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Abstract

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THE RECONSTRUCTION OF NEW ORLEANS: POST HURRICANE KATRINA

By

December S. Venson

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Introduction

New Orleans: A City under Reconstruction

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the many different effects of hurricane Katrina on the City of New Orleans and the rest of the world. The great city of New Orleans dealt with a natural disaster with little state or federal support until days into the crisis. Many high ranking officials were well aware of the threat that a storm of Katrina's magnitude could pose for a city with levees. In addition, prior to hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was overdue for an overhaul of its law, government, and education systems. There were thousands of families within the city unprepared for a storm that could destroy their entire livelihood. The recovery efforts as of this date have been slow and ineffective.

Research on this paper brought many different areas of concern to the surface. One question should be asked in a blunt phrase. Who has to gain from the city and its new plans for reconstruction? Many evacuees were those of lower income status; they were relocated to many other cities and states outside of the disaster areas. Residents who were able to evacuate did so not knowing whether they were going to have anything left when they returned. Upon returning many New Orleans citizens are choosing to leave the city all together and start a new life elsewhere. Their exit has not been met with much resistance. High crime, rent increases and elevated insurance premiums have resulted in many new orleanians leaving the city they loved behind. (Shaila Dewan 2007: 1A) Although many of these issues were known prior to Katrina, they have now exceeded the tolerance level of many New Orleans residents.

The Aftermath

Many well educated and middle class New Orleans residents are now faced with the hard choice of remaining under tragic and destitute conditions or leaving and starting “anew” elsewhere. The city cannot withstand a complete loss of educated and middle class residents who along with their assets could contribute to the well being of the city. According to the American Red Cross, Hurricane Katrina alone destroyed an estimated 275,000 housing units. House Resolution 4100 was a bill sponsored by Representative Richard Baker of Louisiana’s 6th District. (The Louisiana Recovery ACT 2005) This bill favors property owners who face hardships due to Katrina and its resulting damage. Therefore, the program benefits owners who have their property purchased by LRC (Louisiana Recovery Corporation) up to \$500,000 dollars with options on how to rebuild. Now keep in mind that the funds used to purchase properties from the owners are from bonds issued from the State Treasury department. The property would then be auctioned off to private developers only after infrastructure repairs are made. The proceeds would allow the bonds to be repaid.

The Greater Population of New Orleans

The greater population of New Orleans is made up of lower income subsidy - eligible citizens, many of whom were displaced after Katrina. Within these masses were also homeowners who lived from paycheck to paycheck with the required minimal housing insurance. They ask now, “What has Louisiana offered us in regards to our homes and repairs?” The 4100 bill has yet to offer options of repair and mortgage forgiveness to these citizens. This is because The Federal Road Home program has yet to provide relief for many neighborhoods in need of repair. On Thursday June 14th 2007, many New Orleans-area residents marched from the Governor’s Mansion to the State Capitol. (Gyan 2007: 19A) Resident and marcher Francine

Lamonthe stated she has waited since 2005 for assistance from the program designed to help many New Orleans residents. Lamonthe says she was offered \$30,000 to elevate her home and that was not enough to make the necessary repairs. The marchers are questioning the facts regarding the \$5 billion Road Home shortfall. “They said at first they had enough to cover everybody. What happened to that money?” Lamonthe asked. Francine Lamonthe has been away from her home for 21 months following Katrina and has to commute from Baton Rouge, where she resides with relatives. The mayor of New Orleans Ray Nagin and many other city officials marched with concerned New Orleans citizens and their families.

The Response

The Governor of Louisiana, Kathleen Blanco, responded to the citizens concerns with a released statement, that \$5 billion in state money has gone to recovery since Katrina and Hurricane Rita. (Gyan 2007: 19A) She also added that reconstruction in South Louisiana remains her top priority. Governor Blanco plans to meet with congress in Washington with plans to ask for \$714 million on “The Road Home” deficit — a mix of federal recovery dollars and reallocated state cash. She will be asking federal officials to fill the remaining gap. The delay comes from the department of Federal Emergency Management Agency (Gyan 2007)

Even so, The New York Times reported that the cost for the road home project will cost well over the previous estimated \$7.5 billion due to many more families applying than anticipated. Louisiana recipients could receive up to \$150,000 dollars to repair or rebuild. (Eaton 2007) This could possibly mean that Francine Lamonthe as mentioned above may be able to get her appeal granted due to a larger amount of funds being allocated for The Road Home project. Not surprising the financial problems of the project has lead to several rounds of the “blame game”

and finger-pointing. This occurs when an organization fails to hold up its end of responsibility. The federal government *should* and *has* been well versed in the events of disasters and public havoc. Yet, the government failed to develop an effective chain of command.

Centralizing decision making only works when the people in charge are competent. Many federal organizations function at capacity and the main *key* organizations fail to produce effective key resolutions (Westrum 2007: 4). In order to have been effective, President Bush and Governor Blanco needed to stay on top of the renovations funds for New Orleans. Out of 140,000 applicants, only 22,000 families have received funds for renovating their homes and only expending 1.3 billion out of the total allocated for this purpose (Eaton 2007). There is something seriously wrong with this ratio. Top government officials have the power to spend fund(s) for their other agendas. Why is New Orleans not there top agenda? After 9/11 President Bush quickly implemented action plans to fund a massive war for search for weapons of mass destruction which have never been found.

Other Responsible Sectors

Many private insurance agencies have not honored claims to their insured customers. The government expected these insurance agencies to pay for damages incurred by Katrina victims. New Orleans citizens paid monthly premiums to there private insurance companies with expectation they would be covered in the event a natural and resulting property damage. On the other hand, the National Flood Insurance paid out to claimants as promised. Most government relief funds for Katrina victims pay only after private insurance companies have paid their share. Then they normally pay the difference. Because of this tow years after Katrina costs have skyrocketed. Interesting enough, we are back to the blame game and finger-pointing again;

President Bush and his administration blame the state of Louisiana for creating the shortfall by paying for home damage caused by wind, rather than limiting the program to flood damage. Insurance policies are more likely to cover wind damage than flood damage (Eaton 2007). Donald E. Powell, President Bush's coordinator for Gulf Coast rebuilding, stated in an email, that he would make good on more funds if the state could provide viable cause! Why would this tragedy where this natural disaster caused millions of people to be without homes not occur viable? Ironically, responsible leaders in government have dragged their feet. Mr. Powell states, that he is willing to settle this matter quickly. Further he indicated his willingness to sit down with the Governor of Louisiana to resolve this situation.

However, FEMA said it cannot release money intended for hazard-mitigation efforts for elevating homes. FEMA blames the Road Home for discriminating against younger citizens by exempting people 65 and older from a requirement that grant recipients live in their rebuilt houses for three years (Eaton 2007). Moreover some democrat officials for the state of Louisiana feel that the responsibility does not lie just with the Federal Government but the state of Louisiana as well.

A group of former insurance adjusters created a case against their former insurance agencies filing a "whistleblower" lawsuit stating the practices and conduct of business by the insurance companies were inadequate and illegal. The allegations refer to plans of insurance companies, shifting payout cost to the tax payer supported flood insurance program, with the hopes of lessening the amount they owe to homeowners. (Eaton, Treaster 2007) Excessive insurance rates for home and property insurance, has delayed and discouraged builders from

constructing rental housing. This then has caused a huge dilemma for non-profit agencies attempting to provide housing for elderly and indigent citizens.

