

11.945 Spring 2006
Katrina Practicum

Session 3: 2/14/06: New Orleans Context\Timeline of Events

Reflective Practice Exercise: Groups should perform the exercise and report back.

Presentations of small group work in Session 6.

Concrete work on environmental work will dovetail with the work that Tulane students are doing. Professor Phil Thompson is coordinating the same way on neighborhood planning projects.

PART 1: New Orleans Context:

This presentation is an ongoing project that we will need to add to. Most images available right now are post-Katrina. This selection avoided images of destroyed houses, and avoided the French Quarter in order to show a bit of what you might see if you went to New Orleans.

Background Information/Pre-Katrina

Map 1: New Orleans is in the south east corner of the state. A lot of New Orleans is living in Baton Rouge. Many people are driving back and forth every day.

Map 2: Canal systems come down from Lake Pontchartrain. New Orleans is between the lake and the Mississippi River.

Map 3: Aerial Photograph

Map 4: All directions are oriented toward the river or towards the lake. People refer to places as upriver/downriver, lakeside/riverside. This map shows the city according to this orientation.

Map 5: Tremé is right by the French Quarter and near the Central Business District. This map shows all of the different neighborhoods. Lakeview, Lower Ninth, East New Orleans were the most destroyed.

Map 6: Close up on Tremé. The freeway splits the neighborhood in 2 parts. This is the course focus area.

Photos:

Fauberg-Marigny/Bywater: Shotgun house, Creole cottage, Mansions

Tulane Avenue: Runs from the river out to the airport.

Mardi Gras Float: The culture of crews and social and pleasure clubs putting on parades all over the city starting 10-14 days before Mardi Gras.

Jazz Funeral Procession: funerals sometimes turn into big parades. St. Charles Avenue, which turns into Bourbon Street.

Post Katrina Images:

Map 1: Canal Breaches

Map 2: Community Data Center map of extent of the flood. No part of the city was untouched by the flooding.

Aerial View: Central Business District Uptown. This is the view out of the window of the office I worked in on the 54th floor. The skyline is dotted with blue tarps that agencies are putting on peoples roofs that are damaged (but not everybody's). Superdome roof has been replaced (feeling that people were trying to erase what happened in the Superdome).

Oretha Castle Boulevard: Nice homes would exist next to vacant lots, next to buildings that are falling apart even before the flooding. This was one of the nice qualities of New Orleans, and it is important to keep in mind that some abandoned buildings are not due to Katrina.

Bywater backyard.

Warren Easton School: on Canal Street in Mid-city. Waterline of flood is visible.

City Park: The largest park in NO. One of largest parks in the country. Part of it is the swamp. Many of the trees have come down since the storm.

"Temporary Housing" Trailers parked outside peoples houses while they work on them. Not a lot of space for trailers. People

Lafitte Housing Projects: boarded up. Not reopened yet. Some public housing has been reopened. Some FEMA trailers in the backgrounds (not for the residents). Closed all housing projects, not necessarily due to damage, more for management issues.

Esplanade Avenue: splits French Quarter and Fauberg-Marigny.

Moonwalk: named for Moon Landry, whose son is running for mayor. French market in background. Looking down toward Bywater

Photos from Times Picayune:

Mardi Gras Prep: Zulu Social Club held funeral for victims of Katrina.

French Quarter: People decorating for Mardi Gras all over the city. There is some sense outside of New Orleans that the people there don't have the right to hold Mardi Gras.

PART 2: Phil Thompson: Chronology; Discussion; "Our Role as Planners"

NOAA warned: this may be one of the most active hurricane seasons on record. It was known that infrastructure to control the waters of the lake and river were built on the assumption that any storm greater than a Category 3 would be unlikely to happen.

August 27th

- A hurricane watch for LA was issued.
- Mandatory evacuation orders were issued for certain areas.

August 28th

- Gov. Blanco issued a letter to Bush, noting that Katrina's damage would be catastrophic and beyond the capacity of state and local government to handle.
- The governor asked for specific assistance from FEMA, and for the Federal government to declare an expedited state of emergency.

Monday, August 29th

- Katrina touched down.
- FEMA Dir. Michael Brown said, "We've planned for this kind of disaster for many years because we've always known about the New Orleans situation."
- President Bush assured New Orleans that the Federal Government would be there to provide assistance.

Immediate Aftermath:

- 20,000 people ended up in Super Dome.
 - o Superdome electricity and air conditioning stopped working and the toilets wouldn't flush.
 - o It was a public-sanitation nightmare.
- Many ended up in Convention Center.

Short-term Aftermath:

- State of Texas reported that 240,000 people sought refuge in Texas and applied for assistance (a few weeks later).
- Perhaps 200,000 people ended up in Baton Rouge.

- On September 8th, the NYTimes reported that only 40% of homes in New Orleans had flood insurance. Many people lost everything during the storm.

