas and the federal government starts to demolish public housing complexes. Marginal access to healthcare facilities in most parts of the city.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>City Planning Commission commissions another team of consultants to produce the “New Orleans Master Plan.” This is the result of citizen complaints that the UNOP is not bringing about the New Orleans that citizens had hoped for and expected.</td>
<td>Consultants promise that the Master Plan will express a vision of New Orleans’ future for all residents together. This plan, unlike the others, will have the force of law and will be tied to a comprehensive zoning ordinance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2008 – December 2008</td>
<td>Master Plan consultants attempt to construct a city-wide vision of recovery planning.</td>
<td>More public meetings are held to solicit citizen feedback. Neighborhood tours and meetings with local businesspeople are conducted. Many citizens and neighborhood groups that had created plans for the UNOP are frustrated with the duplication of planning efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2009 – July 2010</td>
<td>Master Plan and new zoning ordinance are drafted and reviewed.</td>
<td>Unlike previous plans, the Master Plan focuses on development of the city in the long-term future. The plan will “go beyond all the post-Katrina recovery and rebuilding plans that citizens have worked so hard on since the storm” (City of New Orleans 2010).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Neighborhood character studies” are developed based on public feedback; these studies inform the city’s new zoning ordinance and “place-type” style of development.

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<th>Details and Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 2010</td>
<td>Master Plan ratified by New Orleans City Council</td>
<td>“Neighborhood character studies” are developed based on public feedback; these studies inform the city’s new zoning ordinance and “place-type” style of development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1. (Information in this table is drawn from the following sources: City of New Orleans 2010b; Ford 2010; Olshansky and Johnson 2010).

Figure 1.6: BNOB Parks and Open Space Plan

Figure 1.6: BNOB Parks and Open Space Plan. Dotted green circles represent areas that would be made into open spaces; the plan did not explain what would happen to the residents of these areas, or their property. Green zones cover large portions of the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans East, and other neighborhoods with large populations of low-income Black people. Source: Wallace Roberts & Todd for the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOB 2006).

1.7 Housing after Katrina

In recent urban disasters in the US, the greatest losses in both infrastructure and dollar value have been housing (Comerio 1998; Zhang and Peacock 2009). Under the umbrella of US housing stock, homeowners and renters experience this destruction differently. Federal, state,
and local government programs that direct funding and resources to people with damaged living spaces tend to be focused disproportionately on homeowners. In New Orleans, for example, 46.5% of housing was owner-occupied and 53.5% was renter-occupied before Hurricane Katrina, according to US Census 2000 numbers (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b). However, 80% of the total recovery funds from the federal government were directed to helping homeowners rebuild their homes in Orleans Parish, while funding to rebuild rental housing stock has been slower to materialize (LHFA 2010). By 2008, the Road Home Program had provided only 13 rebuilt affordable rental units, although 70% of all affordable rental units in New Orleans were damaged during the hurricane (Carr et al, 2008).

Non-monetary discrepancies between government support for the rebuilding of owned and rented housing also persist. The design of the Road Home Program, for example, is intended to allow homeowners to rebuild quickly and flexibly. Initial plans by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to require all Road Home grant recipients to be audited before beginning home construction were quickly scrapped amidst claims by the State of Louisiana that this process would unreasonably delay homeowners’ ability to rebuild (Olshansky and Johnson 2010). The Road Home had a much different process for disbursing funding to small rental owners, who provided over 80% of the city’s rental housing stock before Katrina and whose properties were often underinsured (Carr et al, 2008). Instead of writing a check to small rental owners, Road Home would send them a letter of eligibility to receive a certain amount of funds for rebuilding their properties. Because no bank would lend against these promised award letters, rental owners’ only recourse was to put their own money down for repairs and be reimbursed by the Road Home Program after the repairs were complete. For

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4 That homeownership will provide more neighborhood stability and opportunities for economic growth than rental housing is a commonly-held assumption of planners and politicians. This assumption, and its relationship to New Orleans, is explored further in Chapters 2 and 3.
many small rental owners, this alone was enough to deter them from rebuilding rental stock that was desperately needed in New Orleans. For small-rental owners that did have the means to rebuild their properties, HUD, in an effort to ensure that federal money was not being used to create sub-standard rental housing, required that all rebuilt units be equipped with certain amenities and improvements. Unlike the blank slate given to homeowners to re-design their homes, this well-intentioned, poorly-executed stipulation slapped small rental owners with additional costs and delays. Mark, an employee of Neighborhood Housing Services, a nonprofit that works in the Freret Neighborhood to encourage homeownership and community development, had this to say regarding the Road Home Program’s small rental program requirements:

“The wanted to make sure that they weren’t giving money to owners who are just slapping paint on it, so they required certain improvements - garbage disposal or central air or stuff like that - but some people didn’t want those improvements. So you’re spending money uselessly. Like, why couldn’t you just have an inspector come and say ‘yes, this is a decent place to live’” (Personal Communication, November 2010).

Discrepancies between regulation of post-disaster homeowner and rental funding abound. Other interview subjects, especially Sandra, a woman who works in affordable housing development, believe that administrative differences in the implementation of housing and rental recovery funding have a striking effect on how much money has made its way from government budgets to actual housing repairs. Sandra believes that recovery money privileges homeownership because it is “politically safe,” and reinforces “the myth of the American dream” (Personal Communication November 2010). Furthermore, she believes that rental funding is marginalized because renters themselves are marginalized and do not have a financial stake in their neighborhoods or city.

Comerio (1998) finds that housing is the most expensive and socially crucial aspect of disaster recovery. She argues that many rental properties will not be repaired without
government assistance because it is not financially feasible for rental owners to repair them. This point underlies the importance of considering post-disaster recovery policies within their socioeconomic context: the intricacies of urban housing markets persist after a disaster. The following chapter considers the disaster literature in conversation with the history of US subsidized housing and literature on the ways in which communities and neighborhoods are re-scaled in governance changes such as those that occurred in post-Katrina New Orleans. The intersection of these themes contextualizes the two empirical chapters that follow.
Chapter 2: Post-Katrina New Orleans: A Nexus of Recovery, Housing, and Governance Specificities

This chapter will address two main themes: disaster recovery processes and the governance structures in which these processes work, especially over the long-term. In addressing the latter, I touch upon the post-World War II history of US federal housing policy, which has a legacy of diverse interventions in the housing market. The crafting of post-disaster housing policy is a fraught process that involves negotiations between the logics of immediate reconstruction and projections of future housing needs in a highly disrupted market. In exploring these processes, I consider the structural inequalities often inherent to both. This discussion lays the groundwork for Chapter 3, in which I explore a post-Katrina housing debate that eventually resulted in an intervention by the State of Louisiana’s Bond Commission.

A second concern of this chapter is to bring together literature on structural changes in post-welfare state governance and the neighborhood/community as a scale of political action within these structures. I consider the conflation of neighborhood/community and the shifting of formerly-municipal social and economic services to smaller scales of community/government. The shifting of social services and entrepreneurial activities from the city level to individual neighborhoods is widespread in post-Katrina New Orleans. In this de-scaling of urban governance, many neighborhood-level recovery activities are undertaken by community groups, nonprofits, and volunteers.

2.1 Disaster recovery and inequality

Mitchell (2006) has noted that much of the emerging social sciences literature on Hurricane Katrina has focused on the inadequate performance of the U.S. emergency management system. Many of these inadequacies, Mitchell argues, stem from the changing nature of US disaster management after September 11, 2001. In 2002, White House policy
mandated a shift in FEMA’s focus from natural disaster mitigation to threat-based prevention programs, drastically reducing FEMA’s 2005 ability to respond to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Hurricane Katrina occurred just after the political capabilities to address environmental risks had been superseded by a system that prioritizes counter-terrorism and broad-based hazard mitigation. These changes had the effect of narrowing the focus and reducing the flexibility of public policies to cope with natural disasters (Mitchell 2003).

Studies of disasters worldwide have noted the importance of considering both the context of the hazard and the context within which hazard research takes place (Montz et al. 2003). An emerging theme within the social sciences is that disasters must be understood in the context of how people existed before a hazard strikes (Cannon 2005). Human vulnerability to hazards is a complex product of physical/environmental, social, and political processes (Cutter et al. 2008; Pelling 2003; Wisner et al. 2004); however, many of these processes were ignored by the US government after Hurricane Katrina. Smith (2006) has argued that the pre-storm marginalization and poverty of many Katrina victims was minimized by President Bush's 2005 statement that “they are not refugees; they are Americans.” Many scholars have shown that the pre-storm social vulnerability of many New Orleans neighborhoods was a primary cause of spatial differences in the city’s destruction (see Cutter 2006; Yarnal 2007; Katz 2008; Marcuse 2009).

Response and recovery processes tend to reinforce class and ethnic inequalities that were present before a disaster (Blaikie 2009). In this vein, substantial work has been done on the racial and socioeconomic factors behind the destructive geography of Hurricane Katrina. Political ecology and environmental justice research has shown that lower-income, often racial minority groups that lack access to material and political resources tend to live in areas more vulnerable weather-related hazards, and thus suffered proportionately greater damages from Hurricane Katrina (Levine et al. 2007; Cutter et al. 2008). Similar effects from the uneven
presence of environmental and social vulnerabilities have been described in research on the recovery from the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and other disasters in the past twenty years (see, for example, Peacock and Gladwin 19997; Khasalamwa 2009). A common theme emerges: people who were the most socially and environmentally vulnerable before the disaster often have the most trouble recovering after a disaster. Institutionalized inequities have been examined in the political structures that failed the citizens of New Orleans (Peck 2006) and the U.S. disaster declaration process (Schmidtlein et al. 2008). In addition, Colton and Sumpter (2009) show that historical lessons from past hurricanes were systematically ignored in levee construction and evacuation planning in New Orleans. Both physical and human geographers have shown that, over time, draining of wetlands to create space for urban expansion has increased New Orleans' flood risk (Bakker 2005; Campanella 2008).

Adger’s (2006) definition of vulnerability as a level of susceptibility to harm from exposure to both environmental and social stresses is an instructive framework for exploring hurricane recovery. Wisner (1998) has shown how marginalized urban populations that lack access to resources experience increased vulnerability and decreased capacity to cope with natural disasters. In addition, Rowley’s (2008) examination of disaster recovery suggests that progress in hurricane-damaged gulf areas has been dependent on three factors: (1) how effective the community’s leaders were in making decisions about what direction the recovery would take, (2) how badly the community’s business and economic infrastructure was damaged by a storm, and (3) how quickly the community was able to access state and federal aid. Building on this last point, my interviews with community groups in New Orleans show that access to funding, especially from non-governmental sources, played a large role in the recovery trajectories of certain neighborhoods.
Gill (2007, 625) argues that uneven access to recovery resources contributed to “secondary traumas” for New Orleans, which thwarted recovery efforts in some areas. Secondary trauma, he writes, “can be defined as a blow to the social fabric of a community caused by inadequate responses to an initial hazard event and/or inadequate responses to secondary hazards. Events, occasions, or public perceptions that inhibit timely community recovery and prolong stress and disruption are examples of secondary trauma.” Delays in infrastructure repair, a dearth of social services, and lack of adequate recovery funding, Gill argues, constitute a second disaster in New Orleans and are as damaging to the community as the initial hazard event. The post-disaster environment becomes a persisting condition, resulting in diminished social capital, a weakened community, chronic stress and negative livelihood changes among individuals, and prolonged social disruption. Uneven access to resources, such as federal housing recovery funding, has a long legacy in New Orleans, and several authors have noted that pre-existing demographic disparities were reinforced by the flooding and evacuation of the city (Strolovitch 2006; Sze 2006).

Housing after disasters presents a challenge both in terms of scale and responsibility. Comerio (1998) shows that hurricanes and earthquakes in the US during the 1990s resulted in similar levels of housing destruction as were seen in Third World disasters during the same period. Transitioning from temporary to long-term housing solutions after a disaster has been problematic in past gulf coast hurricanes; for example, people who were displaced by Hurricanes Charley and Ivan in 2004 remained in trailer parks in Florida for years (Smith, 2006). Levine et al. (2007) find that efforts to provide post-disaster housing for displaced people collide with pre-existing issues of household income, available land and infrastructure, and housing affordability issues; post-disaster housing is contextualized by the pre-disaster conditions of a locality and its residents. An added complication to addressing housing needs is the presence of multiple
governing bodies that converge after a disaster and attempt to re-instate order in a fragmented policy environment. Levine et al. (2007, 5) note that “by law, a disaster declaration at the state or federal level activates temporary structures of governance that are overlaid on top of normal emergency operations at all levels.”

The responsibility of housing provision is complicated by the numerous authorities present after a disaster and their mandates to provide housing during different, federally-defined “phases” of the disaster (planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation) (FEMA 2010). Neither short-term nor long-term recovery are well-defined, and nor is the transition from disaster response to disaster recovery. FEMA, in coordination with the American Red Cross, provided temporary housing for displaced New Orleans residents. After Katrina, however, some evacuees lived in FEMA trailers for months and even years because no other long-term housing solutions were available to them. This long tenure in FEMA trailers had in part to do with federal dollars, managed by the state of Louisiana, that were slow to reach displaced homeowners and landlords. Additionally, the city of New Orleans operated 7,700 federally-owned housing units that were inhabited by some of the lowest-income residents of the city before Katrina; after the storm HUD and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) closed the units and their residents were never allowed to return to collect their belongings.5

2.2 Disasters as the great levelers? Racism and Katrina

While it is not my primary focus in this thesis, I believe it is important to attend to the racism that was present in the rhetoric surrounding Hurricane Katrina and the government response. Returning to the Gray Line Tour Guide in Chapter 1, it is important to address the myth that Katrina affected all New Orleans residents equally. In addition, stereotyping of disaster victims has implications for the way that recovery planning is executed. In Chapter 3, I

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5 See Flaherty (2010) for an important account of public housing displacement, injustice, and community resistance after Katrina.
touch on one consequence of these stereotypes in a dispute over constructing subsidized housing in New Orleans. Recovery planning and citizen engagement in the Lower Ninth Ward, explored in Chapter 4, is also contextualized by long-standing isolation and discrimination faced by neighborhood residents.

The August 2005 images of American gulf coast hurricane victims trapped on rooftops and streaming into the New Orleans Superdome elicited a variety of racist commentaries. Military/war rhetoric framed New Orleans as space that needed to be locked down and brought under control, spurred by rumors that only criminals had stayed behind while law-abiding residents had heeded evacuation orders. The Army National Guard was deployed to New Orleans after Katrina to prevent looting and support the local police force in law enforcement and rescue efforts. One Brigadier General remarked that “we’re going to go out and take this city back. This will be a combat operation to get this city under control” and “this place is going to look like Little Somalia” (quoted in Chenelly 2005). Allusions to war and stereotypes of violent Africans constructed New Orleans as a city in need of stabilization, under siege by its own displaced citizens (mostly poor, Black people). Graham (2006, n.p.), in a damning critique of the Bush administration’s response to the hurricane, writes that “such rhetoric, backed by an almost complete absence of organized, public evacuation procedures, suggested one simple by powerful thing: if you can’t get out of the city (like rich, suburban, auto owners) it’s your fault…the escapees are normal, respectful citizens. You’re not.”

Media reports in the early days of September 2005 spread rumors (largely unsubstantiated) of looting and violence in New Orleans (Simon 2007; Varano et al. 2010). The city indeed took on a similar appearance to a war zone, complete with curfew and 65,000 National Guard troops on the ground at one point. An account from one resident of New Orleans

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6 Failing to heed a mandatory evacuation order, which occurred in New Orleans, is illegal in many US jurisdictions.
describes how National Guard troops and helicopters patrolled the wealthier areas of the city, prioritizing the surveillance of un-flooded middle class residences over searching for stranded people in submerged areas (Eggers 2009). Looting, in the context of the hurricane, was transformed from a local law enforcement issue into a federal matter with national security implications. In this extreme case, military force was deployed to manage citizens who were deemed a threat to their own city, criminalizing anyone who was left behind after the evacuation orders (see Kaufman 2006 for a detailed analysis).

After the flood water began to recede, Bill Quigley, a professor at Loyola University law school, visited the Lower Ninth Ward and reported that the Army National Guard had set up military-style checkpoints at the entrances to the neighborhood, preventing people from visiting their properties and rented apartments (Quigley 2005). Simon (2007) argues that the false memory of extensive looting and violence in New Orleans has created risk imaginaries that “racially code” American fears of natural disaster victims. New Orleans residents that were unable or unwilling to follow evacuation orders are constructed as the primary threat to the city, as opposed to flood waters, broken levies, and lack of emergency assistance. What comes to bear here is who exactly requires security – not displaced poor people, but homeowners and others who had the means to drive away before the storm hit. The rhetoric surrounding the un-evacuated “refugees” suggests an alien population that deserved no protection under American law (Giroux 2006). This rhetoric constructs evacuation compliance as a marker of good citizenship, and privileges the protection of evacuees’ empty homes over the care of people who were unable (and in some cases unwilling) to evacuate.

2.3 Neighborhood as political unit; neighborhood as community

This thesis considers the neighborhood as an important spatial scale: in urban governance, in political organizing, and in city planning. Various definitions of neighborhood
have been proposed by social scientists. Neighborhood as a place and as a community was
theorized by sociologists at the University of Chicago through observations of European
immigrant communities in Chicago during the 1920s (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-1920) and
through efforts to categorize neighborhoods based on type and land-use changes (Park et al.
1925). Hunter (1979, 267) argued that three analytical approaches were utilized by social
scientists in the study of urban neighborhoods: “1) typologies, (2) stages of change, and (3)
functions—which include economic, administrative, political, and social.” The epistemological
approaches of the early Chicago School sociologists utilized the first two types of analysis by
categorizing types of neighborhoods and by tracking their “progress” through various stages of
development (Hunter 1979). Social cohesion was an important marker of a neighborhood unit
and was assumed to provide positive benefits to its residents. Conversely, Thomas and
Znaniecki noted that social disorganization stemmed from “the inability of a neighborhood to
solve its problems together” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-1920). This approach relies upon the
assumption that residents share an attachment to and local dependence on the fixed attributes of a
particular place.

The second approach that Hunter identifies, “stages of change” was taken up by
geographers in explorations of economic transitions within neighborhoods (cf. Harvey 1989). In
the third approach, a neighborhood is analyzed in terms of its various identities: political unit,
social community, or land use type. Martin (2003a, 363), through research on neighborhood
identities in Athens, Georgia, shows that these identities do not necessarily align, noting that “a
neighborhood might have a clearly identifiable economic identify…such as factory district, but
its residents might not view it as the basis for a social community.” DeFilippis et al. (2006) add
to this analysis the idea that communities are both partially produced and constrained by the
external context in which they are embedded. Tensions often occur between neighborhood as
defined by residents versus neighborhood as defined by administrative boundaries, district, or zoning use. Martin argues that these tensions show that neighborhoods as units are not self-evident. Rather, neighborhoods are socially or politically constructed by a variety of interests for a variety of uses (Martin 2003a). She notes that neighborhood designations can also be used for exclusionary purposes, and that “neighborhood definition - the social and physical bounding of a spatially based group - is an important tool for exclusion. While the defining of a neighborhood, or any place, may have a flexibility over time, one goal of the neighborhood-community demarcation is in fact to harden, or fix, the boundaries” (Martin 2003a, 367). As I show in Chapter 4, neighborhood boundaries have become the borders within which much civic participation in New Orleans is organized and enacted.

DeFilippis (2004, 28) argues that neighborhood boundaries “produce the conditions for social and political life within metropolitan areas and work to reproduce the wealth of people who are on ‘the right side’ of the boundaries.” The use of neighborhoods as a source for legitimizing social exclusion can be derived from a persistent assumption: that the shared sociospatial experiences of (some of) the residents of an urban neighborhood are a legitimate basis for making political claims. Through this process, the idea of neighborhood typologies is employed in city planning and community organizing to speak of neighborhoods as homogenous entities. New Orleans’ 2010 Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance defines its function as ensuring, among other things, that multi-family housing is “sensitive to its neighborhood context” (New Orleans City Planning Commission 2010, 6). References to the “character” of housing in the city’s neighborhoods are coupled with indications of the appropriate neighborhoods for the construction of different types of residential and commercial infrastructure (New Orleans City Planning Commission 2010). References to a homogenized, shared lifestyle in each place-type are used to legitimate this style of zoning, and to unite residents and political leaders behind
certain types of development and reinvestment. The zoning ordinance delineates the type of land uses that are “in character” or “out of character” for various areas in the city; these delineations were created in part through city-sponsored feedback-gathering missions in various neighborhoods. In the summer of 2010, public meetings were held throughout New Orleans to gather information on the neighborhood characteristics desired by residents of various areas. These meetings also asked residents to describe unwanted characteristics of residences and commercial uses in or near their neighborhoods (New Orleans City Planning Commission, Personal Communication, November 2010). Public feedback was wrapped into neighborhood character studies, on which the 2010 zoning ordinance and Master Plan are based. The Master Plan’s definition of neighborhoods as communities relies upon imagined perceived homogeneity of the lifestyle and values of each neighborhood’s residents.