Levee Reconstruction

The levees along the Mississippi coast line have already shown vast problems after Katrina. The levees were repaired by the Army Corps of Engineers. Robert Bea, a leading critic of the corps, investigated the levees and reported the weakest locations are along the Mississippi coast. Dr. Bea was asked by National Geographic to evaluate the levees after Katrina and the yearlong reconstruction project. The Army Corps Engineers boasted that their most formidable project was along the most serious flaws turned up in the rebuilt levees along the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet ship channel. This channel broke in more than 20 places when Katrina's storm surge pounded it; thus leading to devastating flooding in the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish (Bourne, Schwartz 2007: 17A1) . Bea also found areas where large rain storms have eroded the rebuilt levees. Without effective levees, New Orleans will surely parish under future strong hurricanes. New Orleans seems to have trouble filtering out rain water from the city due to the fact the levees have not been renovated in almost a decade. The problem may lie with the need to cover the levees with a substantial material such as concrete or something of that nature. However the Corps feels they are doing what is best fit for the levees and that a harder material will not fix the problem (Bourne, Schwartz 2007: 17A1)

Nevertheless, there needs to be less bureaucracy and more collaboration among the responsible groups to ensure the safety of citizens of New Orleans. Lawsuits and fighting over who is to blame will not solve the problem at hand, during such tirades another storm could hit at anytime, then what? Again it is up to individuals who hold power to bring together collaborating

minds to reconstruct the levees with sufficient collaborative scenarios and plans in place to ensure they work properly. Perhaps a more Organic approach to the repair of the levees would serve as promising outcome. Each person with power should take the issues directly to individuals in charge of the repairs.

Angels in Action

Hope is not all diminished...

There are many private organizations and well known contributors to the survivors of Katrina. In November 2006, Oprah™ Angel Network and Habitat for Humanity® began building a fifth “Oprah Katrina Homes” community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for families impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (Angel Lane Oprah.com). Oprah's Angel Network donated \$11 million dollars to Americas Second Harvest to purchase and distribute food, water, and household supplies to survivors in Louisiana as well as Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Texas. Oprah Winfrey took it upon herself to ensure she placed all available contact numbers and organization relief names for individuals who would like to contribute and or contact these entities on her website. For six days post Katrina Oprah called on her staff, friends and colleagues to assist with relief efforts. Oprah traveled to Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi and Tennessee, she arrived on the coast with convoy trucks loaded with food, water and basic necessities. This goes back to the notion of one person taking control, a person whom may not hold any real power in government or otherwise, quickly became a bureaucracy of one. She did what she knew needed to be done to help the victims of Katrina. As the president of the United States flew above the states aboard Air Force One, Oprah and her staff were on the ground giving there time love and money to those in dire straits.

FEMA did not release desperately needed goods, foods, or sufficient supplies; and often this was caused by not having a single routing number and the approval to move forward. The USS Bataan, a ship well equipped and prepared to assist the thousands of people in need, was turned back, by FEMA's director Michael Chertoff. Chertoff was un-trained and ill-prepared for the events that took place along the gulf coast (Westrum 2007: 4). A bureaucracy that failed in many areas. However, in the most of these failures there stood many angels in the light giving what they could to the Katrina victims

After Hurricane Katrina, Oprah asked all her viewers to open their hearts. As of September 2006, donations to the Oprah Angel Network Katrina registry total more than \$11 million. Homes have been built in four states—Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama—before the one year anniversary of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. (Oprah.com, Philanthropy) Among the many great individuals assisting Katrina victims, is a well known physician by the name of Dr. Mehmet Oz; also known on the Oprah show as “Dr. Oz”, who omit you will read below, he was completely un-prepared for what he encountered in New Orleans. Dr. Oz says, "It's pretty desperate here. They're not drinking. They're not eating. A lot of folks are passing out. You can smell death in the air. Just feces and excrement and human sweat." He goes on to say; “But if you can imagine, the situation on the streets of New Orleans is just as grim.” "I've walked these streets dozens of times; I could never imagine this happening to New Orleans: a dead body in the middle of a street," says Dr. Oz. "You'd never think this is possible in an American city. But literally all we can do right now is put chairs in front of him so he doesn't get run over by cars. Amazing to read, that such an ordeal has occurred right here in an American city (Dr. Oz 2005).

Lisa Ling is a reporter who has traveled to many war zones around the world. Yet she felt overwhelmed by the chaotic scene she witnessed right here on American soil. In her own words; Lisa met many families that told the same horrific stories of their ordeal in the Superdome, the very place that was supposed to serve as a safe haven. Shaken by their stories, Lisa felt compelled to question the way authorities responded: "If this had happened to an affluent, white community, would people have had to wait for five days in a dangerous, dark, disgustingly dirty environment, or would something have been done? This is America, that's the thing that is most disconcerting about this," says Lisa. (Berkus, Ling 2005)

Faith Hill and "Tim (McGraw, her husband) knew that we had to do something. They did one simple task to begin they contacted the American Red Cross and asked, "What can we do? What can we bring?" She was given a list of specifics that she and Tim quickly placed into action. They obtained three semis and their very own personal bus. They began calling close friends and family," says Faith. "We were able to do a major attack on the city of Nashville in one day and it was just mind-blowing how the community came together," she adds. (Hill, McGraw 2005)

Matthew McConaughey was of many Celebrities there to offer assistance and did so in so many ways. Matthew (2005) says that his expectations prior to arriving in New Orleans were not that defined". "I knew what I knew from the television. I saw quite a bit of destruction. I didn't understand necessarily the scope of it. I'm still trying to digest what I think we're all going to have to digest for some time. There's so much work to do. The one thing that is pure about helping out with a tragedy like this is service. Share what you have. And that's the best way we know." McConaughey (2005)

Habitat for Humanity has stepped in and taken responsibility for helping rebuild many locations within New Orleans. They are heading a project called the “Musicians Village” a row of brightly colored homes mainly to be sold to musicians, musicians whom make Mardi Gras what it is musically each year. The site sits on 81 acres that was in the past, an old junior high school. Seventy-one homes will be built here and they will sell for \$75,000 plus the sweat and equity it takes to build them. With the Habitat for Humanity each person qualifying for a home has to contribute so many “sweat hours” into the building of there very own home. Seventy to eighty percent of these homes will be sold to musicians. The buildings are raised 67 inches off the ground due to the high water marks left on other building near by Katrina flooding. Note that the 67 inches is two inches higher than the recommended footage the federal Emergency Management Agency made effective policy (Pareles 2007).

A Larger Housing Crisis

To add to the chaos mentioned in this report, thousands of evacuees since Katrina have been living in trailers set up by the government as emergency housing. The government announced that evacuees will be offered the chance to purchase these trailers for a few hundred dollars. Those whom don’t purchase will have to rent per month at the cost of \$50 which will soon to increase. The Federal Emergency Management Agency runs the trailer program. It is reported that roughly around 86,000 families are still living in the trailers. This is astonishing due to the fact Katrina occurred two years ago. The majority of the trailers reside in Louisiana, although about 26,000 families occupy trailers in Mississippi, said R. David Paulison (Eaton 2007). Eighty percent of those families living in trailers are parked in people’s driveways or yards.

According to government estimates, hurricanes Katrina and Rita collectively destroyed more than 200,000 homes. These estimates include many apartments that, to date, have yet to be rebuilt. The state of Louisiana recently announced that it had awarded \$202 million in federal funds to help small landlords restore more than 5,200 rental units. There is no mention of guidelines as to whether these small landlords would take the money for restoration then sell there property for higher profit to a non local wealthy developer looking to capitalize off of this potential harvest land of wealth.

One could predict that the problem of few apartments being readily available to rent makes way for rental rates to soar along the Gulf Coast. This presents a new problem for the already homeless, post Katrina victims of New Orleans unable to afford rental rates; thus they are unable to return home. There may be some light at the end of the tunnel for those whom thought they would not be able to afford to reside in the home town of New Orleans. April of 2007 FEMA turned over controlling reigns to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. They will now head the rental assistance program. HUD has long standing expertise in running long term housing. Why FEMA was given this task In the first place, is still to be answered.

