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How Neoliberalism Failed Public Housing in New Orleans

by

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Introduction

Public housing in New Orleans is currently and has long been associated with black poverty and criminality and government mismanagement. Although at its origins in New Orleans public housing did not have these connotations, the preexisting segregation structures already employed in the private housing market laid the foundation for an equally racially stratified public housing market. The economy of New Orleans, as a tourist destination first, city second, heavily informed the patterns of internal movement and residence displacement that would create a significant low-income black working class. Because the French Quarter was heavily commercialized, much of the housing near the Quarter was turned into rental housing to the benefit of white homeowners. Because the tourism of New Orleans required the participation of those same low-income black laborers, they were forced to rent from white property owners in order to stay close enough to the Quarter to provide labor but not so close as to spoil the white tourists' colonial fantasy. This economic system, and the fledgling attempt to diversify it, both benefitted from the post-war economic boom and suffered from the economic crises of the 1970s. The economic crises coincided with the political and social upheavals of the 1960s (particularly 1968), which created an upwardly mobile black middle class but a downwardly mobile black lower class. This class stratification in the black community, particularly in a majority black city such as New Orleans, brought about a complementary sociopolitical system by which the capitalist class (working nationally with the Republican Party) collaborated with the new black ascendancy to legitimate their neoliberal economic policies. Following the "neoliberal turn" of the 1980s, the solution to poverty becomes deconcentration, which is antithetical to public housing. So, HOPE VI, the leading vehicle for public housing policy from 1992 to today, becomes tasked with the dissolution of public housing and the implementation of

a publicly funded, privately owned series of mixed income housing. This process is largely slow to take over as the political cohesion among public housing residents remained strong until Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina provided housing “reformists” the political shock they needed to act swiftly to implement the housing change they had planned for nearly fifteen years prior. Over ten years after Hurricane Katrina, the overwhelming conclusion is that, much like many public housing activists predicted prior to the hurricane, HOPE VI and the neoliberal “market solution” to poverty not only failed to reduce or eliminate poverty, but in fact succeeded in regurgitating decades-old patterns of race and wage discrimination.

Public Housing is Introduced to the Segregated Housing Market of New Orleans (1900 - 1945)

The private housing market of New Orleans, as those of many Southern cities following the end of Reconstruction, was racially segregated. Although there are many ways by which segregation was upheld, ranging from informal threats of violence to legal mandates, several citywide measures stand out as having been particularly transformative and influential. To understand how public housing became – and remains – segregated, one must first understand how the city itself became segregated as it is in that context public housing was created. As an extension of an already segregated housing sector, public housing provided a racially uneven foundation for further anti-poverty measures in the city.

City Planning, Racial Zoning, Redlining, and the “Racial Veto”

Residential zoning practices have their roots in a 1908 Los Angeles ordinance intended to protect residential districts from the encroaching industrial nuisances of the city. From there, states rapidly legislated for the advance of cities’ power “to regulate the height, area, location, and use of buildings in any designated part or parts of their corporation limits.” The United States Supreme Court eventually suppressed these practices in *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Corporation* in 1926.¹ Soon, social reformers saw the opportunity to use zoning to enhance, change, or otherwise affect social change within cities. While planner Benjamin Marsh optimistically envisioned zoning as a means of protecting residents from the physical nuisances of industrialization, Yale Rabin wrote, “what began as a means of improving the blighted

¹ Silver, C. (1997). The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities. In *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows*, p. 1

physical environment in which people lived and worked [became] a mechanism for protecting property values and excluding the undesirables.”²

In the South, zoning was used in Baltimore in 1910 to reinforce racial segregation; from there, the success of segregation by zoning facilitated its widespread adoption in the South. This early success was bolstered by the Supreme Court decision in *Hopkins v. City of Richmond* upholding a residential segregation ordinance in Richmond, Virginia, in 1915. The court found that the ordinance did not deny property rights because it allowed both black and white property ownership in “mixed neighborhoods.”³ In reality, this ruling allowed whites to buy property in black neighborhoods, promoting a system of absentee landlordism. Although technically blacks could buy property in white neighborhoods, the threat of violence and obstructive costs prevented this from happening with any consistency. For those who did seek better housing in “white neighborhoods,” those neighborhoods quickly turned black as whites fled and, as provided for by *Hopkins*, rented, rather than sold, their newly vacated houses. Without the construction of new houses, black residents of Richmond were increasingly forced to rent from white landlords or remain in their increasingly impoverished black neighborhoods.

In a unanimous decision, the court ruled in *Buchanan v. Warley* “the denial of the full use of property ‘from a feeling of race hostility’ constituted inadequate grounds to uphold the Louisville racial zoning ordinance.”⁴ In the wake of the *Buchanan* decision in 1917, lower courts overturned previous ordinances, such as Richmond’s. Despite this setback, the South persisted and began a campaign of “expulsive zoning, which permitted ‘the intrusion into black neighborhoods of disruptive incompatible uses that have diminished the quality and undermined

² Silver (1997), p. 1

³ Silver, C. (2016). Zoning in 20th-Century American Cities. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.209.

⁴ Silver (2016), p. 6

the stability of those neighborhoods.”⁵ So whereas the original zoning ordinances were created to protect residential zones from disruptive industrial nuisances such as highways and polluting factories, this “expulsive zoning” worked in the opposite way to allow these nuisances to infiltrate black neighborhoods in an effort to “expel” blacks from the land.

Similarly, cities began to make use of professional city planning as a way to engender “racially informed” zoning ordinances. Atlanta, Birmingham, Charleston, and New Orleans and other Southern cities embraced the use of city planning in the 1920s to resurrect and recreate the effects of those racial zoning ordinances effectively neutralized by *Buchanan*. In 1921, New Orleans acquired zoning authority to “evade the [*Buchanan v. Warley*] ruling of the Supreme Court.”⁶ By 1927, New Orleans became the first Southern city to create an official city planning commission when it created the Vieux Carré Commission “to protect the old colonial city from ‘the encroachment of modern business’” and hired Harland Bartholomew to create an official city plan.⁷ The result of the advocacy of the Vieux Carré Commission and city planner Bartholomew was a system enacting segregation by “racial veto.” A New Orleans ordinance

*...[made] it unlawful for any white person to establish his home or residence in a negro community, or portion of the city inhabited principally by negroes, or for any negro to establish his home or residence in a white community, or portion of the city inhabited principally by white people, “except on the written consent of a majority of the persons of the opposite race inhabiting such community, or portion of the city to be affected.”*⁸

⁵ Silver (2016), pp. 1-2

⁶ Silver (2016), p. 9

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ *Tyler v. Harmon*, 158 La. 439, 448 (La. 1925)

The ordinance was presented as segregating the city “in the interest of public peace and welfare.” The argument that brought the case to court was between a white homeowner on Audubon Street, a white neighborhood, who sued another white homeowner on the other side of Audubon Street for intending to rent part of his cottage to a black tenant without receiving the written consent of the greater “white community.” The Louisiana Supreme Court found that “there is nothing in either the Fourteenth Amendment or the Acts of Congress suggestive of social equality between the white race and the colored race, or forbidding the states to discourage amalgamation or social intercourse between the white and colored race” and further argued that the ordinance was supported by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. The decision quoted from the dissenting *Plessy* opinion to show “that the opposition to such legislation as this is not founded upon the idea of any actual discrimination against the colored race in the matter of any civil or political right, but is founded upon the idea that such legislation is not within the police power of the states...”⁹

Finally, the court decided, “the segregation ordinance, in contest, is only another kind of zoning ordinance,” further exposing the racial veto as an extension of the racial zoning ordinances and, in the wake of *Buchanan*, a way to defy Supreme Court orders against the practice.¹⁰ (*Tyler v. Harmon*, 1925). The court continued, “since it is well settled by the ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that the drawing of the color line does not make the law discriminative, or violate the Fourteenth Amendment . . . our conclusion is that the statutes and the ordinance are valid.”¹¹ The ordinance was eventually struck down after another appeal in the 1927 U.S.

⁹ *Tyler v. Harmon*, 158 La. 439, 448 (La. 1925)

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *ibid*

Supreme Court case *Harmon v. Tyler*, which cited *Buchanan v. Warley* in its decision. Although the ordinance was made null, the idea of the “racial veto” persisted.¹²

Just a few years after the *Buchanan* and *Harmon* decisions, the United States was hit with a major housing crisis as part of the Great Depression. Without wages, people could no longer afford their houses and even for those still earning wages, houses were too expensive to maintain. As part of the New Deal Emergency Act, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) was created to protect homeowners against foreclosures and to make the repurchase of foreclosed homes easier by underwriting mortgages. As part of the program, the HOLC divided “investments” (people looking to receive mortgage loans) into four categories describing the “risk” associated with the investment. Most banks and savings and loans programs also operated within the HOLC risk assessment framework.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), also created during the New Deal, used the risk assessment categories created by the HOLC within the private sector. Banks and loan services would not make loans for properties rated below the second category; “occupancy by racial minorities [was categorized in the lowest tier] with other nuisances to be guarded against for their impact on an area, such as the presence of stables or pig pens.”¹³ This practice, called “redlining,” contributed to the concentration of poverty within urban neighborhoods as whites

¹² In *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority*, the “racial veto” reappeared forty years after the original New Orleans ordinance. The housing authority, whose applicants were over 90 percent black, vetoed the construction of new public housing projects in white areas “99.5 percent” of the time but only ten percent of the time when located in black areas. Accordingly, the vetoes were found to be in violation of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Additionally, in 2007, a proposed bill provided that the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency “shall not approve or otherwise take action to allocate housing tax credit or approve or otherwise take action to implement any housing program in any parish **unless the agency has first received the approval of the parish governing authority.**” In parishes with majority white residents, the parish governing authority becomes an institution of white opinion. This resolution ultimately failed to pass, but the consideration of such restrictions mirrors that initial ordinance and reflects a sustained interest in segregating New Orleans. (See Seichshnaydre, p. 665-667)

¹³ Gonzalez-Perez, M. C. (2003). A House Divided: Public Housing Policy in New Orleans. *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, 44(4), p. 459

who could afford mortgages (with the help of federally-sponsored loans) left the city and black would-be homeowners were unequivocally denied mortgages in spite of financial ability.¹⁴

The Housing Act of 1937

Even with the financial power granted by FHA loans, the housing crisis and the larger economic crisis persisted. The Great Depression created a need for government assistance both to the state and to its people. While governor, Huey Long hesitated to rely on federal financial assistance even as the city of New Orleans “spent less on public assistance than any of Louisiana’s thirty-one metropolitan areas and ... provided no aid whatsoever to its African American poor.” The city did not create a Department of Public Welfare until 1934, five years after the beginning of the depression.¹⁵ Then, invested in providing for the welfare of those affected by the depression, New Orleans became a point of contempt between Senator Long, who fought to retain state sovereignty over welfare programs despite meager financial ability, and the federal Public Works Administration (PWA) headed by Harold Ickes, Roosevelt’s Secretary of the Interior.

Ickes, much like Roosevelt, was politically opposed to Long and began a punitive campaign to rid himself of Long by denying requests from Louisiana cities for PWA loans to be used to construct public housing. When Long refused to bend, Ickes began to turn over much of Louisiana’s federal-state liaison positions to anti-Longites to undermine Long’s decision-making power from within his own state. Mere months before Long’s assassination in 1935, Ickes defunded all public housing projects in Louisiana; three months after the assassination, in December of 1935, Ickes still refused to reinstate funds to New Orleans. While Ickes and Long

¹⁴ Wilson, W. (2008). The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty. *Political Science Quarterly*, 123(4), p. 557

¹⁵ Gonzalez-Perez, p. 451

sparred in Washington, demand for public housing continued to stay high, so Louisiana created state programs without federal funding. The Louisiana Housing Act provided for the creation of the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) on March 15, 1937.¹⁶

Soon after, HANO began to negotiate directly with the PWA for loans to build public housing developments because Ickes still refused to work with the Louisiana state government. The successful HANO negotiations resulted in about \$30 million for the construction of two white and four black developments (totaling just under 5,000 units) as well as the clearance of slums to be replaced by the developments. Public housing now faced opposition at the national level: real estate boards, the banking industry, the lumber industry, and several other *laissez-faire* enthusiast groups protested public ownership of housing because “free enterprise was the foundation of the American economy . . . public housing was socialistic . . . and government housing would quickly and dramatically reduce the demand for private housing.”¹⁷ Despite initial protests, once the state-level government had been replaced with anti-Long liberals willing to work with the private sector, HANO attorney Guste noted that there emerged “a complete attitude of cooperation, interest and desire for the carrying into effect of the projects contemplated.”¹⁸

The idea behind public housing was that, at a time when “joblessness forced either the abandonment of homes or the forgoing of improvements [and] even those employed could barely maintain their dwellings,”¹⁹ the Public Housing Program and HANO would provide for affordable housing to improve the quality of low-income earners’ lives. However, it was not long before now-familiar problems began to plague the program. HANO reported in its 1937-1938