Mapping neighborhoods as political units with associated social communities has its roots in early 20th-century Chicago School sociology. Thomas and Znaniecki’s (1918-1920) research on neighborhoods that were ethnically and culturally similar revealed organized, shared attachments amongst residents based on their location. However, Martin (2003a) notes that these shared bonds have fractured over time as households develop greater economic independence, become geographically distant, travel further to work, and develop attachments to people and places outside their neighborhoods of birth. Martin and other scholars also examine the conflation of neighborhood with “home” (and thus, with familial or familiar community bond) (see also Aitken 2000). This connection is emphasized by many city policymakers and neighborhood associations. For the former, a preference emerges for land use planning and public policy that encourages homogenous communities (both visually and socially), which are assumed to share political views and a vision for the future of their neighborhoods. For the

7 Community as an organizational tool of neoliberal governance has been the subject of much scholarship (see Rose 1990 and Jessop 2002). This idea is briefly touched upon in the following section of this chapter.
latter, shared values and, often, socio-demographic characteristics become a basis for political organizing. Other planners and geographers have made similar arguments as to how the conflation of boundaries and values lends itself to exclusionary meanings of neighborhood/community (see Mitchell 2003; Sandercock 1998; Raco and Flint 2001; Martin and Holloway 2005; Watson 2006).

Martin (2003b) contends that conflations of neighborhood political agendas and their sociospatial locations should be deconstructed. While political agendas may indeed be place-based, their significance is rarely determined entirely by their location (Martin 2003b). The myth of locationally-based identity can be drawn from a variety of neighborhood traits, from a certain demographic majority or primary industry, to perceived historical value. In New Orleans, a neighborhood’s historic context is a characteristic that is deeply tied to administrative boundaries. As Campanella (2008) explains, the older (usually understood as the most historical) neighborhoods are geographically small, yet are all distinguished by unique architectural details. Newer neighborhoods, particularly suburban-style neighborhoods built on drained swampland after the 1950s, are larger and less aesthetically varied. Traveling outward from the older areas of the city that were built along the Mississippi River, neighborhoods to the north and northeast are divided into larger, less densely-populated land parcels. Despite their administrative convenience or social artificiality, however, these boundaries have real, material consequences for the people who live within them (Martin 2003b). Ann, a resident of New Orleans East8 who works as a community development specialist for a residential developer, explains her experience of the cultural priorities placed upon New Orleans’ “more historic” neighborhoods versus her home in New Orleans East. “New Orleans East is thought of as just

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8 For many administrative purposes, as well as in local understandings of neighborhood boundaries, “New Orleans East” comprises all areas east of the Industrial Canal and north of the Intracoastal Waterway: Pines Village, Little Woods, Plum Orchard, West Lake Forest, Read Blvd. East, Read Blvd. West, Village De L’Est, Viavent/Venetian Isles, and Lake Catherine (GNOCDC 2000d). This huge swath of land is one of the newest and poorest areas of the city.
one big “block,” even though it’s 46% of the city. It doesn’t get the same treatment as smaller, more historic neighborhoods do” (Personal Communication, November 2010). Ann describes this disparity in her recollections of unequal resource distribution between neighborhoods after Hurricane Katrina. She believes that neighborhoods with a claim to architectural and cultural history received the most attention and resources in the rebuilding effort, and she notes that these areas are often populated with higher-income, whiter residents. These neighborhoods, as shown in Weil’s (2010) analysis of civic engagement, tend to have higher levels of civic engagement and greater levels of post-Katrina recovery than other neighborhoods.

2.4 Government through community

In his writings on the 20th century transition away from the welfare state model in the US and UK, Nikolas Rose (1999, 142) argues that, instead of one form of government linearly superseding the next, the transition marks a “complexification” of government processes, an opening up of new possibilities of governance and the exercise of political power. Welfare-state restructuring led to the re-tasking of many government social services, which began to look to the private and nonprofit sectors for their funding, leadership, and operating staff (Wolch 1990; Rose 1999). These formerly-federal government functions re-lodged themselves at several sites: state and local governments, national NGOs, and local voluntary and community organizations. In theorizing how the political role of the state is being re-thought through neoliberal politics, Rose sees government as moving to a more enabling, or facilitating role. NGOs and community organizations became new partners of government (Rose 1999).

This process has corresponded with a shift in the responsibility for social and economic development away from local governments to private or community-based entities (see Harvey 1989; Wolch 1990; Peck 1995; Cope 1997; DeFilippis 2004). In the following analysis, I rely on several “commonalities in the assumptions of researchers” regarding the decline of the welfare
state (DeFilippis 2004, 17). This provides the broad context for my exploration of post-Katrina governance restructuring in New Orleans. The general conclusion is that the role of the state in capitalism has transformed. Keynesian relationships between worker, state, and capital have waned and state focus has shifted to creating conditions favorable for capital investment (DeFilippis 2004). This is linked to changes in the politics of US localities and the responsibilities of local governments.

Even more than downloading formerly-federal responsibilities to state and local governments in the US, these responsibilities are downloaded to the “community” level: to voluntary organizations of all types and scales. In an analysis of US welfare state restructuring in the 1970s and 1980s, Wolch and Akita (1989) found that, despite reductions in state funding and declining growth in the voluntary sector, the latter’s provision of services had expanded relative to that of the state for two reasons. First, reductions in federal social services, such as income assistance, thrust a greater share of responsibility for welfare (and other) services onto the voluntary sector. Second, cuts in federal, state, and local spending on public services were greater than reductions in support for the voluntary sector (Wolch 1990). Thus, the transition away from the welfare state expanded the role of voluntary/community organizations in providing public social services in the US and UK.

As the image of the social state gives way to that of the facilitating state, the enabling state or the state as animator, political government is to be relieved of its powers and obligations to know, plan, calculate and steer from the center. The state is no longer required to answer all society’s needs for order, security, health and productivity. Individuals, firms, organizations, localities, schools, parents, hospitals, housing estates must take on themselves - as ‘partners’ - a portion of the responsibility for resolving these issues - whether this be by permanent retraining for the worker, or neighborhood watch for the community. This involves a double movement of autonomization and responsibilitization. Organizations and other actors that were once enmeshed in the complex and bureaucratic lines of force of the social state are to be set free to find their own destiny. Yet, at the same time, they are to be made responsible for that destiny, and for the destiny of society as a whole, in new ways (Rose 1999, 174-175, emphasis added).
This “double movement” is manifested in how organizations in New Orleans are engaging in the post-Katrina political landscape. On one hand, the responsibility (not the resources) to recover and rebuild is thrust from the city to the micro level of each neighborhood, and is dependent on the residents’ particular skills, leadership, and financial resources. For some residents, the experience is tantamount to being abandoned by the city government, particularly in low-income areas that may lack experience in navigating political, financial, and engineering barriers. Many of the people I interviewed in New Orleans feel that the city has asked residents to do their own cleanup and recovery without giving them the resources to do so. On the other hand, however, neighborhood organizations have a new mandate and ability to act. They can more influentially sculpt the future trajectories of their neighborhoods. For some neighborhoods this new autonomy has resulted in empowerment and positive action. A problem arises, however, for those that do not have the resources or skills to enter the political arena and compete with the well-organized, well-funded organizations on the other side of town. Furthermore, their membership is not bound by standards that mandate equal representation of all neighborhood residents (e.g., diversity of racial background, economic status, age, and so on). Thus, the membership of some organizations reflects a narrower population diversity than actually exists within their neighborhoods.

In post-Katrina New Orleans, this difference has often played out across the lines of class and residential tenure. Sam, an associate at a historical development firm in New Orleans observes that returning population is a key indicator of how successful neighborhoods have been in making requests to the city and participating in recovery planning. He notes that:

you could look at how Uptown has developed as opposed to New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward, which are neighborhoods that still haven’t been taken care of, since [their] infrastructure is still broken and hasn’t been fixed...Those neighborhoods have a significant part of their populations that are no longer in New Orleans, that are living outside the city. Whereas many of the other
neighborhoods that are in better shape have almost all of their populations back (Personal Communication November 2010).

Flaherty’s (2010) interviews with community organizers speak to tensions between new residents and those whose families have lived in New Orleans for several generations. Beginning with the overhaul of the city’s school system, much of the recovery effort has been led by an influx of consultants, planners, architects, developers, teachers, and other reformers, many of whom relocated to the city (Flaherty 2010). Flaherty notes that many regard New Orleans as a “blank slate on which they can project and practice their ideas of reform, whether in education, architecture, urban planning, or health care” (Flaherty 2010, 84). However, community activists who worked in New Orleans before the hurricane are critical of what they see as “token attempts at community involvement and a paternalistic attitude” among many of the new-comers (Flaherty 2010, 84). Neighborhood organizations gained new members after Katrina, many of them the self-identified “YURPs” – Young, Urban, Rebuilding Professionals who arrived to gain employment in the recovery effort (Flaherty 2010, 84). The membership of many neighborhood organizations shifted in favor of the disproportionately wealthier returning New Orleanians and YURPs that arrived in the city before many of the evacuated residents could return (Flaherty 2010).

Neighborhood organizations in US cities are generally comprised of citizens who come together to address issues that affect their lives at the neighborhood level. These organizations usually work within existing city governance structures, but can also challenge the validity of these structures (Martin 2003a). For example, Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans, one of the most well-funded and influential city-wide organizations after Katrina, dedicated itself to reforming the city’s property tax assessment process and other city-wide issues. Other organizations, such as those profiled in Chapter 4, interact with the political institutions of the city while also defining their own politics at a finer-grained scale – that of the ward or
neighborhood (Martin 2003b). Community involvement in the city planning process is not
governed explicitly by a code or standards of representation. Rather, this involvement is
voluntary and is framed by participants and their city counterparts as a marker of good
citizenship and “giving back” to the community.

2.5 The “right” of homeownership

Another symbol in dominant American conceptions of good citizenship is the
achievement of homeownership. The “American Dream” of homeownership has been a
keystone of public policy since the Homestead Act of 1862, which legislated homeownership
into a reward for settlers who moved west to farm the land (Vale 2007). The rewards for
becoming a homeowner continued through tax legislation and preferential zoning in the 1920s
(Vale 2007). Increasing homeownership is one of few non-partisan policy issues in the US and
is supported by all major political parties. The post-World War I ideology of homeownership as
a source of social stability and individuality made the issue into a discursive prophylaxis against
socialism. “Socialism and communism do not take root in the ranks of those who have their feet
firmly embedded in the soil of America through homeownership,” read a pro-homeownership
pamphlet published in 1945 (cited in Dean 1945, 41). Homeownership has been touted since this
time as a solution to various social negatives: poverty, sloth, communism, drug use and sales,
and welfare queens (Vale 2007). Homeownership’s near-universal appeal also makes it a
politically safe issue. In the US, liberal politicians are apt to point to its economic stabilizing
influence on poor neighborhoods and to its wealth-generating potential for the urban poor;
conservative politicians argue that homeownership will cure the negative social issues that are
often associated with inner-city renters.

In terms of housing assistance for renters, 1990s policies transitioned toward voucher-
based assistance. Instead of being given a place to live, the poor would be given vouchers and
subsidies to apply to a housing situation that they arranged for themselves. The stated goal of vouchers was to preserve individual choice by allowing people to choose where they wanted to live. Voucher programs are advertized by their supporters as a form of “people-based” rather than “place-based” anti-poverty policy; thus, they privilege individual choice over broad-brush policies that force residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods into prescribed housing solutions (Weicher 1997 and Goetz 2007). The (often false)\textsuperscript{10} declaration that any landlord would be happy to accept a housing voucher allowed proponents of this policy to claim that they were acting in the interest of individual choice and self-determination. And what of conservative fears that this policy would prompt low-income Americans to move into the desirable neighborhoods of their more privileged counterparts? An analysis of voucher programs by the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative US think-tank, attempts to assuage fears that vouchers will make low-income and other undesirable households too mobile:

“Indeed, there have been fears that tenant-based assistance would be too successful - that low-income households, particularly minorities, would be able to move from urban ghettos to attractive suburbs, destabilizing the neighborhoods they move into and making them less enjoyable places to live… [This] appears to be invalid. About 30 percent of participants [currently] use their tenant-based assistance to continue living in their present house or apartment, bringing down their rent burden. These households like their home and their neighborhood; their only problem is the cost. Of those who use tenant-based assistance to move in a given year, about 15 percent move from a city to its suburbs, and another 15 percent move from a suburb back to the city. As a share of all certificate and voucher holders, about 3 percent move in each direction in any year” (Weicher 1997, 29).

\textsuperscript{9} Furthermore, homeowners are individuals and neighbors, while rental properties are often run by developers or landlords who do not live in the neighborhood.

\textsuperscript{10} A 2010 report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing made the following finding after an examination of housing access in the US: “While HOPE VI has improved the quality of the public housing stock, it has also reduced the number of affordable housing units for poor families and permanently displaced many residents of the demolished projects. In principle, units that were not rebuilt were replaced by housing vouchers, but this procedure was not consistently followed. In addition, this practice places the responsibility of finding housing in the private market on the user. The real choices available for vouchers are in many cases very limited, with no units available in certain neighborhoods, or landlords unwilling to participate in this program” (Rolnik 2010, 27). Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur “repeatedly heard reports that tenants with Section 8 vouchers [see discussion in Chapter 3, especially Table 3.1] had great difficulty finding landlords willing to accept these vouchers. This puts voucher holders at risk of losing their benefit, as they can lose the voucher if they do not obtain housing within 90 days and do not obtain an extension” (Rolnik 2010, 27).
This perspective is popular but not completely accepted by purveyors of the voucher solution to housing affordability problems. In many cases proponents of housing vouchers are caught in constant negotiations between the perceived benefits of clearing out urban concentrations of low-income residents versus the detriments of possibly increasing the mobility of these residents (into more desirable neighborhoods). Homeownership initiatives, however, are touted by both conservative and liberal policymakers as a solution to the crime and concentrated poverty of many urban cores because they are not seen as “low income housing programs” and are thus not criticized for anchoring the poor to crime-infested neighborhoods (Goetz 2007, 99). Goetz’s (2007) analysis shows that the emphasis on homeownership as a solution to urban poverty corresponded to a shift of resources away from assisted rental housing to homeownership promotion. Thus, it also results in the stigmatization of renter households in low-income, urban neighborhoods.

The social construction of homeownership as a cultural preference provides important contextual background for the conflicts over housing that occurred in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. A corresponding devaluing of low-income and public housing was spread through media and some academic research on how the city should recover. Parroting Mayor Nagin’s calls for a “market-based” recovery, such research relies on assumptions that low-income people have little to contribute to the city’s recovery. One such article, from the chair of economics at Loyola University in New Orleans, argued that “In many cities, not only New Orleans, public housing sometimes occupies very valuable real estate with short commuting distances to the central business area. There is simply no rationale for reserving these spaces for the very poor in a city struggling for its very life” (Rockwell and Block 2010, 1296).

A thin line exists between (1) government programs that aim to increase homeownership amongst racial minorities and low-income Americans and (2) NIMBYist policies that seek to
make predictable and restrict the residential locations of racial minorities and low-income Americans. While homeownership is associated with inner-city revitalization, rental housing is conversely equated with decline. Goetz (2007) maps these associations to categories of race and class, which so often overlap with housing tenure as a social division. He posits that both politicians and citizens are more comfortable using housing tenure as a basis for expressing their neighborhood- or homeowner-centered interests. Indeed, in the zoning commission and neighborhood organization meetings that I attended in New Orleans in 2010, I heard dozens of comments from homeowners stating that renters do not possess the same level of commitment to or investment in their neighborhoods. It was often quite clear who these renters were assumed to be: the elderly, poor, Black, Hispanic, or homeless people that do not have a financial investment in their neighborhood of residence. Developers and nonprofit workers who participated in my interviews pointed to these stereotypes as a powerful motivating factor in action by New Orleans homeowners to avoid the development of affordable or multi-family housing in their neighborhoods. Citizen feedback solicited by the New Orleans City Planning Commission in July 2010 reveals similar desires on the part of many homeowners to keep this type of development out of their middle- to high-income neighborhoods (New Orleans City Planning Commission 2010). In Chapters 3, I explore how homeownership as a dominant preference for post-storm recovery has a significant effect on the types of housing and community development policies that are gaining traction in post-Katrina New Orleans.

2.6 Renters vs. homeowners: The newest class divide?

Next, I turn to a prevalent assumption of urban renewal and redevelopment: that increased homeownership among the urban poor will provide a path to upward mobility. This line of thinking is nearly universal across US political party lines and mainstream city planning schools. It relies on unexamined assumptions about the types of people who are renters and the
types of people who are homeowners, and what each of these groups will bring to New Orleans neighborhoods. Homeownership’s power as a policy solution is drawn from the perception that it will generate wealth for the poor\(^{11}\) (thus lifting families out of poverty with little government intervention needed) and that, in the process, it will stabilize and improve low-income neighborhoods (again with minimal effort on the part of government social programs). As explored in Chapter 4, homeownership as a tool for neighborhood stabilization is a widely-accepted goal of nonprofits working in New Orleans.\(^{12}\)

In April 2011, the Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance, a coalition of non- and for-profit developers and housing groups, released a proposal to use $62 million to help families that had previously been renting in New Orleans to become homeowners. According to the foundation, the money comes from the Disaster Community Development Block Grant program, and will also re-appropriate some federal money that was originally tagged for the Small Rental Property Program, which provides funding to property owners to repair their storm-damaged, one-to-four unit rental properties and make these units available to low- and moderate-income tenants at affordable rates. An enthusiastic quote from Fred Johnson Jr. of the Neighborhood Development Foundation notes that helping people to buy homes is “what I call breaking the poverty line!” (quoted in Sullivan 2011). As noted above, the doctrine of homeownership as a path to upward mobility is strongly entrenched in post-Katrina rebuilding policies.

Interviews that I conducted with neighborhood leaders and developers in November 2010 revealed similar perspectives on homeownership. Developers cited the American dream of

\(^{11}\) In light of the 2008 housing crisis, this idea may be changing. For example, the 2010 Louisiana Housing Needs Assessment acknowledges that “the recent foreclosure crisis illustrated that homeownership is not appropriate for every household. The lax credit requirements, low down payments and toxic mortgage products led many households into purchasing a home they were not financially or personally prepared for. As a result, many families were overstretched financially and could not afford the monthly payments. This is particularly true for households that have option adjustable rate mortgages and are now seeing their monthly payment increase beyond their means” (LHFA 2010, 4).

\(^{12}\) In 2008, PolicyLink, a national institute for the advancement of economic and social equity in the US, counted 53 nonprofit organizations working in New Orleans to promote homeownership and advocate for existing homeowners (PolicyLink 2008).
homeownership, promotion of neighborhood stability, and a renewed sense of personal responsibility as direct results of increased homeownership in poor areas. An emphasis on homeowners as upstanding citizens is pervasive among progressive nonprofits and community organizations. Only a small percentage of these organizations are dedicated to increasing the availability of affordable rental stock for poor people who either can’t or don’t wish to become homeowners. This mirrors the disparity in public funds that went to rebuilding private housing and promoting new homeownership ($7.5 billion) and to rebuilding rental stock ($1.5 billion) (Carr et al 2008).13 Political and financial preference for increasing homeownership over subsidizing renters is evident throughout the post-hurricane planning process.14

2.7 From government to governance: Post-WWII shifts in civic participation

As I explored earlier in this chapter, many scholars have shown that urban restructuring in the last 25 years of the 20th century has resulted in a transformation of relations between capital, labor, and communities. In this context, funds flow less freely from federal to local governments; thus municipalities, responsible for generating more of their own revenue, have become more economically competitive with each other. In explaining the results of this shift, DeFilippis (2004, 21) notes that “local politics has become increasingly characterized by a shift away from local government and toward local governance, as more and more activities and functions are performed outside of the specific structures of local governments.” An “entrepreneurial turn” in local governance has led municipal governments to be more actively involved in economic development activities, such as the formation of business improvement districts, venture capital financing, and public-private ventures in real estate development (Harvey 1989). The provision and funding of social services are shifting from the public sector  

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13 Two thirds of New Orleans residents before Katrina were renters (Carr et al. 2008).
14 It should be noted that there are many success stories of homeownership as a tool for lifting some families out of poverty. However, these success stories tend to become a hegemonic narrative of poverty alleviation, downplaying the fact that for many low-income families, homeownership is not financially or logistically feasible or desirable.
to the private and non-profit sectors (DeFilippis 2004). Harvey (1989) shows that this intensifies economic competition between cities.