The community organized group Acorn, sued the federal government because of the manner in which it handled post-hurricane housing programs. Acorn praised the extension on housing and the program's shift to HUD. The housing department now has the task of finding adequate housing for the families not able to purchase the trailers and for those whom would like to *not* live in such a cramped reminder of the disaster. For a family to go from a single family home to a trailer can be mentally depressing. To make matters worse there has been a class-

action lawsuit filed in Baton Rouge federal court that claims “hundreds of thousands” of people in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama may have been exposed to the carcinogen Formaldehyde. Named as defendants are Forest River Inc. and “other, as yet unnamed travel trailer vendors to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.” (Brown 2007)

Allegations are that many families have been exposed to dangerously high concentrations of formaldehyde fumes; but, they have no choice but to accept their horrible situation. The trailers in question are the 120,000 temporary trailers FEMA supplied to those displaced by the 2005 storm. The Sierra Club conducted indoor air quality testing of 34 trailers in Louisiana and Mississippi and all but two had aerial formaldehyde levels above those considered safe. Formaldehyde is used in a number of materials inside the trailers, including particle board, plywood, glue, curtains, molded plastic and countertops. As of May 2007, FEMA had received 140 formaldehyde complaints (Eaton 2007). With the onset of these allegations as well as the lawsuit filed, FEMA and HUD have distributed information on proper trailer ventilation to occupants. Fifty trailer units have been replaced to date. FEMA says they will no longer purchase trailers containing materials made with the carcinogen Formaldehyde.

New Orleans Police Department

New Orleans has several police stations operating out of temporary trailers. Officers are working out of trailers for an evidence room housed in the back of an 18-wheeler truck, and a makeshift crime lab set up at a nearby university. Senator Mary Landrieu, D-La., and Sen. David Vitter, R-La., met before a congressional panel to discuss the rising crime waves post Katrina. The city of New Orleans has not fully regained control of crime. The police stations and the city

jail facilities that were destroyed during Katrina have yet to be rebuilt. The violence taking over the city has gotten out of hand, argue many officials.

However without the adequate means to function properly, NOPD argues they have a slim to zero chance of fighting crime and housing criminals. Criminals are well aware of the city's crippling position. Only four out of the 11 jails serving the city have reopened, says Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy, D-Conn "The COPS program has been cut to send police money to Baghdad," Leahy said. (Shields 2007:16A) Despite numerous criminal activities throughout the city, the issue remains that there needs to be adequate buildings and facilities available to effectively carry out police functions. It is not a shock that the state of Louisiana has moved very slow in regards to housing for its citizens, but it's equally troubling the length of time it's taking for municipal departments to have adequate facilities.

The New Orleans Police department has suffered dramatic moral issues prior to Katrina and has been aggravated by the lower budget since Katrina. Many would agree that New Orleans has always been affected negatively, by political influence, dating back to early 18-1900's. If the city could get its buildings projects functioning properly, morale could probably be raised amongst police officials. Through the hurricane Katrina tragedy, this may be what the city needs to show the rest of the world that they are not running a corruption government. Without proper facilities to house the criminals and suspects, the city has little to no chance of regaining and restoring power over crime. What does this mean for the many displaced Katrina victims wanting to return to the city of New Orleans? Will these individuals want to return to a broken city unable to uphold justice? For those whom want to invest in New Orleans for business ventures, will this city be able to provide security? For those residents that were part of the

growing criminal problem, are finding it hard to return to the city they once knew as home. As many of the cities housing projects are now being torn down and rebuilt to house the middleclass with integration of low income residents. The housing projects accounted for more than half of the cities crimes. As lower income, low education and a secluded means of living created a habitat of despair, many residents had to find any means to survive. It is believed that the efforts the city has made so far are those of which to filter out the bad and flood in the good. The city of New Orleans is in need of criminal overhaul and justice based legal systems. Before Katrina the police of the lower ninth, sixth and third wards would systematically walk the beat in the housing projects daily. However, as many of the city's police departments suffer gravely from depleted numbers, they don't have the man power to run these programs within the ghettos. Previously the housing projects of New Orleans housed a great deal of respected and loving residents that cared for their community. This fact however does not overshadow the high rate of crime, drug activity, and murder(s) to which projects have fallen victim. Before Katrina, it is reported that the Lafitte housing project located in the 6th ward succumbed to four murders; four in 2003, seven in 2004, and one in 2005. (Reckdahl 2006: 6)

Low Income Housing

-Project Housing of New Orleans-

Many of New Orleans housing projects were built over fifty years ago. The section 8 and HUD housing programs are well overdue for revision as they have been aggressively approaching rebuilding for market-rate and subsidized housing. Creating these new neighborhoods are the future priorities of the government and the state of New Orleans. Reconstruction plans consist of tearing down existing housing to make way for new developments of mixed income housing. The 80% of low income residents that are waiting to

return home are opposed to the new idea of reform housing. Is it really possible to place people with problems they had prior to Katrina in new housing that is worth more equity than the “*below median*” they were required to pay?.

New Orleans lower income areas were gravely destroyed by Katrina; these were mostly federally zoned sections of entire neighborhoods of subsidized housing. These neighborhoods of great poverty were not formed by mutual uniformity but created by deliberate government choices that placed poor minorities into less desirable areas of the city. Without question many of these families would like to return to their way of life. However the new Section 8 plans are geared towards more of self substance and racial diversity amongst neighbors. There are many new government and state level plans in action to ensure individuals are equipped to function and maintain personal sufficiency, without the government being too much of a reliable crutch for those who choose or were products of social construction; not to educate and seek training on their own without force from “ill-functional ran” programs. Social Science has shown that integrating people amongst those whom have a visual difference and background proves to be rewarding and empowering. Research on poverty and housing shows that a high number of poor individuals wish to move towards economic opportunity but often are daunted by the search process and the emotional disruption of moving.

Unfortunately the same fate applies to the working poor. The events of Katrina have placed the city of New Orleans in a high risk bracket of reconstruction. Insurance agencies are protecting their underwriting agreements by charging higher rates for damage and natural disaster premiums. As the expense of building rises and the addition of insurance premiums; far less affordable housing will be built. This creates an impending problem for the working class

citizens who fall below the median to afford market-rate rent. Whether educated or the other, the rate of rental properties and housing units has forced an extremely sensitive situation into a plethora of new problems.

Housing placement services assist housing citizens in need of coaching throughout the application process. Conspiracy theories postulate that the levees of Louisiana were left as they were to eradicate certain areas of the state, to provide a situation of renewed building and a higher class of society. It would seem that without the guarantee of a safe environment it's not suitable for anyone. Crime at the rates it's maintained since Katrina, low income housing overall may not stand any chance of getting vouchers for housing within the familiar realms of environment provided by the ghettos and housing projects. Discernibly, only eleven percent of the nation's public housing agencies are issuing the emergency vouchers for current HUD certificate holders; which means many of the families with vouchers prior to Katrina are now without Section 8 and not receiving much assistance. According to reports from HUD of the 5,146 displaced Housing Authority of New Orleans recipients, only about 2,300 have received vouchers and further more face the growing problem of finding landlords that will accept the vouchers. (Reckdahl 2006: 8) this may be what lower income status families need to prove that they too are able to be productive in society without the need for so much of the governmental assistance. Although the situation in its entirety may prove to be wayward, look at how the entire economy is functioning throughout the United States.

A New Project

Many New Orleans natives are investing in Evacuee homes. This new trend is ensuring they will have a safe and secure place to shelter personal belongings ensuring “all” is not lost in the event of another hurricane. Katrina has prompted many new orleanians to figure out escape routes out of the city, where to park their second vehicles high enough to avoid water damage and vandalism. Further they are keeping up with the hurricane seasons and when to best leave. The outskirts of New Orleans and the state of Mississippi have become a safe haven for many middle class citizens. They have purchased second homes made possible by foreclosed properties and lower real-estate rates. Last year developers came up with a plan to build a mini New Orleans in Macomb Mississippi.

The homes are geared towards middle class citizens who want a piece of home while waiting out storms in their home town. (Read 2007: 1, 3) It is interesting to note that many of New Orleans residents fear another flood, almost as if it is imminent. Rebuilding for New Orleans may not be the city’s only problem. Keeping their residents in the city is the new issue. Other parts of Louisiana will see a huge rise in real-estate and new neighbors moving into there business areas. Although many are looking to only provide a safe haven for future catastrophe, New Orleans still has many faithful citizens waiting to come back home to live.