¹⁶ Gonzalez-Perez, p. 454

¹⁷ Gonzalez-Perez, p. 456

¹⁸ Gonzalez-Perez, p. 456

¹⁹ Gonzalez-Perez, p. 444

survey that the population of New Orleans had grown from 287,104 in 1900 to 458,792 in 1930, and to nearly 500,000 in 1938. Forty percent of the housing in New Orleans was classified by HANO as “substandard” and about 225,000 people occupied “indecent, unsafe, and unsanitary” units. To accommodate the swelling population and increasingly indecent housing, the number of public housing units grew to more than 145,000, but nearly 63,000 of these units were unfit for accommodation.²⁰

It is apparent that from its inception (or at least within a few years of it), public housing projects in New Orleans have been plagued by substandard conditions. But instead of fixing these inadequate units, HANO built more substandard housing. Black demand for housing increased as white social mobility increased; white projects vacated more quickly while black residents were applying in higher numbers and for longer terms. The commitment to segregation directly affected the conditions of New Orleans’ public housing projects. According to historian Edward Haas,

*HANO, the New Orleans housing authority . . . was remiss in its obligation to relocate black families who lived in areas designated for slum clearance. After the city razed a dilapidated section in central New Orleans to make way for [a] proposed union passenger terminal, the housing authority failed to provide new dwellings for the evicted residents who had sacrificed their homes to the cause of progress.*²¹

The 1937 Housing Act required a one-for-one ratio of public housing units constructed to replace slum units demolished. Blacks and whites both needed public housing, but blacks made

²⁰ Gonzalez-Perez, p. 457

²¹ Gonzalez-Perez, p. 458

up the majority of residents in slums cleared for the construction of public housing, meaning that many more blacks now needed housing than whites. Despite the fact that black demand far outpaced white demand, the “separate but equal” segregation laws required the creation of essentially twice as many projects because for each black project, there needed to be a complementary white project and vice versa. This financial drain was worsened by the need for duplicate staffs, including social workers needed to screen applicants for “good character.”²² So in order to accommodate all the black demand for housing, HANO would have had to either abandon the segregation laws and allow black residency in white projects or gain access to much more funding to continue creating segregated projects.

As the threat of war in Europe began to reach America, the defense industries worked to resuscitate the economy and whites were able to return to work (and private homeownership) in droves. However, many blacks were barred from industrial employment, were relegated to inadequate wages, and were thus stranded in increasingly crowded projects while white projects stood vacant. “Once the majority of tenants were black, public housing became something other than it had been before. A cultural shift occurred that stigmatized the project, making it more undesirable, and thus less open to improvement.”²³

After the war, the 1949 Housing Act provided for “a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.”²⁴ However, when contrasted with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights just a few months prior, neither housing act sufficiently defined housing as a *right*, leaving public housing vulnerable to decades of its own “boom and bust” cycles. Well meaning provisions, such as income tax breaks for homeowners making mortgage

²² Gonzalez-Perez, p. 458

²³ Gonzalez-Perez, p. 460

²⁴ Gardner, T. M., Irwin, A., & Peterson, C. W. (2013, August 29). No shelter from the storm: Reclaiming the right to housing and protecting the health of vulnerable communities in post-Katrina New Orleans.

payments, actually served to further stratify homeowners from renters, high-income earners from low-income earners, and whites from blacks.

New Orleans is Economically Defined by its Tourism (1945 - 1980)

Historic Economic Dependence on Black Culture and Labor

The economic vitality of New Orleans has long been dependent upon the tourism industry which itself is dependent upon the exploitation of black labor and culture. The choice to focus on the French Quarter as the hub of New Orleans culture, and therefore tourism as the basis of its economy, directly contributed to the further marginalization of black New Orleanians – both literally (geographically) and economically. Black neighborhoods and residences were continually pushed further from the Quarter to make room for lucrative tourist-oriented business in which black laborers were expected to “perform” their culture for white tourists far removed from the original cultural context. This was illustrated even before the twentieth century in the case of Storyville, the infamous New Orleans prostitution district.

“In the nineteenth century, visitors used colorful phrases such as the ‘great southern Babylon’ and ‘a perfect Sodom’ to describe [New Orleans]. ... Throughout the twentieth century, otherwise upright Americans, though they might be reluctant to own up to it at home, flocked to the city precisely because of its reputation as an ‘exotic, erotic hot spot.’”²⁵ Following the Civil War, New Orleans garnered a near-mythical reputation as a cosmopolitan oasis amidst the agrarian South, a racial haven where “free blacks” and “quadroons” walked the streets with whites since its colonial days. The pull of New Orleans was heightened in the 1850s with the passage of several ordinances legalizing specific forms of prostitution. It wasn’t until 1897 when

²⁵ Long, A. (2007). Poverty Is the New Prostitution: Race, Poverty, and Public Housing in Post-Katrina New Orleans. *The Journal of American History*, 94(3), p. 797

Councilman Sidney Story created the infamous “Storyville” prostitution district of New Orleans, in an effort to “clean up” the French Quarter, that New Orleans tourism became truly ubiquitous with racial and gender exploitation.²⁶

Of course, there was not an empty plot of land behind the French Quarter waiting to be turned into Storyville. As rumors of the decision spread before the ordinance passed, developers flooded the area, ready to capitalize on the anticipated clientele. Landlords increasingly subdivided rental properties while other residences were transformed into brothels and still others were demolished in favor of barrooms, restaurants, and other edifices of vice. “One landlord admitted that rents in the neighborhood rose ‘from one hundred to three hundred percent’ in the year leading up to the passage of the ordinance.”²⁷ By 1908, a railroad had been constructed through Basin Street, one of the streets bordering Storyville, to further center Storyville as a hub of hedonism and capital.

As with most things in New Orleans, Storyville was segregated. It represented the first use of mandatory residential segregation based not on race but gender and profession. The provision of the law mandated that every woman engaging in prostitution must live within the declared boundaries of Storyville.²⁸ Of course, the commercial exploits lining the streets and the brothels themselves were segregated based on race. And while several white “madams” (brothel owners) became exorbitantly wealthy, it was mostly white landlords who prospered. Most of the previous tenants, many of them black or immigrants, moved several blocks away to a separate, smaller prostitution district dubbed “black Storyville.”

Storyville survived until 1917 when “the upsurge of patriotism, conservatism, and cultural piety that accompanied U.S. entry into World War I led to the closure of vice districts

²⁶ Long, p. 795

²⁷ Long, p. 799

²⁸ Long, p. 800

nationwide.”²⁹ As Storyville was no longer legally sanctioned, businesses filtered out and, with the persistence of prostitution in the area, the land once again became “undesirable,” allowing for the return of black and immigrant residents.

After a brief period of prosperity during the 1920s, New Orleans was ravaged by the economic disaster of the Great Depression. Despite New Deal employment (including slum clearance and public housing construction), the economy floundered until it was again time for war. Naval bases, shipyards, and factories sprouted in and around New Orleans, attracting much-needed laborers and investors. Andrew Higgins, perhaps a little too optimistically, called New Orleans “the great metropolis of the future.”³⁰ Mere months after the war, deLesseps Story “Chep” Morrison was elected mayor after campaigning to take advantage of the wartime windfall to trounce the city’s reputation for indulgence.

Unfortunately, the economic momentum dwindled after the war because of an excess of unskilled labor and an uncompetitive investment market when compared to other Southern metropolises like Atlanta or Charleston. In this economic vacuum, a previously quiet preservationist movement emerged to revive the tourism-based economy New Orleans once enjoyed. Since the 1920s, preservationists had been working to protect the French Quarter’s appearance, supported by professionals, middle and upper class women, “permanent” tourists, and progressive whites. These cultural gatekeepers focused their attention on the French Quarter as representative of a romantic, antebellum “time gone by” which they desperately wanted to preserve. Thus, they worked to solidify the importance of the French Quarter to the character and, therefore, economy of the entire city.³¹

²⁹ Long, p. 800

³⁰ Souther, J. (2007). The Disneyfication of New Orleans: The French Quarter as Facade in a Divided City. *The Journal of American History*, 94(3), p. 805

³¹ Souther, p. 806

The French Quarter Becomes Synonymous with New Orleans

Between World War II and Hurricane Katrina, the struggle between aesthetic preservationists and opportunistic developers defined the landscape of the French Quarter and solidified its place as the economic heart of New Orleans. The struggle encompassed preservationists' desire to retain colonial aesthetics and the city's "history," developers' desire to commercialize the valuable land, locals' desire for employment, and tourists' desire for a "Creole Disneyland."³² The preservationists' interests, however, were as shallow as the stucco they venerated; just a few blocks away from the French Quarter was the now-forgotten "black Storyville" district. Cultural landmarks in the neighborhood included Louis Armstrong's childhood home, the Iroquois Theatre, and the Eagle Saloon, essential pieces of music history, black history, and New Orleans history. Although the buildings' importance to New Orleans history can hardly be overstated, their geographic distance from the French Quarter greatly diminished the preservationists' interests. As such, most cultural landmarks "across the color line"³³ were subject to demolition, restructuring, and commercialization unimpeded by preservationists. Although black culture provided for much of the "mystique" that attracted tourists to New Orleans, the real living black residents of New Orleans were pushed aside and left to fend off disruptive developments on their own.

By the 1960s, the Vieux Carré Commission (VCC) held significant political power within New Orleans. The VCC had been established in 1936 by the city of New Orleans in an amendment to the 1921 Louisiana state constitution with the following purpose (emphasis added):

³² Souther, p. 811

³³ The "color line" here refers to the physical line of demarcation (created by Rampart Street) between the "white" Quarter and the surrounding black neighborhoods.

... the preservation of such buildings in the Vieux Carré [French Quarter] section of the City of New Orleans as, in the opinion of [VCC], shall be deemed to have **architectural and historical value**, and which buildings should be preserved **for the benefit of the people** ... for the public welfare and in order that **the quaint and distinctive character of the Vieux Carré section of the City of New Orleans may not be injuriously affected** ... and in order that **a reasonable degree of control may be exercised over the architecture of private and semi-public buildings erected on or abutting the public streets of said Vieux Carré section...**”³⁴

During the 1960s the VCC directed the demolition of buildings that did not match the colonial aesthetic decided upon by the commission; additionally, the commission strictly dictated the appearance of new constructions in, around, or otherwise near the French Quarter in order to preserve as much as possible the colonial fantasy the commission sought to create. Soon enough, developers sought to capitalize on the effort to re-colonize the Quarter and argued that “new hotels dressed with lacy iron balconies and gas lamps reinforced rather than detracted from the Quarter’s *tout ensemble*, that static, romanticized notion of authentic cityscape.”³⁵

Two events represent most clearly the disconnect between whites and blacks, residents and tourists, over the fate of the rapid French Quarter commercialization of the 1960s. A white preservationist, Martha Robinson, protested a hotel developer’s plans to move St. Mary’s, a black Catholic girls’ school, because she associated the school with “quadroon balls” which never actually took place there. A local black newspaper responded by accusing Robinson and like-minded activists of “holding fast to the monuments of . . . antebellum southern traditions”

³⁴ City of New Orleans v. Board of Directors of Louisiana State Museum, 98- 1170, (La. 1999), 739 So.2d 748, 757.

³⁵ Souther, p. 807

and called for demolition.³⁶ The historian Pamela Tyler wrote that Robinson was “a deeply committed civic activist, and yet she, a descendent of planters, also shared in the local inclination for summoning a romantic past to guide the modernization of New Orleans.”³⁷

Similarly, preservationists and committed citizens underwent a massive campaign to protest the location of Interstate 10 near the Quarter, culminating in a VCC lawsuit against the city and the highway department in 1967. They argued that the introduction of a highway into their colonial fantasyland would subject them to “a super-modern kaleidoscopic view . . . of varicolored vehicles by day and glaring headlights by night.”³⁸ The same highway threatened a major boulevard in the Tremé neighborhood bordering the Quarter, but the black community living there did not have nearly comparable political cohesion and so was unable to successfully protest the highway. This further reinforced the “color line” now dividing the black Tremé and the white, commercial Quarter.

The pursuit of tourism served to redistribute the demographics of New Orleans around the French Quarter. As land values increased and residences were demolished for faux-historic commercial exploits,³⁹ lower class people, black and white, were expelled from the Quarter. However, the tourism industry increasingly relied on black unskilled labor to “perform authenticity” for white tourists in a modern minstrelsy. Low-income black laborers were exiled from their historic residences only to be invited back to the Quarter to serve white tourists at low service-sector wages.

Despite Mayor Ernest “Dutch” Morial’s effort in the 1970s to re-industrialize New Orleans, the World’s Fair he hosted was much more successful and memorable. The subsequent collapse

³⁶ Souther, p. 807

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ Souther, p. 808

³⁹ These exploits included the construction of a “cultural center” surrounding Congo Square, an area that served historically as a meeting and recreational space for enslaved black people.

of the oil industry also devastated the fledgling industries Mayor Morial nurtured, causing a 65,000-person population loss over a five-year period.⁴⁰ As middle class whites fled for the suburbs in the wake of the oil crisis, tourism spending increased, trapping more blacks in low-wage service-sector jobs located in the unattainable white Quarter. Meanwhile, the value of the land on which many public housing projects (particularly the Iberville project) was rapidly increasing due to their proximity to the Quarter. Questions about how to get rid of the projects and salvage the land were being asked.