Martin and Holloway (2003) note that the privatization of formerly-public responsibilities has implications for the degree to which individual citizens can influence urban policy. There is a disconnect between the functioning of local politics (working through public-private ventures) and citizen input on policy decisions (sought by governments directly). In considering this disconnect, Martin and Holloway (2003, 1092) make two observations: (1) that despite the purported goal of citizen involvement in public policy, this new structure of governance does not necessarily offer citizens more influence over policy than under the welfare-state model, and (2) that the structures the government creates to cultivate community involvement in policy-making require critical assessment of the degree to which they privilege the voices of some communities over others. In terms of the first observation, government takes on a facilitating role between citizens and private contractors. Thus, the government can stipulate that community participation must be taken into account by contractors. When the New Orleans city council hired contract planners to write the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) (see Table 1.1), for example, it required the planners to collect and incorporate citizen input into the plans. However, because this and other planning work is done by the contractor instead of public employees, the government has less direct oversight over precisely how (much) citizen participation is incorporated into the planning process. Returning to Watson (2006), the process of collecting and incorporating community participation has very real implications for how exactly this participation is incorporated into the products of planning – land use studies, zoning ordinances, recovery plans, and other planning documents.

By law, public comment on new policy must be solicited by most US federal agencies. This trend is rooted in the negative public reactions to early urban renewal plans in the 1950s
that attempted to revitalize US inner-cities without consulting citizens (Ford 2010). Early urban renewal practitioners theorized that new enterprises would invest in the inner-city if local governments cleared out the blighted buildings in urban cores. However, few provisions were made for people who lived in the areas that were demolished. Even in the 1950s, these wholesale urban renewal programs drew harsh criticism. Critics blamed the government’s reliance on outside experts who presumed to know what was best for citizens (Ford 2010). Subsequent initiatives began to require that citizen feedback be solicited by the professionals who were responsible for land use planning and zoning.

Federal policies toward civic involvement in US cities took a turn in the 1960s and the brief summary of their history that follows provides essential context for my examination of neighborhood organizations in New Orleans. Urban renewal programs of the 1950s had snubbed participation by local communities; public frustration with these policies and a contemporaneous demand by the civil rights movement for greater decision-making power were reflected in the 1960s war on poverty and subsequent anti-poverty programs (DeFilippis 2004). Moynihan’s (1969) history of the 1960s war on poverty and Model Cities Program shows an ideological shift in political understandings of how poverty should be combated. Policymakers began to question the assumption that policies handed down from the educated upper classes could result in real social change for poverty-stricken neighborhoods. This re-thinking of poverty reduction strategy was evident in the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, which stipulated that community action programs should be established in the poorest neighborhoods of the country, involving “maximum feasible participation” of neighborhood residents. As Moynihan (1969, 3) notes, “in the oldest and presumably strongest tradition of American democracy, the local people themselves, those actually caught up in the problem at hand, were to organize themselves to deal with it.” The notion that local action should support a national poverty reduction strategy was
part of a larger post-war preoccupation with problems of community. A widespread perception that the American sense of community was in decline required a fix to combat the growing sense of individual isolation in society. As elucidated by conservative writer Robert Nisbet (1953), men [people] had lost their sense of community because the individual had become functionally irrelevant to society, the economy, and the state. In effect, the authority of community as socially relevant had diminished because its societal function had eroded in the period after the New Deal. His prescription for remedying this sense of irrelevance was to build a “new laissez-faire,” not of the individual but of autonomous groups, in effect, remaking community as economically and socially meaningful. This was to come through the creation of new community institutions (or the revival of old ones), which should be given real functions and would thus acquire meaningful authority amongst their members and within greater society (Moynihan 1969).

Sherry Arnstein (1969), however, cautioned that all community participation is not equal. Despite the government’s interest in poverty reduction through community action, the war on poverty was still a policy declared in the interest of the poor and thus community participation was vulnerable to being merely a policy token. Arnstein argued that effective (beyond rhetorical) community involvement must involve both (1) participation and (2) redistribution of power so that citizens who were previously excluded from the political decision-making process would be included. She wrote that "participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the powerholders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo" (Arnstein 1969, 246). By Arnstein’s measure, community participation in politics could range from being manipulated by city governments to being a truly equal partnership. DeFilippis (2004) examines community participation via the level of autonomy that community-based
groups have to act without unreasonable constraint from municipal government. He argues that for local-scale actors to be autonomous they must gain greater (but not complete) control over their embedded relationships with larger-scale government bodies. In the case studies in Chapter 4, I consider neighborhood involvement in New Orleans planning processes by DeFilippis’s (2004) and Arnstein’s (1969) understandings of local autonomy and levels of community participation.

Returning to the war on poverty, it is also important to note that the Economic Opportunity Act and other programs had long-term policy repercussions. The Act required community plans as a prerequisite for funding of social reform programs; over forty years later, this is a common stipulation of federal funding programs that are targeted at local development. Moynihan also notes that requiring the poor to participate in social reform implicitly allows the government to intervene if they (the poor) do not. By 1968, four years after the Economic Opportunity Act was published, over one thousand community action agencies (CAAs) had been established in the US.

The level of mobilization of CAAs varied between cities by 1967, which marked another turn in the dominant political philosophy of how civic involvement could and should be used as a tool in local governance. The Model Cities Program (1966-1974), a subsequent initiative, attempted to address the shortcomings of the first round of anti-poverty initiatives in the early 1960s. The program provided money to cities for comprehensive planning and retained the hallmark of citizen participation that was present in earlier “war on poverty” initiatives. However, the Model Cities Program redirected CAAs from political organizing to local economic development (DeFilippis 2004). Moynihan (1969) and Fainstein (1987) suggest that redefining community organizing in the realm of economic development was reactionary; the CAAs had become so persuasive that federal policy-makers sought to reclaim neighborhood-
based anti-poverty programs and return them to city governments (DeFilippis 2004). The result was a merging of community-level organizing and community-based economic development. From a national policy perspective, CAAs became a scale for community-based activities, not a venue for community control or participation in decision-making.

What DeFilippis (2004, 47) refers to as “institutional co-option” of community participation in policy deepened in the 1980s and 1990s. Many CAAs transitioned into nonprofit corporations as they faced Rose’s “double movement:” waning public funding, but increased public expectations. DeFilippis (2004) makes two observations regarding the nonprofits that have proliferated since the 1980s: they are largely market-based, and their style of organizing is usually non-confrontational and operates within mainstream political structures. The political use of community as an ideology, explored earlier in this chapter, is particularly relevant here. The participation initiatives of market-based community development programs are grounded in a mainstreamed theory and practice of depoliticizing community development, much as the consensus-based model of city planning discussed earlier in this chapter. I make a distinction, in Chapter 4, between different scales of community development and community activism in New Orleans’ neighborhood organizations after Hurricane Katrina. While all three neighborhood groups that I profile are organizing their residents, a radical difference exists in their goals and outcomes. The two organizations that operate within conventional city governance structures have seen greater success than the group that connects its mission to broader social issues and confrontational social action.

Despite the manipulative nature, as noted by Arnstein (1969) and DeFilippis (2004), of many government attempts at community participation, the formation of community associations in US cities did set a new precedent for participatory governance. Moynihan goes so far as to declare that the Ford Foundation invented a new type of American government
through its creation of inner-city community agencies. These agencies provided a political voice for the city’s neighborhoods and allowed residents to participate in a structured way in land use decisions. As community involvement became vogue in progressive urban planning practices, discourses of responsible citizenship became bound up with civic action and neighborhood-centric concerns. The relationship of communities in “partnership” with the city (Rose 1999) became a new space of political action between the city and the individual. It is this relationship between neighborhood organizations and the city of New Orleans that Chapter 4 will explore.

In Chapter 1, I touched briefly on the complex post-storm politics of rebuilding New Orleans. Contestations over the economic viability of damaged neighborhoods were entangled with conflicting judgments about land use, the cultural-historical value of neighborhoods, and the environmental realities of receding marshlands and flood risks. The city’s affordable housing problems cannot be considered apart from the highly contingent realities (physical and political) of the post-hurricane landscape. The following chapter explores the ambit of housing availability and affordability in New Orleans five to six years after Hurricane Katrina. Returning to Levine et al. (2007), multiple actors within and beyond the city government are responsible for defining the trajectory of the city’s housing policy. In examining the issue of affordable housing, I explore some repercussions of landlord opportunism in a landscape of large-scale housing destruction and resultant rent spikes. Homeowners and renters are framed quite differently in this debate, and the myth of homeownership as economic boon for the poor re-emerges. I end Chapter 3 with some reflection on affordable housing and contestations over the burden of proof: how certain powerful interests have used statistical studies and “objective” data to impede the creation of affordable rental housing.
Chapter 3: Maximum Feasible Uncertainty: Politics of Housing Demand and Supply

3.1 Housing loss and housing needs

Before Hurricane Katrina, there was already an affordable housing problem in New Orleans. Two out of every three extremely low-income households in New Orleans used more than thirty percent of their income for rent, and over half of very low-income households paid over half of their income for rent. There was a waiting list of 17,000 families seeking to live in public housing (Quigley 2006). The storm and subsequent flooding escalated the problem: 46% of the city’s 86,000 low-cost housing units were destroyed or severely damaged (Quigley 2006). After the storm, rents rose by 44%, fuelled by strong demand for the drastically reduced number of apartments, a 33% increase in construction costs, and up to a 400% increase in insurance costs (Plyer et al. 2009; LHFA 2010). Increased insurance and operating costs further tightened the market for affordable units according to a study that compared rents between 2004 and 2007 (Plyer et al. 2009).

US federal standards classify households that pay more than 30% of their income for housing as “cost burdened” and households that pay more than half their income for housing as “severely cost burdened.” In 2010, over 40% of New Orleans renters spent more than half of their pre-tax income on housing. This percentage has increased since 2007 (LHFA 2010).

Affordable housing is defined as housing that does not cost an individual or family more than 30% of its annual, pre-tax income. Affordable housing needs in New Orleans encompass three types of populations: new low income households that will move to New Orleans over the next decade, people who are currently homeless, and low income people currently living in New Orleans who are paying more than 30% of their income toward housing each month. Table 3.1

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15 HUD draws distinctions between the severity of poverty. Low-income households are classified as making 80% or less than the average median household income, which in 2009 was $35,243 in New Orleans (US Census Bureau 2010). “Very low income” is classified as making 50% or less than the average median household income and “extremely low income” is classified as making 80% or less.
below describes the many types of subsidized housing programs that work to assist these renters in New Orleans. 16

Table 3.1: Types of Subsidized Housing in New Orleans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public housing units</th>
<th>Rental apartments supported by federal public housing operating subsidies. To be eligible, tenants must have incomes at or below 80% of area median income.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenant-based vouchers</td>
<td>Federal rental subsidies, administered by a public housing authority, for units that tenants choose in the private market. This category includes the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher and post-Katrina voucher programs. To be eligible, households must have incomes at or below 80% of area median income. However, federal law gives priority to households with incomes at or below 30% of area median income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUD project-based rental assistance</td>
<td>HUD agreements with owners of multifamily apartment complexes to pay the difference between the approved rent and what the tenant can afford. To be eligible, tenants must have incomes at or below 80% of area median income. Many households in these units are elderly and disabled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income housing tax credits</td>
<td>Federal income tax credits administered by the Internal Revenue Service and awarded to developers by the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency (LHFA). Developers typically sell the credits to raise equity capital for their projects. The tax credits may be claimed annually for 10 years against eligible development costs for units restricted to low-income households. The units are generally affordable to households with incomes between 45% and 60% of area median income. Federal tax law requires the owner to comply with rent and income restrictions on designated units for 30 years after they are made available for occupancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Rental Property Program</td>
<td>A rental housing initiative, formulated by the Louisiana Recovery Authority and the state Office of Community Development, that uses HUD’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to provide forgivable loans to landlords for the repair of hurricane-damaged small rental properties, primarily those with one to four units. In return for financing, landlords must comply for 5 to 10 years (longer for nonprofits) with certain tenant income and rent restrictions. Depending on the level of CDBG assistance, the landlord sets maximum rents per restricted unit at levels affordable to households earning 50%, 65% or 80% of area median income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidized housing</td>
<td>Rental units with tenant income, and in some cases rent, restrictions imposed by the above programs. Subsidized households refer to the households that occupy those units.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Unaffordable housing is more likely to be a problem for renters than for homeowners. In

16 The definitions of subsidized and affordable housing are related but not identical. A housing subsidy is a form of government assistance that offsets part or all of the housing costs of a low-income family. The goal of subsidies is to make housing affordable to low-income families; this is defined by HUD as housing that costs no more than 30% of a family’s yearly income (US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2011). However, subsidized housing may still be unaffordable (albeit less unaffordable than completely unsubsidized housing).
2010, 58% of New Orleans renters paid unaffordable housing costs (Plyer and Liu, 2010), compared with 43% before Katrina (US Census Bureau 2000b). In the same year, almost 25% of renters in New Orleans received subsidies from the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) (LHFA 2010), more than double the number that received subsidies before Hurricane Katrina. These subsidies are intended to help low income renters afford housing and are commonly referred to as "Section 8" vouchers. The increase in residents receiving these subsidies comes largely from three populations:

1. People whose houses were damaged or destroyed during the hurricane and who transferred into the HANO program from disaster rental-assistance programs
2. Former residents of thousands of public housing apartments that were demolished after Katrina
3. Former residents of publicly-subsidized, privately-owned apartments that charged affordable rents before the storm but have now increased these rents to keep up with post-Katrina market norms

Since Katrina, the city’s housing policy is transitioning away from city-managed public housing to mixed-use and affordable developments that are managed by private companies (Flaherty 2010; Rolnik 2010; Plyer et al. 2009). In the years between 2005 and 2010, HANO reduced the number of public housing units in New Orleans while increasing the number of Section 8 vouchers that were handed out to low-income renters. This approach is one that has gained traction nationally since 1992 when President Bill Clinton initiated the Hope VI program to transform public housing by building mixed-income communities in its place. Before Hurricane Katrina, 5,200 New Orleans households lived in public housing units managed by HANO, and 9,100 used “Section 8” vouchers to rent in the private market (BGR 2009). At the end of 2010, however, only 1,800 households were living in public housing and 17,000 were using vouchers (LHFA 2010). Thus, the number households living in public housing decreased by 65% between 2005 and 2010, while the number of vouchers increased by 86%.
Several studies carried out by independent policy groups and consulting firms have shown that New Orleans faces a continuous and growing need for affordable housing for its many low-income residents (see Plyer et al. 2009; LHFA 2010; Miestchovich et al. 2011). The impact of Hurricane Katrina and an increase in foreclosures (among other problems stemming from the 2008 housing crisis) have decreased the means of many residents to find jobs and keep their housing. Compared to other US cities, New Orleans' economy has a large demand for low-wage workers to work in the hospitality, food, music, and construction labor sectors (Plyer et al. 2009). Historically, low-income New Orleans residents, who are often Black or other racial minorities, were marginalized and discriminated against with regard to the location and quality of their housing (Strolovitch et al. 2006; Campanella 2008). These inequalities persist today: many studies show that Blacks experienced a disproportionate amount of housing damage from Hurricane Katrina and that low-income, minority home-owners in New Orleans were less likely to return to the city and repair their damaged homes (see Logan 2007; Fussell et al. 2010; Hartmann and Squires 2006; Elliott and Pais 2006; Groen and Polivka 2008; Paxon and Rouse 2008; Vu et al. 2009).

3.2 Adventures in affordable housing: Can there be too much?

Since Hurricane Katrina, the construction of new affordable housing units in New Orleans has become a controversial issue. As discussed in Chapter 1, some landlords and real estate analyses argue that there is an over-abundance of affordable housing and that it is negatively affecting demand for market-rate rentals. Claims that the market is overbuilt tend to follow one of two logics. Some opponents of building additional low-cost housing units argue that Section 8 vouchers cause landlords to increase rents because they know the vouchers will offset part of the cost to the tenant. This, the argument goes, results in the appearance, but not reality of a lack of affordable housing: there would be plenty of affordable units if disreputable
landlords were not raising rents, and what is really needed are safeguards against rent inflation. Another argument is that low-cost units are not needed by everyone who lives, or wants to live in them; in essence, that an over-supply of low-cost units means that many people who live in these units could afford to pay market rents. Donald Vallee, one landlord who has been publically vocal on the issue, has argued that New Orleans tenants are trying to game the city’s system of subsidized housing in order to pay cheaper rent (Cohen 2009; Reckdahl 2009). He argues that the large number of people who applied for housing subsidies in New Orleans in 2009 reflects a culture in which people “want cheap rent and they want someone else to pay for it,” and that it is “a social economic problem more than a housing problem” (quoted in Reckdahl 2009, n.p.).

These arguments overlook ample data showing that unsubsidized rents have risen dramatically since Katrina, much faster than wages (Plyer, et al. 2009; LHFA 2010; Miestchovich et al., 2011). Before the storm there were many low-cost, un-subsidized rental units available in New Orleans. Since baseline rents rose dramatically after Katrina (well above income increases), many formerly low-cost units are unaffordable to people who used to rent them. Many of these people now require housing subsidies to afford their rent. Thus, the demand for affordable housing is vastly more serious than a case of people looking for artificially cheap rent.17 Furthermore, housing subsidies do not make up enough of the cost of rent for everyone who receives them. Rose and Tuggle (2010) show that many New Orleans residents face affordability gaps between the market price of housing and the subsidies for which they are eligible. For example, affordable rent is defined at $333/month for a single, elderly woman who earns $1000/month at a minimum-wage, part-time job. HUD has determined that fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment in New Orleans is $840/month. The 2010 Low Income Housing Tax Credit Rent (LIHTC), a government subsidy program, will lower this

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17 To address possible inflation of rents being charged to HANO subsidy recipients, HANO hired a consultant to compare market rents to those being charged by landlords who have Section 8 tenants (Reckdahl 2011).
woman’s rent to $689/month with the landlord paying utilities. Based on a target affordable rent of $333/month, this means that she faces an affordability gap of $356/month and thus, by HUD definitions, is still paying unaffordable rent based on her income.

In 2009, the Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR), an independent New Orleans research organization, issued a report stating that in the years since Hurricane Katrina, a larger number of New Orleans residents was receiving subsidies from HANO than before the storm (BGR 2009). Specifically, BGR’s findings were as follows:

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the federal government made available significant funding for rebuilding low- and moderate-income housing. As a result of these programs, the number of subsidized rental units in the city has already rebounded past pre-Katrina levels, and is expected to far surpass those levels by 2012. Subsidized housing will assist more of the poorest households in New Orleans than before the disaster, and a far greater number of low- and moderate-income households with incomes between 40% and 80% of median. This is occurring on a much reduced overall population base.

BGR projects that, by 2012:
- New Orleans will have approximately 35,700 units of subsidized rental housing – an increase of approximately 15,800 units over the pre-Katrina level.
- Subsidized rental units as a percentage of all housing will more than double, rising from 10% pre-Katrina to 25%.
- The number of housing units for very low income households will increase by 3,600 (22%) over pre-Katrina levels.
- Although it will have only 27% of the region’s population, New Orleans will have 70% of the subsidized housing in the region (BGR 2009, 1).

The BGR report estimated that the 2009 vacancy rate of New Orleans apartments was around 10%, which was much higher than before the storm. A more detailed market analysis completed in 2011 showed that post-storm occupancy of undamaged or repaired apartments reached a high of 95% in 2006 before declining to 86.9% at the end of 2008. In 2009, the occupancy rate rose to 88.3%, and it rose again to 89.5% in 2010 (Miestchovich et al., 2011). Considering these statistics in their post-hurricane context is crucial. It should be noted, for example, that the high occupancy rate in 2006 likely had little to do with a strong rental market.
and instead pointed to the scarcity of inhabitable rental housing so soon after the hurricane. The apparent decline in occupied rental housing after 2006 does not necessarily imply an over-supply of housing. Rather, it may point to a malalignment of recovery processes that is common after a large disaster. This analysis, however, was outside the scope of BGR’s 2009 report, which addressed solely the rise in subsidized housing since Katrina.

Along with the above findings, BGR cautioned against some of the negative aspects of affordable housing programs in the US and stated that the benefits of subsidized housing projects depend on many factors:

The dramatic projected increase in the volume and market share of subsidized housing underscores the importance of carefully analyzing this segment of the market and its potential impacts on the city as a whole.

Across the United States, government subsidized housing programs have played a critical role in filling unmet housing needs. But the housing programs have also had a downside. In a number of places, such programs have contributed to the concentration of poverty and low-income residents in the core city. The associated problems are well known. They include a negative impact on the quality of life in cities, greater burdens and a declining tax base for core city governments, limited opportunities for economic advancement by the poor, and a mismatch between jobs and affordable housing at the regional level.

The extent to which subsidized housing benefits or hurts a city depends on many factors including location, concentration, the income level of tenants and the quality of management. Any housing analysis or plan must begin with a firm grasp of the numbers (BGR 2009, 1-2, emphasis added).