Neighborhoods Rebuilding: Generative Leadership

The Broadmoor neighborhood residents have proven they are capable of taking charge, at a time when city government has failed. Residents, who formerly resided in the Broadmoor neighborhood just west of Downtown, were informed that if a majority did not return within four months the area would be razed and its land would be turned into a park. Residents quickly came

together and formed their own commission in which they named “The Broadmoor Improvement Association”. This Association would include those who returned and were willing to rebuild and contribute to New Orleans recovery. Mayor Ray Nagin formed a rebuilding commission to ensure the rebuilding of areas damaged by Katrina. However all the plans have numerous rules that often hinder progress. The Broadmoor neighborhood has many historical homes and has been classified as a historical district. Many of the home(s) were built prior to 1950. As of this date only 55 percent of its original residents have moved back in, and new residents are purchasing homes there also. We love our neighborhood, says “Latoya Cantrell”, the president of the BIA. (Shevroy 2007) The Broadmoor neighborhood presented a rather successful example of a generative group-think. New Orleans has a growing number of neighborhoods forming out of generative style management from like-minded groups at large. Residents want to move back to the areas from which they have grown and raised children in. Forming partnerships with universities, private investors and non profit organizations, homes are being rebuilt, gutted and raised to levels well suited for future storms, natural disasters and longevity.

Making the New Concept Work

Post Katrina the lower ninth ward suffered grave damages in large numbers. Ironically other areas of New Orleans, also endured great damage to personal owned and city owned property these properties are now being re-zoned for demolition and total reconstruction. To date all reconstruction areas of New Orleans are focused on a new Neo- New Orleans. A great deal of the city run housing projects are scheduled for reconstruction or total demolition. More over these sites will be the new locations of city parks and new housing complexes. The new housing plans are geared toward the middleclass with an attempt to integrate New Orleans large number of working and non working poor. This plan will filter the six main housing projects that are to

date closed to its residents. Within this mix of citizens are the senior citizens and disabled who survive on fixed incomes. The Fair Market Rent report, released recently by HUD states that the average rent in the eighth parish of New Orleans metro area has risen 45 percent post Katrina. Prior to hurricane Katrina, rent rates for a two bedroom apartment went for about \$676, now the rent for the same size unit is \$978 and a three bedroom unit is now a whopping \$1,256. (NHLS-FMRR 2007) with rent prices steadily moving upward many residents cannot afford to return to New Orleans. The individuals and families that can manage the new market rates will want to live in a stable environment free from constant crime and poverty. Despite opposition HUD will continue with plans to demolish and redevelop four of the largest housing projects, demolishing about 3,000 apartments that were occupied by low income residents prior to Katrina. The new Housing complexes will provide market rate units and about 1,000 low income subsidized units. (Dewan 2007: 4)

HUD and the Family Housing Authority of New Orleans have functioned on outdated material that in most cases goes as far as back 40-50 years ago, when the housing projects were first built. HUD realizes the complex needs of residents and the city's citizens that are hard to place in what they are hoping to create as "main stream society". HUD has looked at the Chicago public housing family study named the HUD HOPE IV; this program effectively housed lower income residents within the middle class sanctum and it worked for many of its residents. The housing complexes consist of market -rate units and subsidized units. Those hard to place where the disabled mentally ill, and those with criminal records. (Reckdahl 2006)

What is the HOPE IV project?

It was a program developed as a result of recommendations made by the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, which was implemented to propose a National Action Plan to eradicate severely distressed public housing.

(HOPE IV Public and Indian Housing)

The Rhizome Factor

Generally what is happening; after Katrina the city's project housing that was home to some 900-2,000 residents each, were fenced up and closed down. With all the projects residents living in neighboring states or with relatives and friends within the city are now permanently displaced. Construction on many of the new planned middle class housing has taken a route of slow and long winded progress. Low income, co-dependant residents are left with the notion of patience, and hope that they will be able to afford the new housing units. Expressed most firmly, within the written interviews of various former housing project residents, was the feeling that they are being wronged and would like to maintain life as it was prior to Katrina; the life they knew as – "life in the ghetto". Their need of family orientation seems to be the popular concern. The housing projects have created a situation of extreme social dependency. Confronted with retention, *change* is not readily accepted by many of New Orleans poor that are relocated to temporary living environments that are very uncomfortable. Sooner rather than later the housing projects were going to need a complete overhaul and restructuring. Providing the same type of relentless environment within a society, inevitably will lead to the dependence and the need for poverty level living. Outdated structures of the New Orleans housing projects segregated the middle class from the lower class social sector. Education, shopping, medical resources, community and local based centers were that of a lower quality to the residents of project

housing. Theoretically, becoming a product of the environments stems from many factors that need immediate attention. The city of New Orleans has to make a conscious effort to ensure the cycle of dependency generates one of self sufficiency.

Although many of New Orleans residents are not in favor of relocating to new neighborhoods they will have to adjust to the new housing plans. Recipients of HUD vouchers and city housing are being forced to except and adjust. If they fail to face this reality, many will be left behind within a society determined to move forward. President Bush was quoted as saying, “we want evacuees to come home, for the best of reason- because they have a real chance at a better life in a place they love.” (Dewan 2007: 1A) This then suggests there is a plan to revamp New Orleans for the better, forcing people to make decisions about their lives. The government assisted programs are only going to go so far with assisting individuals with assistance.

Hurricane Katrina proved that the government will no longer make way for city funded housing projects to linger within the back drop of society. With the new plans underway and many of the housing projects cited for demolition, the government has to be concerned with the hypothetical question, of whether *potential* middleclass occupants will seek housing with subsidized residents? With this question there has to be an effect efficient means by which to systematically incorporate indigent citizens into mainstream society.

The year of electoral change is forth coming, the state of Louisiana will be electing a new governor and amid this election, America collectively will vote for a new president. Voters have a great duty to ensure the prospective leaders will produce strong leadership and regard the state

of events Katrina to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of reform; will be that of substantial effective quality.

Future Metamorphosis

A large population of today's society believe they will die as poor as the day they came into this world, which is a sad perspective, you become what you believe, and you are only what you perceive yourself to be. This Rhizome way of thinking stems from several factors: This tangled web of roots that creates a network of cause and effect. The responsible parties held accountable and in high regard for the well being of citizens, are the controlling cells manning the web of roots. An underground growth of networks designed to keep those in power with the power. Decisions made by these controlling cells, affects the web of roots and stems creating a situation that at times, hard to determine a realistic and beneficial solution.

The initial implementation of project housing was meant to assist the immigrants, blacks of the south and north during a time when segregation was under social construction. These housing complexes were seen as somewhat beneficial for the time. Although many would argue the housing projects were simply built for means of "racial cleansing". They ensured that the immigrants and blacks of non Creole and Cajun decent were placed in an area hidden from main stream society and forced to create their own sense of community. However, over time the housing projects were not updated and the controlling bodies (the state and government) failed to update the management process to fit the evolution of future social needs. Such as; population increases, education progress, employment, government assistance etc. In short, the housing projects should have become a means of assistance for the short term, not one of long term dependence. Several opportunity's and basic facilities such as education and healthcare facilities

have been delegated to the poor by government(s) that place lower standards on care and education levels. This also applies to the local grocer and corner liquor stores. Fresh fruit and fresh meat of high quality is not held at the highest concern. To provide an off brand or knock off cheap brand of food rations is best suited for the poor. This can be proven by simply going to a neighborhood you know is occupied with low income residents and walk into their local grocer. Drive up the street to the neighborhood corner liquor store, what will you find inside? Providing the higher level of facilities into these new reconstructed neighborhoods will be made possible by way of middle class tax payers and the low income tax contributing to the wealth of the community. The future perspective of the government's officials is to make sure that the low income and underprivileged citizens prior to Katrina grow from the past and succeed in society.

Education: A Social Construct

Education seems to be the main missing link within New Orleans social structure. Most low income residents don't have an education further than the ninth grade. This is startling and an insult to our society, to allow individuals to not partake in the requirement to gain an education. The state of New Orleans should be held accountable for this unfortunate mishap. Laws and programs should be put in place immediately for education levels of at least that of a high school diploma.