The tourism of New Orleans has consistently been reliant upon the exploitation of black labor; whether that is black and “quadroon” sex workers in Storyville or black musicians, artists, cooks, and street vendors in the French Quarter is simply a matter of time period. While preservationist efforts followed a scripted notion of historical reverence, they were undermined by unequal actions within the Quarter in contrast to the surrounding black neighborhoods where culture was actually created. And despite rallying against the “modernization” of the Quarter, whites eventually found the tourist cash cow had grown a will of its own. The commercialization of the riverfront represented an unruly tourism-driven economy eventually unresponsive even to local whites; Mardi Gras became a public festival of lewdness and drunkenness for tourists to indulge in – long forgotten is the Catholic tradition. The selfish maintenance of a permanently nostalgic city “had turned New Orleans into a ersatz caricature of itself in which, as one newspaperman lamented, the locals’ ‘main job will be to lend an air of authenticity to a city that once had it in spades.’”⁴¹

New Orleans’ unilateral economy, especially one dependent upon the reputation of the city, created a precarious situation in which something as fickle as public opinion could leave the

⁴⁰ Souther, pp. 810-811

⁴¹ Souther, p. 810

entire city financially hemorrhaging; tourism has the potential to be a ridiculously lucrative means of capital accumulation at the exploitation of black culture and laborers, but it also has the potential to leave the city uncharacteristically high and dry (still at the cost of the black, low wage laborer). No matter the social ill, the market would never favor the black laborer; despite this, a new economic contender would paradoxically purport to support the individual without sacrificing the private accumulation of capital (made possible only by the exploitation of collective labor).

Nationwide Loss of Faith in Keynesian Economics Leads to Embrace of Neoliberalism (1960 - 1990)

Milton Friedman, on the economic crises of the 1970s, said, “when the time came that you had to change ... there was an alternative ready there to be picked up.”⁴² The “stagflation” crisis of the 1970s coupled with the oil crisis led to a loss of faith in Keynesian practices; solutions to stagnation worsened inflation and solutions to inflation worsened stagnation. At the same time, the political upheaval of the Civil Rights Movement and similar rights movements across the 1960s and 1970s likewise generated a desire for change. The sociopolitical shifts of the late 1970s coincided to allow for the rise of an “all-in-one” ideology promising to assuage reactionaries and social progressives alike while returning to an economic conservatism that had not been seen in America since before the New Deal.

Beginnings of a New Center: Neoliberalism

Although the name suggests a simple return to classical liberalism or purist *laissez-faire* policy, neoliberalism in the United States is defined in large part by the political context in which

⁴² Monbiot, G. (2016, April 15). Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems. From <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>

it rises: while the New Right clung to economic conservatism, it also promoted a reactionary view of social justice; on the other hand, the New Left was willing to accommodate a popular, reform-oriented plan for social justice, but retained Roosevelt's Keynesian ideas of economic justice. Neoliberalism purported to present a middle path for those who "still believe[d] in liberty and justice and a fair chance for all, in mercy for the afflicted and help for the down and out ... [but] no longer automatically favor[ed] unions and big government or oppose the military and big business."⁴³

The nature of a middle-of-the-road, "economically conservative, socially liberal" movement creates a complexly contradictory ideology; an ideology that is economically conservative is devoted to the preservation of capitalism and the free market yet a socially liberal ideology is devoted to the equality of marginalized peoples. What follows is then an ideology that is only superficially dedicated to social justice. Without addressing the economic causes, how can the social effects be mitigated and ultimately eradicated? Without denouncing and defeating the causes (e.g. capitalism) of social ills (e.g. poverty), there can be no economic, racial, or gender equality, much less liberation.

What is Neoliberalism? (1980 - 2008)

"Economics are the method, but **the object is to change the soul.**"⁴⁴

Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek first coined the term "neoliberalism" at a Paris meeting in 1938 as they grew discontented with the perceived collectivism of the New Deal in

⁴³ Peters, C. (1982, September 5). A Neo-Liberal's Manifesto. *The Washington Monthly*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1982/09/05/a-neo-liberals-manifesto/21cf41ca-e60e-404e-9a66-124592c9f70d/>

⁴⁴ Harvey, D. (2007). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 23

America and the burgeoning welfare state in the United Kingdom.⁴⁵ Hayek believed strong government planning inevitably crushed individualism and led further to “totalitarianism”; as such, he promoted the will of the free market as an impartial governing body lightly relegated by a state to prevent monopolies.⁴⁶ By 1947, Hayek created the Mont Pelerin Society, an ideological front used later to funnel money from millionaires and foundations such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Centre for Policy Studies, and the Adam Smith Institute to economists, professors, and students at the universities of Chicago and Virginia.⁴⁷

As neoliberalism spread to America, Milton Friedman stood out for defining monopolies not as abuses of the market, but as rewards for efficiency.⁴⁸ Because of the successes of the New Deal and Keynesian practices, neoliberalism remained at the fringe in America until the crises of the 1970s. From a practical standing, neoliberalism originated in Chile following Pinochet’s coup d’état. The economists at the University of Chicago (including Friedman), steeped in neoliberal ideology for several decades, were tasked with the wholesale restructuring of the Chilean economy. After the assassination of reformist socialist Salvador Allende, Pinochet and “the Chicago Boys” faced a militant working class empowered by labor unions, nationalized public industries, and indigenous rights.⁴⁹ As a fascist dictator, Pinochet found little trouble restructuring not only the economy of Chile but also the social and cultural environment of Chile. Where before indigenous and resident laborers were protected by strong labor unions, laborers were soon forced to accept low wages via the threat of unemployment; a docile labor force accustomed to low wages lured multinational corporations which quickly built branches

⁴⁵ Monbiot, Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ Harvey, pp. 8-9

and headquarters in Chile, eager to take advantage of the piteous labor laws they were too weak to enact in their own countries.⁵⁰ The presence of foreign companies then necessitated a shift in the industrial economy from internal improvement to massive exports, which left Chile, as well as much of Latin America, with insurmountable debts.

From this “practice run,” neoliberalism further adapted for a western implementation in the wake of the 1970s economic collapse and subsequent loss of faith in Keynesian economics. David Harvey puts forth the following definition of neoliberalism:

*Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that **human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.** The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture.⁵¹*

From this definition three distinct and complementary tenants of neoliberalism can be identified: the individualization of freedoms; the deregulation of the market; and the withering of

⁵⁰ Harvey, pp. 8-10

⁵¹ Harvey, p. 2

state social responsibilities in favor of strengthening its police powers to enforce and sustain the system. Individually, these characteristics are not *uniquely* neoliberal in nature, but the combination of the three defines neoliberalism in the American context. In accordance with these characteristics, the economic policy begets social policy in such a way that, intentionally, the two become indistinguishable.

Individualizing the Working Class, Consolidating the Capitalist Class

At its core, neoliberalism is an extension and an evolution of capitalism – it therefore shares the same contradictions inherent to capitalism. Namely, capitalism suffers from the contradiction between value produced collectively (by the working class), but extracted and owned by an individual (the capitalist). The exploitation of the laborer for the creation of profit (surplus value) is at the root of capitalism and as such is also at the root of neoliberalism. Where neoliberalism distinguishes itself from capitalism is primarily in its offer to fix social ills through market solutions. Yet, just as labor is a collective and social process,⁵² social ills (such as poverty) are also collective. It is entirely possible to employ one man, but to end unemployment is not simply the process of employing one man after another. Unemployment is a necessary tool of the capitalist to maintain low wages; if there exists a reserve labor force eager for employment at current wages, what benefit does the capitalist see in keeping the same employee with higher wages? None. So the obstacle to full employment is not the unwilling or unable laborer, nor the insufficient market opportunities, but the exploitative capitalist.

The liberation movements of the 1960s were largely informed by and predicated on calls for an expansion of personal and individual freedoms as well as some form of social justice.

⁵² Self-employment and small business ownership are unsustainable in capitalism; self-employed laborers and small business owners are eventually priced out of competition by monopolies (which accumulate wealth for an ever-shrinking number of individuals) and are then forced to participate as wage laborers in a process called *proletarianization*, or downward social mobility.

However, social justice necessitates a collective view of freedoms, which means some individual freedoms (such as free speech) must be curtailed for the greater need of the collective. Harvey points to the tensions between the “traditional left” or New Deal left, supported by organized labor, and the student movement, which demanded individual liberties in a way that would later foment the coalescence of “identity politics.”⁵³ This natural ideological split could then be exploited by a neoliberal ideology that advocated increased individual freedoms to undermine and distance the “traditional left” before, with the approval of the “new left,” accelerating individual freedoms to include corporations and businesses.

While the student movement in particular held both anti-state and anti-business views, the overwhelming collaboration between the state and capitalists led to the consolidation of business into its own “class.” For example, the Business Roundtable was an organization of CEOs “committed to the aggressive pursuit of political power for the corporation” whose corporations collectively accounted for “about one half of the GNP of the United States” during the 1970s.⁵⁴ With the capitalists collaborating with one another as well as with the state, they secured for their corporations those self-same “individual freedoms” students sought in response to the Vietnam War, reactionary violence against other liberation movements, and the state’s reticence to guarantee social justice. Thomas Edsall, a Washington journalist, described this period (the 1970s) as a time when “business refined its ability to act as a class, submerging competitive instincts in favor of joint, cooperative action in the legislative arena. Rather than individual companies seeking only special favors . . . the dominant theme in the political strategy

⁵³ Harvey, p. 41

⁵⁴ Harvey, p. 43-44

of business became a shared interest in the defeat of bills such as consumer protection and labor law reform, and in the enactment of favorable tax, regulatory and antitrust legislation.”⁵⁵

In order to carry out these political goals, like most other special interest groups, corporations sought to use the Republican Party’s established power and legitimacy as a means to their own end. Perhaps the most outstanding “red flag” of neoliberalism came in the series of Supreme Court cases guaranteeing the protection of “the right of a corporation to make unlimited money contributions to political parties and political action committees . . . under the First Amendment.”⁵⁶ Monetary limits of individual donations again necessitated the cooperation of corporations to successfully bring about a “neoliberal turn” in America. The Republican Party’s proximity to economic conservatism (classical liberalism) made it prime for corporate support, although some corporations did continue to support the Democratic Party to similarly further their ideals.

To contrast, the Democratic Party held popular support among special interest social groups, but lacked the backing of a cohesive capitalist class; the Republicans held support from a cohesive capitalist class, but lacked popular electoral support. It is then that the “New Right” was formed as a political base of evangelical Christians, white working class nationalists, and social reactionaries who could be sufficiently mobilized by the capitalist class through fears of a socioeconomic “liberalization” of America.⁵⁷ These “small government” advocates allowed the unbelievable extension of corporate powers via state mechanisms because they framed the government as a group of “liberal elites” who helped minority social groups (also causing a turn of phrase between liberal and conservative, further obfuscating the role neoliberal ideology

⁵⁵ Harvey, p. 48

⁵⁶ Harvey, p. 49

⁵⁷ Harvey, p. 51

played and continues to play in conservative sociopolitical theory).⁵⁸ The Democratic Party, although not sanctified by corporations as the Republican Party was, certainly folded to corporate interests and market deregulation by the 1990s with President Bill Clinton's welfare reform.⁵⁹

The Deregulation of the Free Market

"I don't want to abolish government. I simply want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and **drown it in the bathtub.**"⁶⁰

The deregulation of the market is perhaps the single most important tenant of neoliberalism (although certainly deregulation on its own is not unique to neoliberalism). Deregulation includes classic economic conservatism measures such as cutting and preventing government "surveillance" of the market through the dissolution of social services, business regulations, and minimum wage laws. Notably, the leading economic motivation behind shrinking and ultimately dismantling social services provided by the government is that government participation in the market puts private competitors at a disadvantage. So, to neoliberals the use of government subsidies that would otherwise fund social services to instead fund private enterprise is favorable because (ideally, in a strong neoliberal state) private enterprise is not beholden to the same responsibilities of accountability, transparency, and safety that the government (ostensibly) is in a liberal state.

From the 1984 party platforms in the middle of Reagan's terms in office to the 1996 party platforms, in the middle of Clinton's terms in office, there can be observed a convergence

⁵⁸ Harvey, p. 50

⁵⁹ Harvey, p. 51

⁶⁰ Norquist, G., & Liasson, M. (2001, May 25). Conservative Advocate. Retrieved June 30, 2017, from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1123439>

between the parties. No longer are neoliberalism and Keynesianism pitted against one another but as the 1980s progressed into the 1990s, the Democrats and Republicans came to represent complementary interpretations of the same neoliberal system. Whereas Roosevelt and Johnson acknowledged the importance of government social spending, Mondale and Clinton came to agree with Reagan that “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.”⁶¹ Similarly, a shrinking social arm of the government was accompanied by a growing police state, feverishly fueled by the Cold War, War on Poverty, War on Drugs, and later the War on Terrorism. The differences between the parties remain superficial as Democrats retain a social liberalism that is proportionate with their economic conservatism.