The six-page report concludes by reiterating its stance that the city should work toward a housing market that accommodates all income levels, and that this goal requires a data-driven approach. “Analysis must begin with the development of a comprehensive picture of current and future housing supply and demand” (BGR 2009, 6). There are no conclusions drawn about how well New Orleans’ existing and projected stock of subsidized housing will address affordable housing needs in the city. Instead, the report suggests that future construction and allocation of housing

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18 Other such instances include so-called “commercial deserts” in less-recovered areas like the Lower Ninth Ward. In this case, residents are returning faster than grocery stores, gas stations, and other businesses.
subsidies should be based on data about future demand. Forecasted demand, which is not
including in the BGR report, would consist of a range of projections based on demographic
estimates and projections of future job growth (or loss) (Plyer et al. 2009).

On September 17, 2009, the Louisiana State Bond Commission held a hearing on the
status of the New Orleans rental market. The Bond Commission is responsible for approving the
distribution of state funds to any bond-financed proposals, such as those that provide housing
subsidies. The Commission was created in 1968 to “centralize and administer the incurring of
state debt” (Louisiana Department of the Treasury 2011, n.p.).

The State Bond Commission receives applications from parishes, municipalities,
special taxing districts, and other political subdivisions of the State, requesting
authority to incur debt or levy taxes. These applications are reviewed for
compliance with Constitutional and statutory requirements and feasibility,
including the ability to repay any indebtedness incurred. If the applications are in
order, they are placed on an agenda for consideration by the State Bond
Commission at a regular or special meeting. At the meeting the State Bond
Commission either approves or disapproves the application or defers action on the
application for further discussion (Louisiana Department of the Treasury 2011,
n.p.).

The Bond Commission can hold special hearings to obtain further information on whether or not
indebtedness should be incurred. The hearing on September 17 was requested by several
members of the commission to discuss affordable housing in New Orleans since they were
seeing so many applications for state subsidies for housing being built in the city (Louisiana
State Bond Commission 2009).

The hearing began with a presentation by BGR’s president, Janet Howard, on her
organization’s findings. She answered questions from the Bond Commission members and then
the floor was opened up for testimony from other persons interested in the issue. First in line
was landlord Donald Vallee. His testimony argued that an inflated supply of subsidized housing
was competing with market-rate rentals in New Orleans, driving prices down and resulting in a
lack of tenants for market-priced rentals (Louisiana State Bond Commission 2009). Many other
people involved with New Orleans’ low-income housing market were also present at the hearing. Testimony was heard from local developers and nonprofits, legal organizations, the (now defunct) Louisiana Recovery Authority, and from leaders of surrounding parishes and towns. The reaction from one community development specialist who testified at the hearing shows just how unbelievable she found the debate:

Ms. Tuggle (Southeast Louisiana Legal Services):
…the waiting list for the section 8 voucher program opened September the 6th of 2009 and had been closed since July the 7th of 2001. You couldn’t even apply for a voucher [until now]. And so that application period closes tomorrow. In less than two weeks, in about two weeks’ time, almost 30,000 families in Orleans Parish have applied for Section 8 vouchers…So to me, the notion that we have too much affordable housing coming in New Orleans, you know, I can’t believe it. It’s totally surreal to me (Louisiana State Bond Commission 2009, 192-193).

Wary of the high costs of housing construction and the appearance of a softening rental market in New Orleans in 2009, however, the Bond Commission decided that it would only release state funds for more housing subsidies once it obtained proof that additional affordable housing was in fact still necessary in New Orleans (Reckdahl 2009). The “proof” was to come through a comprehensive market analysis done by an independent party, someone, according to Vallee “without any skin in the game” (Reckdahl 2009, n.p.). The Bond Commission wanted answers as to why New Orleans residents appeared to need housing subsidies in greater numbers than before the hurricane. While waiting for the study to be completed, the Bond Commission placed a moratorium on all bond-financed affordable housing projects for over a year (Reckdahl 2010; Mock 2009b). As a result, any residential developments that would be eligible for affordable housing tax credits or Community Development Block Grants were halted in the fall of 2009; effectively, the construction of all state-funded, subsidized housing was put on hold.

In the face of the testimony and research (noted above) that pointed to a dire need for affordable housing in New Orleans in 2009, the Bond Commission’s freeze on housing subsidies was puzzling to many developers and consultants. Upon learning that its report was being cited
in the Bond Commission’s decision to withhold funding, BGR President Janet Howard responded that its study “was not a comprehensive analysis of the market. It was just about one element: supply. It was not addressing demand” (quoted in Reckdahl 2009, n.p.). Howard also emphasized that BGR was not calling for a reduction or halt to affordable housing in New Orleans; rather the organization’s cautious recommendation was that housing should be approached “on a regional basis, to avoid job-housing mismatches and over-concentrations of poverty in one area” (Reckdahl 2009, n.p.). Howard repeated this view in other interviews. When asked if it would be accurate to cite the BGR report as proof that there is too much affordable housing in New Orleans, Howard said, “That would be inaccurate because all we said is, ‘Here is what’s there,’ and we did not reach any conclusions on whether there is too much or too little affordable housing and we’ve never taken a position on it” (quoted in Mock 2009a, n.p.).

The Louisiana Housing Finance Agency (LHFA), which awards affordable and other tax credits to property developers in the state, presented its own review of the BGR report at the Bond Commission’s September 2009 hearing. Echoing Howard’s cautions about what the BGR report did and did not prove, LHFA’s analysts wrote that “without demographic data or reconciliation between supply and demand, it is our opinion that the BGR report should not be a basis for decisions regarding the need for affordable housing” (quoted in Reckdahl 2009, n.p.). During the hearing, LHFA representatives noted that BGR’s prediction of the number of subsidized units slated for 2012 construction exceeded the actual numbers by around 2,000 units (Louisiana State Bond Commission 2009). Other testimony argued that the softened rental market since Katrina was due to over-zealous construction of middle-to-high rent apartments and condos, not an oversupply of housing targeted towards low-income tenants. Disaggregating demand in the rental market by income, they argued, showed that there was little demand for
high-priced housing and extraordinarily high demand for affordable housing (Louisiana State Bond Commission 2009). Despite these arguments, and several reports that showed more definitively the demand and supply needs for rental housing in New Orleans, the Bond Commission chose to rely on its arguably overstated interpretation of the BGR report.

The independent study commissioned by the Bond Commission was released in March 2011, eighteen months after the BGR report hearings. Titled “New Orleans Market Analysis: a Comprehensive Analysis of Supply and Demand Dynamics,” it contains analyses of historical housing market trends, residential construction, occupancy trends, rent trends, subsidized housing, and Road Home grants for small apartment owners (Miestchovich et al. 2011). The report also projects renter demand and housing unit absorption from 2010-2015 in each of New Orleans’ thirteen planning districts. Based on their extensive analyses,19 Miestchovich et al. (2011, 7) conclude that “there is currently a minor oversupply of rental housing in the New Orleans area stemming from the unsubsidized rental market…the recent construction of subsidized apartments is not the primary cause of this oversupply.” Instead, the study attributes the oversupply of market-rate rental units to a large supply of older, deteriorating apartments, the trickle-down of the global financial slow-down to New Orleans, and “post-Katrina realities” (Miestchovich et al. 2011). The study also identifies a geographical element in the housing market trends of New Orleans; some areas are experiencing strong occupancy rates and others are struggling to fill available units. The report projects that, even in the case of modest regional economic growth, occupancy rates will remain “healthy” despite a small over-supply of rental housing (Miestchovich et al.2011). Upon review of the market analysis, the Bond Commission released its hold on public funds for affordable housing proposals. One month later, work began on affordable and mixed-use developments that had been delayed by the Bond Commission’s

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19 The report used geospatial analysis of parcel-level activity, tax data, field interviews, and housing data to identify New Orleans’ rental market.
eighteen-month stall (Eggler 2011). However, federal funds that were originally intended for affordable housing construction and subsidies are still in danger of being re-directed to other projects (Sullivan 2011).

What led the Bond Commission to choose the 2009 BGR report over the other, concurrent studies (noted above) of the rental market in New Orleans? The Bond Commission’s duty in overseeing state debt is to be vigilant about the programs for which it authorizes the expenditure of public funds. Millions of dollars were spent after Katrina on construction and rehabilitation of flooded properties in New Orleans and the rest of Louisiana. State Treasurer Kennedy explained his hesitance to approve funds for more construction as follows:

Treasurer Kennedy:
...one of the things that bothers me is you start out with $5 million, and $2 million gets on the ground...And then you start drilling down and you see that there were legal fees and this agency took four percent off the top and hired twelve new people to administer the program, and there were developers...the public private partnership in developing for affordable housing has worked very well, but you have to be mindful of the costs (Louisiana State Bond Commission 2009, 121).

Reckdahl’s (2009) interviews with Bond Commission decision-makers and landlords show that much of the ambivalence surrounding housing subsidies had to do with a belief that data on demand for affordable housing was incomplete or inaccurate:

After hearing testimony last month, House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Algiers, also pushed for the moratorium. Policymakers had been "flying by the seat of our pants" when originally determining what housing subsidies were necessary in New Orleans, he said. The result, he says is: "excess supply."

...For his part, [State Treasurer and Bond Commission Chair] Kennedy is looking forward to seeing the data consolidated in one place. He found it difficult to process what he heard at last month's meeting. "At the end of it, the only thing I was certain of is that I was uncertain," he said.

...Vallee also doesn't support building more subsidized housing for low-income residents who either stayed out of town after the storm or moved to outlying areas of the metropolitan area -- and may never return. "I don't think anyone has good numbers of who's out there and who's not," he said (quoted in Reckdahl 2009, n.p.).
By focusing on data uncertainties, Vallee, the State Bond Commission, and the media coverage produced the following question: might there be too much affordable housing in post-Katrina New Orleans? By raising concerns over the lack, or quality, of data, they created a debate over what began as a relatively straightforward summary of the number of affordable units that existed in New Orleans in 2009 and the number of units projected for 2012. The Bond Commission transformed the report into a matter of debate by focusing on some of the (politically loaded) details in the BGR report.

BGR’s final finding (that “although it will have only 27% of the region’s population, New Orleans will have 70% of the subsidized housing in the region”) was cited in testimony throughout the Bond Commission’s hearing, raising doubts about the need for affordable housing. Decontextualized from data on income, cost of living, and unemployment in New Orleans compared to the rest of Louisiana, this statement appears to reveal a travesty of sorts: why do New Orleans residents receive proportionately more subsidized housing than residents in the rest of Louisiana?20 In Vallee’s view, New Orleanians must be getting more than their share of government assistance, or else they are attempting to get out of paying rents that are fair for their city. BGR’s finding that subsidized rental units would make up 25% of New Orleans housing by 2012, and that the number of units for very low-income households will be 22% higher than the amount available before the storm, was taken by the Bond Commission to mean that there might be oversupply of subsidized rentals available in New Orleans.

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20 Re-contextualizing the data with figures from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey would have shown the following: 18.9% of families in New Orleans live below the poverty line, compared with 14.2% of families in Louisiana; during this time period New Orleans had an unemployment rate of 7.7%, compared with 4.6% statewide (these figures have almost certainly risen since the survey was conducted); 35% of New Orleans homeowners pay unaffordable housing costs, compared with 22% of homeowners statewide; 58% of New Orleans renters pay unaffordable housing costs, compared with 51% of renters statewide; the median rent in New Orleans was $818/month, compared with $674/month statewide; and the median mortgage in New Orleans was $1430/month, compared with $1102/month statewide (US Census Bureau 2005-2009d; US Census Bureau 2005-2009e). A detailed data analysis would likely produce a more nuanced comparison, but even with these few figures it is apparent that New Orleans had, on average, a higher cost of living, higher unemployment, and higher poverty rate than the rest of Louisiana.
Furthermore, the Bond Commission cited BGR’s position that “any housing analysis or plan must begin with a firm grasp of the numbers” to argue that no good data on supply and demand of affordable housing was available, despite the existence of several longer, rigorous reports that all found a clear need for continued housing subsidies. Representative Kennedy’s statement that "the only thing I was certain of is that I was uncertain” and Vallee’s comment that “I don’t think anyone has good numbers of who’s out there and who’s not” are illustrative of the Bond Commission’s use of the discourse of scientific uncertainty. Until there is proof, they are saying, until there is objective knowledge, we simply cannot allow public money to be used for these projects; doing so in the face of uncertain data would be irresponsible. To demonstrate the supposed need for proof, the Bond Commission used the six-page BGR report as an alternative to other knowledge about affordable housing in New Orleans, presenting the existing knowledge as partial, unsubstantiated, and lacking.

3.3 Political implications of (lacking) statistics: Subsidized housing and the pursuit of objectivity

The Bond Commission’s request for a new, independent market analysis is rooted in its privileging of “objective” population and economic data over the messy realities in which these data are collected. Poor tracking of housing construction, faulty technology, and inconsistent data collection make it difficult to quantify the current total of housing under construction, let alone to make accurate projections of future projects (Plyer et al. 2009; Mock 2009a). A preoccupation with the need for statistical proof privileges these data without examining their possible omissions and without contextualizing them in New Orleans’ post-disaster social and economic conditions. Numbers are not neutral in politics, though they often appear as such because their material and lived implications are rarely considered by policy bodies. Rose (1999, 198-199) writes that “the apparent objectivity of numbers, and of those who fabricate and manipulate them, helps configure the respective boundaries of the political and the technical.
Numbers are part of the techniques of objectivity that establish what it is for a decision to be ‘disinterested’” (Rose 1999, 198-199). “Disinterest” refers to the appearance (but not always reality) of objective decision-making that favors no specific groups of people. Rose’s history of the astronomical increase in the number and type of statistics that have become available in the post-war era shows that policymakers and those who seek to influence policy have a new, ever-expanding trove of resources at their fingertips. Moynihan’s (1969, 30) reminder that the nation went through the Great Depression of the 1930s “without ever really knowing what the unemployment rate was” speaks to the immense expansion of statistical knowledge in a relatively brief time period.

Since the 1930s, a national statistical system and the widespread use of economic, population, and other data as evidence for policy creation has become mainstreamed. Even in 1969, Moynihan (1969, 30) noted that “statistics are used as mountains are climbed: because they are there.” As Anthony Hopwood puts it, numbers, and the specialist knowledges and professional techniques associated with them, become “implicated in the creation of a domain where technical expertise can come to dominate political debate” (Hopwood 1988, 263). Discussion and debate within this context are encouraged because they are symbols of the democratic process, seemingly allowing a variety of viewpoints to be heard (Swyngedouw 2010). The Bond Commission’s hearing on affordable housing in New Orleans lasted five hours and included dozens of testimonies, certainly giving the appearance of a lively debate on the subject. However, a closer examination of the debate’s content reveals that much of it hinged on a fixation with statistical uncertainties. Senators, state congress-people and the commission members insisted on keeping the debate to “matters of supply” (Louisiana State Bond Commission 2009). When one researcher testified that the Bond Commission needed an understanding of how many low-income families live in Orleans Parish, the commission
chairman stopped him “because I want to keep us focused” (Louisiana State Bond Commission 2009). Staying “focused” on numbers of units and vacancy rates omits a discussion about the lives that are intimately connected to these numbers – unemployed and disabled people, the working poor, and others who struggle to pay rent after Katrina. 

Swyngedouw (2010) has explored the effects of such depoliticized technical contestations through debates about global climate change. He points to what he sees as “the reduction of the political to administration where decision-making is increasingly considered to be a question of expert knowledge and not of political position” (Swyngedouw 2010, 225). In other words, political decision-making as a process is increasingly exercised outside of the traditional realm of political debate. Evidence drawn from statistics and the hard sciences becomes a tool for shutting down debate on social issues, which are examined through a wholly quantitative lens. 

Disregarded during the Bond Commission hearing were the implications of its result for thousands of New Orleans residents who needed immediate housing access and assistance. The depoliticized nature of the hearing allowed the Bond Commission to render unnecessary the task of rationalizing the material effect of its subsidy moratorium. This (unstated) effect was that the demand for housing subsidies would have to wait to be addressed until “better” data were available. Again, the people that create demand for affordable housing were not considered. Through a focus on numbers (on the need for data and a lack of good data), a political debate over the pros and cons of New Orleans’ subsidized housing was avoided entirely. Vallee, who testified first at the hearing and had a clear interest in reducing state funding for subsidized housing, used a preoccupation with data to keep his testimony largely apolitical; he treated the New Orleans housing market as a depoliticized process that must be studied further in order to be understood. Likewise, the Bond Commission kept the agenda of the meeting rooted in the supply of subsidized housing, shying away from discussion of the lived realities of low-income
people in New Orleans. Along these lines, the Bond Commission’s decision to block state funding for affordable housing construction for a year was not required to be justified on the basis of anything more than claims that more data were needed.

The hearing was also part of a larger, ongoing debate in Louisiana about what to do with disaster recovery funds that have not yet been spent. Though the bulk of recovery funding has already gone to homeowners (see Chapters 1 and 2), and much of the remaining funds were originally intended for repairs to and construction of rental housing, these remaining funds can still be re-allocated. Several new proposals would divert these funds away from rental housing to fund additional homeownership programs (Sullivan 2011). Comerio (1998) writes that this is common in disaster recovery. Reflecting on four large-scale disasters that she profiles in her book on urban housing recovery21, she writes that

unlike homeowners, renters always moved on to other rental housing available in the marketplace, and financing for the repair of multifamily housing was virtually non-existent…for these low-rent buildings, repair costs were high and replacement costs were higher. The disaster exacerbated the problems of providing affordable housing in an urban market…After tenants left the damaged (and rent-controlled) buildings, owners privately financed the repairs and put their units back on the market at top prices (Comerio 1998, 241).

Renters in a post-disaster city are fragile. Comerio found that for renters, the tightening of the housing market was often enough to force them to relocate out of the city. In disasters in which a large percentage of the housing stock is destroyed simultaneously, low- and average-rent apartments disappear; in the case of New Orleans, low rents will never return to their pre-storm levels. While homeownership may be a solution for some low-income renters, it is certainly not feasible for all of them, even with down-payment assistance.

The homeownership issue is one final aspect of the Bond Commission hearing warrants analysis. During the five-hour session, Commission members asked several of the people

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testifying to judge whether homeownership or subsidized rent would lift more people in Louisiana out of poverty. The keywords “building equity” were often associated with proposals of homeownership as a poverty reduction tool. As explored in Chapter 2, a powerful icon of homeownership is a poor family lifting itself up through its own hard work to join the dream of the American middle class. This ideology relies doubly on assumptions that home values will always rise and that hard work is a main barrier that keeps more poor families from becoming homeowners. Along these lines, Bond Commission members also asked if there were measures in place to ensure that residents of low-income housing were either employed or were made to look for a job as a condition of their receipt of subsidies (Louisiana State Bond Commission 2009). While not explicitly stated, these questions and comments allude to the familiar discourse of homeownership as the tenure of good, hard-working citizens. At the opposite end of the good citizenship discourse are the low-income renters, people who have no corresponding American dream ideologies standing behind them – people, as stated by Vallee, who want “someone else to pay it for them” (quoted in Reckdahl 2009, n.p.).
Chapter 4: Neighborhood Case Studies: Communities and Recovery Planning from the Ground-Up

I turn next to several more localized explorations of recovery policy in post-Katrina New Orleans. In this chapter I will explore post-Katrina reconstruction from the perspective of three neighborhood organizations. As explored in Chapter 1, New Orleans’ 72 neighborhoods experienced variable damages, and early reconstruction plans expressed doubt that all neighborhoods would – or should – recover (BNOB 2006). The BNOB’s assessment that some neighborhoods were unviable for future habitation was the impetus for a flurry of grassroots citizen organizing. Many existing community associations and dozens of new organizations began working to help their residents return, beginning the recovery effort when the city’s commitment to them was uncertain. This de-scaling of urban governance, in which neighborhoods took control of their own recovery when the city hesitated, is the context for the exploration of this chapter. Chapter 2’s exploration of the history of community participation as a policy instrument of the US government reveals that the relative effectiveness, for citizens, of their involvement in policy decision-making is contingent upon larger political structures. I begin this chapter with a general overview of post-storm community involvement in New Orleans’ recovery planning before proceeding to studies of community organizations in three New Orleans neighborhoods.

These organizations represent three quite variegated examples of how community organizing has worked in post-Katrina planning since 2005. Through interviews with community organization members and several non-profits and developers with which they interact, I explore the parallels and divergences of post-storm experiences of neighborhood organizing. I also describe two public planning meetings that had quite different results for both the citizens and the government bodies involved. I then reflect on the three focus neighborhoods.
in the context of literature explored earlier – on scales of urban governance and on the usefulness of civic participation to these organizations’ members.