Excerpts from assorted news articles:

- Doctor down from Pittsburgh. A bunch of dead bodies put in temporary morgue. Half the people were put in there alive but in bad shape, but left in there to die. Most of them only needed water or something fairly simple. He went to the director of the center from FEMA. Would not allow the doctor to treat anyone because he hadn't signed a release form and they didn't have any for him to sign."
- Bretna police department shot over the heads of people trying to escape to safety over the high water in Bretna. At the time there was a lot of resistance to having the poor N.O. residents come into their communities; a lot of it has to do with issues of race, and those actions are now coming under litigation.
- Joe Conazarro: As a practical matter, these poor folks don't have the resources to come back to our city, just as they didn't have resources to get out"

Housing

HUD announced that they were going to give housing vouchers; after a meeting with the White House, it revoked that announcement. The White House announced that they were going to give people trailers. There was no where to put the trailers. Vouchers give you a lot more flexibility. People have more options of where they can go (near relatives, etc.):

- o FEMA issued two options: temporary housing or trailers
 - Temporary housing vouchers of \$840 per month for up to 18 months requires renewal every three months
 - Will pay for a hotel until you can find temporary housing
 - o Confusing: FEMA has threatened to close down all the hotels, then extended it
 - o No long term plan for housing people
 - Really low income on the rolls, can still use Section 8
 - If you are above the cut-off for Section 8 before the storm, it is not possible to get it after
 - During previous storms more Section 8 vouchers have been supplied, and the program was temporarily expanded and that didn't happen.
 - o Section 8 vouchers are keyed to fair market rent in metropolitan areas.
 - o There is no control on unscrupulous landlords jacking up rents; evicting low-rent renters to make room for higher-income with no notice given.
- o Trailers:

- Idea would be that you could purchase the land in the trailer park
- Backlog for trailers: about 25,000 people
 - Far more people are without housing
- Bush Admin. Didn't want to expand Section 8 housing.
- No state wants the creation of trailer parks all over the state
- In N.O., people don't want dense concentrations of trailers and the people who come with them.
- Some people want a trailer that would enable them to work on their house and work at their job;
 - A housing voucher would not make that possible because there is such a tight rental market.
- There is a difference between the benefit of having a driveway to roll a trailer in them and being forced to live in a trailer park
 - Lots of people are getting trailers but not getting utility hook ups.
- New Orleans Rental Market:
 - If it is non-existent, what is the option other than trailers?
 - Section 8, allows people to find a place to live outside of New Orleans, near family, etc.
 - Administration has a view to stopping the spread of entitlements.

Other Issues

In early October conservative senators blocked a bill to provide Medicaid coverage for Katrina survivors. Survivors only eligible to receive coverage they were eligible for before the hurricane in the Gulf. Hospitals that cared for uninsured people will not be reimbursed. This is a big problem in Houston and Baton Rouge for hospitals that have been treating people.

In early Sept., the House Speaker suggested that New Orleans not be rebuilt. Funds for immediate relief were approved, but no long-term decisions have been made. The debate about rebuilding New Orleans continues.

The metropolitan region has 2/3 or more of population back. About 1/3 is actually in New Orleans.

Race

Michael Fletcher, Washington Post. Monday Sept. 12th:
 "Katrina has been an attention-getting experience for this Administration."

In the 1920s, wealthy New Orleanians dynamited levees and flooded out St. Bernard's Parish, which was the home of very poor whites. A lot of animosity exists amongst the poor whites toward the New Orleans elite.

Blacks upriver were not evacuated, and were conscripted for no pay to fill sandbags. They were put into concentration camps and many died. The treatment of blacks during that storm grew into a lot of the radical black politics that exist today.

It is not race or class; there are both race and class issues.

In Pierce Lewis book, (*New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*. Sante Fe, NM: Center for American Places, 2003) there is a good section about the port.

Close to 90% of African Americans in New Orleans are from New Orleans—representing one of the highest native populations in the South—there are particularities of the black community in New Orleans/Louisiana, but its not all of that different.

Black and white isn't just about skin color— they represent different mindsets.

Don't be surprised if someone starts talking about slavery, plantations, segregation in a meeting—it does have a lot to do with today.

- Prisons in Louisiana are full of black people
- Schools in black neighborhoods don't work.
- There are families in Louisiana who have been in poverty since they got off of the slave ships 400 years ago.

The Port

The Port of New Orleans is a major domestic source of oil and gas; it is the largest producer of seafood in the country. A paradox exists such that LA is asking for money to restore wetlands and to support rebuilding of oil and gas activities, which destroy the wetlands.

States get oil/gas revenues: TX and FL: 100% up to 6 miles, 60% up to 12 miles; LA only gets 100% up to 3 miles, 50% up to 6 miles, which means that it loses a lot of revenue that other states receive.

What does this mean for us as planners?

- What does this mean for us walking into this and our role as planners?
 - o We are mostly white, mostly northerners; how do we create trust?
 - A lot of places that are poor have 'study fatigue,' and because we are not there to study the people, we might encounter a different welcome. We are offering a concrete benefit to the people.
- What are the ways that we can think about addressing these issues as outsiders coming into a community?
 - o Capacity issues
 - o What are we going to be doing down there?

- Community Outreach – mindful of identity, framing questions
- Don't underestimate regional differences
- MIT is making a 5 year commitment
- Be conscious of balancing the time investment you've made and the need to "get grounded"
- Approach the community with empathy
- Framing your role:
 - don't impose your set of values
 - understand that there's a lot of assets right here
 - help people develop their own assets versus saying that I have all of the answers, I'm going to tell you about it
- Community Partners:
 - Neighborhood Housing Services – new in Tremé
 - Ujaama –the community development arm of the St. Clavis Church, the center of the community, it well-established in Tremé