In its 1984 platform, the Republic Party declared, “free enterprise is fundamental to the American way of life. It is inseparable from the social, religious, political, and judicial institutions which form the bedrock of a nation dedicated to individual freedom and human rights.”⁶² Republicans even went so far as to exalt the prospect of the privatization and marketization of space: “We share President Reagan's vision of a permanent manned space station within a decade, viewing it as the first stepping stone toward creating a multi-billion dollar private economy in space.”⁶³ While Democrats in 1984 were not quite on board with the privatization of the final frontier, they began to couch their economic shift in the language of the New Deal. “As Democrats, we believe that human rights and an economy of opportunity are two sides of the same coin of justice. ... Economic justice is also economic common sense.”⁶⁴ While they are still, without saying so, relying on Roosevelt’s legacy of economic justice, there are

⁶¹ Reagan, R. "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>.

⁶² Republican Party Platforms: "Republican Party Platform of 1984," August 20, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25845>.

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ Democratic Party Platforms: "1984 Democratic Party Platform," July 16, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29608>.

qualifications and “strings attached;” economic justice is positive only *because* it benefits the economy as a whole. Above all, “[Democrats] are determined to build an America of self-sufficient, independent people.”⁶⁵

By 1996, “the era of big government [was] over. ... We need a smaller government ... Personal responsibility is the most powerful force we have to meet our challenges and shape the future we want for ourselves, for our children, and for America.”⁶⁶ Additionally, that year’s Democratic Party platform boasts, “President Clinton made the low-income housing tax credit permanent, encouraging private developers to build more affordable housing.”⁶⁷ While the LIHTC is perhaps the most promising existing policy offering affordable housing, the hesitance of federal regulation will allow the program, especially in New Orleans, to reinforce the historic lines of segregation and poverty. In the 1996 Republican Party platform, Republicans propose the elimination of the Department of Energy as well as the Department of Housing and Urban Development “to emphasize the need for greater privatization and to reduce the size of the federal government.” Additionally, they oppose “the use of taxpayer funds to provide a competitive advantage for government agencies seeking to compete with private firms in the free market.”⁶⁸ This explicit belief is the motivating factor for the destruction of the social services of the government because it is perceived as infringing upon potential profits to be made by private enterprisers in the same industry.

In 1984, the Republican Party platform applauded Reagan’s achievements: “the federal law enforcement budget [had] been increased by nearly 50 percent. We added 1,900 new

⁶⁵ Democratic Party Platforms: "1984 Democratic Party Platform," July 16, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29608>.

⁶⁶ Democratic Party Platforms: "1996 Democratic Party Platform," August 26, 1996. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29611>.

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ Republican Party Platforms: "Republican Party Platform of 1996," August 12, 1996. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25848>.

investigators and prosecutors to the federal fight against crime. We arrested more offenders and sent more of them to prison. Convictions in organized crime cases have tripled under the Reagan Administration.”⁶⁹ To compare, the 1984 Democratic Party platform argued, “neither a permissive liberalism nor a static conservatism is the answer to reducing crime. While we must eliminate those elements—like unemployment and poverty—that foster the criminal atmosphere, we must never let them be used as an excuse.”⁷⁰ In contrast with the Republicans’ top-down approach where federal money would supplement local law enforcement, the Democrats encouraged the voluntary draft of individuals into a citizen-army where every man policed his neighbor.

In 1996, the Democratic Party “believed the first responsibility of government is law and order” and that the government “must do everything [it] can to stand behind our police officers” according to that year’s platform.⁷¹ Again, the idea of a citizen-army was promoted: “If 50 citizens joined each of America's 20,000 neighborhood watch groups, we would have a citizen force of one million strong to give our police forces the backup they need.”⁷² To compare, the 1996 Republican Party platform similarly said, “most law enforcement must remain in the hands of local communities ... we support community policing.” In fact, the platform goes on to accuse Clinton and the Democratic Party of not being tough enough on crime, claiming Clinton “only” delivered 17,000 of his promised 100,000 new police officers “on the streets.”⁷³

⁶⁹ Republican Party Platforms: "Republican Party Platform of 1984," August 20, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25845>.

⁷⁰ Democratic Party Platforms: "1984 Democratic Party Platform," July 16, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29608>.

⁷¹ Democratic Party Platforms: "1996 Democratic Party Platform," August 26, 1996. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29611>.

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ Republican Party Platforms: "Republican Party Platform of 1996," August 12, 1996. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25848>.

The Police State: Broken Windows

The point at which Republicans and Democrats converged on crime is heavily influenced by the “broken windows” theory; small non-crimes give the impression that a community is defenseless, which then invites larger, more serious crimes. As such, any violation of the order of the community should be policed on an individual basis. The “broken windows” theory is perhaps the most iconic criminological theory in recent memory. It began as an article in a 1982 issue of the *Atlantic* by George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson that soon gained nationwide favor for its “common sense” tactics. The article appeals to the fears of “disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people: panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed.”⁷⁴ To briefly look beyond the fact that each of these persons named are associated with victimless crimes often provoked by poverty (with the even more nonsensical inclusion of the mentally ill noncriminal), the article also emphasizes and defines the role of police not as harbingers of justice but as protecting and maintaining “order.” Kelling and Wilson harken to the beginnings of the police forces as slave patrols, groups of men who were tasked with the capture of private property (ie. enslaved people) and maintenance of public order.

Kelling and Wilson’s definition of order is the protection of private property; “[u]ntended property becomes fair game for people out for fun or plunder and even for people who ordinarily would not dream of doing such things ... vandalism can occur anywhere once communal barriers—the sense of mutual regard and the obligations of civility—are lowered by actions that seem to signal that ‘no one cares.’”⁷⁵ By assuming that the physical space of a community (particularly “untended behavior” within that space) defines the ability of community members to maintain community controls over social interactions and behaviors, Kelling and Wilson make

⁷⁴ Kelling, G. L., & Wilson, J. Q. (1982, March). Broken Windows. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/304465/>.

⁷⁵ Kelling and Wilson, 1982

crime an error of microscopic proportions. Vacant homes become overgrown lawns become graffiti on the walls become broken windows become public drunkenness become panhandling....⁷⁶ For Kelling and Wilson, the idea that the community no longer “cares” makes it vulnerable to “criminal invasion,” which in turn makes it vulnerable to more serious crimes. In short, “serious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behavior goes unchecked.”⁷⁷

The solution, for Kelling and Wilson, is the implementation of police on the most local levels and the treatment of these “gateway crimes” as serious transgressions against the public order and therefore public safety. They lament the recent (1960s-1980s) trend in which police officers transformed from keepers of order to “law enforcement officers;” most pointedly, Kelling and Wilson felt that the legal boundaries within which the police were forced to work was restricting their abilities as keepers of order. Naturally, this brings Kelling and Wilson to advocate allowing, “[police to take] informal or extralegal steps to help protect what the neighborhood had decided was the appropriate level of public order.”⁷⁸

Broken Windows, as a neoliberal policy, “work[s] to entrench and deepen social inequities... to separate the desired from the undesired; social divisions are mirrored in spatial ones.”⁷⁹ Broken windows, although not solely responsible, has certainly contributed to an increase in the police powers of the state as well as the personal powers of the police; the theory advocates the use of police to supplement the informal social controls naturally exerted by communities. However, the ability of these communities to do this is measured in its ability to *appear* orderly – this obviously puts the poor communities more likely to lack the resources to repair windows and clean graffiti at a higher “need” for policing. Majority black communities

⁷⁶ Kelling and Wilson, 1982

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ *ibid*

⁷⁹ Herbert, S., & Brown, E. (2006). Conceptions of Space and Crime in the Punitive Neoliberal City. *Antipode*, 38(4), p. 756

(especially those surrounding public housing projects) are much more likely to be high poverty. This leads to a trend of aggressive policing in majority black neighborhoods and a series of hyperpunitive policies targeting crimes against “order” such as public drunkenness and drug use which are in turn more likely to occur in areas of higher poverty.⁸⁰

Conversely, neighborhoods with high crime rates that simply aren’t as visible (much of the “white collar” crimes like embezzlement and tax evasion) are not subject to such policing; these crimes supposedly do not disrupt the public order nor do they threaten private property, and so the illusion of safety is preserved – they have no need for police. Broken Windows then reinforces preexisting structures of inequality, exploiting already impoverished communities by putting undue weight (“zero tolerance”) behind victimless crimes such as drug use, sex work, and public drunkenness. The emerging reality is then that visible poverty (homelessness, sex work) is criminalized as a threat to community stability, but invisible crime (money laundering, tax evasion) is ignored until it becomes disruptive (ie. until it threatens private property). Due to the preexisting geographic and economic distances between whites and blacks, black poverty is “remedied” with imprisonment at higher levels than white crime.

What Does This Mean for New Orleans?

Harvey stressed the “consensual” nature of neoliberalization in America. Whereas Chile and Argentina were neoliberalized through rapid and consistent fascist violence, superseding the previous democratic government, the United States either could not or would not commit to a complete fascist takeover. So, the nature of democracy necessitated the creation of a collaborationist political party to legislate neoliberalism into existence. John Arena describes a process by which the “old guard” of the Civil Rights Movement (most of whom were newly

⁸⁰ Herbert & Brown (2006), p. 757-760

middle class after the 1970s) collaborated with the capitalist class to garner the electoral consent of “the black community” in majority black cities, such as New Orleans. While the capitalist class chose the Republican Party as its national political arm, majority black cities generally rejected the reactionary social policies of the Republican Party. In these cases, the capitalist class works with the “old guard,” the “leaders of the black community,” to assert the legitimacy of neoliberal economic plans.

According to Adolph Reed, black politics suffered an era of pacification following the upheaval of 1968; black politics of the 1970s were less militant and depoliticized by an “artificial negativity.”⁸¹ John Arena argues that, particularly in New Orleans, nonprofit organizations are the chief avenues of depoliticizing the black “leadership strata” and manufacturing consent within the neoliberal scheme. Old radicals of the Civil Rights Movement create nonprofits, which are funded by corporate think tanks, which then limit the radical nature of the organization in such a way that class solidarity and intersectionality are unachievable. The goals of the organization become distilled into a single issue that cannot and will not threaten to consolidate political power across identity borders. Additionally, the old guard uses their existing political power to coopt and tame any “outside agitation.” For example, the New Orleans branch of the Black Panther Party was politically based in and organized around the Desire public housing project. The Panthers provided public services denied or poorly offered to the project’s residents until November 1970; the New Orleans Police Department attacked an apartment where the Panthers lived and, in the following days, NAACP attorney and first black HANO board member

⁸¹ Reed, A. L., Jr. (1979). Black Particularity Reconsidered. *Telos*, 1979(39), p. 72

A. P. Tureaud and second black HANO board member Reynard Rochon both praised the actions of the NOPD.⁸²

Arena uses Bayard Rustin's 1965 essay *From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement* to typify the demilitarization of black politics and the rise of this black urban regime. In the first half of his essay, Rustin calls for an expansion of the goals of the movement, including an end to the Vietnam War by redirecting war money to anti-poverty measures, the return of a massive public works program, better funding for public schools, a national health care system, and even "a multibillion-dollar program to create a 'future free of slums' through constructing 'attractive public housing.'"⁸³ In the second half of his essay, Rustin disappointingly asserts that the movement must "mature" and move from protest to politics, as the title says, and change the Democratic Party from within through a coalition of civil rights activists, organized labor, religious groups, and liberals.⁸⁴ Although the inclusion of old radicals in the Democratic Party and the later election of black leaders in majority black cities was seen by some as the realization of Black Power and the movement as a whole, the material gains ushered in by black political leaders were predictably limited to the black middle class, professional laborers, and politically connected religious leaders. Arena admits "the new black leaders did, at times, lament that they had 'not been able to do more for the poor,' as Ernest Morial did in a 1985 campaign speech" but "this did not stop them from energetically carrying out the neoliberal agenda, despite its negative impacts on their black working class constituents."⁸⁵ Ultimately, Rustin's strategy will result in the outright assimilation of many upper and middle class blacks into the increasingly broadening "neoliberal fold."

⁸² Arena, J. (2012). *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatization*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, p. xxxvii

⁸³ Arena (2012), *Driven from New Orleans*, p. 215

⁸⁴ Arena (2012), *Driven from New Orleans*, p. 216

⁸⁵ Arena (2012), *Driven from New Orleans*, p. 217

Neoliberalism in New Orleans – Before Katrina (1970 - 2005)

The Missed Opportunity for Reform (1960-1980)

Because of historic discrimination, public housing had become, by the late 1960s, interchangeable with black poverty. As has been broadly studied, poverty contributes to high levels of violence and crime, therefore further associating public housing also with crime. Since the Fair Housing Act and the economic crises of the 1970s, the role of public housing became less a means to rehabilitate the “temporarily submerged middle class” and more a warehouse for poor blacks. The 1990s retrospective examinations of the nature of black poverty in the 1970s and 1980s (and particularly how public housing uniquely contributed to these changes) heavily influenced a new wave of government-assisted housing policies broadly included under “neoliberalism.”