Martin (2003a, 731) argues that community organizations “conceptualize place-coalitions at scales within urban areas, differentiated from the broader community.” In doing so, these organizations construct the local scale of the neighborhood as a sphere for political activism. Though they work within existing political structures, community organizations are largely informal bodies with volunteer memberships that are not formally appointed or elected. City planners and their consultants talk in the language of community. Community and civic involvement are framed as a moral responsibility of good residents; good residents who have a stake in their community are members of neighborhood organizations. Community involvement in the city planning process is not governed explicitly by codes or standards of representation, but the membership of these organizations is overwhelmingly homeowners. In my interviews with members of New Orleans neighborhood organizations, many people noted that having a financial stake in a neighborhood is important. Many also expressed concern for how to represent the interests of citizens who do not have this traditional, physical investment in their neighborhoods (Personal Communications, November 2010).

Leaders and members of community-based organizations in New Orleans join for a variety of reasons, including a desire to improve their neighborhoods, generate community cohesion, combat crime, enforce zoning and aesthetic preferences, serve their communities, and acquire and direct government (and outside) funding and resources. These groups can both support and challenge formal governance structures. Of the three neighborhood organizations I profile below, one is working consciously within, and accepting, the city’s governance structure. Another organization does quite the opposite, challenging governance at scales even greater than the local as it seeks to effect change through allying itself with national movements for social
and economic justice. The third organization I profile sits somewhere between these two poles of government engagement. Frustrated with its experiences working with the city, it chooses to retreat from participation and turn its focus inward to projects that do not require much government assistance. In New Orleans, my interviews with community groups and developers reveal that differences within the resident body of neighborhoods – social, cultural, economic, and others – are sometimes obscured by neighborhood associations in their quest to realize redevelopment projects in damaged (and undamaged) neighborhoods. As noted by Carla, a member of the Broadmoor Improvement Association (BIA), presenting a neighborhood as a cohesive group of like-minded residents is important for garnering support from the city, which is hesitant to get involved in neighborhood initiatives that it sees as controversial (Personal Communication, November 2010). These organizations must negotiate between recognizing and representing the diversity present in their neighborhoods and the imperative of presenting a unified community voice in their dealings with the city. In most cases, these organizations benefit from presenting an image of homogenized, familiar daily life in their neighborhoods.

Framing community involvement as a homogenous process without place- or scale-based specificities has implications for what kinds of information and priorities are extracted from public and community meetings; as well as for how this information is presented and incorporated into city planning. As with the rapidly changing demographic topography of other cities after large weather disasters and economic crises, New Orleans’ population has shifted and continues to shift dramatically after Hurricane Katrina. Along with a huge population exodus and internal re-shuffling, New Orleans has attracted many new post-storm residents, from government contractors to developers to construction laborers. In the context of these radical demographic shifts, the ways that neighborhoods represent their residents’ interests to the city is influential in the equality of zoning, recovery planning, and allocation of city services.
4.1 Neighborhood planning in post-Katrina New Orleans

Over one million people left Greater New Orleans in response to Mayor Ray Nagin’s mandatory evacuation order on August 28, 2005 and many thousands more were sheltered in the Superdome and Convention Center (Maret and Amdal 2008). Due to toxic floodwaters and a perceived lack of security enforcement, the city barred most residents of damaged areas from returning to the city for three months, although residents of undamaged areas were allowed to return sooner. Conversely, many public housing residents were never allowed back into their apartments and were instead displaced by post-Katrina plans to demolish these structures (Flaherty 2010). People who returned to their homes in the months after the storm were cut off from their former neighbors and communities and faced difficulties in locating each other. In neighborhoods where few people returned quickly, there was little activity. Particularly in these (often most damaged) areas, there were little to no government services for months after the hurricane (Ford 2010).

Neighborhood organizations in New Orleans are community groups formed by citizens who are interested in improving their neighborhoods and representing their collective interests to the city. Some of these groups are formally incorporated as nonprofit organizations, while others are managed more informally. While most neighborhoods in the city have at least one such organization, there is not a neighborhood organization for each of New Orleans’ 72 recognized neighborhoods. Some of the city’s smaller neighborhoods are folded into community associations that represent multiple neighborhoods. In addition, some neighborhoods have multiple community groups that represent different interests within the neighborhood. Many of the city’s neighborhood organizations have a long history and were formed decades before Hurricane Katrina. Many organizations were also formed after the storm, particularly in the most-damaged areas of the city. In sum, these organizations exist at multiple scales within and
across neighborhoods in New Orleans. Additionally, as noted in Chapter 2, their membership is not bound by standards that ensure equal representation of all neighborhood residents (e.g., diversity of racial background, economic status, age, and so on).

At the time of writing, there is no formal mandate that each neighborhood in New Orleans must be represented to the city by a community organization. However, as explained by many of my interview subjects, these organizations are an effective platform through which neighborhoods can communicate with their city council representatives. The New Orleans City Council is the city’s legislative body. There is one city council member for each of five council districts, and each district comprises several neighborhoods. Two at-large members also sit on the city council. City council members are involved to various degrees with New Orleans’ neighborhood organizations. The latter part of this chapter describes positive post-hurricane experiences that two neighborhood organizations have had in working with their city council members, but this is not necessarily representative of the experiences of all neighborhood groups in New Orleans. Well-established and politically-visible organizations often have deeper connections with their city council members than do newer and informal groups.

New Orleans’ Neighborhoods Partnership Network (NPN), an organization that was formed after the storm to facilitate collaboration between neighborhood groups, observed that the Hurricane Katrina revealed significant shortcomings in city institutions such as law enforcement and health care. The organization noted that “citizens have had to become their own “first responders” – from rescuing their neighbors to rescuing their neighborhoods” (NPN 2010). Neighborhood associations that had been active before the hurricanes began to act as information conduits for still-displaced residents about what was going on in their neighborhoods; this was often accomplished through email or internet groups (Flaherty 2010). In the first few years after

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22 As explained further in Chapter 5, a formal process of neighborhood involvement in city politics is in the works, but it is not clear that every neighborhood will necessarily have its own community organization.
Katrina, neighborhood associations were absorbed into several iterations of city planning efforts (see Table 1.1 in Chapter 1). Many of the people interviewed for this study reported that the city looked to neighborhood organizations as the only groups that were capable of claiming to represent the residents of New Orleans’ neighborhoods, however empty many of these neighborhoods were (Personal Communications, November 2010). This was both empowering and cumbersome for the neighborhood organizations. While they had been elevated, in theory, to an influential position in the city’s recovery planning, in practice the results were mixed. Many of my interview subjects spoke of dozens of unproductive meetings and promises of funding that went unfulfilled. Carson, a member of Freret Neighbors United (FNU), an organization in the Freret neighborhood, shared his organization’s double-edged experiences in this regard:

There’s been a greater need to get things done, and our input has been used by government more widely, in one sense. In another sense, we’ve done a lot of going to meetings that don’t get very much accomplished. There was all kinds of recovery money talk thrown around, but when you actually met about it and came up with plans, the money never really materialized and nothing happened unless you did it yourself. But it was easier to get more neighbors involved, knowing that a lot of things needed to be fixed as soon as possible (Personal Communication, November 2010).

Burgeoning citizen involvement in neighborhood organizations was mentioned in many of my interviews with members of these associations, city employees, nonprofit employees, and developers. Interview subjects were generally pleased that more neighbors got involved with community organizations after the storm, noting that they felt, and continue to feel, a strong sense of community cohesion in the face of external (environmental or political) adversity faced by damaged neighborhoods. At the same time, they reported that an organization’s ability to be successful is highly dependent on the skills of its members, its fundraising abilities, the commitment of its residents, and its political influence.

Interview subjects also noted that since the city’s recovery plans have been solidified into
the 2010 Master Plan, the city no longer asks neighborhood organizations to create their own recovery plans. The result is that these organizations have more autonomy, but also fewer resources and less direct contact with city officials. Returning to Rose’s (1999) “double movement,” neighborhood organizations in post-Katrina New Orleans have more leverage and also increased responsibility to set their own agendas. Rose’s theorizing of the social state giving way to the facilitating or enabling state is particularly relevant here. “Organizations and other actors that were once enmeshed in the complex and bureaucratic lines of force of the social state are to be set free to find their own destiny. Yet, at the same time, they are to be made responsible for that destiny, and for the destiny of society as a whole, in new ways” (Rose 1999, 174-175). In no way is Rose’s idea of the third space of community “partners” manifested more literally than in the post-Katrina relationship between New Orleans’ neighborhood associations and the city. A relationship that already tended in this direction before the hurricanes has evolved into an extreme version of this style of partnership.

Members of neighborhood associations said in my interviews that they have learned that it is necessary to ask and to advocate for services in order to receive them. While the city council in 2006 was successful in insisting that a recovery plan be written for New Orleans, the spirit of Mayor Nagin’s call for a “market-based recovery” (Ford 2010, 33) persists. Neighborhoods must often spend substantial time presenting and proving their needs to the city before these needs are addressed. In the context of limited funds available for neighborhood revitalization or infrastructure projects, the city’s resource constraints are a large factor in its inability to address the requests of all neighborhood associations. Interview subjects reported, however, that tight city budgets are more of a hurdle for some neighborhoods than for others. Ann, a community development specialist at one of New Orleans’ most influential residential development firms, notes that in many cases resources go to “whoever whines the most”
In other words, political connections and lobbying skills are crucial to a neighborhood’s ability to acquire a share of the city’s limited resources. Returning to Weil (2010), this constraint may lead organizations with fewer political connections to explore other types of engagement, including obtaining funding from sources outside the city or capitalizing on the skills and labor of their own neighborhoods to revitalize public areas. Members of FNU report that in recent years (i.e., since 2009), the relationship with their neighborhood’s city councilmember is among their organization’s greatest assets.

Some neighborhood organizations began to see more success several years after the hurricane, as city services and policies became more predictable and once the recovery planning process was finally solidified in the Master Plan beginning in late 2008 (Ford 2010; Weil 2010). Clearly-written (if not always implemented) plans have allowed neighborhood associations to develop specific organizational focuses and to more clearly delineate their relationships with the city. Neighborhood organizations retain the role of “community partners” of the city government, but many interview subjects report that their organizations now act with more autonomy than they did in the earlier years of hurricane recovery. Mark, the employee of Neighborhood Housing Services in the Freret neighborhood, says that neighborhood organizations have acquired a great deal of influence in city council decisions that affect their neighborhoods.

Because council members represent geographic areas, and because they can’t be everywhere, they often rely on ‘point people’ in the neighborhood where they can say, ‘hey, this person’s applying for an alcohol license, what do you guys think?’ But they’re sending an email to five people, so they’ve sort of anointed those people as the gate-keepers of the neighborhood...because of geographic boundaries, the rest of the council will defer to the council member that represents that district, and then the council member is in turn deferring to what they’re hearing from the neighborhood. So all of a sudden you have this huge veto power in the neighborhood organization being the gate-keeper” (Personal Communication, November 2010).

My interest in the following snapshots of community participation in New Orleans
neighborhoods stems from a concern with the way in which the void of government capacity after the hurricane opened a window for the mobilization of certain kinds of community influence in the recovery processes of individual neighborhoods. Nearly six years after Katrina, this mission has in some cases morphed into planning that extends far beyond hurricane recovery. Drawing on Rose’s (1999) notion of the “third space” of governance through community (as explored in Chapter 2), I argue that, in the context of the post-storm destruction of the New Orleans economy and city government’s capacity, this “third space” of governance-through-community gained traction and influence.

The three neighborhoods that I profile in this chapter were chosen for the diversity of their post-storm experiences. The neighborhoods themselves also differ in terms of housing and post-storm repopulation trends (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below).

**Table 4.1: Population Changes: New Orleans and Focus Neighborhoods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Freret</th>
<th>Broadmoor</th>
<th>Lower Ninth Ward/Holy Cross</th>
<th>City of New Orleans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000 population</td>
<td>2,446</td>
<td>7,232</td>
<td>14,008</td>
<td>484,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 population</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>5,381</td>
<td>2,842</td>
<td>343,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change</td>
<td>-30%</td>
<td>-26%</td>
<td>-80%</td>
<td>-29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.2: Housing Characteristics: New Orleans and Focus Neighborhoods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Freret</th>
<th>Broadmoor</th>
<th>Lower Ninth Ward/Holy Cross</th>
<th>City of New Orleans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupied housing units, 2000</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>2,915</td>
<td>4,820</td>
<td>188,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupied housing units, 2010</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>2,203</td>
<td>1,061</td>
<td>142,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change</td>
<td>-28%</td>
<td>-24%</td>
<td>-78%</td>
<td>-24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In an account of Freret Neighbors United (FNU), I examine the organization’s frustrating experiences with city planning and contractors, which resulted in FNU disconnecting from city planning.

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23 The difference between 2000 and 2010 population in New Orleans cannot all be attributed to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Other causes of population displacement (economic, familial, and others) affected these numbers. However, census data are the most accurate data available at the neighborhood level.
politics and focusing inward toward work that can be done without resources from the city. A second case study of the Broadmoor Improvement Association (BIA) explores the planning process within a highly-organized, politically visible organization. In a third case study, I explore the way a community group in the Lower Ninth Ward attempted to make its voice heard in an “inappropriate” setting – an informational session put on by the Army Corps of Engineers to explain new levee construction to Lower Ninth Ward residents. Co-opting the meeting discussion allowed the group, A Community Voice (ACV), to problematize the Corps’s public comment session, which is required by law as part of one of its new levee projects. In contrast with the Broadmoor and Freret organizations, which concentrate solely within their specific neighborhoods, A Community Voice sees its mission as strongly connected to a broader fight for social and economic justice for low-income people. The three organizations’ missions and contexts are contrasted below.

4.2 Freret Neighbors United

Figure 4.1: Maps of Freret

Figure 4.1: Location and detail maps of Freret Neighborhood. Source: GNOCDC 2000b.

Geography and demographics

Freret is a small, mixed-income neighborhood surrounded by several middle class and
wealthy districts in southwest New Orleans (see Figure 4.1). The neighborhood is named for William Freret, who operated a cotton mill and served two terms as mayor of New Orleans (GNOCDC 2000b). Freret is a racially and economically diverse neighborhood and was a destination for Jewish and Italian merchants in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1952, the neighborhood’s elementary school transitioned from all-white to all-Black, an effect of Federal Housing Administration\(^{24}\) low-interest loans for whites moving to the suburbs. The overall result was a decrease in Freret’s commercial activity and residential population in the 1950s and 1960s (GNOCDC 2000b). Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), a nonprofit that encourages and supports new homeowners in New Orleans, began to serve Freret residents in the 1990s (NHS 2010). Homeowners in Freret before Katrina were markedly more stable than renters in terms of income and housing affordability. In 2000, nearly 80% of renters paid 30% or more of their incomes to housing costs; in contrast, only 20% of homeowners did (United States Census Bureau 2000b). At this time, 65% of Freret residents lived in rented units and 35% owned their residences (see Table 4.3 below).

### Table 4.3: Freret pre- and post-Katrina Housing Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Housing that is owner-occupied</th>
<th>% Housing that is renter-occupied</th>
<th>% Owner-occupied that is unaffordable(^{25})</th>
<th>% Renter-occupied that is unaffordable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009(^{26})</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Katrina damages**

The Freret neighborhood suffered moderate damages during Katrina. The area to the south of the neighborhood (nearest to the Mississippi River) remained dry; further north, many

\(^{24}\) Described in Chapter 2.

\(^{25}\) Defined as resident/family paying 30% or more of total yearly income to housing costs.

\(^{26}\) Due to changes in the US Census Bureau’s methods of collecting data, these figures are averages of samples collected in the Freret Census Tract by the American Community Survey between 2005 and 2009. The margin of error on these figures ranges between ± 6 – 12%.
buildings sat in six feet of water (GNOCDC 2010). Most damages were to sheetrock, flooring, and roofs. Water damage in basements was also common. Newer houses, often those at the corners of intersections, fared worst because many were not built on piers. Older houses, especially those built before many of the levees, fared better. The major infrastructure needs after Katrina were for mold clean-up and reconstruction of exteriors, roofs, and yards. SJ Green Charter School, the neighborhood’s middle school, had six feet of water in the first story and had to be gutted.

As shown above in Table 4.1, Freret experienced a population displacement similar to the average seen in New Orleans as a whole – a 30% drop in its residents between 2000 and 2010. It experienced a decrease in occupied residential units that was slightly more than New Orleans’ average (see Table 4.2 above). The mix of renters and owners in Freret is about half and half and the average income between 2005 and 2009 was $43,879, compared with $40,686 in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2005-2009a; United States Census Bureau 2000a).

Post-Katrina civic participation

Freret Neighbors United (FNU) is the community-based organization in that serves the neighborhood. Founded in 1974 in association with a parish church, the association started meeting and organizing to improve the community (FNU 2007). Carson, a resident of the Freret neighborhood, has been involved with the organization since 2004. He has taught at the neighborhood’s Charter School since his family returned to New Orleans after five months of Katrina displacement. He estimates that 80% of his organization’s membership is white, compared with about 50% of the neighborhood’s residents, a disparity that Carson laments as “not meeting our demographics very well” (Personal Communication, November 2010). His experiences working with FNU lead to his observation that:

the typical African American family, or people, are sort of disenfranchised with
government at all levels, and they are not that interested in sitting through meetings...We’re definitely open to people and would love to have them, but I think the African American population is less interested than the white homeowners. That being said, some of the older [black] women who live in the neighborhood have seen some of the things we’re doing, and they are some of our strongest volunteers. Lots of elderly people want to be involved and they do what they can (Personal Communication, November 2010).

Carson recalls that in the first few years after Katrina, FNU was visited by consultants hired by the city during the creation of the Unified New Orleans plan.27 FNU was asked to participate in many planning initiatives at a variety of levels – city-wide, district, regional – with architects, nonprofits, the city council, and potential donors. The incredible number of meetings that he has attended is agonizing to Carson because he found that most of them were ineffective and did not lead to many improvements for Freret. He describes the dynamic between the city and his organization as frustrating since Katrina. During the first few years of recovery planning efforts, FNU’s members devoted themselves to working with consultants to visualize their neighborhood’s future (see Figure 4.2 below); from May-July 2006, the organization held community meetings to solicit feedback on the neighborhood’s future (FNU 2007). In September 2007 FNU completed an Infrastructure Plan and Community Plan for the neighborhood, which became part of the plan that FNU submitted for the city-wide Lambert Plan and UNOP. Carson described the experience of working on these plans:

Ed Blakely was our czar of reconstruction and immediately our neighborhood was told that we’re a target neighborhood and we’re going to get two million dollars. So we met and we came up with a plan - a very organized plan. We met for, I’d say, six months, and created a really nice document that said “this is how we’d like to use the funds, this is who can be our fiduciary people,” really laid out nice things.

So then we gave it to [the city] and nothing happened. Each neighborhood organization had created a plan, and so they [the city] spent several million dollars on architecture and their own plans [to be incorporated into a city-wide plan], and all the neighborhood organizations made their own plans, and nothing really got funded. Every once in a while we’d raise our voices and say “what’s going on

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27 See Table 1.1 in Chapter 1 for details on New Orleans’ post-storm planning iterations.
with our plan?” and they’d send somebody to meet with us, deputies in the recovery office - Ed Blakely’s people. They were really very forgettable. One person who came and met with us - we were talking about some of the things that were in our plan, and she was like “you can write a grant to do this and this and this.” And we’re like, “well yeah, we can do all that, but what about the funding that’s supposed to happen, and what about our plan?” And she’s like “oh, what is the plan, I haven’t seen the plan.” I’m like “why are you here then? If you’re sent from Ed Blakely’s office to, you know, help us through with our plan, then you really should have read our plan.” There were a lot of meetings like that (Personal Communication, November 2010).