Without education you cannot function and evolve within the economy. Majority of the New Orleans population are at the poverty level. Majority of the impoverished residents are not educated. Social segregation motivated my prejudice, cripples the society on a whole. If there is a need for reform of the welfare system and HUD programs, educating the impoverished population

is the first stage of economic recovery. Poverty has its ripple affects; moreover, if you are not the person experiencing poverty directly, in some way or another it will have an indirect affect.

Most importantly, the State of Louisiana must recognize its responsibility regarding this unfortunate equation. Society is built on a structure that places leaders in roles of command and decision making, for the well being of social progression. Within the social “superstructure” of a society, citizens have to independently take ownership of their place within society. When faced with the inevitable reality of evolution and change society has to be prepared and pro-active in participation or progression. Charles Darwin believed heavily in the evolution of man as a species. His views on survival are presenting visible signs in the wake of Katrina, and more so within the present state of our countries economy. For generations we have witnessed vast parts of society falling behind and in between the cracks of social change. Hurricane Katrina not only nearly wiped out areas of New Orleans, but it also introduced the world to witness mankind and its ability to survive. —“Survival of the fittest” will be a main theme for the entire state of Louisiana.

The low income citizens of New Orleans have experienced great hardship since Katrina, since they are without adequate education to prepare and provide suitable employment for at least a middle class level. This is not insinuating that the middle working class new orleanians did not face hardship post Katrina, but many owned homes or had jobs to relocate, money saved, insurance, and an education to insure them employment in the wake of permanent relocation outside of New Orleans. Again the Rhizome effect takes shape in full perspective. Several civil rights activists predict definition through action depicts an example of “ethnic cleansing”. Although all class sectors of citizens through New Orleans are enduring similar hardship

regarding housing; the individuals with the least amount of education has been the model citizens of effective removal.

An example of – not knowing anything other than what you have grown accustomed, to that of the Iberville Housing Project(s) residents. The Iberville was slated for redevelopment prior to Katrina. After the hurricane, residents were locked out and un-able to return. (Lydersen 2007) Although some residents were recently permitted to return, the inevitable reality and fact of near future relocation appears non-motivating to its residents. The co-dependency on returning to the housing project in its below-poverty, standards of living caused this trapped scenario. In other words, the residents of the Iberville focused only upon returning to their way of life and living conditions no matter the impoverished situation. Social isolation has caused family values and norms to be placed at a level that one can only experience once they have been introduced and then practiced.

Multi-Family Affordable Housing

Searching for adequate housing has proven to be a large problem for several New Orleans residents. Although Katrina occurred two years ago, residents of New Orleans have yet to locate housing that will accept working families with low wages. A major factor concerning multi-family housing inherently creates the need to provide safe and stable environments to New Orleans citizens. Distinctively, multifamily housing complexes have constructed units varying in numbers. Any one complex could house up to 136-180 families. Dubiously, the term “*multi-family*,” substantiates, housing for low income families/individuals; occupant size one-two would have an income cap of \$27,000; occupant size up to three would have an income cap around \$30,360. The housing complex, *The Crossing* formulated these income figures based

upon the states median for low income housing guidelines.(Anderson 2007) Ideally the discernible plan is to provide housing for the working class. New Orleans has presented a housing *reconstruction* system that will move its residents into an economically driven society. The past retention of housing projects and “ghettos,” are nothing more than an economic throwback within New Orleans history. Rent for a one-bedroom at The Crossing cost about \$546 a month. Although the rental rates are approximately ten to fifteen percent below the market rate (Anderson 2007), overtly, the residents of New Orleans must provide a stable employment position to accommodate the rental rates.

Walnut Square apartments are an example of complete inhalation due to the damage of Katrina. Walnut Square was torn down in 2005, and there are plans to rebuild the complex designed to accommodate 209 mixed-income families. Formerly the apartments were a series of concrete slabs, worn and defrayed by the changes of time. (Gyan 2007: 14A) The National Housing Partnership Foundation, of Washington D.C.; a non-profit, owns the Walnut Square. Ideally the foundation wishes to make the *new* Walnut Square housing complex, one that will serve as a model for future affordable multifamily housing communities. (Gyan 2007: 14A) Walnut Square would include 12 acres. This will facilitate 16 buildings of housing units, administrative offices, a five-thousand square foot community center, two playgrounds, walking trails, and one acre reserved for commercial space. (Gyan 2007: 14A) In reflection of similar affordable housing communities, Walnut Square will also accommodate mixed- income residents with an unrestricted income guideline. Monthly rent computations will vary dependant upon family size and income compared to the New Orleans area median of \$52,200 for a family size of four. In addition, twenty five units will postulate floor plans accommodating tenants with wheelchairs and another sixteen units designed for the hearing impaired. (Gyan 2007: 14A) The

NHP Foundation reports about seventy three percent of affordable housing for low income residents, prior to Katrina, were located in and around New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Objectively, the NHP Foundation plans to create three thousand housing communities that present an effective quality. (Gyan 2007: 14A)

The Need for Social Evolution in the Wake of Tyranny

The revocation and banning of New Orleans low income evacuees by at least five parishes in Louisiana and Mississippi presents a true level of segregation and racial prejudice. Although these counties have small numbers of blacks living amongst the whites, the urgency to keep the 80 percent of New Orleans black low income population out of there parish(s) is most important and held at high value. Whites in these parish(s) overtly remain within the 1950's way of life as the towns are mostly run as such, with sheriffs and deputy's holding true to their beliefs. The internet and many highly syndicated news reporting posts produce numerous articles of quotes stated by parish leaders and residents, all voicing they would like to see New Orleans as a separate city altogether, leaving other parish's out of the equation in dealing with the housing problems.

Counties of Louisiana wanting evacuees to leave the parish(s) or not permitting evacuees to enter —

- St. Bernard – Louisiana
- St. John the Baptist – Louisiana
 - Jefferson – Louisiana
 - Pascagoula – Mississippi
- Ocean Springs - Mississippi

The daunting process for many evacuees to relocate for the long term or momentarily have become vague. The evictions of the permits and vouchers have been under legal scrutiny by many civil rights groups. Joseph D Rich, project director for fair housing and community

development says, “High levels of crime within the trailer parks have prompted extra security provided by FEMA”. He believes that there are racially motivated reasons for not allowing the permits to be renewed there is a lot of concern that black and low-income people will be coming into there neighborhoods. (Dewan 2007: Frontpage)

These actions all play a role in the whole overtone of what is happening to the restructuring of New Orleans. Society has to evolve to a higher level in order to have a humane culture and civilization. Prejudice and personal convictions should be placed aside for the security and well being of all. New Orleans is a city of the south that has become unusually segregated. Majority of its white middle class has moved north, across Lake Pontchartrain or west to Jefferson Parish. (Marsh 2005: 1, 4) Of course there are a few remaining parish's and towns that would like to remain the way they have for centuries back, segregated, prejudiced and white. Some local jurisdictions and parishes are fighting to prevent the reconstruction and repair of rental units that were occupied pre Katrina. Jefferson Parish, a suburb west of New Orleans, blocked a 200 unit complex for the elderly in Terrytown; they claimed it would increase crime in their town. The county has also placed a moratorium on a multifamily building. (Dewan 2007) Chris Roberts, a Jefferson county councilman, complains that such residents are often idle and don't want to work. He says; “you have some people that just lack any degree of civilization, I think low-income housing which is not properly run invites those people.” These views are not limited to just one individual; the infamous David Duke a Klansman, resides in the Jefferson parish. Duke ran for governor back in 1991, and won more than half of the states white vote. (Marsh 2005: 1, 4) Unfortunately many of New Orleans white middle class residents feel as he does. The manner in which low income housing has been handled in the past 30 years, has not shown much progress, it would be hard to dispute what some feel in regards to the low income

projects and housing voucher recipients, although there are many families that work and live from pay check to paycheck. However you have the vast majority within many projects and neighborhoods that become a product of the environment they have grown accustomed to. Such would be the case for those who grow up in blighted homes, they most likely will be the same once adults an have families of there own. The cycle of norms and family values plays a huge role that in turn shape peoples lives.