Sociologist William Julius Wilson observed, in 1984, “that while the socioeconomic status of the most disadvantaged members of the minority population has deteriorated rapidly since 1965 and especially since 1970, that of advantaged members has steadily improved ... most clearly seen in ... the American black population ...”⁸⁶ While on the whole, black gains in white-collar employment, median annual income, college enrollment, and home ownership increased dramatically and in some cases outstripped those of whites, low income blacks (mostly concentrated in “ghettos”) saw decreases in employment, and increases in welfare dependency.⁸⁷ Wilson further argued that despite the achievement of Civil Rights Era legislation and policy in helping the black middle and upper class succeed, those same policies failed to help who he called the “truly disadvantaged” or the “ghetto underclass.” Wilson defines the ghetto underclass as “that heterogeneous grouping of inner-city families and individuals who are outside the

⁸⁶ Wilson, W. (1984). Race-Specific Policies and the Truly Disadvantaged. *Yale Law & Policy Review*, 2(2), p. 272

⁸⁷ Wilson (1984), pp. 272-273

mainstream of the American educational system – including those who lack training and skills and either experience long term unemployment or have dropped out of the labor force altogether, and those who are more or less permanent recipients of public assistance.”⁸⁸

Wilson argued that blacks felt the gains made by Civil Rights legislation unequally across class lines in part because the decline of manufacturing eliminated much of the higher-paying jobs available to unskilled laborers and increased unemployment among the black working class. Additionally, as higher-wage jobs moved out of the urban centers and into the surrounding suburbs, so too did middle and upper class educated black workers who could afford to move, leaving behind a poorer working class now oversaturated with low-wage service sector jobs.⁸⁹ Wilson explains that simple racial bias can no longer explain the economic disadvantage experienced by the ghetto underclass. The economic changes of the 1970s structurally changed the nature of black poverty; sociologist Douglas Massey sought to supplement Wilson’s theory by adding, “when the poverty rate of a residentially segregated population is increased poverty necessarily becomes more geographically concentrated.”⁹⁰

Massey and Kanaiaupuni later looked to public housing as instruments of poverty concentration in the wake of this economic restructuring of major American cities. Because public housing projects are, by nature, occupied by low-income residents and because these projects have historically been relegated to majority black neighborhoods and barred from majority white neighborhoods (as revealed in the *Gautreaux* case, for example), it is evident that “blacks suffered more than any other group from this federally subsidized, publicly promoted for

⁸⁸ Wilson (1984), p. 275

⁸⁹ Massey, D., & Kanaiaupuni, S. (1993). Public Housing and the Concentration of Poverty. *Social Science Quarterly*, 74(1), 109-122.

⁹⁰ Massey and Kanaiaupuni, p. 110

of poverty concentration.”⁹¹ Their conclusion, after completing a study of public housing and the concentration of poverty in Chicago, was that

...segregation concentrates poverty by confining high rates of black poverty to a small number of all-black neighborhoods and by restricting any increase in black poverty to geographically isolated ghettos ... de facto federal policy [since the 1970s] and high levels of racial discrimination [in urban housing markets] have led, in turn, to high levels of black-white residential segregation ... [and] public housing concentrates poverty because federal guidelines explicitly require public housing applicants to be poor and because projects apparently generate class-selective migration into neighborhoods that contain them... ”⁹²

According to Massey and Kanaiaupuni, the poverty concentrated by a public housing project is permanent in a way that segregation and economic upheaval are not. Even as residents become socioeconomically mobile, new residents will always be low income, discouraging upper income residents (particularly whites) from living in the unsubsidized housing in the neighborhood surrounding the project.⁹³ It is then evident that public housing will need to be radically reformed or perhaps entirely replaced with a different system of low income housing assistance. Although perhaps it could have been argued that the effects of public housing would not be so detrimental had cities more successfully desegregated, Massey later contends that the time for desegregation had largely passed. In “Getting Away with Murder,” Massey provided an explanation linking high levels of black crime to similarly high levels of black poverty and black

⁹¹ Massey and Kanaiaupuni, p. 110

⁹² Massey and Kanaiaupuni, pp. 119-120

⁹³ Massey and Kanaiaupuni, p. 120

segregation; in Massey's theory, high levels of black crime are provoked by highly concentrated poverty and extreme social isolation which were developed, paradoxically, as ways of protection against this same violence.⁹⁴

Massey acknowledged that desegregation would alleviate and perhaps break this self-serving cycle of violence and poverty within highly segregated black communities, but found that whites were unwilling to integrate because they did not perceive integration to be beneficial for whites. "If poverty rates are higher for blacks and if crime is associated with poverty, then, by isolating blacks in segregated neighborhoods, the rest of society insulates itself from the crime and other social problems that stem from the higher rate of black poverty."⁹⁵ Shihadeh and Flynn found that in addition to spatial and geographic segregation, the *social* isolation of black communities is another contributor to high levels of violence. For example, high rates of unemployment create a distance between would-be black laborers and the social resources necessary to find employment.⁹⁶ Without employment, the neighborhood becomes impoverished, which then leads to violence and crime as Massey explained. So while desegregation could and would alleviate the social disadvantages plaguing poor black communities, the desegregation would have to be total (as in geographically, economically, socially, etc.) which uninterested whites have successfully and consistently blocked at local and state levels. These realities necessitated action on behalf of the federal government to more thoroughly enforce and perhaps find alternative means of residential desegregation and poverty alleviation.

Fifteen years after *Brown v. Board*, another court decision pronounced the "race-based" location of government assisted housing likewise unconstitutional. In the late 1960s, HUD began

⁹⁴ Massey, D. (1995). Getting Away with Murder: Segregation and Violent Crime in Urban America. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 143(5), p. 1222

⁹⁵ Massey (1995), p. 1224

⁹⁶ Shihadeh, E. S., & Flynn, N. (1996). Segregation and Crime: The Effect of Black Social Isolation on the Rates of Black Urban Violence. *Social Forces*, 74(4), p. 1330

to prohibit the concentration of new projects within black neighborhoods as well as the reservation of units in white neighborhoods exclusively for white occupants. The Fair Housing Act of 1968, one of the greatest hallmarks of liberal policy since the New Deal, “imposed on HUD a substantive obligation to promote racial and economic integration in administering the section 8 [of the 1937 Housing Act] program.” Further, “[a]s part of HUD's duty under the Fair Housing Act, an approved housing project must not be located in an area of undue minority concentration, which would have the effect of perpetuating racial segregation.”⁹⁷ The lower courts have since interpreted this charge to extend to any local agency in cooperation with HUD and receiving federal housing funding, such as in *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority*.⁹⁸

The Perpetuation of “Public Housing”

As public housing has evolved to include dozens of acts, bills, and ordinances, a current, simple working definition of “public housing” in New Orleans follows: every unit of housing that is built, bought, and/or maintained by the New Orleans Housing Authority (HANO).⁹⁹ Public housing can further be identified in accordance with three major types of housing assistance: Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), Section 8 project-based vouchers (“Section 8 housing”), and the private “tenant-based” Housing Choice Voucher Program (“vouchers”). LIHTC are subsidized tax breaks available to private companies in exchange for the construction of affordable housing. Affordable housing is defined as housing where rent is equal to or less than thirty percent of the area median income (AMI). Section 8 housing is the most easily recognizable and is often referred to as “the projects.” Qualifying tenants or families

⁹⁷ Seicshnaydre, S. E. (2011). How Government Housing Perpetuates Racial Segregation: Lessons from Post-Katrina New Orleans. *Catholic University Law Review*, 60(3), p. 668

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ Marcuse, P. (1995). INTERPRETING "PUBLIC HOUSING" HISTORY. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 12(3), p. 249

who receive Section 8 vouchers are able to rent a unit within a public housing project using an amount of government-subsidized money (in proportion to their income level) towards their rent. New Orleans public housing tenants lived on average in neighborhoods with 74 percent poverty concentration (HUD denotes “extremely high poverty” neighborhoods have at least 40 percent poverty concentration).¹⁰⁰

HUD uses the following income level designations to determine the voucher payout: “low income” denotes an income no greater than 80 percent of the AMI; “very low income” denotes an income no greater than 50 percent of the AMI; “extremely low income” denotes an income no greater than 30 percent of the AMI. The HCVP works similarly to Section 8 vouchers except HCVP vouchers can be used in the private housing market, not just for project-based units.

The Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) program offers subsidies in the form of tax credits to private contractors in order to encourage the construction of affordable housing. LIHTC has the potential to efficiently desegregate and break up concentrated poverty by placing affordable units in low poverty areas. However, between 1995 and 2001, no multiple bedroom units were built in the lowest poverty neighborhoods (neighborhoods in which no more than 10 percent of residents live below the poverty line) of the New Orleans metropolitan statistical area; comparatively, 44 percent of multi-bedroom LIHTC units were built in high poverty neighborhoods.¹⁰¹ By 2000, one fourth of neighborhoods in New Orleans were considered

¹⁰⁰ Seicshnaydre, p. 674-677

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

“extremely high poverty,” meaning at least 40 percent of residents earned incomes below the poverty line.¹⁰²

The Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) provides for the use of government-subsidized rent vouchers within the private rental market. While this provides the *opportunity* for greater social mobility, the trend of deferring social programs to the state and to the market in the absence of a strong federal social program has allowed historic patterns of discrimination to persist. For example, a 2003 study from HUD revealed that New Orleans voucher users lived in neighborhood poverty concentrations of over 30 percent at twice the average (compare 46.9 percent to 22 percent) across the top fifty MSAs.¹⁰³ When central-city neighborhoods are compared to the suburbs, this disparity widens: in central city neighborhoods 51.8 percent of voucher users in New Orleans lived in poverty concentrations of 30+ percent compared to the national average of 33.6 percent. When comparing the suburbs, an overwhelming 40.4 percent of voucher users live in 30+ percent poverty concentrations compares to the national average of 6.1 percent.

Of the 7,864 total voucher users in New Orleans, over 93 percent of them were black. In neighborhoods with 40percent+ poverty concentration, 1.8 percent of white voucher users (compared to 21.3 percent of black voucher users) lived in such neighborhoods; when compared nationally, white voucher users were half as likely (and black voucher users were twice as likely) to live in these neighborhood poverty concentrations.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Berube, A., & Katz, B. (2005, October 1). Katrina’s Window: Confronting Concentrated Poverty Across America | Brookings Institution. Retrieved June 30, 2017, from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/katrinass-window-confronting-concentrated-poverty-across-america/>

¹⁰³ Seicshnaydre, p. 674

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

When taken individually, 46.9 percent (national average 22.2 percent) of HCVP users in the New Orleans metropolitan statistical area lived in neighborhoods of extreme poverty,¹⁰⁵ 78.9 percent (national average 44.4 percent) of Section 8 housing tenants lived extreme poverty, and an outstanding 97.4 percent (national average 66.1 percent) of public-housing residents lived in extreme poverty.¹⁰⁶ In 2000 in Orleans Parish, roughly 60 percent of households were black, compared to 33.4 percent of households across the New Orleans MSA and just 6.1 percent of St. Bernard Parish households.¹⁰⁷ In New Orleans, 37.7 percent of residents lived in extremely high poverty neighborhoods even though only 28 percent of residents personally earned incomes below the poverty line (and just 18 percent of residents of the MSA). Over 40 percent of low income blacks (compared to just under 11 percent of low income whites) lived in these extremely high poverty neighborhoods in New Orleans; across the MSA, the percentage of blacks in these neighborhoods drops slightly to 32 percent while the percentage of whites drops dramatically to about three percent. Alternatively, low-income whites were fifteen times likelier to live in low poverty neighborhoods (<10 percent poverty) than similarly low-income blacks across the MSA; in Orleans Parish, the percentage of low-income blacks living in low poverty neighborhoods was just 1 percent.¹⁰⁸ If the definition of “low poverty neighborhood” is widened to allow up to 20 percent poverty concentration, these neighborhoods include 72 percent of low-income whites but just 19 percent of low-income blacks.¹⁰⁹

As acknowledged with the passing of the Fair Housing Act in 1968 (and reaffirmed in the *Gautreaux* decision), HUD has a responsibility to promote and enforce fair housing,

¹⁰⁵ The New Orleans metropolitan statistical area (MSA) is the area including Orleans Parish (used interchangeably with “the city of New Orleans” and “New Orleans”), as well as Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, and St. Tammany parishes.

¹⁰⁶ Office Of Policy Dev. & Research, U.S. Dep't Of Hous. & Urban Dev. (2003). Housing Choice Voucher Location Patterns: Implications For Participant And Neighborhood Welfare.