FNU’s participation in city planning efforts persisted throughout the 2007 development of the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP). When the UNOP fell apart in 2008, FNU’s efforts turned inward, returning to its pre-Katrina focus on bettering the neighborhood in ways that capitalize on assets already present in Freret, rather than on outside planners, resources, or funding that only the city can provide. This shift is notable on FNU’s website. In 2007, the site was updated frequently to publicize the neighborhood’s planning efforts. Since then, it does not appear to have been used. Figure 4.2 below is an excerpt of the type of planning that went on in Freret in 2007, when FNU was working with city contractors to construct a recovery plan and vision for the neighborhood. The planning efforts focused both on rebuilding efforts, such as getting neighbors to fix their houses and enforcing zoning codes, and more general community-generating activities, such as holding neighborhood block parties and opening a farmers market. Physical rebuilding and community bonding are both crucial to the neighborhood’s plans. During this period of city-mandated planning, neighborhoods like Freret dreamed big visions for the future.
Carson is also emphatic that his neighborhood’s councilmember is a true advocate for the area. “We meet with her a lot. She is a tiger about holding the specific government people accountable for what they are supposed to be doing. If we have issues, we’ll meet with her. She has come to our neighborhood organization meetings and heard our concerns, and she’ll get her

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Involvement</th>
<th>Noise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- More active neighborhood association – Status: Done</td>
<td>- Invite business leaders to neighborhood association meetings – Status: Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Neighbors need to know their neighbors – Status: Ongoing</td>
<td>- Publicize decibel level – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Block captains communicate with police and neighbors – Status: Ongoing</td>
<td>- Take photos of loud cars – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provide social activities for the neighborhood such as block parties – Status: Not Done</td>
<td>- Write down time, make and model of loud cars – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have a Farmer’s Market – Status: Done</td>
<td>- Post speed limits – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- More facilities to encourage community activity – Status: Done</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friar Tucks Bar &amp; Grill</th>
<th>Businesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Establish relationship with management to express concerns – Status: Ongoing</td>
<td>- Hold businesses accountable for maintaining vacant property – Status: Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Better law enforcement – Status: Ongoing</td>
<td>- Establish timeline to notify owners? – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soil Toxicity and Environmental Concerns</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Have testing done – Status: Not Done</td>
<td>- Support existing businesses – Status: Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provide practical solutions – Status: Not Done</td>
<td>- Establish development business, i.e. Café Reconcile – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Publicize new business openings – Status: Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Create a website of stores on Freret – Status: Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Increase number of family-oriented businesses, i.e. fewer bars, more coffee shops – Status: Ongoing</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treescape</th>
<th>Trash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Horticulture consultation – Status: Not Done</td>
<td>- Have neighborhood cleanups on weekends – Status: Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acquire trees and encourage planting by residents – Status: Ongoing</td>
<td>- Create a kids litter patrol – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Arbor Day Tree-planting event – Status: Not Done</td>
<td>- Cleanup graffiti on signs, buildings, and houses – Status: Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inquire about Parkway Partners tree program – Status: Done</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stray/Unleashed Dogs</th>
<th>Streets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Provide information to the neighborhood about sensible care of dogs – Status: Not Done</td>
<td>- Publicize the number to call/email address/website for pothole repair – Status: Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Find out who to call about strays – Status: Not Done</td>
<td>- Clean debris from catch basins – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Clean in front of houses – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Remove debris – Status: Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sidewalk cans – Status: Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Publicize number to call for problems with catch basins. – Status: Ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<th>Community Center</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- design a community center for seniors and youth – Status: Ongoing</td>
<td></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship with businesses</th>
<th>Transportation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Get a stronger business association – Status: Done</td>
<td>- Monitor RTA decisions regarding service in the area – Status: Not Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have neighborhood association be involved in the Main Street application – Status: Done</td>
<td>- Research viability of bike lanes – Status: Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
people on it, she’ll harass the right people and things will get done” (Personal Communication, November 2010).

Carson notes, however, that since the end of the city’s UNOP planning efforts, FNU has also stepped back from structured planning. The city never used the plans that FNU developed for the UNOP, and the related monies never materialized. Since then, FNU has focused on organizing service projects, such as graffiti and trash clean-ups, and trying to become more visible in the neighborhood with t-shirts, signs, and an annual “night out against crime” block party. Carson finds that these kinds of activities – “things that neighbors can do” – are eliciting more visible changes to the neighborhood than did FNU’s participation in city-wide recovery planning. He acknowledges that there is probably money available from nonprofit foundations and other non-city sources for neighborhood improvement projects, but notes that the effort of researching and applying for these funds would fall on his and other volunteers’ shoulders. “I would have to say there’s probably funding out there that can be found and utilized, but I teach here full time, I do the coaching, I have my own kids and my own family; I don’t have time to research that” (Personal Communication, November 2010). Instead, Carson and FNU look to what they can accomplish with resources already present in the neighborhood, mostly in terms of “working, not funding” by the residents of the community (Personal Communication, November 2010).

FNU is typical of many neighborhood-based organizations in post-Katrina New Orleans. Ann, the community development specialist, and Sandra, a non-profit developer of affordable housing, both spoke of their interactions with many community organizations that operate on a similar level as FNU (Personal Communications, November 2010). While FNU was highly active within the city’s planning process in 2007, its involvement waned once the membership became frustrated with writing plans that the city did not use. In Rose’s “third space” of
governance, FNU is navigating its role as Freret’s representative body with limited political influence at the city level. However, after Katrina the organization took on new responsibilities. It organized neighbors to help each other gut their houses and to clean debris out of the neighborhood school. In the aftermath of disasters such actions are typical and necessary; the city and emergency management personnel from higher levels of government rely on local action and volunteers to begin the cleanup process and help assess the damage.

However, FNU’s new responsibilities have persisted in the years that followed initial recovery. Carson and Mark, the employee of NHS, described how FNU has organized with NHS to create detailed maps of blighted properties in Freret. FNU uses these maps in its attempts to contact property owners to get them to clean up their properties. After an initial survey of the neighborhood was done, NHS has helped FNU keep its maps updated as blighted properties are torn down or sold (Personal Communications, November 2010). Monitoring of property ownership and cleanup status is a huge form of assistance that NHS, a national nonprofit corporation, provides for the neighborhood. When in 2010 the City of New Orleans created BlightStat, a city-wide program to track blight and contact the owners of blighted properties, it used FNU’s data on Freret instead of doing its own survey of the neighborhood. Carson describes how “they [the city] invited us to come to City Hall and we presented our property campaign and the different steps we take in getting properties back to commerce. Part of that was that NHS had created a mapping scheme and had done many different surveys in this neighborhood” (Personal Communication, November 2010). Carson also related several stories of FNU working with private companies to get certain areas of the neighborhood cleaned up. He described one such instance:

There’s an Entergy Power Substation down the corner down there. They had a really horrible chain-link fence - super ugly - there were lots of holes in it and lots of people were getting in there and graffiting the whole place. One person was trying to steal copper and electrocuted himself and died. And so we would
routinely go with a pick-up and pick up trash around the place. We met with them [Entergy] several times and they put up a new fence, they put green blinds on the fence, they put in trees and plants, re-painted the place, removed the graffiti; they really handled every one of our concerns, and it was just a super collaborative effort. So those meetings went really well (Personal Communication, November 2010).

In the collaborative effort that Carson describes, FNU is taking responsibility for mitigating a neighborhood safety hazard. And in the case of the blight mapping, FNU and NHS provided New Orleans with a service that the city had to pay to accomplish in other neighborhoods. The “invitation” to city hall valorizes FNU’s actions as positive community action and good citizenship. From a governance perspective, however, FNU is participating in a sub-contracting relationship with the city. Only in this case, the workers are not getting a wage.

The blight surveys have become FNU’s main avenue of participation in Freret’s housing market. Carson and Mark referred to blight as a problem that lowers the value of adjacent houses and decreases neighborhood safety. NHS is also concerned with “land-banking” in the neighborhood, which means gutting empty or blighted buildings and preserving them for use several decades in the future when the neighborhood’s population has recovered (Personal Communication, November 2010). FNU also relies on NHS’s vision for increasing homeownership in Freret, as Carson notes that FNU does not have its own capacity to assist new homeowners with counseling and loans. NHS, on the other hand, has been successful in garnering funds through its nation-wide relationships with other nonprofit foundations and even international governments; the government of Qatar donated to the organization for several years after Katrina and provided “gap funding” to make up the difference between approved and needed loan amounts for many first-time, low-income homebuyers (NHS 2010). Mark, the NHS employee, explains that the idea that homeownership will stabilize neighborhoods is not a “hard and fast” rule, but he believes there is sufficient positive evidence to make this a legitimate goal.

Where it becomes a tool for neighborhoods is that we see it as a stabilizing force for
neighborhoods, especially where the homeownership rate is low - 25% or lower, 30% or lower, you have a lot of transience, people come and go, a lot of times landlords don’t live nearby so there’s lack of oversight in terms of what’s going on in the house or the building condition. Whereas a homeowner is more likely, in general, to be able to take care of it, and is more self-interested, often. Now that’s an oversimplification because there are good landlords and bad landlords, and there are good homeowners and bad homeowners…But I think certainly as a general rule, the people who own want to live next to people who own (Personal Communication, November 2010).

Mark also notes that he is encouraged to see “aspiring homeowners” (i.e., current renters) involved in blight reduction efforts. He believes that these people are interested in “what’s happening with property in the neighborhood in general, knowing what the opportunities are. And they’re kind of committed to the neighborhood in general” (Personal Communication, November 2010). Carson believes that homeownership is important, but thinks that other things, such as Freret’s rehabilitated charter school, have been the main source of the neighborhood’s recovery. FNU’s role is mainly to work on smaller-scale issues, like neighborhood beautification and community-building, that aren’t going to be addressed by the city and NHS (Personal Communication, November 2010).

By Arnstein’s (1969) standards, the level of FNU’s true civic participation is mixed. Its main involvement in city politics was in the 2007 UNOP planning. Consultants captured FNU’s planning goals, but the promised city-wide plans never materialized. Arnstein might rate this participation as tokenism, “They allow citizens to advise or plan ad infinitum but retain for powerholders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice” (Arnstein 1969, 248). Furthermore, FNU’s access to the political decision-making process decreased once the city dropped the idea of completing the UNOP. FNU also relies heavily on a nonprofit, NHS, for many of the extra-municipal services provided in Freret. Both Carson and Mark believe that NHS raises the visibility of Freret within the city.

From Carson’s perspective, the responsibilities taken by FNU for neighborhood cleanup and blight reduction are more efficient than waiting for the city to (perhaps never) take on these...
tasks. In his years of work with FNU, Carson has learned what to expect from the urban governance structure within which FNU operates. He has adapted the organization’s goals to work with the city when it is useful, and to work autonomously when he expects interactions with the city to be fruitless or inefficient. In the case of the graffiti clean-up, he realized that involving the city’s public works department would be time-consuming, so FNU contacted Entergy (the power company) itself without the city as an intermediary. Thus, FNU becomes an active governing body within the neighborhood scale. The negotiations of its existence between city-wide and local issues are complex and ongoing.

4.3 The Broadmoor Improvement Association

Figure 4.3: Maps of Broadmoor

Geography and demographics

The Broadmoor neighborhood borders Freret to the north. Broadmoor was originally a lake, which was drained throughout the 1800s to make way for residential construction (GNOCDC 2000a). A pumping station and drainage canals keep water out of the neighborhood, but Broadmoor deals with frequent flooding and was the site of several pre-Katrina drainage improvement projects. As with Freret, Broadmoor lost residents to suburbanization in the 1950s
and 1960s. However, the Broadmoor Improvement Association (BIA), founded in 1930, worked to stabilize the neighborhood and the suburban exodus was less severe than seen in other New Orleans neighborhoods (GNOCDC 2000a). Before Katrina, Broadmoor had a slightly higher rate of homeownership than the rest of New Orleans (United States Census Bureau 2000b). The housing affordability burdens amongst renters and owners were close to the New Orleans average, 68% and 31% respectively (see Table 4.4 below). Today the neighborhood is well-known in New Orleans and is home to a racially and financially diverse population.

### Table 4.4: Broadmoor pre- and post-Katrina Housing Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Housing owner-occupied</th>
<th>% Housing renter-occupied</th>
<th>% Unaffordable owner-occupied housing</th>
<th>% Unaffordable renter-occupied housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009²⁸</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>65.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Katrina damages*

Hurricane Katrina inflicted substantial damages in Broadmoor, more so than were seen in Freret. Nearly every block experienced damages of at least 30% (Protentis 2005). Most properties took on 6-10 feet of water and were decimated by the subsequent mold (enviRenew and Salvation Army of New Orleans 2009). When the BNOB presented its 2006 plan for rebuilding New Orleans, it recommended that most of Broadmoor be converted into parkland and other open space due to a high probability of future flooding (BNOB 2006). Green space, a progressive notion elsewhere in urban America, became a dirty word in post-Katrina New Orleans (Campanella 2008). Later that week, the BIA held a meeting on a resident’s lawn and voted unanimously to support every resident’s right to return to Broadmoor (BIA 2008). The

²⁸ Due to changes in the US Census Bureau’s methods of collecting data, these figures are averages of samples collected in the Broadmoor Census Tracts by the American Community Survey between 2005 and 2009. The margin of error on these figures ranges between ± 6 and 12%. However, this is the most accurate data available at the census tract or neighborhood level.
BIA quickly created repopulation and revitalization committees, a “Broadmoor Lives” marketing plan to increase the neighborhood’s visibility, and started a website for “quality of life reporting,” where residents could obtain assistance with restoration of gas and electric power, towing of abandoned cars, debris removal, and other services (BIA 2010).

Post-Katrina civic participation

The BIA’s mission statement at its formation was to preserve Broadmoor’s “well-established, multi-racial/multi-ethnic community already living in harmony” (BIA 2008, n.p.). The BIA is often cited, both by the media and my interview subjects in New Orleans, as an inspiring example of civic participation and neighborhood leadership since Katrina (Goldberg 2006). After the hurricane, the organization’s already-strong leadership moved seamlessly into the position of the neighborhood’s main, and for a time only, advocate. In defiance of the BNOB, doubtful city officials, and researchers from the Urban Land Institute, who claimed that residents’ “emotional and financial attachments” to the neighborhood clouded their judgments of whether or not the neighborhood would be viable in the future (Goldberg 2006), residents of Broadmoor began to return and self-organize to gut flooded houses and keep track of their neighborhood’s displaced and dispersed population. Sidestepping the city’s sluggish apparatus for distributing recovery funding, the BIA partnered with nonprofits outside of New Orleans, the Harvard School of Government, and an oil company (Shlaes 2007). This rapid infusion of funding allowed the BIA to execute rebuilding projects more quickly than other neighborhoods, even those that experienced less damage.

The organization aspires to gain participation from every resident of Broadmoor, though most members are homeowners. As noted in Table 4.4, Broadmoor’s homeownership rate has risen by approximately 15% between 2000 and 2009. Since Katrina, the BIA has focused on initiatives that attract former and new homeowners back to the neighborhood. In 2006 the BIA
formed the Broadmoor Development Corporation, which encourages homeownership by rehabilitating and selling properties in the neighborhood at relatively low costs. The organization has also created incentives to help first responders buy homes in Broadmoor (Sisco 2011).

Martin (2003a, 367), in unpacking the notion of neighborhoods as collections of people that share common values and experiences, notes that “the ideal of neighborhoods as residences of people who share values and lifestyles is a pervasive one, and it is maintained in part through economic structures such as the housing market, which divides housing types by characteristics such as family structure and consumptive lifestyle” (2003a, 367). The BIA works to project a highly unified lifestyle for present and future Broadmoor residents, and its homeownership emphasis is prevalent in many of its actions, which include citing neighborhood residents for zoning violations and for parking vehicles on their front lawns. New Orleans police officers are invited frequently to BIA monthly meetings, and residents can use this opportunity to ask questions about crime prevention and report zoning violations or other problems. In addition, the BIA offers free weekly programs for neighborhood children, hosts a yearly community fair, and has committed $30,000 to education programming including a basketball league, ballet classes, after-school partnerships, and senior citizens activities (Sisco 2011). More than 13,000 volunteers have worked 362,000 hours in the neighborhood since Hurricane Katrina (BIA 2011). Both the BIA and interview subjects from outside the neighborhood point to the BNOB’s “green dot” plan as a rallying point for Broadmoor residents in getting organized, raising money, and taking action (BIA 2011; Personal Communications, November 2010). Carson, the member of FNU, spoke of the difference between the BIA and his own organization and noted that neighborhoods that had the greatest losses (such as Broadmoor) also had the greatest need to get organized and bring their case to the city. He also mentions Latoya Cantrell, executive director
of the BIA, as being extremely skilled at lobbying the city for resources. Broadmoor, early on in
the recovery process, also looked beyond the city government for funding and assistance. The
BIA began a collaboration with Harvard University and Bard College in 2006; over two
summers, eighty Harvard graduate students traveled to Broadmoor to consult and collect data on
repopulation, education, housing, and economic development (Belfer Center for Science and
International Affairs 2007). Another crucial service provided by the graduate students was to
write grant applications to secure funding for Broadmoor’s rebuilding efforts. Since 2006,
Broadmoor has leveraged more than $48 million in outside investments, including grants from
the Clinton Global Initiative ($5 million), NeighborWorks America, the Salvation Army, and
many private donors (BIA 2011). Cantrell, the executive director, states that “we’ve had
numerous national funders in the years since the levee failures, and it’s allowed us to accomplish
many things—like a new charter school, social programs and many rebuilt homes—that most
neighborhoods have been unable to do” (Cantrell, quoted in BIA 2011, n.p.). One team of
Harvard graduate students even created plans for a post-Katrina dog park, “Dogmoor” (see
Figure 4.4 below).
In collaboration with Harvard grad students, the BIA also published the “Broadmoor Guide for Recovery Planning and Implementation” based on the neighborhood’s successes (Farrell 2008). The guide (see Figure 4.5) aimed to share the BIA’s recovery methods with other neighborhood organizations operating after Katrina.
Figure 4.5: Excerpted from “Lessons from Katrina: How a community can spearhead successful disaster recovery.” Source: Hummel and Ahlers 2007.

The guide champions a bottom-up approach to organizing and planning for recovery.

While money and policy come from above – from the city, state, or federal governments – rebuilding is, the guide notes, at its heart an individual endeavor: “while centralized authorities
can support and stimulate this effort, the actual work of rebuilding (other than public infrastructure) is a bottom-up decentralized approach” (Hummel and Ahlers 2007, 4). Its first lesson is that neighborhood residents need a cause around which to mobilize, which the guide calls an “impetus to change.” This impetus can come in a variety of forms, including threats to a community’s viability (alluding to the BNOB green dot map), post-disaster reconstruction needs, and both internal and external pressures for change (Hummel and Ahlers 2007). Figure 4.5 above advises other neighborhood organizations on the adversity that they should expect during the recovery process.

At a BIA meeting on November 15, 2010, neighborhood residents met in the lunch room of the neighborhood’s elementary school, Andrew H. Wilson Charter School. Around 40 BIA members attended the meeting, including many visible minorities. From their comments during the meeting, it was evident that most were homeowners. Items of business included reports from Broadmoor’s city council member, the BIA’s “quality of life” officers, and an officer from the New Orleans Police Department. Latoya Cantrell officiated the meeting with a loud voice and no microphone, introducing each speaker to address the meeting attendees who were gathered in a circle of miniature tables. First up, city councilwoman Stacey Head gave a brief speech about upcoming city initiatives that would benefit Broadmoor. Next, the police officer gave advice on how to deal with a recent increase of crime in the neighborhood. The “quality of life” officers reported that they had completed the documentation of blighted properties in the neighborhood; they were now moving on to addressing inhabited properties: parking violations, unruly children, and commercial property stored in front of houses. Enforcement of quality of life ordinances for the purposes of “neighborhood stabilization” was of primary concern to the quality of life officers, and they stated that they would be meeting with the police department later in the month to report violators.
Next, in a move that Cantrell called “ground-breaking” for New Orleans neighborhood organizations, the BIA’s membership voted to change the organization’s bylaws to include elected representatives for three Broadmoor “subgroups.” With this change, all residents of Broadmoor will now have voting power in the BIA and, renters and owners alike, will pay a yearly $100 land parcel fee to fund the BIA, which will act as the neighborhood’s official improvement body. Passage of the amendment to the bylaws meant that the BIA had become New Orleans’ first elected body to represent a neighborhood to the city. Finally, Cantrell informed the group that the BIA now had an intern, a local Tulane University student, who could take on various projects.

The passage of the BIA’s compulsory neighborhood task was made possible by 2010 legislation passed by the State of Louisiana that applied specifically to the BIA’s status as a neighborhood improvement district. The BIA worked with State Senator Karen Carter Peterson to draft and successfully pass a bill “to create the Broadmoor Neighborhood Improvement District; to provide for district boundaries, purpose, governance, and funding, including the levy of a parcel fee; to provide relative to the powers and duties of the district and its governing board; and to provide for related matters” (Act No. 554 2010, 1). The BIA is identified in the bill as the governing body of the Broadmoor Neighborhood Improvement District. The Act allows the BIA to enter into contracts with private entities, to provide its own security patrols, to provide its own signage and lighting, to provide beautification and improvements to the district of Broadmoor, to acquire and lease or sell property within its boundaries, to procure liability insurance for its board members, and to “perform or have performed any other function or activity necessary or appropriate to carry out the purposes of the district or for the overall betterment of the district” (Act No. 554 2010, 4). The City of New Orleans is directed to collect the parcel tax and remit the funds to the BIA; the Act states that unpaid parcel fees “shall be
enforced with the same authority and subject to the same penalties and procedures as unpaid ad valorem [personal property] taxes” (Act No. 554 2010, 5). Notably, the Act also states that all services provided by the BIA shall be in addition to, not in lieu of, the personnel and services provided in the district by the City of New Orleans and State of Louisiana. In other words, the bill states that BIA initiatives are meant to enhance the existing services and quality of life in the neighborhood. The baseline of services provided to all neighborhoods (e.g., law enforcement and public utilities) will not be replaced with BIA-provided services.