Katrina Related Crime

The city of Houston Texas reports the crime rate within the city rose after Katrina evacuees sought refuge and temporary solitude. The New York Times reports, during September of 2006, there were sixty one reported homicides linked to evacuees; the victims in twenty four cases, the suspects in twenty two, and fifteen cases of which one evacuee was accused of killing an individual. (The Associated Press NYT 2007) Houston police reported twenty five Katrina related homicides this year alone. The increase of crime prompted resentment towards the evacuees. (The Associated Press NYT 2007)

It is estimated that approximately a hundred thousand evacuees remain living throughout the Houston area. Total record calculations of homicides within Houston through September of 2007, were two hundred and forty eight; a decline from the two hundred and seventy nine homicides reported the previous year, police chief Harold stated. City agencies working with the evacuee's state, the reduction of homicide rates are due to a decrease of evacuees residing in apartment complexes, where the majority of the violent crimes were committed. Amid the increase in crime and resentment from native Houstonians, city officials and agency advocates remain firmly in saying, that not all evacuees were the cause of trouble and created problems,

however the fact remains several gang leaders from New Orleans moved to Houston after the hurricane. (The Associated Press NYT 2007)

Conclusion

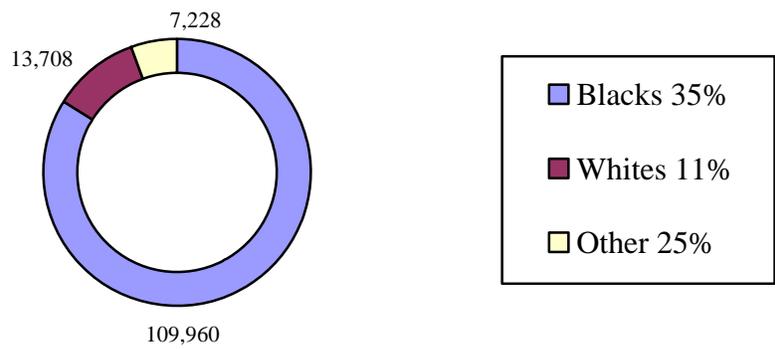
The great city of New Orleans has a historical importance within American History. The city built from the hands of diverse cultures, has suffered a great loss from land and cultural monuments. Reconstruction efforts for the “big easy” must present a system of combined team work and governmental assistance. Although, the city of New Orleans will never be the same after Katrina, the native people remain optimistic and are moving forward to reconstruct their lives, homes, business’s and city to the grandeur southern sanctuary they love.

After hurricane Katrina there are several government policies and procedures that will require much needed restructuring. Hopefully the lesson taught from old rotted levees and outdated evacuation manuals; will force the city of New Orleans to make the necessary changes to better ensure the future of New Orleans.

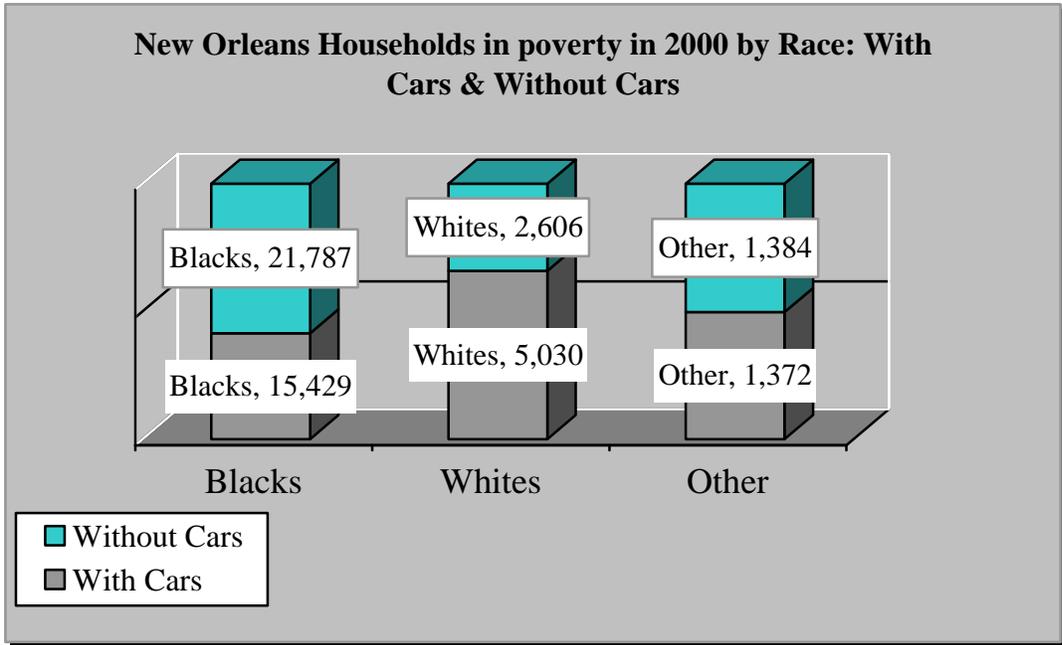
~Appendix~

This section details charts representing numbers and percentages for New Orleans public and private services, before and after the devastating event of hurricane Katrina. In addition to the graphical data, I have enclosed pictures of two housing projects (Algiers and Calliope) within the wards that suffered the most damage due to hurricane Katrina. Note that all housing projects in New Orleans are scheduled for demolition. Days after the hurricane fencing was placed around the housing projects that were home to many of New Orleans low poverty residents. These residents have now been permanently (evicted, eradicated, relocated?)

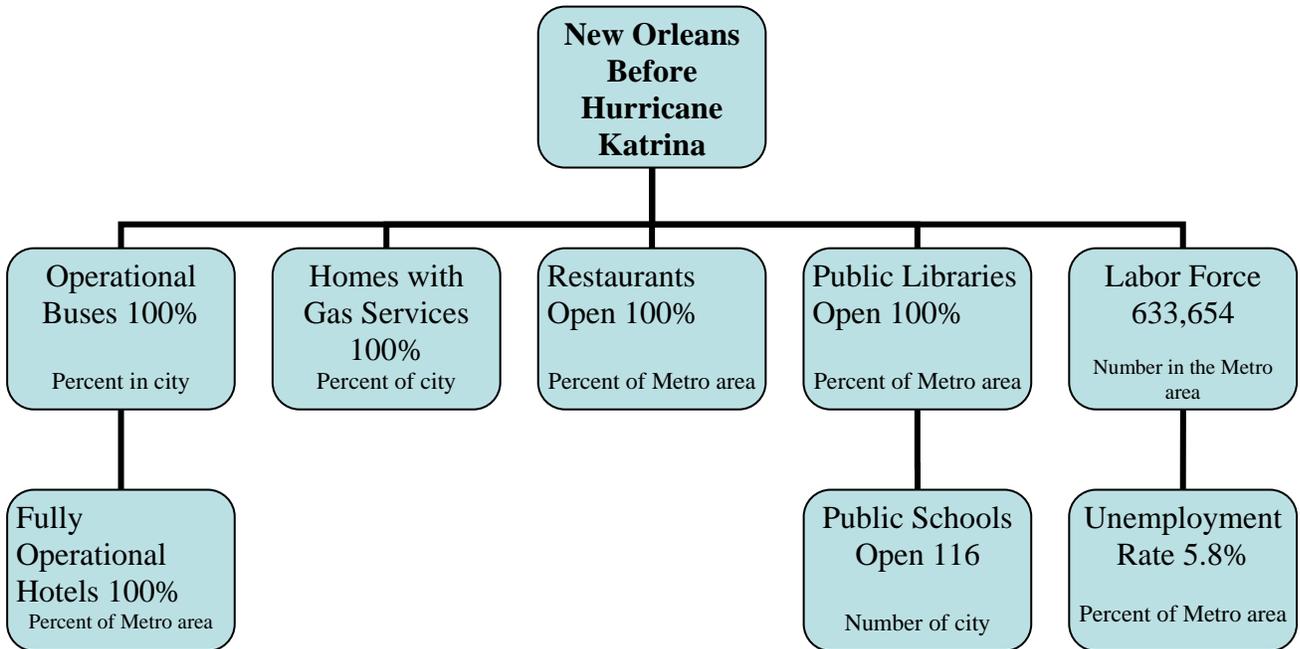
New Orleans Residents the year 2000 Living in Poverty