¹⁰⁷ Berube & Katz, Katrina’s Window

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*

desegregation, and the deconcentration of poverty even in units not directly under HUD control (any HUD-funded unit, at any level, is included in this responsibility, which would include affordable HCVP-eligible units). Seicshnaydre argues that HUD continues to fund affordable housing in ways that perpetuate segregation and encourage gentrification because of an implicit understanding that segregation is inevitable yet preferable to the absence of affordable housing.¹¹⁰ Majority-white, low poverty neighborhoods with strong political organization are able to effectively block the construction of affordable housing units, forcing the compromise to build affordable housing, alleviating the short term cost burden, away from low poverty neighborhoods (and necessarily in high poverty neighborhoods); this provides a temporary relief from high rents, but worsens the often generational condition of poverty and the ill effects it causes.¹¹¹ In New Orleans, a city where 48 percent of households were renters, about 60 percent of those renters paid “unaffordable” housing prices (>30 percent of income); in comparison, 33 percent of households nationally are renters and 49% of those renters pay unaffordable housing rates.¹¹²

HOPE VI

A 1992 policy called HOPE VI would come to dominate government assisted housing policy even twenty-five years after its introduction. The basic ideology supporting HOPE VI is “new urbanism,” a theory that supports “traditional neighborhood patterns essential to restoring functional and sustainable communities [including] houses facing the streets, with . . . a mix of housing types, prices, and sizes to attract a mix of people; shopping and parks accessible via

¹¹⁰ Seicshnaydre, p. 683-684

¹¹¹ Seicshnaydre, p. 687-690

¹¹² Seicshnaydre, p. 685

footpaths and sidewalks; a grid of streets.”¹¹³ As a HUD initiative, this also included the creation of “defensible spaces” which promoted private outdoor spaces in the place of traditionally common entrances, green spaces, and walkways.¹¹⁴ The concept of “defensible space” is an extrapolation of Broken Windows compounded with the neoliberal promotion of personal responsibility. Residents are personally responsible for their private neighborhood spaces, charged with maintaining and defending that space from visible signs of crime, poverty, and overall quality degradation. In New Orleans, as Arena argues, HOPE VI amounted to a national plan for “negro removal” legitimated by black sociologists such as William Julius Wilson.

The Shock Doctrine (2005 - 2010)

The Opportunity Katrina Presented

According to Robert Tanner, an urban planner and housing advocate in New Orleans, “after [Hurricane Katrina] there was a desire for a clean slate on the part of local leaders ... and that clean slate mostly displaces poor and minority residents.”¹¹⁵ Depending on the person, societal ills were variously attributable to government corruption, high crime rates, widespread poverty, and the simple, radical existence of marginalized people. For example, on September 8, 2005, columnist David Brooks wrote in a *New York Times* article on Katrina’s “silver lining.” According to Brooks, Hurricane Katrina “[had] given us an amazing chance to do something serious about urban poverty.”¹¹⁶ Brooks specifically argued, “the only chance we have to break

¹¹³ Popkin, S. J., Katz, B., Cunningham, M. K., Brown, K. D., Gustafson, J., & Turner, M. A. (2004, May 18). A Decade of HOPE VI, p. 16

¹¹⁴ *ibid*

¹¹⁵ Gardner, T. M., Irwin, A., & Peterson, C. W. (2013, August 29). No shelter from the storm: Reclaiming the right to housing and protecting the health of vulnerable communities in post-Katrina New Orleans, from <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2013/08/no-shelter-from-the-storm-reclaiming-the-right-to-housing-and-protecting-the-health-of-vulnerable-communities-in-post-katrina-new-orleans/>

¹¹⁶ Brooks, D. (2005, September 8). Katrina's Silver Lining. *The New York Times*, p. A29. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/08/opinion/katrinassilver-lining.html>.

up the cycle of poverty is to integrate **people who lack middle class skills** into neighborhoods with people who possess these skills and who insist on certain **standards of behavior**” (Brooks, 2005). Brooks saw the apparent economic illiteracy of low-income individuals as a moral failing (a neoliberal understanding of the responsible individual) and an inability to harbor those ambiguous “middle class skills” vaguely characterized as “gumption” or a “tightened belt.”

Similarly, the Urban Sociology section of the American Sociological Association created and publicized a petition entitled “Moving to Opportunity in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina.” Sponsors William Julius Wilson and Xavier Briggs described a “historic opportunity to lift thousands of the nations’ most vulnerable families out of ghetto poverty.”¹¹⁷ The petition then explains, “moving to lower poverty, lower risk neighborhoods and school districts can have significant positive effects on the well-being and economic opportunity of low-income children and their families.”¹¹⁸

While Wilson may have disagreed with Brooks on most days, they presented a similar message: the poverty of the ghettos stems not from capitalist exploitation and neoliberal dismissal, but from the residents themselves. Adolph Reed and Stephen Steinberg point out the similarities between Brooks’ article and the following statement from a *The News Hour* interview with Wilson:

*“Another thing, it would have been good if he had talked about **the need to ensure that the placement of families in New Orleans does not reproduce the levels of concentrated poverty that existed before. So I would just like to underline what Bruce Katz was saying***

¹¹⁷ Johnson, C. (Ed.). (2011). *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*. U of Minnesota Press, p. 76

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

and that is that we do have evidence that moving families to lower poverty neighborhoods and school districts can have significant positive effects.”¹¹⁹

While Wilson’s advocacy of the deconcentration of poverty is not so boastfully classist as Brooks’ plan, Wilson makes reference to Bruce Katz, Clinton’s HUD chief of staff, who clarifies their plan in the same interview:

*“I think **the city will be smaller** and I'm not sure if that's the worst thing in the world. I think we have an opportunity here to have a **win-win**. I think we have an opportunity to build a very different kind of city, a city with a much **greater mix of incomes**...”¹²⁰*

Reed and Steinberg argued that “Moving to Opportunity” rested on three fallacies, the first of which was that this dispersal of poverty was driven by a desire to make poverty *invisible* (to echo the Broken Windows thesis), not immaterial. Joblessness and poverty (not unemployed and poor people) create the conditions for crime, alcoholism, panhandling, domestic violence, and drug use no matter where; without some safety net awaiting these displaced persons in their new city, the problems will not be solved. Secondly, the displaced persons would have to rely on the imagined benevolence of middle class white strangers to “teach” them how to pick themselves up by their bootstraps. Although Texas initially scrounged to find housing for

¹¹⁹ Reed, A., Jr., & Steinberg, S. (2006, May 4). Liberal Bad Faith in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina. Retrieved June 30, 2017, from http://www.blackcommentator.com/182/182_cover_liberals_katrina.html

¹²⁰ Reed & Steinberg, Liberal Bad Faith

displaced persons, residents of Houston shelters began receiving eviction notices within a few months.¹²¹

The reality is that “[the petitioners] want[ed] only to depopulate the city of concentrated poverty, and ... leave intact middle-class black communities that will insulate [the petitioners] from charges of racism.”¹²² This points to another larger concept within neoliberalism: class collaboration. One of the consistently strongest methods of preserving capitalism within America has been the use of racism to divide the lower class between black and white to encourage poor whites to work with rich whites to the detriment of poor blacks. This is described in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s 1965 speech at Montgomery:

*If it may be said of the slavery era that the white man took the world and gave the Negro Jesus, then it may be said of the Reconstruction era that the southern aristocracy took the world and gave the poor white man Jim Crow ... And **when his wrinkled stomach cried out for the food that his empty pockets could not provide, he ate Jim Crow, a psychological bird that told him that no matter how bad off he was, at least he was a white man, better than the black man** ... You see, it was a simple thing to keep the poor white masses working for near-starvation wages in the years that followed the Civil War. Why, if the poor white plantation or mill worker became dissatisfied with his low wages, the plantation or mill owner would merely threaten to fire him and hire former Negro slaves and pay him even less.*¹²³

¹²¹ Younge, G. (2006, April 19). Gary Younge: Big business sees a chance for ethnic and class cleansing, from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/apr/20/comment.hurricanekatrina>

¹²² Reed & Steinberg, Liberal Bad Faith

¹²³ King, M. L., Jr. (1965, March 25). Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March. Retrieved June 30, 2017, from http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_address_at_the_conclusion_of_selma_march.html

However, in adherence to the neoliberal façade of social liberalism, racial assimilation into the ruling class was later allowed and even encouraged. Racial diversity in managerial, governing, capitalist roles provided the veneer of a “post-racial” society but masked the reality of a nation still burdened with homelessness, drug use, and segregation. The diversification of the ruling class cushioned the preexisting ruling whites from the old liberal accusations of racism and convinced increasing numbers of centrist minorities that the will of the free market would ensure they received their deserved rewards.

Reed and Steinberg identify the third fallacy: the series of “Moving to Opportunity” studies (to which Wilson, Briggs, et al point in their petition) provided mixed results, and those positive results were only seen by a small percentage of the poverty population.¹²⁴ The “Opportunity” came with qualifications, restrictions, and guidelines that could only be met by a small number of low-income people; the lowest income earners are left behind as the meager sums previously invested in high poverty neighborhoods were dumped into Potemkin opportunity programs. And still more insidious was the fact that the policy tends to be enacted in poor black neighborhoods occupying valuable real estate.

Reed and Steinberg point to Cabrini Green in Chicago as an example. During the 1980s, the single unit home value rose from \$138,000 to \$700,000 as 7,000 black residents were booted out with Section 8 vouchers and 4,000 whites moved in.¹²⁵ Despite posturing on both sides, conservatives like David Brooks, Representative Richard Baker (“We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans.”), and first lady Barbara Bush (“So many of the people in the

¹²⁴ Reed & Steinberg, *Liberal Bad Faith*

¹²⁵ *ibid*

[Superdome] here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this, this is working very well for them.”) simply eschewed the niceties of Wilson and Katz while promoting the same plan.¹²⁶

The Shock

In her book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Naomi Klein describes how the government has used public disorder and fear resulting from disasters (natural or man-made) to push through policies that would normally be unacceptable in order to regain social control. Hurricane Katrina provides a case study in the “shock doctrine” as the neoliberal gears began turning within hours of landfall. Private militias walked the streets to guard wealthy white property on the high land; public housing damage reports were exaggerated and falsified to justify demolition; oil and gas deregulation was piggybacked onto recovery funds; white vigilantes, whether in uniform or not, targeted black evacuees; a restrictive moratorium was imposed on the construction of affordable housing in a scheme to prevent the return of those poor and black evacuees scattered across the states. Although President Bush delivered a rousing speech in Jackson Square promising “this great city will rise again,” New Orleans returned more segregated and more impoverished than before.¹²⁷ Yet, the return of the French Quarter to capitalist hedonism again masked the reality of iniquity beyond the square; as the Quarter’s tourists began to trickle back in, parts of the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East remained virtually unchanged since August 2005.

Increased Police Powers

Among the most lasting images of post-Katrina New Orleans are those of militarized police, private mercenaries, and U.S. troops walking the streets and patrolling the submerged

¹²⁶ Reed & Steinberg, *Liberal Bad Faith*

¹²⁷ The New York Times. (2005, September 16). 'This Great City Will Rise Again,' Bush Promises, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/16/politics/this-great-city-will-rise-again-bush-promises.html>

neighborhoods. The above witnesses give just one scene, one moment where that police presence was felt; whether it was their absence, their negligence, or their help, the police and the military played a hugely influential role in the recovery process in New Orleans. As described in the Broken Windows theory, the crimes which pose the most danger to civil society are visible crimes: homelessness, vandalism, drunkenness, drug use, etc. These crimes are also most heavily associated with and caused by poverty. In the wake of Katrina, the population that had not evacuated (both the lowest income earners who could not afford to evacuate and the richest property owners who knew they would not flood) was put under extraordinary circumstances, leading to a surge of survival-based crimes like looting and carjacking. Additionally, evacuation centers like the Superdome and the Convention Center concentrated thousands of people who were suddenly and violently displaced in the same space as the police. Without resources, and constantly confronted with the reality of death, tensions remained dangerously high.

On September 1, 2005, Blackwater mercenaries arrived in New Orleans in response to what Blackwater's strategic initiatives vice president Chris Taylor referred to as a "flood" of calls.¹²⁸ Blackwater is a private sector security task force that was previously contracted by the federal government for engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan; by September 11, 2005, hundreds of operatives were in the Uptown district.¹²⁹ ISI, another private military organization, was hired by wealthy businessman Jimmy Reiss to guard his home – mercenaries stood at the gated Audubon Place neighborhood armed with M16 rifles to "discourage" looters and loiterers.¹³⁰

The images of paramilitary thugs guarding the ivory towers of wealthy Uptown residents as poor black people swam past dead bodies to reach dry land certainly made an impact on the

¹²⁸ Witte, G. (2005, September 08). Private Security Contractors Head to Gulf, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/07/AR2005090702214.html>

¹²⁹ Wilson, J. (2005, September 11). Mercenaries guard homes of the rich in New Orleans, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/12/hurricanekatrina.usa>

¹³⁰ *ibid*

media. While some reported on the absurdity or the “shock” of the situation, more mainstream media sensationalized stories of the television-grabbing looters, or of the elderly black man hauling armfuls of cigarettes instead of food or water. The portrayal of looters in particular reinforced the notion that the military and a militarized police were necessary because destroyed neighborhoods meant neighborhoods could not protect themselves or their property, therefore (in accordance with Broken Windows) encouraging looting.