Now that all residents of the neighborhood are paying into the BIA, the organization expects a 2011 operating budget of $127,000 (BIA 2011). Attendance at BIA meetings remains high, and has not experienced the drop-off at some organizations, such as FNU, have seen since the end of the UNOP in 2008. Several people interviewed about the BIA as part of this research stated that the organization is successful in attracting a mixed demographic of members; they work hard to encourage participation from all types of residents, especially now that all Broadmoorians will be paying into the BIA (Personal Communications, November 2010). The BIA’s latest project is designing and funding a joint community center and health clinic that will be located in the neighborhood.

Broadmoor’s transformation into “a body politic and corporate” (Act No. 554 2010, 1), with the BIA at the helm, represents a dramatic re-scaling of urban governance in New Orleans. Neighborhood-level governance has been made official by the state legislature, bypassing City Hall and other municipal-level permissions. With its own revenue, board, and decision-making structure, the BIA has claimed autonomy in a way significant by both Arnstein’s (1969) and DeFilippis’s (2004) assessments. By Arnstein’s (1969) definition, the BIA has truly taken some control away from the city. In converting itself into an elected body, the BIA is using the city to collect parcel fees on its behalf. These fees are then distributed to the organization, which has
absolute control over the funds. And by DeFilippis’s (2004) gauge, the BIA has increased its autonomy relative to other neighborhood groups in New Orleans. The BIA is operating outside the traditional neighborhood scale of urban governance. Like FNU, the BIA has learned what it can expect from the city; when city politics are not the efficient way of getting things done, the organization is skilled at finding other ways of getting things done. In the specificities of post-storm New Orleans, the “third space” of governance-through-community has gained traction and influence in Broadmoor.

The BIA is also ensconced within a governance structure that rewards its highly organized leadership and political connections. While the organization is adept at lobbying the city for resources, it is also skilled at acquiring funding through collaborations with nonprofit foundations and universities in and beyond New Orleans. The BIA’s status as a highly visible organization in New Orleans has allowed it to attract money from the city, but also large amounts from outside investors. The organization’s emphasis on “quality of life” and “neighborhood stabilization” initiatives (as described during the November 8, 2010 meeting) are rooted in a culture of increasing and maintaining homeownership, which appeals to many of its outside supporters. The BIA has found a niche within New Orleans’ governance structure that allows it both support and autonomy from the city; as stated in the Act that authorized its autonomy, the City of New Orleans must continue to provide all services and personnel that were provided previous to Broadmoor’s incorporation as a political subdivision. As with the FNU, Broadmoor has taken some responsibility for neighborhood security and monitoring zoning violations, but still relies on the city to resolve many of these issues. The BIA’s role, in this case, is to bring these matters to the city’s attention through its connections with police officers and Stacey Head, the city councilwoman. The organization’s entrepreneurialism is rewarded on

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29 DeFilippis (2004) explains that autonomy is a relational concept, not something that individual groups can possess outside their context as embedded within various structures of governance.
two plains: first, in its position as a well-respected, politically-savvy organization operating within New Orleans’ structure of urban governance; second, in its success in gaining autonomy as a distinct political body through a mandate from the Louisiana State Legislature. Between FNU and the BIA, community participation is manifesting quite differently within the governance structure of post-Katrina New Orleans.

4.4 Lower Ninth Ward and A Community Voice

**Figure 4.6: Maps of Lower Ninth Ward**

![Maps of Lower Ninth Ward](image)

Figure 4.6: Location and detail maps of Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood. Source: GNOCDC 2000c.

*Katrina damages*

The Lower Ninth Ward has gained perhaps the most media coverage of any New Orleans neighborhood since Hurricane Katrina. The neighborhood’s history of disenfranchisement and isolation from the rest of New Orleans laid the groundwork for a humanitarian crisis when it flooded in 2005. The storm surge from 1965’s Hurricane Betsy put 80% of the Lower Ninth Ward underwater and foreshadowed eerily what would happen in 2005: in 1965, a dearth of financial assistance and disaster recovery loans meant that many people and businesses moved out of the neighborhood (GNOCDC 2000c). On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina resulted in breaches of levees on three sides of the neighborhood and the water level rose ten feet in twenty
minutes (Campanella 2008). It is estimated that 1,000 deaths in the Lower Ninth Ward are directly attributable to the flooding; deaths resulting from the evacuation and many suicides are difficult to count (Flaherty 2010).

Table 4.5: Lower Ninth Ward pre- and post-Katrina Housing Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Housing owner-occupied</th>
<th>% Housing renter-occupied</th>
<th>% Unaffordable owner-occupied housing</th>
<th>% Unaffordable renter-occupied housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009&lt;sup&gt;30&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Geography and demographics**

The Lower Ninth Ward is far from being the lowest-lying area of the city; its elevation is in fact several feet higher than other low-income neighborhoods in New Orleans. Before Katrina, it also had a relatively high (for New Orleans) level of home ownership. 59% of units were owner-occupied before the hurricane, compared with a 46% average for the city as a whole, and many small businesses run by neighborhood residents (see Table 4.5 above). Many homeowners in the neighborhood inherited their property from relatives who had moved to the neighborhood when it was one of the first subdivisions designated for Black New Orleanians (Campanella 2008). 82% of the houses standing when Hurricane Katrina hit the Lower Ninth Ward were built before 1970, and more than 1/3 of these were constructed pre-1949 (United States Census Bureau 2000b). Due to long tenures of family ownership and residence, the mortgage payments of homeowners in the neighborhood were comparatively low when measured against those in the rest of the city and surrounding suburbs (Campanella 2008). However, due to the lower-than-average income of Lower Ninth Ward residents, housing

<sup>30</sup> Due to changes in the US Census Bureau’s methods of collecting data, these figures are averages of samples collected in the Lower Ninth Ward Census Tracts by the American Community Survey between 2005 and 2009. The margin of error on these figures ranges between ± 6 – 20%. However, this is the most accurate data available at the census tract or neighborhood level.
affordability was still a problem: as shown above in Table 4.5, 55% of homeowners and 45% of renters in the neighborhood paid more than 30% of their income to housing costs before Katrina (United States Census Bureau 2000a).

Post-Katrina civic participation

While the Lower Ninth Ward has been geographically isolated from the rest of the city since the construction of the Industrial Canal and Gulf Intra-coastal Waterway,31 it is also a neighborhood with a long-standing history of activism and community organizing inspired by its isolation and perceived neglect by city officials (GNOCDC 2000c). Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward were influential actors in the movement for US school desegregation in the 1950s.32 Between 1998 and 2002, several activist groups in the neighborhood partnered with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the now-defunct Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) to halt the Army Corps of Engineers’ plans to widen the Industrial Canal until an assessment of neighborhood impact was presented to and approved by the neighborhood (GNOCDC 2000c).

In the wake of post-Katrina destruction in the Lower Ninth Ward, high-profile projects from celebrities and artists have drawn media coverage, volunteers, Fulbright Scholars, and multitudes of outside funding (Urbaszewski 2011). Brad Pitt’s “Make it Right” foundation, for example, has built over 50 homes in the neighborhood since Katrina, attracting pro bono assistance from big-name architects and artists (Make it Right 2009). Figure 4.7 below shows a 2007 art installation in the Lower Ninth Ward, co-organized by Pitt and GRAFT, a design studio out of Los Angeles. The temporary pink structures recall the pre-Katrina density of homes in the neighborhood, comparable to that of the stretch of houses beyond the installation.

31 See Figure 1.3 in Chapter 1.
32 Following integration in the 1960s, nearly all white residents of the neighborhood moved east to the suburbs of neighboring St. Bernard Parish (Campanella 2008).
The BNOB’s 2006 Parks and Open Space Plan placed a “green zone” over much of the Lower Ninth Ward, with a new canal connection proposed to connect the drainage from “green zones” in St. Roch and Gentilly, two other damaged residential neighborhoods that the BNOB slated for conversion to parkland (Ford 2010). As already noted, the UNOP, which followed the failed BNOB plan, reversed course and declared that all of New Orleans would be rebuilt as it was before Katrina (Ford 2010). This ameliorated the political fallout and suspicions that surrounded the BNOB, but also excused the city from scrutinizing New Orleans’ pre-Katrina land use decisions against future hurricane and flooding forecasts. The people who moved back to the drained swamplands of the worst-flooded neighborhoods were once more to be protected.
by the US Corps of Army Engineers and its levee reinforcement system, not by environmentally-informed changes to land use planning in the city.

Much community action has occurred in the Lower Ninth Ward since Hurricane Katrina. Given that it is impossible to survey all Lower Ninth Ward community activism within the scope of this thesis, I have chosen to focus in detail on one organization in the neighborhood, A Community Voice (ACV). This organization was formed in 2009 by the former board members of the Louisiana chapter of ACORN. The Louisiana chapter, one of the most active in the country, was involved in post-Katrina fund-raising and advocacy work on behalf of Lower Ninth Ward and other poor residents of New Orleans. In 2009, ACORN’s national leadership attempted to take over the Louisiana Chapter after New Orleans ACORN members criticized President Obama’s planned itinerary during a trip to the city (Barrow 2009). Louisiana ACORN responded by threatening to go to court to gain control of the Louisiana ACORN resources, including membership dues, property and recovery grants that were controlled by the national organization. The incident prompted a split between the state and national chapters and was characteristic of in-fighting that took place within several organizations operating in the Lower Ninth Ward after Katrina (Personal Communication, November 2010). Once ACORN dissolved and ACV was formed, the latter began to operate at a local scale without national oversight.

ACV is active throughout the city of New Orleans, lobbying for affordable housing, health care access, and social and environmental justice. The organization’s mission statement is as follows:

A Community Voice (ACV) is a non-profit community organization comprised of working, poor, elderly, women, children, and families. ACV provides a community voice for its members and constituencies in the everyday issues that affect their daily lives. This enables the community to bring together those who

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33 ACORN (Association of Communities for Reform Now) was a national movement of community-based organizations that advocated for health care, voter registration, safety, affordable housing, and social justice in low-income areas of the US. A 2009 controversy over its accounting practices and use of government and private funds eventually led to the organization’s bankruptcy in 2010.
have common interests and concerns to improve the quality of their lives and those of others in the community (ACV 2011).

One of ACV’s most persistent campaigns since Katrina has been for equity in the city’s rebuilding projects. ACV members have testified to members of the US Department of Justice regarding post-Katrina discrimination in rebuilding New Orleans’ low-income and otherwise marginalized areas. The organization also meets with the mayor’s office and other city officials to discuss what it sees as “constant delays” to capital projects for the Lower Ninth Ward (ACV 2011). ACV is also involved in environmental justice issues stemming from the BP oil spill. It organizes leadership and training workshops for its members and is currently conducting a housing survey of New Orleans residents to support an equitable housing campaign (ACV 2011). The organization is equally attuned to local issues in the Lower Ninth Ward as it is to issues of inequality that span the entire city of New Orleans. ACV also sees its campaigns for social and environmental justice in Louisiana as closely tied to national issues. Its organizing style is drawn from its roots with ACORN, which focused on local communities and disenfranchised citizens as the agents of social change (DeFilippis et al. 2007). The organization’s strategy since its formation has been to be highly visible in media and politics. Several of its members have appeared in post-Katrina documentaries and have met with Brad Pitt, Bill Clinton, and Barak Obama. ACV members often appear together at public meetings in New Orleans that are concerned with issues of disaster preparedness, housing access, and civic engagement.

Levee repair: differences in height or differences in protection?

On November 8, 2010, the US Army Corps Engineers held a public meeting at the Light City Church in the Lower Ninth Ward. The purpose of the meeting was to present plans and progress on the improved protection of the Industrial Canal, part of a $14 million project funded by the US Congress to provide 100-year storm protection to all of New Orleans by June 2011.
The improvements presented at the church meeting explained to Lower Ninth Ward residents three improvements: (1) blocking off several waterways through which the storm surge entered New Orleans during Katrina, (2) raising and/or strengthening the levees that protect the Lower Ninth Ward, and (3) repairing pump stations (USACE 2010). Corps staff explained the detailed modeling and calculations that they had used to develop a retrofitted levee system that would protect New Orleans from a once-every-hundred-years flood. By projecting and modeling the fluvial geography of future storm surges, including the force and elevation of water in all New Orleans waterways, the Corps had developed what it deemed to be ideal levee heights for the entire system. The storm surge models showed ideal levee heights ranging from 12 to 32 feet at different points in the city. The Corps representatives also showed photos of progress on the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal (IHNC) Surge Barrier, which is meant to protect the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish from storm waters from the Gulf of Mexico (see Figure 4.8 below). At the conclusion of the slide presentation, the 55 attendees of the meeting were asked to provide their feedback and questions.

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34 The Corps is required to hold such meetings in all New Orleans neighborhoods affected by levee construction, as per requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970.
During the presentation, a woman in the audience passed a stack of flyers down the rows of chairs in the church gallery. The flyers were produced by ACV and stated the organization’s concerns with regard to the Corps presentation. ACV was advocating for stopping expansion of the Industrial Canal (the human-made canal that separates the Lower Ninth Ward from the rest of New Orleans to the west; see Figure 1.3), complete Category 5 hurricane levee protection for the Lower Ninth Ward, and a safe pedestrian crossing on the main bridge that connects the neighborhood to the rest of New Orleans. The back of the flyer invited the public to a “Stop Rape Protest Candlelight Vigil” that would be held on the upcoming Friday night to protest the public school buses’ habit of dropping off children in unsafe, blighted areas in the Lower Ninth Ward.

Members of ACV had followed the Corps’s request to fill out comment cards to signify
their desire to speak after the slide presentation. When it was their turn to speak, they addressed the Corps staff members politely, but it soon became clear that the two groups’ concerns were not the same. The Corps representatives were prepared to answer questions about their modeling techniques, the environmental impact assessment, and the decisions about how levee gates would be constructed. They were not keen to answer the questions asked by ACV and other people in the audience that focused on equity issues, disparities between neighborhoods in the heights of levees, and the order in which the levees were outfitted for 100-year flood protection (i.e., why was Lower Nine not first in line for levee repair when it had suffered the worst flooding in the city). Of particular concern to the audience were the differences in the height of levees to be built or improved in different parts of New Orleans. Audience members, including some members of ACV, asked questions about specific stretches of levees that border the Lower Ninth Ward. The Corps representatives, who are responsible for miles of levees throughout the city, were often unfamiliar with the exact levee locations referred to by audience members.

During the public comment period, State Senator Cynthia Willard-Lewis arrived at the meeting. After listening to many people who were concerned about disparities in levee height, she addressed a question about historical differences in levee height between New Orleans neighborhoods, and between Orleans Parish and neighboring Jefferson and St. Bernard Parishes. A Corps scientist explained that before Hurricane Katrina, the levee system had been only partially funded by the US Congress and as such, the Corps could only produce a partially-built system. “The exact case you are talking about,” he responded, “was one side got money for a levee raise and the other side didn’t” (US ACE 2010, 19). Now that the system was “fully-funded,” he assured the State Senator, the Corps would be able to produce a fully-funded, fully integrated system that would eliminate any past inequities in the levee coverage of New Orleans and the surrounding parishes.
The Corps representatives spoke of the long-term, of hundred year floods, predicted storm surge averages, and the growth of the levee system as a whole. They also talked in numbers: feet of levees, width of locks, gallons of water pressure factored into the analysis. The audience, however, was concerned with a different set of specifics: differences in levee height, an unreinforced dirt levee at a specific intersection, and the proposal for a sediment disposal project in the neighborhood would depend entirely on the Corps’s proposed levees to prevent a toxic release in the event of another large hurricane (USACE 2010, 13). The following exchange is evocative of many that occurred during the course of the meeting:

**Lower Ninth Ward Resident:** In the last meeting you said with the deep wells the water goes into the drainage system, so I’m still saying that if you are in the middle of a storm and it’s raining on your side and you are getting a lot of water, but if you have a lot of deep wells on that side you are going to get more water into the ….

**US ACE Branch Chief:** But it’s not a lot of water. All those parameters were taken into consideration in the analysis…You have to understand that we are using the latest and greatest engineering and science that we have available to us to design the system.

**LNW Resident:** I’m just going to say this. What we feel in this neighborhood is that we don’t feel like there has been any consistency to the height of these levees. To tell us that there are levees that are being raised to 32 feet and we are still at 12 feet really upsets us…There is no consistency or urgency to provide protection for this, the most flooded area in the city. It hurts us that we are the last ones to get protection and to hear you all stand up and say there are no differences being made, yes there are. I don’t understand you people. Is there any compassion for our lives in this area, for our property or is it always about the bottom line, money, the port, the city and your jobs? It’s not about us because we have flooded over and over again and until you walk in our shoes, you will never understand how we feel. So all of this means nothing because there is no consistency and no urgency to protect us and we know that.

**US ACE Branch Chief:** First of all, we do have a sense of urgency. We are working extremely hard to have all these systems in place next hurricane season. Right now we envision we will be done on time, that’s our schedule. As far as it goes, every individual living behind this system when it’s done will have the same level of protection. I don’t know any other way to put it…well then you know more than our engineers and our scientists.
**LNW Resident:** We still have metal pile driving along Bayou Bienvenue that the Orleans Levee Board won’t address. We have all kind of pockets of weak situations in our levee system. They talk about blight being a jack o’lantern effect; we have a jack o’lantern levee system…How did you get authorization to heighten levees everywhere else but in this area, the area that has flooded the most? Because you know why, you want to hold us hostage with this lock project. The city wants to dredge and put the sediment on Bayou Bienvenue and then you will poison our water down here. You don’t care about us (USACE 2010, 23-24).

Realizing that their descriptions of “supercomputer” calculations (USACE 2010) and technical objectivity would not satisfy the audience, the Corps representatives thanked everyone for coming and noted that they would stick around to answer individual questions (USACE 2010). Members of ACV remained after the meeting to ask many questions, visibly frustrating several Corps representatives.

From the Corps’s perspective, the meeting satisfied a requirement for public comment on engineering projects that are paid for with federal funds. Some members of the public attended the meeting to learn about the project and how it will affect the Lower Ninth Ward. Other members of the public, along with ACV, attended the meeting with the intent of using it as a forum to draw attention to the many inequalities that have plagued their neighborhood throughout the hurricane recovery process. The Corps responded to these complaints diplomatically, but it was obvious to both parties that none of the public statements would truly affect the construction of the new levee system.

As the subject matter experts, the Corps scientists believed in the objectivity of the process an in relying upon technical calculations to make decisions, set priorities, and allocate resources. In an analysis of the use of statistical and calculative methods, Anthony Hopwood argued that the officials that use these methods are themselves constrained by the calculative apparatuses that they use. “A network of the apparently precise, specific and quantitative emerges out of, and is superimposed upon, the contentious and the uncertain” (Hopwood 1988,
The Corps representatives, during the meeting, attempted to explain that the levee rebuilding process was inherently disinterested (that is, favoring no interest above others). In response to the question of why the levees were rebuilt in a particular order, the USACE Branch Chief again alluded to the fact that the order in which the work is completed is an objective, technical determination, not a value judgment (USACE 2010). The technical argument is simple: all walls and levees have been analyzed and will be remediated to meet the guidelines.

Audience members’ questions about why their neighborhood had to wait the longest for levee reinforcement began to sound paranoid in comparison: why, a Corps representative asked, does it matter if the Lower Ninth Ward levees are last to be reinforced as long as all the work is completed by the June 2011 deadline? To allay the fears of Lower Ninth Ward residents, the Corps described its extensive process of modeling for the new levee system:

**Corps Scientist:**

We looked at three approaches coming up the river. Now with the advent of super computers, we were able to generate 152 storms and we used six super-computers. The Department of Defense gave up three of their super-computers to do nothing but analysis on this model. We had three computers from universities. We then took these 152 storms and came up with our system… They have taken every combination that these super computers could come up with and they came up with the model. They then turned around and tested the model with storms that we’ve already had (USACE 2010, 18).

The Corps representatives, in their role as experts and professionals, were making precisely calculated decisions for the protection of a flood-prone neighborhood. Scientific analysis and modeling parameters are privileged over the complaints of neighborhood residents and the presumed objectivity of the science is supposed to ensure social equity; the differences in the height of the levees will ensure equal protection for all. Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward are expected to rely on the Corps’s modeling and projections, which say that physical disparities in levee height will translate to invisibly equal protection for all. The visible difference in levee heights, however, was a point of contention for many residents; regardless of what the Corps’s
models say, these residents saw differences within the levee system as symbolic of a long history of unequal treatment of the Lower Ninth Ward. Being on the “right side” (DeFilippis 2004) of the boundary gave certain neighborhoods and parishes more protection than others.