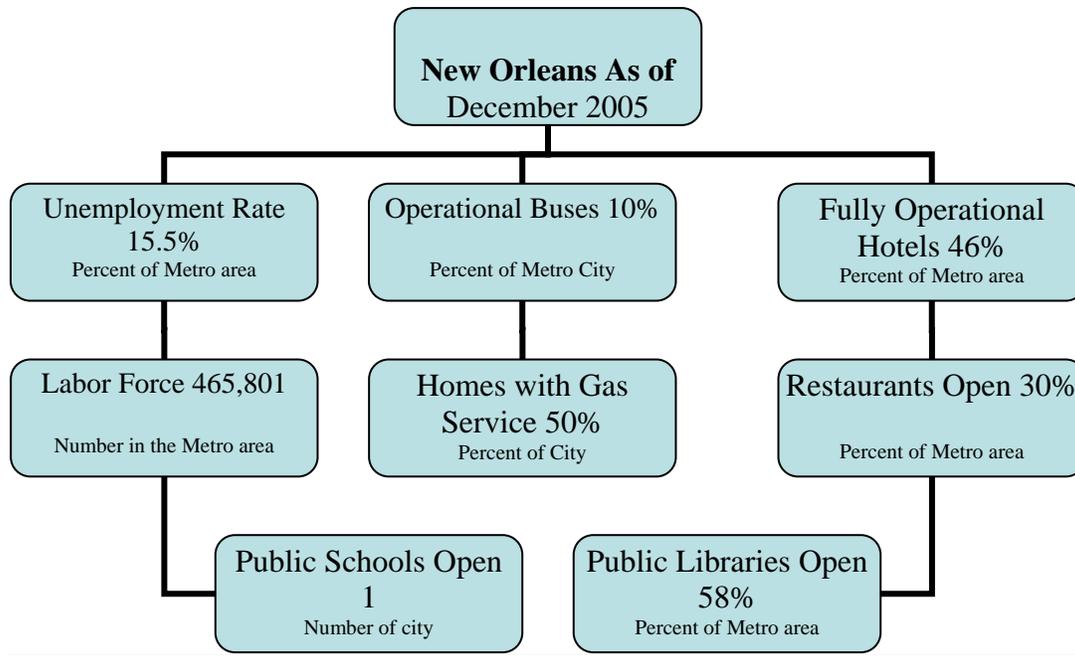
Sources: 2000 Census Data; *Bill Marsh The New York Times*- September 2005