Several fabricated or exaggerated stories emerged from the flooded city within the first month of the disaster, and although they were largely debunked by October, the damage had already been done. Baton Rouge media reported armed riots in shelters and epidemic carjackings; accordingly, Baton Rouge Mayor Kip Holden responded: “We do not want to inherit the looting and all the other foolishness that went on in New Orleans. . . . We do not want to inherit that **breed** that seeks to prey on other people.”¹³¹ Evacuees were becoming criminalized as Mayor Holden’s dog whistle revealed the anti-blackness behind support for such aggressive policing. The *Associated Press* reported that “storm victims were raped and beaten, fights and fires broke out, corpses lay in the open, and rescue helicopters and law enforcement officers were shot at as flooded-out New Orleans descended into anarchy today” on September 1, 2005.¹³² With similar alarmist language such as “anarchy” and “bedlam,” it is no wonder several police leaders assumed power beyond that originally ordained by Mayor Ray Nagin.

Mayor Nagin himself repeated later-debunked rumors in televised speeches about rapes and murders in the Superdome, perhaps influencing Nagin’s later decision to “stop search and

¹³¹ Younge, G. (2005, September 05). Murder and rape - fact or fiction?, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/06/hurricanekatrina.usa3>

¹³² The Associated Press. (2005, September 1). “Desperate SOS” from mayor, from <http://www.denverpost.com/2005/09/01/desperate-sos-from-mayor/>

rescue and bring [the police] back to controlling the streets.”¹³³ Police captain James Scott was recorded saying “[The police] have authority by martial law to shoot looters.”¹³⁴ Several members of the police also recalled Warren Riley, the department’s second-in-command, telling officers to “take the city back and shoot looters” and on another occasion saying “if you can sleep with [what you’ve done], do it.”¹³⁵

Given effective *carte blanche*, the abuses of power seem much less surprising but no less horrifying. Within the week after landfall, at least ten people were shot and killed by police in New Orleans including Keenon McCann, Henry Glover, Danny Brumfield, and Matthew McDonald.¹³⁶ The most infamous case of these abuses and the exaggeration of “chaos” is the Danziger Bridge shooting. On September 4, 2005, six people were fired upon as they walked across the Danziger Bridge; Ronald Madison, a mentally disabled black man, and James Brissette, a seventeen-year-old boy, were killed while Susan Bartholomew, Leonard Bartholomew, Lesha Bartholomew, and Jesse Holmes were injured.¹³⁷ None of them were armed, nor had they committed crimes. One of the police officers, in the subsequent trial that would stretch over ten years beyond the incident, testified in court that he had begun firing before the police vehicle had even stopped.¹³⁸ In 2015, the 5th Circuit issued a decision that began by placing the actions at Danziger Bridge within “the **anarchy** following Hurricane

¹³³ Shankman, S., Jennings, T., McCarthy, B., Maggi, L., & Thompson, A. C. (2012, July 24). After Katrina, New Orleans Cops Were Told They Could Shoot Looters, from <https://www.propublica.org/nola/story/nopd-order-to-shoot-looters-hurricane-katrina/>

¹³⁴ *ibid*

¹³⁵ *ibid*

¹³⁶ Grimm, A. (2016, February 23). A decade after Danziger Bridge shooting, killings still cast a shadow, from http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2015/09/a_decade_after_shootings_danzi.html

¹³⁷ DeBerry, J. (2015, August 21). Hurricane Katrina, Danziger Bridge and the exaggeration of 'chaos': Jarvis DeBerry, from http://www.nola.com/katrina/index.ssf/2015/08/katrina_danziger_police.html#incart_river_index_topics

¹³⁸ *ibid*

Katrina” and referred to the subsequent trials as “bungled.”¹³⁹ Ten years on from the storm, the mythology persisted that police abuses occurred within and were even justified by the perceived and often imagined “lawlessness” or “anarchy” of a city struggling to survive.

Deregulation of the Economy

In September of 2005, the House Republican Study Committee created and circulated a list of “Pro-Free-Market Ideas for Responding to Hurricane Katrina and High Gas Prices.”¹⁴⁰ This was a series of economic reforms and policies to be enacted in the affected areas, including a number of proposals constituting much of the initial “shock.” Representative Paul Ryan wanted to turn the entire affected area into a “flat-tax free-enterprise zone.”¹⁴¹ The Heritage Foundation (one of the original neoliberal think tanks employed by Hayek) lobbied for a repeal of environmental regulations and removal of church-state barriers “hindering” faith-based organizations from participating.¹⁴² Representatives Shadegg, Tiahrt, Poe, and Rohrabacher proposed various reforms benefitting the oil industry: increase offshore drilling, temporarily suspend the gas tax and/or permanently reduce the gas tax, encourage private sector extraction of oil shale, remove environmental protections barring new oil refinery construction, allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and remove Clean Air Act provisions guarding gas formulation regulations.¹⁴³ This economic conservatism culminated in the suspension the Davis-Bacon Act, which removed the government responsibility to force private contractors to pay their workers “prevailing wages,” in an alleged attempt to incentivize small business contractors to

¹³⁹ *United States v. Bowen* 799 F.3d 336 (2015)

¹⁴⁰ Klein, N. (2005, September 23). GOP Opportunity Zone, from <https://www.thenation.com/article/gop-opportunity-zone/>

¹⁴¹ Klein, GOP Opportunity Zone

¹⁴² *ibid*

¹⁴³ *ibid*

work with the government.¹⁴⁴ In reality, the repeal of the law meant the exploitation of workers when they most desperately needed living wages.¹⁴⁵

Additionally, Republicans prohibited the use of the already approved \$11 billion recovery package to pay salaries for public workers. As a result, the city was forced to fire about three thousand workers, including sixteen members of the city's planning staff, at a time when public services and city planning were in dire need. Additionally, Louisiana State University hospital CEO Don Smithburg prohibited the reopening of Charity Hospital despite its working condition, because "if we do, we will never get another one."¹⁴⁶ Governor Kathleen Blanco pulled disaster relief units from the site and, across a years-long legal dispute, FEMA officially estimated the damage at Charity totaled nearly \$500 million, up from the initial \$23 million.¹⁴⁷ With the allotment, Charity Hospital began to be replaced at the cost of the working class Lower Mid-City neighborhood. Governor Blanco, who seemed unable to move faster than the receding floodwaters around her, struck precisely to charterize the New Orleans school system. Where before New Orleans public teachers were protected and represented by a strong union, Blanco violated the union contract and simply fired nearly five thousand public school teachers. New Orleans had 123 public schools and seven charter schools prior to Hurricane Katrina; after the storm, there were only four public schools and thirty one charter schools, making New Orleans "the nation's preeminent laboratory for the widespread use of charter schools," because "Katrina accomplished in a day . . . what Louisiana school reformers couldn't do after years of trying."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Borger, J. (2005, September 22). Hurricane aid used 'to test out rightwing social policies', from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/22/hurricanes2005.hurricanekatrina>

¹⁴⁵ Edsall, T. B. (2005, September 09). Bush Suspends Pay Act In Areas Hit by Storm, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/08/AR2005090802037.html>

¹⁴⁶ Gratz, R. B. (2011, April 27). Why Was New Orleans's Charity Hospital Allowed to Die? Retrieved July 01, 2017, from <https://www.thenation.com/article/why-was-new-orleans-charity-hospital-allowed-die/>

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*

¹⁴⁸ Klein, N. (2008). *The Shock Doctrine: the Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, p. 5-6

When confronted with shuttered, yet undamaged public housing projects, Endesha Juakali, a public housing activist, said, “they’ve had an agenda for St. Bernard a long time, but as long as people lived here, they couldn’t do it. So they used the disaster as a way of cleansing the neighborhood when the neighborhood is weakest. . . . This is a great location for bigger houses and condos. The only problem is you got all these poor black people sitting on it!”¹⁴⁹

While prominent Democrats such as John Kerry presented opposition to “[turning] the [Gulf Coast] region into a vast laboratory for rightwing ideological experiments,” these protests ring hollow when compared to Democrats like Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, who received nearly one million dollars in campaign contributions over the course of her eighteen year term in the Senate (where she repeatedly tried to help pass the Keystone XL pipeline) before being hired, in 2016, as a lobbyist on behalf of two oil and gas companies operating in occupied Palestine.¹⁵⁰

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The intense and wholesale contracting of government social responsibility to private enterprise in the wake of Hurricane Katrina would set a dangerous precedent for America and a profitable one for the neoliberal ruling class; the emergency management chief of the Florida Keys predicted in 2006 “it’s all going to be private enterprise before it’s over.”¹⁵² As government functions had withered through two decades of small-government policy and competitive private markets, they were overwhelmingly underprepared to deal with the disaster of Katrina.

¹⁴⁹ Klein, N. (2007, December 21). The Shock Doctrine in Action in New Orleans, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/naomi-klein/the-shock-doctrine-in-act_b_77886.html

¹⁵⁰ Borger, J. (2005, September 22). Hurricane aid used 'to test out rightwing social policies', from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/22/hurricanes2005.hurricanekatrina>

¹⁵¹ Vardi, I. (2016, February 2). Revealed: Ex-U.S. Senator Landrieu's Revolving Doors in Israel's Oil and Gas Bonanza, from <https://www.desmogblog.com/2016/02/01/revealed-ex-u-s-senator-landrieu-s-revolving-doors-israel-s-oil-and-gas-bonanza>

¹⁵² Klein, N. (2006, August 29). Naomi Klein: Disaster capitalism - how to make money out of misery, from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/aug/30/comment.hurricanekatrina>

That is not to say this stemmed from an unawareness or that Hurricane Katrina was such an anomaly preparedness was impossible; on the contrary, in 2004, FEMA simulated the effects of a Category 3 hurricane in New Orleans and found the levee systems to be insufficiently high as storm surge flooded the city despite the levees.¹⁵³ An earlier *Times-Picayune* series imagined a storm even worse than Katrina in 2002 and experts predicted flooding would last up to several months and leave hundreds of thousands homeless if the levees were breached.¹⁵⁴ And yet, President Bush “[didn’t] think anybody could have anticipated the breach of the levees” and Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said the “‘perfect storm’ of catastrophes exceeded the foresight of the planners, and maybe anybody’s foresight.”¹⁵⁵

So, as Naomi Klein defines it, a “disaster capitalism complex” is created; the government, weakened through decades of reform, provides laughably inadequate services in the face of disaster while private contractors use huge amounts of government subsidies (in this case a nearly \$11 billion package) to save the day.¹⁵⁶ The people become embittered towards the government and are more likely to support further shrinking of the government while preferring further privatization. Despite the seemingly altruistic miracle, many of these government subsidies were actually not seen by the people but instead contributed to “the Shaw Group's new state-of-the-art Baton Rouge headquarters, Bechtel's battalions of earthmoving equipment, [and] Blackwater USA's 6,000-acre campus in North Carolina.”¹⁵⁷ Klein warned in 2006 the “benevolence” of the private sector may soon run out; she makes an analogy with the AIDS crisis: after more than a decade of federal hemming and hawing, private companies created life-

¹⁵³ Jewson, M., & Maldonado, C. (2015, August 28). Ten Years After Katrina, Myths About Warnings, Violence, and Recovery Persist. Here’s the Truth, from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2015/08/hurricane_katrina_10_years_later_the_myths_that_persist_debunked.html

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*

¹⁵⁶ Klein, *Disaster Capitalism – how to make money out of misery*

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*

saving drugs (with enormous government subsidies) then priced those medicines to such a degree that victims were forced to choose between a death by AIDS or by crushing debt.¹⁵⁸

The Creation of a New New Orleans

Simply put, the neoliberal strategy was a resettlement program intended to rid New Orleans of its poverty population. First, although over 50 percent of residents both before and after Katrina were renters, 84.8 percent of recovery dollars were dedicated to homeowners. The little money left for rental units went to landlords who overwhelmingly saw greater personal economic benefit in claiming total loss, allowing for the demolition of the “affected” units, then reaping tax credits and subsidies for building new, mixed-income housing. At the same time, a restrictive moratorium was imposed on the construction of affordable housing, meaning that those units being rebuilt to replace the “total loss” units were unaffordable to those who lived there before the storm. In addition, white action in the suburbs of New Orleans, particularly St. Bernard and Jefferson parishes, prevented the settlement of displaced blacks, but not that of whites.

According to data from the Louisiana Office of Community Development, Disaster Recovery Unit, Road Home, the program for homeowners to rebuild their damaged properties, received the vast majority of recovery money (nearly \$9 billion out of about \$10.5 billion) even though homeowners were just about 15 percent of all New Orleans residents. The Small Rental Property program was designed to incentivize the rebuilding of “small scale rental properties... and offer them at affordable rents.”¹⁵⁹ It was funded by HUD community development block grants (CDBG) funneled through the Louisiana Office of Community Development.¹⁶⁰ Before

¹⁵⁸ Klein, *Disaster Capitalism – how to make money out of misery*

¹⁵⁹ Small Rental Property Program. (n.d.). Retrieved June 30, 2017, from <https://www.road2la.org/srpp/>

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*

Katrina these properties accounted for about 70 percent of all rental units in New Orleans and served low-income tenants such as the elderly or otherwise overburdened fixed income earners, but not the lowest income (<40 percent AMI) earners.¹⁶¹ The lowest income earners needed the sort of “rehabilitative” services offered by federal public housing (childcare services, green spaces, social workers, etc.). For this lowest income group, the “piggyback program” was developed to combine Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and CDBG to encourage the private development of low-income housing.