4.5 Neighborhood scale and radical organizing

A trait that defines many of New Orleans’ neighborhood organizations is their inward-focused missions. FNU and the BIA both work largely within established city governance structures of New Orleans, as do most of the other neighborhood-based organizations in the city. Working within city governance structures entails, as explored above through DeFilippis’s (2004) analysis, accepting the market-based goals of mainstream community development practices and engaging in non-confrontational forms of engagement. “Consensus-building” and cooperative relationships with state and city governments (such as the relationships built by the BIA) are paradigms of these forms of community engagement and organizing. Current understandings of community organizing often hold contempt for the organizing efforts of the 1960s, which sometimes relied upon divisive political tactics or other strategies that are seen as confrontational by today’s dominant standards (DeFilippis 2004). The in-your-face style of ACV’s activism is less appropriate, by these standards, than the professionalized engagement style of organizations like the BIA.

ACV is also different from many neighborhood-based New Orleans organizations because of its connections to broader campaigns for social and environmental justice. The scale of community activism and participation is important to this difference. FNU and the BIA were formed to address the problems of specific neighborhoods; both apply 100% of their efforts to fundraising, beautifying, policing, and lobbying for the one neighborhood in which their members reside. While, as Carson of FNU notes, they may write letters of support for other neighborhood organizations operating in New Orleans (Personal Communication, November
FNU and the BIA do not participate in activism in other neighborhoods. Their mission statements are inwardly-directed and neighborhood-specific. This narrow scope of action has allowed them to be relatively effective in leveraging available resources to meet their goals.

Mark of NHS, in speaking generally about New Orleans’ neighborhood organizations, believes that small-scale organizing is generally the path through which neighborhood organizations have been most successful since Katrina. In this case, success is measured in material terms: blighted houses cleaned up, population returned, schools rebuilt, or funding acquired.

ACV, on the other hand, focuses its activism at a different scale than the BIA and FNU. While several Lower Ninth Ward organizations exist to serve that neighborhood exclusively, ACV recognizes that these other organizations have not been able to bring the reinvestment and rebuilding seen in other areas of New Orleans. Drawing from its ACORN roots of direct action by marginalized people, ACV connects its civic engagement to broader issues: social and environmental justice, housing rights, school safety, and rebuilding equity in New Orleans as a whole, with issues in the Lower Ninth Ward as catalysts for broader action. The terminology that ACV uses to discuss its activist goals includes “institutional change,” “fighting for equity,” “caravan for justice,” and “fighting for social and economic justice” (ACV 2011). The connection to these large-scale issues is not present in the rhetoric of organizations like FNU and the BIA. ACV has members working in the Lower Ninth Ward, the Upper Ninth Ward (part of New Orleans East), and Lake Charles, a city 200 miles to the west of New Orleans. The chapter of ACV in Lake Charles was founded in 2009. While both organizations maintain local autonomy, they see their missions as connected to broader issues, such as affordable housing and fair police protection, which affect marginalized residents in both cities (ACV 2011). In 2010, the members of the BIA and FNU did not appear to feel particularly marginalized. FNU members, frustrated by their participation in unsuccessful city plan-writing, returned to smaller-
scale neighborhood organizing and generally thought it more effective than attending city-wide meetings. While the BIA’s post-Katrina activism was motivated by the BNOB “green dot” plan in 2006 (which marginalized Broadmoor by essentially recommending that the neighborhood should cease to exist), its subsequent five years of organizing and action have culminated in legislative recognition as an autonomous political body within the city of New Orleans. ACV, however, is strongly rooted in its role as an advocate for marginalized populations in New Orleans; many of its members, as demonstrated through their comments at the Army Corps of Engineers Meeting, see themselves and their neighborhood of residence as similarly marginalized in 2005 and in 2011. The level of activism used to demand equality has not diminished.

This raises a question of how radical community activism is manifest and defined in post-Katrina New Orleans. It could be said that the BIA’s declaration that Broadmoor was coming back, despite the BNOB’s declaration that the neighborhood was unviable, was radical. But this radicalism is politically acceptable: a neighborhood-based organization picks itself up, raises money, and fills in the gaps where the city does not provide. The neighborhood becomes relatively self-sufficient within the accepted realm of community action and does not truly challenge the scale at which its actions are acceptable. ACV, in comparison, has been vocal and confrontational about its discontent. Tying itself to labor unions, anti-racist, and social justice movements, it seeks change beyond the geographic boundaries of the Lower Ninth Ward. Its radicalism is unpalatable within the politically-appropriate scale of community participation in post-Katrina New Orleans. While the BIA and FNU are praised by developers and city planners for their local entrepreneurialism, ACV is relatively marginalized from these kinds of politics specifically because it is seen as a radical political movement with goals beyond increasing business investment and development in the Lower Ninth Ward.
Similarly, the ideology of community engendered by the BIA and FNU exists at a different scale than that of ACV. As discussed in the theories of community described earlier in this chapter, the place-coalitions of BIA and FNU are defined at a more local scale than that of ACV. In FNU and the BIA’s “small-scale” civic participation, these organizations subscribe to and produce communities as defined within the city’s geographic divisions. ACV, with its connections to several New Orleans neighborhoods, the city of Lake Charles, and state-wide issues, enacts community at a different, cross-boundary scale. Its focus on larger-scale issues of social and environmental justice reflects this larger community.

As city government responsibilities are de-scaled to the neighborhood level, the community becomes a valorized zone of politics, and ever-more-local elements of the community take on responsibilities for their own well-being. While, by Arnstein’s (1969) definition, this may allow community organizations to become more powerful in their relationships with city government, it also reflects Rose’s (1999) “double movement,” in which neighborhood organizations take on additional social and economic responsibilities along with their new autonomy. As noted by DeFilippis (2004, 55-56), “All of this would be fine…if this understanding of community development had demonstrated itself capable of accomplishing the two goals of this project: to allow low-income people to have more control over their economic lives, and to do so in ways which equitably improve the lives of people in low-income communities.” DeFilippis goes on to argue that “community development needs to reconnect with its goals of community control.”

All three neighborhood-based organizations profiled in this chapter have been affected by a post-Katrina “double movement,” and their post-storm participation in New Orleans politics has manifested in wildly different ways. Community control is an interesting lens through which to end this chapter. Within these profiles of neighborhood organizations, the BIA has most
visibly gained economic control at the neighborhood-level. FNU has seen a dramatic increase in civic participation, and some increase in community control through its blight-elimination activities and its ability to attract outside funding through NHS. ACV does not work exclusively within the neighborhood scale of urban governance. Thus, the amount of influence the ACV has over Lower Ninth Ward politics is mixed. ACV’s organizing tactics tend to produce broader, less visible changes than the building of the Freret Market or the development of Broadmoor properties. One recent ACV “win” was to elevate the rape of a Lower Ninth Ward teenager to a city-wide issue, resulting in policy changes within the New Orleans Recovery School District and increased police patrols in blighted neighborhoods (ACV 2011). Working inside or outside of neighborhood-scale politics yields different results, some more easily visible in New Orleans’ recovery than others.

4.6 What is omitted?

The above cases of civic participation in post-Katrina New Orleans, as well as the interviews that construct them, are necessarily limited by the length and breadth of this thesis and of my fieldwork. My interviews were also constrained by an inevitable selection bias – by interviewing people who were residents of New Orleans in 2010, I was not able to capture the experiences of people who left the city during Katrina and did not return. While I spoke at length with many people, the opportunity to interview them was contingent upon my personal connections, their schedules and desires to share, and their presence in New Orleans in the first place. My interviews did not capture the experiences of New Orleans residents who relocated permanently out of the city after Katrina. The perspectives of these people are difficult to obtain, because no systematic tracking of their whereabouts occurred after the Katrina evacuations. Filings for disaster assistance with FEMA reveal that many people went to Texas and other southern states; some journalists have also found large pockets of Katrina evacuees through
churches, which provided much assistance to New Orleans residents who left their homes and re-established their lives in new cities. I have, notably, refrained from a detailed analysis of the racial dimensions of community marginalization and success in post-Katrina civic participation. While this decision serves to narrow the scope of my analysis to a focus on governance, it should in no means suggest that race does not have a powerful role in many disparities in political access and financial resources.

Similarly, I emphasize the limited scope of the above analysis in an effort to avoid disempowering the broader movement of effective neighborhood rebuilding and social justice campaigns that has intensified in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. Countless activists, both native to and from beyond New Orleans have produced remarkable results in flood-damaged and politically-vulnerable neighborhoods. Recognizing the injustices that often accompany a disaster recovery effort over the long-term (see Chapter 2), these groups are at work in all 72 of New Orleans’ neighborhoods advocating for affordable housing, equitable rebuilding, and other important issues (see Flaherty 2010 for many accounts of these organizations). My goal in this chapter was to explore the operation of several of these groups in the complex post-Katrina political environment. Future studies could explore the experiences of many more organizations in the ever-changing governance of New Orleans.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored several intersections of hurricane recovery, urban planning, housing assistance, and neighborhood organizing in post-Katrina New Orleans. These intersections include the mobilization of particular kinds of evidence in redevelopment planning, the construction of “community” and “neighborhood” in the aftermath of disaster, and the changing geographical scale of neighborhood community development in a post-disaster environment. After introducing the goals and context of my project in Chapter 1, I argued in Chapter 2 that the disaster literature on Hurricane Katrina can benefit from entanglement with literature on urban governance and the politics of civic engagement. Similarly, I proposed in Chapter 3 that economic analyses of pre-and post-Katrina differences should be contextualized by the post-Katrina politics and social realities of New Orleans.

In Chapter 3, I explored the effects of depoliticizing a debate about affordable housing in New Orleans. Promoting the geographic separation of publicly-subsidized housing from single-family or affluent neighborhoods has been a project of socially exclusive interest groups in US cities for decades. However, as negative generalizations about people who inhabit subsidized housing have become less acceptable in mainstream US politics, new tactics have emerged to present subsidized housing as a nuisance to neighborhoods and, more threateningly, to urban housing markets as a whole. In engendering public uncertainty about the reliability of housing data, powerful landlords and politicians avoided a debate on housing access and instead focused legislative attention on a seemingly counterintuitive question: is there too much affordable housing in New Orleans? In a political landscape that favors land and property owners, the burden of proof is increasingly placed on consumers and proponents of affordable housing. This chapter’s analysis of the September 2009 State Bond Commission hearing reveals much about how injustices in housing provision are politically orchestrated. Further explorations of the
pursuit of “disinterest” through the use of numbers can reveal other depoliticized policy debates that perpetuate urban inequalities.

A common disagreement between community organizations, developers, and city planners is the “share” of the city’s low-income housing that each neighborhood should take on. Should each neighborhood be obligated to have a certain number of affordable housing units, or should these units be distributed in a manner more sensitive to the “context”35 (i.e., existing racial and socioeconomic make-up) of each neighborhood? Differences within and between neighborhoods are crucial axes of negotiation in post-hurricane recovery planning. In Chapter 4, I explored some of these differences in studies of three neighborhood-based organizations in New Orleans. Two organizations, Freret Neighbors United and the Broadmoor Improvement Association, have been successful in working within formal political structures to improve their neighborhoods and acquire resources from the City of New Orleans and outside agencies. The Broadmoor Improvement Agency, in particular, has gained autonomy from the city by becoming a special political district as authorized by the Louisiana State Legislature. The third organization that I profile, A Community Voice, uses an activism style that often works outside formal political structures. This organization pursues causes of social justice and rebuilding equity that are rooted in the Lower Ninth Ward but affect neighborhoods across the city. A Community Voice seeks broader alliances with other activist groups and has largely achieved its successes outside of the dominant, market-based tradition of community development. As I explored in Chapters 1 and 2, the Lower Ninth Ward’s historical context of marginalization from the rest of New Orleans put it at a disadvantage in terms of hurricane recovery, even though a rich tradition of community activism exists in the neighborhood. Other historically marginalized areas of New Orleans, such as public housing projects and other low-income areas with large

35 The wording used in the 2010 New Orleans Master Plan.
numbers of racial minorities, have seen similarly slow recovery processes. Hurricane recovery in New Orleans has varied widely between neighborhoods. Additionally, welfare state devolution and the resultant responsibilization of smaller scales of governance, accelerated by the post-Katrina vacuum of government, have increased economic and political competition between neighborhoods in New Orleans.

As of this writing, the New Orleans East neighborhood, which encompasses a huge swath of land between the Lower Ninth Ward and Lake Pontchartrain, does not have a hospital; the result is a minimum of 40 minutes between dialing 911 and being treated in an emergency room (DuBos 2011). The neighborhood had two hospitals before the hurricane, but the city chose not to reopen them due to repair costs and, in the early months after Katrina, a fear that New Orleans East might not see sufficient repopulation to support two large healthcare facilities. Under pressure from frustrated residents in 2010, the city purchased Methodist Hospital, one of the neighborhood’s pre-storm hospitals, and began to plan for its re-opening, which the mayor promises will occur by the end of 2013, or eight years after Katrina. As of this writing, the city is short $30 million needed to supplement the federal community block grants that will pay for repairs to the damaged facility (Burton 2011). Until then, the neighborhood’s 60,000 residents will rely on an urgent care center that opened in the summer of 2011 (DuBos 2011).

Compared to New Orleans East, neighborhoods like Broadmoor appear to be quite privileged. It is projects like Dogmoor (see Figure 4.4) to which some of my interview subjects outside of Broadmoor reacted most negatively. The visible inequalities in the post-Katrina recovery process were particularly frustrating to Sandra and Ann, two interview subjects who develop affordable and mixed-income housing in New Orleans. Sandra is ambivalent about community involvement in New Orleans’ politics and says that she has “lost faith in the model.” She has seen several community groups in New Orleans use their political power to perpetuate
housing inequalities by using their political influence to block the construction of affordable housing and housing for the elderly in their neighborhoods (Personal Communication, November 2010). Ann noted that many poor neighborhoods that saw similar levels of destruction as Broadmoor had not recovered to anywhere near the degree where they would be thinking about building a dog park. She listed destroyed houses, closed schools, and commercial blight as persistent concerns in her neighborhood of New Orleans East five years after Katrina. Additionally, she believes that New Orleans East and similar neighborhoods are not building dog parks and other (relatively) luxurious improvements because they were not aware, when rebuilding funding was available to neighborhoods in 2007, that they could even ask for such improvements. The cause of this, she believes, lies in the historical disparities of resource distribution amongst New Orleans neighborhoods. Poorer neighborhoods began the hurricane recovery effort already disadvantaged by years of resource scarcity (Personal Communication, November 2010).

This is a crucial point. Most research on the post-Katrina disparities in neighborhood recovery has focused on differences in damage between neighborhoods, investigating whether the most-flooded neighborhoods took longer to repopulate than neighborhoods with less damage. The answer is certainly yes (GNOCDC 2010), but this question obscures another, more significant question: why have the most-flooded neighborhoods recovered at such vastly different rates? As I discuss in Chapter 4, for example, Broadmoor and the Lower Ninth Ward were both 100% flooded with a minimum depth of 6 feet of floodwaters, but they have shown wildly different levels of rebuilding and repopulation since 2005. In this thesis I have examined this disparity from the perspective of post-storm civic involvement and its relationship to a neighborhood’s ability to both acquire resources from the city of New Orleans and to act autonomously. There are, however, many other variables that affect disparities in recovery
amongst the city’s most flooded neighborhoods. Studies like Weil (2010), which include all of the city’s neighborhoods, can further illuminate the connections between civic involvement and neighborhood recovery. Continuing to study the long-term effects of Hurricane Katrina is important to tracking the inequalities that continue to infuse neighborhood politics. Furthermore, incorporating interviews with members of these organizations provides crucial insights into how they are affected by and engage with formal and informal political structures in post-Katrina New Orleans.

In November 2010, the New Orleans City Council voted to request that the City Planning Commission establish a system for neighborhood participation. This new program is intended to foster community participation in city planning and initiatives. While enormous amounts of civic participation are already occurring in New Orleans, the neighborhood participation program will attempt to regulate and standardize citizen involvement in city planning processes, and will be based on “all previous work completed on citizen participation in New Orleans and best practices nation-wide” (Substitute Resolution R-10-439 2010). While a rich body of scholarship recognizes that the decisions made by planners are inherently value-laden, the professionalized arm of the field is often apt to assume the existence of a set of universal values that informs ethical judgments (Watson 2006; Ford 2010). Watson argues that planning interventions applied by (many) professional planners, in the traditions of liberal democracy and neoliberalism, are reliant on assumptions derived from an aggregation of certain individual’s choices about what is good, normal, and ethical (Watson 2006). Added to these assumptions is the notion that universal values will apply to all places and people, especially when planners are working within the single nation context of the US. Whether or not New Orleans’ neighborhood participation program will equalize neighborhood organizations’ influence over political decisions, and whether it represents a token or progressive policy will depend on the extent to which it
engenders equal power-sharing between neighborhoods and also between neighborhoods and the city (Arnstein 1969). For example, A Community Voice and similar organizations have been fostering community engagement in marginalized neighborhoods since long before Hurricane Katrina, but these organizations themselves have been repeatedly marginalized in formal planning processes. The goal of the neighborhood participation program should be what Swyngedouw and Moulaert (2010, 219) call the “fermenting” of socially emancipatory practices in urban neighborhoods that are often the sites of inequality and exclusion.

This thesis has considered community participation in New Orleans’ governance through the perspective of the new autonomy and new responsibilities that these groups have assumed since Hurricane Katrina. Structurally, this process appears to open up a “third space” (Rose 1999) in which community participation becomes an important element in how New Orleans is governed. Herbert (2005), however, cautions that community is not a “sturdy support” for this governance process; rather, it cannot sustain an endless offloading of state responsibilities and is better seen as a trap door. “Community thus exists as a false floor, ready to collapse when laden with excessive political expectations” (Herbert 2005, 853). While the enormous growth of civic participation since Katrina has empowered many communities and individuals in New Orleans, this participation should not replace the demand for city governance practices that treat all neighborhoods equitably in the recovery process and future development. Too often in New Orleans’ recovery, the city’s lack of commitment to marginalized neighborhoods has been offset by local community and outside nonprofit groups that pick up the slack. Similarly, the material effects of the State Bond Commission’s blockage of affordable housing subsidies were offset by intrepid developers and nonprofit groups that found funding elsewhere to assist low-income people during the year before the construction moratorium was lifted.
Progressive actions outside of formal governance structures should be celebrated and encouraged, but at the same time must not legitimize the inequitable politics of post-Katrina New Orleans’ governance structures. Herbert (2005, 853) writes that “states can…ostensibly off-load responsibilities to communities with minimal political cost because this can be legitimated as strengthening local control.” Yet he finds that this effort at legitimation “falls flat” with many community residents, who are suspicious of the state’s effort to endow communities with ever-greater responsibilities for their own governance and well-being. While New Orleans’ citizens have taken on these responsibilities with passion, in many cases they were compelled to do so by the threat of their neighborhoods being declared as unviable and thus not deserving of city services. As urban planning in New Orleans transitions from hurricane rebuilding to broader-based planning for the longer term, neighborhood-based groups will face a similar transition in their purposes and goals. In operating within a city government that since 2005 has placed so much governance responsibility at the neighborhood scale, community-based groups must decide whether to accept these responsibilities as the new status quo or to pressure the city to provide them with more services and resources. In the background of these negotiations, as always, are the historical inequalities in the division of resources between New Orleans neighborhoods. Community-based organizations operating in these neighborhoods have gained new skills and influence since Hurricane Katrina, but continue to face persisting inequalities in their ability to get things done within the formal governance structures of New Orleans.
Works Cited


United States Supreme Court Reports. (1873). “Slaughter-house cases.” 83 US 36.


### Appendix: Table of interviews and meetings attended in New Orleans

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution/Resident/Meeting</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center</td>
<td>November 4, 2010</td>
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<td>Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center</td>
<td>November 5, 2010</td>
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<td>Public Presentation: Army Corps of Engineers IHNC Levees and Floodwalls (IERS 11.b Tier 2)</td>
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<td>Resident of St. Bernard Parish</td>
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<td>Meeting of the New Orleans Board of Zoning Adjustments</td>
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<td>Neighborhood Housing Services</td>
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<td>Resident of Audubon Neighborhood</td>
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<td>Resident of Audubon Neighborhood</td>
<td>November 13, 2010</td>
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<td>Gray Line “Hurricane Katrina Tour”</td>
<td>November 13, 2010</td>
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<td>HRI Properties</td>
<td>November 14, 2010</td>
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<td>Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans</td>
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<td>Meeting of the Broadmoor Improvement Association</td>
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<td>A Community Voice</td>
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<td>Resident and business-owner in Central Business District Neighborhood</td>
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<td>Resident of Seventh Ward Neighborhood</td>
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<td>HRI Properties</td>
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<td>November 22, 2010</td>
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<td>New Orleans City Planning Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting of the Louisiana Select Committee on Hurricane Recovery</td>
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