Sources: 2000 Census Data; *Bill Marsh The New York Times*- September 2005

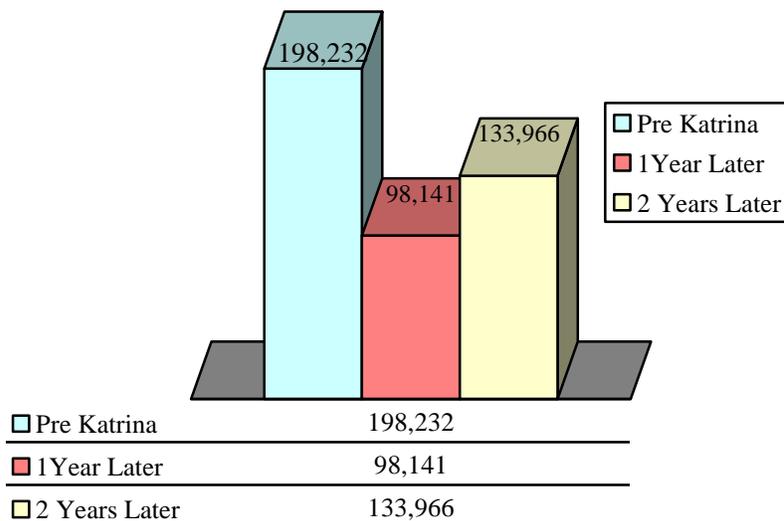


Sources: *The New York Time*; Bruce Katz, Matt Fellows 2005

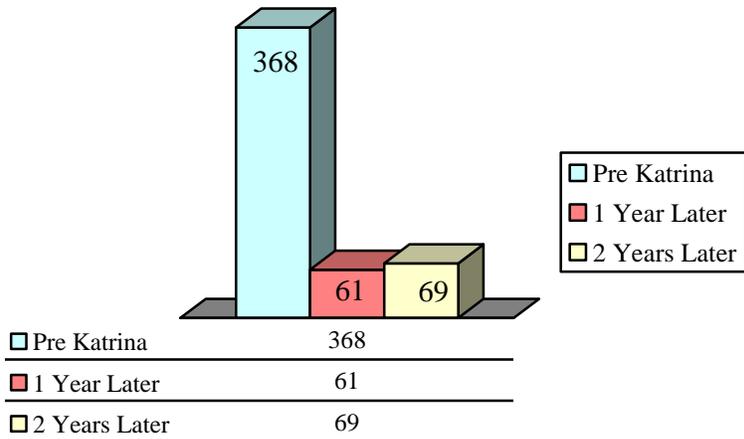


Sources: *The New York Time*; Bruce Katz, Matt Fellows 2005

Households- Actively receiving mail in Orleans Parish

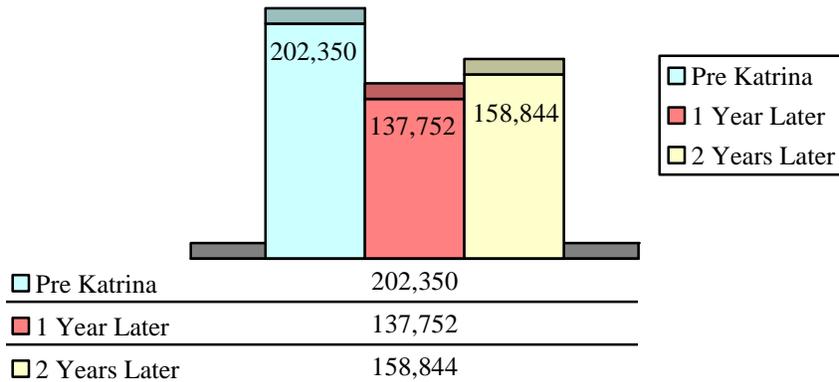


Buses operational in Orleans Parish

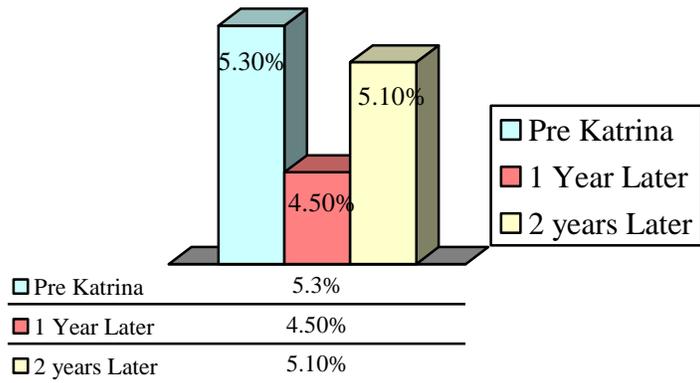


Sources: *The New York Time*; Amy Liu, 2007

Labor Force in Orleans Parish 2007

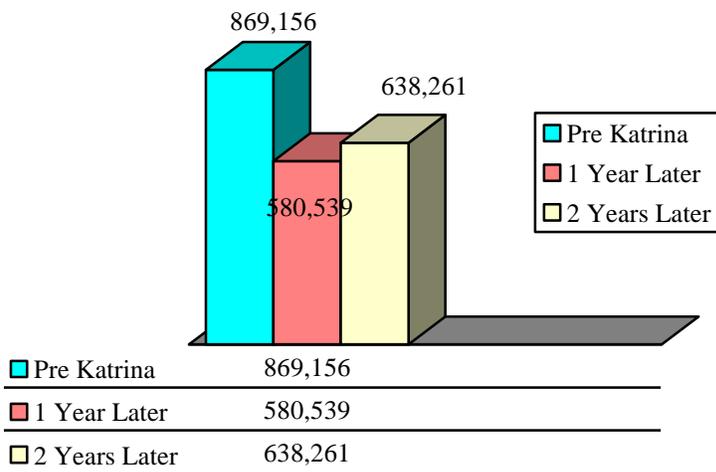


Unemployment Rates in New Orleans Metro Area 2007

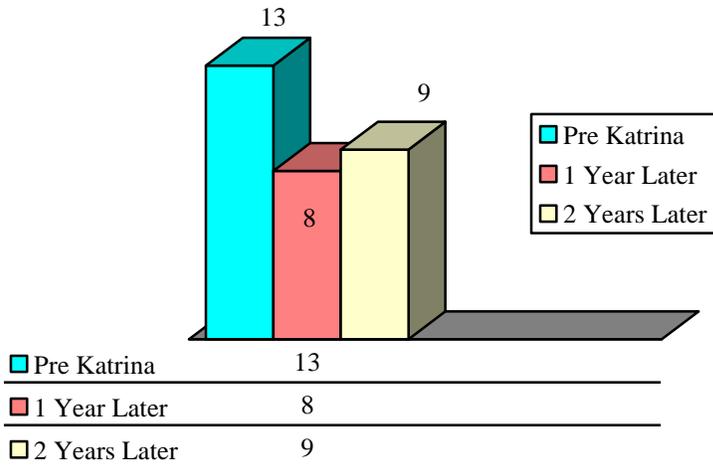


Sources: *The New York Time*; Amy Liu, 2007

Air passenger traffic arriving/departing @ Louis Armstrong airport, June 2007

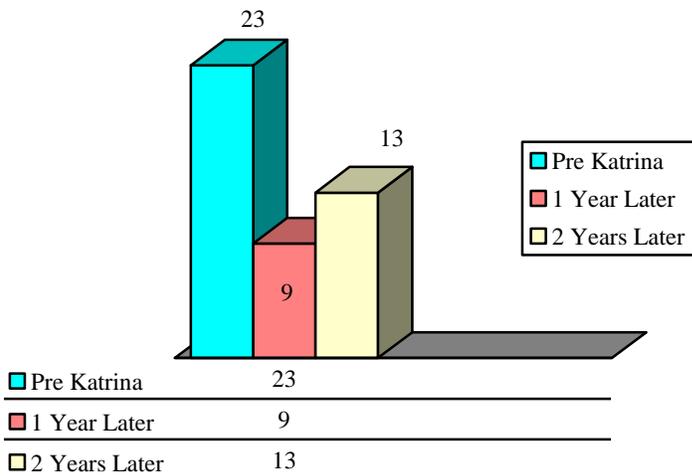


Libraries open in Orleans Parish

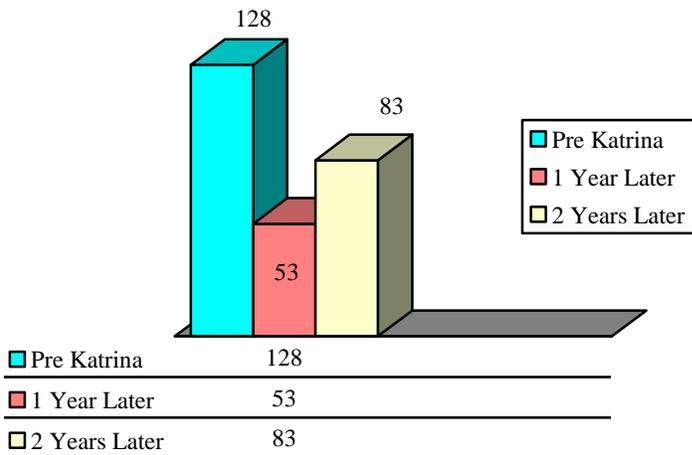


Sources: *The New York Time*; Amy Liu, 2007

Hospitals operational in Orleans Parish

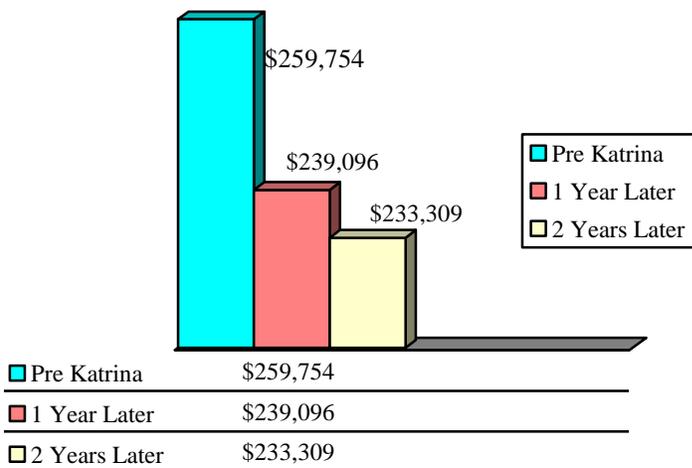


Public schools open in Orleans Parish

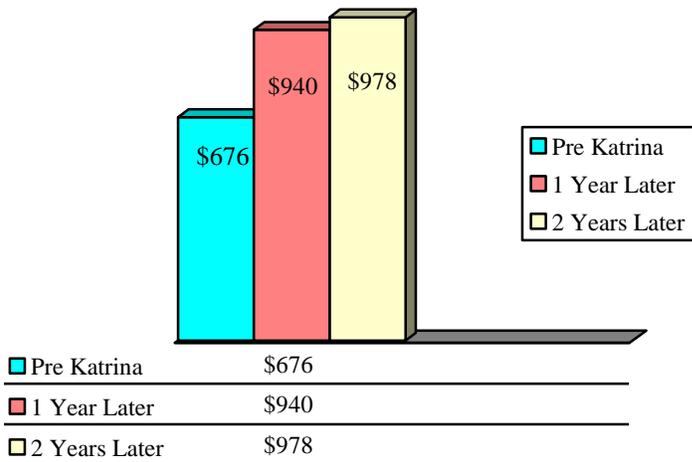


Sources: *The New York Time*; Amy Liu, 2007

House prices- average sales in New Orleans metropolitan area

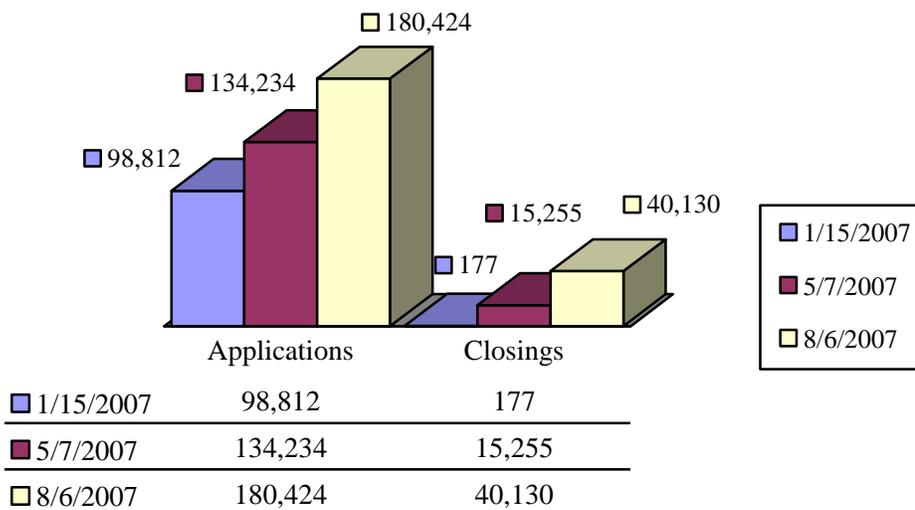


Fair market rent-two bedroom apartment in New Orleans metropolitan area



Sources: *The New York Time*; Amy Liu, 2007

Road Home application vs. closings



Sources: *The New York Time*; Amy Liu, 2007

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