The Data Center released a report in early 2006 estimating the damage to housing stock after Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma; across the entire state of Louisiana, 331,070 owner-occupied units were damaged compared to 184,179 renter-occupied units.¹⁶² In Orleans Parish, over 70 percent of occupied units (owner- and renter-occupied) were damaged in the storms, totaling 134,344 damaged units.¹⁶³ Of those damaged units, 66,609 were owner-occupied and 67,735 were renter-occupied.¹⁶⁴ Renter-occupied units represented almost exactly 50 percent of total damaged units in Orleans Parish but large multifamily rental structures (10+ units, which generally refers to conventional public housing projects) comprised just 22 percent of those damaged rental units. Further, these larger complexes were more likely to sustain only minor damage from flooding (meaning damage totaling no more than \$5,200 or water depth in the area of no more than 1 foot) than other rental types.¹⁶⁵ Orleans Parish was scheduled to replace about one third of its rental housing while Jefferson Parish (majority middle class, roughly 80 percent white in 2000) only planned to replace 13 percent of its damaged units. Narrowed to affordable

¹⁶¹ Mock, B. (2015, August 27). Why Louisiana Fought Low-Income Housing in New Orleans After Katrina, from <http://www.citylab.com/housing/2015/08/why-louisiana-fought-low-income-housing-in-new-orleans-after-katrina/401939/>

¹⁶² *CURRENT HOUSING UNIT DAMAGE ESTIMATES: HURRICANES KATRINA, RITA, AND WILMA* (pp. 8, 11, 15-16, 23 Rep.). (2006). New Orleans, LA: The Data Center.

¹⁶³ *ibid*

¹⁶⁴ The Data Center, *Current Housing Unit Damage Estimates*, p. 8, 11, 15-16, 23

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*

rental units, only 32 percent of damaged affordable rental units across the New Orleans MSA were to be replaced.¹⁶⁶ And yet, even this replacement by less-than-half measures proved too much for public housing opponents.

HUD had already been planning to completely restructure public housing in New Orleans in accordance with HOPE VI and the new urbanism. Prior to the storm, New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial dismissed New Orleans Saints owner Tom Benson's plan to build a new football stadium downtown, requiring the demolition of the Iberville housing complex, as "completely insensitive."¹⁶⁷ However, in 2002 the St. Thomas public housing complex was destroyed and replaced with mixed income units and a Wal-Mart by developer Pres Kabacoff. After Hurricane Katrina, the valuable land on which the Iberville project was built was within reach. The hurricane provided the necessary emotional smoke screen under which the demolition of one of the most visible public housing projects (located on the historic site of Storyville) in New Orleans despite the fact that the solid construction was nearly unspoiled by the storm.

On December 20, 2007 a city council hearing resulted in the unanimous decision to begin demolition of the remaining public housing projects to make way for various mixed income housing or private business properties. When tenants and activists dared to hold their representatives to task for representing interests not in line with their constituents, the New Orleans Police Department went to work. Beatings, tear gassings, and dozens of arrests took place just beyond the table where the council made their decision.¹⁶⁸ After these wide scale demolitions began, several housing studies were released warning against the "dangers" of "too

¹⁶⁶ Seicshnaydre, p. 686

¹⁶⁷ Thomas, G. (2001, June 28). Saints want to raze Iberville development, but Morial says favored stadium site is off-limits, from http://www.nola.com/saints/index.ssf/2001/06/saints_want_to_raz_e_iberville.html

¹⁶⁸ Arena, J. (2014, February 18). Justice in New Orleans?: The Real Crimes of Former Mayor Ray Nagin and the Entire Ruling Class, from <https://www.blackagendareport.com/content/justice-new-orleans-real-crimes-former-mayor-ray-nagin-and-entire-ruling-class>

much” affordable housing. In May 2009, “The House That Uncle Sam Built” from the Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR) warned that the government was overreaching and was spending too much taxpayer money on housing for low-income earners. Rather than suggest an increased minimum wage to lower the amount of low income earners or convince then-Governor Bobby Jindal to accept proffered federal stimulus money to lessen the tax burden, BGR simply sought the path of least resistance: to stop spending tax money, they should stop building affordable housing.¹⁶⁹ Rather than simply halting the construction of new affordable housing to accommodate a greater demand, some parishes further refused to construct new housing to replace those lost in the storm.

Empowered by the BGR’s report, the state bond commissions rejected plans for two multifamily projects “that would have included permanent supportive housing units to help the homeless.”¹⁷⁰ The chairman and commissioner of the state bond commission both suggested that CBDGs (\$600 million in grants given for redevelopment as part of the recovery package) not be used for affordable housing because of the perceived “market advantage” it granted private developers over those that built market-value units. From there, a moratorium was placed on the construction of new subsidized multifamily projects. The degree to which this would detriment the low-income earners of New Orleans prompted a Fair Housing Act complaint from the US DOJ:

In August 2009, the State Bond Commission adopted a Moratorium on approving bond financing under the Piggyback Program for low-income housing projects located in the City (“Bond Commission Moratorium”). The City and Bond Commission were aware

¹⁶⁹ Mock, Why Louisiana Fought

¹⁷⁰ Mock, Why Louisiana Fought

*that, at the time, the Esplanade and two other affordable housing projects in New Orleans would be subject to the Bond Commission Moratorium. **The Bond Commission stated that its Moratorium was needed to study whether the housing market in the City would support the Esplanade and the other two projects. In March 2011, a final study was completed, which concluded affirmatively that the City’s housing market would support additional affordable housing for very low-income individuals. Despite this report, the Bond Commission has not lifted the Moratorium on the Esplanade, which remains in effect today.***¹⁷¹

State Treasurer John Kennedy, the state bond commissioner chairman who approved the initial moratorium, fought to preserve it until July 2014. With a five year moratorium on affordable housing, the total affordable housing units built after Katrina by 2015 was an underwhelming ~12,000, nowhere near the approximate 20,000 needed in 2009.¹⁷²

Aftershocks/Conclusion (2010 -)

“There are three ways things could have gone. In the first story, New Orleans slides into its own wet grave, another **urban tragedy of geography and economics**. In the second story, New Orleans rebuilds itself as it was before — **a sleepy southern belle of a town** serving up wet weekends of intemperance. In the third story, Hurricane Katrina somehow kickstarts an age of innovation and **an economic renaissance in a city written off for dead**. The Big Easy has chosen the third path — the hard path, and their struggle has revealed both the tantalizing allure, and the deep challenges, of **reinventing a city**.”¹⁷³

Neoliberalism is not so much a failure as it is a deliberate campaign to eradicate poverty by expelling the impoverished through a “free market of the fittest.” The overwhelming measure

¹⁷¹ Amended Complaint in United States v. City of New Orleans (E.D. La.)

¹⁷² Mock, Why Louisiana Fought

¹⁷³ Thompson, D. (2013, April 09). Is New Orleans America's Next Great Innovation Hub? Retrieved July 01, 2017, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/04/is-new-orleans-americas-next-great-innovation-hub/425703/>

of New Orleans' success, recovery, and perseverance following Hurricane Katrina has been economic power. Economic recovery, in line with neoliberal thinking, simply **is** recovery. The economic health of the city necessarily informs the social and cultural health of the city. Yet, an economy that relies on the exploitation of black workers can never be truly healthy. So, it is important to view retrospectives and measures of success with the knowledge that "returning to normal" signifies white economic comfort with the exploitation of poor black laborers.

In the months after the storm, the ever-opportunistic tourism industry got to work again in New Orleans. Thomas describes two distinct narratives of tourism in post-Katrina New Orleans. The first was one of "forgetting" about the storm; tours focused on the pre-Katrina staple narratives demanding "the erasure of black New Orleans *except* insofar as blackness is used to perform, through the 'food, music, and hospitality,' a romantic mythology of the antebellum south, landscaped with cooking, dancing, singing, and serving black stereotypes."¹⁷⁴ The other predominant narrative is one of "rememory." These tours "mandate that visitors come face-to-face with post-Katrina New Orleans" and consistently created new routes to show black areas like the Upper and Lower Ninth wards, New Orleans East, Gentilly, and the Tremé.¹⁷⁵ These tours put forth an effort to correct the misremembered past often represented in the pre-Katrina narratives in addition to telling the contemporary stories of the storm. However, as the immediacy of the storm died down, ambivalence arose among the industry between narratives expressing "both that the city has recovered from the storm intact, ready to do business as usual *and* that New Orleans and its residents, particularly its black population, continue to languish from neglect and abandonment."¹⁷⁶ This stark divide is evidenced in the 2007 and 2008 tourism

¹⁷⁴ Thomas, L. (2009). "Roots Run Deep Here": The Construction of Black New Orleans in Post-Katrina Tourism Narratives. *American Quarterly*, 61(3), p. 755

¹⁷⁵ Thomas (2009), p. 756

¹⁷⁶ Thomas (2009), p. 763

brochures for Tours by Isabelle: in the 2007 brochure, the top half pictures Isabelle dressed as a typical antebellum “belle” at the Oak Alley plantation while the bottom half is an image of the eye of the storm as Hurricane Katrina hit landfall. In the 2008 brochure, the image of the belle at the plantation took up the entire cover.¹⁷⁷

With this in mind, many whites across the country willed the economy into revival despite Hurricane Katrina and despite the 2008 recession. Lt. Gov Mitch Landrieu, days after the storm made landfall but before the worst of it had come to pass, said, “we must rebuild New Orleans, the city that gave us jazz, and music, and multiculturalism.”¹⁷⁸ Not only does Landrieu here perpetuate the false history of racial harmony in New Orleans, he depersonalizes the people of New Orleans, separating the labor and culture of black New Orleanians (jazz) from the city itself mere days after the storm.

White journalist Kristen McQueary “[found herself] wishing for a storm in Chicago — an unpredictable, haughty, devastating swirl of fury. A dramatic levee break. Geysers bursting through manhole covers. A sleeping city, forced onto the rooftops. That's what it took to hit the reset button in New Orleans.”¹⁷⁹ She goes on to admire the ability of “the storm” to create “the nation’s first free-market education system,” destroy teacher’s unions, and “overthrow a corrupt government.”¹⁸⁰ Of course, it is obvious that these crimes were committed not by a storm but by the neoliberal government working under cover of the wind and rain to dismantle the public education, public housing, and labor unions that had survived until the storm. McQueary equates herself with “the residents of New Orleans climbing onto their rooftops and begging for help and

¹⁷⁷ Thomas (2009). P. 764

¹⁷⁸ Harris, F. (2005, September 02). Is New Orleans a city without a future?, from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1497466/Is-New-Orleans-a-city-without-a-future.html>

¹⁷⁹ McQueary, K. (2015, August 14). Chicago, New Orleans, and rebirth, from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-chicago-katrina-financial-disaster-landrieu-new-orleans-mcqueary-emanuel-pers-20150813-column.html>

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*

waving their arms and lurching toward rescue helicopters” because she can’t wait for the neoliberal floodwaters to swallow Chicago fast enough.¹⁸¹ With people like McQueary equating the fear of death and of being flooded from your own home with an obvious disdain for government social spending and assistance for the welfare of its citizens even ten years after the storm, the future looks bleak for those looking to oppose neoliberalism.

What Is To Be Done?

Naomi Klein, in the first few days following the storm, declared, “the \$10.5 [billion] released by Congress and the \$500 [million] raised by private charities doesn't actually belong to the relief agencies or the government - it belongs to the victims.”¹⁸² She called for a “people’s reconstruction” of the city, to allow the people to rebuild their homes, or move where and when they chose. Jay Arena called for a “people’s tribunal drawn from the victims of capitalism” to put “the real looters,” the capitalists, on trial. Overwhelmingly, the solution to neoliberalism is democracy and socialism. Neoliberalism, as a detour along capitalism’s inevitable journey to fascism, has an expiration date that is soon approaching. The system of privatization, policing, and alienation is not sustainable and can only be remedied with a people’s solution. There exists in New Orleans both empty houses and homeless people; for the reason of profit, they are not allowed to exercise their human right to housing. For the reason of profit, democracy has been consistently relegated to a mostly anonymous elite. For the reason of profit, thousands of residents were left stranded in New Orleans for weeks or even months. What is to be done is to reject and remove the capitalist class who exploit the laboring class for private benefit. In a democratic people’s republic, the imperative of profit no longer prevents the homeless from

¹⁸¹ McQueary, Chicago, New Orleans, and rebirth

¹⁸² Klein, N. (2005, September 8). Let the People Rebuild New Orleans, from <https://www.thenation.com/article/let-people-rebuild-new-orleans/>

receiving a house, the sick from receiving healthcare, or the hungry from receiving food. In such a state Hurricane Katrina may have been just a storm.

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